P5

An Observational Perspective on Embedding Mental Health in Workplace Strategy:

From concept to completion

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TUDelft

Have you ever?

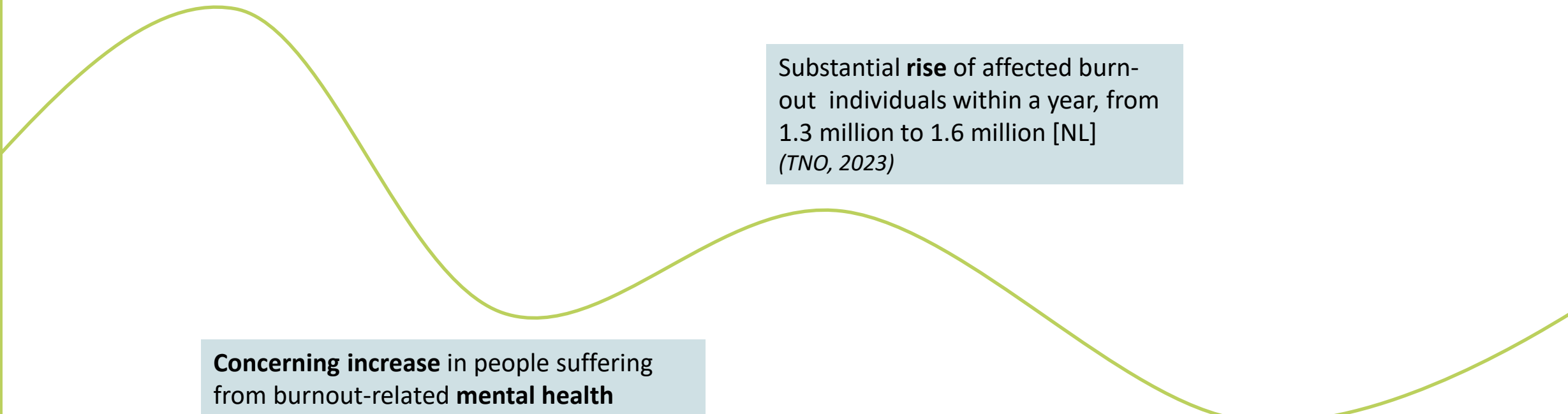In past five years, the discussion surrounding **mental health** in **society** and **organisations** has **gained momentum...**
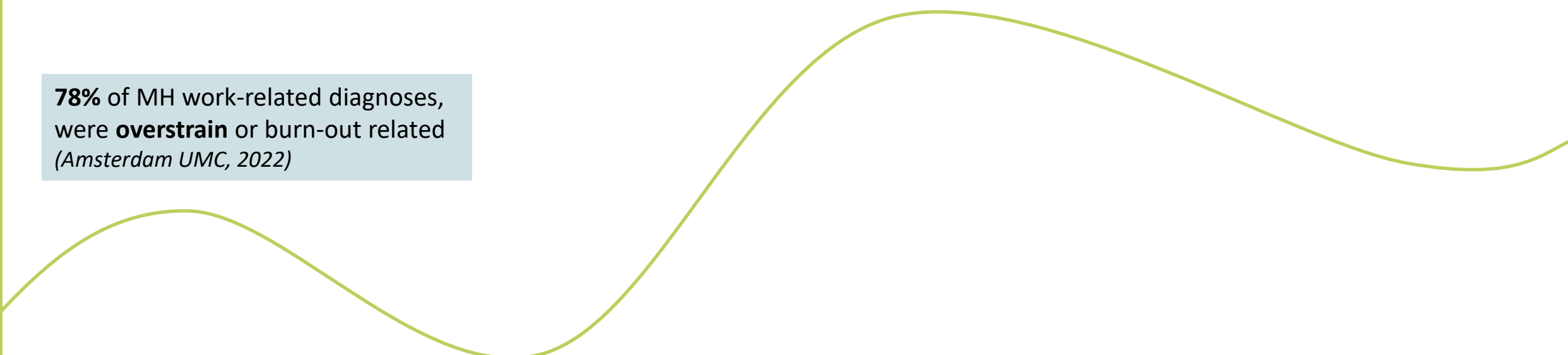
Rise in **mental health** issues has gained attention on **national government agendas**
(World Health Organization: WHO, 2019)

Substantial **rise** of affected burn-out individuals within a year, from 1.3 million to 1.6 million [NL]
(TNO, 2023)

Concerning increase in people suffering from burnout-related **mental health** challenges **induced** by **workplace stressors**
(CBS, 2020; TNO, 2019)

Work-related stress affect **one in five** employees, with a noticeable rise over the past five years
(Overspannenheid En Burn-out | Volksgezondheid En Zorg, n.d.)

Costs of **work-related stress** surpassing **3.3 billion euros** annually in the Netherlands
(Ministerie van Algemene Zaken, 2023; TNO, 2023)

78% of MH work-related diagnoses, were **overstrain** or burn-out related
(Amsterdam UMC, 2022)

Posing **financial challenges** for organisations as **long-term absence**; adversely **affects revenues** and overall **productivity**
(Aarstad & Kvitastein, 2023)

...More and more organisations **publicly express** an interest in the subject and aim to **improve working conditions** for their employees.

Moreover, the influence of **physical work environments** on **well-being** is widely established in scientific literature.

Problem Statement

Despite the startling statistics around mental health, and the acknowledged impact of mental health on organisational productivity and revenue, there is a gap in understanding how current knowledge on mental health is integrated into the forming and implementing of workplace strategies in corporate businesses in the Netherlands.

Consequently, there is a need to investigate how organisational goals related to mental health are reflected in the forming and implementing of workplace strategies.

Content

II. Research Methods

Research Questions

How is the topic of mental health incorporated in the forming and implementing of workplace strategies in Dutch corporate offices?

Theoretical

01 | What is a **workplace strategy** and how is it **formed** and **implemented**?

02 | What are **mental health considerations** in the workplace?

Empirical

03 | What factors **help or hinder** how the topic of MH is **incorporated** in the **forming** of WPS?

04 | What factors **help or hinder** how the topic of MH is **incorporated** in the **implementing** of WPS?

Objective
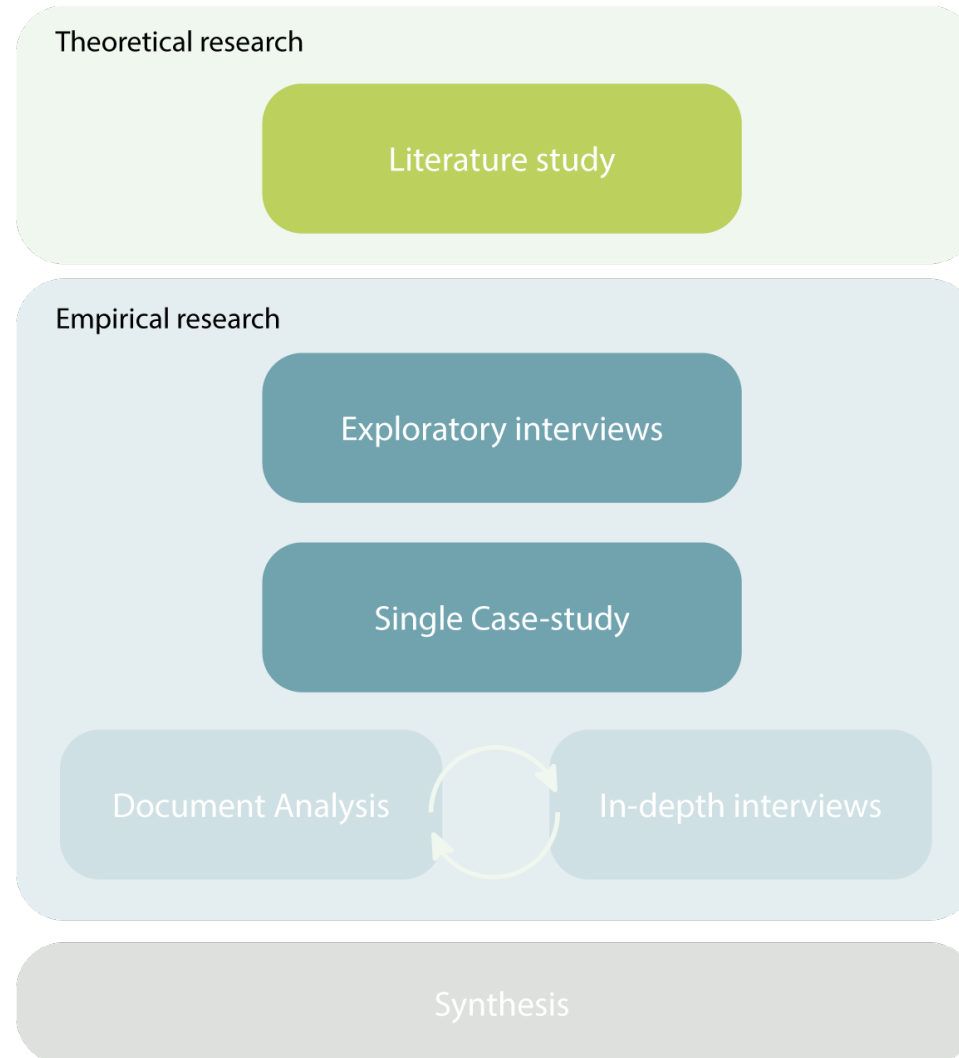
To gain insight into current practice around the embedding of mental health into workplace strategy forming and implementing.

By uncovering this process and creating a comprehensive overview of its enablers and barriers, practitioners will be able to improve their future processes.

The comprehensive overview will be visualised in the form of a critical pathway.

Research Design

Theoretical research

Literature study

Empirical research

Exploratory interviews

Single Case-study

Document Analysis

In-depth interviews

Synthesis

BRiNK

III. Theoretical Research

Definitions

Mental Health

*"Mental health is a state of **mental well-being** that enables people to **cope** with the **stresses** of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community. It is an **integral component** of health and well-being." (WHO, 2022)*

Well-being

*"Well-being encompasses **quality of life** and the **ability** of people and societies to **contribute** to the world with a sense of **meaning** and **purpose**."(WHO, 2024)*

The workplace

The workplace

MH considerations in the WP

Intangible

- Culture & Values
- Social Dynamics
- Engagement & Autonomy
- Communication & Information
- Services & Amenities

Tangible

- Layout & Spatial design
- Lighting & Visual Environment
- Acoustics
- Temperature & Ventilation
- Ergonomics
- Technology & Equipment
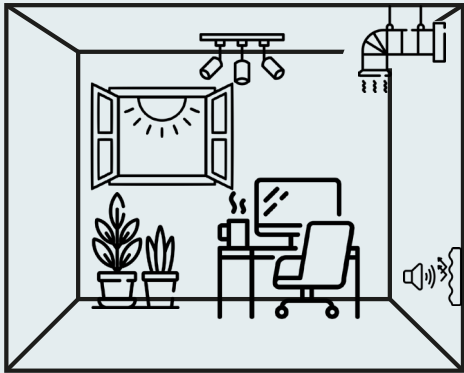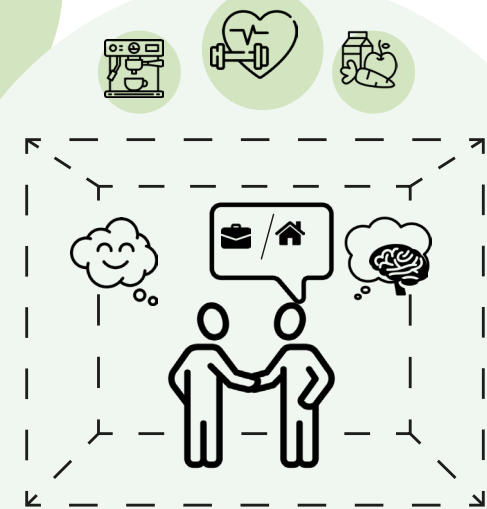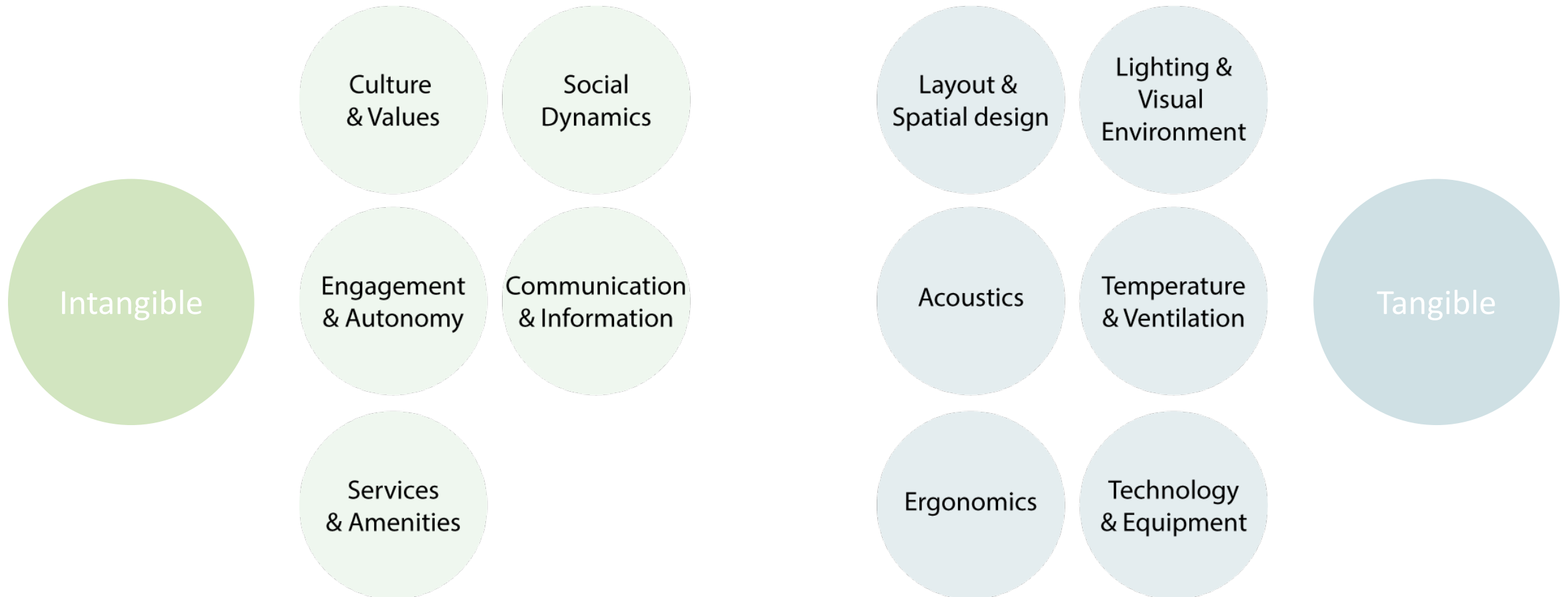
Workplace Strategy

Workplace Strategy

*"the **alignment** of the organisation's **workplace** with **business strategy** to optimise employee **effectiveness** and achieve **strategic business goals**".*
(Redlein et al., 2020)

The process of alignment is two-fold:

Pre-defined strategic plans

Human management

Alignment

Cascading

*"Cascading **strategic plans** into a **clear operational program** is **essential** for organizational success." (Safari & Mazdeh, 2018)*

*"...**process of cascading** strategies develop during the <u>planning</u> phase into **actionable, operational programs** during <u>implementation</u>." (Mazdeh & Safari, 2018)*

Cascading process
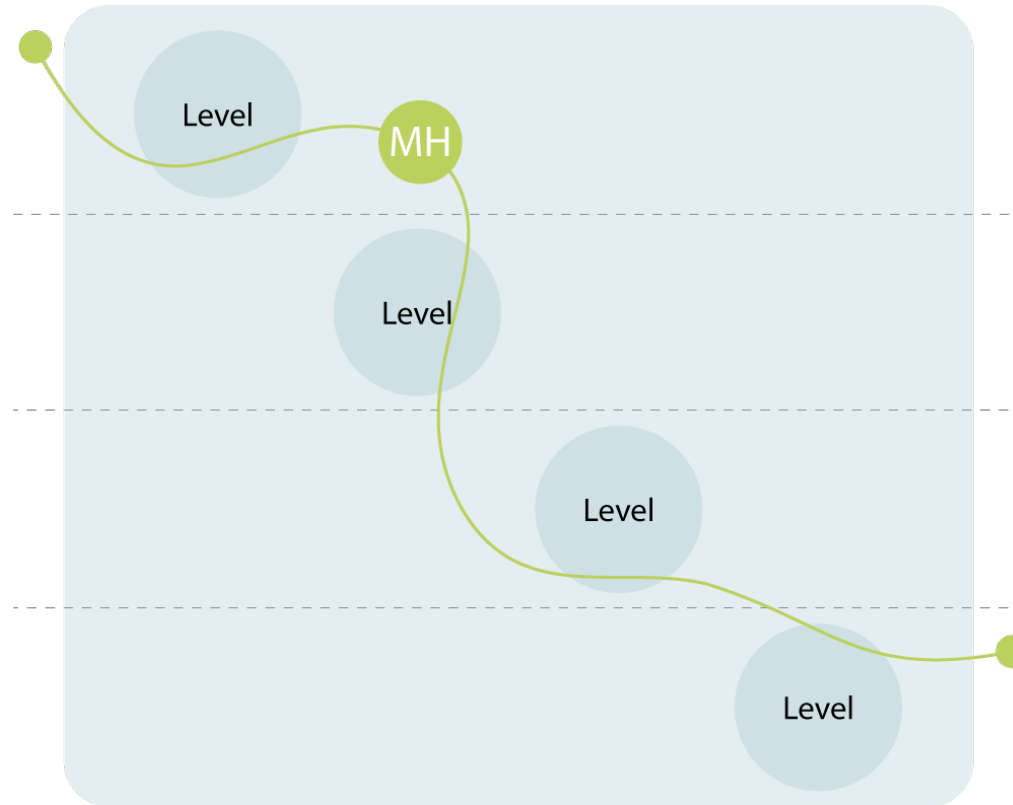
Pre-defined strategic plans

Content

Human management

Process

Conclusions

SQ1 What is a workplace strategy and how is it formed and implemented?

SQ2 What are mental health considerations in the workplace?

Cascading

Pre-defined strategic plans

Human management

Tangible

Intangible

IV. Empirical Research

Case Description | WeCare

- Dutch global corporate > 40.000 employees

- Vast portfolio of workplaces

- The company publicly expresses their commitment to Well-being

- This commitment is embedded in one of their core values
  - Challenge
  - Collaborate
  - Care

- Commitment is embedded in their Workplace Strategy

Data collection

Documents

- Total   17 docs
- Forming   7 docs
- Implementing   10 docs

Content

Interviews

- 4 internal   WeCare
- 1 interim   WeCare/Brink
- 3 external   Brink

Process

Data analysis
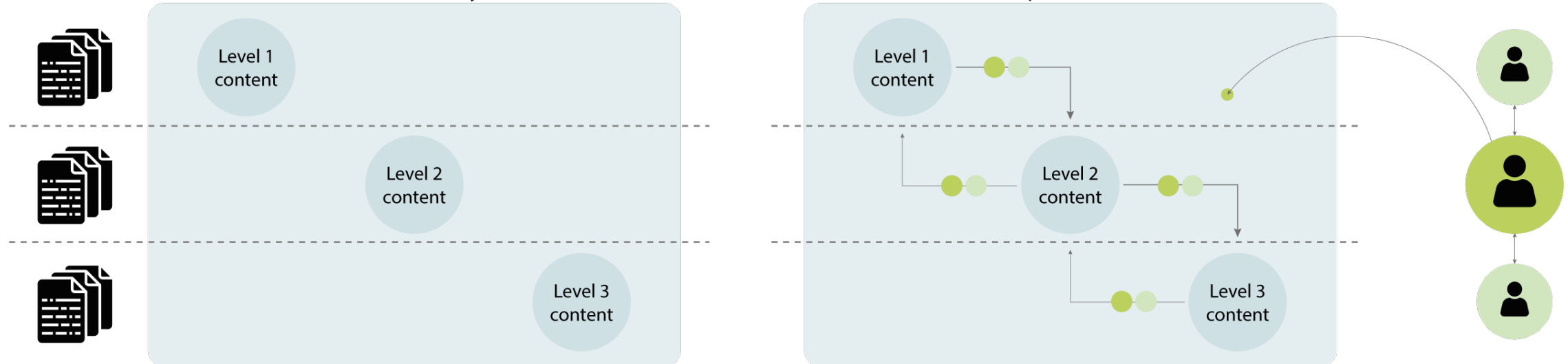
Interview Analysis

Role	Organisation	Level
HR	WeCare	N/S
MR Workplace Experience	WeCare	N/S
WP Design Lead Sus. & WB	WeCare	S
Program Manager	WeCare	S
Project Manager/space planner	WeCare/Brink	T
WP Consultant	Brink	T
Senior Project Manager	Brink	O
Medior Project Manager	Brink	O

Findings | Content

Content Analysis

Findings | Process

Process Analysis

| | Normative | Strategic | Tactical | Operational |
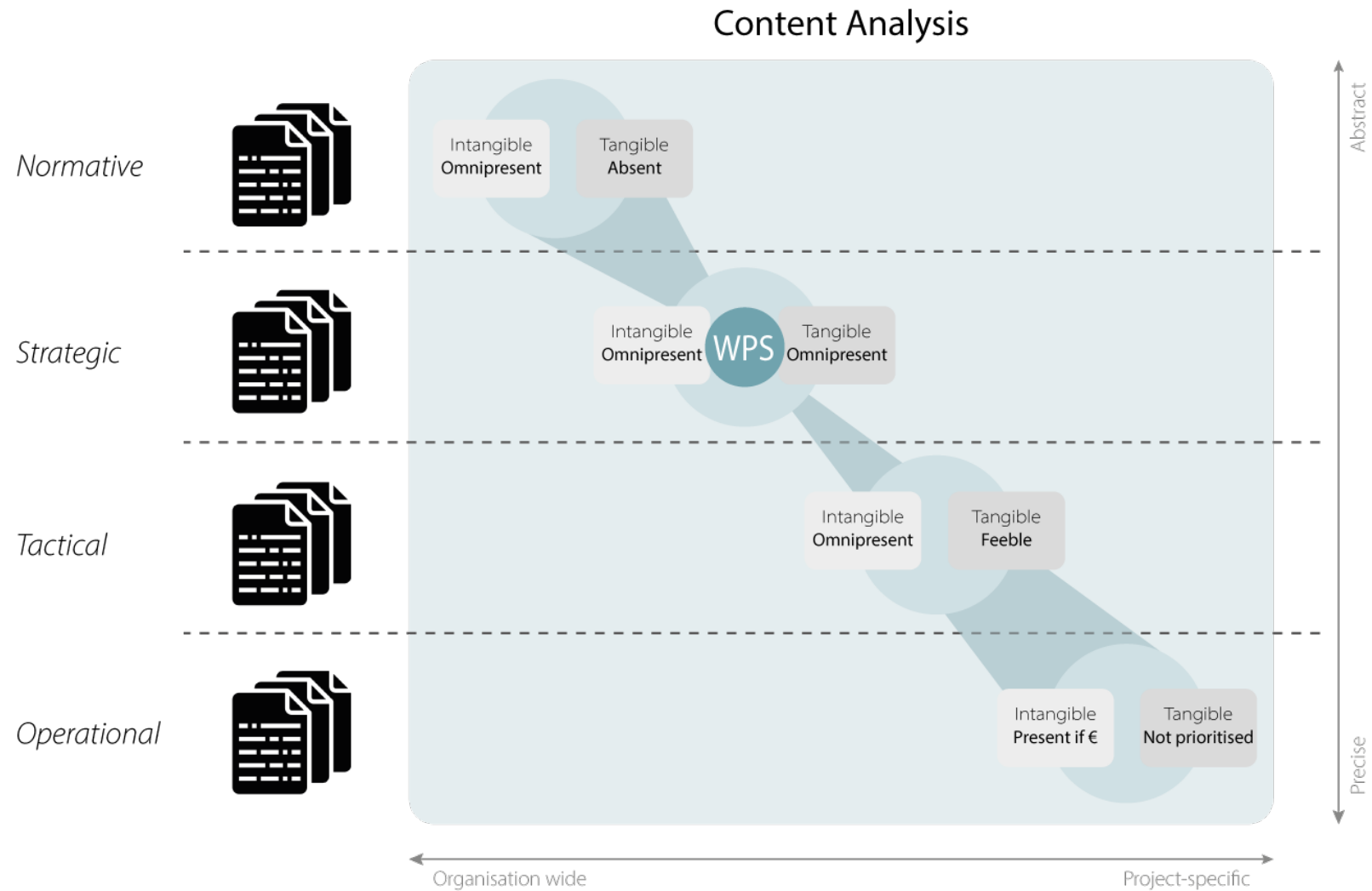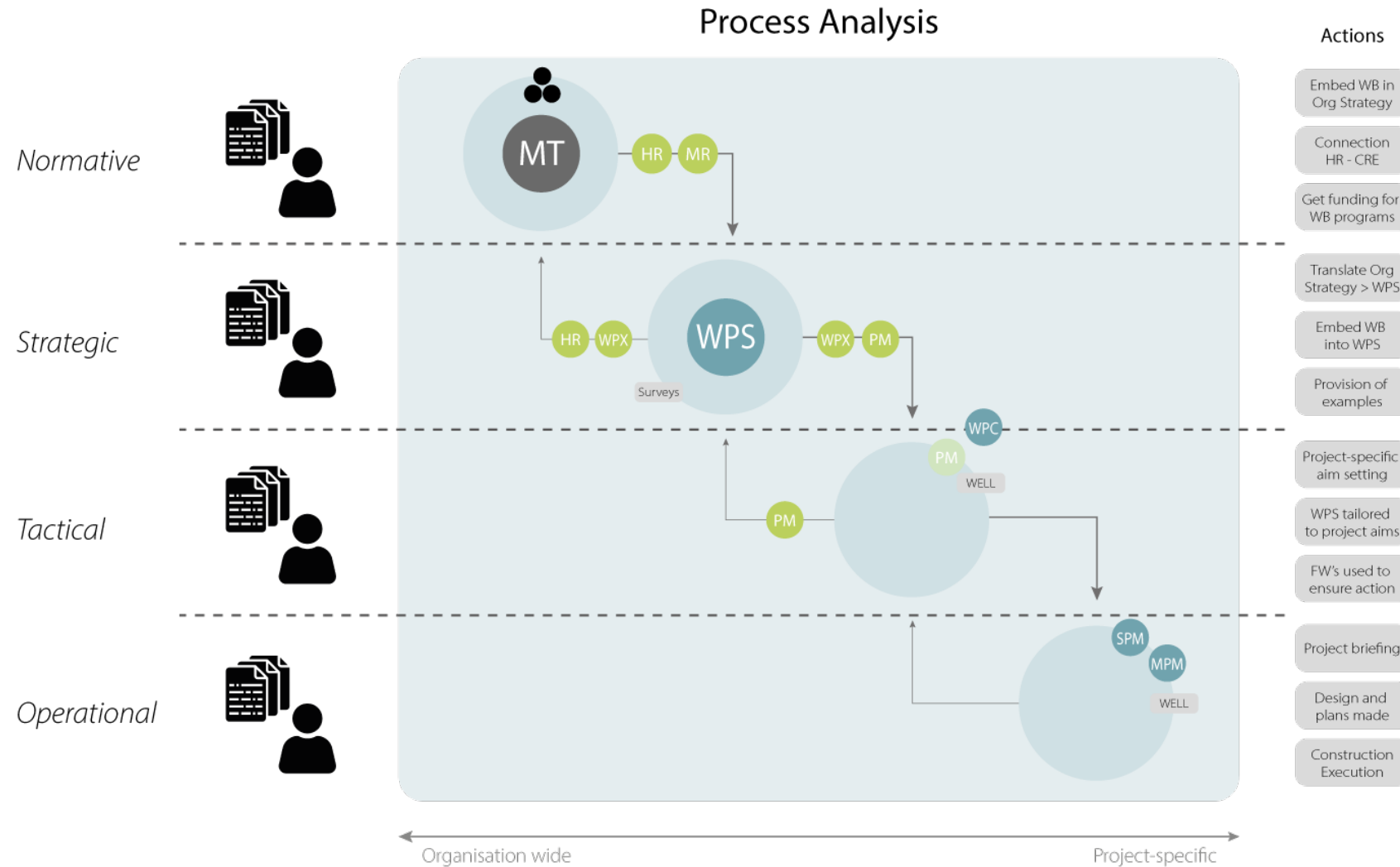
Conclusion

SQ3 What factors help or hinder how the topic of mental health is incorporated in the forming of WPS?

SQ4 What factors help or hinder how the topic of mental health is incorporated in the implementing of WPS?

Conclusion
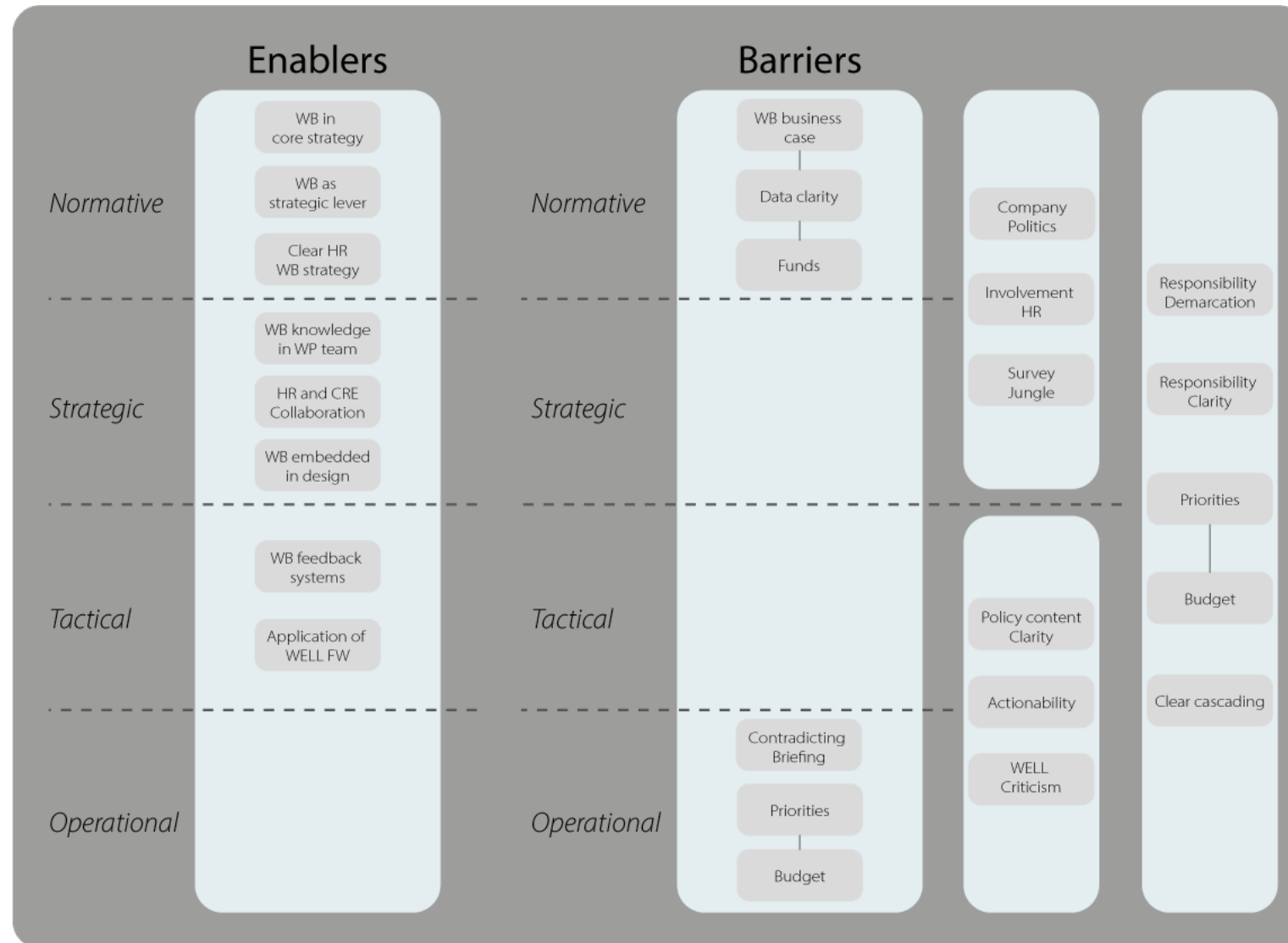
V. Discussion

Interpretation of findings | Forming

Helps

- MH is embedded in commitment to WB
- WB in core strategy
- **Highly strategic embedding**
- Accountability
- HR strategy clear
- Knowledgeable WPS team
- WB embedded in WPS structures

Hinders

- Approval from top management
- **Funding issues**
- Lack of concrete cause-and-effect: business case
- Lack of understanding WB tangible WP
- Willingness to prioritise the tangible
- Insufficient collaboration between HR & CRE
- Vagueness on role allocation & demarcation
- Vagueness around WPS and WB responsibility

Interpretation of findings | Implementing

Helps

- **Accountability through WELL framework**
- Intangible well cascaded and prioritised due to strong HR business case

Hinders

- Use adequate framework
- Difficulties translating aims into actions
- Clear lack of knowledge on WB and embedding in tasks
- Must-haves vs. nice-to-haves
- Lack of precision and decisiveness around WB
- Vagueness on role allocation & demarcation
- Absence HR
- Budget restrictions
- **Briefing contradictions**
- Tangible discarded; Intangible not endangered

Main findings | Generic

Intangible vs Tangible tensions

Conflicts of interests

Involvement of HR

Funding and budget

Accountability

Actionability

Clear gap between S & T

VI. Conclusion & Output

Answering of the research questions

"How is the topic of mental health incorporated in the forming and implementing of workplace strategies in Dutch corporate offices?"

MH incorporated in the form of WB	Launched by HR	WB Strategic lever	Tangible & Intangible considerations embedded in WPS
Intangible well-cascaded	Tangible Poorly cascaded	Tangible struggles to transpire from S-level	Main obstacles: scatteredness, responsibility and finances

Critical Pathway

Adopt strategic motivation for MH, link it to € value

Build a concrete financial business case for both Intangible and Tangible MH considerations

Receive Funds

Embed topic in Organisational Strategy

Organisational Strategy

Embed MH considerations into WPS pillars

Ensure adequate MH knowledge within WPS team

Mind balance between Intangible/Tangible

Embed MH considerations into WP concept standards

Define clear WB aims & sepcify requirements

Ensure clarity on priorities regarding WB requirements

Workplace Strategy

Forming

Mind actionable cascading

Implementing

Define clear follow-up actions & specify requirements

Workplace Plans

Mind contradicting project briefs

Budget issues

Mind contradicting interests of executors

Use frameworks or standards to enforce commitment

Design and Project execution

Advice

Set concrete Aims

Clarity & Actionability

Clarity of Responsbilities

Clear role Accountability

HR & CRE Collaboration

Mind Company Politics

Prioritise MH Actively

Lessons for practice

Ensure consistent and clear collaboration **HR** and **CRE**

Build a strong **business case** for WB in the tangible workplace to receive funds

Embed WB into the business strategy & use WB as a **strategic lever**

Clarify **responsibility allocation** and **role demarcation**

Be mindful of **policy clarity** and **actionability** for concrete implementation

Minimise **conflict of interests** ahead of budget restrictions: set **priorities** and **responsibilities**

Research Limitations & Recommendations

Limitations

- Work-from-home policies excluded from research

- Single-case study

- Time constraints

- **Data bias due to reliance – lack of independent sources**

- Case company potential reluctance to share information

- Professional dependability interviewees

Recommendations

- Expand case-scope

- Increase data population

- Independent study

- **Split research focus**

Thank you for listening
Questions?

Research tools

Literature study

WP introduction
WP subdivision tangible/intangible

Workplace strategy - shaping & implementing
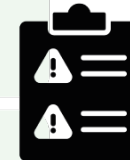Strategy & cascading
Process elements
Process framework

Process

Mental health in the workplace
Mental health in the tangible WP
Mental health in the intangible WP
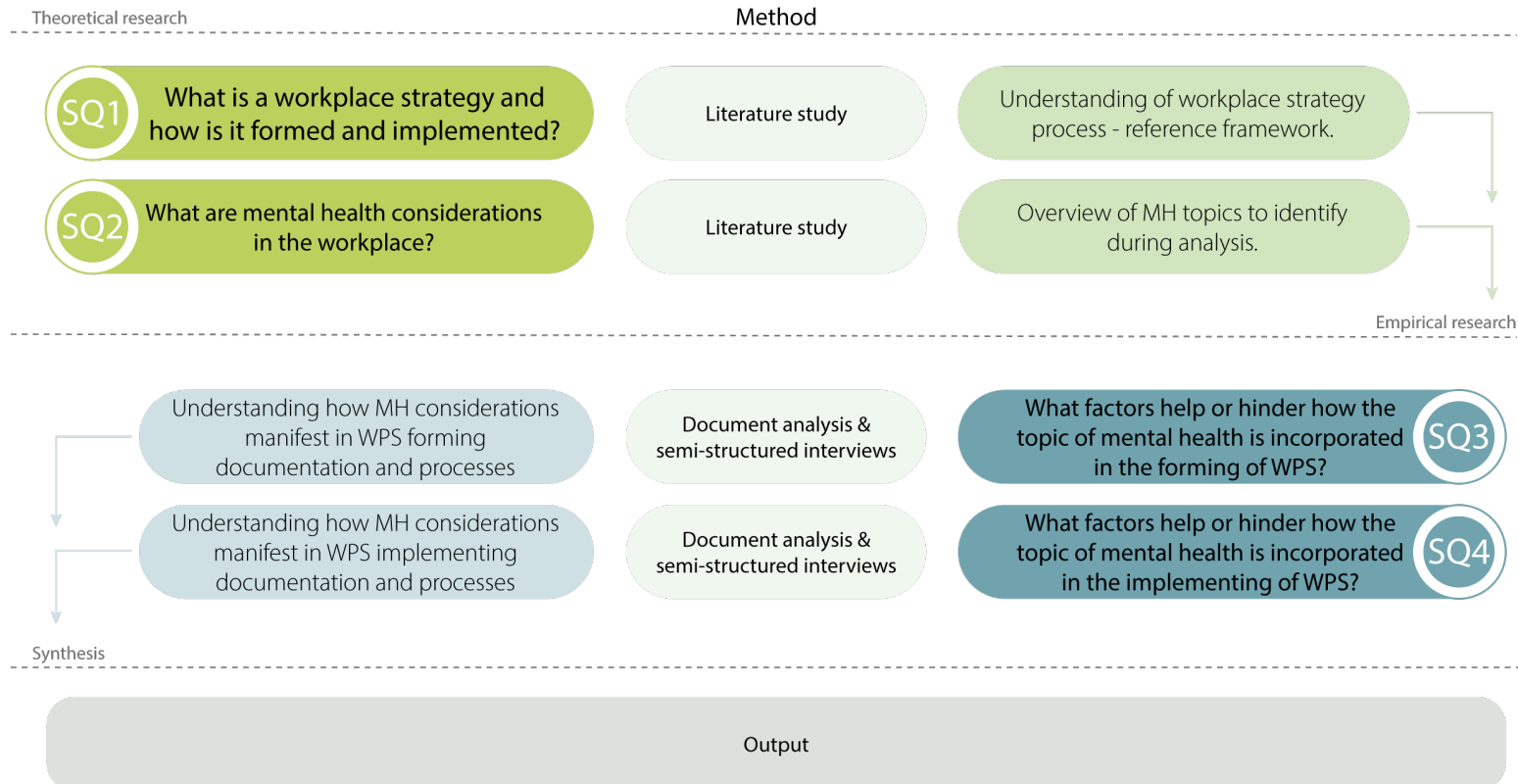
Content

Research Design

"How is the topic of mental health incorporated in the forming and implementing of workplace strategies in Dutch corporate offices?"

Theoretical research

Method

| SQ1 | What is a workplace strategy and how is it formed and implemented? | Literature study | Understanding of workplace strategy process - reference framework. |

| SQ2 | What are mental health considerations in the workplace? | Literature study | Overview of MH topics to identify during analysis. |

Empirical research

| Understanding how MH considerations manifest in WPS forming documentation and processes | Document analysis & semi-structured interviews | What factors help or hinder how the topic of mental health is incorporated in the forming of WPS? | SQ3 |

| Understanding how MH considerations manifest in WPS implementing documentation and processes | Document analysis & semi-structured interviews | What factors help or hinder how the topic of mental health is incorporated in the implementing of WPS? | SQ4 |

Synthesis

Output

Workplace Strategy

Normative

Strategic

Tactical

Operational

HR

CRE/FM

User representatives

ICT

Finance

Data collection | Documents
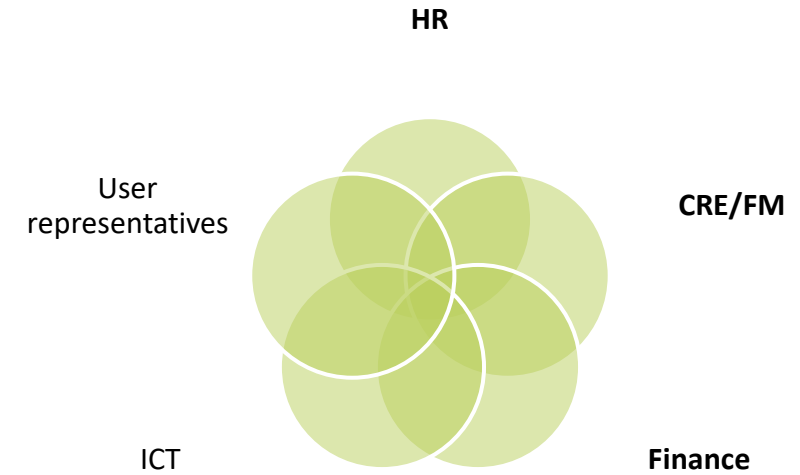
Positioning Documents
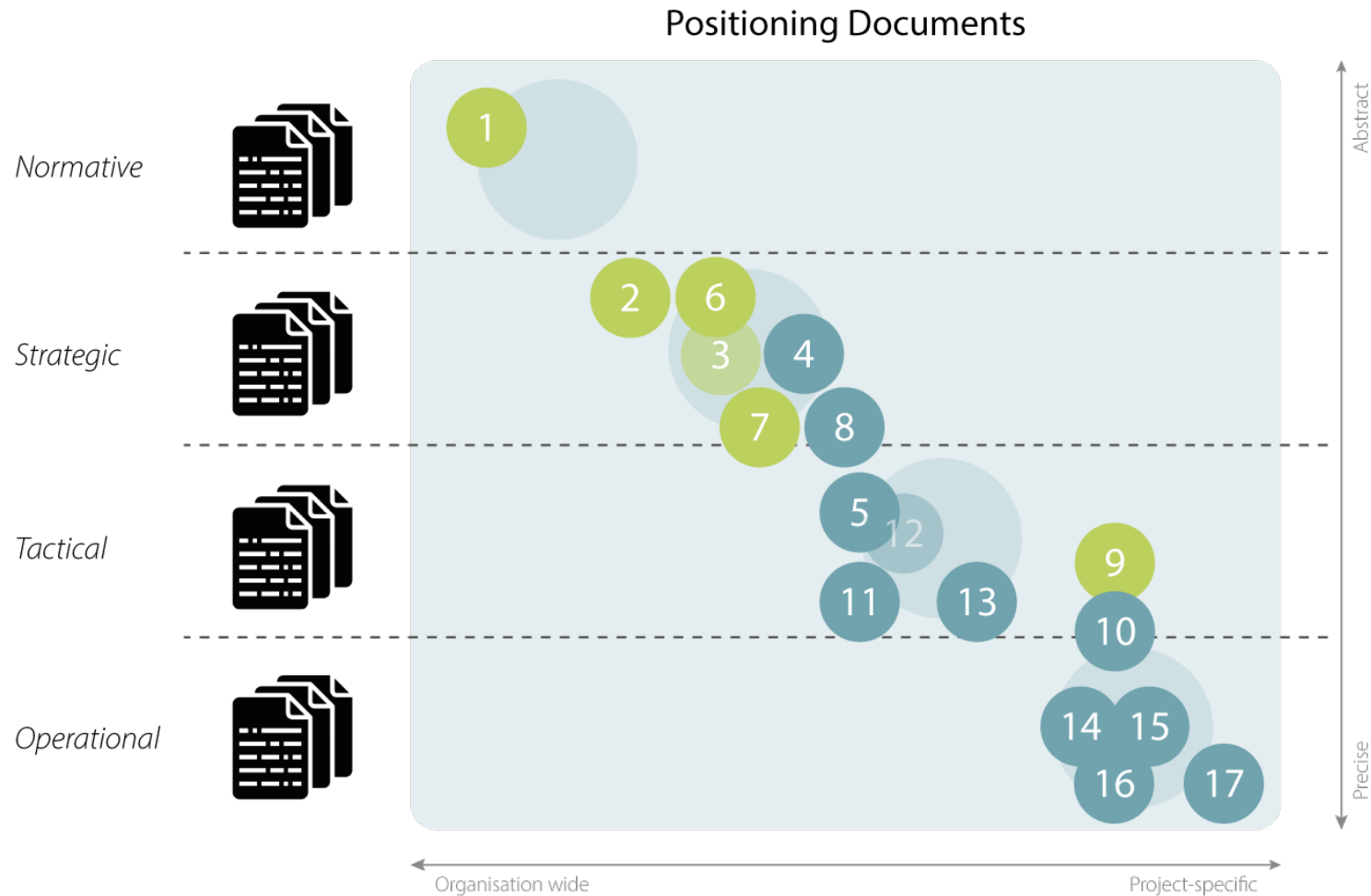
Data collection | Interviewees
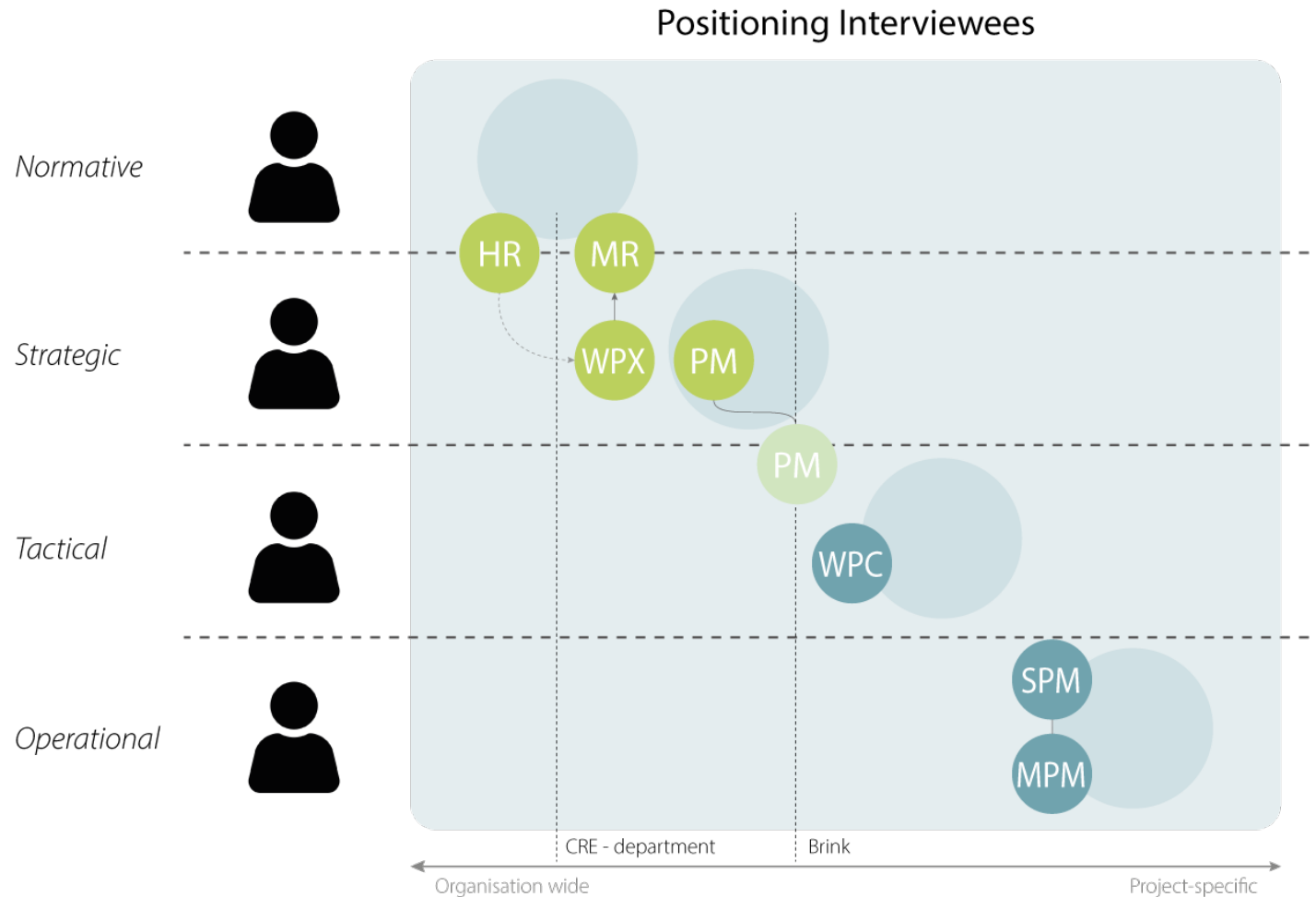
Thematic analysis

Themes		Prevalence
Roles		Responsibilities
		Contact with other departments
		Collaboration with other departments
		Relationship to WPS
Motivation		**Talent attraction and retention**
		Productivity
		Reduce employee stress
		Company Brand/Image
Forming Process		**Content translation between levels**
		Feedback systems
Forming Bottlenecks		**Understanding WB importance Top Management**
		Company growth
		Absence HR
		Role responsibility scope
		Effectivity of strategy
		Oversight of Data
		Clarity of Data
Implementing Process		Project briefing
		Clarity of Policies
		WELL
Implementing Bottlenecks		**Feasibility/Budget**
		Complexity of project planning
		Tensions/Contradictions
		Quality checks
		Managers
Overall Cascading Bottlenecks		Ambiguity of WB
		Ownership and responsibility WB
		Priorities
		Actionability
		Policy vs reality

	Themes	Prevalence
Emergent	Embeddedness in Policy	ESG as one of four pillars of overall Business strategy
		Embedded as a Social pillar of ESG
		ESG linked to stakeholders wishes
		Embedded in strategic aim of employee experience
		Main focus in HR strategies
		Embedded in one of three core values
		Embedded in one of five WP pillars
		Derivatives embedded in WP concepts
		Derivatives embedded in WP behaviour guidelines
		Derivatives embedded in WP design direction
		Derivatives embedded in WP amenities
	Embedded in Structures	Triple Accountability on topic in top-management
		Expertise groups on ESG
		Expertise groups on WB
	Embedded in Processes	**ESG embedded in all company governance**
		Collaboration between departments on WB
		Continuous feedback employee experience
		Standard application of WELL in construction
		Embedded in programs available to employees
	Motivation	Deliver on ESG goals for stakeholders
		Talent attraction and retention
		Experience and Brand
		Reduce employee stress
		Productivity
		Collaboration
		Occupational health and safety
Pre-defined	Intangible workplace considerations	**Workplace culture and values**
		Social dynamics
		Engagement and autonomy
		Communication and information flow
		Services and amenities
	Tangible workplace considerations	**Office layout** and spatial design
		Lighting and **visual environment**
		Acoustics
		Temperature and ventilation
		Ergonomics
		Technology and equipment

Findings | N & S level

Normative
- WB integration in ESG
- Top management accountability
- Governance embedding
- Motivation – Strategic lever
- Intangible

Strategic
- Translation – three values
- Embedding into strategy structures
- Thematic overlap
- Ambitious yet vague
- Design directions & brand-focussed
- Intangible & Tangible

- Bottom-up approach
- HR and CRE collaboration
- MT approval
- Top management understanding €
- The WB case €
- HR presence debate

Findings | S & T level

Strategic
- Translation – three values
- Embedding into strategy structures
- Thematic overlap
- Ambitious yet vague
- Design directions & brand-focussed
- Intangible & Tangible

Tactical
- Project visions, scarce WB content
- Aspirational language
- Limited Actionable Information
- Amenities amenities amenities
- Intangible > Tangible

- Information gaps forming > impl.
- Responsibility implementation WB
- Design requirement vagueness WB
- Actionability issues
- Introduction of WELL as framework

Findings | T & O level

Tactical
- Project visions, scarce WB content
- Aspirational language
- Limited Actionable Information
- Amenities amenities amenities
- Intangible > Tangible

Operational
- Project visions, scarce WB content
- Lack of WB in tactical documents
- WB visible in derivatives
- Remainder is brand-focussed
- Intangible > Tangible

- Lack of information on transition process
- Contradictions in Brief
- Responsibility vagueness
- Budget constraints €
- Priorities vary greatly per role €