

# Impact of Workplace Inclusivity on Employee Morale and Performance

Dr. Trinley Paldon, Senior Assistant Professor

Xavier Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship, Bangalore-560100

Bhumika Motwani, PGDM Student

Xavier Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship, Bangalore-560100

Nishtha Sharma, PGDM Student

Xavier Institute of Management and Entrepreneurship, Bangalore-560100

## Abstract

*In recent years there has been a shift from diversity to inclusivity in the workplace. There have been varied explanations and interpretations in all aspects of diversity and inclusion to help us in understanding their meanings and conceptualizations. Grounded in theoretical frameworks surrounding workplace inclusivity among the varied work groups, culture and research on diversity. This paper explores the reciprocal relationship between workplace inclusivity on the employee performance and morale. The paper posits that fostering workplace inclusivity enhances employee performance and morale, while simultaneously, high morale and performance contribute to a more inclusive workplace culture. This reciprocal relationship underscores the importance of organizational commitment to inclusivity and the positive outcomes it yields. The study will lead us to the theoretical foundation of how an inclusive environment in an organization can impact the personnel's morale and performance and it will deepen the link between the direct relationship that exists between workplace inclusivity on the employee morale and performance.*

**Keywords:** inclusion, employee morale, motivation, diversity management, organizational performance, employee performance

***i. INTRODUCTION***

In recent years, the concept of workplace inclusivity has garnered substantial attention within organizational research. It generally refers to "involves giving socially marginalised group members the same opportunity to participate and contribute as they do to non-marginalized group members, and supporting employees in their efforts to be fully engaged at all levels of the organisation and to be authentically themselves." (Shore et al., 2018).

Scholars emphasize that workplace inclusivity should extend beyond mere representation of diverse groups. It necessitates fostering an environment that supports all employees, which may involve initiatives such as offering training and resources to managers to address biases and promoting open communication and feedback channels (Santoro et al., 2020; and Glowka et al., 2022). Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that workplace inclusivity not only carries ethical and moral significance but also bears a relationship with the employees in the organization.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of promoting an inclusive workplace in the dynamic environment of modern businesses. In the pursuit of success and longevity, the productivity and well-being of employees have become crucial factors. The study explores the complex topic of workplace inclusion, paying particular attention to the significant impact on worker morale and productivity.

Diversity and inclusion are not simply catchphrases; they are necessary for success. It is important to understand the intricate connections between an inclusive workplace and the productivity and well-being of its employees.

However, despite a growing body of research and attention on the workplace inclusivity topic, the outcomes in the context of impacting employee morale and performance have received very less attention. Therefore, this research tries to find if inclusivity at workplace impacts the employee morale and performance.

The following section consists of review of literature, methodology, results and findings and conclusion.

***ii. Review of Literature***

Countless studies have underscored the pivotal role that morale and performance play in organizational success, with an increasing emphasis on the interplay between these factors and the broader concept of workplace inclusivity. This review seeks to explore the extensive body of literature surrounding the impact of morale and performance, the strategies for fostering inclusion in the workplace, and the theoretical underpinnings that elucidate the intricate dynamics at play.

### **i. Impact of morale and performance**

In HRM, employee motivation is a key target. The psychological mechanism that gives behaviour direction and purpose is known as motivation (Lindner, 1998). A different perspective might contend that motivation is the inside desire to satisfy an unfulfilled need (Lindner, 1998). With these two concepts in mind, it is evident that the term "motivation" describes an action that piques someone's interest in changing their present situation and moving in the direction of a better one. Employee motivation is critical to an organization's performance and needs to be handled carefully, claims Ganta (2014). Employees who lack motivation are more likely to produce mediocre work and quit.

One of the advantages of inclusion that employees mention is that they feel more confident when they can be who they are at work. When people are allowed to be who they are at work instead than trying to be someone they are not, they can be most productive.

Furthermore, a person's perception of their own talents may improve as their confidence grows, which may positively impact performance. This assurance could increase the likelihood that workers will engage in supra-role activity known as Organisational Citizenship activity (OCB) (O'Donovan, 2018).

Organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), has been linked to improved organisational performance, is another crucial factor (Koys, 2001). The characteristics of OCB are as follows: (i) conscientiousness, which denotes that workers go above and beyond what is called for in assigned tasks; (ii) altruism, which denotes that workers assist one another; (iii) civic virtue, which denotes that workers participate in the political life of the company in an open and responsive manner; (iv) sportsmanship, which denotes that workers have positive attitudes and do not complain; and, lastly, (v) courtesy, which denotes that workers show consideration for one another (Koys, 2001). The organisational culture has a significant impact on generosity within a given organisation.

A work environment that prioritises individualism, employee competition, and exclusion will diminish altruism and, consequently, the work environment as a whole. In addition to focusing on developing Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) rules, organisations must make sure that employees internalise these practises. Therefore, in order to create a truly inclusive and cooperative workplace, a shift in values and cultures is required to represent the new compromise with inclusiveness. It goes without saying that if the values are from above, then employees will be inspired to work together and treat one another with respect.

This is what is meant by courtesy, which is to create a safe and accepting environment where employees can be themselves without worrying about criticism or having their integrity compromised. Positive connections at work as it

drives employee engagement which helps them to perform better at work (Bhuvanaiah and Raya,2015). Employees look for fair treatment and involvement to foster.

## **ii. Fostering Inclusion in the workplace**

Establishing accountability systems for inclusion within the organization's performance management system is identified as a best practice. This involves embedding measures of inclusion into performance management, aligning individual and organizational goals with inclusive practices. Leaders are encouraged to invest in training programs aimed at equipping employees and managers with the necessary skills for fostering inclusion that helps in creating and sustaining an inclusive environment.

Roberson (2006) helps to distinguish between practices related to inclusion and diversity. The author also pointed out to include people of marginalised identity groups in decision-making. By highlighting the particular inclusion management techniques used by Chinese businesses and highlighting the cultural quirks particular to the Chinese setting, Tang et al. (2015) expands on this understanding. The concept of organisational inclusion behaviours is introduced by Sabharwal's (2014) research and includes fair treatment from management, employee influence on choices, and commitment from top leadership. The study highlights the need for leaders to actively practise inclusive behaviours in order to have a good impact on organisational performance, as diversity management alone is not adequate. Daya (2014) found that inclusion is multifaceted and that important components include communication, belonging, organisational atmosphere, senior leadership, and transparent recruitment.

Tremblay (2017) investigates the complex interactions between workplace culture, humour, and inclusion by examining the relationship between leader humour climate, organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), and organisational inclusion perceptions. For leaders of organisations, Gallegos (2014) and Gotsis and Grimani (2016) offer doable recommendations on how to cultivate an inclusive culture. This entails setting clear expectations for behaviour, fostering inclusive settings, demonstrating inclusive behaviour, and keeping a close eye on hiring and promotion trends.

## **iii. Theoretical Background**

Understanding the fundamentals of workplace inclusion is the first step towards exploring its effects on morale and performance. Shore et al. (2011) and Cox and Blake (1991) stated that an inclusive workplace transcends simple demographic diversity. It includes an organisational culture that respects and values individual differences and helps

workers feel like they belong. The literature reveals a major theme that emphasises how psychological safety affects employee morale in inclusive settings.

Edmondson (1999) research on psychological safety mentioned morale rises when workers feel free to express themselves honestly without worrying about repercussions. Workers who work in inclusive environments feel more psychologically comfortable, which has a favourable effect on their general well-being and job satisfaction. Workplace inclusivity is associated with higher levels of employee engagement (Delery & Doty, 1996; and Grant, 2012). A sense of purpose and belonging is fostered by inclusive environments, and this leads to higher levels of engagement. Employees that are engaged demonstrate improved job performance and productivity. Further Delery and Doty (1996), found that employee attitudes and behaviours are influenced by organisational culture, especially the degree of inclusion. Moreover, Mor Barak and her colleagues studied the essence of inclusivity as organisations negotiate the challenging terrain of diversity and inclusion (Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998). They emphasised that an inclusive workplace goes beyond following rules set forth by the company. It represents a pluralistic value system that honours various cultural viewpoints and promotes an atmosphere in which every person is respected and acknowledged (Mor Barak & Daya, 2014).

Nishii (2013) Defined inclusion are as follows: equitable treatment, true respect for each person's individuality, and active involvement in decision-making. Equal chances are created for all employees in inclusive workplaces, which embrace a wide range of cultural perspectives, as opposed to exclusionary workplaces that require adherence to pre-established standards. Inclusion actively seeks strategies for creating environments where diversity is not a mere demographic metric but a source of organizational advantage (Winters, 2014). Inclusive environments foster collaboration, flexibility, and fairness, ensuring that every individual can contribute to their full potential (Office of Personnel Management, 2011). The emphasis is not just on the benefits of equal opportunity but on invoking policies and practices that transform diversity into a tangible organizational advantage (Hays-Thomas & Bendick, 2013).

The shift towards inclusivity brings into the question the impact it is creating on employee morale and employee performances. Inclusivity has been identified as a vital driver to enhance employee work engagement and it has been found that particularly inclusive leadership has a strong and significant influence on employee work engagement. (Cenkci et al,2020). Work engagement refers to the state of mind that is enthusiastic, committed and absorbed while engaged in one's work. (Schauefeli et al,2002). Inclusive work environments have been shown to influence employee's willingness to go beyond the job roles and engage in organizational citizenship behaviour. Through person-job fit, inclusivity and employee work engagement are positively correlated. The findings also show that the positive direct association between inclusive leadership and person job fit as well as the indirect relationship between inclusive leadership and work engagement through person job fit are moderated by employees' sense of responsibility (Bao, 2021).

The way that diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) are understood and approached in the modern workplace is undergoing a profound change. Companies are realising more and more that creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace is not only the right thing to do, but also a smart move with direct effects on productivity and success. This acknowledgment is a result of mounting data indicating that inclusive and diverse workplaces foster creativity, employee engagement, and overall corporate performance in addition to social responsibility (Oswal, Siddiqui, 2021). It is reasonable to hypothesize that workplace inclusion and employee engagement, both yielding comparable advantages for organizations, are likely interrelated, possibly even mutually reinforcing. However, the precise nature of their relationship requires deeper investigation, as suggested by prior studies (Downey et al., 2014; Ohemeng & McGrandle, 2021; Settles, 2016).

There exists a wide range of opinions concerning the effects of implementing diversity and inclusion policies on business performance. Advocates of diversity enhancing organizational outcomes assert that individuals from diverse backgrounds offer varied perspectives that enhance decision-making. Additionally, they emphasize the potential external benefits, such as meeting consumer needs, fostering brand loyalty, and boosting sales, which can result from increased diversity within a company. Conversely, detractors of promoting diverse workforces argue that hiring individuals from diverse backgrounds may reduce cohesion and teamwork, thereby potentially increasing turnover rates (Herring, 2009). According to Richard (2000), when analysing the effects of racial diversity on organizational performance, a resource-based perspective is applied. This viewpoint suggests that firms with similar characteristics may exhibit differences due to variations in their resource composition. Richard contends that a diverse workforce can confer a competitive edge upon a business by enabling it to engage with a broader spectrum of customers and market segments.

The systematic literature review aims to establish a robust understanding of the intricate relationship between workplace inclusivity, employee morale, and performance. By synthesizing existing research findings, this review seeks to shed light on the multifaceted dynamics at play within organizational environments which are diversity initiatives, leadership practices, and organizational culture. The review endeavours to uncover how these factors influence employee perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. Ultimately, by elucidating the connections between workplace inclusivity, morale, and performance, this theoretical background sets the stage for empirical research to further explore and validate these relationships in diverse organizational contexts. Through collaborative efforts to promote inclusivity and equity in the workplace, organizations can not only enhance employee well-being and satisfaction but also drive innovation, productivity, and sustainable growth in the ever-evolving landscape of the modern workforce

**iv. Methodology**

A Systematic Review of research methodology is employed to comprehensively explore the impact of workplace inclusivity on employee morale and performance. Here's a concise breakdown of our methodology: **Keyword Selection:** The authors initiated search on the EBSCO database using strategically chosen keywords: "Workplace Inclusivity" and "IMPACT OF Workplace inclusivity on performance." **Filtering Criteria:** To refine the focus, the authors used specific filters, narrowing the scope to papers published between 2000 and 2023. This ensured relevance and contemporaneity in the collected data. **Application of Filters:** After applying the temporal filter, 32 papers remained in consideration for further analysis out of the 52 papers retrieved. **In-depth Examination:** Subsequently, these 32 papers were studied to understand workplace inclusivity's impact on performance and morale of an employee in the organization. **Systematic Review:** The systematic review phase involved synthesizing insights from scholarly articles, research papers, and industry reports. This methodical process aimed to extract actionable insights and delved a comprehensive overview.

**v. Result and Findings**

K. Milchus, J. Sanford, F. Harris, M. Linden, H. Mahajan (2015) study highlights the positive impact of universal design (UD) on work outcomes, particularly in relation to job satisfaction. Unlike traditional views that focuses solely on task performance, UD features promote both inclusivity and task effectiveness.

Notably, UD features in common areas like meeting spaces and break rooms significantly influenced performance, participation, and job satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of extending accessibility beyond individual workstations.

Lynn M.Shorea, Cleveland, Sanchez (2018) work illustrates the importance of organizational commitment to inclusivity through inclusive practices, fostering contributions from diverse employees. The evolving literature on inclusion requires clarity in definitions and measures, underscoring the necessity for collaborative efforts between scholars and practitioners to advance inclusive workplace initiatives effectively.

Babaita, Ahmed, Olowookere (2023) found a significant correlation between inclusive leadership and employee work engagement in hospital settings, with leaders fostering an environment of accessibility and inclusivity, valuing diverse backgrounds and skills. These findings resonate with prior research, emphasizing the influential role of inclusive leadership in promoting engagement and innovative behaviour among employees. Furthermore, the study suggests that inclusive leadership positively influences work engagement, particularly in green environments, underlining its crucial role in creating supportive organizational climates that encourage innovation and prosocial behaviours. Overall, the

research underscores the multifaceted impact of inclusive leadership on employee engagement and organizational climate, shaping behaviours beyond routine tasks.

Carmeli, Palmon, Ziv (2009) highlighted that inclusive leadership, characterized by traits like openness and accessibility, fosters psychological safety among employees, which in turn enhances creativity. These results underscore the significance of inclusive leadership in cultivating environments conducive to innovation within organizations.

Royall (2021) mentioned the vital role of leadership and open communication in fostering an inclusive workplace through effective diversity training. Leaders are instrumental in facilitating cultural understanding and creating opportunities for cross-cultural interactions among employees. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of organizational support and continuous reinforcement for the success of diversity training programs. Overall, the findings underscore the significance of valuing diversity and fostering inclusiveness for organizations to thrive in the global economy.

Qi (2019) found a positive relationship between inclusive leadership and employee innovative behaviours, mediated by perceived organizational support (POS). Specifically, when employees perceived their leaders as inclusive and supportive of their ideas, they felt valued by the organization, which in turn increased their innovative behaviours.

Bao, Xiao and Noorderhaven (2022) found that inclusive leadership positively influences employee work engagement through perceived person-job fit, particularly when employees feel a high level of personal responsibility for their work. The study contributes to inclusive leadership theory by integrating social information processing theory and person-environment fit theory, enriching the understanding of the relationship between inclusive leadership and work engagement. Additionally, it identifies perceived person-job fit as a critical mediator, shedding light on the underlying mechanisms linking inclusive leadership and work engagement. This research fills a gap in existing literature by unpacking the complex dynamics of these relationships and providing theoretical and empirical evidence to support the proposed model.

Barak (2018) studied the dynamics of inclusion within a diverse human service organization (HSO), revealing its pivotal role in shaping perceived quality of care. Through fostering climates for innovation and bolstering job satisfaction, perceptions of workplace inclusion positively influenced the overall quality of care provided. Notably, the research underscored the significance of inclusive environments in encouraging idea sharing and innovation among employees.

Moreover, it shed light on the nuanced interplay between personal characteristics such as age and education, as well as group-level characteristics like racial and ethnic diversity, in shaping perceptions of inclusion. Older employees reported feeling less included, hinting at potential age discrimination, while higher education levels were associated with greater feelings of inclusion. High racial and ethnic diversity within work groups was linked to heightened climates for inclusion, suggesting the pivotal role of diversity in fostering inclusive environments. These findings offer



valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of diversity and inclusion within organizational contexts, particularly in human service healthcare settings.

Moreover, beyond just demographic representation, genuine inclusion requires valuing and embracing differences in thoughts and perspectives. When individuals feel included, they are more likely to contribute their unique talents and ideas, fostering innovation, creativity, and overall organizational success (Nair,2015)

Priyashantha (2019)investigated the impact of workforce diversity, encompassing age, educational background, religious affiliation, work experience, and attitude diversity, on employee performance. Through regression analysis, positive and significant relationships were found between workforce diversity and employee performance across all dimensions studied, consistent with previous research. These findings emphasize the importance of diversity management in enhancing organizational performance.

Despite advancements in workplace diversity, inequities persist, with disparities evident in earnings and opportunities based on characteristics like gender, race/ethnicity, and other factors. Research reveals that women, minorities, and individuals with diverse attributes often face lower salaries, limited promotions, and unequal treatment compared to their counterparts (Shore,2011).

Sikandar (2022) The research paper investigates how diversity and inclusion policies affect an organization's performance and makes the claim that greater efforts to promote diversity and inclusion result in better performance. The four distinct Gender Equality Score components are the main topic of this research. This series of equations examines the relationship between particular elements—like work-life balance, workforce balance, equal compensation, and gender equality in leadership—and organisational effectiveness.

MAKUDZA, MUCHONGWE, DANGAISO (2020) workforce diversity and employee productivity, leading to improved customer experience. While age diversity showed no significant impact and gender had a moderate inverse effect, secondary dimensions of diversity positively influenced productivity. Practical implications suggest implementing diversity management frameworks to accommodate employees' unique characteristics and foster collaboration between HR and marketing units. Despite limitations, the study validates the pivotal role of workforce diversity in enhancing both employee productivity and customer experience.

Joy (2016) Stated that the IT industry in India has become the largest private sector employer, offering significant opportunities for educated women to pursue lucrative careers. A key factor driving women graduates to IT firms is the presence of gender-neutral HR practices, ensuring fair opportunities for all. Recognizing the challenge of retaining skilled employees, especially women, software firms are implementing inclusive strategies to mitigate turnover.

Brown (2023) investigated the relationship between workplace inclusivity and employee engagement among SOM workers by using information from six employee engagement surveys conducted between 2012 and 2020.

Nevertheless, a weak and erratic association between the two variables was found by the statistical analysis, which prevented a direct correlation from being established.

This points to a possible indirect association that might be impacted by other unidentified variables. The study emphasises the complexity of workplace inclusion and employee engagement in spite of these ambiguous findings, highlighting the continued significance of encouraging inclusive and engaged workplace cultures for favourable human and organisational outcomes.

All tested variables significantly influence inclusion, including belongingness, uniqueness, decision-making, access to resources, and job security. Moreover, inclusion positively correlates with employee effort, supporting the notion that fostering inclusivity enhances organizational culture and performance (Ohemeng, McGrandle, 2020).

Jaiswala, Dyaram, Khatri (2022) including gender, age, religion, marital status, first language, and region of origin. It is found that the sample closely mirrored national demographics. Employee well-being correlated significantly with perceived surface diversity, inclusion, and perception of organizational politics, while no significant correlations were found with control variables.

Sabharwal (2014) The paper advocates the case that inclusive settings are preferable to diversity management strategies and that they improve employee performance. The ability to influence organisational decisions, fair treatment, and a commitment to inclusion from senior leadership are the three main ideas of organizationally inclusive behaviours, or OIB. Although diversity management alone has little effect on organisational performance, it can have a favourable effect when integrated with OIB.

The findings underscore the importance of dedicated leadership fostering inclusion and empowering employees to influence decision-making. Organizations relying solely on structural and policy changes to accommodate diversity may not fully succeed in increasing productivity. Therefore, it's crucial for organizations to cultivate inclusive environments and empower individuals to contribute fully. Inclusive management holds greater potential for workplace harmony and improved productivity compared to diversity management alone.

Robust diversity and inclusion programs offer numerous benefits, including enhanced employee morale, improved brand reputation, and even financial success for firms. ( Rodriguez, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the impact of workplace inclusivity on employee morale and performance is a significant and burgeoning area of study within organizational research. Over the years, numerous studies have shed light on the multifaceted relationship between inclusivity and employee outcomes. Factors such as employee engagement, organizational citizenship behaviour, and overall job satisfaction have emerged as key indicators in demonstrating and establishing the link between inclusivity and its effects on morale and performance.

Research has consistently shown that workplaces characterized by inclusivity tend to foster higher levels of employee morale, job satisfaction, and overall well-being. When employees feel valued, respected, and included, they are more likely to be motivated, engaged, and committed to their work. This, in turn, translates into improved performance outcomes, including higher productivity, creativity, and job performance. Moreover, the positive impact of workplace inclusivity extends beyond individual employees to the organization as a whole. Inclusive workplaces often experience lower turnover rates, reduced absenteeism, and enhanced team collaboration and cohesion. Furthermore, organizations that prioritize inclusivity are better positioned to attract and retain top talent, thereby gaining a competitive advantage in the marketplace. While considerable progress has been made in understanding the relationship between workplace inclusivity, employee morale, and performance, there is still ample room for future research. Scholars and practitioners alike can examine deeper into exploring the mechanisms through which inclusivity influences various aspects of employee well-being and organizational effectiveness. Additionally, investigating the role of leadership, organizational culture, and diversity initiatives in promoting inclusivity remains an area ripe for exploration.

In the coming years, research in this domain is likely to expand its focus to include more diverse populations, industries, and geographical contexts. Furthermore, with the increasing recognition of the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace, there is a growing demand for evidence-based strategies and interventions to create more inclusive organizational environments. Thus, the study of workplace inclusivity and its impact on employee morale and performance holds considerable promise for shaping the future of work and organizational practices.

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