

INCLUSION AS A MANAGERIAL LIFE SKILL FOR ENHANCING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between the job performance of employees with disabilities and inclusion as a life skill among managers. Empowering managers should be a top priority for firms looking to improve their inclusion quotient since inclusion is crucial in both societal and organizational contexts. More than a workplace practice, inclusion is a transformative skill that drives personal growth and organizational development. Diversity and inclusion contribute to better decision-making, higher productivity, and sustainable organizational change. Employees with disabilities, when provided an inclusive environment, can make significant contributions to organizational goals with enhanced commitment and performance. This study conducted surveys and interviews as part of a mixed-methods strategy, and it analyzed data using correlation and content analysis. The findings demonstrated an important positive correlation between managers' inclusive behaviors and the job performance of employees with disabilities, which is significant information for management, researchers, and human resources professionals.

Keywords: *Inclusion as a life skill, fair implementation of policies, integration of differences, decision making, employees with disabilities, job performance*

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INTRODUCTION

Organizational policies and practices that promote diversity and inclusion ensure sure that every employee, regardless of their individual traits, is valued, treated with dignity, and given an equal chance to contribute to the objectives of the organization. An inclusive climate fosters trust, strengthens relationships, builds confidence, encourages the exchange of ideas, and empowers employees to reach their full potential. Managers who exhibit inclusive behaviors are typically open-minded, empathetic, growth-oriented, and tolerant in challenging situations. However, inclusion as a life skill is often underestimated, as many managers assume they already possess it. Raising awareness is therefore critical, since inclusion significantly influences employee performance. A lack of inclusive practices may unintentionally result in

lower performance, reduced creativity, and higher attrition. Conversely, once managers recognize the importance of inclusion, they can cultivate it as a life skill that enhances both personal and organizational outcomes. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) jointly released a report that emphasizes the importance of inclusive organizational culture and employee empowerment in achieving a sustainable future. Social inclusion can be understood as the managerial skill of creating environments that enhance employee participation—particularly for marginalized groups—through opportunities, voice, respect for rights, and access to resources. Increased awareness has encouraged many organizations to hire employees with disabilities, and evidence suggests that when such employees are provided with inclusive environments and necessary resources, their performance on the job is frequently better than their counterparts. Blanck (2020) demonstrates the need to assess employment policies for workers with disabilities in the past, present, and future due to the unprecedented social and economic issues caused by the pandemic. Managers who understand the value of diversity and inclusion are better able to improve job performance and cultivate organizational commitment (Sabharwal, 2014). Similarly, Cho and Barak (2008) stress the need for managers to understand diversity and inclusion in order to engage effectively with clients from diverse and immigrant backgrounds. While diversity management is important, research indicates that it is insufficient in isolation; inclusion, particularly through autonomy and enhanced self-esteem, contributes more substantially to improved performance.

Organizations are increasingly focusing on workforce diversity to reflect demographic realities, including greater representation of women, minorities, and employees with disabilities (Pitts, 2009). To address workplace challenges, managers often implement diversity training programs that tackle issues such as sexual harassment and emphasize respect for differences related to race, gender, religion, disability, and sexual orientation. Nevertheless, organizations continue to encounter obstacles in integrating diverse employees toward shared objectives. As a result, many adopt structural and functional strategies to recruit and retain diverse talent (Pless & Maak, 2004). Scholars have underscored that inclusion now lies at the core of contemporary diversity efforts (Adamson et al., 2020; Tai et al., 2023; Broadnax, 2010; Rangarajan & Black, 2007; Riccucci, 2002; Wise, 2002; Miller, 1998). According to Nishii (2013), managerial focus has shifted from “diversity management,” which emphasized addressing challenges, to “inclusion,” which emphasizes integration and valuing diversity. All employees, regardless of their status as a majority or minority, are regarded as belonging to the target group, and inclusion is really about acknowledging and valuing individual differences (Ferdman & Deane, 2014). However, Guillaume et al. (2014) contend that merely valuing diversity is insufficient to leverage its potential for innovation, effectiveness, and well-being. A truly inclusive work environment is underpinned by pluralistic values that respect all employees, regardless of cultural background (Mor Barak & Daya, 2014), and that encourage mutual support among diverse groups to maximize engagement and performance (Shore, Cleveland, & Sanchez, 2018). According to Thomas and Ely (1996), an inclusive work environment improves employee performance, which in turn boosts organizational productivity. Organizations that cultivate inclusion tend to have more satisfied and engaged employees, leading to reduced turnover and lower recruitment costs. To sustain such outcomes, organizations must implement human resource strategies that include fair policies, flexible work arrangements, and inclusive practices, thereby contributing not only to organizational success but also to societal development.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Climate of Inclusion

An inclusive work environment fosters the free exchange of ideas, enabling employees from diverse backgrounds to learn from one another, thereby enhancing team innovation and productivity. However, creating such a climate is not without challenges. Pless and Maak (2004) argued that organizations face innate obstacles when trying to foster inclusion and suggest four crucial transformational stages: increasing awareness to foster understanding, creating an inclusive vision, reconsidering important management ideas and principles, and modifying organizational procedures and systems. Scholars have conceptualized the climate of inclusion in various ways (Park et al., 2023; Adamovic et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2018; Shore et al., 2018). Mor Barak and Cherin (1998), for instance, characterize it in terms of how employees perceive their level of access to valued resources and participation in significant organizational decisions. On the other hand, Pelled et al. (1999) define it as the extent to which workers are regarded as insiders and accepted at work. Theoretical frameworks like Crenshaw's intersectionality theory, social identity theory, and optimal uniqueness theory offer compelling evidence for comprehending how an inclusive workplace produces favorable organizational results. Enhanced organizational commitment, lower turnover, and less interpersonal conflict have all been repeatedly associated with a healthy organizational environment of inclusiveness. These factors all help to increase the productivity and profitability of an organization. To foster such outcomes, organizational policies and procedures must reinforce the principles of inclusivity, ensuring that both managers and employees actively promote inclusive practices in their actions and decision-making (Jenkins & Probst, 2022). According to Le et al. (2021), fostering an inclusive workplace requires open communication between coworkers, inclusive decision-making procedures, fair hiring policies, and the equitable treatment of employees with disabilities and those who are gender nonconforming. Furthermore, organizations that prioritize diversity and inclusivity as part of their strategic agenda and link these efforts to long-term sustainability are the most successful (Heitner et al., 2013).

Dimensions of Climate of Inclusion

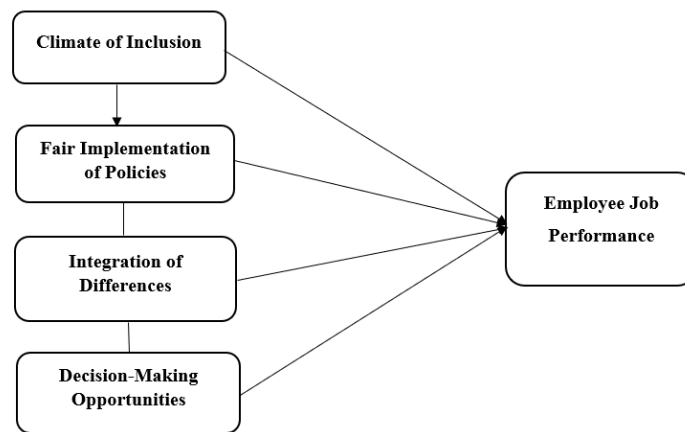
According to Nishii (2013), there are three main components of an inclusive workplace culture: equitable policy execution, diversity integration, and decision-making participation. These are explained as follows:

- **Fair Implementation of Policies-** Employee perceptions of inclusion are closely linked to the organizational climate, particularly when it is characterized by fairness. In a fair workplace, employees are more willing to speak up and participate fully, which has been related with a reduced incidence of discrimination and harassment (Vohra et al., 2015). Jenkins and Probst (2022) argue that organizations with an inclusive climate implement policies and practices that are equitable and free from favoritism or bias. Such organizations foster authenticity and individuality, integrate cultural differences, and encourage input from employees at all levels. This approach is referred to as the discrimination-and-fairness paradigm by Thomas and Ely (1996), and it emphasizes that all employees should be treated equally, have equal opportunities, and adhere to the law. In a similar vein, Greenhaus et al. (1990) demonstrate that removing discriminatory hiring practices reduces status disparities within firms based on demographic factors. Practical examples of fair policy implementation include providing accessibility facilities such as ramps for employees with physical disabilities, text-to-speech software, and Braille printers for visually impaired employees—measures that help establish a “level playing field” (Colquitt et al., 2002).
- **Integration of Differences-** The integration of differences is essential to diversity and inclusion management because it is predicated on the idea that doing so successfully fosters a productive workplace where staff members feel appreciated, inspired, and capable of giving their best efforts (Bagshaw, 2004). According to Schneider and Reichers (1983), integration of differences reflects shared perceptions of the work environment. Ragins (2008) explains that it enables workers to engage with essential components of their self-concept and preserve important facets of their identities without worrying about unfavorable outcomes. In such environments, diversity is not merely tolerated but celebrated, thereby enhancing organizational performance.
- **Inclusion in Decision-Making-** Inclusion in decision-making ensures that different viewpoints are integrated into organizational plans, which boosts productivity and creativity. Armstrong (2011) emphasizes that inclusive team development strategies lead to more effective and equitable decisions. Ely and Thomas (2001) also highlight that seeking and integrating diverse opinions into organizational decisions reduces discrimination and fosters inclusivity. Similarly, Kalev (2008) notes that decision-making processes that involve employees across levels are essential for mitigating organizational inequalities. Providing employees with autonomy and a voice in significant organizational matters motivates them and reinforces their value as essential assets to the organization (Milliken & Martins, 1996).

Employee Job Performance

Employee job performance is the degree to which an employee accomplishes predetermined goals within a given period of time. It can also be understood as the comparison between actual output and the intended output of an employee. Campbell et al. (1990) emphasize that the degree of individual contribution that separates employee job success from overall organizational performance is represented by this performance. Job performance is a multi-dimensional construct, conceptualized in terms of both outcomes and behaviors (Muindi & K’Obonyo, 2015). Behavioral aspects focus on employees’ contributions toward organizational goals through task execution, while outcome aspects refer to the results of these behaviors, which are often shaped by environmental factors (Campbell et al., 1993). Academics have highlighted that motivation, mutual regard, inclusive leadership approaches, and respect can all improve performance in the workplace (Nguyen et al., 2019). Similar to this, Jung and Avolio (2000) demonstrate that subordinate work performance is greatly enhanced by supervisor-subordinate value congruence, which is based on mutual respect and reciprocal connections. Markham et al. (2010) further highlight that mutual recognition and respect are positively associated with performance outcomes. An inclusive climate characterized by uniqueness and belongingness leads to increased organizational commitment, work satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), and overall well-being. It also cultivates strong relationships with managers and team members (Shore et al., 2011). According to Thomas and Ely (1996), an inclusive work environment improves overall productivity by having a greater impact on job performance than other organizational characteristics. Management practices that promote positive attitudes and behaviors among employees are found to reduce turnover rates (Folakemi et al., 2018). Chan et al. (2020) suggest that disability inclusion training across organizational levels helps dispel misconceptions about employees with disabilities, thereby improving both job performance and social functioning.

Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework for the Study



As shown in Figure 1, the conceptual framework identifies Climate of Inclusion—through its three dimensions of Fair Implementation of Policies, Integration of Differences, and Decision-Making Opportunities—as the independent variables. Employee Job Performance serves as the dependent variable, reflecting how an inclusive workplace environment enhances employees’ effectiveness in fulfilling their roles.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To examine the relationship between climate of inclusion and employee job performance.
- To analyze the relationship between fair implementation of policies and employee job performance.
- To investigate the relationship between integration of differences and employee job performance.
- To assess the relationship between decision-making opportunities and employee job performance.

PROPOSED HYPOTHESES

- H1: There is a significant relationship between the climate of inclusion and employee job performance.
- H1a: There is a significant relationship between the fair implementation of policies and employee job performance.
- H1b: There is a significant relationship between the integration of differences and employee job performance.
- H1c: There is a significant relationship between decision-making opportunities and employee job performance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study opted for a cross-sectional causal design that was based on surveys. Semi-structured interviews and standardized questionnaires were employed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. The climate of inclusion was evaluated using the Workplace Inclusion Questionnaire (WIQ), which was created by Vigdis Sveinsdottir et al. (2021) and focused on three aspects: Decision-Making Opportunities, Integration of Differences, and Fair Implementation of Policies. The employee job performance was evaluated using a modified version of the Employee job Performance Questionnaire developed by Williams and Anderson (1991). In this measure, managers evaluated the in-role performance of 49 employees with disabilities working across government organizations, private firms, and multinational companies. Sample items included: “*This employee adequately completes assigned duties,*” “*This employee performs tasks that are expected of him/her,*” and “*This employee neglects aspects of the job he/she is obligated to perform.*”

The scale’s internal reliability was good, as indicated by its Cronbach’s α rating of 0.91, Seven semi-structured interviews (N = 7) were carried out to examine the significant factors in a modern organizational setting in order to supplement the survey data. Throughout the data collection process, an iterative content analysis was conducted. The sampling design adopted was convenience purposive sampling, combined with the snowball technique to reach relevant respondents.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section aims to present the study’s findings and analyze the impact of an inclusive climate on the job performance of employees with disabilities. The findings are discussed in relation to the research hypotheses and existing literature.

Table 1: showing relationship (Pearson Correlation between Climate of Inclusion & Employee Job Performance.

		Correlations	
		Employee Job Performance	Climate of Inclusion
Employee Job Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.593**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	49	49
Climate of Inclusion	Pearson Correlation	.593**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	49	49

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1 presents the Pearson correlation analysis between Climate of Inclusion and Employee Job Performance. The results indicate a moderately strong positive correlation ($r = .593$, $p < .01$), indicating that employees who operate in an environment that is more inclusive typically do better on the job. This result validates H1, which asserts that employee job performance and the climate of inclusion are significantly correlated.

Table 2: Relationship between dimensions of Climate of Inclusion & Employee Job Performance

		Correlations	
		Employee Job Performance	
Employee Job Performance	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	49	
Fair Implementation of Policies	Pearson Correlation	.484**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	49	
Integration of Differences	Pearson Correlation	.384*	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.019	
	N	49	
Decision Making	Pearson Correlation	.365*	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.016	
	N	49	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 presents the association between the dimensions of the Climate of Inclusion and employee job performance. Fair implementation of policies is positively and significantly correlated with employee job performance ($r = .484, p < .01$). Integration of differences also shows a positive and significant correlation with employee job performance ($r = .384, p < .05$), while decision-making opportunities are positively and significantly related to employee job performance ($r = .365, p < .05$). These findings provide empirical support for H1a, H1b, and H1c, confirming that inclusive practices related to policy implementation, integration of differences, and employee participation in decision-making contribute to improved employee job performance.

Table 3: Coefficient of determination in the causal relationship between dimensions of Climate of Inclusion & Employee Job Performance

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.480 ^a	.230	.213	1.10241
2	.549 ^b	.301	.298	1.06294

a. Predictors: (Constant), Fair Implementation of Policies

b. Predictors: (Constant), Fair Implementation of Policies, Decision Making, Integration of Differences

Table 3 presents the results of the regression analysis examining the combined effect of the dimensions of the Climate of Inclusion on employee job performance. The findings indicate that Fair Implementation of Policies, Decision-Making, and Integration of Differences jointly explain 30.1% of the variance in employee job performance ($R^2 = 0.301$), with an Adjusted R^2 of 0.298. This suggests that these inclusion-related dimensions collectively make a meaningful contribution to employee job performance. Specifically, employees who perceive organizational policies as fair, experience effective integration of differences, and are provided opportunities to participate in decision-making are more likely to demonstrate higher levels of job performance.

DISCUSSION

The results support hypotheses H1, H1a, H1b, and H1c by showing a substantial correlation between employee job performance and the climate of inclusion. The findings align with earlier research, including Cho and Mor Barak (2008), which showed that culture of inclusion had a major impact on job performance and organizational commitment. They found that employees' job performance improves when they perceive themselves as adequately involved in the organization's mainstream activities, which enhances their sense of inclusion. Interviews with employees with disabilities revealed that they perform more efficiently when management fosters a climate of inclusion through decision-making opportunities and accessibility measures. One respondent (Respondent #1) remarked, *"It is their (management's) responsibility to give us wings, and we would be more than happy to soar high."* This supports Nishii's (2013) research shows that an atmosphere of inclusion enhances employees' commitment, job satisfaction, sense of belonging, and perceived organizational support, all of which increase their likelihood of staying with the organization. In a similar vein, Chung et al. (2016) showed that inclusion is positively correlated with supervisory evaluations of creativity and job performance, and that belongingness and uniqueness are separate components of workgroup inclusion. Innstrand and Grodal (2022) found that perceived inclusion was positively correlated with organizational commitment, work-home facilitation, and work engagement, and negatively correlated with work-home conflict. One visually impaired respondent (Respondent #5) commented, *"As the management cares about me by providing text-to-speech software, I feel more emotionally committed to the organization and try to contribute more towards its objectives."* The multiple coefficient of determination shows that fair implementation of policies and decision-making are significant predictors of employee job performance. Specifically, $R^2 = 0.301$ and Adjusted $R^2 = 0.298$ indicate that approximately 30% of the variation in employee job performance can be explained by fair policy implementation and decision-making. While other organizational variables may also contribute to performance, they were outside the scope of this study. Employees with disabilities often feel marginalized, and managerial efforts to create an inclusive environment help motivate them to perform better. Man et al. (2020) argued that organizational support and accommodations for employees with disabilities enhance motivation. One responder emphasized that having authority over decisions about work procedures and timetables not only demonstrated organizational confidence but also boosted active participation. Richard and Hannekam (2019) emphasized the need for organizations to

promote sensitivity toward disabilities among managers and include employees with disabilities in decision-making processes, particularly regarding flexible work systems. Genuine efforts to create a climate of inclusion can have a lasting impact. Mor Barak and Daya (2014) noted that diversity and inclusion should extend beyond organizational boundaries to include external stakeholders. In today's globalized economy, interactions among people from diverse backgrounds are inevitable, and competition arises from all corners of the world (Green & Kaley, 2008). Therefore, fostering a climate of inclusion is crucial for managers to enhance employee job performance, ultimately supporting the achievement of overall organizational goals.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The climate of inclusion for employees with disabilities is an important antecedent for enhancing employee job performance. This study offers practical implications for human resource professionals, managers, researchers, and policymakers striving to improve employee performance and, consequently, organizational outcomes. The study empirically established the positive interaction between the climate of inclusion and employee job performance. Employee attitudes and workplace behaviors improve with improved diversity management strategies and the involvement of employees with disabilities in organizational activities, which helps the organization achieve its objectives. This result is consistent with Sabharwal's (2014) conclusion that more productive firms are those that support employees' freedom of expression and include their opinions in critical decision-making. The absence of an inclusive climate has been noted to foster segregation among organizational members and contribute to distrust (Mor Barak et al., 2016; Ely & Thomas, 2001). Therefore, managers should develop inclusion as a key managerial skill to create an environment with practices that support workforce development, consultation, and feedback, all of which improve employee performance. Disability-inclusive employment policies and accommodations for employees with disabilities must be put into place in order to enhance job performance and support the long-term viability of businesses, society, and the country. The study's small sample size may limit generalizability, and the analysis included only a few variables. Future research could incorporate a larger sample and additional organizational and individual variables, using advanced statistical techniques to gain deeper insights into the factors influencing employee job performance.

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