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**Challenges and Opportunities in the Inclusion of Individuals with
Intellectual Disabilities:
Psychosocial Aspects**

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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*To my father, Luciano,
my greatest mentor*

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1. SUMMARY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

This doctoral thesis is organized into two main sections, structured around the research objectives and taking into account that this doctoral thesis follows a publication compendium format. The first section contextualizes the phenomenon under study. It addresses the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in contemporary society, reviews the main theoretical models for understanding disability, from the medical model to the social model and the capability approach, and examines different domains relevant to inclusion, including practice leadership in service organizations, digital transformation, organizational context factors, inclusion processes in work teams, and emotional processes in inclusive work settings. This theoretical framework provides the foundation for the thesis objectives and situates the contributions of the studies that comprise it.

The second section is made up of the five studies that constitute the doctoral thesis. It opens with a description of the research objectives, the general methodology adopted, and a summary of the main findings. This is followed by a detailed account of the theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions of the thesis, as well as the main future lines of research derived from the studies conducted.

The central body of the thesis thus consists of five empirical studies. The first study is a systematic literature review on practice leadership in organizations that provide services to people with intellectual disabilities. The second study analyzes the impact of digitalization on integrated employment for this population. By integrated employment, we refer to the development of paid work by a person with intellectual disabilities within mainstream

companies, interacting with people without such disabilities and receiving a salary comparable to that of other workers in the same occupational situation. The third study examines the organizational context factors that influence the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of workers with intellectual disabilities. The fourth study addresses inclusion processes in work teams, analyzing whether the performance of these workers translates into genuine integration or into peripheral positions, a situation of invisibility, within the group. Finally, the fifth study explores emotional processes in inclusive teams, focusing on the role of emotional authenticity and the influence of inclusive leadership and the team's interactional competence.

The thesis closes with a final section in Spanish that compiles information on the introduction, main findings, contributions, and future lines of research, with the aim of facilitating accessibility of the work within the national academic context.

1.1.1. The Inclusion of People with Intellectual Disabilities in Contemporary Society

In recent decades, the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities has gained increasing relevance on the social, political, and scientific agenda at the international level (Verdugo et al., 2012; World Health Organization, 2011). This interest has been driven by normative and conceptual advances aimed at recognizing the rights of people with disabilities, most notably the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which promotes the full and effective participation of this population in all areas of society (Schalock et al., 2010; United Nations, 2006).

Within this new framework, inclusion is understood not merely as access to specific services or resources, but as the opportunity to participate fully in social, educational, and work life on equal terms with the rest of the population (Lysaght et al., 2009; Verdugo et al., 2012). From this perspective, inclusion entails creating social and organizational contexts that enable people with intellectual disabilities to develop their capabilities, exercise their rights, and contribute actively to their communities.

Globally, it is estimated that between 1% and 3% of the world's population has an intellectual disability, representing approximately 200 million people (Special Olympics, 2024). In the United States, around 6.5 million people are estimated to have an intellectual disability (Special Olympics, 2024). In the European context, estimates indicate that there are approximately 20 million people with intellectual disabilities across European Union member states (Inclusion Europe, 2024). In Spain, the most recent data from the Institute for Older Persons and Social Services indicate that 157,895 people have an officially recognized degree of intellectual disability in the country (IMSERSO, 2024). Of course, many people with intellectual disabilities do not have an officially recognized diagnosis.

These figures underscore the magnitude of the phenomenon and highlight the importance of developing social and organizational environments that promote the effective inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. From a psychosocial perspective, inclusion depends to a large extent on the interaction between the individual capacities and lived experiences of people with intellectual disabilities and the conditions of the environment in which they participate (Haegele & Hodge, 2016; Schalock et al., 2010). From this interaction, a new psychosocial reality emerges that cannot be reduced to either the intellectual

disability itself or to the environment alone. Intellectual disability is, of course, a life condition that accompanies the person, but the possibilities for inclusion also depend on the surrounding environments and contexts. Thus, disability is a reality that is constructed through the interaction between the person and their environment, with different biological, psychological, and social dimensions involved (Martínez-Tur et al., 2025a).

In this regard, the inclusion processes of people with intellectual disabilities unfold across different social and organizational contexts. Traditionally, many of these individuals have participated in specialized support and service organizations, such as day centers, residential facilities, or community support programs, where they interact primarily with specialized professionals (Bigby & Beadle-Brown, 2018; Mansell & Beadle-Brown, 2012). In these settings, direct support professionals play a fundamental role in promoting the autonomy, social participation, and quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities (Mansell & Beadle-Brown, 2012). Consequently, the quality of the supports provided and the organizational dynamics that structure the work of these professionals become key factors in fostering processes of inclusion and empowerment (Beadle-Brown et al., 2012).

At the same time, in recent decades integrated employment has been increasingly promoted as a fundamental pathway to social inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities (OECD, 2010; Wehman et al., 2028). Integrated employment refers to those work contexts in which people with intellectual disabilities work in mainstream work environments alongside people without disabilities, participating in productive activities and receiving remuneration for their work under conditions comparable to those of other workers (Lysaght et al., 2012; Wehman, 2006). A growing body of research has shown that

participation in employment is associated with significant benefits for people with intellectual disabilities, including improvements in quality of life, psychological well-being, self-esteem, and the development of social and occupational skills (Akkerman et al., 2018a; Jahoda et al., 2008; Martínez-Tur et al., 2025b; Robertson et al., 2019).

Likewise, comparative studies have shown that people with intellectual disabilities who participate in integrated employment settings report higher levels of job satisfaction and well-being compared to those working in segregated or sheltered environments (Beyer et al., 2010; Jiranek & Kirby, 1990). These findings suggest that work is not only an economic activity, but also a key space for social participation and the construction of citizenship for people with intellectual disabilities.

Nevertheless, both in specialized service contexts and in integrated employment settings, people with intellectual disabilities continue to face a range of challenges related to organizational conditions, relational dynamics, and social perceptions that shape their opportunities for participation and contribution (Akkerman et al., 2018a; Lysaght et al., 2012). Understanding inclusion processes therefore requires an analysis of the psychosocial factors that shape the social and organizational contexts in which these individuals participate. Research on organizational inclusion has shown that workers' experiences of inclusion depend to a large extent on environmental factors such as leadership, organizational climate, and management practices that foster recognition of diversity and the participation of all organizational members (Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2018). From this perspective, inclusion is not limited to the mere presence of diverse individuals in the workplace, but rather involves generating organizational conditions that

allow all workers to feel valued, participate actively, and fully develop their capabilities (Mor Barak, 2015; Roberson, 2006). This starting point allows us to situate the focus of this thesis: to analyze how different psychosocial factors facilitate or hinder the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in specialized services and in integrated employment settings.

1.1.2. General Models of Disability: From the Medical Model to the Social and Capability Models

The way in which societies understand disability has evolved significantly over time, giving rise to different conceptual frameworks that have influenced academic research, public policy, and intervention practices directed at people with disabilities (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2013). Among these approaches, two models have had a particularly significant impact on the understanding of intellectual disability: the medical model and the social model (Humpage, 2007).

The medical model of disability has historically been one of the dominant approaches. From this perspective, disability is interpreted primarily as an individual condition, associated with functional deficits or limitations, which must be diagnosed and addressed through clinical or rehabilitative interventions (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). In the case of intellectual disability, this approach has traditionally focused on limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, regarded as inherent characteristics of the person.

In response to this perspective, the social model proposes that disability cannot be understood solely as an individual characteristic, but rather as the result of the interaction

between the characteristics of the person and the barriers and facilitators present in the social environment (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). From this standpoint, the difficulties experienced by people with disabilities are not explained exclusively by their individual limitations, but also by social, cultural, and organizational factors that restrict their opportunities for participation.

More recently, various theoretical approaches have sought to integrate both perspectives. Among these, the capability approach, developed by Sen (1999) and subsequently expanded by Nussbaum (2006), stands out. This approach proposes analyzing the well-being and inclusion of individuals in terms of the real opportunities they have to develop their capabilities and participate in society. From this perspective, disability is not defined solely by the person's functional limitations, but also by the opportunities that the environment provides for individuals to exercise their capabilities and lead a life they have reason to value.

This approach is particularly useful for understanding the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in social and organizational contexts (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2006). In these settings, the opportunities for participation, development, and contribution of people with intellectual disabilities depend to a large extent on the social and organizational conditions that shape the work context (Lysaght et al., 2012). Factors such as leadership, organizational practices, an inclusive climate, or opportunities for participation can either expand or restrict individuals' capabilities to participate actively (Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2018; Mor Barak, 2015).

From this perspective, intellectual disability can be understood as a phenomenon that emerges from the psychosocial interaction between the characteristics of the person and the barriers and opportunities offered by social and organizational contexts.

1.1.3. Practice Leadership in Service Organizations for People with Intellectual Disabilities

Organizations that provide services and supports to people with intellectual disabilities have undergone significant transformations in recent decades. Traditionally, these services were structured around institutional models characterized by highly structured and segregated settings (Mansell & Beadle-Brown, 2010). However, changes in social policy and in conceptual approaches to disability have driven a progressive transition toward models oriented around community support, self-determination, and the active participation of people with intellectual disabilities in society (Mansell & Beadle-Brown, 2012; Schalock et al., 2010).

In this process of transformation, organizations that provide services to people with intellectual disabilities face the challenge of adapting their structures and practices to promote more person-centered supports (Beadle-Brown et al., 2014). This shift entails not only modifying models of care, but also transforming the organizational dynamics that shape the way professionals interact with the individuals who use their services. In this context, organizational leadership takes on a particularly relevant role in orienting professional practices toward more inclusive and participatory models of support (Beadle-Brown et al., 2012; Hewitt et al., 2004).

Within these organizations, frontline supervisors play a particularly important role. These professionals act as intermediaries between the organization's management and the direct support staff who work on a daily basis with people with intellectual disabilities (Beadle-Brown et al., 2014). Their influence is therefore fundamental to ensuring the quality of the supports provided and promoting practices that foster the autonomy, participation, and well-being of service users (Hewitt et al., 2004).

It is in this context that the concept of practice leadership emerged, developed within the field of services for people with intellectual disabilities (Mansell et al., 2004). This approach defines leadership as the capacity of supervisors to actively guide, support, and oversee staff in the implementation of practices aimed at improving the participation and quality of life of people with disabilities (Mansell et al., 2008). Unlike more traditional approaches to organizational leadership, practice leadership focuses on the concrete day-to-day actions of supervisors in their work with direct support staff.

Research in this area has shown that the leadership exercised by frontline supervisors is associated with a range of outcomes that are relevant both for service users and for the professionals working in these organizations. For example, several studies have indicated that effective leadership can promote the implementation of active support practices that foster the meaningful participation of people with intellectual disabilities in everyday activities and social relationships (Beadle-Brown et al., 2012; Beadle-Brown et al., 2014). It has also been observed that practice leadership is associated with higher quality supports, a reduction in challenging behaviors, defined as behaviors that pose a risk to the individual or to those around them and that hinder their social inclusion, among service

users, and better work experiences among direct support staff (Beadle-Brown et al., 2015; Lowe et al., 2010).

Furthermore, leadership also influences relevant organizational variables such as staff well-being, job satisfaction, and worker motivation (Lowe et al., 2010). When supervisors provide clear guidance, ongoing support, and learning opportunities, direct support staff tend to experience lower levels of stress and higher levels of job satisfaction (Deveau & McGill, 2014, 2016). These organizational dynamics are particularly important in contexts where direct support work involves significant emotional and relational demands.

Despite the recognized importance of leadership in organizations that provide services to people with intellectual disabilities, the scientific literature in this area remains relatively limited and fragmented. In particular, there is a need for a better understanding of how different leadership approaches influence outcomes related to the quality of life of people with intellectual disabilities, staff well-being, and the functioning of work teams. This issue constitutes the starting point of the first study in the thesis.

Specifically, the first study of this doctoral thesis addresses this question through a systematic literature review on practice leadership in organizations that provide services to people with intellectual disabilities. This study aims to analyze the theoretical models of leadership used in this field, as well as to identify supervisor competencies and the outcomes associated with leadership in terms of the quality of life of service users and staff well-being.

Although much of the research on intellectual disability has traditionally been conducted in the context of specialized services, inclusion processes also extend to other relevant social contexts, such as integrated employment. Analyzing both spaces of participation is essential for understanding how different psychosocial factors shape the opportunities for inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in social and working life.

1.1.4. Digital Transformation and Integrated Employment of People with Intellectual Disabilities

While the first study is situated within the domain of specialized services and supports, the subsequent studies shift to the terrain of integrated employment, where new challenges and opportunities for inclusion emerge. Alongside the transformations in support models for people with intellectual disabilities, the world of work is undergoing profound changes associated with digital transformation (World Economic Forum, 2023). The growing incorporation of digital technologies, process automation, and the use of intelligent systems are modifying the nature of many work tasks and redefining the competencies required to participate in the labor market (Guest, 2022). These changes present both challenges and opportunities for the labor inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities (Safari et al., 2023).

From an optimistic perspective, digitalization can serve as a facilitator of labor inclusion (Lancioni et al., 2014). Various technologies, such as cognitive accessibility tools, task support applications, and digital assistance systems, can help increase the autonomy and capacity of people with intellectual disabilities to perform certain work functions

(Owuor et al., 2018; Ramsten et al., 2019). In this regard, the development of user-centered technologies has the potential to expand opportunities for labor participation and improve the quality of the work experience for this population (Wahl & Kiuppis, 2023).

However, digital transformation also introduces risks that could particularly affect people with intellectual disabilities. A significant proportion of the tasks traditionally performed by people with intellectual disabilities in integrated employment settings involve manual or low-skill activities, such as logistical support tasks or auxiliary services (Livermore et al., 2017; Taanila et al., 2005). These types of activities are among the most susceptible to automation in work digitalization processes, which could create new barriers to employment access for this population.

In response to these challenges, several authors have proposed analyzing the relationship between technology and work from a sociotechnical perspective, which holds that work systems should be designed by jointly considering both the technological and the social aspects of the organization (Guest, 2022; Mumford, 2006). From this standpoint, the introduction of digital technologies should not be understood as a purely technical process, but rather as an organizational transformation that must balance technological efficiency with the well-being and inclusion of the people who participate in the work system (Waschull et al., 2022).

Applied to the domain of intellectual disability, this approach suggests that digitalization can become an opportunity for labor inclusion if it is implemented through strategies that integrate the accessibility, training, and supports needed by people with

disabilities (Wehmeyer et al., 2006, 2012). Conversely, if digitalization processes are developed without considering the specific needs of this population, they could reinforce existing inequalities and limit their opportunities for participation in the labor market.

Despite the growing relevance of these processes, research on the impact of digitalization on the employment of people with intellectual disabilities remains limited. In particular, there is a need for a better understanding of how the different stakeholders involved in integrated employment, such as people with intellectual disabilities, supervisors, and technology experts, perceive the challenges and opportunities associated with these processes of digital transformation. This question gives rise to the second study of the thesis.

Specifically, the second study of this doctoral thesis analyzes the impact of technology-driven change linked to digitalization on the integrated employment of people with intellectual disabilities. Through a methodological approach combining qualitative interviews and a Delphi method with experts, the study explores both the challenges posed by digitalization and the strategies that could enable technologies to become allies in fostering the labor inclusion of this population.

1.1.5. Organizational Context Factors and Well-Being of Workers with Intellectual Disabilities

Beyond technological changes, inclusion in integrated employment also depends on the psychosocial conditions that shape the everyday work experience. A growing body of research has indicated that the quality of the work experience of people with disabilities is

influenced by organizational context factors that affect their opportunities for participation, learning, and development at work (Akkerman et al., 2018a; Lysaght et al., 2012).

In this regard, understanding the labor inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities requires analyzing not only the individual characteristics of workers, but also the psychosocial conditions of the organizational environment in which they carry out their work. Factors such as leadership, organizational norms, management practices, and interpersonal relationships within the work team can either facilitate or hinder the experience of inclusion at work (Shore et al., 2018).

A particularly useful theoretical perspective for understanding these processes is Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which proposes that the well-being and motivation of individuals are associated with the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The satisfaction of these needs has been linked to higher levels of motivation, psychological well-being, and engagement across different organizational contexts (Akkerman et al., 2018b; Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Applied to the domain of integrated employment, this perspective suggests that organizational contexts that promote opportunities for participation, recognition of individual capabilities, and supportive relationships among coworkers can foster the satisfaction of these basic psychological needs in workers with intellectual disabilities (Deci et al., 2017). In particular, the literature has highlighted the role of factors such as inclusive leadership, an inclusive climate, and a procedural justice climate as elements that

contribute to generating more equitable and participatory work environments (Carmeli et al., 2010; Martínez-Tur & Moliner, 2017; Nishii, 2013; Thibaut & Walker, 1975).

Nevertheless, organizational contexts can also generate barriers that hinder the experience of labor inclusion for people with intellectual disabilities. Several studies have noted that poorly adapted working conditions, negative attitudes among staff toward hiring workers with intellectual disabilities, or a lack of disability awareness within organizations can restrict the opportunities for development and participation of this population in the workplace (Kaye et al., 2011; Lysaght et al., 2012). Likewise, social dynamics such as workplace ostracism, the perception of threat on the part of some coworkers, or the internalization of discriminatory attitudes can negatively affect the sense of belonging and well-being of workers with intellectual disabilities (Kocman et al., 2018; Luo et al., 2022).

In this sense, the organizational context can simultaneously act as a source of both opportunities and challenges for the labor inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. While certain organizational practices can facilitate participation and the development of capabilities, other conditions can limit the autonomy, recognition, and social integration of these workers in the work environment. This tension between facilitators and obstacles becomes the focus of the third study.

Within this framework, the third study of this doctoral thesis analyzes the organizational context factors that facilitate or hinder the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of workers with intellectual disabilities in integrated employment settings. Through a qualitative approach based on interviews with different stakeholders

involved in integrated employment, including people with intellectual disabilities, supervisors, and experts, the study identifies both organizational facilitators and obstacles that influence the experience of well-being and participation of this population at work.

1.1.6. Inclusion Processes in Work Teams: Integration or Peripheralization

In the preceding section, emphasis was placed on the organizational context factors that can promote the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of workers with intellectual disabilities. However, research also suggests that these organizational conditions do not necessarily guarantee the full integration of the individual into the everyday dynamics of the work team (Roberson, 2006; Shore et al., 2018). Labor inclusion is constructed, to a large extent, through the daily interactions among group members and through the recognition that each worker's contributions receive within the team (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Mathieu et al., 2017).

From the perspective of team research, collective performance is understood as the result of the coordination of individual contributions and the interaction processes among group members (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006; Mathieu et al., 2017). In this sense, labor inclusion does not only entail the presence of a person with intellectual disabilities in a work team, but also the recognition of their contributions to the functioning of the group. When the individual contributions of workers are integrated into the cooperative dynamics of the team, these contributions can positively influence the collective performance of the group (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000; Steiner, 1972).

Nevertheless, several studies have noted that the formal inclusion of people with disabilities in integrated employment settings can coexist with more subtle forms of

exclusion within work teams (Akkerman et al., 2018; Lysaght et al., 2012). In some cases, workers with intellectual disabilities may occupy peripheral positions within the group, participate in a limited way in the team's core tasks, or be perceived as marginal contributors to collective performance (Dovidio et al., 2011; Haegele & Hodge, 2016). These dynamics can reduce opportunities for participation and limit the recognition of their contributions within the group.

This phenomenon has been described in the research literature as a possible "illusion of inclusion," in which the presence of people with disabilities in mainstream settings does not necessarily imply genuine participation in the interactions, decisions, and cooperative dynamics that structure the team's activity (Metzel & Walker, 2001; Pellicano et al., 2018). From this perspective, inclusion may be merely apparent when the person with intellectual disabilities is present in the work environment, but their effective participation in group dynamics is limited or barely visible.

Drawing on this debate, the fourth study of this doctoral thesis puts forward two competing hypotheses regarding the inclusion of workers with intellectual disabilities in work teams. The first is the peripheralization hypothesis, which suggests that the social differences associated with disability may place the worker with intellectual disabilities in a marginal position within the group, reducing the recognition of their contributions by their coworkers without disabilities (Cavanagh et al., 2021; Hafsteinsdóttir & Hardonk, 2023).

The second is the integration hypothesis, which aligns with the principles of the social model of disability and the capability approach. From these perspectives, inclusion does not

depend solely on individual characteristics, but also on the opportunities the environment provides for people to participate and contribute actively (Nussbaum, 2006; Oliver, 1990; Sen, 1999). In the context of work teams, this approach suggests that when barriers are reduced and conditions for participation are created, the contributions of workers with intellectual disabilities can be recognized and integrated into the group's functioning dynamics, thereby fostering their effective inclusion.

To address this debate empirically, the fourth study adopts a diary study design that enables an analysis of how daily variations in the individual performance of the worker with intellectual disabilities relate to changes in the performance of the team of which they are a part. This type of design makes it possible to examine inclusion not as a static state, but as a dynamic process that is constructed through everyday work interactions (Ohly et al., 2010).

In this way, the study addresses a central question for the understanding of labor inclusion: whether the presence of workers with intellectual disabilities in work teams translates into effective integration into collective performance dynamics, or whether, on the contrary, their participation tends to occupy peripheral positions within the group.

1.1.7. Emotional Processes and Authenticity in Inclusive Work Teams

While the previous study addresses the question of whether workers with intellectual disabilities succeed in integrating into the performance dynamics of work teams, the literature suggests that inclusion processes also depend on relational and emotional factors that influence the quality of interactions among group members. Research highlights that contexts that allow for authentic emotional expression, where individuals can display

emotions that align with what they genuinely feel, are associated with more positive social interactions and personal outcomes, in contrast to situations that require individuals to mask or excessively regulate their emotions (Côté et al., 2013; Grandey, 2000).

In this context, emotional expression plays a relevant role in the way team members build interpersonal relationships. However, emotional expression at work is not a completely spontaneous process, but typically involves emotional self-regulation processes through which individuals adjust the way they express their emotions according to the social context in which they interact (Grandey, 2000; Gross, 1998).

From this perspective, emotional authenticity can be understood as the degree to which the emotions expressed by a person are perceived as genuine by the other members of the group (Salmela, 2005). Research on emotional authenticity has indicated that this perception does not depend solely on the individual's internal emotional experience, but also on the way in which their emotional expressions are interpreted by observers in the social context (Grandey, 2003; Cha et al., 2019). Consequently, emotional authenticity is constructed to a large extent in the interaction between the person who expresses the emotion and those who perceive it.

In the case of workers with intellectual disabilities, these processes may be influenced by social categorization dynamics that affect the way their behaviors and emotional expressions are interpreted by their coworkers (Johnson-James et al., 2025). Research on social identity suggests that visible differences between groups can activate categorization processes that influence interpersonal perceptions and opportunities for

participation within the group (Turner, 1985). These dynamics can affect both the way in which workers with intellectual disabilities regulate their emotional expressions and the way in which these expressions are interpreted by their coworkers.

Nevertheless, certain factors in the social context can foster more positive interactions and reduce the effects of such categorization dynamics. In particular, inclusive leadership has been identified as a key factor in promoting environments in which people feel valued, respected, and safe to participate actively in group interactions (Carmeli et al., 2010). Likewise, the team's own capacities for engaging with diversity, what some authors have termed the team's interactional competence, can facilitate the construction of supportive and cooperative relationships among its members (Hall & Doehler, 2011).

From this perspective, the inclusion of workers with intellectual disabilities in work teams does not depend solely on their contribution to collective performance, but also on the relational conditions that allow their emotional expressions to be perceived as authentic and valued by the other members of the team. In other words, emotional authenticity can be understood as a relational mechanism that contributes to the construction of positive interactions and to the strengthening of social integration within the group. Thus, the focus of the thesis shifts from the recognition of the contribution to the team toward the emotional quality of the relationships that sustain that inclusion.

Within this framework, the fifth study of this doctoral thesis analyzes the role of inclusive leadership and the team's interactional competence in the expression of positive emotions by workers with intellectual disabilities toward their coworkers. Through a

multilevel design, the study examines how these social context factors of the team influence the way in which coworkers perceive the authenticity of these emotional expressions, and how these contribute to the construction of positive interpersonal relationships in inclusive teams.

1.2. RESEARCH STUDIES

1.2.1. Thesis Objectives

The foregoing sections make clear that the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in different social and organizational contexts entails both opportunities and challenges from a psychosocial perspective. On the one hand, changes in support and care models, as well as the development of integrated employment, have expanded the opportunities for social and labor participation for this population. On the other hand, various environmental factors, including leadership practices, organizational characteristics, technological changes, and relational dynamics within teams, can influence how these opportunities translate into real experiences of inclusion.

In this context, understanding the inclusion processes of people with intellectual disabilities requires analyzing different levels of the social and organizational environment in which they participate. These processes encompass both leadership practices in organizations that provide services and supports to people with intellectual disabilities, such as residential facilities or day centers, and the organizational, technological, and relational conditions present in integrated employment settings. This doctoral thesis addresses these questions from a psychosocial perspective, analyzing different factors that

can act as facilitators or obstacles to the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities across various social and organizational contexts.

Building on this conceptual framework, the general objective of the thesis is to analyze the challenges and opportunities, from a psychosocial perspective, associated with the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in different social and organizational contexts, with particular attention to the role of leadership, technological changes, the organizational context, and relational dynamics within work teams.

To achieve this general objective, the thesis is structured around the following specific objectives:

Objective 1. To analyze the existing research on the impact of leadership, as a key contextual factor in organizations that provide services to people with intellectual disabilities, on variables related to the quality of life and well-being of people with intellectual disabilities and the professionals who work with them.

Objective 2. To examine the impact of technological change associated with digitalization processes on the employment of people with intellectual disabilities, identifying both the challenges and the opportunities that these changes may generate for their labor inclusion.

Objective 3. To identify the organizational context factors that facilitate the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of workers with intellectual disabilities in integrated employment settings, analyzing both the facilitators and the obstacles present in those contexts.

Objective 4. To analyze, through a quantitative longitudinal design based on a diary study, the relationship between the individual performance of workers with intellectual disabilities, as perceived by their team members, and the collective performance of the work team, exploring whether daily variations in individual performance are associated with changes in team performance.

Objective 5. To examine the role of inclusive leadership and the team's interactional competence in the expression of positive emotions by workers with intellectual disabilities toward their coworkers, through the mediating role of emotional authenticity in the context of inclusive work teams.

1.2.2. General Methodological Aspects of the Doctoral Thesis

In order to address the objectives set out above, this thesis adopts a plural methodological approach that combines quantitative and qualitative methods, making it possible to analyze the inclusion processes of people with intellectual disabilities from different perspectives and levels of analysis. This methodological approach responds to the complexity of the phenomenon under study, given that the social and labor inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities requires consideration of organizational, social, and relational factors that can hardly be captured through a single methodological approach.

In this regard, the thesis draws on different research designs that allow for an examination of the psychosocial challenges and opportunities associated with the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities across different social and organizational contexts. First, it includes a systematic literature review, the aim of which is to synthesize the existing

scientific evidence on the role of leadership in organizations that provide services to people with intellectual disabilities. This type of review makes it possible to identify research trends, theoretical models used, and outcomes associated with leadership in this field.

Second, the thesis incorporates studies based on qualitative methodologies, which allow for an in-depth exploration of the perceptions and experiences of different stakeholders involved in the inclusion processes of people with intellectual disabilities. These studies include the analysis of semi-structured interviews and the application of the Delphi method with experts, techniques that enable the identification of organizational and technological context factors that may influence the inclusion processes of this population in integrated employment settings.

The thesis also includes studies based on quantitative methodologies, which allow for the analysis of relationships between variables and the examination of dynamic processes of inclusion at work. Among these approaches, particular prominence is given to the use of longitudinal designs based on diary studies, analyzed through Latent Growth Models (LGM), which make it possible to examine the variability of work experiences over time and to understand how everyday interactions influence inclusion processes within work teams. Furthermore, the fifth study of the thesis incorporates multilevel analyses and mediation models using structural equations, enabling the analysis of complex relationships between individual variables and contextual factors operating at different levels within work teams.

Additionally, the thesis is characterized by the participation of diverse stakeholders involved in the inclusion processes of people with intellectual disabilities, which allows for a broad view of the phenomenon under study. The samples used across the different studies include people with intellectual disabilities themselves, supervisors and coworkers in integrated employment settings, as well as experts in disability, social inclusion, and technology. This diversity of participants contributes to enriching the analysis and to capturing different perspectives on the challenges and opportunities associated with inclusion.

Taken together, the consideration of different methodological approaches, analytical techniques, and types of participants allows the phenomenon of the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities to be examined from a richly multifaceted perspective, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the psychosocial factors that influence their opportunities for social and labor participation.

1.2.3. Main Findings of the Thesis

The studies that comprise this doctoral thesis provide relevant empirical evidence for understanding the psychosocial challenges and opportunities associated with the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities in different social and organizational contexts.

The first study, based on a systematic literature review, demonstrates that the leadership exercised by frontline supervisors constitutes a determining factor in the quality of the supports provided in organizations that serve people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In particular, practice leadership emerges as the most widely

used theoretical model and shows consistent associations with positive outcomes for both service users and professionals. The findings indicate that higher quality practice leadership is associated with greater implementation of active support, greater participation of people with disabilities in meaningful activities and social relationships, and a reduction in challenging behaviors. This type of leadership is also associated with better work experiences among direct support staff, including lower levels of stress and higher levels of job satisfaction. Although other approaches, such as transformational leadership, have also been considered, the evidence highlights the central role of practice leadership and the importance of supervisors' specific competencies in day-to-day management. Nevertheless, the review also reveals the existence of structural barriers, such as funding limitations, high staff turnover, and administrative demands, that hinder the effective implementation of leadership practices in these contexts.

The second study analyzes the impact of digitalization processes on the employment of people with intellectual disabilities. The findings show that, although digitalization may pose a challenge for certain jobs traditionally held by people with intellectual disabilities, it can also generate new opportunities for their labor inclusion. In particular, the different stakeholders participating in the study, including people with intellectual disabilities, professionals, and technology experts, tend to perceive digitalization more as an opportunity than as a threat. Assistive technologies, digital tools, and support systems can help improve the autonomy of workers with intellectual disabilities and facilitate their labor participation. Nevertheless, these findings also raise new questions about the impact of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, on the future of integrated employment.

The third study analyzes how different organizational context factors influence the satisfaction of basic psychological needs and, consequently, the well-being of workers with intellectual disabilities. The findings show that certain elements of the work environment act as key facilitators of inclusion, most notably the adaptation of working conditions to the characteristics of people with intellectual disabilities, the existence of an inclusive and procedural justice climate, inclusive leadership, and the recognition of their capabilities within the organization. Broader factors such as corporate social responsibility, awareness of labor inclusion, and family involvement in employability processes also contribute to generating more favorable contexts for the participation and development of this population.

Nevertheless, the study also identifies a number of organizational barriers that can significantly limit the experience of inclusion. These include low participation in decision-making, precarious employment conditions reflected in low wages or temporary contracts, and a lack of knowledge about intellectual disability in the business environment. These conditions are compounded by negative relational dynamics, such as workplace ostracism, the perception of threat on the part of some coworkers without intellectual disabilities, and the internalization of discriminatory attitudes, all of which can affect the sense of belonging and well-being of workers with intellectual disabilities. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the organizational context can simultaneously act as a source of opportunities and exclusion, decisively influencing the experience of labor inclusion.

The fourth study examines inclusion processes in work teams through a diary study design, analyzing the relationship between the daily performance of workers with intellectual disabilities and the performance of their teams from the perspective of their

coworkers without disabilities. The findings reveal significant variability in both individual and group performance, showing that these processes are not static but fluctuate on a day-to-day basis. In line with the integration hypothesis, variations in the performance of workers with intellectual disabilities are found to be positively associated with fluctuations in team performance, indicating that their contributions are recognized by their coworkers as part of the collective functioning of the group. The analyses also suggest that this relationship may be reciprocal, reflecting a dynamic process in which individual and group performance mutually influence each other over time.

These findings challenge more pessimistic views of labor inclusion by showing that people with intellectual disabilities can be recognized as members who contribute meaningfully within work teams. Nevertheless, the study adopts a cautious position with regard to the peripheralization hypothesis, noting that it may manifest during the initial stages of joining a team, even if it is not observed in already consolidated groups such as those analyzed. Taken together, the study provides evidence that inclusion in work teams can be understood as a dynamic process of integration in which the contributions of workers with intellectual disabilities form an active part of collective performance.

Finally, the fifth study analyzes the role of emotional processes in the construction of positive relationships within inclusive work teams. In particular, the study examines how social context factors of the team, such as inclusive leadership and the interactional competence of coworkers, influence the expression of positive emotions by workers with intellectual disabilities toward their coworkers. The findings show that the team's interactional competence has a significant indirect effect on the expression of positive

emotions, mediated through the perceived emotional authenticity of the worker with intellectual disabilities as assessed by their coworkers without intellectual disabilities. In other words, when teams possess greater competencies for engaging with diversity, the emotional expressions of workers with intellectual disabilities tend to be perceived as more authentic by their coworkers, which in turn fosters the expression of positive emotions toward the group. In contrast, inclusive leadership did not show a significant indirect effect in this process, suggesting that peer relational dynamics may play a particularly relevant role in the construction of positive interactions within inclusive work teams.

Taken together, the findings of the different studies show that the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities does not depend solely on the elimination of structural barriers or on access to certain resources, but also on the psychosocial dynamics that unfold in the contexts in which they participate. Factors such as leadership, organizational conditions, technological transformations, and relational dynamics within teams jointly shape the real opportunities for participation, recognition, and contribution of people with intellectual disabilities.

1.2.4. Contributions of the Thesis and Conclusion

This doctoral thesis contributes to the advancement of knowledge on the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities by analyzing the challenges and opportunities, from a psychosocial perspective, associated with their participation in different social and organizational contexts. Taken together, the thesis adopts a psychosocial perspective that makes it possible to understand inclusion as the result of the interaction between

intellectual disability itself, the only individual-level factor considered in this work, and the conditions of the organizational and social environment in which these individuals participate.

Theoretical Contributions

A first contribution of the thesis consists of broadening the understanding of the inclusion processes of people with intellectual disabilities from a multilevel perspective. While much of the existing literature has tended to focus on individual factors or inclusion policies, the findings of this thesis show that inclusion is shaped through the interaction among different levels of the environment, including organizational practices, team dynamics, and relational processes among coworkers. This perspective aligns with the social model of disability (Haegele & Hodge, 2016; Oliver, 1990) and the capability approach (Nussbaum, 2006; Sen, 1999), which understand disability as the result of the interaction between the person and the barriers or opportunities in the environment, and connects with frameworks on organizational inclusion (Mor Barak, 2015; Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2018), which emphasize that effective inclusion depends on environmental conditions and not solely on the presence of people with disabilities in the workplace.

Second, the thesis contributes to the literature on leadership in organizations that provide services to people with intellectual disabilities, offering systematic evidence that supports the practice leadership model (Mansell et al., 2004, 2008). The findings of the first study show that higher quality practice leadership is associated with greater implementation of active support, greater participation of people with intellectual disabilities in meaningful

activities and social relationships, a reduction in challenging behaviors, and better work experiences among direct support staff (Beadle-Brown et al., 2012, 2014, 2015; Deveau & McGill, 2014, 2016; Lowe et al., 2010). This contribution is particularly relevant in a context where services are evolving toward more person-centered models (Mansell & Beadle-Brown, 2012; Schalock et al., 2010). The study also identifies the structural obstacles that hinder the implementation of practice leadership, such as staff turnover, funding cuts, and administrative overload, pointing to important directions for future research.

Furthermore, the thesis contributes to the emerging literature on technology, digitalization, and labor inclusion. The findings of the second study suggest that digitalization processes can represent both a challenge and an opportunity for the labor inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities. The research highlights the need to approach these processes from a sociotechnical perspective (Guest, 2022; Mumford, 2006; Waschull et al., 2022), one that allows for a joint analysis of technological changes and the social and organizational conditions that influence opportunities for labor participation. In line with the capability approach (Nussbaum, 2006; Sen, 1999), the findings show that the impact of technology on inclusion cannot be assessed independently of the context in which it is implemented.

The thesis also broadens knowledge on the role of organizational factors in integrated employment. The findings of the third study highlight the relevance of variables such as inclusive leadership, an inclusive climate, and procedural justice, in line with the literature on organizational inclusion (Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2018) and procedural justice (Martínez-Tur & Moliner, 2017; Thibaut & Walker, 1975), and empirically link them to the

satisfaction of the basic psychological needs contemplated in Self-Determination Theory (Deci et al., 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2017). The study also identifies theoretically relevant barriers that have been little explored in this population, such as workplace ostracism (Kocman et al., 2018; Luo et al., 2022) and the internalization of discrimination (Santuzzi & Waltz, 2016).

Another relevant theoretical contribution consists of empirically addressing the debate on the possible "illusion of inclusion" in integrated employment (Metzel & Walker, 2001; Pellicano et al., 2018). The findings of the fourth study show that daily variations in the individual performance of workers with intellectual disabilities are positively associated with the collective performance of the team, supporting the integration hypothesis over the peripheralization hypothesis (Cavanagh et al., 2021; Hafsteinsdóttir & Hardonk, 2023) and challenging more pessimistic views of their contribution to teamwork. The analyses also point to the possibility of reciprocal relationships between individual and group performance, opening the door to complex dynamics explicable through social learning models and affect infusion, and is consistent with process-oriented perspectives that emphasize temporal variability and mutual influence in work groups (Bartunek & Woodman, 2015). Finally, these findings contribute to the debate on the citizenship of people with intellectual disabilities (Nussbaum, 2006; Sen, 1999), by showing that integrated employment can be a domain in which these individuals exercise agency, contribute actively, and are recognized as team members.

Finally, the thesis contributes to the study of emotional processes in inclusive work teams. The findings of the fifth study show that the team's interactional competence (Hall &

Pekarek Doehler, 2011) has a significant indirect effect on the expression of positive emotions by workers with intellectual disabilities toward their coworkers, mediated through perceived emotional authenticity (Cha et al., 2019; Grandey, 2003; Salmela, 2005). From an emotional regulation perspective (Grandey, 2000; Gross, 1998), emotional authenticity should not be understood as a stable individual trait, but rather as the result of the relational conditions of the environment: when the team provides a supportive context, workers with intellectual disabilities need to regulate or suppress their emotions less, which facilitates the perception of their expressions as authentic by their coworkers. Likewise, from the perspective of social identity theory and categorization processes (Turner et al., 1985), it can be anticipated that the expression of positive emotions may contribute to workers with intellectual disabilities being perceived as part of the team, thereby fostering their social acceptance.

Methodological Contributions

In addition to its theoretical contributions, the thesis presents important methodological contributions by drawing on different research approaches to analyze the inclusion processes of people with intellectual disabilities. In particular, the doctoral thesis incorporates systematic literature reviews, qualitative methodologies based on semi-structured interviews, the Delphi method with experts, longitudinal diary-based studies, and multilevel quantitative analyses.

This methodological plurality makes it possible to analyze the phenomenon of inclusion from different perspectives and levels of analysis, offering a more comprehensive

view of the psychosocial factors involved. Likewise, the use of longitudinal designs based on diary studies allows for the capturing of the dynamic nature of inclusion processes at work, showing how everyday interactions influence the integration of workers with intellectual disabilities into their teams.

Practical Contributions

The thesis presents relevant practical implications for organizations, professionals, and policymakers working in the field of intellectual disability.

First, the findings underscore the importance of strengthening practice leadership in organizations that provide services to people with intellectual disabilities. The training and performance evaluation of frontline supervisors should be oriented toward promoting active support practices that foster the participation of service users in meaningful activities. At the same time, it is necessary to address the structural obstacles that hinder its implementation, such as high staff turnover, excessive administrative demands, and insufficient resources.

Second, the thesis highlights the importance of approaching technological transformation processes from an inclusive perspective. To this end, it is recommended to develop digital competencies and soft skills in the professional profiles of people with intellectual disabilities, integrate digital competency training into educational stages prior to employment, develop technologies oriented toward cognitive accessibility, and strengthen coordination among the different stakeholders involved, including families,

organizations, the third sector, and public administration, to ensure an inclusive technological transition.

Third, the research indicates that promoting inclusive work environments requires simultaneously attending to several organizational factors. Leaders should receive training to recognize intellectual disability, adapting working conditions to the characteristics of each individual. It is also necessary to improve the working conditions of workers with intellectual disabilities, including participation in decision-making, a fair wage, and contractual stability, to implement awareness programs for coworkers without disabilities that facilitate the recognition of the contributions of their colleagues with intellectual disabilities, and to promote both formal and informal bonds of team integration.

Fourth, the findings of the study on team performance invite a reconsideration of task assignment for workers with intellectual disabilities. Organizations and leaders should avoid assigning them tasks that fall below their actual capabilities, as designing or redesigning jobs to be sufficiently stimulating can maximize their contributions and foster their recognition by coworkers without disabilities.

Finally, the findings on emotional processes point to the importance of developing the interactional competence of work teams through training programs that reinforce skills such as effective communication, perspective-taking, and confidence in collaboration with people with intellectual disabilities. Creating respectful and non-punitive interaction norms can reduce the emotional self-censorship of workers with intellectual disabilities, facilitate the expression of authentic and positive emotions, and contribute to more sustainable

forms of inclusion that transcend formal policies and become embedded in the everyday interactions of the team.

1.2.5. Future Lines of Research

This doctoral thesis also opens up a broad set of future lines of research that can help deepen the understanding of the challenges and opportunities, from a psychosocial perspective, associated with the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities.

First, building on the study of leadership in service organizations, a particularly relevant future direction consists of moving beyond the identification of models and outcomes associated with leadership toward the evaluation of concrete leadership interventions, especially in relation to practice leadership. In this regard, it would be useful to develop studies that examine which training strategies or supervisory practices are most effective in strengthening frontline leadership in organizations that provide supports to people with intellectual disabilities. Likewise, given that the systematic review revealed a significant concentration of studies in residential services, future research could broaden the analysis to other support delivery contexts, such as community services, independent living support programs, supported employment, or community inclusion initiatives. Exploring these settings would allow for a better understanding of how leadership practices influence the quality of supports and the opportunities for participation of people with intellectual disabilities across different care models.

Second, the study on digitalization points to the need to continue investigating how processes of technological change affect the integrated employment of people with

intellectual disabilities. Given that this work was conducted with relatively small samples and with participants from Spain, future research could replicate the study with larger samples and in other countries, which would allow for an assessment of the robustness of the findings and an examination of the role of institutional and cultural context. It would also be valuable to complement the qualitative and Delphi approach used in this thesis with quantitative designs that allow for a more systematic analysis of the relationships between digitalization, competencies, supports, and employment opportunities. Furthermore, in light of the rapid recent expansion of technologies such as artificial intelligence, a particularly promising line of research opens up, oriented toward examining the extent to which these technologies may become new barriers or, conversely, new tools for accessibility, cognitive support, and job personalization.

Third, building on the study of organizational context factors and the satisfaction of basic psychological needs, it would be important to examine more closely how the identified facilitators and obstacles relate to specific outcomes of inclusion, well-being, and job retention. Along these lines, future research could develop longitudinal and comparative designs that allow for an analysis of how variables such as inclusive leadership, an inclusive climate, procedural justice, ostracism, or low participation in decision-making influence, over time, the satisfaction of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. It would also be particularly useful to broaden the study of other environmental factors that have barely begun to be explored, such as the role of formal organizational policies, natural peer support systems, family involvement, or differences across sectors and job types. These lines of inquiry could contribute to moving from a qualitative identification of factors

toward a more precise understanding of which combinations of organizational conditions foster more sustained inclusion trajectories.

A fourth line of research, particularly important given its centrality in this thesis, derives from the diary study on individual and group performance. In this case, a key question for future work consists of examining inclusion processes during the early stages of the employment relationship, that is, at the moment when people with intellectual disabilities first join a work team. As suggested in the manuscript itself, a plausible interpretation is that, in the early stages, the person with intellectual disabilities may occupy a more peripheral position within the group and that, over time, they gradually move toward fuller integration. However, the study included in this thesis was conducted with people with intellectual disabilities who had already been part of their teams for a considerable period of time, and therefore does not allow for direct observation of that initial transition. Consequently, future research should design studies that follow workers from the outset of their entry into employment, with the aim of analyzing whether peripheralization and integration can be understood as successive phases within a broader temporal trajectory. It would also be advisable to extend the research to individuals with greater support needs, to other countries and cultural contexts, and to incorporate additional measures, such as observational data, objective performance information, or even qualitative diaries, that allow for a better understanding of the mechanisms that explain the relationship between the individual performance of the worker with intellectual disabilities and the collective performance of the team.

Finally, the fifth study, focused on emotional authenticity and the expression of positive emotions, opens up several highly promising future directions. First, given that the variables were assessed from the perspective of coworkers without intellectual disabilities, it would be valuable to complement this approach with observational methods, experience sampling designs, or multi-method measures, with the aim of better distinguishing between the emotional self-regulation processes of the person with intellectual disabilities and the interpretation that observers make of their emotional authenticity. Second, it would be important to replicate this study with a larger number of teams, which would allow for the estimation of more complex multilevel models and the examination of possible moderating variables, such as frequency of interaction, task interdependence, or team composition. Third, future research could explore additional explanatory mechanisms beyond emotional authenticity, incorporating variables such as psychological safety, interpersonal trust, or specific emotional regulation strategies, as well as studying the intraindividual variability of authenticity and emotional expression across different moments and work situations. Taken together, these lines of inquiry would allow for a more precise understanding of how positive interpersonal relationships are constructed in inclusive teams and why horizontal peer dynamics appear to play such a relevant role.

Cutting across all the studies, it also seems particularly pertinent to incorporate in future research variables that allow for a better capturing of the internal diversity of the population of people with intellectual disabilities. In particular, it would be relevant to explore in greater depth the role of gender, as the opportunities and challenges associated with inclusion may not be experienced in the same way by men and women with intellectual

disabilities. It would also be valuable to examine more closely how variables such as the type and degree of disability, prior support history, employment sector, or job quality interact with the inclusion processes studied in this thesis.

Ultimately, the body of studies presented in this thesis reinforces a central idea: the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities should not be conceived as a fixed state or as an outcome guaranteed by mere presence in a service or in a job, but rather as a dynamic, relational, and situated process that is constructed through the continuous interaction between individuals and the social and organizational contexts in which they participate.

2. PUBLISHED RESULTS

2.1. STUDY 1: Front Line Leadership in Organisations for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: A Systematic Review

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Front Line Leadership in Organisations for Persons With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: A Systematic Review

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Keywords: frontline managers | organisations for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities | practice leadership | quality of life | systematic Review

ABSTRACT

Background: Leadership is crucial for frontline managers leading direct support staff in intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) services because it impacts both the staff and service users.

Method: A systematic review using CADIMA software, guided by the 2020 Prisma statement, analyzed 32 articles from Scopus, WOS, PsycINFO, and EBSCO databases.

Results: Practice Leadership (PL) emerges as the most commonly applied theoretical model, although other approaches, such as transformational leadership, are also utilized. PL showed significant associations with positive outcomes for service users (improved

quality of life, fewer challenging behaviors) and staff (lower stress, higher job satisfaction). Specific competencies for frontline managers were identified. Despite its demonstrated benefits, numerous barriers impede the implementation of effective leadership, including funding constraints, high staff turnover, and increased administrative demands.

Conclusion: Although PL provides a valuable framework for understanding leadership in IDD services, future research should focus on testing effective leadership interventions in diverse contexts.

Summary

- Practice leadership is an important factor in determining the quality of active support and the extent to which persons with IDD engage in meaningful activities and relationships.
- Practice leadership quality is directly associated with fewer challenging behaviors in persons with IDD.
- Practice leadership has been linked to lower stress, motivation, job satisfaction, and positive experiences among direct support staff.

1. Introduction

Organizations providing services to persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities have undergone significant transformations in recent decades, transitioning from institutional care models to community-based support systems. This paradigm shift reflects a broader societal movement toward inclusion, self-determination, and active participation of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities in their communities (Mansell and Beadle-Brown 2010; Schalock, Luckasson, and Tassé 2021). Consequently, the move to community-based support necessitates innovative approaches to organizational leadership. Managers at all levels are now tasked with fostering organizational change, ensuring high-quality support, and maintaining service delivery standards in increasingly complex environments (Beadle-Brown et al. 2014).

Leadership is particularly critical at the level of frontline managers, who are directly responsible for overseeing and supporting direct support staff (Hewitt et al. 2004). These managers occupy a pivotal intermediary role within organizations serving persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In their role, they are uniquely positioned to translate organizational missions, values, and policies into practical, day-to-day operations (Beadle-Brown et al. 2014). Their responsibilities include training, evaluating, and motivating direct support staff, fostering a culture centered on the individual, and empowering their teams to provide flexible and tailored support to persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (Mansell et al. 2008).

However, frontline managers face significant challenges across three contexts: outer system, inner system, and individual. Aspects of the outer system context, such as social

policies, funding models, and regulatory requirements, often lie beyond the direct control or influence of frontline managers, and yet they significantly impact their leadership capabilities and, consequently, affect the quality of the support provided (Bigby and Humphreys 2024; Deveau and Rickard 2024; Deveau, Gore, and McGill 2020; Berlin Hallrup, Kumlien, and Carlson 2019). Some of the most impactful variables are policy changes (e.g., Transforming Care), austerity measures and funding cuts, regulatory burdens, and excessive paperwork requirements (Bigby and Humphreys 2024; Deveau and Rickard 2024; Deveau, Gore, and McGill 2020; Berlin Hallrup, Kumlien, and Carlson 2019). External crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, further compound these challenges (Bigby and Humphreys 2024). The way organizations respond to these pressures is crucial, given that those that explicitly embed leadership practices within managers' roles may demonstrate greater resilience to external stressors.

In the inner system context, frontline managers struggle with the need for effective collaboration within multidisciplinary teams and on workforce issues, including turnover and recruitment difficulties (Bigby and Humphreys 2024). Factors contributing to staff turnover include low compensation, heavy workloads, inadequate training, lack of variety in the work, insufficient resources, challenging working conditions, limited advancement opportunities, and burnout (Hewitt and Larson 2007). At the individual context level, evolving knowledge and skill requirements often hinder managers' capacity to lead effectively (Hewitt et al. 2008; Beadle-Brown et al. 2014).

Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of how leadership can mitigate these obstacles and foster high-quality services in organizations for persons

with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Various leadership models can be relevant in intellectual and developmental disability services. As documented in this field, transformational leadership emphasizes inspiring staff through a compelling vision that connects daily work to higher-purpose values when providing services (York-Fankhauser 2013). Although other leadership models have not been studied as extensively in intellectual disability contexts, they offer valuable frameworks that could be applied in these settings. Servant leadership, characterized by prioritizing others' needs and empowering team members (Greenleaf and Spears 2002), could align well with person-centered approaches in disability services. Likewise, distributed leadership based on collaboration, trust relationships, and active participation particularly emphasizes shared responsibility among team members, promoting collaborative decision-making (Curtis 2019), which ultimately fosters more personalized and inclusive care. Inclusive leadership, which aims to create environments that embrace diversity (Randel et al. 2018), is particularly relevant when working with marginalized populations. Similarly, ethical leadership, which emphasizes normatively appropriate conduct (Brown and Treviño 2006), provides a framework that ensures that dignity and rights are upheld when supporting vulnerable populations.

In this context, practice leadership (PL) emerged as a key concept, defined by Mansell et al. (2004) as the ability to guide staff in implementing practices that enhance the active participation and empowerment of service users. According to Beadle-Brown, Bigby, and Bould (2015), a practice leader is typically a front-line manager who develops, encourages, and supports their team in implementing the organization's vision. PL involves developing and maintaining high-quality support for staff, which is consistently highlighted as crucial

for implementing effective support practices for users, such as Active Support (Lowe et al. 2010). Active Support is a key approach or technology that primarily focuses on promoting greater participation and engagement in meaningful activities by persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, particularly those who require considerable support (Stancliffe et al. 2008). Research demonstrates that when frontline managers act as role models and maintain an active presence, the staff are more likely to engage in practices that promote autonomy and participation among persons with disabilities, leading to improved staff satisfaction, reduced turnover, and enhanced organizational outcomes (Beadle-Brown et al. 2014; Lowe et al. 2010).

The five core domains of PL include: (a) prioritizing the quality of life of service users and ensuring effective staff support, (b) coordinating and assigning staff responsibilities based on the needs of service users, (c) guiding staff improvement through direct supervision, feedback, and modeling best practices, (d) assessing staff performance through regular one-on-one evaluations to identify opportunities for growth, and (e) evaluating team effectiveness in promoting meaningful activities and relationships for service users during team meetings (Mansell et al. 2004).

Despite the recognized importance of leadership in intellectual and developmental disability services, the existing literature remains limited. A notable example is a realist review by Bigby and Beadle-Brown (2018) that identified leadership as a significant factor influencing the quality of life of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. However, no previous systematic reviews have focused explicitly on leadership within intellectual and developmental disability services. This gap represents a critical oversight,

given the profound impact of leadership on the quality and effectiveness of services provided to persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

To address this gap, it is essential to conduct systematic reviews that synthesize existing research, identify best practices, and provide evidence-based insights. These reviews can serve as valuable resources for scholars, policymakers, practitioners, and organizations striving to improve service outcomes.

The primary objective of this systematic review is to develop a comprehensive understanding of the leadership research on organizations serving persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The specific aims are to: (a) synthesize the theoretical models employed in leadership research within the intellectual disability services sector, (b) identify the essential competencies for frontline managers, (c) examine the types of services most frequently studied in the context of intellectual and developmental disabilities, (d) analyze the impact of leadership on variables such as quality of life and performance, and (e) explore the obstacles identified in existing studies within this field.

2. Method

2.1 Design

A mixed systematic review was conducted following the guidelines of the PRISMA 2020 (Figure 1) declaration (Page et al. 2021) and using the CADIMA software (Kohl et al. 2018). The protocol for this review was registered in PROSPERO with reference number (CRD42024574695).

2.2 Search Strategy and Data Sources

A Boolean search of terms was conducted in the Scopus (46), Web of Science (63), Psycinfo (39), and EBSCO (23) databases, using the following search terms: ("front line leader*" OR "First-line leader*" OR "front line manage*" OR "First-line manage*" OR "front line supervisor*" OR "First-line supervisor*" OR "practice leader*" OR "front line practice leader*") AND ("daycare centers" OR "day services" OR "day support" OR "vocational programs" OR "community vocational supports" OR "sheltered employ*" OR "sheltered workshops" OR "employment service*" OR "community employment programs" OR "residential facilities" OR "residential services" OR "residential home" OR "residential care" OR "supported living settings" OR "group home*" OR "small group homes" OR "community home*" OR "accommodation service*" OR "supported accommodation service*" OR "supported accommodation" OR "community service*" OR "community supports" OR "service* for people with intellectual disabilit*" OR "intellectual disabilit* support service*" OR "intellectual disabilit* care*" OR "mental disabilit* care*" OR "develop* disabilit* care*" OR "active support").

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Document types were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles and gray literature, specifically PhD dissertations. The search was conducted without establishing a limit on the publication years, which led to the identification of articles published since 2004. The bibliographic search yielded 85 results after eliminating duplicates. Two researchers reviewed the articles in parallel and independently, examining the title, abstract, and keywords. Discrepancies were resolved by consensus between the two researchers. The full-text versions of the 49 articles that passed the first filter were reviewed. At this stage,

articles were filtered out for the following reasons: (1) duplicate article (K=2), (2) article not available (K=2), (3) document type (K=5), or (4) did not include the leadership variable (K=8). Thirty-two articles remained that met all the criteria for inclusion in the review. Three of the 32 results were classified as grey literature.

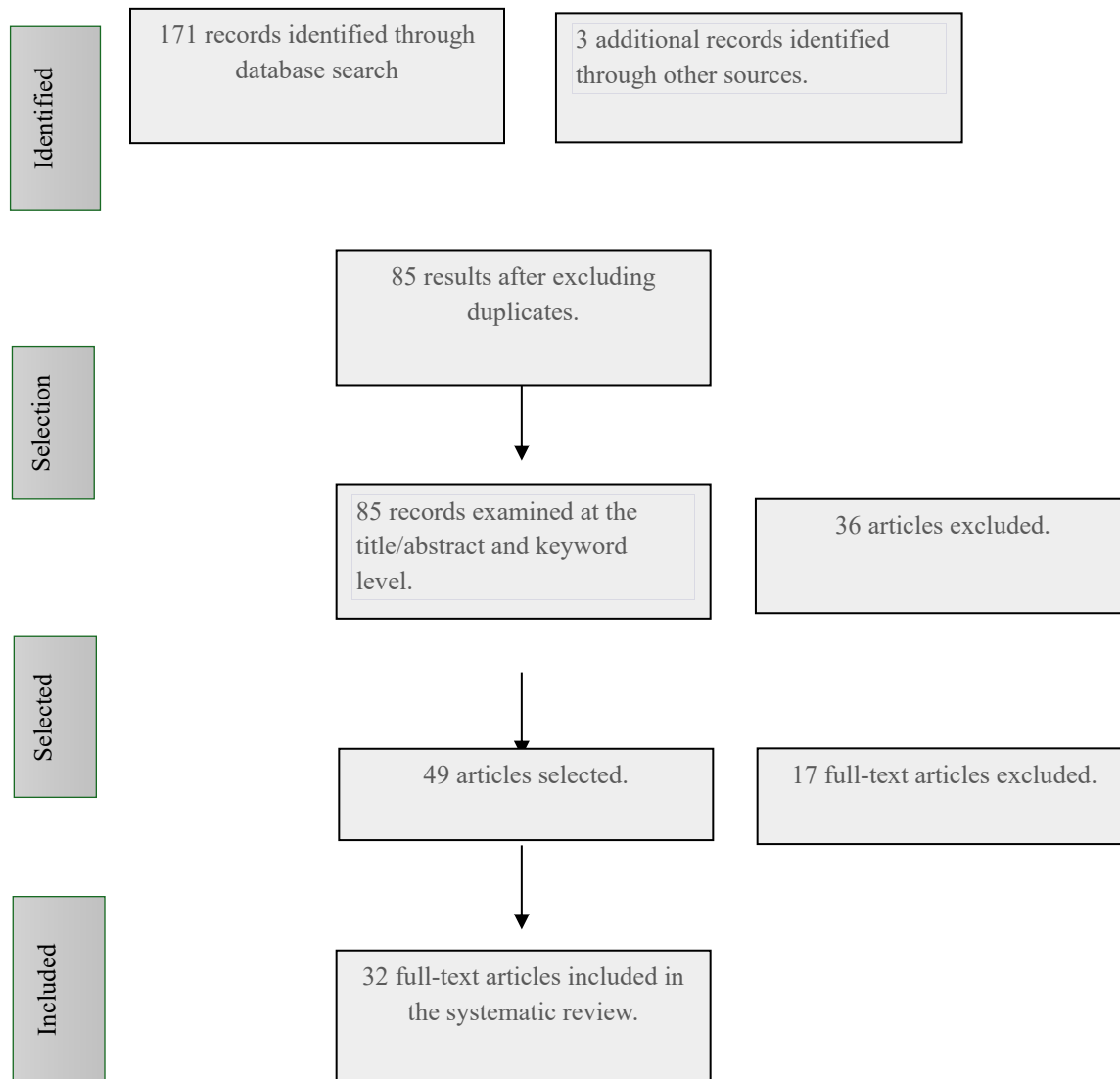


FIGURE 1 | PRISMA flowchart: literature identification, and selection process

2.4 Selection of Studies based on Quality Assessment and Risk of Bias

The Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT), version 2018 (Hong et al. 2018), was used to evaluate the quality of the studies and address possible limitations, biases, and confounding factors that could influence the results. Two researchers independently applied a 7-item checklist for quantitative, qualitative, and mixed studies. These checklists provided a standardized approach to assess study quality. The total score for each study indicates strength of evidence (i.e., higher scores indicate higher study quality). The possible results for each item were: met (1) or did not meet or was not mentioned (0). We did not exclude any studies from our review based on quality.

2.5 Data Extraction

The full texts of the studies that met the inclusion criteria for the systematic review were analyzed in parallel and independently by two researchers. Discrepancies were resolved by consensus, requiring review by a third researcher if they persisted. For data extraction, the following were included: (a) authors, (b) year of publication, (c) article titles, (d) abstracts, (e) keywords, (f) data location, (g) type of study, (h) method of analysis, (i) theoretical models, (j) sample, (k) variables, (l) instruments, (m) type of organization, and (n) results.

3. Results

The synthesis of 32 studies published in the past two decades reveals several key findings in two directions. First, we analyzed formal study characteristics, such as the choice of a methodological design, publication year, country where the study was conducted, and sample size. Second, we also carried out an analysis and synthesis of the content, addressing aspects such as the theoretical leadership models used in the studies, the

necessary competencies for frontline managers in services for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, the type of services for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities analyzed, and the obstacles to leadership identified in these organizations.

3.1 Characteristics of studies

The research studies included various methodological approaches encompassing 14 quantitative, 13 qualitative, and five mixed methods designs (see Annex 1). This methodological diversity reflects the richness of the perspectives explored. In fact, more specifically, the studies used a wide range of methods, including surveys (n = 8), qualitative interviews (n = 5), realistic reviews (n = 1), case studies (n = 1), Delphi projects (n = 2), focus groups (n = 1), and mixed methods such as observational measures, document review, structured interviews, ethnographic observations, and others (n = 14). A longitudinal approach is also observed in eight studies.

The final sample includes articles dating from 2004 to 2024 (see Figure 2). The inaugural article was published in 2004. In general, since 2014 there has been a gradual increase in the number of studies (2020 is a record-breaking year with six articles, 18%), with a sharp decline in 2021 and a slight recovery in 2023 and 2024. This could be due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which may have temporarily redirected research interests towards other topics. Over time, the focus on PL has been consolidated, given that 24 of the 32 articles consider this leadership approach.

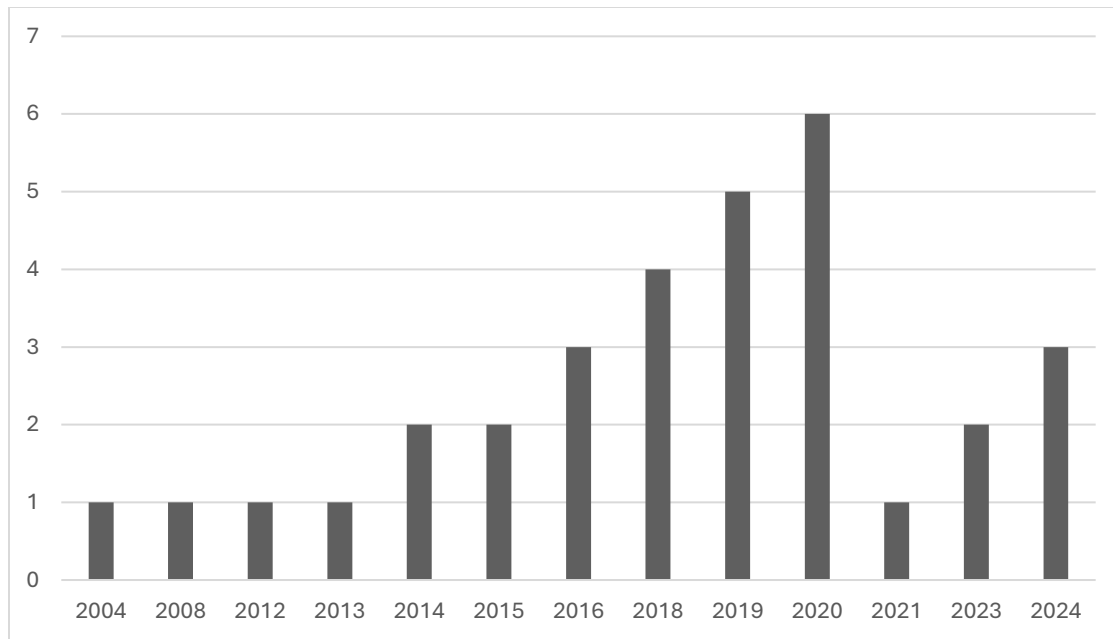


FIGURE 2 | Number of articles published by year.

The countries with the highest academic production on this topic were Australia, with 43.8% (14 articles), and the UK, with 37.5% (12 articles). Articles were also identified from the US, which represented 9.4% (3 articles), with Sweden representing 6.2% (2 articles) and the Netherlands 3.1% (1 article). The prevalence of studies in these nations may reflect a specific academic and policy interest in intellectual and developmental disabilities, possibly indicating more significant resources and capabilities in terms of educational institutions, specialized researchers, and dedicated funding for research in this field. Additionally, despite the absence of language restrictions in our methodology, the exclusive emergence of English-language publications in our search results may be another factor in this geographic distribution pattern. Although these regions may be taking steps to promote research, it is evident that biases and difficulties in generalizing the results can arise, particularly when considering the potential linguistic restrictions in the available literature.

The studies included participants from a variety of roles within disability services, such as supervisors/leaders and direct support staff, as well as service users themselves.

Of the 32 studies evaluated, the results showed that 14 studies had sample sizes ranging from 0 to 50, indicating that 44% of the included studies had relatively small sample sizes. This is consistent with the fact that 13 were qualitative studies, in which smaller sample sizes are typical and justified due to the depth and detail required in qualitative research methods, as in in-depth interviews or focus groups. Additionally, five studies had sample sizes ranging from 51 to 150, and eight studies had sample sizes ranging from 151 to 300. These numbers suggest that many studies had medium to large sample sizes, which typically provide more robust data for statistical analysis. Four studies had sample sizes ranging from 301 to 500, indicating that these studies handled large samples, which is favorable for generalizing the results. Finally, only one study had a sample size ranging from 501 to 900, representing the largest sample size in the review. The characteristics of each study are presented in Annex 1.

3.2 Analysis and synthesis of content

3.2.1 Theoretical Leadership models

The systematic review reveals that PL is the most researched type of leadership in service organizations for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This approach was considered in 24 of the 32 studies reviewed, representing 75% of the total. Mansell, Hughes, and McGill (1994) proposed PL as a crucial facet of services for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Based on this leadership approach, managers adjust their strategies and behaviors to the specific situations they encounter,

allowing for greater flexibility and effectiveness in the daily management of services. This leadership also develops and maintains good support for service users, promoting their active participation and empowerment.

The prevalence of studies on PL is mainly observed in the UK and Australia. Of the 12 articles reviewed in the UK, all of them focus on PL, indicating a strong orientation towards this leadership approach in that country. Of the 14 articles analyzed in Australia, 12 deal with PL, one does not mention any specific leadership theory, and another article focuses on the effective team leadership dimension within the Group Home Culture scale. In the case of the US, of the three articles reviewed, two do not mention a specific leadership theory, and one addresses transformational leadership theory. Finally, one of the two studies from Sweden and one study from the Netherlands do not mention any leadership theory, whereas the second study from Sweden mentions the participation model. In conclusion, PL is the predominant focus of studies from the UK and Australia, the two regions with the highest number of studies.

The prevalence of PL is congruent with the word cloud generated with the VOSviewer software (Van Eck and Waltman 2023), showing that the constructs most repeated in the reviewed manuscripts on leadership in services for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities are practice leadership and active support (see Figure 3). Other constructs were quality, engagement, frontline manager, intellectual disability, group home, support staff, and challenging behavior, among others.

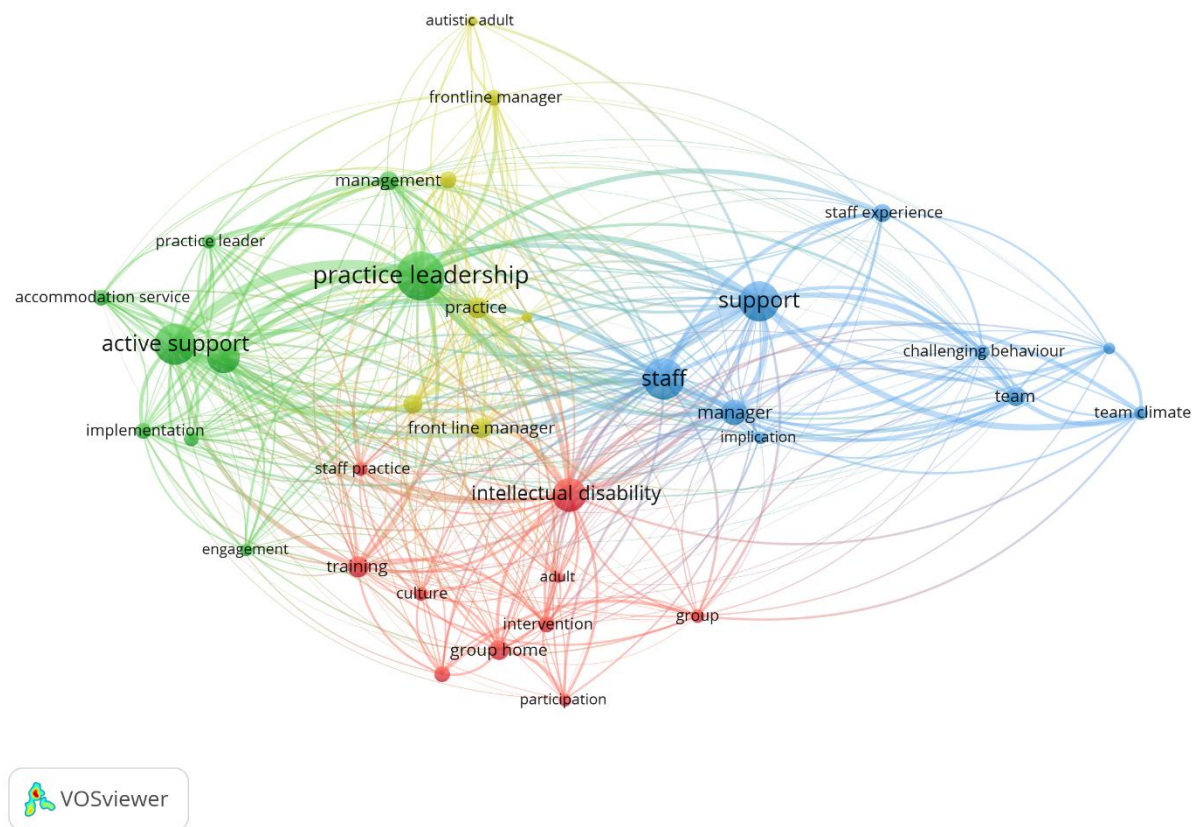


FIGURE 3 | Word cloud with the entire corpus of the content analysis. VOSviewer software word cloud.

Five studies did not refer to a specific theoretical framework. In addition, three studies addressed different leadership models. One study focused on transformational leadership, another used the participation model, and a third analyzed the "effective team leadership" dimension within the Group Home Culture Scale.

3.2.2 Competencies required in frontline managers in services for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities

According to Hewitt et al. (2004), frontline managers require specific competencies to achieve organizational outcomes. Their research identified 142 competency statements

organized into 14 key areas. These areas encompass a range of skills, including staff management (enhancing staff relations, managing personnel, staff development), direct support functions (modeling support, facilitating networks, protecting health and safety), administrative responsibilities (program planning, financial management, scheduling), and organizational representation (promoting public relations, coordinating policies). This comprehensive framework highlights the complexity and multifaceted nature of the frontline manager role in disability services.

Likewise, Fountain (2015) emphasized the importance of competencies, citing Hewitt et al. (2004), who pointed out that the primary focus of frontline leaders is to ensure competency in establishing effective staff and group home operations. Fountain further emphasized that the importance of these competencies is manifested through direct support professionals.

Clement and Bigby (2012) validated this competency framework, confirming its applicability across different group home contexts and countries with similar policy objectives for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Their research emphasized that beyond these technical competencies, frontline managers require essential "orientations" to perform effectively, including passion for the job, resilience, flexibility, calmness, tolerance for autonomy, and work-life balance. Interpersonal skills such as empathy and effective communication were also identified as crucial for connecting with teams and service users.

Although only three studies from the systematic review (Clement and Bigby 2012; Fountain, 2015; Hewitt et al., 2004) explicitly focused on frontline managers' competencies,

this limited emphasis can be explained by several factors. Some studies focused on specific interventions such as Active Support, examining their impact on quality of life rather than detailing leadership competencies (Bigby, Bould, and Beadle-Brown 2019; Bigby et al. 2020b; Bigby et al. 2020c; Bould et al. 2019). Other studies explored the broader concept of “practice leadership”, which overlaps with competencies but encompasses additional elements such as modeling good practices and providing feedback (Beadle-Brown et al. 2014; Beadle-Brown, Bigby, and Bould 2015). This approach was evident in the research by Beadle-Brown et al. (2014), which found that staff reported low levels of practice leadership from frontline managers, suggesting competency deficiencies but without explicitly cataloging them.

Several studies concentrated on organizational culture and team climate as factors influencing outcomes (Bigby and Beadle-Brown 2016; Clement and Bigby 2012; Deveau, Gore, and McGill 2020; Humphreys, Bigby, and Iacono 2020; Lokman et al. 2023). Although frontline leadership shapes these aspects, the research emphasized cultural characteristics rather than specific leadership skills. Other qualitative studies explored implementation challenges faced by frontline managers, indirectly suggesting necessary competencies (such as time management or communication), but without making them the primary focus (Berlin Hallrup, Kumlien, and Carlson 2019; Deveau and Rickard 2024).

The relative scarcity of competency-focused research may also reflect methodological limitations, the exploratory nature of some studies, or an evolution in the research focus. Some researchers may have built upon previously established competency

frameworks to investigate their impact or implementation factors rather than re-identifying the competencies.

As Clement and Bigby (2012) noted, organizations seeking to improve services for people with intellectual disabilities have to clarify the expected competencies for frontline leaders.

3.2.3 Type of services

The analysis of services for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities reveals a variety of support options that can be grouped into two main categories: Residential and Supported Living Services and Community Services.

3.2.3.1 Residential and Supported Living Services. This category encompasses Supported Accommodation Services, Residential Services, Group Homes, and Supported Living, given that they share core characteristics and are often used interchangeably in the literature. A total of 29 studies analyzed more than 1,270 services within this group. These services typically provide 24-hour support in small, community-based settings, with an average of 4 to 6 users per service. Their main goal is to promote autonomy, community participation, and a home-like environment while ensuring appropriate levels of supervision and support. Research highlights the critical role of leadership and service culture in achieving high-quality active support, particularly in smaller services (Beadle-Brown et al. 2014; Beadle-Brown, Bigby, and Bould 2015; Beadle-Brown, Hutchinson, and Whelton 2008; Berlin Hallrup, Kumlien, and Carlson 2019; Bigby and Beadle-Brown 2016; Bigby and Beadle-Brown 2018; Bigby and Humphreys 2024; Bigby, Bould, and Beadle-Brown 2019; Bigby et al. 2020a; Bigby et al. 2020b; Bigby et al. 2020c; Bould et al. 2018a; Bould et al. 2018b; Bould et al. 2019; Bradshaw et al. 2018; Brady 2020; Clement and Bigby 2012; Deveau and McGill 2014;

Deveau and McGill 2016a; Deveau and McGill 2016b; Deveau and McGill 2019; Deveau, Gore, and McGill 2020; Deveau and Rickard 2024; Fountain 2015; Hume, Khan, and Reilly 2021; Humphreys, Bigby, and Iacono 2020; Lokman et al. 2023; Rickard and Deveau 2024; York-Fankhauser 2013).

3.2.3.2 Community Services. Three studies focused on Community Services, which include Group Homes, community vocational support, employment programs, and daily activity services. Although the number of services analyzed was not specified, these services emphasize community integration, work skill development, and meaningful daily routines. They provide opportunities for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities to actively participate in their communities, fostering social inclusion and personal growth (Björne et al. 2023; Gomes and McVilly 2019; Hewitt et al. 2004).

3.2.4 Effects of leadership

Leadership helps to predict a range of outcomes in the articles we reviewed. Outcomes can be categorized into two main groups: a) quality of life and b) performance. In general, the outcomes are experienced by two different recipients: employees and service users.

For employees, in terms of quality of life, PL has been linked to experiences of lower stress (Deveau and McGill 2014; 2016a) and greater motivation (Brady 2020), job satisfaction, and positive experiences (Deveau and McGill 2014; 2016a; 2016b). In terms of employee performance, PL has been linked to a positive work environment, clear communication, increased support, more significant commitment, a sense of purpose, teamwork, trust in the manager, and shaping staff performance (Beadle-Brown et al. 2014;

Beadle-Brown, Bigby, and Bould 2015; Deveau and McGill 2016a; Berlin Hallrup, Kumlien and Carlson 2019; Bigby and Humphreys 2024; Lokman et al. 2023). Bigby and Beadle-Brown (2016) suggest that strong PL is both a defining factor and a driver of culture in better-performing services.

Focusing on service users, the presence and quality of PL are directly associated with well-being (Beadle-Brown, Bigby, and Bould 2015), fewer challenging behaviors (Deveau and McGill 2019), and improvements in quality of life (Beadle-Brown et al. 2014; Beadle-Brown, Bigby, and Bould 2015; Bigby and Beadle-Brown 2016; Bigby et al. 2020a). In addition to performance-related variables such as perceived service quality, PL also enhances the involvement of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities in decision-making processes and better service user experiences with staff (Berlin Hallrup, Kumlien and Carlson 2019). Furthermore, PL is an important factor in determining the quality of active support and, therefore, the extent to which persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities engage in meaningful activities and relationships (Beadle-Brown et al. 2014; Beadle-Brown, Bigby, and Bould 2015; Bigby et al. 2020a; 2020b; Bigby, Bould, and Beadle-Brown 2019; 2020a; Bould et al. 2018b; 2019).

However, it is necessary to recognize that although PL is an important factor in improving and maintaining the quality of staff support, it is not the only factor needed (Beadle-Brown, Bigby, and Bould 2015; Bould et al. 2018b; Mansell and Beadle-Brown 2012). Beadle-Brown et al. (2014) found that, in situations of poor management quality, PL was ineffective in changing the extent to which the staff used Active Support. PL only had an effect when management quality was high. Furthermore, Bould et al. (2019) showed that

solid PL, staff with Active Support training, and services with six or fewer users were significant predictors of Active Support quality. Bould et al. (2018a; 2028b) also found that the presence of the manager, in addition to a good level of PL, was associated with greater engagement and better support quality. Bigby et al. (2020c) showed that predictors of good Active Support were adaptive behavior, PL, Active Support training, and time since implementation.

3.2.5 Obstacles

The reviewed studies also refer to obstacles that hinder effective leadership, which impact frontline managers' roles broadly, not just their practice leadership functions. Many of the obstacles to leadership reflect broader issues related to funding, staffing, and changing models of care. Specifically, obstacles include austerity measures and funding cuts (Beadle-Brown, Bigby, and Bould 2015; Bigby and Humphreys 2024; Bradshaw et al. 2018; Deveau and McGill 2019), high turnover of direct support staff (Beadle-Brown, Bigby, and Bould 2015; Bigby and Humphreys 2024; Deveau and McGill 2014; Lokman et al. 2023), and recruitment issues, causing persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities to have a lot of new and different staff, which makes it challenging to develop good and stable relationships (Bigby and Humphreys 2024; Deveau and Rickard 2024). While our study examines these barriers in relation to practice leadership, these impediments affect the broader spectrum of leadership responsibilities that frontline managers fulfill.

The changing models of care and the evolution of this model are complex, which means that frontline managers oversee multiple small services, thus reducing or removing direct support work from the manager's role. Therefore, managers have to delegate some

management tasks to staff who should have been engaged in direct support roles, taking time away from service users (Bigby et al. 2020b; Bigby and Humphreys 2024; Bradshaw et al. 2018; Deveau and McGill, 2016a; 2019; Deveau and Rickard 2024).

The shift towards personalized and community-based services, as well as the new model of individualized disability funding and its associated regulation, also presents obstacles related to increased paperwork and administrative tasks required of disability service organizations (Bigby and Humphreys 2024; Deveau and McGill 2019; Deveau and Rickard 2024; York-Fankhauser 2013). Time pressure experienced by frontline managers due to increased administrative and managerial tasks and workforce issues (Bradshaw et al. 2018; Deveau and Rickard 2024) reduces their capacity to carry out leadership tasks in practice, resulting in weak leadership (Beadle-Brown et al. 2014; Bigby and Humphreys 2024; Deveau and McGill 2019) and hindering the implementation of active support principles that improve the quality of life of service users (Beadle-Brown, Bigby, and Bould 2015; Bould et al. 2019).

Lack of support, training, and role guidance for frontline staff and managers are also significant obstacles (Bigby and Humphreys 2024; Björne et al. 2023; Deveau and McGill 2019). Frontline managers need more information and training in specialist support (Bradshaw et al. 2018; Fountain 2015). However, providing this specialist support can be challenging if there are not enough staff members with exemplary leadership and management to meet the needs of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (Rickard and Deveau 2024).

Finally, the staff are also not sufficiently trained to tailor Active Support to each individual's needs and support people with severe disabilities (Bigby et al. 2020c). For example, Mansell and Beadle-Brown (2012) found that service users with mild disability receive the best support, even though individuals with more severe disabilities need more specialized and direct support (Bould et al. 2018b; Bigby, Bould and Beadle-Brown 2019). Services may also exclude persons with severe and profound intellectual and developmental disabilities, as they are often non-verbal (Berlin Hallrup, Kumlien and Carlson 2019).

4. Discussion

The main objective of this systematic review was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the essential aspects of research on leadership in organizations for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, comparing the characteristics of the studies and their contents. Regarding the characteristics, our findings show the existence of a certain interest in leadership since 2004 (especially in developed regions such as Australia and UK), the use of a variety of methodological approaches, and, with few exceptions, the absence of large samples in the research. With regard to content, the findings of this review reflected the prevalence of PL as the dominant leadership theory (despite the existence of significant obstacles to its implementation), the identification of competencies that frontline managers should display in order to be effective in organizations for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and the positive effects of PL on performance and quality of life. Through our systematic review, we were able

to identify the main research areas in the reviewed studies and relevant input for future research. They are discussed below.

4.1 Main Identified Research Areas

We identified three main research areas in the investigation of leadership in organizations for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. First, our findings show that PL plays a prominent role, although other less frequently applied theories (e.g., transformational) have also been used in our context. It is not surprising that research gives importance to PL in organizations for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. After all, it is a contextualized theoretical approach to leadership that is person-centered, focusing on practices that promote the support and empowerment of persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (Beadle-Brown, Bigby and Bould, 2015; Mansell et al., 2004). Empirical evidence supported this central role, with significant relationships between PL, commitment, and the quality of Active Support provided to persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (Beadle-Brown, Bigby, and Bould 2015; Bould et al. 2018b; Mansell and Beadle-Brown 2012). In addition, PL is also associated with positive staff experiences, lower stress, job satisfaction, well-being, clear communication, increased support, commitment, and other variables (Bigby et al. 2020a; 2020b; Deveau and McGill 2014; 2016a; 2016b).

Second, research has also paid attention to obstacles in the implementation of PL. Despite its meaningful positive effects, certain factors hinder the generalization of PL in organizations for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Some examples are the requirement of individualized funding plans, austerity measures, staff turnover,

difficulties in recruitment, the use of temporary staff, and the increase in management and administrative tasks that produce time pressure and reduce leaders' capacity to carry out PL tasks (Deveau and Rickard 2024; Rickard and Deveau 2024). In addition, one of the consequences of policy changes (funding and staffing cuts) is that the frontline manager oversees multiple small services, which increases the difficulty of providing direct presence, observation, and feedback to staff in the implementation of active support (Deveau and McGill 2016a; 2019). Therefore, managers are forced to provide feedback via calls, emails, or messages rather than in person (Deveau and Rickard 2024). All of this makes it difficult to implement PL.

Finally, a promising research area in the studies focused on identifying the competencies of frontline managers. The findings showed that frontline managers require specific competencies to perform their duties. Hewitt et al. (2004) identified 142 competencies distributed across 14 areas.

4.2 Input for Future Research

Based on our findings, we propose five main inputs to guide future research. First, the experimental study of PL interventions could be relevant to explore how to enhance this leadership approach in organizations for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Given the importance of PL and its limited generalization, as observed in several studies (Beadle-Brown et al. 2014; Bigby, Bould, and Beadle-Brown 2019; Bradshaw et al. 2018; Deveau and Rickard 2024), it is important to identify and test interventions that could promote it. Experimental studies can examine how frontline managers respond to interventions (experimental group) such as training, personal development, and support for

specific skills, among others. Interventions can also be designed to remove obstacles in PL implementation. These studies would make it possible to examine the efficacy of different types of PL interventions and their effects, compared to responses of frontline managers who are not exposed to PL interventions (control group).

Second, further research on PL is needed because differences have been found across organizations in the way they understand and implement leadership (Bould et al. 2018b; Deveau and McGill 2016a). Specifically, future research can examine how to implement PL appropriately in difficult situations, for example, when frontline managers work in more than one service, when they work on a rotating shift, when they have to balance administrative and practice roles, and when they work in a central vs. mobile office.

Third, a significant proportion of the reviewed studies (8 out of 32) were longitudinal in design, providing robust evidence and making it possible to reach causality inferences. This temporal dimension could be further enhanced by incorporating diary studies that allow more detailed tracking across various days. For example, in future research, the effects of PL could be examined during an intervention period in which the reactions and behaviors of support staff and service users are recorded daily. This approach can provide more detailed information about changes over time.

Fourth, because PL research has mainly concentrated on living arrangement services (accommodation, residential, group homes etc.) in Australia and the UK, future research could conduct studies on a broader range of services for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities and countries. Day services, vocational programs, and community employment, among other services, can be investigated. Countries other than

Australia and the UK can be considered. This extension will make it possible to observe differences-similarities and identify relevant contextual factors that may depend on the type of service, culture, and/or country.

Finally, our review has not identified a research area that could be highly relevant: what happens in services for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities when good quality leadership is absent. The absence of good quality leadership is not necessarily the same as bad quality leadership, but it can lead to negative effects (Mathieu and Gilbreath 2025). Future research could improve our understanding by examining the effects of the absence of good-quality leadership in services for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. For example, the absence of good leadership can cause stagnation in the organization's functioning, automatic inertia, deterioration of service quality, and the continuation of entrenched practices that may no longer be useful, among other consequences.

5. Conclusion

This systematic review provides an overview of leadership research on frontline managers in organizations for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. PL emerged as the dominant leadership approach, with effects on employees and service users in terms of quality of life and performance. Our findings also provide relevant information about the competencies required for frontline managers, the types of services investigated, and the obstacles to implementing effective leadership. The results also suggest future areas of research that will lead to a better understanding of leadership and its impact on employees and persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Author Contributions

Leadly V. Fajardo-Castro: conceptualization of research design, acquisition of data, data screening, data analysis, writing, editing and reviewing. **Sedigheh Jalili:** data screening, data analysis, writing, reviewing. **Vicente Martínez-Tur:** overall supervision, data screening, data analysis, editing, reviewing.

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The authors have nothing to report.

Ethics Statement

The authors have nothing to report.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section.

Data S1: Supporting Information.

Annex 1

Characteristics of the included articles.

Author(s) (year), country	Design, Method, and Analysis	Sample	Approaches to Leadership	Type of service
Hewitt et al. (2004), US	Qualitative Focus groups Thematic analysis to identify and categorize the competencies needed for frontline managers	The study included 146 participants, 97 direct support professionals, 40 frontline managers, and seven managers supervising frontline managers	No mention	Community services: small group homes, community vocational supports, and community employment programs
Beadle-Brown, Hutchinson, and Whelton (2008), UK	Quantitative Longitudinal study Observational measures and survey Statistical analyses were conducted, but the specific types of analyses were not mentioned	29 individuals with intellectual disabilities and very high support needs	Practice leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Clement and Bigby (2012), Australia	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews and ethnographic observation Qualitative analysis	16 high-performing house managers and 5 senior managers	Practice leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
York-Fankhauser (2013), US	Quantitative Cross-sectional survey Pearson correlation analysis	Forty agencies that provided usable surveys for analysis. Each participating agency involved its CEO and selected three additional employees, which means that the total sample could include 160 participants	Transformational leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Beadle-Brown et al. (2014), UK	Quantitative Longitudinal study	Participants include people living in residential services for people with	Practice leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services

	Survey and Observational measures Multiple linear regression	severe or profound intellectual disabilities. In 2005/2006, data were collected for 649 people in 138 settings. Then, additional data were collected for 126 people in 33 services in 2009 and 124 in 39 services in 2010		
Deveau and McGill (2014), UK	Quantitative Cross-sectional survey Non-parametric statistics	149 employees working in residential services for adults with intellectual disabilities	Practice Leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Beadle-Brown, Bigby, and Bould (2015), Australia	Quantitative Cross-sectional survey and observational method Cluster and correlation analysis	241 people with intellectual disabilities received services from nine organizations in 58 supported accommodation centers	Practice Leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Fountain (2015), US	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and researcher field notes Data analysis was conducted by transcribing the individual and focus group interviews verbatim for data analysis	20 front-line managers of nonprofit agencies operating group homes for individuals with intellectual disabilities	No mention	Residential and Supported Living Services
Bigby and Beadle-Brown (2016), Australia	Qualitative ethnographic methods Participant observation and semi-structured interviews The Template Analysis Approach	17 residents with severe intellectual disabilities living in three high-performing group homes managed by two non-governmental organizations	Practice Leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Deveau and McGill (2016a), UK	Quantitative	332 employees from residential services for	Practice Leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services

	Cross-sectional survey Non-parametric statistical analyses	people with intellectual disabilities		
Deveau and McGill (2016b), UK	Qualitative Semi-structured and open-ended interviews Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis	19 managers of ordinary residential services	Practice Leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Bigby and Beadle-Brown (2018). Australia	Qualitative Realist review Analyze existing literature, with team meetings to discuss and synthesize theories	44 documents	Practice leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Bould et al. (2018a), Australia	Quantitative Longitudinal study Survey, Observed Measure, Structured Interviews, and Document Review Correlational and regression analysis	29 practice leaders from supported accommodation services, working across 36 different services in Australia. Data were collected from 134 service users and 135 support workers	Practice leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Bould et al. (2018b), Australia	Quantitative Longitudinal study Survey and Observed Measure Descriptive statistics and statistics to evaluate the difference in means and medians	187 service users with intellectual disabilities from 58 different shared supported accommodation services	Practice leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Bradshaw et al. (2018), UK	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews	35 managers of supported accommodation services	Practice Leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services

	Thematic networks analysis			
Bigby, Bould, and Beadle-Brown (2019), Australia	Mixed Methods Longitudinal study Staff questionnaires, observations, and manager interviews. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, exploratory analysis, and Univariate linear regression	407 service users over 4 years of data collection.	Practice Leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Bould et al. (2019), Australia	Quantitative Longitudinal study Direct observation and survey Multilevel modeling	194 service users with intellectual disabilities residing in 51 supported accommodation services	Practice Leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Deveau and McGill (2019), UK	Quantitative Cross-sectional survey Descriptive data and correlation analysis	144 direct support staff	Practice Leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Gomes and McVilly (2019), Australia	Qualitative Delphi research method Inductive thematic analysis and descriptive statistics	There were 29 participants in the first round, 17 in the second round, and 13 in the third round	No mention	Community services: Accommodation, day support, and employment services.
Berlin Hallrup, Kumlien, and Carlson (2019), Sweden	Qualitative Individual interviews Thematic content analysis	14 service managers	Participation model	Residential and Supported Living Services
Bigby et al. (2020a), Australia	Quantitative Cross-sectional survey interviews and observations	253 service users from 71 services	Practice Leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services

	Multilevel model analysis			
Bigby et al. (2020b), Australia	Mixed Methods Semi-structured interviews and Structured observations Inductive interpretative analysis approach with grounded theory The percentage of service users receiving good Active Support was calculated using the ASM measure for quantitative data	253 service users were selected as a representative sample based on sociodemographic characteristics, adaptive behavior, and additional disabilities. Additionally, 18 senior managers participated and were responsible for implementing Active Support	Practice Leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Bigby et al. (2020c), Australia	Quantitative Cross-sectional survey Multilevel models (MLM)	461 service users from 134 services managed by 14 non-profit organizations	Practice Leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Brady (2020), UK	Mixed Methods Longitudinal study Semi-structured interviews Non-Concurrent Multiple Baseline Design (NCMBD) Thematic analysis Descriptive statistical analysis and ANOVA	The primary participants were frontline staff (n=52), including all frontline staff (n=42) in the three residential houses, three PICs, three deputy PICs, three clinical psychologists, and one service manager	Practice leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Deveau, Gore, and McGill (2020), UK	Qualitative Delphi research method Content analysis and thematic analysis were used in Rounds 1 and 2. In Round 3,	11 senior managers from organizations in the UK providing services for people with intellectual disabilities	Practice leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services

	data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to assess consensus and importance			
Humphreys, Bigby, and Iacono (2020), Australia	Quantitative Cross-sectional survey Multilevel modeling	The participants were 98 people with intellectual disabilities, 86 disability support workers (DSWs), and 21 front-line managers (107 staff members in all) from 23 group homes	Effective Team Leadership (Culture dimension)	Residential and Supported Living Services
Hume, Khan, and Reilly (2021), UK	Qualitative Single-case study Direct observation and specific evaluation tools for data collection Descriptive analyses and implementation and effectiveness indicators	16 staff members who are team managers and senior support workers in a residential service for adults with intellectual disabilities and autism	Practice Leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Björne et al. (2023), Sweden	Mixed methods A cross-sectional survey with 10-item Likert scales and free-text questions Descriptive methods and content analysis	355 people participated: 52 managers and 303 staff members	No mention	Community services: specifically, group homes and daily activity services
Lokman et al. (2023), Netherlands	Quantitative Cross-sectional survey Multilevel analyses	The study included 262 professionals working in residential service organizations for people with mild intellectual disabilities and severely challenging behaviors. 201 staff members, 18 team managers, 21 managers, and 22 psychologists participated	No mention	Residential and Supported Living Services
Bigby and Humphreys (2024), Australia	Mixed methods Cross-sectional and longitudinal components	70 frontline managers responsible for 96 services from 11 organizations	Practice Leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services

	Observed Measurements, interviews, and field notes about observations and paperwork review Nonparametric tests and Thematic analysis			
Deveau and Rickard (2024), UK	Qualitative semi-structured interviews Thematic analysis	14 frontline managers	Practice Leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services
Rickard and Deveau (2024), UK	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews Thematic analysis	14 participants were employed full-time in a frontline management role	Practice Leadership	Residential and Supported Living Services

2.2. STUDY 2: Digitalization and integrated employment for persons with intellectual disabilities

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Digitalization and Integrated Employment for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

Background: Digitalization is transforming our world cross-sectionally, affecting the work of individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID). Based on the socio-technical approach, digitalization must respect the employability and quality of life of individuals with ID.

Aims: This research analyzed the challenges and identified the opportunities stemming from digitalization for integrated employment.

Methods and procedures: We conducted two studies. Building on the grounded theory, we analyzed the content of semi-structured interviews (Study 1) using three information sources: experts in technology and ID, workers with ID, and team supervisors in which at least one individual with ID works. Second, we implemented a Delphi method (Study 2) with the participation of experts in technology and ID.

Results: The results identified three main themes: characteristics of new professional profiles, opportunities generated by digitalization, and support that can promote the autonomy of individuals with ID.

Conclusions and implications: Our study emphasized the need to adapt professional profiles, develop necessary skills, and strengthen support systems. This study takes a significant step toward identifying promising practices for adapting to digitalization in

integrated employment. Results also highlighted the importance of a coordinated effort involving employers, the third sector, family members, and public administration in promoting integrated employment.

Keywords: Digitalization, Intellectual disabilities, Grounded theory, Delphi, Integrated employment, Digitalized competencies

What this paper adds

This article presents two research studies examining the relationship between digitalization and integrated employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. First, we analyzed semi-structured interviews conducted with experts in digitalization and intellectual disabilities, individuals with intellectual disabilities currently employed in integrated settings, and team supervisors with at least one team member with intellectual disabilities. Second, we conducted a Delphi study involving experts in digitalization and intellectual disabilities. Overall, digitalization is perceived not as a threat but as an opportunity. Although there are potential risks of job loss, digitalization also offers opportunities to promote integrated employment. These opportunities, identified in our research, will require collaborative efforts from employers, third-sector organizations, family members, and public administration.

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1.Introduction

Individuals with disabilities face more difficulties in accessing integrated employment (Baldwin & Marcus, 2011; United Nations, 2019), especially when they have greater support needs (i.e., intellectual disabilities). The challenges of accessing integrated employment could increase with digitalization. The types of job activities traditionally performed by individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) may increase their vulnerability in the technological transition. It should be noted that when these individuals work in integrated employment, they tend to engage in manual tasks requiring low qualification (Livermore et al., 2017; Taanila et al., 2005) that technological systems can potentially perform.

With this in mind, this study conducted an in-depth analysis of the challenges and opportunities presented by technological change linked to digitalization in the integrated employment of individuals with ID. The study focused on identifying the tasks performed by individuals with ID in integrated employment, the use of technology in their job roles, the skills that will be required in the future, the opportunities that technology provides for their career development, and the optimization of support systems for their adaptation in this evolving technological transition environment. Two complementary strategies were implemented to achieve these goals. We carried out a content analysis of semi-structured interviews with workers with ID, experts in both technology and integrated employment, and supervisors of workers with ID. The present study also carried out statistical analyses of Delphi group responses from experts in technology and ID.

2. Theoretical Background

The socio-technical approach originated in the 1950s at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (United Kingdom) and was interested in worker-machine interaction in the industrial context. It suggested that there is no single way to implement technological change (Guest, 2022). Individuals and societies are potentially free to decide the best path, which will be the one that achieves a balance between productivity and the quality of life of workers (Guest, 2022; Mumford, 2006). To better understand the role of digitalization in integrated employment for individuals with ID, it is important to highlight some fundamental principles of the socio-technological approach. First, technology can change the nature of work (Trist et al., 2013). This is crucial in understanding how technologies can be adapted to the capabilities of individuals with ID to facilitate their effective participation in the workforce (Lancioni et al., 2014). Second, job enrichment is reinforced by including tasks that incorporate features such as autonomy, variety, complexity, and social support (Waschull et al., 2022). This is relevant because a job design based on enrichment can facilitate the effective participation of workers with ID, for example, through supported employment programs (Cimera, 2014) or customized employment (Riesen & Morgan, 2018). This job enrichment should be compatible with digitalization. Third, the socio-technical approach is interested in enhancing the personal development of workers (Mumford, 2006). To achieve successful integrated employment for individuals with ID, it is essential for organizations to implement digitalization processes that also promote learning and development opportunities tailored to their specific needs.

Therefore, the generalization of digital technology reveals significant challenges and opportunities for individuals with disabilities, especially those with ID. A study conducted in

Germany with 50 individuals with ID revealed their desire to improve their digital skills, although they often did not feel supported by their caregivers in this process (Heitplatz, 2020). Assistive technologies emerge as crucial tools to compensate for specific disabilities and enhance the quality of life of individuals with disabilities (Boot et al., 2018; Shih et al., 2012). In fact, according to Owuor et al. (2018), assistive technologies can reduce functional limitations and improve the autonomy of individuals with disabilities, promoting inclusion and well-being. However, support, education, and training in technology for individuals with ID is a persistent need (Khanlou et al., 2021). Decision-making related to access to technology is influenced by environmental and social factors, such as knowledge and beliefs about technology (Ramsten et al., 2019). Personalized technological environments are crucial for the autonomy and support of individuals with ID (Ramsten et al., 2019; Wahl & Kiuppis, 2023), but this customization is not guaranteed. Additionally, the active participation of individuals with disabilities in the design of technology can enhance usability and lead to a sense of empowerment and ownership (Balasuriya et al., 2022). In some cases, it can also help to reduce support requirements for individuals with ID, thus increasing their autonomy and freeing support staff for other activities (Balasuriya et al., 2022; Ramsten et al., 2019; Wahl & Kiuppis, 2023).

In summary, the relationship between digitalization and ID is a complex challenge. However, research is still limited. This study aims to analyze factors that could facilitate integrated employment of individuals with ID in the digitalization era, including new professional profiles, opportunities from digitalization, and necessary support. As mentioned above, two different studies with two methodologies were applied: analysis of

semi-structured interviews using Strauss's Grounded Theory and the Delphi method. Ethical approval was obtained from the ethical committee of the research team's university. All appropriate measures were taken with regard to participants' consent and confidentiality.

Study 1

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

The version of Grounded Theory used was Straussian Grounded Theory, framed within the philosophical currents of symbolic interactionism and phenomenology (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This systematic methodology facilitates the adaptation of concepts to data, generating new knowledge, especially in areas where research is limited, as in the field of digitalization of work for individuals with ID (Trip et al., 2020). It is a suitable strategy for theory generation through content analysis of semi-structured interviews (Estrada-Acuña et al., 2021).

3.2. Participants

We conducted the study in collaboration with “Plena inclusión”, a non-governmental organization (NGO) located in Spain and dedicated to the social inclusion of individuals with ID. This NGO opened a call to recruit participants. Three groups of individuals participated as interviewees: three experts in technology and ID (two males and one female), two individuals with ID employed in integrated employment, and four team supervisors (three females and one male) who had at least one individual with ID on their team.

The first participant was 48 years old with 17 years of experience in the same

position and had an officially recognized disability rating of 33%. He was employed as a general laborer. The second participant was 40 years old with 2 years of work experience in his current position and had a disability rating of 67%. He was employed as a cleaning service worker. Both participants were able to perform their job duties with varying degrees of support, representing different levels of workplace independence and accommodation needs. Their extended work histories provided valuable insights into the long-term employment experiences of individuals with ID and their challenges with workplace digitalization.

3.3. Data Collection

The data were collected from semi-structured interviews that addressed three areas that corresponded to the three aforementioned objectives: new professional profiles, digitalization as an opportunity, and the support needed by individuals with ID in the face of digitalization. The interviews were conducted using the Microsoft Teams platform and recorded with the participant's consent for subsequent transcription. The average duration of the interviews was 30 minutes.

3.4. Procedure

The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, and content analysis was carried out using methods consistent with a grounded theory approach with the assistance of NVivo 14 software. Initially, multiple readings of the transcripts were conducted to allow the researchers to become familiar with the data. Subsequently, a line-by-line coding process was applied, generating numerous descriptive codes that reflected different aspects addressed in the interviews. To enhance the credibility of the emerging codes, two different

researchers performed the same process in parallel, facilitating comparison and discussion of the results. This process led to a final list of codes and categories. Subsequently, the codes were grouped into three predefined categories: the characteristics of new professional profiles for individuals with ID, opportunities generated by digitalization for integrated employment, and the support needed by individuals with ID. These categories were reanalyzed, interview by interview and across interviews, to identify subthemes based on the participants' narratives, following an abductive approach that combines deductive and inductive analysis (Awuzie & McDermott, 2017). In addition, theoretical sampling was performed based on the classification of interviews to find variations in situations and analyze them. The aim of the analysis was to establish patterns and themes from the data through field notes and associated memos, selecting representative quotes to illustrate the meaning of the categories. The constant comparative method allowed researchers to search for patterns in the data and compare emerging codes for similarities and differences, integrating codes and subcategories to arrive at a manageable number of categories. Each new case was evaluated with respect to the original coding structure, adjusting codes as necessary. This process continued until saturation was reached, and new cases did not yield additional codes. Finally, the results were compared with previous research to observe similarities and differences.

3.5. Data Analysis

The content analysis of the semi-structured interviews was carried out using NVivo version 14. First, the open coding process was performed, which involved identifying codes in the data. Next, axial coding was conducted to discover categories and their relationships.

Finally, selective coding was carried out to identify central categories (Estrada-Acuña et al., 2021; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

4. Results

Different aspects were observed for each main area associated with our objectives (characteristics of new professional profiles for workers with ID, opportunities generated by technological change, and support needed by workers with ID). Participants' quotes were replaced with the initials of their roles and the interview number as follows: Ex_001 (Expert), SU_001 (Supervisor), and PDI_001 (Individual with ID). We selected one representative quote for each code (complete data available in Annexes 1).

4.1. Theme 1: Characteristics of New Professional Profiles

As mentioned above, when individuals with ID work in integrated employment, they tend to perform low-skilled manual tasks (Livermore et al., 2017). This does not mean that individuals with ID lack the ability to carry out more complex tasks. In fact, it is common for these individuals to perform roles that are below their potential (Migliore & Butterworth, 2008; Schneider & Sherlock, 2018). These aspects were stressed by participants in the interviews. The jobs that individuals with ID typically perform are related to unskilled activities.

...almost all the job placements we make for individuals with disabilities are unskilled positions, from production assistants... or office assistants, and if we look at the service sector, they are still assistants, such as waiters' assistants or restocking assistants. (EX_002)

In this context, one of the crucial challenges is to achieve a technological transition that avoids the exclusion of individuals with ID. In this regard, the participants express optimism and agree that, although changes in the professional profiles of workers with ID are likely, these changes should not be seen as a threat:

Well, some might have negative effects, and others positive, but I think everything I'm seeing in the company is for the better; it's positive. (PDI_002)

The participants also agreed that one of the most significant changes will be the transition towards more specialized professional profiles, leaving versatility behind:

...well, in the past week, I think artificial intelligence has really taken off, and it has reached our associations and our daily lives. I see it as an opportunity for individuals with disabilities to have even more specialized profiles. (EX_001)

As a result of the use of technologies and specialization in tasks, it is expected that individuals with ID will achieve a higher degree of self-determination:

...that's where I see that perhaps the shell needs to be broken, and parents should allow their children to go their own way, not keeping them so enclosed. (SU_001)

Furthermore, technological change will require the development of soft (e.g., proactivity) and digital skills within the professional profiles of individuals with ID:

... in the last few decades, there has been a change in job requirements. Ten years ago, digital skills were not required for some unskilled jobs, such as a janitor... Now, for these jobs, digital skills are being requested... and that is making the integration a bit more challenging... (EX_002)

The interviews highlight that not only will the professional profiles of individuals with ID change, but significant changes will also occur in the role of job coach (professionals responsible for facilitating the adaptation of individuals with ID to the workplace). Several of their functions will be taken over by technology as a learning and reference tool in the workplace for workers with ID. In this context, specialized support will need to be oriented towards and adapted to training in the use of technology. Therefore, it will be necessary for support professionals to be trained in technology management.

...provide ongoing training to all individuals with disabilities with the support of trainers, which I think is vital in this digital transformation, so that tutors and daily work companions in this transformation must also be trained, certainly before the individuals with disabilities themselves. (SU_001)

Finally, in addition to technological change, the pandemic has transformed the way we work and interact, and this has also had an impact on individuals with ID.

When the pandemic came, we all had to reinvent ourselves. The truth is that we were very successful. We didn't think they would adapt so quickly. Even for people who didn't interact as much in person, we managed to get them to interact through a screen, so in some cases, it surprised us a lot. (EX_003)

4.2 Theme 2: Opportunities Generated by Technological Change Linked to Digitalization

Digitalization could become an essential support tool for individuals with ID, as Wehmeyer et al. (2012) indicated. It not only allows for adaptation, but it also provides support in various areas, reducing the gap between individual and environmental demands. This is mentioned by the participants.

...the truth is that we realized that technology was incredibly valuable, and we discovered many things, interactive games, and many platforms that helped us and them. They could make our day-to-day life more comfortable. (EX_003)

In this regard, technology has the potential to enhance functional skills, promote greater independence in daily activities, provide control over the environment, and ultimately foster better community integration (Wehmeyer et al., 2012). Consequently, the support individuals with ID require from job coaches is likely to decrease, or their focus may shift toward managing technology as a support resource.

Well, for instance, if you have any doubts about your work, you can go online and find the answers. That's what happened to me; I had some questions, and as they say here, 'Dr. Google' solved them for me. (PDI_001)

Finally, according to Wehmeyer et al. (2006), the use of technology to promote employment outcomes is generally effective, especially when addressing Universal Design features (a design that creates spaces or products accessible to most people, also known as design for everyone). Additionally, technology can reduce barriers faced by individuals with ID in their work lives in areas such as speaking, reading, and writing.

...I have a computer at home, and I manage it well. I haven't really had any issues with technology. Our machine is very easy to use. (PDI_002)

4.3. Theme 3: Support Needed by Individuals with ID to Adapt to Technological Change Linked to Digitalization

As part of the support demands posed by digitalization in integrated employment for individuals with ID, there is a considerable need to create specific training programs tailored

to this group and facilitated by private companies, third-sector entities, and public policy/administration authorities. Participants suggested strategies such as incorporating digital skills into training programs, integrating them into curricula, and developing cognitive accessibility strategies for technology use.

It's important to include training in new technologies in specific programs, and this training should be accessible. (EX_001)

In the workplace, the role of supervisors is crucial for the successful integration of workers with ID into the work team and their effective adaptation to their jobs. These supervisors play a key role in raising awareness among other team members about the importance of accepting and supporting individuals with ID.

...the supervisor or manager, their support must be initial when it comes to restructuring, if you want, when it comes to making potential colleagues aware, right? It's an initial support... (EX_002)

Likewise, in the work experience, individuals with ID often use technology with the support of specialized staff or co-workers (natural supports). These supports play a crucial role in influencing how technology is used and adapted.

...well, the first few days were difficult because I was quite nervous, and the support I had was a week with the coworker I had at the time in that position. He spent a week with me, telling me how to do things, and then I was on my own. (PDI_002)

Furthermore, it is essential to highlight the importance of support provided by caregivers, who must have a strong level of familiarity and technological skills to ensure effective assistance (Balasuriya et al., 2022).

The role of families is crucial, but it's a long-term effort... they have to instill the importance of digital skills. We are in an increasingly digitalized society, so it's not about taking away mobile phones just because they become indiscriminately addicted to social media or video games. They should also see those computer programs and the mobile phone as an opportunity for their child's development and professional growth... (EX_002)

To put all these supports into action, the interviewees agree on the need to enhance coordination among various stakeholders: families, organizations, the third sector, and public administration.

Well, I think, in addition, the associations that I know are making a superhuman effort to carry out the many projects they have in progress. So, I believe they need to partner with the administration so the administration can provide them with these financial resources... (SU_001)

Technology not only has positive aspects. Inappropriate use or lack of control can lead to issues such as addiction to smartphones or social media, with individuals with ID being more vulnerable in many cases and requiring mental health support (Bednar & Welch, 2020).

Well, sometimes the mobile phone brings problems with WhatsApp, social media, and stuff. Some become obsessed with someone and keep talking to you all the time. Or they call you, and they don't have a filter, so sometimes it can be 2:00 in the morning... (EX_003)

Finally, it is important to highlight that both individuals with and without ID face similar challenges when it comes to managing technology. This equality in terms of challenges underscores the need for inclusive and accessible solutions that do not just benefit a specific group but rather address technological difficulties in a widespread and equitable manner.

...besides, new technologies are also complicated for those without disabilities. (PDI_002)

Study 2

5. Methodology

5.1. Design

The Delphi method is a widely used social research strategy for gathering data and obtaining the most reliable consensus from a panel of experts (Lyons et al., 2018), in this case regarding digitalization and integrated employment for individuals with ID. This is due to the method's specific interest in understanding what future strategies are important and feasible for individuals with ID in adapting to digitalization in the workplace.

5.2. Participants and Procedure

To carry out the Delphi study, seven experts in technology and ID participated. The design of the questionnaire was based on a participatory process in which experts suggested items for each of the three sections. After removing items due to redundancies, the final questionnaire (see Annex 1) comprised three areas that corresponded to our objectives: new professional profiles (19 items), digitalization as an opportunity (30 items), and support (18 items). Items reflected potential future *strategies* to help workers with ID to adapt to

digitalization in the workplace. Experts reported on two dimensions for each strategy (item): its importance and its feasibility (likelihood of occurrence). Both dimensions were rated on 10-point scales. For importance, the scale ranged from 1 ("not important at all") to 10 ("very important"). For feasibility, the scale ranged from 1 ("very unlikely") to 10 ("very likely"). We conducted a two-step online Delphi method study (Keeney et al., 2011). The 7 experts completed the first Delphi round (answered the questionnaire), and 6 completed the second round (one expert declined to participate in the second round for personal reasons). The research team analyzed the first round of data, and the responses from this first round were used to conduct a second Delphi round. Each expert received feedback on the aggregated responses of the expert group, and they were informed about the items on which they disagreed with the group, having the opportunity to amend their own scores or maintain them.

In the final stage (remote teamwork), the experts consensually classified the items into categories within each area corresponding to our objectives: a) strategies (items) for new professional profiles were classified in the categories of education, professional and social attitude, person-centered technology, and personal basic competencies; b) strategies (items) for digitalization as an opportunity were classified in the categories of education, technology focused on the work or professional stage, and technology focused on cognitive accessibility; and c) strategies (items) for support were classified in the categories of natural social supports, labor natural supports, specialized supports, and technological supports. The final scores were analyzed, considering these categories.

5.3. Data Analysis

For the data analysis of the Delphi method, the Average Deviation Index (ADI) was employed. This index, proposed by Burke et al. (1999), is used to measure agreement among participants. ADI is based on calculating the average deviation for each strategy on the scale to determine the agreement among the experts. It is calculated as the mean of the absolute deviations of each strategy from the arithmetic mean. An average deviation index of less than 1.67 is indicative of agreement, following the interpretation criteria established by Dunlap et al. (2003). All the data were collected and analyzed using Microsoft Excel with the assistance of equation functions.

6. Results

In the following subsections, we describe the results of the Delphi group analysis in the three areas of new professional profiles, digitalization as an opportunity, and support. We present a summary of expert consensus, highlighting the most relevant categories and strategies (complete data available in Annexes 3-5).

6.1. New professional profiles

The Delphi analysis showed strong expert consensus on strategies related to new professional profiles, with all 19 strategies meeting the consensus criteria (ADI values below 1.67) by the second round (see Annex 3 for complete results).

Importance ratings: Experts rated "personal basic competencies" as the most important category (M = 8.06), while "education" received the lowest importance ratings (M = 7.29).

Overall, the importance across all strategies averaged 7.57.

Feasibility ratings: Similarly, "personal basic competencies" was deemed most feasible ($M = 6.83$), while "professional and social attitude" was rated least feasible ($M = 6.07$). Overall feasibility across strategies averaged 6.30.

Highest-rated strategies: Two strategies stood out for importance: "basic skills for handling electronic devices in non-skilled jobs" and "positive attitude toward technology training" (both 8.67). For feasibility, the highest-rated strategies were "basic skills for handling electronic devices" (8.00) and "ability to perform routine jobs with technology use" (7.83).

Annex 3 provides a comprehensive breakdown of all ratings by category and strategy.

6.2. Digitalization as an Opportunity

The Delphi analysis revealed varying levels of expert consensus on digitalization opportunities, with most strategies meeting consensus criteria by the second round (see Annex 4 for complete results).

Consensus levels: By the final round, 26 of 30 strategies (86.7%) achieved consensus on importance ratings, while 24 of 30 strategies (80%) reached consensus on feasibility ratings.

Importance ratings: Experts identified "technology focused on cognitive accessibility" as the most important category ($M = 8.56$), while "technology focused on the work or professional stage" received lower importance ratings ($M = 7.74$). Overall importance across all strategies averaged 8.06.

Feasibility ratings: Similarly, "cognitive accessibility-focused technology" was deemed most feasible ($M = 6.97$), with "technology focused on the work or professional stage" rated least feasible ($M = 5.56$). Overall feasibility across strategies averaged 6.02.

Highest-rated strategies: Two strategies were rated most important (both 9.17): "digital competence training in educational stages" and "automatic adaptation of texts to easy reading through artificial intelligence." For feasibility, "audiovisual resources for individuals with reading comprehension difficulties" (7.43) and "promotion of augmentative communication methods through technology" (7.24) received the highest ratings.

Annex 4 provides a comprehensive breakdown of all ratings by category and strategy.

6.3. Supports

The Delphi analysis demonstrated strong expert consensus on support strategies, with all 18 strategies meeting consensus criteria for both dimensions by the second round (see Annex 5 for complete results).

Importance ratings: Experts identified "natural workplace supports" as the most important category ($M = 8.89$), while "technological supports" received comparatively lower importance ratings ($M = 8.12$). Overall importance across all strategies averaged 8.57.

Feasibility ratings: "Natural social supports" was rated most feasible ($M = 7.17$), with "specialized supports" considered least feasible ($M = 6.49$). Overall feasibility across strategies averaged 6.57.

Highest-rated strategies: Two strategies tied for highest importance (both 9.33): "specific training in digital skills for individuals with ID" and "universal design of devices and technological tools used in the workplace." For feasibility, "apps to create personalized supports" (7.83) and "websites with cognitive accessibility" (7.75) received the highest ratings.

Annex 5 provides a comprehensive breakdown of all ratings by category and strategy.

7. Discussion

The aim of this study was to analyze the challenges and identify opportunities arising from digitalization in the integrated employment of individuals with ID. To achieve this goal, two qualitative studies were conducted: semi-structured interviews and the Delphi method. The main implications of the findings are described below.

7.1. General advances in knowledge

Concerns and opportunities in the interviews. The interviews identified a series of concerns and opportunities in each of the three areas. In the first area, which is about new professional profiles, there is a concern about the possible disappearance of jobs traditionally associated with individuals with ID due to digitalization and task automation. It is essential to consider that many of these jobs are related to manual, low-skilled tasks. The second area highlights the opportunities that digitalization offers for integrated employment of individuals with ID. Technology is identified as a crucial tool for improving functional skills, promoting independence in everyday activities, and facilitating job search and community integration. The third area emphasizes the need for specific support and training programs for individuals with ID in the context of technological transformation. This area includes the integration of digital skills into training programs, the adaptation of cognitive accessibility strategies, and the improvement of coordination among various stakeholders involved in supporting individuals with ID in the workplace.

Concerns and opportunities in the Delphi method. The analysis of the results of the Delphi method revealed a considerable gap between the importance that experts assigned to digitalization in the workplace and their feasibility. Importance scores were always higher

than feasibility scores. The difference is above one point in the area of new professional profiles. The gap in the area of opportunities is even higher than two points. Likewise, support scored a two-point gap. Our results suggest that despite the importance attributed to the strategies considered, implementing them in the future is not easy. The study also indicated that the average deviation indices (degree of agreement among experts) for the feasibility dimension were larger than those for the importance dimension. It seems that experts differ on the feasibility of the proposed strategies. It is possible that this variability among experts depends on their frameworks and/or the contexts where they work.

In addition, there are differences in the level of importance attributed to the different areas. Overall, a gradation exists where experts attribute more importance to Area Three, followed by Area Two and Area One. In other words, the area of support is particularly relevant for experts. Therefore, taking advantage of the opportunities of digitalization will not be possible without people and environments that support it. Consequently, it is necessary to consider redesigning workplaces and stakeholders' involvement to make it possible to support individuals with ID beyond improving their professional profiles.

These findings underscore the importance of adequately preparing individuals with ID for an increasingly digitalized work environment, through specific training and adapted support systems, which is consistent with previous studies on positive vocational outcomes associated with technological implementation (Damianidou et al., 2019a; Morash-Macneil et al., 2018).

7.2. Area 1: New Professional Profiles

Among the interviewed participants, there is a concern that digitalization can make it difficult to access integrated employment for individuals with ID who do not have digital skills. Many unskilled jobs currently occupied by individuals with ID are susceptible to incorporating new technologies, thus altering the way tasks are carried out and requiring new digital competencies from the workers. Interestingly, the participants expressed that the profile that will probably be affected the most by this technological change associated with digitalization is that of job coaches because many of their functions can be taken over by technology. However, in the Delphi method, there is a consensus among experts that technology should not be perceived as a threat but rather as an opportunity for specialization and the development of digital, digitalized, and soft skills (*anonymized*; Waschull et al., 2022). Furthermore, it is anticipated that the roles of job coaches will evolve to include the use of technology as a support tool in the workplace.

These findings support previous research on the evolution of professional profiles. Historically, the profiles promoted within supported employment have been based on industrial-era roles, which involved low-skilled tasks such as manufacturing, assembly line work, repetitive tasks, production, manipulation, storage, cleaning, and transportation (Martínez-Rivera, 2012). Technology is transforming these profiles through specific applications, as demonstrated by several examples: handheld devices providing audiovisual prompts for tasks such as folding pizza boxes and packaging software products (Wehmeyer et al., 2006); technological support for tasks like cleaning bathrooms, rolling silverware, and office tasks such as scanning, faxing, and photocopying documents (Morash-Macneil et al., 2018); or vibrating watches programmed to improve time management skills (Damianidou et

al., 2019a). These examples illustrate how job roles are integrating technological solutions that allow for greater independence and efficiency.

Congruently with these concerns, experts participating in the Delphi method emphasize the importance and likelihood of acquiring basic skills for handling electronic devices in unskilled jobs. This opinion underscores the need for specific technology training for individuals with ID, especially in the educational environment, which aligns with the findings of Schneider and Sherlock (2018). The ability to perform routine tasks through the use of technology is also considered relevant, indicating an evolution toward job roles that effectively integrate technology. In the case of soft skills, experts believe it is crucial to foster awareness of technological change (digital mindset), as well as responsibility, professionalism, and perseverance in the digitalization context. Flexibility, adaptability, and proactivity are also fundamental, as is resilience to frustration when facing technological challenges. Developing the capacity to work in teams, communication skills, and social skills in a digital environment, along with a positive attitude toward technology training and digitalization, are aspects that will significantly contribute to the vocational success of workers with ID in this context.

7.3. Area 2: Opportunities

The interviewees perceived the implementation of technology as an opportunity to promote supported employment programs that facilitate the development of personal resources and job-related skills, enhancing the ability of individuals with ID to face the new demands of digitalization. They also highlighted technology's potential to reduce barriers in the working life of individuals with ID, demonstrating its effectiveness, especially when

addressing aspects of universal design and accessibility. Additionally, digitalization appears to decrease the dependence on traditional specialized support, granting greater autonomy to individuals with ID. These findings are consistent with those of Wahl and Kiuppis (2023) and Balasuriya et al. (2022).

These benefits materialize in concrete examples: applied cognitive technology enables independent performance of vocational tasks, as demonstrated by Davies et al. (2002) with their system that provided self-directed audiovisual prompts on a portable computer to improve accuracy and independence in assembly tasks. This system significantly enhanced performance and achieved greater independence by reducing the assistance needed from the job coach. Similarly, Damianidou et al. (2019) document how technology supports people with ID in error detection in their work, reducing the need for general hierarchical control (Martínez-Rivera, 2012). Another significant example is the rise of telework, which has eliminated physical barriers by allowing tasks to be performed remotely, particularly benefiting people with severe disabilities (Hernández-Sánchez et al., 2021).

Regarding the Delphi method, experts also emphasize the importance of digital competence training during the educational stages to facilitate the transition to employment. They also highlight the usefulness of technology focused on cognitive accessibility, such as adapting texts for easy reading and generalizing accessible apps to facilitate employment and autonomy for individuals with ID.

7.4. Area 3: Supports

The interviewed participants thought it was relevant to involve stakeholders in the adaptation of individuals with ID to digitalization. Among the stakeholders who stand out are job supervisors (who are essential in integrating workers with ID into their work teams), peers and job coaches (who offer training and support in navigating the new technologies), and caregivers or family members (who facilitate access to these technologies outside the work context). Experts underline the relevance of natural, social, and workplace supports for adapting to the digital work environment. They highlight the roles of family members and coworkers in providing support and facilitating the integration of individuals with ID into the digital work world. Additionally, experts emphasize the importance of specific training in digital competencies and the universal design of technological devices and tools to ensure the effectiveness of the support.

Wehmeyer et al.'s (2006) research reinforces these findings, documenting how various types of technological support, such as augmentative and alternative communication devices, have been effectively used to teach specific requests in vocational settings. Chadwick et al. (2021) point out that people with ID face significant challenges in using digital technology, including cognitive demands, difficulties understanding how it works, lack of digital literacy skills and confidence, and reliance on others for access from home. These supports should be multimodal and include devices offering multiple presentations (pictorial, verbal, tactile) adapted to individual variations, such as iPads and iPhones (Damianidou et al., 2019b). Safari et al. (2023) further emphasize the importance of involving people with ID in the design of digital technology to promote their digital inclusion and develop more suitable tools.

It is essential to recognize that although technology offers opportunities for the integrated employment of individuals with ID, it also poses challenges, such as inappropriate or addictive use of technological devices, which require attention and mental health support. Furthermore, it is crucial to acknowledge that both individuals with ID and those without this type of disability face similar challenges in technology management, underscoring the need for inclusive and accessible solutions that benefit society as a whole.

7.5. Practical implications

Our contributions provide a solid foundation for practice and enhance our understanding of integrated employment in the digital era. More specific recommendations can be provided with the aim of guiding support professionals, policymakers, organizations, and other stakeholders in the practical use of the results. First, it is necessary to promote the development of soft and digital skills in professional profiles for individuals with ID in line with current technological demands. Second, it would also be highly beneficial to provide training for support professionals in the use of technology to adapt to the new work dynamics resulting from digitalization. Third, it would be helpful to integrate digital competence training programs into educational stages to facilitate the transition to employment for individuals with ID. Fourth, it would be useful to develop technology focused on cognitive accessibility in order to enable the adaptation of texts and audiovisual resources to easy-to-read formats, thus enhancing comprehension. Fifth, it is necessary to strengthen coordination among relevant stakeholders (families, organizations, the third sector, and the public administration) to ensure an inclusive technological transition. Finally, it would be

relevant to train and raise awareness in supervisors and coworkers to support the successful integration of workers with ID into the digital work environment.

7.6. Limitations and Future Research

As in any other study, ours also has limitations that, without invalidating the observed results, may serve as a stimulus for future research. First, although the number of participants in our studies is adequate given the qualitative approach considered and the agreement found, it is important to mention that the small sample sizes could limit the generalization of the results. Therefore, replicating our analyses with additional participants in future research studies will help to confirm the findings further. Second, our participants were from Spain. It is reasonable to expect that similar opportunities and concerns emerge in other countries. However, exploring integrated employment for individuals with ID in other contexts would be welcome in future research efforts. Finally, we combined two qualitative methodologies and involved different types of participants, providing a rich view of integrated employment for individuals with ID. Nevertheless, future studies could add quantitative approaches as a complementary research strategy that would enrich the picture.

8. Conclusion

Based on accumulated research evidence, we believe that, although digitalization can create challenges for individuals with ID in accessing employment, it also offers opportunities. Whether digitalization becomes an opportunity depends on the decisions made by today's societies and organizations. According to the socio-technical approach, there is no single way to implement a technological change such as digitalization. It is

essential to find ways for this transformation to have positive effects, not only on efficiency but also on the citizens, including people with ID. This process will require training individuals, designing technologies and contexts that facilitate inclusion, and providing the necessary support. Although implementing appropriate strategies for inclusion is possible, it will not be easy, and it will require a deliberate effort to place people at the center when making decisions.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Esther Gracia: Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Eva Lira:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Conceptualization. **Carolina Moliner:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Vicente Martínez-Tur:** Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Fajardo-Castro Leady Viky:** Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

Statement: During the preparation of this work, the authors used ChatGPT-3.5 (Open AI, <https://chat.openai.com>) only during the writing process to improve readability and language. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as necessary and take full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Annex 1

Qualitative Analysis Results: Codes and Supporting Quotes from Semi-Structured Interviews

Codes of New Professional Profiles	Supporting Quotes
The jobs that individuals with ID typically perform are related to unskilled activities	I make blister packs for a cheese factory here... (PDI_001) I work as a laborer in an integrated employment company. (PDI_002) From our experience, what we have right now is individuals who are doing workshop cleaning. (SU_001) We are looking for profiles more dedicated to manual work in the store... (SU_002) ...almost all the job placements we make for individuals with disabilities are unskilled positions, from production assistants... or office assistants, and if we look at the service sector, they are still assistants, such as waiters' assistants or restocking assistants. (EX_002)
Positive attitude towards technological change	...I don't think it poses a threat. Will professional profiles change? Yes. But well, I think we should be adaptable to change... (EX_001) ...not as a replacement for a person, I see it as a support for people... (EX_001) ...jobs like yours or mine, well... I mean, a machine won't take our jobs. (PDI_001) New job opportunities will arise, new jobs that probably don't exist as of today, and that's where we all need to be included. (SU_001) Well, some might have negative effects, and others positive, but I think everything I'm seeing in the company is for the better; it's positive. (PDI_002)
Specialization in job positions as a result of digitization	...What's happening is that digitalization is specializing job positions a lot at the expense of the level of versatility required from the person. We notice this a lot in large companies. On one hand, being more specialized, the functions tend to be one, two, three, right? Very linear. (EX_002) ...well, in the past week, I think artificial intelligence has really taken off, and it has reached our associations and our daily lives. I see it as an opportunity for persons with disabilities to have even more specialized profiles. (EX_001)
Increase in self-determination as a result of technology use	I believe that persons with disabilities will gain in terms of self-determination, which will have a significant impact on them... Because the individual will be much more autonomous in making their decisions through technology. (EX_001) ...that's where I see that perhaps the shell needs to be broken, and parents should allow their children to go their own way, not keeping them so enclosed. (SU_001)
Skills that will be required in the future for individuals with ID in a	They require more attention to detail, which is true, and these are abilities that are generally more developed in persons with disabilities. (EX_002) In the end, I think what stands out is having a proactive attitude to adapt in the long term. (SU_001)

context of technological change	Well, I believe that, in all professional profiles, there will be a component related to ICT or digital media. (EX_001) ...disadvantages of digitization, digital skills; in the last few decades, there has been a change in job requirements. Ten years ago, digital skills were not required for some unskilled jobs, such as a janitor... Now, for these jobs, digital skills are being requested... and that is making the integration a bit more challenging... (EX_002)
Change in the professional profile of specialized supports as a result of digitization and technological advancement	I believe that technology will affect the job coach profile more than the profile of the person with a disability. (EX_001) ...when the individual used to perform action X, the job coach provided support. Now, I believe that when the person performs action X, technology will provide support, and the job coach will provide support to the person in using the technology. I think the profile of the specialized person changes completely. (EX_001) ...provide ongoing training to all persons with disabilities with the support of trainers, which I think is vital in this digital transformation, so that tutors and daily work companions in this transformation must also be trained, certainly before the persons with disabilities themselves. (SU_001)
Increase in the use of technologies in job positions as a result of the pandemic	Well, I think we should revamp our way of working. I believe that there has already been a good transformation with the pandemic issue; it has forced us to work in a different way, like all organizations. And, well, I think we should take advantage of this movement and continue to digitize ourselves and continue to move in the digital world. And continue to use this medium; in the end, it's going to be a way of connecting... (EX_001) When the pandemic came, we all had to reinvent ourselves. The truth is that we were very successful. We didn't think they would adapt so quickly. Even people who didn't interact as much in person, we managed to get them to interact through a screen, so in some cases, it surprised us a lot. (EX_003)
Codes of Digitalization as an Opportunity	Supporting Quotes
Digitalization could become an essential support tool for individuals with ID	Well, I believe it can be a facilitator and reduce the burden on what we call specialized support, allowing it to shift more towards generic support through technology. (EX_001) ...another advantage is that it allows supported employment programs to bridge the gap, right? Making video calls, but even more... doing family intervention through video calls... (EX_002) ...the truth is that we realized that technology was incredibly valuable, and we discovered many things, interactive games, many platforms that helped us and them. They could make our day-to-day life more comfortable. (EX_003)
The support individuals with ID require from job coaches is likely to decrease, or their focus may shift toward managing technology as a support resource	For example, in job searching, when specialized support is used to facilitate a person's job search... that specialized support won't have the same weight when technology is used because technology will enable us to conduct job searches online. So, the role of that person won't be as important or influential as technology... and support may not be provided in the same way as before, but, instead, support will be directed towards technology to perform the same functions as the previous supports. (EX_001) Well, for instance, if you have any doubts about your work, you can go online and find the answers. That's what happened to me; I had some questions, and as they say here, 'Dr. Google' solved them for me. (PDI_001)
Technology can reduce barriers faced by individuals with ID in	...and another opportunity is that, although we haven't consulted studies, we do realize that there are persons with intellectual disabilities with certain cognitive limitations, but no limitations in using technology. Some persons with

their work lives in areas such as speaking, reading, and writing	disabilities may struggle with reading and writing but have remarkable proficiency when it comes to using technology... What happens is that we have support in the workplace, and the person has assimilated the concepts very well because they've done it through the company's program... (EX_002) Well, there are people who can read, people who can write, and people who can't do either. So, for those who can't read and write, technology itself helps. Now, you don't have to fiddle with the keyboard; you press a button, speak, and it finds it for you. (PDI_001) ...my employee uses a mobile phone, uses social media, and has no problem with electronics or new technologies... I believe there wouldn't be more problems or fewer than there are now, there might even be fewer. Because from a young age, they start using computers, mobile phones, etc., and, therefore, it's much easier for them to adapt to it than it might be for manual jobs they haven't done... (SU_003) ...I have a computer at home, and I manage it well. I haven't really had any issues with technology. Our machine is very easy to use. (PDI_002)
Codes of Supports	Supporting Quotes
Need to create specific training programs tailored to this group and facilitated by private companies, third-sector entities, and public policy/administration authorities	The demand for digital skills in persons with intellectual disabilities is significant, and it's like the major subject pending in the educational stages for these individuals. (EX_002) The knowledge about how to use the tool, I believe, should have a universal accessibility component that should be common for everyone. (EX_001) Especially adapting certain commonly used websites to be accessible for all disabilities, not only visual or hearing impairments, but also intellectual disabilities. But it seems like easy reading is somewhat overlooked, not that it's forgotten, but I think it's still a great unknown. (EX_003) It's important to include training in new technologies in specific programs, and this training should be accessible. (EX_001)
The role of supervisors is crucial for the successful integration of workers with ID into the work team and their effective adaptation to their jobs.	...to create a good work environment, and, as you mentioned, make the other employees aware, which should be the norm... (SU_003) ...the supervisor or manager, their support must be initial when it comes to restructuring, if you want, when it comes to making potential colleagues aware, right? It's an initial support... (EX_002)
The support of specialized staff or co-workers (natural supports).	The explanation of how to use the technology the company has is given to the worker with intellectual disabilities by the responsible person in the company. There is also their support monitor, so that the company's employee only has to explain it once. We, because we know the person better, then take care of explaining it again in the workplace or in a different way, or we coordinate with their supported living facility or family to reinforce it at home. (EX_002) ...coworkers, in that sense, are the ones who help us the most, not only the persons with disabilities, but also us because we don't ultimately use that tool. And of course, we don't know how it works. So, yes, we have to rely on coworkers, obviously... coworkers are generally the ones who serve as natural supports. (EX_003) Workplace colleagues are crucial. Those who work side by side with persons with intellectual disabilities are essential, but always with a limit that doesn't become an excessive workload. (EX_002) ...well, the first few days were difficult because I was quite nervous, and the support I had was a week with the coworker I had at the time in that position.

	He spent a week with me, telling me how to do things, and then I was on my own. (PDI_002)
The importance of support provided by caregivers, who must have a strong level of familiarity and technological skills to ensure effective assistance	At first, the initial sessions were individual, like “connect through the phone, okay, dial this number, write it down for next time.” It was quite challenging work, but then everything went smoothly, and in that regard, we also had support from families, from siblings, as some of them were at home. (EX_003) The role of families is crucial, but it's a long-term effort... they have to instill the importance of digital skills. We are in an increasingly digitalized society, so it's not about taking away mobile phones just because they become indiscriminately addicted to social media or video games. They should also see those computer programs and the mobile phone as an opportunity for their child's development and professional growth... (EX_002)
Coordination among various stakeholders: families, organizations, the third sector, and public administration	...in the end, the labor inclusion of persons with disabilities has to be something coordinated among different stakeholders, right? In fact, one of the things I believe is lacking is that there's still a significant gap between the public administration, the industrial fabric, and the third sector. (EX_002) Well, I think, in addition, the associations that I know are making a superhuman effort to carry out the many projects they have in progress. So, I believe they need to partner with the administration so the administration can provide them with these financial resources... (SU_001)
Inappropriate use or lack of control can lead to issues such as addiction to smartphones or social media	Another disadvantage is indiscriminate use, excessive use, addiction to mobile phones... Increased exposure to social media, more anxiety disorders, and worse hygiene and sleep habits. If a person has good daily habits and routines, it's easier to find a job because they already go to bed at the same time, are disciplined, and so on. When there is indiscriminate use of the mobile phone, you first have to work on that addiction, and then you can refer them to a job where they have the ability to concentrate for four or eight hours. (EX_002) Well, sometimes the mobile phone brings its problems with WhatsApp, social media, and stuff. Some become obsessed with someone and keep talking to you all the time. Or they call you, and they don't have a filter, so sometimes it can be 2:00 in the morning... (EX_003)
Individuals with and without ID face similar challenges when it comes to managing technology	Well, I think we're all on the same level, I mean persons with disabilities or different abilities or any other type of person. So, starting from that basis, digitization is going to be beneficial for all of us, even though it will be challenging for all of us at first, some more than others, although in the end, it will be challenging for all of us. (SU_001) ...besides, new technologies are also complicated for those without disabilities. (PDI_002)

Annex 2

Delphi Method questionnaire

New Professional Profiles	Strategies (items)
Education	1. Basic digital literacy enabling searches in secure and reliable environments. 2. Ability to participate in shared digital environments while respecting intellectual property. 3. Basic skills for handling electronic devices in non-skilled jobs (e.g., PDA usage). 4. Digital skills for job searches (employment portals). 5. Ability to use key concepts in Artificial Intelligence tools to generate content.

	6. Overall ability to use digital tools in work environments. 7. Management of personal information and acquisition of basic concepts of cybersecurity in networks and platforms. 8. Ability to plan to use digital tools.
Professional and Social Attitude	9. Developing awareness of technological change in employment (digital mindset). 10. Responsibility, professionalism, and perseverance in a context of technological change. 11. Flexibility and adaptability in the face of technological change. 12. Proactivity to anticipate and navigate technological change. 13. Ability to perform routine tasks using technology.
Person-Centered Technology	14. Ability to work in a team using technology. 15. Development of communication and social skills in a digital world. 16. Use of technology in manual jobs.
Personal Core Competencies	17. Resilience to frustration in the face of technological changes in employment. 18. Positive attitude (desire to learn and improve) towards training in technology and digitalization. 19. Emotional education for individuals with intellectual disabilities in a digital work environment.
Digitalization as an Opportunity	Strategies (items)
Technology focused on the educational stage	1. Development of computer programs for personnel selection that specifically consider intellectual disabilities. 2. Software programs or applications that enable job performance assessment adapted to intellectual disabilities. 3. Opportunities to socialize and interact with others, facilitating employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. 4. Educational methodologies driven by technological change (such as the Flipped Classroom) that enable individuals with intellectual disabilities to obtain basic qualifications. 5. Training in digital competency during educational stages, facilitating the transition to employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities by implementing tools and skills that will be needed in the future. 6. Learning new ways of working, especially for individuals with intellectual disabilities, becomes easier with tablets or computer software.
Technology focused on the work or professional stage	7. Programs or applications that help individuals with intellectual disabilities to manage time in order to maintain an appropriate work pace. 8. Development of technology applied to active job searching for individuals with intellectual disabilities. 9. Programs or applications that make it possible to assess the development of individuals with intellectual disabilities in the workplace and improve their employability. 10. Development of technology to identify suitable job vacancies for individuals with intellectual disabilities and communicate them to the company's Human Resources department. 11. Technology that enables increased autonomy and self-esteem for individuals with intellectual disabilities in their work. 12. Online work, which increases the supply and variety of jobs for individuals with intellectual disabilities, without limiting the job search to the local area. 13. Development of complex job skills through artificial intelligence that were not accessible until now 14. Performing complex tasks in a simple and repetitive manner, thanks to technology, which facilitates its use by individuals with intellectual disabilities.

	15. Voice converters, facilitating employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. 16. Development and use of accessible PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants) to facilitate employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. 17. Automatic self-checkout systems (in stores, restaurants, etc.) that return change on their own, facilitating this task for individuals with intellectual disabilities. 18. Employment opportunities through devices, software, and algorithms that can identify emotions in individuals with intellectual disabilities with high levels of dependency. 19. Mobility opportunities for individuals with intellectual disabilities, thanks to robotics, facilitating inclusive employment. 20. Inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities in various job positions with the ease provided by new technologies for their execution. 21. Use of mobile phones by individuals with intellectual disabilities to perform tasks in the workplace. 22. Performing many tasks without the need to memorize, thanks to technology, which is beneficial for the employment of many people with intellectual disabilities.
Technology focused on cognitive accessibility	23. Creation of more fluid communication systems that facilitate more horizontal relationships between individuals with intellectual disabilities and their support networks, promoting inclusive employment. 24. Automatic adaptation of texts to easy-to-read formats through artificial intelligence, facilitating the process. 25. Adaptation of computer programs to easy-to-read formats. 26. Audio-guidance in easy-to-read format. 27. Audiovisual resources, through technology, that are very helpful for individuals with difficulties with reading comprehension. 28. Promotion of augmentative communication methods through technology (e.g., communication boards with pictures and symbols) that facilitate inclusive employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. 29. Widespread use of QR codes to facilitate employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. 30. Widespread use of accessible apps to facilitate employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities.
Supports	Strategies (items)
Natural Social Supports	1. Family support in the face of technological challenges in the workplace performed by individuals with intellectual disabilities.
Natural Workplace Supports	2. Natural support from non-disabled coworkers for adapting to a digital work environment. 3. Support in cross-cutting skills and social abilities in a digital world, facilitating inclusive employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. 4. Support in monitoring the tasks performed by individuals with intellectual disabilities in their work through technology.
Specialized Supports	5. Specific training in digital skills for individuals with intellectual disabilities. 6. Financial assistance for technological training for individuals with intellectual disabilities, aimed at inclusive employment. 7. Support from third-sector associations and entities in the technological challenges of the workplace for individuals with intellectual disabilities. 8. Specialized supports trained in digital competence to provide assistance in a technological context.

	9. Pre-training in new technologies during educational stages that individuals with intellectual disabilities can leverage in a job.
	10. Continuous and intermittent support personnel to consolidate task learning among individuals with intellectual disabilities in a digital world.
	11. Training/collaboration with professionals or university programs that design technological tools oriented towards the inclusive employment of individuals with intellectual disabilities.
Technological Supports	12. Universal design of devices and technological tools used in the workplace by individuals with intellectual disabilities.
	13. Accessible electronic resource banks for individuals with intellectual disabilities.
	14. Digital supports that promote self-determination and free choice, such as applications or other types of software.
	15. Specific supports offered by technology that cover individual and personalized needs.
	16. Websites with cognitive accessibility for individuals with intellectual disabilities.
	17. Support through virtual meeting and work applications like Zoom or Teams.
	18. Apps to create personalized supports with mobile applications (for example, Mefacilyta)

Annex 3

New professional profiles

New professional profiles	Round 1				Round 2			
	Importance		Feasibility		Importance		Feasibility	
<i>Education</i>	Mean	ADI	Mean	ADI	Mean	ADI	Mean	ADI
Strategy 1	8.14	1.02	6.71	1.47	7.75	0.67	6.50	1.17
Strategy 2	6	2	5	1.43	5.83	0.89	4.33	0.89
Strategy 3	8.86	1.35	8.14	1.02	8.67	1.44	8	0.67
Strategy 4	8	1.14	6.29	1.67	7.83	1.22	5.83	0.94
Strategy 5	5.57	1.51	4.43	1.02	5.17	1.22	4.50	1.17
Strategy 6	8.71	0.90	7.57	1.35	8.33	0.67	7.17	1.17
Strategy 7	8.14	1.02	6.29	1.47	8	1	6.50	1.50
Strategy 8	7	1.14	6.57	0.94	6.75	0.92	6.42	0.75
<i>Professional and Social Attitude</i>								
Strategy 9	7.43	1.51	6.43	1.51	7.42	0.75	6.17	0.56
Strategy 10	7.71	0.90	6.71	0.82	7.83	0.89	6.50	0.67
Strategy 11	8.43	1.10	6.43	0.90	8	1	6.17	0.61
Strategy 12	6.86	1.59	3.86	0.73	6.67	1.33	3.67	0.67
Strategy 13	8.43	0.78	8.14	0.78	8.33	0.78	7.83	0.61
<i>Person-Centered Technology</i>								
Strategy 14	7.86	0.78	6.86	1.02	8	0.33	6.67	0.67
Strategy 15	8.29	0.61	6.43	0.90	8.33	0.67	6.33	0.89
Strategy 16	6.71	1.18	7.14	1.55	6.67	1.11	6.67	1.44
<i>Basic Personal Competences</i>								
Strategy 17	8.14	0.73	6.57	0.94	7.83	0.56	6.50	0.83
Strategy 18	8.86	0.78	7.43	1.51	8.67	0.78	7.17	1.17
Strategy 19	7.86	1.59	6.86	0.73	7.67	1.44	6.83	0.83

Note. For the importance scale, 1 = not important at all, and 10 = very important; for the feasibility measure, 1 = very unlikely, and 10 = very likely. The name of each strategy can be consulted in Annex 1. The two strategies with the highest average in the measures of importance and feasibility of each category for the second round are highlighted in bold.

Annex 4

Digitalization as an opportunity

Digitalization as an opportunity	Round 1				Round 2			
	Importance		Feasibility		Importance		Feasibility	
	Mean	ADI	Mean	ADI	Mean	ADI	Mean	ADI
<i>Technology centered on the educational stage</i>								
Strategy 1	6.86	2.16	5.57	1.35	7.31	1.69	5.17	1.17
Strategy 2	7.71	1.18	5.43	1.22	7.83	1.22	5.33	1.33
Strategy 3	8.14	1.02	7.29	1.18	8	1	6.83	0.89
Strategy 4	9	0.86	6.29	1.27	8.83	0.83	5.83	0.83
Strategy 5	9.29	0.41	6.71	1.18	9.17	0.28	6.17	0.83
Strategy 6	8.29	0.61	7	1.43	8.17	0.56	6.50	1.17
<i>Technology focused on the job or professional stage</i>								
Strategy 7	8.29	1.10	7	1.71	8.17	1.17	6.50	1.17
Strategy 8	8.43	1.06	6.29	1.10	8.33	0.78	5.83	0.83
Strategy 9	8	1.14	5.43	1.22	8.33	1	5.17	1.17
Strategy 10	7.57	2.04	4.71	1.18	6.93	1.95	4.33	1
Strategy 11	7.43	1.80	5.43	1.63	7.76	1.58	5.67	1.67
Strategy 12	7.57	1.63	5	1.14	7.33	1.67	4.67	0.67
Strategy 13	7.29	1.59	4.86	1.31	7	1.67	4.33	1
Strategy 14	7.57	1.47	6.71	2.04	7.17	1.44	6.17	1.83
Strategy 15	7.43	0.94	6.43	1.35	7.50	1	5.83	0.83
Strategy 16	7.86	1.06	6.86	1.84	7.50	1	6.48	1.48
Strategy 17	8.43	0.94	7.57	1.92	8.17	0.83	7.17	1.83
Strategy 18	7.43	1.51	4.57	1.35	7.17	1.50	4.50	1.17
Strategy 19	7.71	1.76	4.14	1.92	7.95	1.05	3.33	1
Strategy 20	8.14	1.31	5.86	1.59	8.17	1.22	5.50	1.17
Strategy 21	7	2	7	1.43	7.67	1.33	7	0.67
Strategy 22	9	0.86	7	1.71	8.83	0.83	6.50	1.33
<i>Technology focused on cognitive accessibility</i>								
Strategy 23	9.14	0.73	7	1.71	9	0.67	6.67	1.33
Strategy 24	9.29	0.61	6.57	2.04	9.17	0.56	6.67	2.11
Strategy 25	8.86	0.82	7.29	1.96	8.67	0.89	7.22	1.81
Strategy 26	8.57	0.90	7.29	2.04	8.83	0.61	7.22	1.55
Strategy 27	8.86	0.78	7.57	1.80	8.67	0.78	7.43	1.43
Strategy 28	8.43	0.65	7.43	1.80	8.33	0.67	7.24	1.24

Strategy 29	8.29	0.90	6.86	1.59	8	0.67	6.67	1.67
Strategy 30	7.86	0.78	6.71	1.67	7.83	0.89	6.62	1.29

Note. For the importance scale, 1 = not important at all and 10 = very important; for the feasibility measure, 1 = very unlikely and 10 = very likely. The name of each strategy can be consulted in Annex 1. The two strategies with the highest averages in the measures of importance and feasibility of each category for the second round are highlighted in bold.

Annex 5

Supports

Supports	Round 1				Round 2			
	Importance		Feasibility		Importance		Feasibility	
	Mean	ADI	Mean	ADI	Mean	ADI	Mean	ADI
<i>Natural social supports</i>								
Strategy 1	9	0.86	7.57	1.35	8.83	0.89	7.17	1.17
<i>Natural job supports</i>								
Strategy 2	9	0.86	7.14	1.88	9	0.67	7.19	0.87
Strategy 3	8.86	1.02	6.43	1.18	8.67	1	6	0.67
Strategy 4	9.14	0.98	7.14	1.27	9	1	6.83	1.17
<i>Specialized supports</i>								
Strategy 5	9.43	0.82	8	1.14	9.33	0.89	7.50	1
Strategy 6	9	0.57	7	1.43	9.17	0.56	6.33	0.78
Strategy 7	9	0.86	7.57	1.92	8.83	0.83	7.43	1.29
Strategy 8	8.86	0.49	7	1.43	8.67	0.44	6.50	1
Strategy 9	9.29	0.61	6.43	1.18	9.17	0.56	5.83	0.61
Strategy 10	8.29	1.39	6.57	1.35	8	1.33	6.17	1.17
Strategy 11	9	0.86	6.43	2.04	8.83	0.83	5.67	1.44
<i>Technological supports</i>								
Strategy 12	9.29	0.61	6.29	0.78	9.33	0.44	5.83	0.28
Strategy 13	6.57	1.63	5.86	1.84	6	1.33	5.64	0.64
Strategy 14	7.71	1.18	6.14	1.59	7.50	0.83	5.50	1.17
Strategy 15	8.86	1.06	6.14	1.02	8.50	1	6	0.67
Strategy 16	8.75	1.25	8.25	1.75	8.50	1	7.75	1.38
Strategy 17	8	1.71	7.57	1.47	8.17	1.17	7.17	1.44
Strategy 18	9	0.86	8.14	0.78	8.83	0.89	7.83	0.61

Note. For the importance scale, 1 = not important at all, and 10 = very important; for the feasibility measure, 1 = very unlikely, and 10 = very likely. The name of each strategy can be consulted in Annex 1. The two strategies with the highest averages in the measures of importance and feasibility of each category for the second round are highlighted in bold.

Data Availability

The data that has been used is confidential.

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2.3. STUDY 3: Organizational Context and Satisfaction of Basic Needs of Workers with Intellectual Disability as Sources of Well-Being

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Organizational Context and Satisfaction of Basic Needs of Workers with Intellectual Disability as Sources of Well-Being

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Abstract: The inclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities (ID) through integrated employment is essential for achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. This research study examines how organizational contextual factors facilitate or hinder the inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID in their workplaces, as well as organizational practices that satisfy their basic needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), thus promoting their well-being. Semistructured interviews were conducted with experts in integrated employment, workers with ID, and supervisors. Content analysis was then performed using the grounded theory methodology. Data analysis revealed three main categories: (1) organizational contextual factors that favor inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID; (2) organizational contextual factors that hinder inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID; and (3) organizational practices that satisfy basic needs of workers with ID. These findings underscore the importance of creating work environments that promote inclusion, positive contributions, and satisfaction of the basic needs of workers with ID, thus fostering their well-being and professional development.

Keywords: organizational context; satisfaction of basic needs; intellectual disabilities; integrated employment; well-being; grounded theory methodology

1. Introduction

Worldwide, it has been estimated that 1.3 billion people live with some form of disability, and approximately 200 million people face significant challenges to their functioning (WHO 2023). Furthermore, persons with intellectual disabilities (ID) encounter particularly significant challenges to their inclusion in society as citizens (e.g., Dusseljee et al. 2011). One of the crucial ways to achieve the effective social inclusion of persons with ID is through their integrated employment in organizations, interacting with co-workers without disabilities, and enjoying the same dignified working conditions as other workers without disabilities who hold comparable positions (Smith et al. 2019).

Evidence shows that persons with intellectual disabilities can successfully integrate into integrated employment (Cimera 2011; Conley and Conroy 2009; Jiranek and Kirby 1990). However, working with co-workers without disabilities may negatively impact their experience, increasing, for example, feelings of isolation (Petrovski and Gleeson 1997). Caution is warranted because factors such as the level of functioning may influence these outcomes (Kober and Eggleton 2005). Many persons with disabilities prefer sheltered or segregated spaces and services, possibly due to a lack of confidence in the support they receive in integrated contexts when interacting with persons without disabilities, or because they feel isolated in such contexts (Lockwood and Lockwood 1996). The existence of an adequate support system seems to be a key factor for persons with disabilities and their families when choosing integrated services (Mayer and Anderson 2014).

In any case, participation in integrated contexts offers many benefits, despite obstacles. Numerous studies have highlighted the positive impact of integrated

employment on persons with ID. Research indicates that the closer the nature of their work aligns with that of their peers without intellectual disabilities, the higher their overall quality of life (Verdugo et al. 2006). Factors such as a sense of belonging, physical and mental well-being, skill enhancement, self-esteem, security, and independence have consistently emerged as noteworthy benefits associated with integrated employment (Carew et al. 2010; Donnelly et al. 2010; Dunn et al. 2008; Jahoda et al. 2009; Robertson et al. 2019; Voermans et al. 2020). Moreover, a comparative study conducted by Jiranek and Kirby (1990) examined job satisfaction and psychological well-being in persons with similar levels of ID across two distinct work environments: sheltered employment and integrated employment. The findings revealed that persons with ID who held integrated employment exhibited significantly higher levels of job satisfaction than their counterparts in sheltered employment settings. This finding highlights the importance of the work environment in the satisfaction and well-being of persons with ID, emphasizing the relevance of integrated employment as a facilitator of a more positive work experience for this group. However, despite these advances, significant challenges persist and make it difficult to achieve the inclusion of persons with ID in integrated employment.

Although employers have positive attitudes about hiring and retaining persons with disabilities, these views do not always translate into concrete hiring and retention actions (Burke et al. 2013; Hernandez et al. 2000; Paez and Arendt 2014). A series of studies have identified misconceptions that often present obstacles to hiring persons with ID, such as the belief that they require additional job adaptations, a perceived lack of necessary skills, or

difficulties in completing their work on time (Amir Ziv and Chan 2009; Kocman et al. 2018). These misconceptions, contribute to a lack of employment and labor discrimination towards persons with ID and, along with other factors, act as barriers to the inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID.

Beyond acquiring employment, it is important to investigate factors that enable workers with ID to feel good and remain in their workplace, supporting the inclusion and positive contribution of workers with ID. This sense of well-being can contribute to a positive social image that conveys that persons with ID can make significant contributions to society through their work, thus facilitating a more widespread integration into the workforce. Therefore, the role of organizational contextual factors related to the inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID in their workplaces and teams is especially relevant. In addition, meeting the basic needs of persons (autonomy, competence, and relatedness), as proposed in the well-founded self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan 2000), could play a crucial role in enhancing well-being and achieving long-term employment. Organizational practices, as part of the context, should be implemented within organizations towards satisfying these basic needs. Satisfaction of basic needs in the workplace enables individuals to showcase their true strengths, show competence in their job performance, actively acquire new skills and knowledge, and develop positive interpersonal relationships (Luo et al. 2022).

Despite the importance of organizational contextual factors and satisfaction of basic needs at work as sources of well-being and job continuity, there is a lack of research focused on persons with ID. An exception is the work by Akkerman et al. (2018), who examined the

relationship between meeting the basic needs of workers with ID and their job satisfaction. However, there is a need for an in-depth study of organizational contextual factors and the satisfaction of basic needs in workers with ID.

The objective of our study is to address the gap in the literature with regard to the study of organizational contextual factors and the satisfaction of basic needs in workers with ID by performing a content analysis of semi-structured interviews, using the grounded theory methodology developed by Corbin and Strauss (2015). We will examine the factors in the organizational context—specifically inclusive leadership, climate of inclusion, and procedural justice climate—that support (or act as barriers) for the inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID and organizational practices implemented towards the satisfaction of basic needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) of workers with ID (see Figure 1). At a conceptual and theoretical level, the objective of this study is to advance knowledge about the contribution of organizational contextual factors to the inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID in their workplaces and teams. This study will also make progress in understanding the organizational practices that promote the satisfaction of the basic needs of workers with ID. On a practical level, it will provide valuable information for designing interventions and policies that promote the inclusion and well-being of workers with ID through integrated employment.

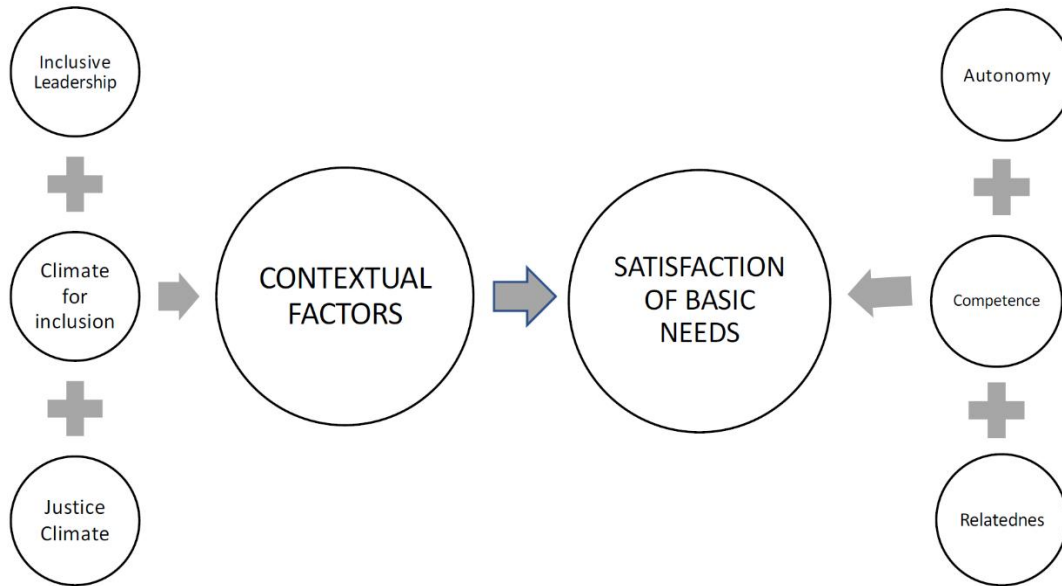


Figure 1. Graphical representation of the model.

1.1. *Relevant Organizational Contextual Factors*

Although the factors in the organizational context are numerous, there are some that are particularly relevant because they are directly related to the inclusion of workers with ID and their contributions to workplaces and teams. Based on the specialized literature, we selected three contextual factors: inclusive leadership, climate of inclusion, and procedural justice climate. Despite the limited research, the initial results are promising, suggesting that these organizational factors can play a significant role in processes promoting the inclusion and contributions of persons with ID.

Regarding leadership, Luu (2019a, 2019b) confirmed the positive links from inclusive and benevolent leadership to the well-being of employees with disabilities. Inclusive leadership represents a specific form of relational leadership (Uhl-Bien 2006). Within this conceptual framework, inclusive leadership focuses on the way the leader`s actions foster and value the contributions of diverse individuals within heterogeneous groups, ensuring

that they feel genuinely appreciated (Carmeli et al. 2010). We argue that inclusive leadership, by avoiding discrimination and recognizing the contributions of all the team members, will have a positive impact on the inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID in their workplaces and teams.

Another relevant organizational contextual factor in this study is the climate for inclusion, defined by Nishii (2013) as the degree to which the organizational context is perceived to integrate all the employees, offer non-discriminatory treatment, and encourage the participation of all the employees in decision making. Previous research confirmed that an inclusive climate favors the inclusion (Nelissen et al. 2017) and psychological safety (Gonzalez et al. 2020) of workers with disabilities. We propose that an inclusive climate promotes the inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID.

The last organizational contextual factor we analyze is the procedural justice climate, which refers to the perception of fair treatment by the organization in the implementation of procedures (Thibaut and Walker 1975). Procedural justice climate has been widely addressed in the research (Martínez-Tur and Moliner 2017; Naumann and Bennett 2000). In the case of workers with disabilities, they are likely to face a higher perception of injustice in procedures due to common biases against this group, as Snyder et al. (2010) pointed out when investigating the treatment of workers with ID. Thus, creating a context characterized by fair procedures for all, including workers with ID, is a condition for achieving inclusion and well-being. We propose that in work environments where a climate of procedural justice prevails, persons with ID are more likely to be able to contribute and feel part of a team and/or organization, thus fostering a sense of belonging.

Although these are the three most relevant contextual factors we considered a priori, other aspects of the context may emerge in the collection and analysis of information in the present study. This is the case of the adaptation of working conditions and ergonomics (de Paula Nunes Sobrinho and de Lucena 2012). Integrating ergonomic principles could ensure that the physical and cognitive aspects of the work environment are designed to accommodate the diverse needs of all employees, including those with ID. Workplace characteristics can impact health outcomes, and an ergonomically based approach to workplace design could help to address barriers to inclusion for persons with ID (Vujica Herzog et al. 2019).

1.2. Satisfaction of Basic Needs Based on the Self-Determination Theory

One of the crucial facets of the self-determination theory, proposed by Deci and Ryan (2000), is the existence of the three aforementioned basic human needs. Autonomy involves having control and volition over decisions, whereas competence is based on feeling effective in interacting with the environment. Finally, the need for relatedness refers to feeling connected to others. It is assumed that all individuals have these needs, and that contexts, including the work setting (and specifically the organizational practices), can either promote or hinder their satisfaction, with important consequences for individuals. In fact, a primary way to foster work motivation is to ensure that the external situation meets employees' three basic psychological needs (Deci and Ryan 2000; Luo et al. 2022). Research has also demonstrated that satisfaction of these fundamental needs is a direct precursor of well-being and health. Nelson et al. (2015) confirmed this link from satisfaction of basic human needs to well-being in a six-week randomized experimental study in the

United States and South Korea. Satisfaction of basic needs also predicted mental health and healthy relationships (Patrick et al. 2007), encouraging individuals to find a greater sense of meaning in life (Eakman 2014). Moreover, those with higher satisfaction of basic needs exhibited fewer symptoms of depression and indifferent behaviors (Ferrand et al. 2015). Additionally, when these basic needs were satisfied, work motivation, growth, and well-being were strengthened, increasing people's belief in the meaningfulness of work and their confidence in professional development (Luo et al. 2022), which, in turn, promoted positive behaviors (Guo and Cheng 2021). By contrast, if these basic needs were not met, the perception of work meaningfulness was reduced, stimulating negative work attitudes and behaviors such as job detachment (Li et al. 2020, cited in Luo et al. 2022).

Although scholars have suggested that persons with disabilities have the same needs and desires as those without disabilities (e.g., Melchiori and Church 1997), research on persons with ID is limited and tends to focus on the need for autonomy. Considerable research efforts have been devoted to investigating and promoting the autonomy of persons with ID in their daily activities as an indicator of their quality of life (e.g., Blížková et al. 2022; Martínez-Tur et al. 2018; Wehmeyer and Shogren 2016; Zhang et al. 2005). Furthermore, as mentioned above, Akkerman et al. (2018) employed the Self-Determination Theory to understand job satisfaction in workers with ID. Specifically, they confirmed that satisfying the three basic needs contributes to job satisfaction. However, there is a lack of research on the role of context (organizational practices) in promoting the satisfaction of basic needs in workers with ID. We propose that in work environments with a climate of procedural justice, inclusive leadership, and climate for inclusion, persons with ID are more

likely to have a higher level of satisfaction with basic needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). Additionally, other contextual factors may emerge as a result of the content analysis of the interviews.

In sum, the aim of our study is to fill the gap in the literature on organizational contextual factors and basic needs satisfaction for workers with intellectual disabilities (ID). Through a content analysis of semi-structured interviews, using Corbin and Strauss's (2015) grounded theory methodology, we explore organizational contextual factors—inclusive leadership, climate of inclusion, and procedural justice climate—that either support or act as a barrier to the inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID. Additionally, we examine how these organizational practices relate to the satisfaction of basic needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness).

In the following sections, we will explain the research we carried out (and the results obtained) on the organizational contextual factors that facilitate inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID, as well as the organizational practices that meet their basic needs in their workplaces. Moreover, we will describe the main implications of our findings.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. *Design*

A qualitative cohort exploratory study (Creswell and Creswell 2017) was carried out by performing a content analysis of semi-structured interviews, utilizing Corbin and Strauss's (2015) grounded theory methodology with the assistance of the NVivo software program (QSR International Pty Ltd. 2023).

The interview protocol used in the study was developed based on the literature review findings. Several expert meetings were held to scrutinize the topics and questions to be incorporated into the interview protocol. A pivotal part of this process was the involvement of a professional job coach for persons with intellectual disability, whose expertise was instrumental in refining the language of the questions to make them more accessible to participants with intellectual disabilities. The content validation test (Escobar-Pérez and Cuervo-Martínez 2008), which encompassed experts in psychology, methodology, and intellectual disability, further ensured the questions' relevance, clarity, and coherence. The interview guide used a comprehensive approach, incorporating open, closed, and probing questions. The latter was used to delve deeper into the responses provided by the participants to explore a topic further (Patton 2014). This thorough data collection allowed a comprehensive understanding of workers' experiences with ID, supervisors, and experts. The interviews were conducted via video conference using the Microsoft Teams tool, via a link connection. Persons with ID who participated in the interviews were also allowed to have a job coach present if they did not understand some of the interviewer's questions; only one person asked for this help. As for the connection through the Teams tool, the participants connected autonomously or asked their relatives for help.

2.2. Ethical Considerations and Consent Declaration

The study received approval from the Ethics Committee of the University of the corresponding author. All appropriate measures were taken to ensure participant consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. Additionally, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. It is essential to highlight that the informed consent

document for persons with disabilities was adapted by experts external to the research team to include accessible language.

2.3. Participants

To select the participants in the interviews, a call was launched through the organization “Plena inclusión”, a non-governmental organization in Spain dedicated to improving the inclusion and quality of life of persons with ID. In all, four experts in integrated employment in the field of ID, four workers with ID, and two team supervisors working with persons with and without ID participated, ensuring that the sample was sufficiently diverse to capture a wide range of experiences and perspectives. Of the 10 participants, seven were women, and three were men. Their ages ranged between 25 and 50 years. The sample size was determined based on the theoretical saturation obtained during the data collection process (Guest et al. 2006).

2.4. Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted via the Microsoft Teams platform between July 2022 and January 2023. These interviews were recorded with participants’ consent for subsequent transcription. The average duration of the interviews was 32 min. The interviews explored the organizational contextual factors in the three aforementioned areas (inclusive leadership, climate for inclusion, and procedural justice), focusing on the inclusion and positive contribution of workers with ID in their workplaces and teams. An example of a question was: How do your colleagues help you at work? What do they do? Could you give me an example? Satisfaction of the basic needs of workers with ID was also explored explicitly, examining organizational practices that promote autonomy,

the development of competencies and self-efficacy (competence), and a sense of belonging to the work team (relatedness). An example of a question was: Can you choose how to do your job or which tasks to do first? Finally, questions were asked about the well-being of people with ID and their teams and personal growth. An example question was: How do you feel about working at that company? How do you think your colleagues feel about working with you? Questions were developed in clear and simple language, and visual aids were included when necessary to ensure understanding by all participants. Finally, it is important to mention that before the interview, test sessions were held to make sure that participants knew how to handle the basic functions of the tool, such as turning the microphone or camera on and off, etc.

2.5. Procedure

Interview transcripts were textually transcribed, and a qualitative content analysis of the ten interviews was conducted using NVivo 14 software, employing methods consistent with a grounded theory approach. The interviews were analyzed in four rounds following the guidelines of Corbin and Strauss (2015) and Estrada-Acuna et al. (2021).

In the first round, multiple readings of the transcripts were performed to familiarize researchers with the data, and interviews were classified according to the participants' roles.

In the second round, one of the researchers applied a line-by-line coding process, generating numerous descriptive codes that reflected different aspects addressed. Simultaneously, to strengthen the credibility of the emerging codes, a different researcher

carried out the same process. Then, comparison and discussion of the results took place, resulting in a final list of codes and categories.

In the third round, an analysis of the relationship between codes was conducted to subsequently group them into predefined categories that were re-analyzed, interview by interview and across interviews, to identify subthemes based on participants' narratives. This approach followed an abductive methodology that combines deductive and inductive analysis (Awuzie and McDermott 2017).

In the fourth round, the constant comparative method allowed researchers to search for patterns in the data and compare emerging codes for similarities and differences. Codes and subcategories were integrated to reach a manageable number of categories. Each new case was evaluated according to the original coding structure, adjusting codes as necessary. This process continued until saturation was reached and new cases did not contribute additional codes.

2.6. Data Analysis

To analyze the content of the semi-structured interviews, NVivo version 14 software was used. The analytical process was divided into three main stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss 2015; Estrada-Acuna et al. 2021). In the first stage, open coding, the data were explored to identify relevant codes. This involved a detailed examination of each interview to find patterns, themes, and emerging concepts. Data were broken down into smaller units, and descriptive codes were assigned to each of these units.

Subsequently, axial coding was carried out to look for relationships between the identified codes in the previous stage. This process made it possible to group related codes into broader categories. Connections and associations between different codes were explored to better understand the structure and underlying themes in the data. During open and axial coding, certain recurring words or phrases were identified as fundamental to understanding the main themes of the study. For example, words such as autonomy or support appeared repeatedly in the responses, indicating their relevance to the participants. The constant comparative method allowed us to look for patterns in the data and compare the emerging codes for similarities and differences (Corbin and Strauss 2015). In this analysis, paragraphs that did not add new or significant information to the emerging categories or contribute to the theoretical saturation of the categories developed during coding were excluded.

Finally, selective coding was performed to identify the central categories or main themes that emerged from the analysis. Categories identified in the previous stages were reviewed, selecting those that best represented the main findings and conclusions of the study. Theoretical codes were incorporated, and emerging concepts were compared with pre-existing literature. The development of the coding structure continued until saturation was reached and the new cases did not offer any additional codes.

In addition to these stages, a data triangulation process was conducted to validate the results. This process involved comparing and contrasting the findings obtained from different sources of information: experts in integrated employment in the field of ID, workers with ID, and team supervisors.

3. Results

Given our research objectives, we established two initial categories: (a) organizational context factors that facilitate the satisfaction of basic needs in persons with ID, and (b) satisfaction of basic needs of workers with ID. As the coding process progressed, a new category emerged: (c) organizational context factors that impede the satisfaction of basic needs in workers with ID.

We coded 158 references related to the three categories, with the satisfaction of basic needs of workers with ID representing 50% of the coding (79 references), organizational context factors that facilitate inclusion, and the positive contributions of workers with ID representing 39% (62 references), and organizational context factors that hinder inclusion and the positive contributions of workers with ID representing 11% (17 references).

In the category of organizational context factors favoring inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID, eight codes were identified: (a) adaptation of working conditions according to the particular characteristics of workers with ID; (b) climate for inclusion; (c) procedural justice climate; (d) inclusive leadership; (e) recognition of the capabilities of persons with ID; (f) corporate social responsibility; (g) raising awareness about the labor inclusion of persons with ID; and (h) involvement of families in the employability process of the worker with ID. In the category of organizational contextual factors hindering inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID, seven codes were identified: (a) low participation in decision making by persons with ID; (b) challenges in obtaining a decent wage; (c) temporary employment contracts; (d) lack of awareness of

intellectual disability in the business sector; (e) ostracism; (f) peers without intellectual disability perceiving persons with ID as a threat; and (g) internalization of discrimination.

Finally, in the category of organizational practices satisfying basic needs of workers with ID, three codes were identified: (a) organizational practices that foster a sense of belonging of persons with ID in their work; (b) organizational practices that promote the autonomy of persons with ID in their work; and (c) organizational practices that facilitate the development of work skills in persons with ID and increase their sense of efficacy and contribution to their team. In summary, the coding system comprises three categories and 18 codes, as Table 1 reveals.

Table 1. Codes: references coded and corresponding reports.

Category 1: Factors in the Organizational Context Favoring Inclusion and Positive Contributions of Workers with ID	Coded References	% of All Coded Codes	Reports
(a) Adaptation of working conditions according to the particular characteristics of persons with ID	7	11%	3
(b) Climate for inclusion	23	37%	10
(c) Procedural justice climate	5	8%	3
(d) Inclusive Leadership	12	19%	7
(e) Recognition of the capabilities of persons with ID	8	13%	5
(f) Corporate Social responsibility	1	2%	1
(g) Raising awareness about the labor inclusion of persons with ID	5	8%	4
(h) Involvement of families in the employability process of the person with ID	1	2%	1
Category 2: Factors of the Organizational Context Hindering Inclusion and Positive Contributions of Workers with ID	Coded References	% of All Coded Codes	Reports
(a) Low participation in decision-making by persons with ID	4	23.6%	4
(b) Challenges in obtaining a decent wage	3	17.6%	2
(c) Temporary employment contracts	3	17.6%	1
(d) Lack of awareness of intellectual disability in the business sector	1	5.9%	1
(e) Ostracism	2	11.8%	2
(f) Peers without intellectual disability perceiving persons with ID as a threat	3	17.6%	2
(g) Internalization of discrimination	1	5.9%	1

Category 3: Organizational Practices Satisfying Basic Needs of Workers with ID	Coded References	% of All Coded Codes	Reports
(a) Organizational practices that foster a sense of belonging of persons with ID in their work	18	23%	8
(b) Organizational practices that promote the autonomy of persons with ID in their work	50	63%	10
(c) Organizational practices that facilitate the development of competences in persons with ID and increase their sense of efficacy and contribution to their team	11	14%	6

3.1. *Interview Content Analysis*

From the data analysis of the interviews, the three aforementioned main categories emerged: (a) organizational contextual factors favoring inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID; (b) organizational contextual factors hindering inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID; and (c) organizational practices satisfying the basic needs of workers with ID. Participants'

quotes were replaced with the initials of their role and the interview number, as follows:

Ex_001 (expert), SU_001 (supervisor), and PID_001 (person with intellectual disabilities).

3.1.1. Theme 1: Organizational Contextual Factors Favoring Inclusion and Positive

Contributions: Identified Factors within the Organizational Environment That Support the Inclusion and Positive Contributions of Workers with ID

(a) Adaptation of working conditions according to the particular characteristics of persons with ID

One of the organizational context factors favoring inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID is related to the adaptation of working conditions according to their particular characteristics. In this regard, participants indicated that working

conditions are frequently adapted to the specific needs of persons with intellectual disabilities, such as shorter workdays, more rest periods, or reduced workload.

“...Normally these individuals don’t usually work full-time; it’s either part-time or because we’ve also noticed that they get tired or bored with long shifts...”

(SU_002_Man)

“...In summary, for me, it’s about making those individuals feel comfortable performing the task... The previous guy, he couldn’t be outdoors because he would have epileptic seizures, so he had to work in the shade... We give him more breaks to drink water, to hydrate, those things. But it’s about adapting the workplace for him...” (SU_002_Man)

“When a person with a disability starts, I think they try to adapt the job a little more and assign tasks. For example, two tasks are organized for them when they start, and they don’t deviate from those two tasks. What happens is that when the person is capable and is progressing with this work, then they are given many more tasks.” (EX_001_Woman)

(b) Climate for inclusion

Another key factor is the climate for inclusion perceived by workers with ID. In fact, participants pointed out that some organizations carry out various activities to integrate their members with ID into the team, as reflected in the following direct quotations:

“...Treating them like any other worker and including them in everything, well, if they have dinners, if they have company meals, all those kinds of things also help the organization’s context to be more inclusive.” (EX_004_Man)

“Well, the reality is we have a whiteboard, so they write down birthdays, dinners, and there I see things. Basically, that’s been done, then if they do something else, well, it’ll be seen on the whiteboard... I see the paper there and I approach and say, ‘well, look, today we’re going to do this, tomorrow we’ll do that,’...”
(PID_003_Woman)

“...Well, during the breaks, like I was saying, in the coffee break, we’re with them, the trainer and others, to try to break that ice that may exist on both sides so that later, when we aren’t there, this integration continues, right? And that inclusion with all the workers...” (SU_001_Woman)

(c) Procedural justice climate

Participants referred to procedures that are fairly implemented for persons with ID as a good practice.

“...And then on the business side, they ask us for advice about how to conduct the selection process, and I always say that they should do it completely normally as they would for any other person without a disability. I mean, just because they have a disability, if we have already evaluated the job and know the person, and we know it’s a job they can perform, why should we give them a different selection process?” (EX_003_Woman)

“Well, I think that right now, giving them a job position, as it currently has to be, a permanent one like any other person, an ordinary job, etc.” (EX_001_Woman)

(d) Inclusive leadership

In the case of inclusive leadership, participants confirmed the importance of leaders who accept and support the contribution of persons with ID.

“...we are indeed seeing that they are being, well, leaders of a change in the way of understanding, seeing disability and accepting that any person can perform a job position, if they are qualified for it.” (EX_003_Woman)

“...Well, the boss also praised me once. (What did he say to you?)... That your parents should be proud of you, or something like that.” (PID_002_Woman)

(e) Recognition of the abilities of persons with ID

Participants mentioned the abilities of workers with ID, who in most cases have mild intellectual disabilities, which allow them to do jobs similar to those of their peers without intellectual disabilities.

“The work team I manage maintains the philosophy that we must believe in people’s abilities and believe that it is possible, and that we all have capacities and skills that allow us to perform certain jobs.” (EX_003_Woman)

“...what we have is the idea and the vision of a person with a disability, very dependent individuals with difficulties, and maybe we realize that without knowing it, the person sitting next to us has a very mild intellectual disability, and physically or speaking with the person you don’t notice it. So I think we should have more vision, see that there are very capable people, regardless of whether they have a disability, and that they can be included in the labor market without the need for the label of ‘I have a disability’, because they don’t need it.”

(EX_001_Woman)

(f) Corporate social responsibility

Corporate social responsibility is another element that, according to participants, facilitates the integrated employment of persons with ID.

“...aside from the legislation that mandates hiring people, it is true that we are seeing the issue of corporate social responsibility, which is increasingly committed to the employment inclusion of people with disabilities. So, for us, that is very valuable, for a company to say to us: ‘I want it to be seen in my work team or in my company that we are committed to the employment inclusion of people with disabilities within social responsibility’.” (EX_003_Woman)

(g) Raising awareness about labor inclusion of persons with ID

Another aspect highlighted by the participants has to do with the importance of increasing awareness about the employment inclusion of persons with ID, given that there is a significant lack of awareness in the business sector.

“...we promote not only the fiscal advantages, right? for hiring people with disabilities, we also promote the capabilities of our people, because truly the companies that hire our community are companies that are not motivated solely by the economic incentive, because with that incentive they could hire any other group, right? They are motivated more by, well, a sensitivity...” (SU_001_Woman)

(h) Involvement of families in the employability process of the person with ID

Finally, participants reported about the important role of families in supporting the employment of their relatives with ID.

“Once we interview the person we are offering the job to, we call the family, right? We interview them, tell them about this job opportunity, that their son or daughter is interested, and so on, but we also express that we want the family’s involvement. If the family agrees, we have a protocol in place, where the family signs. We know it doesn’t hold legal weight, right? But the family commits to certain basic things, as I was saying, handling money and very basic matters; they commit to ensuring that their son or daughter will have it.” (SU_001_Woman)

3.1.2. Theme 2: Organizational Contextual Factors Hindering Inclusion and Positive Contributions: Uncovered Factors within the Organizational Setting That Act as Barriers to the Inclusion and Positive Contributions of Workers with ID

During the interviews, some aspects of the organizational environment that could hinder the inclusion and positive contributions of workers were highlighted. As Luo et al. (2022) pointed out, a negative external environment in the workplace obstructs the inclusion and participation of workers with ID and fosters deviant behaviors in the workplace.

(a) Low involvement in decision making by persons with ID

One of the crucial factors that can hinder the inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID is related to their limited involvement in organizational decision making. The lack of inclusion of this group in decision-making processes is confirmed by participants.

“Well, the experience we have, the truth is that we don’t. They are low-level workers and don’t make any decisions in the company.” (EX_004_Man)

(b) Challenges in obtaining a decent wage

Another factor that influences a lack of inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID is the presence of inadequate working conditions. Specifically, participants pointed out that, in many cases, workers with ID receive lower wages compared to peers without intellectual disabilities performing the same type of work.

“And it is true that, on many occasions, their salary tends to be lower. I specifically have a girl working 36 h a week. I mean, what would be more or less equivalent to a full-time job with Saturdays and Sundays, holidays, rotating, and she doesn’t even earn 800 euros.” (EX_002_Woman)

“We had a case of a person who was in a company, came to our service, and was already working. To give you an idea of how perverse it gets, they worked two days a week in the contracted company and three in practice. They worked the whole week, but they were paid for two.” (SU_001_Woman)

(c) Temporary employment contracts

Participants also noted that it is common practice in the business sector to temporarily hire persons with ID for three-month periods while they undergo their internships, only to be replaced by another person with ID afterward.

“There’s a reality, I don’t know if it happens to you, but here in Galicia, people who are in an organization lose their position after working 45 days.” (SU_001_Woman)

“... there are companies that have a person with a disability in an internship for three months; they leave, we bring in another for three months, and in the end, they have positions filled for free...” (SU_001_Woman)

(d) Lack of awareness of intellectual disability in the business sector

As mentioned earlier, a lack of awareness about ID and a lack of understanding about how to properly integrate these individuals into organizations are significant challenges, even today.

“Well, the world of disability is still very unknown to employers.”

(EX_003_Woman)

(e) Ostracism

Participants also highlighted exclusion in the workplace as an additional factor hindering the positive contributions of workers with ID. We interpreted this phenomenon as ostracism, which refers to the feeling experienced by employees when they are excluded or ignored by their colleagues or superiors (Choi 2020).

“Well, you see, I always have the reference that there are people with intellectual disabilities who, just because they are present, are not included. I mean, you can have people in a company who eat their sandwich alone, have lunch alone, and don’t interact with colleagues, so in the end, they are alone. They are included in work, but really, in terms of personal relationships, they are not included.”

(EX_003_Woman)

“...as for this Christmas dinner, I haven’t signed up yet; they didn’t say anything to me. They do it on their own. Let’s see if they invite me sometime.” (PID_004_Man)

(f) Peer without intellectual disabilities can perceive persons with ID as a threat

Additionally, participants highlighted a worrisome perception that sometimes arises in organizations: considering colleagues with ID a threat to employees who have been working in the company for years with temporary contracts. This occurs because,

on occasion, managers choose to replace these temporary employees with workers with disabilities, either to meet regulatory requirements for hiring a certain number of persons with disabilities or simply because it is more cost-effective to hire this group. This phenomenon creates tension in the workplace.

“It may have happened in companies that maybe they have fired people or have not hired people who have been working for years on temporary contracts, and when there has been a need to hire someone, they have resorted to people with disabilities, and they understand that it is because in the end the expense for the company is lower. So there have been times when they haven’t said anything because they may clearly say: ‘I understand that everyone has to have a job and they have the same right as me,’ but it is true that I know that my boss above hires someone because it costs him less than hiring this person who may deserve it more because he has been doing temporary contracts for many years...”

(EX_002_Woman)

(g) Internalization of discrimination

Finally, another factor identified through the interviews, related to the social context of the organization, seems crucial: the internalization of discrimination by some workers with ID toward co-workers with ID, possibly due to a lack of identification with them. This phenomenon reveals the complexity of social dynamics within the community of workers with disabilities, where discrimination can be manifested internally, further exacerbating the barriers and challenges faced by this group.

“...for the person, it’s wonderful to find themselves in a regular position with people without disabilities because many people with disabilities even reject other people with disabilities and prefer to be in more ordinary environments.”

(EX_001_Woman)

3.1.3. Theme 3: Organizational Practices Satisfying Basic Needs: Explored Specific Practices Implemented within Organizations That Address the Basic Needs (Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness) of Workers with ID, Thereby Promoting Their Well-Being
(a) Organizational practices that foster a sense of belonging of persons with ID in their work

We identified several organizational practices that foster a sense of belonging among workers with ID. Based on the gathered testimonies, one of these practices is active inclusion by co-workers, who often effectively integrate them into work and social dynamics. For instance, participants highlighted the gesture of inviting them to share everyday activities, such as lunch, and including them in communication groups such as WhatsApp chats where they can participate in conversations and stay updated about team activities.

“...usually, colleagues tend to integrate them very well; perhaps the simple act of saying, ‘Let’s have lunch, come with me,’ or ‘I’ll add you to the WhatsApp group, where we discuss things if there’s anything.’” (EX_002_Woman)

“...we had a guy... we even followed up on the job, and I asked him, I said, ‘Well, how about the colleagues? Do you feel comfortable here, and do you feel that your concerns are taken into account by the team?’ and he said, ‘Of course, they

take me into account,' he says, 'I've already organized a WhatsApp group, and I'm the one organizing things like meetings or outings, and such.' And of course, there, I mean, it was super noticeable that he was part of the team and that he felt that way." (EX_003_Woman)

Furthermore, the importance of concrete actions by the organization were mentioned, such as providing work uniforms, which not only serve a practical function but also foster a sense of belonging to the group.

"...actions like, for example, providing uniforms, right? Having everyone wear the same uniform gives a sense of belonging to the group. Eating together, for example, having lunch together, right? During break times, when they have to rest, being together, right? And that always helps to improve the atmosphere."
(EX_004_Man)

"...Yes, I have a work uniform; it's red and black. And they're going to change it to orange. And we would look very handsome." (PID_004_Man)

(b) Organizational practices that promote the autonomy of persons with ID in their work

The analysis of the interviews identified various organizational practices that positively influence the autonomy of workers with ID. Among these practices, supported employment stands out, provided by specialists in vocational preparation, which facilitates the development of necessary competences for effective job performance. Additionally, it was observed that natural supports coming from co-workers play a crucial role in promoting integration and learning in the workplace. The learning process, based on observation, modeling, and continuous feedback, also emerged as a key factor in fostering the autonomy

and independence of workers with ID in their workplace. This approach allows individuals to acquire skills actively, strengthening their ability to function autonomously in the workplace.

“Typically, it’s usually done by a support person from the association, right? They come to the workplace, intervene in the context, and provide support in the context. Well, they serve as a model for the tasks that need to be done, right? For example, if they have to sweep, they explain how to sweep, where to sweep, and support them to improve in that regard.” (EX_004_Man)

“Well, I was taught through my colleagues. The more experienced ones, you know. And to this day, they still help me.” (PID_002_Woman)

“Yeah. Maybe when I’m doing the first round with them, I explain, ‘You have to pick up this or take the garbage bag.’ I explain with words, observe if they’re doing it or not. Okay, if not, I’ll do it myself. ‘See how it’s done?’ If I see that they’re doing it well after imitation, maybe they do it. Look, this person learns by imitation.” (SU_002_Man)

(c) Organizational practices that foster the development of competences in persons with ID and increase their sense of efficacy and contribution to their team

Organizational practices that facilitate the development of competences in workers with ID and enhance their sense of efficacy and contribution to the team are fundamental for their integration and success in the workplace. A crucial practice mentioned was the detailed analysis of the capabilities and labor competences of each individual, as well as the precise identification of tasks associated with each job position. This involves prior work

by professionals to understand the specific demands of the position and adequately prepare the worker with ID.

“The employer wants them to be just another worker and to be getting the job done. So, we have to analyze their capabilities and labor competencies beforehand, and have all the tasks of the job position well identified. When I visit companies and if a company tells me they ‘need two warehouse assistants’, I go to the workplace with my notebook and ask: ‘So, what does a warehouse assistant do? What time do they start? What time do they finish? When do they take breaks? What do they have to do? Do they operate forklifts? If so, will they encounter four others in the aisle, moving boxes, considering the weight, whether they’ll lift 20 kg or 5 kg, etc.’ So, you have to have everything under control, and there’s also an important role for professionals to play in analyzing job positions. Then, you train the person, meaning you have to have the person ready, and even if I believe they have the capabilities to perform that job, I still say, ‘Let’s see what you need to prepare for, what you need to train for’, just like how we prepare for a job interview, preparing for things like lifting weights or knowing how to scan if it’s an office job... In other words, the person has to be prepared.” (EX_003_Woman)

“And then, we also offer associations these pre-employment courses, basic computer skills, basic things to access the job market.” (SU_001_Woman)

4. Discussion

This qualitative study had two main goals to achieve through the content analysis of semi-structured interviews with workers with ID, experts in integrated employment, and

supervisors. First, the study explored the factors in the organizational context that facilitate or hinder the inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID in their workplaces and teams. Second, we examined the organizational practices, also as part of the context, that help to satisfy the basic needs of workers with ID (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). This study has allowed us to identify the facets of the organizational context that promote (or hinder) the creation of positive environments for workers with ID that influence their well-being.

After reviewing the content of the interviews, we concluded that organizational contextual factors play both positive and negative roles. Our results emphasized the importance of organizational contextual factors in promoting (or hindering) the inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID in their workplaces and teams. Although this aligns with previous approaches (e.g., Hebl et al. 2020), our study identifies specific organizational contextual factors that are particularly significant. Below, we discuss these contextual factors in more detail, following the same structure used in the Results section.

4.1. Theme 1: Organizational Contextual Factors Favoring Inclusion and Positive Contributions: Identified Factors within the Organizational Environment That Support the Inclusion and Positive Contributions of Workers with ID

(a) Adaptation of working conditions according to the particular characteristics of persons with ID

Logically, organizations vary in the extent to which they adapt their working conditions to the needs, interests, and specific characteristics of individuals with ID. This is the rationale behind customized employment for individuals with significant disabilities (Riesen

et al. 2015; Wehman et al. 2007), where negotiating relevant aspects of jobs is central to achieving their integrated employment. Adaptations can involve adjustments to employment terms, such as the number of working hours and vacation days, as well as modifications to the work environment, including physical characteristics such as noise levels, temperature, hygiene, and safety (Akkerman et al. 2014). These would include ergonomic interventions oriented toward preventing psychosocial risks and promoting well-being (e.g., de Paula Nunes Sobrinho and de Lucena 2012). According to the participants in our study, adaptations were essential for promoting the inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID. They are not just useful for meeting the needs of the employer, but they also involve achieving mutual benefit by adapting the working conditions to the worker with ID.

(b) Climate for inclusion

Generally, research has indicated that acceptance and a tolerance for diversity within an organization (climate for inclusion) can encourage employees to develop and apply their skills, which, in turn, contributes to the organization (Shore et al. 2011). Employees' perception of an inclusive climate within the organization is a positive factor that can counteract negative influences (Luo et al. 2022). The positive effects of a climate for inclusion have also been observed in terms of retention (Habeck et al. 2010) and stigma avoidance (Iwanaga et al. 2018) among workers with disabilities. Consistent with these findings, our study also confirmed that a climate for inclusion helps to integrate workers with ID into work teams.

(c) Procedural justice climate

When organizational procedures are implemented fairly and equitably, which is consistent with the individual psychological need for inclusion and respect, employees perceive inclusion in the organization positively (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). This approach involves respecting the uniqueness of each person, maintaining a high level of organizational justice, fostering cultural compatibility, and demonstrating a willingness to listen to employees' opinions. The impartial application of procedures promotes equal opportunities, even for individuals with ID (Snyder et al. 2010). This idea aligns with our findings, which suggest that procedural justice can help to reduce discrimination against individuals with ID in their employment opportunities.

(d) Inclusive leadership

Research has highlighted that support from top management is one of the most critical factors in the success of diversity initiatives (e.g., Jayne and Dipboye 2004; Rynes and Rosen 1995). This support has been particularly emphasized in the context of disability diversity, where it can help to counteract entrenched stereotypes and negative attitudes held by various organizational stakeholders, such as colleagues and direct supervisors (Schur et al. 2005). Our findings also supported this argument.

(e) Recognition of the abilities of persons with ID

Traditionally, research has considered ID from a deficit perspective. Accordingly, ID has been associated with problems, impairments, and limitations in various areas of social life. This perspective has obscured the possibility that persons with ID can make contributions through their strengths and abilities. However, recent positive psychology has shown increasing interest in their potentially valuable contributions (Albaum et al. 2021). In

this vein, our results corroborated that recognizing the capabilities of workers with ID is a positive factor in integrated employment.

(f) Corporate social responsibility

Corporate social responsibility is typically defined as the way organizations design policies and conduct practices aimed at positively impacting the community in accordance with the common good (Fenwick and Bierema 2008). Although corporate social responsibility is increasingly popular, the inclusion of people with disabilities and their integrated employment remain limited (Gould et al. 2020), despite the positive effects on the organizational reputation (Dwertmann et al. 2023). Our results showed that the integrated employment of persons with ID can be part of an organization's corporate social responsibility, thus enhancing integration.

(g) Raising awareness about labor inclusion of persons with ID

It is reasonable to expect that awareness of the potential for labor inclusion of persons with ID is a prerequisite for achieving integrated employment. After all, if individuals and institutions are not aware of employment opportunities for people with disabilities, it is unlikely that concrete actions will be implemented. Unfortunately, despite interesting initiatives around the world (e.g., Office of Disability Employment Policy 2015; Plena Inclusión España 2022), awareness about these initiatives remains low, even among self-advocates (Rogan and Rinne 2021). Our results also indicated a lack of awareness, despite the perception that it could be a positive factor in the integrated employment of persons with ID.

(h) Involvement of families in the employability process of the person with ID

It is crucial to highlight the fundamental role that families play in the employability processes of persons with ID. Families sometimes start their own businesses, creating an entrepreneurial context that facilitates employment for their relatives with ID (Percival 2022). Additionally, although relatively unexplored, families are able to implement practices that support the integrated employment of their relatives with ID (Schwartzman et al. 2023), and this is consistent with our results. Participants perceived that families' active participation and continuous support are essential to ensure the success and sustainability of the labor inclusion of persons with ID.

4.2. Theme 2: Organizational Contextual Factors Hindering Inclusion and Positive Contributions: Uncovered Factors within the Organizational Setting That Act as Barriers to the Inclusion and Positive Contributions of Workers with ID

(a) Low involvement in decision making by persons with ID

Traditionally, persons with ID have faced significant social obstacles that limit their possibilities of making decisions in various areas of their lives. Despite the well-documented benefits of decision making for their quality of life (Bigby et al. 2017) and the existence of programs designed to enhance decision-making opportunities for persons with ID (e.g., Beadle-Brown 2015), barriers persist. Our findings confirmed that this situation also exists in the workplace context. Participants reported that participation in decision making by workers with ID is generally not expected in companies.

(b) Challenges in obtaining a decent wage

One crucial working condition for workers in general is to have a decent wage that allows them to reach an adequate quality of life. This is also true for people with ID. In fact,

Taylor et al. (2022) concluded in their review that economic prosperity through employment of persons with ID leads to a higher quality of life, greater inclusion and independence, and better overall health. However, achieving a decent wage for workers with ID is still a challenge (Lindstrom et al. 2014). Our findings confirmed this situation, describing important obstacles to receiving adequate wages.

(c) Temporary employment contracts

Previous research has shown that, despite efforts to increase the employability of persons with ID, unemployment remains persistent, along with difficulties in maintaining employment over time (e.g., Jacob et al. 2023; Riesen et al. 2015). Our findings suggested that a common practice helps to explain this challenging situation in our context: the widespread use of temporary contracts for persons with ID, often in the form of internships, that are not renewed or sustained over time.

(d) Lack of awareness of intellectual disability in the business sector

Despite progress made in the social inclusion of persons with ID, employers' knowledge about ID remains limited. Jacob et al. (2023) observed that employers perceive persons with ID as a subordinate group incapable of performing a job. Our findings were aligned with this unfortunate view, given that participants reported that the business sector is largely unaware of ID and the potential contributions that persons with this disability can make to companies.

(e) Ostracism

Generally, ostracism in the workplace can be manifested through the refusal to collaborate, avoidance of communication, and even ignoring the presence of others (Choi

2020). Moreover, previous research has shown that ostracism negatively impacts basic needs such as self-esteem, a sense of belonging, control, and self-worth (Al-Atwi et al. 2021). Scholars have observed that ostracism is particularly experienced by persons with ID (e.g., Edwards et al. 2019; Ouattara et al. 2023). According to our findings, it was also present in the workplace, where workers without ID may exclude or avoid contact with co-workers with ID. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that the social interactions of workers with ID are restricted to work-related activities, rather than including other activities (e.g., having coffee together) that promote inclusion.

(f) Peers without intellectual disabilities can perceive persons with ID as a threat

An unexpected result of our research was related to the fact that workers without ID who had temporary contracts and the possibility of losing their jobs perceived workers with ID as a threat. This situation may be quite specific to the context of our study, but it would be beneficial for future research to address this issue to find out whether it is a more widespread phenomenon.

(g) Internalization of discrimination

It is well known that identity is a complex issue for persons with disabilities in the workplace as well (Santuzzi and Waltz 2016). This complexity can lead workers with disabilities to deny their disability in order to avoid stigmatization (Livneh 2009a, 2009b). This situation was closely related to our findings for persons with ID, given that we observed that it is possible for workers with ID to discriminate against other co-workers with ID.

4.3. Theme 3: Organizational Practices Satisfying Basic Needs: Explored Specific Practices Implemented within Organizations That Address the Basic Needs (Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness) of Workers with ID, Thereby Promoting Their Well-Being

(a) Organizational practices that foster a sense of belonging of persons with ID in their work

Relatedness, or a sense of belonging, is a universal basic need for all humans (Deci and Ryan 2000; Luo et al. 2022), including those with ID (e.g., Melchiori and Church 1997). Previous research has confirmed that participation in integrated employment serves as a source of relatedness for persons with ID, enhancing their sense of belonging (Jahoda et al. 2009; Soeker et al. 2021). In this vein, our findings confirmed that organizations can implement concrete practices to meet this basic need, such as active inclusion by co-workers (e.g., inviting them to lunch) and providing work uniforms.

(b) Organizational practices that promote the autonomy of persons with ID in their work

Another universal basic need for humans is autonomy. However, satisfying this need is a persistent challenge for persons with ID, who are often subject to excessive control and overprotection (e.g., Callus et al. 2019), creating barriers to independence and inclusion. Previous research has demonstrated the positive impact of customized support, such as supported employment, on the autonomy of persons with ID. For example, Wehmeyer (1994) highlighted the association between employment and a greater sense of internal control in these individuals. These findings underscore the importance of integrated employment in meeting the autonomy needs of workers with ID. Our results also provided evidence that organizational practices can promote this autonomy, practices such as support from specialists in vocational preparation and co-workers.

(c) Organizational practices that foster the development of competences in persons with ID and increase their sense of efficacy and contribution to their team

Finally, competence—feeling effective in interacting with the environment—is also a universal need whose satisfaction can impact individuals with ID. Nota et al. (2010) specifically discussed how self-efficacy beliefs influence the career choices of individuals with ID. Based on unrealistic beliefs about their limitations, often reinforced by others, these individuals may experience indecision and delays in making career decisions (see Nota et al. 2010). This highlights the importance of self-efficacy beliefs in fostering career interests and promoting work inclusion (e.g., Panagos and DuBois 1999). According to our findings, meeting the competence needs of individuals with ID could be further supported in integrated employment settings by improving the alignment between the individual and the job requirements. In other words, assessing job demands and preparing individuals with ID to meet those demands can enhance their sense of effectiveness in the workplace.

4.4. Implications for Practice

In identifying the factors that facilitate the inclusion and positive contributions of workers with ID in their workplaces and teams, the importance of inclusive leadership stands out. The training and performance evaluation of leaders can be geared towards accepting and leveraging diversity, viewing ID as an asset to teams and the organization as a whole. This leadership is likely to foster the perception of an inclusive climate among organizational members, in addition to efforts to adapt the working conditions to workers with ID.

The barriers most cited by participants also provide us with relevant inputs for professional practice. One area of intervention consists of achieving working conditions (participation in decision making, salary, temporality) for workers with ID that are comparable to those of workers without ID. Companies can be involved in this action, but also policymakers, legislators, and non-governmental organizations advocating for better working conditions for workers with ID. Another area of intervention is more subtle and requires specific awareness programs for workers without ID so that they are able to recognize the contributions of their co-workers with ID as an opportunity and asset. Likewise, it is important to promote policies and practices (e.g., communication, clarification of expectations) that keep the worker with ID from being perceived as a potential threat to the worker without ID.

Regarding organizational practices that directly satisfy the basic needs of workers with ID, there are three main aspects to consider from a practical perspective: (a) promotion of training programs for workers with ID that foster their autonomy and their sense of efficacy on the job; (b) customizing support for workers with ID through the identification of their capabilities and preferences, as well as adapting the demands of the job position; and (c) actions for the integration of workers with ID both from a formal approach (e.g., use of uniforms) and from an approach that promotes informal bonds with their peers without intellectual disabilities (for example, inviting workers with ID to team celebrations).

4.5. Limitations, Future Research, and Strengths

As with all research studies, our investigation has certain limitations. First, the small sample size restricts the generalizability of the results, though we believe an adequate

number of participants and interviews was achieved for the specific objectives of the study. Second, the sample is limited to Spain, which raises concerns about the applicability of the findings to other contexts. Finally, although our qualitative approach has allowed us to gain a deep understanding of the contextual factors that facilitate or hinder appropriate integrated employment for workers with ID, relying on a single methodological strategy is limiting.

In light of these limitations, we propose directions for future research. First, it would be advisable to increase the sample size to ensure the generalizability of our findings. Second, while our results are likely to be applicable in other countries, given the global challenges faced by workers with ID, it would be valuable to validate our findings in different cultural contexts. Lastly, for future research, we recommend employing a strategy that combines both qualitative and quantitative data. Merging our qualitative approach with quantitative methodologies could provide a more comprehensive understanding.

It is relevant to highlight that this study also has at least two relevant strengths. First, our study considered the participation of experts in integrated employment, team supervisors, and workers with ID. The consideration of multiple viewpoints, including the voice of workers with ID, provides a comprehensive understanding of inclusion, positive contributions in workplaces and teams, and satisfaction of basic needs, all of which are positive for the well-being of workers with ID. Second, our study expands the knowledge related to the integrated employment of workers with ID. Previous efforts mainly focused on the positive effects of employment for persons with ID. By contrast, our study examined the

complex organizational contextual factors that affect the experiences of workers with ID and their well-being, with important implications for practice.

5. Conclusions

Based on semi-structured interviews with a total of 10 participants, including four experts in integrated employment, four workers with ID, and two team supervisors, our qualitative research offers a valuable analysis of the organizational contextual factors that promote (or hinder) inclusion, positive contributions in the workplace and teams, and the satisfaction of basic needs of workers with ID. The design of organizations and their practices allows different options, rather than following only one path. Our research has identified the aspects of the context that should be considered in the organizational design (and those that should be avoided or removed) in order to achieve a work environment that leads to the well-being of everyone, especially workers with ID.

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3. OTHER STUDIES

**3.1. STUDY 4: Daily Evaluation of Workers with
Intellectual Disability in Work Groups:
Peripheralization or Integration?**

(Submitted)

Daily Evaluation of Workers with Intellectual Disability in Work Groups: Peripheralization or Integration?

Abstract

Purpose - Integrated employment for individuals with intellectual disability (ID) plays a vital role in promoting their inclusion. For this reason, it is important that their performance be recognized by coworkers without ID. This study investigated whether daily changes in the performance of workers with ID are linked to fluctuations in the work group's performance. Two competing hypotheses were formulated: *Peripheralization* (the worker with ID is on the cognitive periphery and their performance is overlooked by coworkers without that disability) and *integration* (the performance of the worker with ID is recognized by coworkers).

Desing/methodology/approach - We analyzed daily records collected over four days from 131 workers without ID who worked alongside an individual with ID in 26 integrated work groups across multiple economic sectors in Spain. A diary design and latent growth modeling were used to examine day-to-day performance dynamics. Additional analyses assessed the possibility of reverse associations between the study variables.

Findings - Significant daily variability was confirmed. Results showed that 31% of the variance in the performance of workers with ID and 47% of the variance in the group's performance were due to day-to-day differences. Findings also revealed positive relationships between the daily performance of workers with ID and the daily performance of their work groups, thus supporting the integration hypothesis. Additional analyses further suggested that this relationship may be reciprocal.

Originality/value - This study challenges common misconceptions about the abilities of workers with ID, and it highlights their contributions within work groups where members without ID predominate.

Keywords daily performance of workers with intellectual disability, daily workgroup performance, integrated employment, peripheralization, integration

Introduction

For individuals with intellectual disability (ID), participating in the labor market is an invaluable opportunity for personal growth and inclusion (Lysaght *et al.*, 2012; Martínez-Tur *et al.*, 2025; Verdugo *et al.*, 2012). In this study, ID is understood as a developmental condition characterized by limitations in intellectual functioning (e.g., reasoning, learning, and problem solving) and adaptive behavior, including the necessary conceptual, social, and practical skills for everyday life. These limitations originate during the developmental period, typically before the age of 22, and they affect individuals' ability to adapt to changing demands in family, work, and social contexts (Plena inclusión, 2022).

The evidence supporting the benefits of employment for individuals with ID is strong and multidimensional (Akkerman *et al.*, 2018; Dixon and Reddacliff, 2001; Ellenkamp *et al.*, 2016; Lysaght *et al.*, 2012). In addition to meeting economic needs, employment helps to fulfill human needs (Jahoda, 1982; Ryan and Deci, 2002) such as achieving a particular identity and status, attaining self-fulfillment, and building meaningful social relationships (Creed and Klisch, 2005; Creed and Macintyre, 2001; Lysaght *et al.*, 2012; Stephens *et al.*, 2005). Research also shows that integrated employment, where individuals with ID receive a salary for their contributions and work in regular settings alongside individuals without this disability, is positively related to higher levels of quality of life, well-being, and autonomy (Jahoda *et al.*, 2008; Bush and Tassé, 2017). Similarly, a review by Jahoda *et al.* (2008) found that young adults with ID who worked scored significantly higher on quality of life, competence, independence, and social connection than those who did not work or remained in segregated environments. Finally, integrated employment provides individuals

with ID with real opportunities to develop and showcase their skills, which can be a source of pride and personal satisfaction (Lysaght *et al.*, 2009).

Despite these benefits, individuals with ID face significant barriers to accessing integrated employment and experience greater marginalization compared to other disability groups (Alkan *et al.*, 2024; Khayatzadeh-Mahani *et al.*, 2020). A study by Dean *et al.* (2022) found that employers' perceptions of the job performance of individuals with ID are the most influential factor in their willingness to hire them. Employers often have concerns about the performance, quality, and work skills of individuals with ID (Lysaght *et al.*, 2012), frequently based on preconceptions rather than direct experience (Dovidio *et al.*, 2011). In this context, the role of coworkers without ID is crucial. It is quite possible that coworkers without ID can help to foster a positive environment if they recognize the contributions of workers with ID within the work group. However, some early qualitative evidence was not optimistic, showing that coworkers with ID can suffer from stigma (Cavanagh *et al.*, 2021; Gormley, 2015), and that their participation may be seen as a cost rather than a benefit (Almalki, 2019), or even a threat (Fajardo-Castro *et al.*, 2024). Nevertheless, attitudes can become more positive after the worker with ID joins the work group (Almalki, 2019; Gormley, 2015).

With this in mind, we focus on the contribution of workers with ID to the work group from the perspective of their coworkers without ID. Specifically, the current study investigates the relationship over time between the performance of workers with ID and the performance of the work group, using a quantitative diary study. We contribute to previous knowledge in three ways. First, the study provides empirical evidence regarding two competing hypotheses: peripheralization and integration. According to the peripheralization

hypothesis, based on theoretical frameworks such as similarity-attraction, social identity theories, and self-categorization, coworkers without ID tend to push their colleagues with ID to a cognitive periphery. As a result, coworkers without ID do not recognize the contributions of the member with ID when reporting the work group's performance. By contrast, the integration hypothesis, grounded in information/decision-making perspectives and value-in-diversity, suggests that workers with ID make significant contributions to the work group that are acknowledged by their coworkers without ID. Our study aims to determine which of these hypotheses receives empirical support. Second, most of the research has focused on the way integrated employment impacts workers with ID themselves. However, there is limited understanding about how workers with ID contribute to others, such as coworkers without ID and the work group. This gap is important because recognizing the potential positive contributions of workers with ID to others is essential for achieving full citizenship and true inclusion. Finally, our analysis employs a diary study, allowing us to examine whether daily variations in the performance of workers with ID are related to fluctuations in the work group's daily performance. This approach allows us to capture the contributions of workers with ID in real-time and detect day-to-day changes. In other words, it provides insights into what happens to the group's performance on days when the worker with ID performs well and on days when their performance is weaker.

Competing Hypotheses

Including individuals with ID in integrated employment increases diversity within work groups. The effects of diversity on these groups have been examined from various perspectives in scientific studies (see Roberson, 2019). Some theoretical approaches, such

as social identity theory, tend to be more pessimistic about the positive effects of diversity, suggesting that individuals with different attributes may be excluded from the in-group. This exclusion could apply to workers with ID, who might be pushed to the cognitive periphery and have their potential contributions overlooked by coworkers without ID. We refer to this hypothesis as peripheralization. Conversely, other theoretical perspectives (information/decision-making) are more optimistic about diversity in work groups, proposing that it offers valuable resources such as experiences and skills. Therefore, one could argue that ID provides a source of richness that coworkers without ID recognize. In the following sections, we will outline the arguments supporting these two competing hypotheses.

The Peripheralization Hypothesis

Diversity refers to any variation in the composition of the members of a work group (Roberson *et al.*, 2017). Such differences may lead members to see others as either similar to or different from themselves. Based on this view, several interconnected theories have been proposed that consider diversity to be a potential challenge to workgroup functioning, including similarity-attraction, social identity, and self-categorization. Importantly, these theories emphasize that social categorization processes are not based solely on observable differences between individuals, but also on the social meanings, stereotypes, and value judgments attached to those differences (Tajfel, 1978; Turner, 1985). Accordingly, individuals tend to favor in-group members while distancing themselves from out-group members, particularly when out-groups are associated with lower social status or negative stereotypes. In fact, contact with outgroup members is less likely to reduce prejudice when the outgroup is perceived as low status (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006).

From a similarity-attraction perspective, people are generally more attracted to and more willing to cooperate with others whom they perceive as similar (Byrne, 1971; Berscheid and Walster, 1978). As a result, socially meaningful differences can create divisions that hinder interaction and cooperation among coworkers. Likewise, social identity and self-categorization theories suggest that when individuals encounter colleagues whom they perceive as belonging to a different social category, they may be less likely to define them as part of the in-group from which they derive a sense of belonging and self-concept (Tajfel, 1978; Turner, 1985). Under these conditions, the contributions of out-group members may be considered less relevant or less worthy of attention.

These processes are particularly salient in relationships involving workers with ID in contexts where people without ID are predominant. In this case, categorization is not only based on visible aspects of disability, but also on historically rooted stigmatizing beliefs that associate ID with incompetence, dependency, and limited potential to contribute (Haegele and Hodge, 2016; Dovidio et al., 2011). Such deficit-oriented stereotypes go beyond simple perceptions of differences and involve evaluative judgments that can legitimize marginalization, reduced expectations, and discrimination. Empirical research has shown that workers with ID are often evaluated through this deficit lens, which may translate into lower performance expectations and less recognition of their contributions (Lysaght et al., 2012; Cavanagh et al., 2021). From a social identity and self-categorization perspective, these stigmatizing representations can lead coworkers without disabilities to define workers with ID as a devalued out-group. This process not only affects interpersonal attraction and

identification, but it also shapes whose contributions are considered relevant, credible, or worthy of attention in collective performance assessments. Consequently, prejudice and discrimination are integral components of categorization processes that may push workers with ID to the cognitive periphery of the work group.

The aforementioned arguments support a plausible initial hypothesis about the peripheralization of workers with ID. In workplaces dominated by people without this disability, workers with ID may be relegated to the periphery. This phenomenon could illustrate the “illusion of inclusion” existing in our societies (Metzel and Walker, 2001; Pellicano *et al.*, 2018), whereby individuals with ID are physically present in work settings but not meaningfully involved in important interactions, discussions, or decision-making processes. As a result, their presence does not necessarily translate into genuine inclusion.

One key mechanism underlying this invisibility is the limited involvement of workers with ID in organizational decision-making and task-related exchanges. When individuals are systematically excluded from these processes, they may be perceived as having less voice, power, or relevance, which positions them as passive recipients of support rather than active contributors (Fajardo-Castro *et al.*, 2024). Over time, this dynamic can reinforce their marginal status within the work group.

In addition, subtle forms of workplace ostracism may further exacerbate this invisibility. Ostracism refers to experiences of being ignored, excluded from collaboration, or avoided by colleagues or supervisors (Choi, 2020). Such experiences reduce opportunities for interaction and information exchange and undermine basic psychological needs such as belonging, control, self-esteem, and self-worth (Al-Atwi *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, even

when workers with ID perform well, their contributions may go unnoticed (Hafsteinsdóttir and Hardonk, 2023).

In our case, these dynamics imply that coworkers without an ID might overlook the performance of workers with ID when assessing the overall performance of the work group. Importantly, the peripheralization of workers with ID has a cognitive nature: although they are physically present within the work group, they are not cognitively integrated as contributors to the group's performance. Therefore, from a diary study perspective, fluctuations over time in the performance of the worker with ID would not be expected to align with changes in perceived workgroup performance as reported by coworkers without ID. Based on these considerations, we propose the following hypothesis:

Competing Hypothesis 1a: Changes in the daily performance of workers with ID are not related to changes in the daily performance of the work group

The Integration Hypothesis

Unlike social categorization perspectives, other views are more optimistic about diversity within the work group. This is true for the information/decision-making perspectives (van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2004) and the value-in-diversity hypothesis (Cox and Blake, 1991), which argue that diversity offers a wide range of task-relevant knowledge, skills, and abilities. Diversity not only provides non-redundant resources but also helps to prevent hasty decisions and can foster innovation and creativity by combining different perspectives on a task or challenge (Li *et al.*, 2022; Shore *et al.*, 2018).

It is reasonable to suggest that these more optimistic views could increasingly apply to the involvement of individuals with ID in integrated employment. Today's societies are

shifting from the traditional medical model of disability to a more social one (Humpage, 2007). The medical model views disability as an individual impairment that should be cured or contained. It defines disability as a deficit that hampers individuals' participation in inclusive settings, such as mainstream education or integrated employment. As a result, individuals with disabilities have often been segregated in institutions, and especially those with ID (e.g., Göransson *et al.*, 2022).

Over time, a social perspective of disability has gained recognition, coexisting with the medical model. The social model of disability does not imply the absence of difficulties or challenges associated with ID. Rather, in contrast to the medical model, which conceptualizes disability primarily as an individual deficit, the social model locates disability in the interaction between individuals and socially constructed barriers, such as stigma, prejudice, and inaccessible environments (Haegele and Hodge, 2016). From this perspective, functional impairment is not inherently disabling; instead, disability emerges when social contexts fail to recognize, accommodate, or value individuals' capabilities and contributions.

This conceptual shift does not automatically lead to integration. The social model also allows for the possibility of marginalization and peripheralization when social barriers persist. However, it opens up conceptual space in which to view workers with ID as potential contributors whose performance may be recognized within inclusive environments (Martínez-Tur *et al.*, 2025; Taylor *et al.*, 2022). This perspective is closely aligned with the capability approach developed by Sen (1999) and further elaborated by Nussbaum (2006), which emphasizes individuals' capabilities and opportunities to achieve valued forms of

functioning. Applied to disability, this approach shifts the attention from limitations to the possibilities for what individuals can be and do, given appropriate social arrangements. In the context of integrated employment, the capability approach underscores that workers with ID may contribute meaningfully to work groups when environments recognize their capabilities and allow them to be expressed.

In this vein, scholars have argued that workers with ID represent a source of untapped talent (Lindsay *et al.*, 2018; Lysaght *et al.*, 2012). Some empirical evidence has supported the idea that individuals with ID can contribute to work groups and organizations through integrated employment. Shafer *et al.* (1987) observed that employers are generally satisfied with the performance of workers with ID. Shafer *et al.* (1988) also identified three performance aspects from the employers' perspective that are especially relevant for retaining workers with ID: attendance, punctuality, and consistency in completing tasks. Finally, Werner and Hochman (2019) found that soldiers with ID are especially efficient, persistent, and committed to completing tasks that pose a challenge for other soldiers without disabilities. From this optimistic perspective, workers with ID could genuinely contribute to work group performance, even when workers without ID predominate. This idea suggests that the worker with ID is not an invisible person on the periphery of the work group. Instead, their coworkers without disabilities might value their contributions when they report the performance of the work group. From a diary study perspective, on days when workers with ID perform better, work group performance might also improve. Based on the previous arguments, we propose the following hypothesis:

Competing Hypothesis 1b: Changes in the daily performance of workers with ID are positively related to changes in the daily performance of work groups.

Method

Participants and procedure

This research employed a quantitative design with four measurement times (corresponding to four consecutive workdays for each individual with ID) to examine the daily performance of workers with ID and their relationship with daily workgroup performance. The present study received approval from the Ethics Committee of Research in Humans at the University of the corresponding author (protocol code UV-INV_ETICA-2081059). All appropriate measures were taken to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. They provided informed consent.

For participant recruitment, a strategic partnership was formed with “Plena inclusión España,” the leading national NGO representing individuals with ID in Spain. This partnership was essential for achieving our goal. In collaboration with our research team, this NGO launched a campaign to identify and invite participants to the study through its affiliated organizations and professional contacts. Although there is no systematic registry of individuals with ID engaged in integrated employment, access was granted to 26 work groups that met the study criteria: a) They practiced integrated employment where members with ID earned a salary for their work and interacted daily with coworkers without ID; and b) The work group included one member with ID.

Each work group included one worker with ID. Accordingly, a total of 26 workers with ID were involved in the study and evaluated by their coworkers without ID. The size of the work groups ranged from 2 to 8 members, with an average team size of 5.04 members. In Spain, ID is officially recognized as a minimum degree of disability of 33%, as established by Royal Decree 888/2022. This public assessment evaluates limitations in functioning and participation, and it classifies ID according to cognitive functioning and support needs, commonly distinguishing among mild, moderate, severe, and profound levels. Individuals with ID who access integrated employment through “Plena inclusión España” typically have a formally recognized degree of disability equal to or greater than 33%. Most individuals in this context present mild ID (an IQ between 50 and 70, approximately) or, to a lesser extent, a moderate level of ID.

All 26 work groups and the organizations involved agreed to participate in the study, representing a variety of sectors, including hospitality, public administration, services, agriculture, construction, and social services. Workgroup members without ID who interacted daily with the worker with ID also agreed to participate, which led to the involvement of 131 workers without ID. Their ages ranged from 20 to 63 years ($M = 42.09$, $SD = 11.86$), and about 75% were women.

Across these settings, integrated employment was implemented to enable workers with and without ID to collaborate on daily tasks. For example, in the retail sector (e.g., clothing stores), workers with and without ID performed similar functions, such as customer service, organizing merchandise, and tidying the shop floor. In other sectors, such as

hospitality or public services, workers with ID were involved in operational tasks that required ongoing coordination with coworkers without ID.

Daily interaction and collaboration between workers with and without ID were key inclusion criteria for the study. Researchers verified that workgroup members interacted and collaborated daily, rather than working in parallel or in segregated roles. This ensured a meaningful level of task interdependence across the participating work groups. Additionally, workers with ID were employed under the same labor agreements and sector-specific collective bargaining agreements as their coworkers without ID, and they received the same salary conditions based on their roles and working hours. Although some workers with ID were employed part-time, they were fully integrated into the work group's daily operations during their working hours. These conditions allowed coworkers without ID to directly observe and evaluate the quality of the work and contributions of the workers with ID on a daily basis.

Following a series of preparatory meetings and careful planning, our research team carried out an extensive data collection campaign. To ensure data quality and methodological consistency, data collection was performed by researchers on site within the participating work groups, with their presence extended as needed to cover four consecutive working days for each worker with ID. Researchers were present on site exclusively in a data-collection role. They did not perform work tasks, participate in production activities, or serve as members of the work group. Their role was limited to administering questionnaires, ensuring that data collection followed the established procedure, and addressing any questions about the study protocol. This process required

significant effort, but it was undertaken because it provided important benefits for the quality of the research. Thus, the researchers were able to oversee data collection to ensure consistent instructions and procedures and ensure that the questionnaires were always completed at the end of the workday. Additionally, this physical presence of researchers helped to achieve a good response rate. Ideally, the study design would have resulted in 524 daily diary recordings if all the participants had completed every questionnaire on the four days. We collected 498 recordings, resulting in a 95% response rate across participants and measurement times. The main reason that some participants did not complete the questionnaire on certain days was the lack of overlap with the worker with ID on those days. It should be noted that shifts could vary, or the worker with ID might not have been employed full-time, and so their four consecutive working days did not always align with those of their coworkers without ID.

Questionnaires were handed out in person at the end of each workday during the four-day observation period, ensuring that the respondents had interacted with their worker with ID throughout the entire workday before providing their assessments. To protect response anonymity while allowing questionnaire matching across days, participants created a unique code that they included on each day's questionnaire. Participants evaluated the performance of the worker with ID and the overall performance of the work group, always focusing on the specific workday. Researchers were available to answer any questions or concerns.

Measures

One challenge in conducting diary studies is maintaining employees' participation over time, especially when asking them to answer the same questions daily. To address this, we followed established methodological recommendations for diary studies, using short forms (see Ohly *et al.*, 2010), which allowed participants to complete the questionnaire in just a few minutes (see Reis and Gable, 2000).

Performance of workers with ID. This dimension was assessed using the individual competence scale developed by Sheldon *et al.* (2001). It consisted of three items, which we adapted to measure daily performance. Accordingly, the evaluation focused on the performance of the worker with ID each day. An example item is "Today, this person has successfully completed their tasks". For all the items on the questionnaire, responses were given on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from "1: *Strongly disagree*" to "7: *Strongly agree*". Reliability was high for each workday, with alpha coefficients ranging from 0.83 to 0.89.

Workgroup performance. We used the questionnaire developed by Jehn *et al.* (1999), which consisted of two items. Again, we adapted it to focus on daily workgroup performance. An example of an item is "Your work group has done a very good job today". Responses were recorded on a 5-point Likert scale for all items, ranging from "1: *Nothing*" to "5: *Very much*". Reliability was good for each workday, with alpha coefficients ranging from 0.86 to 0.96.

Analysis

To examine our hypotheses, we used a linear latent growth model (Duncan *et al.*, 2013). This approach makes it possible to measure model change over time using longitudinal data. The statistical package MPlus version 8 (Muthén and Muthén, 2019) was used for the data analysis. The linear latent growth model allowed us to examine whether

changes in the performance of workers with ID over time led to changes in the performance of the work groups. The nested structure of the data was considered in our model testing, with occasions as Level 1 and individuals as Level 2. Maximum likelihood (ML) was used as the estimation method. We also controlled for gender and age.

Results

Preliminary Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and aggregated correlations among the study variables. Participants' mean scores for both the performance of workers with ID and workgroup performance were above the midpoints of the scales. There was a significant and positive relationship between the performance of workers with ID and workgroup performance.

Table 1

Means, standard deviations, and correlations between daily study variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>
1. Performance of workers with ID	5.51	1.06	
2. Workgroup performance	4.31	0.59	0.52**

Note. ** $p \leq 0.01$. Descriptive statistics and correlations among daily variables were computed by aggregating participants' daily scores. Specifically, we estimated the average value for each person across all days for all the variables in the study. Then, we correlated the average values for the variables.

We estimated the systematic variance within and between individuals for each daily measure. This estimation was essential to determine whether daily (within-person) variance

in intrapersonal variables existed that could predict or be predicted by other intrapersonal variables. To do this, we ran a null model without predictors at any level of analysis for each daily variable: the performance of workers with ID and workgroup performance. Results indicated that daily variability is statistically significant for both variables (see Table 2). Approximately 31% of the systematic variance in the daily performance of workers with ID and 47% of the systematic variance in workgroup performance were due to daily fluctuations, supporting the investigation of intraindividual relationships.

Table 2

Variance Components of the Daily Measures

Variable	Within Person σ^2	Between Person τ_{00}	Within Person (%) ^a
Performance of Workers with ID	0.46**	1.04**	31
Work Group Performance	0.23**	0.26**	47

Note. The percentage of within-person variance was computed as $\sigma^2/(\sigma^2 + \tau_{00})$. $n = 131$ participants, with 498 observations. ** $p \leq 0.01$.

Hypothesis Testing

Table 3 shows the results of the linear growth model, indicating a significant positive link between the daily performance of workers with ID and workgroup performance. These results support the competitive H1b (integration). Specifically, the parameter estimate was 0.42 ($p < .01$), which means that daily changes in the performance of workers with ID were significantly and positively related to shifts in workgroup performance.

The intercept of the model was 4.27 ($p < .01$), indicating a relatively high baseline of workgroup performance. The time parameter (0.03) was not statistically significant. Control variables such as sex (-0.02) and age (-0.01) did not show significant effects. The model fit

indices indicated a satisfactory fit to the data. The chi-square test (χ^2) results showed a value of 78.334 ($df = 38$, $p = 0.0001$). The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.09, slightly above the recommended threshold of 0.08. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.94 and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) of 0.93 both exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.90, indicating a good model fit. Overall, these indices suggest that the model effectively captures the relationships between the daily performance of workers with ID and daily workgroup performance.

Table 3

Relations between daily performance of workers with ID and daily workgroup performance

Parameter	Workgroup Performance	
	Estimate	SE
Linear growth model: Change as a predictor of change		
Intercept (g00)	4,27**	0.06
Time (g10)	0.03	0.02
Sex	-0.02	0.04
Age	-0.01	0.01
Daily Performance of Workers with ID (g20)	0.42**	0.11

Note. SE standard error. ** $p < .01$

Testing the Reverse Direction^[1]

Although our hypothesized model posits that changes in the daily performance of workers with ID are related to changes in daily workgroup performance, an alternative causality is also plausible. Specifically, higher perceived workgroup performance may lead coworkers without ID to evaluate the performance of workers with ID more positively. Theories such as social learning (Bandura, 1977) and the affect

^[1] We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer, who suggested conducting this alternative test.

infusion model (Forgas, 1995) would be compatible with this alternative mechanism. Team performance serves as a resource for individuals' learning (social learning). The worker with ID learns from their successful coworkers and adopts behaviors that lead to good individual performance. Likewise, this positive environment may induce the experience of positive affect in the worker with ID, which in turn stimulates good performance on their part (affect infusion model).

To test this alternative causal direction, we estimated a reverse model in which daily workgroup performance was specified as the antecedent and daily performance of workers with ID was the outcome variable. Results showed that daily workgroup performance was positively and significantly associated with the performance of workers with ID ($\gamma_{20} = 0.66$, $SE = 0.20$, $p < .01$). The overall fit of the reverse model was comparable to that of the hypothesized model. The chi-square test yielded a value of $\chi^2 = 74.655$ ($df = 38$, $p = 0.0004$), with a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.09. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) were both 0.94, indicating an acceptable model fit.

To further compare the strength of the relationships across models, we conducted a statistical contrast of the parameter estimates across models. The difference in the strength of the associations between the hypothesized model and the reverse model was not statistically significant ($z = -1.05$, $p > .05$). This result indicated that the magnitude of the relationship does not differ significantly depending on which variable is specified as the antecedent.

Taken together, these findings suggest that, in addition to the hypothesized relationship tested in this study, a reverse direction between workers with ID performance and perceived workgroup performance also exists. Rather than indicating a clearly stronger causal direction, the results point to a dynamic process in which team and individual performance perceptions may mutually reinforce each other over time.

Discussion

In the present study, we examined the relationship between the daily performance of workers with ID and that of their work groups from the perspective of their coworkers without ID. The results clearly showed that changes in the performance of workers with ID were positively associated with fluctuations in workgroup performance. Of the two competing hypotheses we proposed, the results supported integration (H1b). Thus, the performance of the worker with ID was recognized by their coworkers without ID when reporting the performance of the work group as a whole. Further analyses also suggested the potential for reciprocal relationships between individual and team performance. Implications of our results are discussed below.

Theoretical Implications and New Research Needs

Our study shows that workers with ID are not passive individuals who simply receive support from their environment. They can also actively contribute, and their performance can be recognized and valued by coworkers without ID. Moreover, the performance of people with ID, as well as that of the entire work group, is not fixed but rather changes daily, which is similar to many other concepts in organizational behavior research. In addition, as previously mentioned, the presence of reciprocal relationships appears to be a possibility.

Based on these findings, we highlight theoretical implications and suggest new directions for research.

ID as a Positive Diversity Driver. Our findings challenge pessimistic assumptions about the inclusion of workers with ID by demonstrating that their contributions in work groups are positively recognized by coworkers without ID. Contrary to concerns about diversity, workers with ID are not pushed to a cognitive periphery. These findings support earlier publications suggesting that workers with ID are an important source of untapped talent (Lindsay *et al.*, 2018; Lysaght *et al.*, 2012) and show capabilities that are valuable in the workplace (e.g., Shafer *et al.*, 1988). While our findings help to improve understanding about the integration of workers with ID into employment settings, they also raise important questions for future research. A particularly relevant area involves the specific types of contributions these workers bring to their work groups. In this study, our focus was on a general measure of performance; however, it would be helpful to more closely examine the specific contributions that coworkers without ID recognize and appreciate. As mentioned earlier, some initial qualitative evidence on this topic exists (Shafer *et al.*, 1988; Werner and Hochman, 2019), but more systematic research using diverse methods would be advisable.

Can the Peripheralization Hypothesis be Definitively Rejected? Although our findings provide clear support for the integration hypothesis, we remain cautious about definitively rejecting peripheralization. Rooted in robust theoretical traditions such as social identity theory, peripheralization may unfold according to specific temporal dynamics. Our study examined well-established work groups, but it is possible that, at the initial stages of incorporating workers with ID, peripheral exclusion and skepticism about their contributions

may emerge. It is important to note that none of the workers with ID included in this study were in the initial stage of their employment relationship. All of the workers with ID had already been integrated into their respective work groups prior to the data collection period. Therefore, the present findings reflect performance dynamics in ongoing employment relationships, rather than during the initial adjustment or onboarding phase. It is also possible that a selection effect plays a role, insofar as workers with ID who gain access to integrated employment may enter work environments that are already relatively open to inclusion and diversity.

In any case, it is important to emphasize that, even in organizations that are more reluctant to engage in integrated employment, time may have a favorable effect on integration and the recognition of the contributions of workers with ID. Hiring individuals with ID in integrated employment situations is a strategy that, if given sufficient time, may advance both their inclusion and their contributions to team performance. Some qualitative studies offer preliminary indications consistent with this view (Almalki, 2019; Gormley, 2015). Future research would benefit from designs that capture this temporal trajectory from the very onset of participation, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding. In fact, peripheralization and integration may be compatible when examined from a broader temporal perspective that explicitly includes the entry point of workers with ID into the work group.

Temporal Variability in the Performance of Workers with ID. This study also adds to the performance literature by applying a temporal perspective (Roe, 2008; Bartunek and Woodman, 2015) to the performance of workers with ID, allowing for the analysis of daily

fluctuations. The variability we identified suggests that the performance of workers with ID does not go unnoticed by their coworkers without ID. If workers with ID were at the cognitive periphery, it would be reasonable to expect their coworkers to evaluate their contributions with a certain degree of stability or even indifference. However, the data show variability across days. In other words, coworkers without ID can recognize different performance levels of workers with ID, depending on what happens each day, just as they do with the rest of the work group. Viewing this phenomenon through a static lens is limiting because workers with ID and their work groups do not perform the same every day. Because performance fluctuates daily, a static perspective seems inadequate. Future research should include this temporal dimension when analyzing the performance of workers with ID and their coworkers.

Reciprocal relationships between team and individual performance. Although this was not our primary objective, the additional statistical analyses conducted regarding the reverse direction seem to support the idea of a reciprocal relationship between individual performance and team performance. This opens the door to complex dynamics in which the worker with ID contributes, through their daily performance, to the collective performance of the team. At the same time, strong team performance may provide resources to its members with ID. That is, it may create a favorable context where the worker with ID can learn and a positive work environment that fosters their performance, in line with theoretical models such as social learning and affect infusion. This reciprocal dynamic aligns with process-oriented perspectives on workgroup functioning, which emphasize that organizational phenomena unfold over time through ongoing interactions and mutual

influence (Roe, 2008; Bartunek and Woodman, 2015). Moreover, adopting a temporal and relational perspective is consistent with diary-based approaches in organizational research that highlight day-to-day variability and dynamic performance evaluations within work groups (Ohly et al., 2010). Future research should address this issue by identifying the specific mechanisms underlying these reciprocal relationships. For example, research could examine the extent to which the positive affect (mediator) derived from strong collective performance (antecedent) creates an environment that stimulates the individual performance of the worker with ID (consequence).

Towards citizenship for individuals with ID. Our research contributes to ongoing debates about citizenship for individuals with ID by focusing on their role as workers in integrated employment contexts, without implying that citizenship is contingent upon labor market participation. Individuals with ID are citizens with full rights, regardless of their employment status, and the ability to participate in paid work depends not only on individual characteristics, but also on the extent to which labor markets and organizations are willing and able to be inclusive. From a capability-oriented perspective, however, justice and citizenship involve not only the formal possession of rights, but also real opportunities to exercise these rights in meaningful ways. In this sense, integrated employment represents one important, though by no means exclusive, domain in which individuals with ID may have the opportunity to exercise agency, contribute to collective activities, and have their contributions socially recognized. Our findings suggest that, when such opportunities are available, the daily contributions of workers with ID can be recognized by their coworkers

without disability, thus challenging deficit-oriented assumptions about passivity and dependence.

Importantly, this perspective does not diminish the citizenship of those who cannot or do not participate in the labor market. Rather, it highlights the value of creating inclusive contexts where participation and recognition are possible, when appropriate, while reaffirming that citizenship fundamentally rests on rights and dignity. Future research informed by the capability approach may further explore how different social domains, such as work, education, community life, and care, can expand or constrain the ability of individuals with ID to participate and be recognized as full members of society.

Implications for Practice

Our findings have important practical implications that are interconnected. First, this study challenges common misconceptions about ID. Many organizations might mistakenly believe that workers with ID cannot contribute effectively to work groups, but our results directly contradict this assumption. This insight can help to change organizational perspectives and foster more inclusive workplace practices. For example, organizations can promote openness to diversity through initiatives such as establishing integration policies and standards, offering diversity training programs, and creating suitable reward systems (Trzebiatowski *et al.*, 2025; Vasquez-Peñaloza *et al.*, 2025). Second, our findings suggest that leaders have the potential to empower workers with ID by encouraging them to take on active roles within their work group, which could significantly increase their contributions. One way to do this is by implementing strategies to enhance the skills of workers with ID. Finally, it is possible that workers with ID are assigned tasks that are easier than their actual capabilities.

Organizations and leaders need to recognize that designing or redesigning jobs to be sufficiently challenging can motivate these workers, help to maximize their contributions, and ensure that their efforts are recognized and valued by coworkers without ID.

Limitations and Future Research

All studies have limitations that serve as opportunities for improvement. This is also true of our study. First, an important limitation of this study has to do with the characteristics of the sample. Although integrated employment aims to promote inclusion for all individuals with ID, the majority of the participants in this study had mild or moderate levels of ID. Identifying and recruiting individuals with higher support needs (e.g., severe or profound ID) for integrated employment is still particularly challenging in practice. This difficulty reflects broader structural barriers in current labor markets, rather than research design decisions. Future research should, therefore, explore strategies that facilitate the inclusion of individuals with greater support needs into integrated employment. In this regard, approaches such as customized employment, which tailors job roles to individuals' strengths and support needs, seem especially promising. Recent evidence from Spain suggests that customized employment can enhance employment outcomes and well-being for individuals with ID (Martínez-Tur et al., 2025). Expanding such programs may help to extend the benefits of integrated employment to individuals who are currently underrepresented in the labor market.

Second, the sample was gathered exclusively from organizations in Spain, which limits the generalizability of our findings to other countries and cultural contexts. Although the situation of workers with ID and their work groups is probably similar across different

countries, replicating this study in diverse cultural settings would be advisable. In addition, we would welcome the testing of the generalizability of our results to other sectors. For example, in our study, there is a bias toward the presence of women in the sample. In some of the sectors considered (social services, public administration, and services), women are more prevalent in Spain, which might explain why women predominate in the present research. Therefore, our analyses should be replicated in other sectors.

Third, all the data were collected through self-report methods. Although ensuring participant anonymity and confidentiality in our study helps to enhance data reliability, future research could incorporate alternative measurement techniques, such as objective performance data or direct observational methods, to address potential methodological weaknesses. For instance, presenting objective performance data on workers with ID to coworkers without ID and supervisors could help to examine changes in reactions toward ID within work groups.

Fourth, although our quantitative diary study design allowed us to observe daily performance variations, combining this information with qualitative diary entries could yield more detailed and comprehensive insights into workplace dynamics. This methodological triangulation would provide a richer, more contextually nuanced understanding of performance fluctuations.

Fifth, although this study offers an initial look at performance dynamics between workers with ID and the way coworkers without ID perceive them, opportunities for further research remain. Future studies could aim to explore the mechanisms underlying the

relationship between the performance of workers with ID and their coworkers, thus fostering a deeper understanding of the processes involved.

Finally, given that our focus was on the perspective of workers without ID, we did not consider the evaluations provided by coworkers with ID themselves. In future research, it would be advisable to compare both perspectives in at least two directions: (a) to examine whether there is also within-person variability over time among workers with ID, as is the case of workers without ID; and (b) to assess whether both types of workers (with and without ID) express similar evaluations or, conversely, biases or differences emerge between them.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study contributes to the literature on workplace inclusion by demonstrating that workers with ID can be recognized as meaningful contributors to workgroup performance in integrated employment settings. Using a diary design, we show that the performance of workers with ID is not static, but fluctuates daily, and that these fluctuations are associated with coworkers' perceptions of overall workgroup performance. Beyond supporting the integration hypothesis, additional analyses suggest that this relationship may be reciprocal, reflecting a dynamic process in which individual and collective performance mutually reinforce each other over time.

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3.2. STUDY 5: Eliciting the expression of positive emotions among employees with intellectual disability toward coworkers: A cross-level study of inclusive leadership and team interactional competence

(Submitted)

Eliciting the expression of positive emotions toward coworkers in employees with intellectual disability: A cross-level study of inclusive leadership and team interactional competence

Abstract

Enabling employees with intellectual disability to develop authentic relationships in the workplace and express positive emotions toward their coworkers without disability is a challenge for integrated employment. This study examined a cross-level process in which two team-level relational resources (team interactional competence and inclusive leadership) lead to the individual-level expression of positive emotions toward coworkers in employees with intellectual disability, through emotional authenticity, which is understood as an indicator of reduced emotional inhibition. We tested a 2-1-1 mediation model using data from 131 employees nested in 26 teams. We focused on small work teams in which one member had an intellectual disability, examining the perspective of coworkers without disability. A three-wave, time-lagged design was employed, and hypotheses were tested using multilevel structural equation modeling. Results partially supported the hypothesized model. Emotional authenticity was a robust predictor of positive emotional expression. Team interactional competence predicted positive emotional expression indirectly through emotional authenticity. In contrast, although inclusive leadership was associated with emotional authenticity, its indirect effect was not statistically significant. Taken together, the findings highlight emotional authenticity as a key regulatory mechanism through which team interactional competence reduces emotional inhibition and facilitates positive emotional expression in employees with intellectual disability.

Key words: team interactional competence, inclusive leadership, emotional authenticity, positive emotional expression, employees with intellectual disability, integrated employment

Introduction

Integrated employment has increasingly been promoted as a central strategy in the social and occupational inclusion of individuals with intellectual disability (ID), emphasizing not only access to paid work, but also meaningful participation in everyday workplace interactions (Creed & Klisch, 2005; Creed & Macintyre, 2001; Stephens et al., 2005). Beyond macro structural inclusion, successful integration of individuals with ID in micro work settings depends heavily on the quality of their interpersonal relationships with coworkers without ID, given that inclusion is enacted and experienced primarily through daily interactions rather than through formal arrangements alone (Lysaght et al., 2012; Verdugo et al., 2012). These interactions are inherently emotional and involve ongoing interpretations of others' affective displays, intentions, and sincerity, which shape how coworkers are evaluated, trusted, and responded to over time (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987, 1989). From this perspective, emotions in integrated employment contexts are not merely private experiences, but they are also socially embedded processes that play a central role in how inclusion is perceived and sustained within work teams (Jahoda et al., 2008; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006).

A large body of organizational behavior research has demonstrated that emotional expressions have important communicative and relational functions at work, influencing interpersonal judgments, cooperation, and the overall quality of social exchanges (Barsade, 2002; Pugh, 2001; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988; Tsai & Huang, 2002). In particular, the expression of positive emotions has been shown to facilitate coordination, foster favorable impressions, and promote positive social climates through mechanisms

such as emotional contagion and affective signaling (Barsade, 2002; Pugh, 2001; Tsai & Huang, 2002). However, the expression of positive emotions should be perceived as genuine and authentic because observers are sensitive to cues indicating emotional sincerity and congruence between felt and expressed emotions (Cha et al., 2019; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989; Weischer et al., 2013). Despite these advances, little is known about how emotional expressions of employees with ID, and their perceived authenticity, can be enhanced in integrated employment settings, where interactions may be characterized by heightened ambiguity, asymmetrical expectations, and concerns about misinterpretation (Johnson-James et al., 2025; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). For employees with ID, an inclusive team environment would allow their emotions to be perceived as authentic and enable them to express positive feelings toward coworkers without ID.

This study contributes, in at least three ways, to understanding how this expression of positive emotions occurs. First, we focused on work teams in which individuals with ID interact with others without ID. Access to integrated employment for individuals with ID is still quite limited in today's societies (e.g., Alkan et al., 2024; Khayatzadeh-Mahani et al., 2020). Studying these teams is a costly task, but it provides direct access to the perceptions of teams that include a member with ID and makes it possible to explore the interpretations of coworkers without ID. Second, we proposed a cross-level model in which team-level variables contribute to the individual positive expression of emotions by team members with ID that can be perceived by their coworkers without ID. These approaches involving different levels of constructs and analysis allow for a more precise understanding of organizational life (González-Romá & Hernández, 2017; Lin et al., 2023). Specifically, we propose a dual-

corridor approach at the team level that takes into account the two types of members relevant to the employee with ID: the leader and the coworkers. On the one hand, supervisors differ in the extent to which they display inclusive leadership. This type of leadership is expected to promote emotional authenticity and the expression of positive emotions by employees with ID. On the other hand, the interactional competence of coworkers without ID in interacting with colleagues with ID is also relevant. It is likely that if the team as a whole demonstrates interactional competence, it will be easier for members with ID to be authentic and express positive emotions toward coworkers without ID. Third, we suggested a mediating mechanism (authenticity in emotional expression) in the relationship between the team-level factors and the expression of positive emotions. When leadership is inclusive and the team demonstrates competence in its interactions with coworkers with ID, these employees are more likely to express their emotions more authentically. Facilitating this authenticity should, in turn, increase the likelihood that they will express positive emotions toward their coworkers without ID. Overall, we conducted a cross-level process that explains how team members receive positive emotions from coworkers with ID.

Concepts

Team interactional competence

In our social world, people exercise their capacity to interact with others by responding to the behaviors of those around them, making their own behaviors recognizable as responses to others, and ultimately establishing meaningful relationships. This process occurs across the various social contexts where individuals operate (Dai, 2024; Hall &

Doehler, 2011). Being competent in social interactions is not easy in some situations. A particularly illustrative case would be communication and interaction with individuals with ID, including in workplace settings (e.g., Purcell et al., 2000). In these interactions, people without ID often feel uncomfortable and incompetent. For example, they tend to adopt a directive communication style rather than engaging in genuine dialogue (McConkey et al., 1999). In defining interactional competence, we adopt a team-level perspective. As Hall and Doehler (2011) noted, in line with symbolic interactionism, this competence is constructed through interactions with other members of a social group who share a common context. Accordingly, our focus is on the work team as a whole, which, to a greater or lesser extent, develops its capacity to interact with the coworker with ID and builds a shared level of competence. This interactional competence, therefore, constitutes an important team-level contextual resource for inclusion, describing the team's capacity to interact with its coworkers with ID.

Inclusive leadership

In the organizational literature, leadership is considered a key construct for understanding employees because it influences their perceptions, evaluations, and behaviors (e.g., Harms et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2020; Tsai, 2011). Among the myriads of leadership styles (for a review see Dinh et al., 2014), Inclusive leadership seems the most appropriate approach to facilitate the collaboration among members with and without ID (Pless & Maak, 2004). In short, identity leadership is characterized by openness, accessibility, and appreciation of individual differences (Carmeli et al., 2010; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Inclusive leaders tend to display a higher frequency of listening

attentively to employees' needs, remaining approachable and accessible, and fostering a supportive climate that encourages open communication and participation (Cao et al., 2023; Hollander, 2009).

Following prior studies (Li & Tang, 2022), in the present study we focus on team-members' perceptions of their managers inclusive leadership behaviors, rather than managers' self-reports. Our rationale for this is two-fold. First, this approach prevents ego-defensive or social desirability bias in reporting, and thus allows capturing a more accurate description of managers' behaviors. Second, from a symbolic interaction approach (Blumer, 1969; Zohar & Hofmann, 2012), we argue that team members interact daily and develop shared perceptions of the inclusive leadership displayed by their supervisor toward the team member with ID. In addition, according to structuralism (Reichers & Schneider, 1983), we hypothesize that team members are exposed to similar stimuli (i.e., supervisor behaviors), which helps create shared perceptions of the extent to which inclusive leadership is displayed towards the coworker with ID.

Emotional authenticity

Emotional authenticity refers to the extent to which others perceive emotional expressions as sincere and congruent with the underlying emotional experience (Ashforth & Tomiuk, 2000; Salmela, 2005). From an emotion regulation perspective, lower authenticity reflects greater emotional dissonance (gap between expressed and genuinely felt emotions) resulting from inhibition or self-censorship (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). This gap is particularly relevant for individuals with ID, as some evidence suggests they often experience difficulties with emotion regulation (Sáez-Suanes et al., 2023). The literature

traditionally considers authenticity an individual-level construct because it involves a subjective perception that does not necessarily converge in shared views (e.g., Côté et al., 2013; Krumhuber & Manstead, 2009).

Expression of positive emotions

Positive emotional expression refers to observable displays such as smiling, friendliness, and pleasantness (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987). These expressions impact relational judgments and emotional reactions during two-party interactions (Barsade, 2002; Pugh, 2001). Observable displays of emotion are crucial for individuals with ID because previous research efforts have indicated that they can experience difficulties in expressing emotions that can be processed by others (Adams & Oliver, 2011). Again, the perception of expressions of positive emotions displayed by individuals with ID is a subjective process that describes an individual-level construct (Alharbi et al., 2020).

Theory and hypotheses

The theory of emotion regulation posits that individuals not only experience emotions automatically, but they can also modulate when, how, and which emotions they express to adapt to social demands and contextual requirements (Gross, 1998). This regulation often involves strategies such as inhibiting or self-censoring emotions, which can be necessary in order to maintain social harmony or avoid conflict. However, research highlights that contexts that allow authentic emotional expression, where individuals can display emotions that align with what they genuinely feel, are associated with more positive social interactions and personal outcomes, in contrast with situations that require individuals to mask or excessively regulate their emotions (Côté et al., 2013; Grandey, 2000). Although emotion

regulation is adaptive, emotional authenticity is a key factor in true social inclusion because simulating emotions can hinder the formation of meaningful relationships. This aspect is even more important for individuals with ID, who face particularly significant challenges in integrated employment and when interacting with colleagues without ID. The theoretical framework for emotion regulation, as well as the consideration of employees with ID who collaborate in teams alongside coworkers without ID, forms the basis for the hypotheses proposed below.

Linking team interactional competence to emotional authenticity

Higher levels of interpersonal competence have been associated with reduced ambiguity and smoother social exchanges (Ferris et al., 2001; Martínez-Tur et al., 2016). These conditions provide low interpersonal uncertainty and reduce the need to regulate emotional expression to avoid misunderstandings or negative evaluations by others. From an emotion regulation perspective, environments characterized by lower social ambiguity reduce inhibitory demands and emotional dissonance (Grandey, 2000; Gross, 1998; Hochschild, 1983). When individuals perceive their social environment as prepared and supportive, they are less likely to engage in suppression or self-censorship of emotional expression (Grandey, 2000).

This rationale can be transferred to teams that promote integrated employment for individuals with ID. In this type of context, where teams are mostly composed of employees without ID but include a person with an ID in their daily work, the ability to interact effectively with that colleague should influence their freedom to express their emotions genuinely. High team competence in interactions with their member with an ID is characterized by certainty

and support. In such cases, the employee with ID is more likely to feel comfortable and free in their interactions with coworkers (e.g., Traver et al., 2017). Therefore, they are more likely to respond to their teammates without ID with greater authenticity in their emotional expression because suppression or self-censorship is unnecessary. Based on these arguments, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1a. Team interactional competence will be positively associated with the emotional authenticity of the coworker with ID.

Linking inclusive leadership to emotional authenticity

Supervisors play a central role in shaping perceived norms of acceptance and participation within teams (Wolfart et al., 2025). Inclusive leadership, characterized by openness, accessibility, and appreciation of individual differences, indicates that diversity is recognized and valued rather than penalized (Carmeli et al., 2010; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). Such signals describe a context characterized by psychological safety and low interpersonal risk in everyday interactions (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006; Randel et al., 2018). This context influences emotional regulation. It is reasonable to argue that displaying inclusive leadership signals an environment of openness and acceptance, thereby reducing the need for emotional inhibition. Conversely, when the leadership informs that the work environment is experienced as restrictive or judgmental, emotional self-censorship and suppression become more likely, thus reducing authenticity and increasing emotional dissonance (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015).

Applying this logic to the situation faced by employees with ID, inclusive leadership should promote their emotional authenticity. In addition to coworkers, the supervisor is a

proximal authority figure who influences the atmosphere experienced within teams. If the supervisor demonstrates inclusive leadership, employees with ID are more likely to express themselves authentically in their interactions with coworkers without ID. After all, inclusive leadership describes an environment that accepts diversity and encourages sincerity in expressing emotions. Under such conditions, emotional expressions are more likely to be congruent with genuinely felt emotions and to be perceived as authentic by coworkers (Ashforth & Tomiuk, 2000; Salmela, 2005). Therefore, we intend to test the following empirically:

Hypothesis 1b. Inclusive leadership will be positively associated with the emotional authenticity of the coworker with ID.

Linking emotional authenticity to the expression of positive emotions

Emotional authenticity leads to expressing positive emotions toward others (Grandey, 2000). Research on emotion regulation suggests that aligning emotional expressions with genuinely felt emotions (authenticity) entails an underlying positive affective experience (Grandey, 2000; Landa & English, 2022). This positive affective state is particularly relevant in social interactions because it broadens individuals' thought-action repertoires, increasing openness, approach tendencies, and the formation of lasting social bonds (Fredrickson, 2001), thereby facilitating the expression of positive emotions toward others, such as warmth and friendliness (Côté, 2005; Grandey, 2003). Taken together, these findings suggest that emotional authenticity can create conditions that facilitate the expression of positive emotions toward others: individuals who express emotions that are congruent with their internal states experience a sense of positive comfort that favors

displaying positive emotions in their interactions with others (Yang et al., 2021). It is reasonable to assume that this process also occurs in work teams that include a member with ID. When the employee with ID expresses emotional authenticity, they are more likely to display positive emotions toward their coworkers without ID. Based on these arguments, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 2. Emotional authenticity will be positively associated with the expression of positive emotions by the coworker with ID.

Emotional authenticity as a mediating mechanism

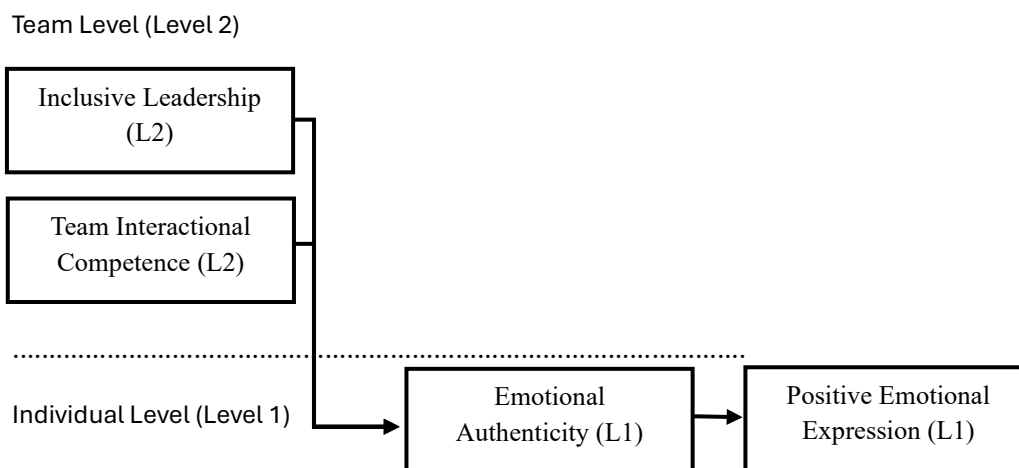
The preceding arguments lead to hypotheses proposing bivariate relationships, following an analytical approach that considers each relationship between two variables independently. However, this strategy can be complemented by a more holistic view that examines the process or mechanism as a whole. The focus on processes or mechanisms makes a significant contribution to previous knowledge by going beyond the simplicity of considering only a bivariate relationship. It indicates maturity in the scientific progress (see Hayes, 2012). In other words, we can examine the broader picture that leads to the expression of positive emotions, rather than focusing on parts of a more complex process. It is truly important that team members without ID perceive that their coworker with ID is expressing positive emotions, given the difficulties individuals with ID face in achieving genuine integration in natural contexts such as the workplace. In fact, the functions of expressing positive emotions include improving the quality of interactions and fostering social connectedness (Sels et al., 2021). Therefore, it is essential to propose and test mechanisms or processes that support the expression of positive emotions by employees

with ID within their work teams. Taken together, the previous arguments and hypotheses suggest a cross-level mediation process in which team-level contextual resources (team interactional competence and inclusive leadership) are related to the emotional authenticity of employees with ID. This authenticity, in turn, increases the likelihood that they will express positive emotions toward their coworkers without ID (see Figure 1). Accordingly, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 3. Emotional authenticity will mediate the relationship between team-level contextual resources (team interactional competence and inclusive leadership) and positive emotional expression by the coworker with ID.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model of the Cross-Level Mediation



Note. The model represents a 2–1–1 cross-level mediation structure. L1, individual measures; L2, team measures

Method

Participants and procedure

Participants were employees without ID who worked in small teams that included one coworker with ID. Recruitment was facilitated through a collaboration with “Plena inclusión España”, the leading national NGO representing individuals with ID in Spain. Although there was no formal record of individuals with ID participating in integrated employment, “Plena inclusión España” held a call for participation and, through its centers and professional contacts, successfully recruited 26 teams that met two eligibility criteria: (a) the team had to employ one salaried worker with ID; and (b) team members without ID had to interact daily with that coworker. Data were collected by researchers on-site using paper-and-pencil questionnaires on three consecutive workdays of the team member with ID, thus introducing temporal separation among the predictors, mediator, and outcome. This required substantial effort from the research team, but it allowed better control over the data collection and, therefore, increased confidence in the study’s results and conclusions. On Day 1 (T1, at the beginning of the workday), participants completed measures of team interactional competence and inclusive leadership (Level-2 predictors). On Day 2 (at the end of the workday), they evaluated emotional authenticity (Level 1 mediator). On Day 3 (at the end of the workday), they assessed positive emotional expression (Level-1 outcome). This time-lagged design not only ensured the necessary temporal order for mediation testing but also minimized common method bias and the artificial inflation of relationships between variables that can occur when participants answer all items at the same time (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

Participation was voluntary. Before data collection, participants were informed about the study’s aims, the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and their right to

withdraw at any time without any negative consequences. To ensure anonymity while allowing responses to be matched across measurement times, participants were instructed not to provide names or personal identification numbers, but instead to generate a self-created identification code known only to them, which they reported consistently on each questionnaire. This procedure allowed the research team to link responses from the same participant across time measurements without compromising confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Ethical approval was granted by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the corresponding author's university (protocol code: UV-INV_ETICA-2081059).

A total of 133 employees completed the first questionnaire. Of them, 131 responded at all three measurement times (response rate = 98.5%) and comprised our final sample. Non-participation at any of the measurement points was mainly due to not being scheduled on the same day as the coworker with ID (e.g., due to a shift change). The 131 employees were nested within the aforementioned 26 work teams. They represented multiple sectors in Spain (e.g., hospitality, public administration, services, agriculture, construction, and social services). Team size ranged from 2 to 8 members ($M = 5.04$). Teams operated under formal supervision and engaged in daily collaborative tasks with their coworker with ID. Participants' ages ranged from 20 to 63 years ($M = 42.09$, $SD = 11.86$), and approximately 75% were women.

Measures

Team Interactional Competence (T1, Level 2). This construct was measured using three items adapted from Martínez-Tur et al. (2016) to assess employees' self-perceived

competence to interact effectively with the team member with ID. Responses ranged from 1 (“Strongly disagree”) to 6 (“Strongly agree”). An example of an item is: “I feel skilled when interacting with my coworker with an intellectual disability.” Reliability was satisfactory ($\alpha = .85$, $\omega = .86$).

Inclusive Leadership (T1, Level 2). Inclusive leadership was assessed with the 9-item scale by Carmeli et al. (2010), using the coworker with ID as the referent. Items were rated on a scale from 1 (“Not at all”) to 5 (“Very much”). An example of an item is “Our immediate supervisor listens to the ideas of our coworker with an intellectual disability.” Reliability was satisfactory ($\alpha = .90$, $\omega = .90$).

Emotional Authenticity (T2, Level 1). To measure emotional authenticity, we adapted the three-item scale by Richard (2006) to focus attention on how team members without ID perceive their coworker with ID. Item responses ranged from 1 (“Strongly disagree”) to 7 (“Strongly agree”). An example of an item is: “My coworker with an intellectual disability has expressed emotions that were completely sincere.” Reliability was satisfactory ($\alpha = .90$, $\omega = .91$).

Expression of Positive Emotions (T3, Level 1). The expression of positive emotions by the team member with ID was assessed using the three-item scale by Tsai and Huang (2002), focusing on how team members without ID perceive their coworker with ID. Item responses ranged from 1 (“Strongly disagree”) to 5 (“Strongly agree”). An example of an item is: “My coworker with an intellectual disability was pleasant toward me.” Reliability was satisfactory ($\alpha = .96$, $\omega = .96$).

Control Variables. Gender (0 = female, 1 = male) was included as a Level-1 covariate. Previous research indicated that women and men can differ in their attitudes towards individuals with disability (Goreczny et al., 2011). For this reason, we controlled gender (women vs. men) in our statistical analyses.

Data Analysis

To test the hypotheses, we conducted multilevel structural equation modeling (MSEM) using version 8 of Mplus analytic software (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). MSEM is appropriate for analyzing hierarchically structured data, such as those from employees nested within work teams, and it allows the relationships to be examined simultaneously across levels. In multilevel research, variables referring to team-level phenomena are typically specified at Level 2, whereas variables referring to individual experiences are modeled at Level 1. Accordingly, the analyses followed a 2–1–1 mediation design in which Level-2 predictors (team interactional competence and inclusive leadership) were modeled as antecedents of the Level-1 mediator (emotional authenticity), which in turn predicted the Level-1 outcome (positive emotional expression). The MLR estimator was used because it provides robust standard errors under conditions of non-normality.

Because team interactional competence and inclusive leadership were conceptualized as team-level constructs, we first examined whether it was appropriate to aggregate individual responses to the team level. Both constructs were measured through individual team members' perceptions and subsequently aggregated to represent team-level variables. Following recommendations in multilevel research (Bliese, 2000; Kozlowski & Klein, 2000), within-team agreement was assessed using the Average Deviation Index (AD).

Intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC_1) were also computed to estimate the proportion of variance attributable to team membership and assess the appropriateness of multilevel modeling. As preliminary analyses, we also computed descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and correlations among the variables.

Indirect effects were estimated as the product of the unstandardized a and b paths. Because bootstrap estimation of indirect effects is not available for random-intercepts MSEM in Mplus, confidence intervals were calculated using the Sobel (1982) method, based on unstandardized coefficients (MacKinnon et al., 2007). Model fit was evaluated using multiple indices, including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual at the within- and between-team levels (SRMR-within and SRMR-between). Corresponding model fit values are reported in the Results section.

Results

Aggregation analysis and descriptive statistics

Regarding aggregation, the cut-off values for the Average Deviation Index ($AD_M(J)$) were 1.00 for 6-point scales (team interactional competence) and .83 for 5-point scales (inclusive leadership) (Dunlap et al., 2003). The mean average deviation index for team interactional competence, as assessed by team members, was .55 ($SD = .33$), which is below the recommended cutoff for 6-point scales. For inclusive leadership, the mean AD value was .39 ($SD = .23$), which is below the recommended cutoff for 5-point scales. These results supported aggregating team members' perceptions of team interactional competence and inclusive leadership at the team level.

In addition, intraclass correlation coefficients indicated meaningful between-team variability for emotional authenticity ($ICC_1 = .278$) and positive emotional expression ($ICC_1 = .195$), supporting the use of a multilevel modeling approach (Bliese, 2000).

Descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and multilevel correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 1. In general, the correlations between team interactional competence, on the one hand, and emotional authenticity and positive emotional expression, on the other, were in the expected direction. Correlations also indicated that team interactional competence and inclusive leadership were independent.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics, reliabilities, and multilevel correlations among study variables.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>4</i>
1. Inclusive Leadership (L2)	4.42	.38	.90	.07	.60**	.20
2. Team Interactional Competence (L2)	5.24	.42	--	.85	.46*	.57***
3. Emotional Authenticity (L1)	5.66	1.32	--	--	.90	.78***
4. Positive Emotional Expression (L1)	4.57	.80	--	--	.51***	.96

Note. Between-team correlations appear above the diagonal, and within-team correlations appear below the diagonal. Dashes (--) indicate that within-team correlations are not defined for team-level variables.

Cronbach's α reliabilities appear in bold on the diagonal. L1 = individual-level variables; L2 = team-level variables. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Hypothesis testing

The proposed 2–1–1 multilevel mediation model demonstrated excellent overall fit to the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999), $\chi^2(8) = 66.84$, CFI = .998, TLI = .984, RMSEA = .030, SRMRwithin

= .034, and SRMR_{between} = .001. Figure 2 presents the estimated coefficients for the hypothesized model.

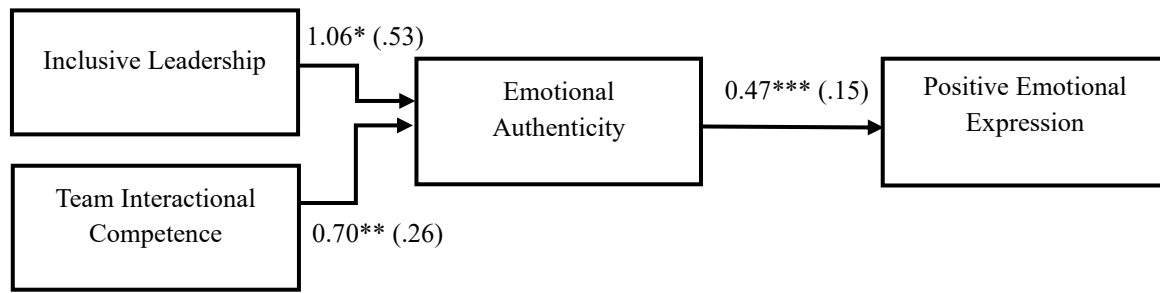
From an analytical perspective, team interactional competence was positively associated with emotional authenticity ($b = 0.703$, $SE = 0.262$, $p < .01$), supporting H1a. Inclusive leadership was also positively related to emotional authenticity ($b = 1.057$, $SE = 0.527$, $p < .05$), supporting H1b. Emotional authenticity, in turn, was positively associated with positive emotional expression ($b = 0.469$, $SE = 0.145$, $p < .001$), supporting H2. Neither team interactional competence ($b = 0.144$, $SE = 0.170$, $p > .05$) nor inclusive leadership ($b = -0.345$, $SE = 0.280$, $p > .05$) had a significant direct relationship with positive emotional expression.

From a more holistic perspective, and with respect to the mediation hypothesis, the indirect association between team interactional competence and positive emotional expression through emotional authenticity was significant (indirect effect = 0.330, 95% CI [0.006, 0.653]). In contrast, the indirect relationship between inclusive leadership and positive emotional expression through emotional authenticity was not significant (indirect effect = 0.495, 95% CI [-0.128, 1.118]). The total indirect effect of the combined predictors was significant (indirect effect = 0.624, 95% CI [0.077, 1.171]), and it was primarily driven by the team interactional competence pathway, providing partial support for Hypothesis 3.

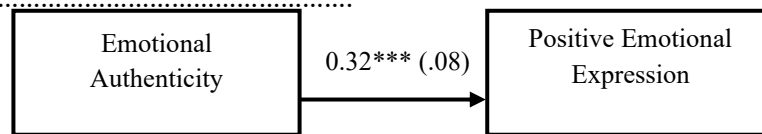
Figure 2

Tested 2–1–1 model

Team Level (Level 2)



Individual Level (Level 1)



Note. The model represents a 2–1–1 cross-level mediation structure. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Coefficients are unstandardized.

Discussion

This study focused on work teams that were predominantly composed of employees without ID but had one team member with ID. We investigated the emotional regulation and expression of the team member with ID, always from the perspective of the employees without ID. Two team-level contextual resources were considered antecedents of both the authenticity and positive emotional expression of the employee with ID toward their coworkers without ID: team interactional competence and inclusive leadership. Analytically, the results showed that both team interactional competence and inclusive leadership were positively associated with the emotional authenticity of the team member with ID. Additionally, authenticity was positively linked to the expression of positive emotions. From a holistic perspective, team interactional competence had an indirect effect on the expression of positive emotions through authenticity. This mediation effect was not observed for inclusive leadership. The implications of these findings are discussed below.

Theoretical implications and future research needs

One of the key issues characterizing the inclusion of individuals with ID in the workplace is their ability, in interactions with coworkers without ID, to be authentic in their emotional expression and display positive emotions. This capacity reflects a situation of comfort and high-quality interpersonal relationships, but it is not easy for individuals with ID to achieve (Sáez-Suanes et al., 2023). As noted above, our results highlight the importance of the social context shaped by coworkers and leaders. We outline the main theoretical implications of these findings below.

Emotional regulation depends on the social context of work. Employees, including those with ID, interact with two main actors in their immediate work-related social environment: their coworkers and their direct supervisors. This social context exerts a strong influence on behavior. Our study confirms this idea with regard to the emotional regulation of employees with ID. The ideal situation is for these employees to be authentic, which means they should not feel the need to inhibit or self-censor their emotional expressions when interacting with coworkers without ID, but whether this occurs or not largely depends on the social context. From a theoretical standpoint, this result reinforces interactionist accounts by situating emotional authenticity within emotion regulation dynamics embedded in social contexts (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Salmela, 2005). Emotional authenticity appears not as a stable characteristic of the expresser, but as an emergent outcome of interactions in which regulatory demands vary according to the contextual support. In line with intersubjective conceptualizations of authenticity, the findings suggest that authenticity judgments depend on whether the social environment allows individuals to

express emotions without excessive regulation (Weischer et al., 2013). These findings encourage future research in at least two directions. First, the social context can be expanded. In some jobs, interactions occur not only with coworkers and supervisors, but also with customers. It is reasonable to expect that customers' ability to interact with people with ID may influence the latter's emotional regulation. Second, future studies could examine the effects of interventions designed to enhance inclusive leadership and interactional competence in the actors who make up the social context of employees with ID. Appropriate training is expected to increase authenticity and reduce emotional inhibition.

If there is authenticity, positive emotions are expressed. One of the challenges to the genuine inclusion of people with ID across the contexts in which they operate, including employment, is their ability to express positive emotions toward others without ID. After all, the expression of positive emotions is clearly linked to success in various contexts (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005), and to the development of high-quality social relationships (Gable et al., 2004). However, individuals with ID may experience greater difficulties in expressing emotions (McClure et al., 2009). According to our findings, emotional authenticity emerged as a robust predictor of their positive emotional expression. From a regulatory perspective, authenticity reflects an experiential condition characterized by low emotional dissonance, psychological comfort, and interpersonal safety, which facilitate the experience and outward expression of positive affect (Barsade, 2002; Grandey, 2000; Pugh, 2001). Future studies can extend this logic to incorporate the effects of expressing positive emotions on the inclusion of workers with intellectual disabilities. For example, from the perspective of social identity (Hogg, 2018; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and categorization

processes (Reimer et al., 2022; Turner et al., 1987), we can anticipate that positive emotional expression may help workers with ID to be perceived as part of the work team by creating stronger social relationships and the resulting acceptance by others.

A holistic perspective on mechanisms. As noted above, considering mediation effects enhances the maturity of research and advances knowledge by moving beyond bivariate relationships and incorporating holistic processes that account for the mechanisms (Hayes, 2012) that, in our case, explain workers with IDs' expression of positive emotions toward colleagues without ID. Our results clearly support one process: team interactional competence translates into emotional authenticity on the part of workers with ID, which in turn promotes the expression of positive emotions toward their colleagues without ID. This is not the case for inclusive leadership. Although inclusive leadership was positively associated with emotional authenticity, its indirect effect on positive emotional expression was not significant when team interaction competence was considered simultaneously. This result suggests that more proximal interpersonal dynamics may play a stronger role in translating authenticity into observable emotional expressions. In particular, the competence of team members in interacting with colleagues with ID may create the immediate relational conditions that allow authentic experiences to be expressed as positive emotions. A possible interpretation is that, although inclusive leadership can foster a sense of authenticity, authenticity does not necessarily imply the expression of positive emotions; instead, it may also involve the expression of neutral or even negative affect, depending on the situation. In contrast, the more proximal and day-to-day interactions within the team may shape how this authenticity is enacted, channeling it toward more

positive emotional expressions. In this sense, the team context appears to play a critical role in transforming internal authentic experiences into externally visible positive emotions. An interesting avenue for future research would be to examine potential moderators that might influence whether inclusive leadership translates into the expression of positive or negative emotions among employees with ID. Supervisors must address both positive and negative events. Therefore, the distinction between positive and negative events may be a relevant moderating factor. It is possible that the authenticity fostered by inclusive leadership leads to positive emotions in response to positive events, whereas these emotions may be negative when the events addressed by the supervisor are negative.

Cross-level views. In addition to mechanisms, cross-level analyses make a significant contribution to the body of knowledge by addressing the realities of organizations and jobs more realistically (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Employees' behavior does not respond solely to variables at a single level of analysis and construct, but it also responds to factors at different levels. In our study, this perspective is clearly reflected in the expression of positive emotions by employees with ID. This variable is the result of another individual-level variable (emotional authenticity) and factors that characterize a collective (i.e., team interactional performance). This approach makes it possible to better capture complexity, thus opening up opportunities for future research. Our study has focused on team-level and individual-level variables, but this focus can be extended, for example, by considering organizational-level variables, such as an inclusion culture, which help to explain other lower-level variables (team and individual). Moreover, effects do not necessarily have to occur from a higher level (e.g., organizational) to a lower one (e.g., team). Effects can also

emerge from lower levels and influence the organization as a whole (see Grand et al., 2016; Kozlowski et al., 2013). For instance, the effective functioning of teams that include members with ID could lead to changes in organization-wide policies. These interrelationships between levels of analysis and constructs have strong potential to generate a deeper understanding.

Practical implications

Our findings offer several practical implications for organizations that employ workers with ID, particularly regarding how to shape everyday interactions to support emotional authenticity and the expression of positive emotions. First, the central role of team interactional competence highlights the importance of training and rewarding systems. Programs that strengthen and recognize interactional skills, such as effective communication, perspective-taking, and confidence in collaborating with coworkers with ID, may reduce interpersonal uncertainty and emotional inhibition, thereby facilitating more authentic and positive emotional expression (Fajardo-Castro et al., 2024).

Second, based on our results, training and reward programs should also be implemented to promote supervisors' inclusive practices leadership. Although leadership does not indirectly influence the expression of positive emotions, it does enhance the emotional authenticity of employees with ID. Strengthening this type of leadership, which values and leverages diversity, would appear to provide an ideal context where individuals with ID can feel sufficiently comfortable to express their genuine emotions.

Third, because emotional authenticity predicts the expression of positive emotions, organizations may benefit from intentionally creating interactional contexts that minimize

emotional self-censorship. Encouraging respectful, empathic, and non-judgmental interaction norms can help employees with ID feel safer when expressing their emotions, without the need for excessive regulation. Over time, such conditions are likely to strengthen coworker relationships, enhance team climate, and support more sustainable forms of inclusion that extend beyond formal policies to everyday emotional exchanges.

Limitations and Future Research

Our study, like all others, has limitations that should be considered and can provide the basis for future research. First, although we used three measurement waves in order to mitigate common method variance, relying solely on measures that capture participants' perceptions may have limitations. Although perceptions are informative, it would be advisable to combine them with other objective measures so that future studies can replicate our findings appropriately. For example, objective assessments of interactional competence in interpersonal relations with coworkers with ID could be incorporated.

Second, the number of teams included in the study, although adequate for multilevel structural equation modeling, limits the complexity of models that can be estimated. Future studies with larger team-level samples could examine more nuanced cross-level dynamics, including potential moderators that may condition the effects of team interactional competence and inclusive leadership on authenticity and expression of positive emotions among employees with ID.

Third, one of the strengths of our study is the inclusion of three measurement waves. However, this temporal perspective could be expanded to achieve an even richer understanding in future research. A relevant methodology would be to use diary studies to

track the evolution of coworkers without ID and supervisors' behavior across workdays, as well as the association between this daily variability and day-to-day changes in emotional authenticity and the expression of positive emotions in employees with ID.

Conclusion

The ability of employees with ID to express their emotions authentically and display positive emotions toward coworkers without ID would represent a meaningful achievement in terms of inclusion. Our study shows that, in reaching this end, the social context plays an important role. When supervisors demonstrate inclusive leadership, employees with ID tend to be more authentic in their emotional expressions. Moreover, if coworkers without ID are competent in interacting with their colleagues with ID, the latter are more authentic and reciprocate by expressing positive emotions. The social work environment, composed of supervisors and coworkers, is therefore crucial for achieving progress in the emotional life of individuals with ID at work.

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4. RESUMEN GLOBAL

4.1. INTRODUCCIÓN

La presente tesis doctoral se organiza en dos bloques principales, estructurados a partir de los objetivos de investigación y considerando que esta tesis doctoral se realiza en formato de compendio de publicaciones. En el primer bloque, se contextualiza el fenómeno de estudio. Se aborda la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual en la sociedad contemporánea, se revisan los principales modelos teóricos para la comprensión de la discapacidad, desde el modelo médico hasta el modelo social y el enfoque de capacidades, y se analizan distintos ámbitos relevantes para la inclusión, incluyendo el liderazgo en organizaciones de servicios, la transformación digital, los factores del contexto organizacional, los procesos de inclusión en equipos de trabajo y los procesos emocionales en contextos laborales inclusivos. Este marco teórico permite fundamentar los objetivos de la tesis y situar las contribuciones de los estudios que la componen.

El segundo bloque está integrado por los cinco estudios que componen la tesis doctoral. Se inicia con la descripción de los objetivos de la investigación, la metodología general adoptada y un resumen de los principales resultados. A continuación, se detallan las contribuciones teóricas, metodológicas y prácticas de la tesis, así como las principales líneas de investigación futuras derivadas de los estudios realizados.

Así pues, la parte central de la tesis está compuesta por cinco estudios empíricos. El primer estudio consiste en una revisión sistemática de la literatura sobre el liderazgo en organizaciones que prestan servicios a personas con discapacidad intelectual. El segundo estudio analiza el impacto de la digitalización en el empleo inclusivo de este colectivo. Con

empleo inclusivo nos referimos al desarrollo de una ocupación laboral por parte de la persona con discapacidad intelectual en empresas, interactuando con personas sin esa discapacidad y recibiendo un salario equiparable al de otras personas en la misma situación laboral. En inglés, lo que aquí denominamos empleo inclusivo suele denominarse con términos como “integrated employment” o “competitive employment”. El tercer estudio examina los factores del contexto organizacional que influyen en la satisfacción de las necesidades psicológicas básicas de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual. El cuarto estudio aborda los procesos de inclusión en equipos de trabajo, analizando si el desempeño de estos trabajadores se traduce en integración real o en posiciones periféricas (situación de invisibilidad) dentro del grupo. Finalmente, el quinto estudio explora los procesos emocionales en equipos inclusivos, centrándose en el papel de la autenticidad emocional y en la influencia del liderazgo inclusivo y de la competencia interaccional del equipo.

4.1.1. La inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual en la sociedad contemporánea

En las últimas décadas, la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual ha adquirido una creciente relevancia en la agenda social, política y científica a nivel internacional (Verdugo et al., 2012; World Health Organization, 2011). Este interés se ha visto impulsado por avances normativos y conceptuales orientados al reconocimiento de los derechos de las personas con discapacidad, entre los que destaca la Convención de las Naciones Unidas sobre los Derechos de las Personas con Discapacidad, que promueve la

participación plena y efectiva de este colectivo en todos los ámbitos de la sociedad (Schalock et al., 2010; United Nations, 2006).

En este nuevo marco, la inclusión no se entiende únicamente como el acceso a servicios o recursos específicos, sino como la posibilidad de participar plenamente en la vida social, educativa y laboral en condiciones de igualdad con el resto de la población (Lysaght et al., 2009; Verdugo et al., 2012). Desde esta perspectiva, la inclusión implica crear contextos sociales y organizacionales que permitan a las personas con discapacidad intelectual desarrollar sus capacidades, ejercer sus derechos y contribuir activamente a sus comunidades.

A nivel mundial, se estima que entre el 1 % y el 3 % de la población global presenta discapacidad intelectual, lo que representa aproximadamente 200 millones de personas (Special Olympics, 2024). En Estados Unidos, se calcula que alrededor de 6,5 millones de personas tienen una discapacidad intelectual (Special Olympics, 2024). En el contexto europeo, las estimaciones indican que existen aproximadamente 20 millones de personas con discapacidad intelectual en los países de la Unión Europea (Inclusion Europe, 2024). En el caso de España, los datos más recientes del Instituto de Mayores y Servicios Sociales señalan que 157.895 personas tienen reconocido oficialmente un grado de discapacidad intelectual en el país (IMSERSO, 2024). Por supuesto, hay muchas personas con discapacidad intelectual que no la tienen oficialmente reconocida.

Estas cifras ponen de manifiesto la magnitud del fenómeno y subrayan la importancia de desarrollar entornos sociales y organizacionales que favorezcan la inclusión

efectiva de las personas con discapacidad intelectual. Desde una perspectiva psicosocial, la inclusión depende en gran medida de la interacción entre las capacidades y vivencias individuales de las personas con discapacidad intelectual y las condiciones del entorno en el que participan (Haegele y Hodge, 2016; Schalock et al., 2010). De esa interacción surge una nueva realidad psicosocial que no puede reducirse ni a la propia discapacidad intelectual ni al entorno. La discapacidad intelectual es, por supuesto, una condición vital que acompaña a la persona, pero las posibilidades de inclusión también dependen de los entornos o contextos. Así, la discapacidad es una realidad que se construye a través de la interacción entre la persona y su entorno, con diferentes facetas biológicas, psicológicas y sociales involucradas (Martínez-Tur et al., 2025a).

En este sentido, los procesos de inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual se desarrollan en distintos contextos sociales y organizacionales. Tradicionalmente, muchas de estas personas han participado en organizaciones especializadas de apoyo y servicios, como centros de día, residencias o programas de apoyo comunitario, donde interactúan principalmente con profesionales especializados (Bigby y Beadle-Brown, 2018; Mansell y Beadle-Brown, 2012). En estos entornos, los profesionales de apoyo directo desempeñan un papel fundamental en la promoción de la autonomía, la participación social y la calidad de vida de las personas con discapacidad intelectual (Mansell y Beadle-Brown, 2012). En consecuencia, la calidad de los apoyos proporcionados y las dinámicas organizacionales que estructuran el trabajo de estos profesionales se convierten en factores clave para favorecer procesos de inclusión y empoderamiento (Beadle-Brown et al., 2012).

Paralelamente, en las últimas décadas se ha promovido cada vez con mayor intensidad el empleo inclusivo como una vía fundamental para la inclusión social de las personas con discapacidad intelectual (OECD, 2010; Wehman et al., 2028). El empleo inclusivo se refiere a aquellos contextos laborales en los que las personas con discapacidad intelectual trabajan en entornos de trabajo ordinarios junto a personas sin discapacidad, participando en actividades productivas y recibiendo una remuneración por su trabajo, en condiciones equiparables a las del resto de trabajadores (Lysaght et al., 2012; Wehman, 2006). Diversas investigaciones han mostrado que la participación en el empleo se asocia con importantes beneficios para las personas con discapacidad intelectual, incluyendo mejoras en la calidad de vida, el bienestar psicológico, la autoestima y el desarrollo de habilidades sociales y laborales (Akkerman et al., 2018a; Jahoda et al., 2008; Martínez-Tur et al., 2025b; Robertson et al., 2019).

Asimismo, estudios comparativos han mostrado que las personas con discapacidad intelectual que participan en entornos de empleo inclusivo presentan niveles más altos de satisfacción laboral y bienestar en comparación con aquellas que trabajan en entornos segregados o protegidos (Beyer et al., 2010; Jiranek y Kirby, 1990). Estos hallazgos sugieren que el trabajo no solo constituye una actividad económica, sino también un espacio clave de participación social y de construcción de ciudadanía para las personas con discapacidad intelectual.

No obstante, tanto en los contextos de servicios especializados como en los entornos de empleo inclusivo, las personas con discapacidad intelectual continúan enfrentando diversos desafíos relacionados con las condiciones organizacionales, las

dinámicas relacionales y las percepciones sociales que influyen en sus oportunidades de participación y contribución (Akkerman et al., 2018a; Lysaght et al., 2012). En consecuencia, comprender los procesos de inclusión requiere analizar los factores psicosociales que configuran los contextos sociales y organizacionales en los que estas personas participan. La investigación sobre inclusión organizacional ha mostrado que las experiencias de inclusión de los trabajadores dependen en gran medida de factores del entorno como el liderazgo, el clima organizacional y las prácticas de gestión que fomentan el reconocimiento de la diversidad y la participación de todos los miembros de la organización (Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2018). Desde esta perspectiva, la inclusión no se limita a la mera presencia de personas diversas en el lugar de trabajo, sino que implica generar condiciones organizacionales que permitan a todos los trabajadores sentirse valorados, participar activamente y desarrollar plenamente sus capacidades (Mor Barak, 2015; Roberson, 2006). Este punto de partida permite situar el objeto de la presente tesis: analizar cómo distintos factores psicosociales favorecen o dificultan la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual en servicios especializados y en entornos de empleo inclusivo.

4.1.2. Modelos generales sobre la discapacidad: del modelo médico al modelo social y de capacidades

La manera en que las sociedades comprenden la discapacidad ha evolucionado significativamente a lo largo del tiempo, dando lugar a distintos marcos conceptuales que han influido tanto en la investigación académica como en las políticas públicas y en las prácticas de intervención dirigidas a las personas con discapacidad (Oliver, 1990; Shakespeare, 2013). Entre estos enfoques, dos modelos han tenido un impacto

especialmente relevante en la comprensión de la discapacidad intelectual: el modelo médico y el modelo social (Humpage, 2007).

El modelo médico de la discapacidad ha sido históricamente uno de los enfoques dominantes. Desde esta perspectiva, la discapacidad se interpreta principalmente como una condición individual, asociada a déficits o limitaciones funcionales, que deben ser diagnosticados y tratados mediante intervenciones clínicas o rehabilitadoras (Haegele y Hodge, 2016). En el caso de la discapacidad intelectual, este enfoque se ha centrado tradicionalmente en las limitaciones en el funcionamiento intelectual y en la conducta adaptativa, consideradas características inherentes a la persona.

Como respuesta a esta perspectiva del modelo médico, el modelo social propone que la discapacidad no puede entenderse únicamente como una característica individual, sino como el resultado de la interacción entre las características de la persona y las barreras y los facilitadores presentes en el entorno social (Haegele y Hodge, 2016). Desde este enfoque, las dificultades que experimentan las personas con discapacidad no se explican únicamente por sus limitaciones individuales, sino también por factores sociales, culturales y organizacionales que restringen sus oportunidades de participación.

Más recientemente, diversos enfoques teóricos han tratado de integrar ambas perspectivas. Entre ellos destaca el enfoque de las capacidades (Capability Approach), desarrollado por Sen (1999) y posteriormente ampliado por Nussbaum (2006). Este enfoque propone analizar el bienestar y la inclusión de las personas en términos de las oportunidades reales que tienen para desarrollar sus capacidades y participar en la

sociedad. Desde esta perspectiva, la discapacidad no se define únicamente por las limitaciones funcionales de la persona, sino también por las oportunidades que el entorno proporciona para que las personas puedan ejercer sus capacidades y llevar una vida que valoren.

Este enfoque resulta especialmente útil para comprender la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual en contextos sociales y organizacionales (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2006). En estos entornos, las oportunidades de participación, desarrollo y contribución de las personas con discapacidad intelectual dependen en gran medida de las condiciones sociales y organizacionales que configuran el contexto de trabajo (Lysaght et al., 2012). Factores como el liderazgo, las prácticas organizacionales, el clima de inclusión o las oportunidades de participación pueden ampliar o restringir las capacidades de las personas para participar activamente (Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2018; Mor Barak, 2015).

Desde esta perspectiva, la discapacidad intelectual puede entenderse como un fenómeno que emerge de la interacción psicosocial entre las características de la persona y las barreras y oportunidades que ofrecen los contextos sociales y organizacionales.

4.1.3. Liderazgo en organizaciones de servicios para personas con discapacidad intelectual

Las organizaciones que ofrecen servicios y apoyos a personas con discapacidad intelectual han experimentado importantes transformaciones en las últimas décadas. Tradicionalmente, estos servicios se estructuraban en modelos institucionales caracterizados por entornos altamente estructurados y segregados (Mansell y Beadle-

Brown, 2010). Sin embargo, los cambios en las políticas sociales y en los enfoques conceptuales sobre la discapacidad han impulsado una transición progresiva hacia modelos orientados al apoyo comunitario, la autodeterminación y la participación activa de las personas con discapacidad intelectual en la sociedad (Mansell y Beadle-Brown, 2012; Schalock et al., 2010).

En este proceso de transformación, las organizaciones que prestan servicios a personas con discapacidad intelectual se enfrentan al desafío de adaptar sus estructuras y prácticas para promover apoyos más centrados en la persona (Beadle-Brown et al., 2014). Este cambio implica no solo modificar los modelos de atención, sino también transformar las dinámicas organizacionales que influyen en la manera en que los profesionales interactúan con las personas usuarias de los servicios. En este contexto, el liderazgo organizacional adquiere un papel especialmente relevante para orientar las prácticas profesionales hacia modelos de apoyo más inclusivos y participativos (Beadle-Brown et al., 2012; Hewitt et al. 2004).

Dentro de estas organizaciones, los supervisores de primera línea desempeñan un rol particularmente importante. Estos profesionales actúan como intermediarios entre la dirección de la organización y el personal de apoyo directo que trabaja cotidianamente con personas con discapacidad intelectual (Beadle-Brown et al., 2014). En consecuencia, su influencia resulta fundamental para garantizar la calidad de los apoyos ofrecidos y promover prácticas que favorezcan la autonomía, la participación y el bienestar de las personas usuarias de los servicios (Hewitt et al., 2004).

En este contexto surge el concepto de liderazgo en la práctica (practice leadership), desarrollado en el ámbito de los servicios para personas con discapacidad intelectual (Mansell et al., 2004). Este enfoque define el liderazgo como la capacidad de los supervisores para guiar, apoyar y supervisar activamente al personal en la implementación de prácticas orientadas a mejorar la participación y la calidad de vida de las personas con discapacidad (Mansell et al., 2008). A diferencia de enfoques más tradicionales de liderazgo organizacional, el liderazgo en la práctica pone el foco en las acciones concretas de los supervisores en el día a día del trabajo con el personal de apoyo directo.

La investigación en este ámbito ha mostrado que el liderazgo ejercido por los supervisores de primera línea se encuentra asociado a diversos resultados relevantes tanto para las personas usuarias de los servicios como para los profesionales que trabajan en estas organizaciones. Por ejemplo, diversos estudios han señalado que un liderazgo efectivo puede favorecer la implementación de prácticas de apoyo activo que promueven la participación significativa de las personas con discapacidad intelectual en actividades cotidianas y relaciones sociales (Beadle-Brown et al., 2012; Beadle-Brown et al. 2014). Asimismo, se ha observado que el liderazgo en la práctica se asocia con una mayor calidad de los apoyos ofrecidos, una reducción de conductas desafiantes (comportamientos que suponen un riesgo para la propia persona o para quienes la rodean, y que dificultan su inclusión social) por parte de las personas usuarias de los servicios y mejores experiencias laborales entre el personal de apoyo directo (Beadle-Brown et al. 2015; Lowe et al. 2010).

Además, el liderazgo también influye en variables organizacionales relevantes como el bienestar del personal, la satisfacción laboral y la motivación de los trabajadores (Lowe

et al., 2010). Cuando los supervisores proporcionan orientación clara, apoyo continuo y oportunidades de aprendizaje, el personal de apoyo directo tiende a experimentar menores niveles de estrés y mayores niveles de satisfacción con su trabajo (Deveau y McGill 2014, 2016). Estas dinámicas organizacionales resultan especialmente importantes en contextos donde el trabajo de apoyo directo implica demandas emocionales y relacionales significativas.

A pesar de la importancia reconocida del liderazgo en las organizaciones que prestan servicios a personas con discapacidad intelectual, la literatura científica en este ámbito sigue siendo relativamente limitada y fragmentada. En particular, existe la necesidad de comprender mejor cómo los diferentes enfoques de liderazgo influyen en los resultados relacionados con la calidad de vida de las personas con discapacidad intelectual, el bienestar del personal y el funcionamiento de los equipos de trabajo. Esta cuestión constituye el punto de partida del primer estudio de la tesis.

En concreto, el primer estudio de la presente tesis doctoral aborda esta cuestión mediante una revisión sistemática de la literatura sobre el liderazgo en organizaciones que prestan servicios a personas con discapacidad intelectual. Este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar los modelos teóricos de liderazgo utilizados en este campo, así como identificar las competencias de los supervisores y los resultados asociados al liderazgo en términos de la calidad de vida de las personas usuarias de los servicios y del bienestar del personal.

Aunque gran parte de la investigación sobre discapacidad intelectual se ha desarrollado tradicionalmente en el ámbito de los servicios especializados, los procesos de

inclusión también se extienden a otros contextos sociales relevantes, como el empleo inclusivo. Analizar ambos espacios de participación resulta fundamental para comprender cómo distintos factores psicosociales configuran las oportunidades de inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual en la vida social y laboral.

4.1.4. Transformación digital y empleo inclusivo de personas con discapacidad intelectual

Si el primer estudio se sitúa en el ámbito de los servicios y apoyos especializados, los siguientes trabajos se desplazan al terreno del empleo inclusivo, donde emergen nuevos retos y oportunidades para la inclusión. En paralelo a las transformaciones en los modelos de apoyo a las personas con discapacidad intelectual, el mundo del trabajo está experimentando cambios profundos asociados a la transformación digital (World Economic Forum, 2023). La incorporación creciente de tecnologías digitales, la automatización de procesos y el uso de sistemas inteligentes están modificando la naturaleza de muchas tareas laborales y redefiniendo las competencias necesarias para participar en el mercado de trabajo (Guest, 2022). Estos cambios plantean tanto desafíos como oportunidades para la inclusión laboral de las personas con discapacidad intelectual (Safari et al., 2023).

Desde una perspectiva optimista, la digitalización puede actuar como facilitadora de la inclusión laboral (Lancioni et al., 2014). Diversas tecnologías, como las herramientas de accesibilidad cognitiva, las aplicaciones de apoyo a la tarea o los sistemas de asistencia digital, pueden contribuir a aumentar la autonomía y la capacidad de las personas con discapacidad intelectual para desempeñar determinadas funciones laborales (Owuor et al.,

2018; Ramsten et al., 2019). En este sentido, el desarrollo de tecnologías centradas en el usuario tiene el potencial de ampliar las oportunidades de participación laboral y mejorar la calidad de la experiencia de trabajo de este colectivo (Wahl y Kiuppis, 2023).

Sin embargo, la transformación digital también introduce riesgos que podrían afectar en particular a las personas con discapacidad intelectual. Una parte significativa de las tareas que tradicionalmente desempeñan las personas con discapacidad intelectual en entornos de empleo inclusivo está asociada a actividades manuales o de baja cualificación, como tareas de apoyo logístico o servicios auxiliares (Livermore et al., 2017; Taanila et al., 2005). Este tipo de actividades se encuentran entre las más susceptibles de ser automatizadas en los procesos de digitalización del trabajo, lo que podría generar nuevas barreras para el acceso al empleo de este colectivo.

Ante estos desafíos, diversos autores han propuesto analizar la relación entre tecnología y trabajo desde el enfoque sociotécnico, que plantea que los sistemas de trabajo deben diseñarse considerando de manera conjunta los aspectos tecnológicos y los aspectos sociales de la organización (Guest, 2022; Mumford, 2006). Desde esta perspectiva, la introducción de tecnologías digitales no debería entenderse como un proceso puramente técnico, sino como una transformación organizacional que debe equilibrar la eficiencia tecnológica con el bienestar y la inclusión de las personas que participan en el sistema de trabajo (Waschull et al., 2022).

Aplicado al ámbito de la discapacidad intelectual, este enfoque sugiere que la digitalización puede convertirse en una oportunidad para la inclusión laboral si se

implementa mediante estrategias que integren la accesibilidad, la formación y los apoyos necesarios para las personas con discapacidad (Wehmeyer et al., 2006, 2012). En cambio, si los procesos de digitalización se desarrollan sin considerar las necesidades específicas de este colectivo, podrían reforzar las desigualdades existentes y limitar sus oportunidades de participación en el mercado laboral.

A pesar de la creciente relevancia de estos procesos, la investigación sobre el impacto de la digitalización en el empleo de las personas con discapacidad intelectual sigue siendo limitada. En particular, existe una necesidad de comprender mejor cómo distintos actores implicados en el empleo inclusivo, como personas con discapacidad intelectual, supervisores y expertos en tecnología, perciben los retos y las oportunidades asociados a estos procesos de transformación digital. Esta cuestión da lugar al segundo estudio de la tesis.

Concretamente, el segundo estudio de la presente tesis doctoral analiza el impacto del cambio tecnológico vinculado a la digitalización en el empleo inclusivo de las personas con discapacidad intelectual. A través de un enfoque metodológico que combina entrevistas cualitativas y un método Delphi con expertos, el estudio explora tanto los desafíos que plantea la digitalización como las estrategias que podrían permitir convertir las tecnologías en aliadas para favorecer la inclusión laboral de este colectivo.

4.1.5. Factores del contexto organizacional y bienestar de trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual

Además de los cambios tecnológicos, la inclusión en el empleo inclusivo también depende de las condiciones psicosociales que configuran la experiencia cotidiana de trabajo. Diversas investigaciones han señalado que la calidad de la experiencia laboral de las personas con discapacidad está influida por factores del contexto organizacional que afectan a sus oportunidades de participación, aprendizaje y desarrollo en el trabajo (Akkerman et al., 2018a; Lysaght et al., 2012).

En este sentido, comprender la inclusión laboral de las personas con discapacidad intelectual requiere analizar no solo las características individuales de los trabajadores, sino también las condiciones psicosociales del entorno organizacional en el que desarrollan su actividad laboral. Factores como el liderazgo, las normas organizacionales, las prácticas de gestión y las relaciones interpersonales dentro del equipo de trabajo pueden facilitar o dificultar la experiencia de inclusión en el trabajo (Shore et al., 2018).

Una perspectiva teórica especialmente útil para comprender estos procesos es la teoría de la autodeterminación (Self-Determination Theory) (Deci y Ryan, 2000), que plantea que el bienestar y la motivación de las personas están asociados a la satisfacción de tres necesidades psicológicas básicas: autonomía, competencia y pertenencia. La satisfacción de estas necesidades se ha relacionado con mayores niveles de motivación, bienestar psicológico y compromiso en distintos contextos organizacionales (Akkerman et al., 2028b; Ryan y Decy, 2017).

Aplicada al ámbito del empleo inclusivo, esta perspectiva sugiere que los contextos organizacionales que promueven oportunidades de participación, reconocimiento de las

capacidades individuales y relaciones de apoyo entre compañeros pueden favorecer la satisfacción de estas necesidades psicológicas básicas en trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual (Deci et al., 2017). En particular, la literatura ha destacado el papel de factores como el liderazgo inclusivo, el clima de inclusión y el clima de justicia de los procedimientos como elementos que contribuyen a generar entornos laborales más equitativos y participativos (Carmeli et al., 2010; Martínez-Tur y Moliner, 2017; Nishii, 2013; Thibaut y Walker, 1975).

No obstante, los contextos organizacionales también pueden generar barreras que dificultan la experiencia de inclusión laboral de las personas con discapacidad intelectual. Diversos estudios han señalado que las condiciones laborales poco adaptadas, las actitudes negativas del personal hacia la contratación de trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual o la falta de conocimiento sobre la discapacidad en las organizaciones pueden restringir las oportunidades de desarrollo y participación de este colectivo en el trabajo (Kaye et al., 2011; Lysaght et al., 2012). Asimismo, dinámicas sociales como el ostracismo laboral, la percepción de amenaza por parte de algunos compañeros de trabajo o la internalización de actitudes discriminatorias pueden afectar negativamente el sentido de pertenencia y el bienestar de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual (Kocman et al., 2028; Luo et al., 2022).

En este sentido, el contexto organizacional puede actuar simultáneamente como fuente de oportunidades y de desafíos para la inclusión laboral de las personas con discapacidad intelectual. Mientras que ciertas prácticas organizacionales pueden facilitar la participación y el desarrollo de capacidades, otras condiciones pueden limitar la

autonomía, el reconocimiento y la integración social de estos trabajadores en el entorno laboral. Esta tensión entre facilitadores y obstáculos se convierte en el foco del tercer estudio.

En este marco, el tercer estudio de la presente tesis doctoral analiza los factores del contexto organizacional que facilitan o dificultan la satisfacción de las necesidades psicológicas básicas de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual en entornos de empleo inclusivo. Mediante un enfoque cualitativo basado en entrevistas con distintos actores implicados en el empleo inclusivo, incluidas personas con discapacidad intelectual, supervisores y expertos, el estudio identifica tanto facilitadores como obstáculos organizacionales que influyen en la experiencia de bienestar y participación de este colectivo en el trabajo.

4.1.6. Procesos de inclusión en equipos de trabajo: integración o periferización

En el apartado anterior hemos puesto el acento en los factores del contexto organizacional que pueden favorecer la satisfacción de las necesidades psicológicas básicas de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual. Sin embargo, la investigación también sugiere que estas condiciones organizacionales no garantizan necesariamente la plena integración de la persona en las dinámicas cotidianas del equipo de trabajo (Roberson, 2006; Shore et al., 2018). La inclusión laboral se construye, en gran medida, a través de las interacciones diarias entre los miembros del grupo y del reconocimiento que reciben las contribuciones de cada trabajador dentro del equipo (Kozłowski y Ilgen, 2006; Mathieu et al., 2017).

Desde la investigación sobre equipos, el desempeño colectivo se entiende como el resultado de la coordinación de las aportaciones individuales y de los procesos de interacción entre los miembros del grupo (Kozlowski y Ilgen, 2006; Mathieu et al., 2017). En este sentido, la inclusión laboral no solo implica la presencia de una persona con discapacidad intelectual en un equipo de trabajo, sino también el reconocimiento de sus contribuciones al funcionamiento del grupo. Cuando las aportaciones individuales de los trabajadores se integran en las dinámicas de cooperación del equipo, estas contribuciones pueden influir positivamente en el desempeño colectivo del grupo (Kozlowski y Klein, 2000; Steiner, 1972).

No obstante, diversos estudios han señalado que la inclusión formal de personas con discapacidad en entornos de empleo inclusivo puede coexistir con formas más sutiles de exclusión en los equipos de trabajo (Akkerman et al., 2018; Lysaght et al., 2012). En algunos casos, los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual pueden ocupar posiciones periféricas dentro del grupo, participar de manera limitada en las tareas centrales del equipo o ser percibidos como contribuyentes marginales al desempeño colectivo (Dovidio et al., 2011; Haegele y Hodge, 2016). Estas dinámicas pueden reducir las oportunidades de participación y limitar el reconocimiento de sus aportaciones dentro del grupo.

Este fenómeno ha sido descrito en la investigación como una posible “ilusión de inclusión”, en la que la presencia de personas con discapacidad en entornos ordinarios no implica necesariamente una participación real en las interacciones, decisiones y dinámicas de cooperación que estructuran la actividad del equipo (Metzel y Walker, 2001; Pellicano et al., 2018). Desde esta perspectiva, la inclusión puede ser aparente cuando la persona con

discapacidad intelectual está presente en el entorno laboral, pero su participación efectiva en las dinámicas del grupo es limitada o poco visible.

A partir de este debate, el cuarto estudio de la presente tesis plantea dos hipótesis que compiten en relación con la inclusión de trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual en equipos de trabajo. La primera es la hipótesis de la periferización (*peripheralization*), que sugiere que las diferencias sociales asociadas a la discapacidad pueden situar al trabajador con discapacidad intelectual en una posición marginal dentro del grupo, reduciendo el reconocimiento de sus contribuciones por parte de sus compañeros sin discapacidad (Cavanagh et al., 2021; Hafsteinsdóttir y Hardonk, 2023).

La segunda es la hipótesis de la integración, que se alinea con los principios del modelo social de la discapacidad y con el enfoque de capacidades. Desde estas perspectivas, la inclusión no depende únicamente de las características individuales, sino también de las oportunidades que ofrece el entorno para que las personas participen y contribuyan activamente (Nussbaum, 2006; Oliver, 1990; Sen, 1999). En el contexto de los equipos de trabajo, este enfoque sugiere que, cuando se reducen barreras y se generan condiciones de participación, las contribuciones de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual pueden ser reconocidas e integradas en las dinámicas de funcionamiento del grupo, favoreciendo así su inclusión efectiva.

Para abordar empíricamente este debate, el cuarto estudio adopta un diseño de estudio de diario que permite analizar cómo las variaciones diarias en el desempeño individual del trabajador con discapacidad intelectual se relacionan con los cambios en el

desempeño del equipo del que forma parte. Este tipo de diseño permite examinar la inclusión no como un estado estático, sino como un proceso dinámico que se construye a través de las interacciones cotidianas del trabajo (Ohly et al., 2010).

De este modo, el estudio aborda una cuestión central para la comprensión de la inclusión laboral: si la presencia de trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual en los equipos de trabajo se traduce en una integración efectiva en las dinámicas de desempeño colectivo o si, por el contrario, su participación tiende a situarse en posiciones periféricas dentro del grupo.

4.1.7. Procesos emocionales y autenticidad en equipos de trabajo inclusivos

Si bien el estudio anterior aborda la cuestión de si los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual logran integrarse en las dinámicas de desempeño de los equipos de trabajo, la literatura sugiere que los procesos de inclusión también dependen de factores relacionales y emocionales que influyen en la calidad de las interacciones entre los miembros del grupo. La investigación destaca que los contextos que permiten una expresión emocional auténtica, donde los individuos pueden mostrar emociones que se alinean con lo que realmente sienten, se asocian con interacciones sociales y resultados personales más positivos, en contraste con las situaciones que requieren que los individuos enmascaren o regulen excesivamente sus emociones (Côté et al., 2013; Grandey, 2000).

En este contexto, la expresión emocional desempeña un papel relevante en la manera en que los miembros del equipo construyen relaciones interpersonales. Sin embargo, la expresión emocional en el trabajo no es un proceso completamente

espontáneo, sino que suele implicar procesos de autorregulación emocional mediante los cuales las personas ajustan la forma en que expresan sus emociones en función del contexto social en el que interactúan (Grandey, 2000; Gross, 1998).

Desde esta perspectiva, la autenticidad emocional puede entenderse como el grado en que las emociones expresadas por una persona son percibidas como genuinas por los demás miembros del grupo (Salmela, 2005). La investigación sobre autenticidad emocional ha señalado que esta percepción no depende únicamente de la experiencia emocional interna del individuo, sino también de la forma en que sus expresiones emocionales son interpretadas por los observadores en el contexto social (Grandey, 2003; Cha et al., 2019). En consecuencia, la autenticidad emocional se construye en gran medida en la interacción entre quien expresa la emoción y quienes la perciben.

En el caso de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual, estos procesos pueden verse influenciados por dinámicas de categorización social que afectan a la manera en que sus comportamientos y expresiones emocionales son interpretados por sus compañeros de trabajo (Johnson-James et al., 2025). La investigación sobre identidad social sugiere que las diferencias visibles entre grupos pueden activar procesos de categorización que influyen en las percepciones interpersonales y en las oportunidades de participación dentro del grupo (Turner, 1985). Estas dinámicas pueden afectar tanto a la forma en que los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual regulan sus expresiones emocionales como a la manera en que estas expresiones son interpretadas por sus compañeros.

No obstante, ciertos factores del contexto social pueden favorecer interacciones más positivas y reducir los efectos de dichas dinámicas de categorización. En particular, el liderazgo inclusivo ha sido identificado como un factor clave para promover entornos en los que las personas se sientan valoradas, respetadas y seguras de participar activamente en las interacciones del grupo (Carmeli et al., 2010). Asimismo, las capacidades del propio equipo para interactuar con la diversidad, lo que algunos autores han denominado competencia interaccional del equipo, pueden facilitar la construcción de relaciones de apoyo y cooperación entre sus miembros (Hall y Doehler, 2011).

Desde esta perspectiva, la inclusión de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual en los equipos de trabajo no depende únicamente de su contribución al desempeño colectivo, sino también de las condiciones relacionales que permiten que sus expresiones emocionales sean percibidas como auténticas y valoradas por los demás miembros del equipo. En otras palabras, la autenticidad emocional puede entenderse como un mecanismo relacional que contribuye a la construcción de interacciones positivas y al fortalecimiento de la integración social dentro del grupo. Así, el foco de la tesis se desplaza desde el reconocimiento de la contribución al equipo hacia la calidad emocional de las relaciones que sostienen dicha inclusión.

En este marco, el quinto estudio de la presente tesis doctoral analiza el papel del liderazgo inclusivo y de la competencia interaccional del equipo en la expresión de emociones positivas por parte de trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual hacia sus compañeros de trabajo. A través de un diseño multinivel, el estudio examina cómo estos factores del contexto social del equipo influyen en la manera en que los compañeros de

trabajo perciben la autenticidad de estas expresiones emocionales y en cómo estas contribuyen a la construcción de relaciones interpersonales positivas en equipos inclusivos.

4.2. ESTUDIOS DE INVESTIGACIÓN

4.2.1. Objetivos de la tesis

Lo descrito en los apartados anteriores pone de manifiesto que la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual en distintos contextos sociales y organizacionales implica tanto oportunidades como desafíos desde una perspectiva psicosocial. Por un lado, los cambios en los modelos de apoyo y atención, así como el desarrollo del empleo inclusivo, han ampliado las oportunidades de participación social y laboral para este colectivo. Por otro lado, diversos factores del entorno, incluyendo prácticas de liderazgo, características organizacionales, cambios tecnológicos y dinámicas relacionales dentro de los equipos, pueden influir en cómo estas oportunidades se traducen en experiencias reales de inclusión.

En este contexto, comprender los procesos de inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual requiere analizar distintos niveles del entorno social y organizacional en el que participan. Estos procesos incluyen tanto las prácticas de liderazgo en organizaciones que prestan servicios y apoyos a personas con discapacidad intelectual, como residencias o centros de día, como las condiciones organizacionales, tecnológicas y relacionales presentes en entornos de empleo inclusivo. La presente tesis doctoral aborda estas cuestiones desde una perspectiva psicosocial, analizando diferentes factores que

pueden actuar como facilitadores u obstáculos para la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual en diversos contextos sociales y organizacionales.

A partir de este marco conceptual, el objetivo general de la tesis es analizar los desafíos y oportunidades, desde una perspectiva psicosocial, asociados a la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual en distintos contextos sociales y organizacionales, prestando especial atención al papel del liderazgo, los cambios tecnológicos, el contexto organizacional y las dinámicas relacionales dentro de los equipos de trabajo.

Para alcanzar este objetivo general, la tesis se estructura en torno a los siguientes objetivos específicos:

Objetivo 1. Analizar la investigación existente sobre el impacto del liderazgo, como factor clave del contexto en organizaciones que prestan servicios a personas con discapacidad intelectual, en variables relacionadas con la calidad de vida y el bienestar de las personas con discapacidad intelectual y de los profesionales que trabajan con ellas.

Objetivo 2. Examinar el impacto del cambio tecnológico asociado a los procesos de digitalización en el empleo de las personas con discapacidad intelectual, identificando tanto los retos como las oportunidades que estos cambios pueden generar para su inclusión laboral.

Objetivo 3. Identificar los factores del contexto organizacional que facilitan la satisfacción de las necesidades psicológicas básicas de los trabajadores con discapacidad

intelectual en entornos de empleo inclusivo, analizando tanto los facilitadores como los obstáculos presentes en dichos contextos.

Objetivo 4. Analizar, mediante un diseño cuantitativo longitudinal basado en un estudio de diario, la relación entre el desempeño individual de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual, percibido por sus compañeros de equipo, y el desempeño colectivo del equipo de trabajo, explorando si las variaciones diarias en el desempeño individual se asocian con cambios en el desempeño del equipo.

Objetivo 5. Examinar el papel del liderazgo inclusivo y de la competencia interaccional del equipo en la expresión de emociones positivas por parte de trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual hacia sus compañeros de trabajo, a través de la mediación de la autenticidad emocional en el contexto de equipos de trabajo inclusivos.

4.2.2. Aspectos generales de la metodología de la tesis doctoral

Con el fin de abordar los objetivos planteados, la presente tesis adopta un enfoque metodológico plural que combina métodos cuantitativos y cualitativos, permitiendo analizar los procesos de inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual desde diferentes perspectivas y niveles de análisis. Este enfoque metodológico responde a la complejidad del fenómeno estudiado, ya que la inclusión social y laboral de las personas con discapacidad intelectual implica la consideración de factores organizacionales, sociales y relacionales que difícilmente pueden ser captados a través de un único enfoque metodológico.

En este sentido, la tesis considera diferentes diseños de investigación que permiten abordar los desafíos y oportunidades psicosociales asociados a la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual en distintos contextos sociales y organizacionales. En primer lugar, se incluye una revisión sistemática de la literatura, cuyo objetivo es sintetizar la evidencia científica existente sobre el papel del liderazgo en organizaciones que prestan servicios a personas con discapacidad intelectual. Este tipo de revisión permite identificar tendencias en la investigación, modelos teóricos utilizados y resultados asociados al liderazgo en este ámbito.

En segundo lugar, la tesis incorpora estudios basados en metodologías cualitativas, que permiten explorar en profundidad las percepciones y experiencias de distintos actores implicados en los procesos de inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual. Estos estudios incluyen el análisis de entrevistas semiestructuradas y la aplicación del método Delphi con expertos, técnicas que permiten identificar factores del contexto organizacional y tecnológico que pueden influir en los procesos de inclusión de este colectivo en entornos de empleo inclusivo.

Asimismo, la tesis incluye estudios basados en metodologías cuantitativas, que permiten analizar relaciones entre variables y examinar procesos dinámicos de inclusión en el trabajo. Entre estos enfoques destaca la utilización de diseños longitudinales basados en estudios de diario, analizados mediante Latent Growth Models (LGM), que permiten examinar la variabilidad de las experiencias laborales a lo largo del tiempo y comprender cómo las interacciones cotidianas influyen en los procesos de inclusión dentro de los equipos de trabajo. Además, el quinto estudio de la tesis incorpora análisis multinivel y

modelos de mediación mediante ecuaciones estructurales, lo que permite analizar relaciones complejas entre variables individuales y factores contextuales que operan en distintos niveles dentro de los equipos de trabajo.

Por otra parte, la tesis se caracteriza por la participación de diversos actores implicados en los procesos de inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual, lo que permite obtener una visión amplia del fenómeno estudiado. Las muestras utilizadas en los distintos estudios incluyen a las propias personas con discapacidad intelectual, supervisores y compañeros de trabajo en entornos de empleo inclusivo, así como expertos en discapacidad, inclusión social y tecnología. Esta diversidad de participantes contribuye a enriquecer el análisis y a captar diferentes perspectivas sobre los retos y oportunidades asociados a la inclusión.

En conjunto, la consideración de diferentes enfoques metodológicos, técnicas de análisis y tipos de participantes permite abordar el fenómeno de la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual desde una perspectiva de gran riqueza, proporcionando una comprensión más completa de los factores psicosociales que influyen en sus oportunidades de participación social y laboral.

4.2.3. Principales resultados de la tesis

Los estudios que componen esta tesis doctoral aportan evidencia empírica relevante para comprender los desafíos y oportunidades psicosociales asociados a la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual en distintos contextos sociales y organizacionales.

El primer estudio, basado en una revisión sistemática de la literatura, evidencia que el liderazgo ejercido por los supervisores de primera línea constituye un factor determinante en la calidad de los apoyos proporcionados en organizaciones que atienden a personas con discapacidad intelectual y del desarrollo. En particular, el liderazgo en la práctica emerge como el modelo teórico más utilizado y muestra asociaciones consistentes con resultados positivos tanto para las personas usuarias como para los profesionales. Los hallazgos indican que una mayor calidad del liderazgo en la práctica se relaciona con una mayor implementación del apoyo activo, una mayor participación de las personas con discapacidad en actividades significativas y relaciones sociales, así como con una reducción de conductas desafiantes. Asimismo, este tipo de liderazgo se asocia con mejores experiencias laborales entre el personal de apoyo directo, incluyendo menores niveles de estrés y mayores niveles de satisfacción laboral. Aunque otros enfoques, como el liderazgo transformacional, también han sido considerados, la evidencia destaca el papel central del liderazgo en la práctica y la importancia de las competencias específicas de los supervisores en la gestión cotidiana. No obstante, la revisión también pone de relieve la existencia de barreras estructurales, como limitaciones en la financiación, alta rotación del personal y demandas administrativas, que dificultan la implementación efectiva de prácticas de liderazgo en estos contextos.

El segundo estudio analiza el impacto de los procesos de digitalización en el empleo de las personas con discapacidad intelectual. Los resultados muestran que, aunque la digitalización puede representar un desafío para ciertos puestos de trabajo tradicionalmente ocupados por personas con discapacidad intelectual, también puede

generar nuevas oportunidades para su inclusión laboral. En particular, los distintos actores participantes en el estudio, incluyendo personas con discapacidad intelectual, profesionales y expertos en tecnología, tienden a percibir la digitalización más como una oportunidad que como una amenaza. Las tecnologías de apoyo, las herramientas digitales y los sistemas de asistencia pueden contribuir a mejorar la autonomía de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual y facilitar su participación laboral. No obstante, estos resultados también plantean nuevos interrogantes sobre el impacto de tecnologías emergentes, como la inteligencia artificial, en el futuro del empleo inclusivo.

El tercer estudio analiza cómo distintos factores del contexto organizacional influyen en la satisfacción de las necesidades psicológicas básicas y, en consecuencia, en el bienestar de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual. Los resultados muestran que ciertos elementos del entorno laboral actúan como facilitadores clave de la inclusión, entre los que destacan la adaptación de las condiciones de trabajo a las características de las personas con discapacidad intelectual, la existencia de un clima de inclusión y de justicia procedimental, el liderazgo inclusivo y el reconocimiento de sus capacidades dentro de la organización. Asimismo, factores más amplios como la responsabilidad social corporativa, la sensibilización sobre la inclusión laboral y la implicación de las familias en los procesos de empleabilidad contribuyen a generar contextos más favorables para la participación y el desarrollo de este colectivo.

No obstante, el estudio también identifica una serie de barreras organizacionales que pueden limitar significativamente la experiencia de inclusión. Entre ellas se encuentran la baja participación en la toma de decisiones, la precariedad laboral, reflejada en salarios

bajos o contratos temporales, y la falta de conocimiento sobre la discapacidad intelectual en el entorno empresarial. A estas condiciones se suman dinámicas relacionales negativas, como el ostracismo en el trabajo, la percepción de amenaza por parte de algunos compañeros sin discapacidad intelectual y la internalización de actitudes discriminatorias, que pueden afectar al sentido de pertenencia y al bienestar de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual. En conjunto, estos resultados evidencian que el contexto organizacional puede actuar simultáneamente como fuente de oportunidades y de exclusión, influyendo de manera decisiva en la experiencia de inclusión laboral.

El cuarto estudio examina los procesos de inclusión en equipos de trabajo a partir de un diseño de diario, analizando la relación entre el desempeño diario de trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual y el desempeño de sus equipos desde la perspectiva de sus compañeros sin discapacidad. Los resultados evidencian una variabilidad significativa en el desempeño tanto individual como grupal, mostrando que estos procesos no son estáticos, sino que fluctúan en el día a día. En línea con la hipótesis de integración, se observa que las variaciones en el desempeño de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual se asocian positivamente con las fluctuaciones en el desempeño del equipo, lo que indica que sus contribuciones son reconocidas por sus compañeros como parte del funcionamiento colectivo del grupo. Asimismo, los análisis sugieren que esta relación puede ser recíproca, reflejando un proceso dinámico en el que el desempeño individual y grupal se influyen mutuamente a lo largo del tiempo.

Estos hallazgos cuestionan visiones más pesimistas sobre la inclusión laboral, al mostrar que las personas con discapacidad intelectual pueden ser reconocidas como

miembros que contribuyen de manera significativa dentro de los equipos de trabajo. No obstante, el estudio adopta una posición cautelosa respecto a la hipótesis de periferización, señalando que esta podría manifestarse en etapas iniciales de incorporación al equipo, aunque no se observe en grupos ya consolidados como los analizados. En conjunto, el estudio aporta evidencia de que la inclusión en equipos de trabajo puede entenderse como un proceso dinámico de integración en el que las contribuciones de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual forman parte activa del desempeño colectivo.

Finalmente, el quinto estudio analiza el papel de los procesos emocionales en la construcción de relaciones positivas dentro de equipos de trabajo inclusivos. En particular, el estudio examina cómo factores del contexto social del equipo, como el liderazgo inclusivo y la competencia interaccional de los compañeros de trabajo, influyen en la expresión de emociones positivas por parte de trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual hacia sus compañeros. Los resultados muestran que la competencia interaccional del equipo presenta un efecto indirecto significativo sobre la expresión de emociones positivas, a través de la autenticidad emocional percibida de la persona con discapacidad intelectual por parte de sus compañeros sin discapacidad intelectual. En otras palabras, cuando los equipos cuentan con mayores competencias para interactuar con la diversidad, las expresiones emocionales de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual tienden a ser percibidas como más auténticas por sus compañeros, lo que a su vez favorece la expresión de emociones positivas hacia el grupo. En cambio, el liderazgo inclusivo no mostró un efecto indirecto significativo en este proceso, lo que sugiere que las dinámicas relacionales entre

compañeros pueden desempeñar un papel especialmente relevante en la construcción de interacciones positivas dentro de equipos de trabajo inclusivos.

En conjunto, los resultados de los distintos estudios muestran que la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual no depende únicamente de la eliminación de barreras estructurales o del acceso a determinados recursos, sino también de las dinámicas psicosociales que se desarrollan en los contextos en los que participan. Factores como el liderazgo, las condiciones organizacionales, las transformaciones tecnológicas y las dinámicas relacionales dentro de los equipos configuran conjuntamente las oportunidades reales de participación, reconocimiento y contribución de las personas con discapacidad intelectual.

4.2.4. Contribuciones de la tesis y conclusión

La presente tesis doctoral contribuye al avance del conocimiento sobre la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual al analizar los desafíos y oportunidades, desde una perspectiva psicosocial, asociados a su participación en distintos contextos sociales y organizacionales. En conjunto, la tesis adopta una perspectiva psicosocial, que permite comprender la inclusión como el resultado de la interacción entre la propia discapacidad intelectual, único factor individual considerado en este trabajo, y las condiciones del entorno organizacional y social en el que participan estas personas.

Contribuciones teóricas

Una primera contribución de la tesis consiste en ampliar la comprensión de los procesos de inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual desde una perspectiva

multinivel. Mientras que gran parte de la literatura existente ha tendido a centrarse en factores individuales o en políticas de inclusión, los resultados de esta tesis muestran que la inclusión se configura a través de la interacción entre distintos niveles del entorno, incluyendo prácticas organizacionales, dinámicas de equipo y procesos relacionales entre compañeros. Esta perspectiva se alinea con el modelo social de la discapacidad (Haegele y Hodge, 2016; Oliver, 1990) y el enfoque de las capacidades (Nussbaum, 2006; Sen, 1999), que entienden la discapacidad como el resultado de la interacción entre la persona y las barreras u oportunidades del entorno, y conecta con los marcos sobre inclusión organizacional (Mor Barak, 2015; Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2018), que subrayan que la inclusión efectiva depende de condiciones del entorno y no únicamente de la presencia de personas con discapacidad en el lugar de trabajo.

En segundo lugar, la tesis contribuye a la literatura sobre liderazgo en organizaciones que prestan servicios a personas con discapacidad intelectual, aportando evidencia sistemática que respalda el modelo de liderazgo en la práctica (Mansell et al., 2004, 2008). Los resultados del primer estudio muestran que una mayor calidad de este tipo de liderazgo se asocia con una mayor implementación del apoyo activo, una mayor participación de las personas con discapacidad intelectual en actividades significativas y relaciones sociales, una reducción de conductas desafiantes y mejores experiencias laborales entre el personal de apoyo directo (Beadle-Brown et al., 2012, 2014, 2015; Deveau y McGill, 2014, 2016; Lowe et al., 2010). Esta contribución resulta especialmente relevante en un contexto en el que los servicios están evolucionando hacia modelos más centrados en la persona (Mansell y Beadle-Brown, 2012; Schalock et al., 2010). Asimismo, el estudio identifica los obstáculos

estructurales que dificultan la implementación del liderazgo en la práctica, como la rotación de personal, los recortes de financiación o la sobrecarga administrativa, lo que señala importantes necesidades de investigación futura.

Por otra parte, la tesis contribuye a la literatura emergente sobre tecnología, digitalización e inclusión laboral. Los resultados del segundo estudio sugieren que los procesos de digitalización pueden representar tanto un desafío como una oportunidad para la inclusión laboral de las personas con discapacidad intelectual. La investigación destaca la necesidad de abordar estos procesos desde una perspectiva sociotécnica (Guest, 2022; Mumford, 2006; Waschull et al., 2022), que permita analizar conjuntamente los cambios tecnológicos y las condiciones sociales y organizacionales que influyen en las oportunidades de participación laboral. En línea con el enfoque de las capacidades (Nussbaum, 2006; Sen, 1999), los hallazgos muestran que el impacto de la tecnología sobre la inclusión no puede evaluarse al margen del contexto en el que se implementa.

Asimismo, la tesis amplía el conocimiento sobre el papel de los factores organizacionales en el empleo inclusivo. Los resultados del tercer estudio ponen de relieve la relevancia de variables como el liderazgo inclusivo, el clima de inclusión y la justicia procedimental, en línea con la literatura sobre inclusión organizacional (Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2018) y justicia procedimental (Martínez-Tur y Moliner, 2017; Thibaut y Walker, 1975), y los vinculan empíricamente con la satisfacción de las necesidades psicológicas básicas contempladas en la teoría de la autodeterminación (Deci et al., 2017; Deci y Ryan, 2000; Ryan y Deci, 2017). El estudio identifica además barreras teóricamente relevantes y poco

exploradas en este colectivo, como el ostracismo laboral (Kocman et al., 2028; Luo et al., 2022) y la internalización de la discriminación (Santuzzi y Waltz, 2016).

Otra contribución teórica relevante consiste en abordar empíricamente el debate sobre la posible "ilusión de inclusión" en el empleo inclusivo (Metzel y Walker, 2001; Pellicano et al., 2018). Los resultados del cuarto estudio, muestran que las variaciones diarias en el desempeño individual de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual se asocian positivamente con el desempeño colectivo del equipo, lo que respalda la hipótesis de integración frente a la de periferización (Cavanagh et al., 2021; Hafsteinsdóttir y Hardonk, 2023) y cuestiona las visiones más pesimistas sobre su contribución al trabajo en equipo. Asimismo, los análisis apuntan a la posibilidad de relaciones recíprocas entre el rendimiento individual y el grupal, lo que abre la puerta a dinámicas complejas explicables desde modelos de aprendizaje social e affect infusion, y es coherente con perspectivas orientadas al proceso que enfatizan la variabilidad temporal y la influencia mutua en los grupos de trabajo (Bartunek y Woodman, 2015). Por último, estos hallazgos contribuyen al debate sobre la ciudadanía de las personas con discapacidad intelectual (Nussbaum, 2006; Sen, 1999), al mostrar que el empleo inclusivo puede ser un dominio en el que estas personas ejercen agencia, contribuyen activamente y son reconocidas como miembros del equipo.

Finalmente, la tesis contribuye al estudio de los procesos emocionales en equipos de trabajo inclusivos. Los resultados del quinto estudio muestran que la competencia interaccional del equipo (Hall y Pekarek Doehler, 2011) tiene un efecto indirecto significativo sobre la expresión de emociones positivas de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual

hacia sus compañeros, a través de la autenticidad emocional percibida (Cha et al., 2019; Grandey, 2003; Salmela, 2005). Desde una perspectiva de regulación emocional (Grandey, 2000; Gross, 1998), la autenticidad emocional no debe entenderse como un rasgo estable del individuo, sino como el resultado de las condiciones relacionales del entorno: cuando el equipo ofrece un contexto de apoyo, los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual necesitan regular o suprimir menos sus emociones, lo que facilita que sus expresiones sean percibidas como auténticas por sus compañeros. Asimismo, desde la teoría de la identidad social y los procesos de categorización (Turner et al., 1985), cabe anticipar que la expresión de emociones positivas puede contribuir a que los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual sean percibidos como parte del equipo, favoreciendo su aceptación social.

Contribuciones metodológicas

Además de sus aportaciones teóricas, la tesis presenta importantes contribuciones metodológicas al considerar diferentes enfoques de investigación para analizar los procesos de inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual. En particular, la tesis doctoral incorpora revisiones sistemáticas de la literatura, metodologías cualitativas basadas en entrevistas semiestructuradas, el método Delphi con expertos, estudios longitudinales basados en diarios y análisis cuantitativos multinivel.

Esta pluralidad metodológica permite analizar el fenómeno de la inclusión desde diferentes perspectivas y niveles de análisis, ofreciendo una visión más completa de los factores psicosociales implicados. Asimismo, el uso de diseños longitudinales basados en estudios de diario permite capturar la naturaleza dinámica de los procesos de inclusión en

el trabajo, mostrando cómo las interacciones cotidianas influyen en la integración de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual en los equipos.

Contribuciones prácticas

La tesis presenta implicaciones prácticas relevantes para organizaciones, profesionales y responsables de políticas que trabajan en el ámbito de la discapacidad intelectual.

En primer lugar, los resultados subrayan la importancia de fortalecer el liderazgo en la práctica en organizaciones que prestan servicios a personas con discapacidad intelectual. La formación y la evaluación del desempeño de los supervisores de primera línea deberían orientarse a promover prácticas de apoyo activo que favorezcan la participación de las personas usuarias en actividades significativas. Al mismo tiempo, es necesario abordar los obstáculos estructurales que dificultan su implementación, como la alta rotación del personal, las demandas administrativas excesivas o la insuficiencia de recursos.

En segundo lugar, la tesis destaca la importancia de considerar los procesos de transformación tecnológica desde una perspectiva inclusiva. Para ello, se recomienda desarrollar competencias digitales y habilidades blandas en los perfiles profesionales de las personas con discapacidad intelectual, integrar la formación en competencias digitales en las etapas educativas previas al empleo, desarrollar tecnologías orientadas a la accesibilidad cognitiva, y fortalecer la coordinación entre los distintos actores implicados,

familias, organizaciones, tercer sector y administración pública, para garantizar una transición tecnológica inclusiva.

En tercer lugar, la investigación señala que promover entornos laborales inclusivos requiere atender simultáneamente varios factores organizacionales. Los líderes deberían formarse para reconocer la discapacidad intelectual, adaptando las condiciones de trabajo a las características de cada persona. Asimismo, es necesario mejorar las condiciones laborales de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual, participación en la toma de decisiones, salario digno y estabilidad contractual, implementar programas de sensibilización para compañeros sin discapacidad que faciliten el reconocimiento de las contribuciones de sus colegas con discapacidad intelectual, y promover tanto vínculos formales como informales de integración en el equipo.

En cuarto lugar, los resultados del estudio sobre desempeño en equipos invitan a revisar la asignación de tareas a los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual. Las organizaciones y los líderes deberían evitar asignarles tareas por debajo de sus capacidades reales, ya que diseñar o rediseñar los puestos de trabajo de forma suficientemente estimulante puede maximizar sus contribuciones y favorecer su reconocimiento por parte de los compañeros sin discapacidad.

Finalmente, los resultados sobre procesos emocionales apuntan a la importancia de desarrollar la competencia interaccional de los equipos de trabajo mediante programas de formación que refuercen habilidades como la comunicación efectiva, la toma de perspectiva y la confianza en la colaboración con personas con discapacidad intelectual.

Crear normas de interacción respetuosas y no punitivas puede reducir la autocensura emocional de los trabajadores con discapacidad intelectual, facilitar la expresión de emociones auténticas y positivas, y contribuir a formas de inclusión más sostenibles que trasciendan las políticas formales para arraigarse en las interacciones cotidianas del equipo.

4.2.5. Futuras líneas de investigación

La presente tesis doctoral también abre un conjunto amplio de líneas futuras de investigación que pueden ayudar a profundizar en la comprensión de los desafíos y oportunidades, desde una perspectiva psicosocial, asociados a la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual.

En primer lugar, a partir del estudio sobre liderazgo en organizaciones de servicios, una línea futura especialmente relevante consiste en avanzar desde la identificación de modelos y resultados asociados al liderazgo hacia la evaluación de intervenciones concretas de liderazgo, especialmente en relación con el liderazgo en la práctica. En este sentido, sería útil desarrollar estudios que examinen qué estrategias formativas o qué prácticas de supervisión resultan más eficaces para fortalecer el liderazgo de primera línea en organizaciones que prestan apoyos a personas con discapacidad intelectual. Asimismo, dado que la revisión sistemática mostró una concentración importante de estudios en servicios residenciales, futuras investigaciones podrían ampliar el análisis a otros contextos de prestación de apoyos, como servicios comunitarios, programas de apoyo a la vida independiente, empleo con apoyo o iniciativas de inclusión en la comunidad. Explorar estos

entornos permitiría comprender mejor cómo las prácticas de liderazgo influyen en la calidad de los apoyos y en las oportunidades de participación de las personas con discapacidad intelectual en distintos modelos de atención.

En segundo lugar, el estudio sobre digitalización sugiere la necesidad de continuar investigando cómo los procesos de cambio tecnológico afectan al empleo inclusivo de las personas con discapacidad intelectual. Dado que este trabajo se desarrolló con muestras relativamente pequeñas y con participantes procedentes de España, futuras investigaciones podrían replicar el estudio con muestras más amplias y en otros países, lo que permitiría contrastar la robustez de los hallazgos y examinar el papel del contexto institucional y cultural. Del mismo modo, sería valioso complementar la aproximación cualitativa y Delphi utilizada en esta tesis con diseños cuantitativos que permitan analizar de forma más sistemática las relaciones entre digitalización, competencias, apoyos y oportunidades laborales. Además, a la luz de la rápida expansión reciente de tecnologías como la inteligencia artificial, se abre una línea de investigación especialmente prometedora orientada a examinar en qué medida estas tecnologías pueden convertirse en nuevas barreras o, por el contrario, en nuevas herramientas de accesibilidad, apoyo cognitivo y personalización del trabajo.

En tercer lugar, a partir del estudio sobre factores del contexto organizacional y satisfacción de necesidades básicas, sería importante profundizar en la forma en que los facilitadores y obstáculos identificados se relacionan con resultados específicos de inclusión, bienestar y permanencia en el empleo. En esta línea, futuras investigaciones podrían desarrollar diseños longitudinales y comparativos que permitan analizar cómo

variables como el liderazgo inclusivo, el clima de inclusión, la justicia procedimental, el ostracismo o la baja participación en la toma de decisiones influyen, a lo largo del tiempo, en la satisfacción de las necesidades de autonomía, competencia y pertenencia. También sería especialmente útil ampliar el estudio de otros factores del entorno que apenas han comenzado a explorarse, como el papel de las políticas organizacionales formales, los sistemas de apoyo natural entre compañeros, la participación de las familias o las diferencias entre sectores y tipos de puesto. Estas líneas podrían contribuir a pasar de una identificación cualitativa de factores a una comprensión más precisa de qué combinaciones de condiciones organizacionales favorecen trayectorias de inclusión más sostenidas.

Una cuarta línea de investigación, particularmente importante por su centralidad en esta tesis, se deriva del estudio de diario sobre desempeño individual y desempeño grupal. En este caso, una cuestión clave para trabajos futuros consiste en examinar los procesos de inclusión en las etapas tempranas de la relación laboral, es decir, en el momento en que las personas con discapacidad intelectual se incorporan por primera vez a un equipo de trabajo. Tal como se plantea en el propio manuscrito, una interpretación plausible es que, en los primeros momentos, la persona con discapacidad intelectual pueda ocupar una posición más periférica dentro del grupo y que, con el tiempo, vaya avanzando hacia una integración más plena. Sin embargo, el estudio incluido en esta tesis se realizó con personas con discapacidad intelectual que ya llevaban un tiempo considerable dentro de sus equipos, por lo que no permite observar directamente esa transición inicial. En consecuencia, futuras investigaciones deberían diseñar estudios que sigan a los trabajadores desde el inicio de su

incorporación al empleo, con el fin de analizar si la periferización y la integración pueden entenderse como fases sucesivas dentro de una trayectoria temporal más amplia. Además, también sería conveniente extender la investigación a personas con mayores necesidades de apoyo, a otros países y contextos culturales, e incorporar medidas adicionales, como datos observacionales, información objetiva de desempeño o incluso diarios cualitativos, que permitan comprender mejor los mecanismos que explican la relación entre el desempeño individual del trabajador con discapacidad intelectual y el desempeño colectivo del equipo.

Finalmente, el quinto estudio, centrado en autenticidad emocional y expresión de emociones positivas, abre varias líneas futuras muy prometedoras. En primer lugar, dado que las variables fueron evaluadas desde la percepción de los compañeros sin discapacidad intelectual, sería valioso complementar este enfoque con métodos observacionales, diseños de experiencia momentánea o medidas multimétodo, con el fin de distinguir mejor entre los procesos de autorregulación emocional de la persona con discapacidad intelectual y la interpretación que hacen los observadores de su autenticidad emocional. En segundo lugar, sería importante replicar este estudio con un mayor número de equipos, lo que permitiría estimar modelos multinivel más complejos y examinar posibles variables moderadoras, como la frecuencia de interacción, la interdependencia de tareas o la composición del equipo. En tercer lugar, futuras investigaciones podrían profundizar en otros mecanismos explicativos además de la autenticidad emocional, incorporando variables como la seguridad psicológica, la confianza interpersonal o estrategias específicas de regulación emocional, así como estudiar la variabilidad

intraindividual de la autenticidad y de la expresión emocional en distintos momentos y situaciones de trabajo. En conjunto, estas líneas permitirían comprender con mayor precisión cómo se construyen las relaciones interpersonales positivas en equipos inclusivos y por qué las dinámicas horizontales entre compañeros parecen desempeñar un papel tan relevante.

De forma transversal a todos los estudios, también parece especialmente pertinente incorporar en futuras investigaciones variables que permitan captar mejor la diversidad interna del colectivo de personas con discapacidad intelectual. En particular, sería relevante explorar en mayor profundidad el papel del género, ya que las oportunidades y desafíos asociados a la inclusión podrían no experimentarse del mismo modo en hombres y mujeres con discapacidad intelectual. Asimismo, sería valioso examinar con más detalle cómo interactúan variables como el tipo y grado de discapacidad, la trayectoria previa de apoyos, el sector laboral o la calidad del empleo con los procesos de inclusión estudiados en esta tesis.

En última instancia, el conjunto de los estudios presentados en esta tesis refuerza una idea central: la inclusión de las personas con discapacidad intelectual no debe concebirse como un estado fijo ni como un resultado garantizado por la mera presencia en un servicio o en un puesto de trabajo, sino como un proceso dinámico, relacional y situado que se construye a través de la interacción continua entre las personas y los contextos sociales y organizacionales en los que participan.

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