



Cornell University  
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## Framework of Organizational Inclusion

### Introduction and Background

Discussion of workplace diversity has evolved from a focus on diversity management to one on organizational inclusion (Roberson, 2005; Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 2000). Scholars (e.g., Cox, 1994; Thomas & Ely, 1996) and practitioners (e.g., Ted Childs of IBM) alike are beginning to recognize that in order for the positive performance benefits of diversity to be realized, diverse employees need to not only be hired and retained, but also integrated more fully into the social fabric and operations of the organization. Specifically, in order to arrive at the oft-touted increased levels of innovation and creativity, employees need to be given opportunities to contribute their diversity of opinions and experiences (Van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004). Furthermore, they need to be treated in such a way that they feel motivated to engage themselves and feel safe about contributing their honest opinions. Despite the numerous theoretical arguments that have been made about the importance of creating an inclusive, learning-oriented organization in order to leverage the benefits of diversity, little research and meaningful assessment has been done on this issue.

The primary purpose of our research is to develop and validate a measure of organizational inclusion that is consistent with Cox's (1991) pioneering conceptualization of inclusion. He argued that organizations can be characterized as monolithic, plural, or multicultural, with the major differences among them being the level of structural and cultural inclusion that diverse employees experience. In monolithic organizations, very little attention is paid to including diverse employees. In plural organizations, attention is paid to increasing diverse representation and enhancing fair treatment (the focus of more traditional forms of "diversity management"), but individuals are still expected to assimilate to dominant norms. In the most ideal multicultural organization, policies and practices focus not only on reducing discrimination and increasing representation, but also on creating a work environment that "feels" inclusive to all individuals, and to facilitating the full utilization of diverse human resources to maximize both the employees' and organization's potential.

### Three Dimensions of Organizational Inclusion

**Dimension 1—Foundation of Fairness in Employment Practices**—This dimension captures the extent to which the organization's HR policies and practices ensure a fair and level playing field for all employees. The assumption here, based on social exchange theory, is that employees who feel mistreated in any way by the organization's employment practices will be less inclined and able to contribute fully toward the organization's goals. Thus, in order to create a truly inclusive work environment, organizations must first design and implement its practices without bias to ensure: a) diverse representation throughout the organization; and b) goodwill on the part of all of its employees.

**Dimension 2—Organizational Culture of Inclusion**—This dimension is designed to capture the extent to which the organization’s basic assumptions, values, and norms are inclusive of all employees. When an organization’s assumptions, values, and norms are truly inclusive in nature, employees do not perceive that there is some ideal profile to which they must conform but which shuns or conflicts with their true identity. In addition, organizational practices will be sensitive to the needs of “non-traditional” employees (e.g., gay/lesbian/bisexual/ transgender employees, employees caring for children or the elderly, people with disabilities, etc.), and necessary organizational resources will be devoted to ensuring that employees have the skills necessary to cooperate effectively with diverse others, recognize multiple perspectives and create openness to learning from one another’s views. Furthermore, employees will be encouraged to cooperate with diverse others through the modeling behavior of leaders.

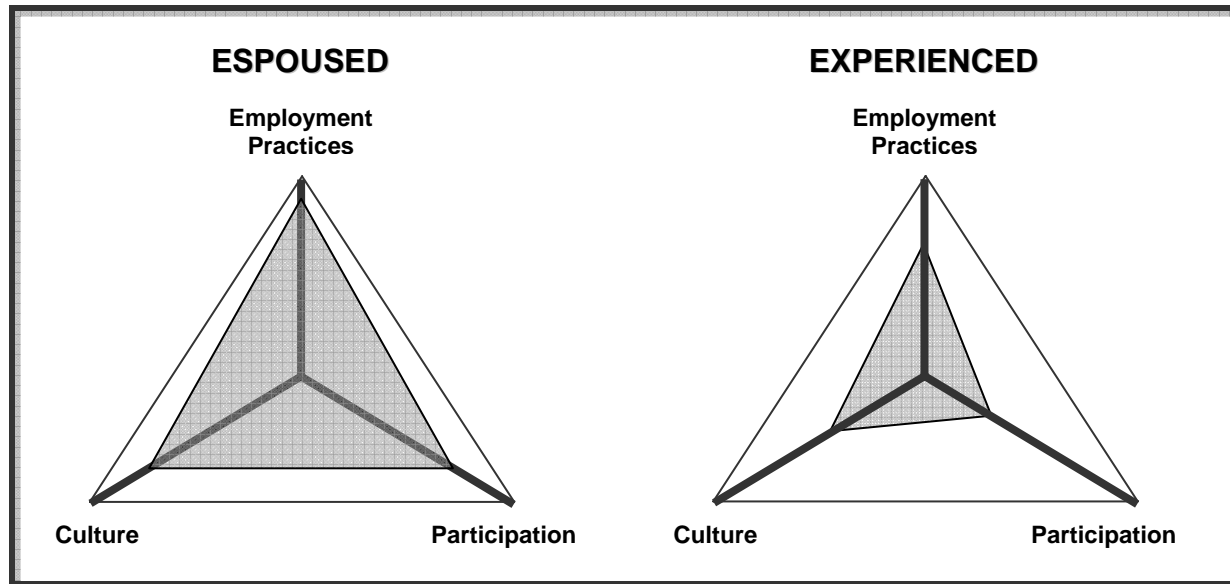
**Dimension 3—Inclusion through Participation**—In essence, this dimension captures the extent to which an organization successfully capitalizes on and leverages its workforce diversity to apply learning from diverse perspectives to workplace decision-making. It is based on the premise that workforce diversity only benefits organizations in so far as the diversity of thought and experience inherent in its many forms of diversity (e.g., demographic, knowledge, background, etc.) is encouraged to manifest itself in idea generation and decision making within the organization. In its ideal form, the mechanisms necessary to ensure full participation of employees – both within their jobs and beyond – will be in place. This involves formal and informal participation: formal participation in the form of representation in key decision making bodies, suggestion schemes, etc., and informal participation in everyday decision making on the job (i.e., empowerment, brainstorming, feedback mechanisms, etc.). Furthermore, once expressed, the diversity of opinions and experiences must be incorporated into decision making in order for employees to feel respected and included, and also to arrive at improved and innovative decisions.

The basic assumption is that if an organization falls short on any one of these dimensions, obstacles to the full utilization of its diversity remain. Put differently, we expect that the relationship between diversity and performance (defined broadly to include not only profits but innovation and learning) will be moderated by these three dimensions: in units/organizations that score high on these dimensions, there will be a stronger, positive relationship between diversity and performance than in units/organizations that score low on these dimensions.

## **Measurement Concepts**

The inclusion assessment tool is a workplace climate survey. In addition to reframing inclusion beyond diversity per se, our assessment tool has some innovative measurement features. First, we are differentiating between “espoused” values/objectives and “actual” experiences around diversity and inclusion. Scholars have started to recognize (e.g., Nishii & Wright, in press; Ostroff & Bowen, 2004; Wright & Nishii, forthcoming) that organizational practices as espoused by managers may differ markedly from employees’ experiences of those practices. Our expectation is that the effect of scoring a 3 out of 5 on some “actual” practice differs depending on whether the organization was only claiming to accomplish that level 3, versus when the organization claimed to be accomplishing 5 (i.e., the espoused). Measuring this discrepancy is especially important when it comes to diversity, because much backlash against diversity initiatives is based on perceptions that “management doesn’t walk the talk.”

In addition to questions about “espoused” and “actual” practices, we are also collecting data from HR managers on the management/organizational practices that need to be in place to ensure that the espoused values are translated effectively into practice (e.g., “employment practices are continually audited to ensure fairness”). The content of these enabling practices has been drawn from two decades of organizational research on the HR and managerial practices that are required to eliminate bias and increase employee engagement in organizations.



Measuring the extent to which an organization has implemented these practices will help to identify possible reasons for the existing discrepancy between espoused and actual practices, as well as the interventions that are likely to be most appropriate. For example, the finding that employees report not receiving fair performance evaluations (as revealed by reports of “actual” practices) might be explained by the fact that an organization does not use objective rating criteria for performance reviews or does not train raters on how to eliminate biases, both explanations which would be assessed by the “enabling” practice data collected from HR managers.

Finally, for each of our three dimensions, we are collecting data on the attributions that employees make for any perceived discrepancies between espoused versus actual practices. This focus on attributions represents an extension of previous research (Nishii, 2003) which revealed that the attributions that employees make for HR practices have a significant impact on their attitudes and behaviors, and ultimately customer satisfaction. Similarly, in this research, we expect that the nature of employees’ attributions regarding the gap between espoused and enacted practices will have important consequences for organizational interventions. Assume, for example, that management touts the importance and value of empowering employees and engaging them in decision making, but in reality employees do not experience such empowerment. The implication of this discrepancy may differ depending on whether employees attribute the discrepancy to management distrust of employees versus an inability to incorporate autonomy into work design due to safety reasons. Most likely, the effects of the former on employee engagement and behaviors will be more negative than for the latter.

# Assessment Structure

(with example scale items)

## ESPOUSED

In terms of **employment practices**, this organization presents itself as...

- having an unbiased selection process
- supporting the principle of “equal pay for equal work”
- wanting to hear employee’s grievances

In terms of **organizational culture**, this organization presents itself as...

- a place where people can be themselves
- accommodating variation in people’s needs
- valuing diversity awareness

In terms of **participation**, this organization presents itself as...

- believing that employees will be more engaged if their ideas are taken seriously
- wanting employees to challenge “status quo” thinking
- nurturing a climate for healthy debate

## ATTRIBUTIONS

How do employees interpret gaps that they perceive to exist? The same gap can take on different meanings depending on the attributions employees make.

## ENABLERS

What could help account for gaps in terms of the absence of enabling mechanisms (i.e. policies, procedures, practices, etc.)?

## EXPERIENCED

In terms of **employment practices**, in this organization...

- discrimination in hiring is not a problem
- qualifications, more than connections, get you promoted
- it is safe for employees to voice their grievances

In terms of **organizational culture**, in this organization...

- it is risky to be seen as different
- employees’ unique needs are met by benefit program flexibility
- employees appreciate the differences that people bring to the workplace

In terms of **participation**, in this organization...

- everyone’s ideas are given serious consideration
- employees’ insights are used to rethink or redefine work practices
- employees engage in constructive conflict on work-related matters

In addition, the interventions that would be appropriate to address the discrepancy would differ, based on the differential attributions made by employees. We expect most attributions to fit within 3 main categories: (1) ability – the attribution that gaps reflect an inability to execute needed practices due, for example, to lack of time, resources, or competence, even when the organization’s intentions are good; (2) benevolence – attributions that gaps reflect a fundamental difference between an organization’s value orientation and what is required for inclusion; and (3) integrity – attributions that gaps reflect lack of true

commitment or even intention to follow through on espoused values and practices.

Ultimately, our goal is to not only validate this measure and develop a typology of attributions relevant to the management of diversity and inclusion in organizations, but to also assess the relationship between this measure and other relevant organizational variables such as leadership (what traits and behaviors are associated with the creation of inclusive climates), engagement (how are the dimensions differentially associated with employee commitment), employee behaviors (organizational citizenship behaviors, counterproductive behaviors, productivity), and ultimately, performance.

## **Summary**

Our approach has the potential to offer significant value to organizations. First, the data collected from our inclusion assessment tool will help organizations to identify their strengths and weaknesses when it comes to the perceived fairness of employment practices, and the inclusion that employees experience in the organization's culture and work processes. An analysis of the gaps between "espoused" and "enacted" practices can also help to identify blind spots on the part of the organization. It is not uncommon for organizations (i.e., management) to perceive that certain outcomes have been achieved when employees themselves feel differently, at least around some issues. The identification of these gaps provide a nice starting point for organizational interventions designed at improving the participation and contributions of diverse employees. In particular, data regarding the organization's successful implementation of "enabling" practices will highlight specific areas for improvement. Furthermore, the exact nature of the interventions that are most likely to be effective will be informed by the attributions that employees make for the gap between espoused and actual practices.

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