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Conceptual, Structural Dimensions of Inclusion and Related Empirical Research

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Abstract. As society rapidly develops and multiculturalism deepens, people's living environments are becoming increasingly complex and diverse. Inclusion has emerged as a vital component in cross-cultural interaction, social harmony, and organizational development. This paper reviews prior literature on inclusion from three perspectives: perception of inclusion, inclusive climate, and inclusive practices. We describe the structural dimensions, measurement scales, and theoretical models of inclusion, identify their antecedents, effects, and mediating mechanisms, and outline the limitations of current research and directions for future inquiry.

Keywords: Perception of inclusion; inclusive climate; inclusive practice; empirical research

1. Introduction

With the accelerated pace of globalization, heightened social diversity, and ongoing progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), inclusive research has become a critical interdisciplinary field. Covering disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and management, it has evolved into three main research foci: perceived

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inclusion, inclusive climate, and inclusive practices. Utilizing a systematic literature review approach, this study synthesizes theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence to: illustrate the definitions and connotations of these three key concepts; assess their measurement instruments; and analyze their interrelationships and effects on employee motivation and team performance. Drawing on the research outcomes, this paper further delves into the practical insights for Chinese business management, aiming to foster theoretical advancement and real-world application of domestic inclusive research.

2. Relevant concepts of inclusion

In the academic discourse on inclusion, scholars engage with the subject through varied theoretical lenses, predominantly concentrating on its manifestations within organizational and workplace environments. Building on this scholarly consensus, we consolidate recent research findings on inclusion, organizing our analysis around three interrelated dimensions: individuals' subjective perception of inclusion, the prevailing inclusive climate within organizations, and the operationalization of inclusive practices.

2.1. Perception of inclusion

Inclusion has been recognized as a transformative force that counteracts exclusionary practices in dominant organizations [1]. Conceptualized as both a process and practice, inclusion enables groups and organizations to leverage their diversity effectively. Within human resource management (HRM), inclusion represents positive organizational practices that enhance diversity and equality [2], with Combs [3] emphasizing its role in maximizing diversity benefits by ensuring equal rights, opportunities, and advancement privileges for all members.

Operationalized in work processes, inclusion reflects members' degree of engagement. Berkman et al. [4] conceptualize it as a continuum measuring individuals' perceived participation in critical organizational processes, including information access, team involvement, and decision-making influence. Jing and Zhou [5] further specify this as employees' psychological experience of workplace inclusion.

Regarding diversity relationships, inclusive workplaces embrace a value framework that respects all employee cultural perspectives [6] and enables diverse groups to mutually support full organizational participation [6]. As Nishii [7] and Shore et al [8] establish, inclusion serves as the ultimate objective of diversity initiatives, ensuring all employees feel valued and respected as organizational members.

2.2. Inclusive climate

The pursuit of equity and the elimination of discrimination in organizations constitutes the foundation for developing an inclusive climate. Shore [8] defines an inclusive climate as

one where institutional policies, procedures, and actions ensure equitable treatment for all social groups, particularly those historically disadvantaged. Dwertmann and Nishii [9] identify two key dimensions of inclusive climate: (1) ensuring equal opportunities and eliminating discrimination, and (2) creating synergistic benefits from diversity, though most definitions emphasize the former over the latter.

Hofhuis et al. [10] conceptualize inclusive climate as the psychological environment regarding diversity within workgroups or organizations, closely tied to perceived ethical norms and values. Focusing specifically on gender, Kossek et al. [11] define gender-inclusive climate as the extent to which the work environment supports diverse female identities and values through its social interactions, cultures, and structures, thereby fostering belonging and enabling women to fully contribute their talents.

2.3. Inclusive practice

Bennett et al. [12] pioneered research on inclusive practices, identifying specific human resource management approaches such as employee assistance programs and rehabilitation opportunities for substance users. Organizational inclusion practices encompass policies, programs, and initiatives designed to foster acceptance, support, and participation for employees from diverse backgrounds. Berkman et al. [4] emphasize that organizations cultivate inclusion through diversity integration, information sharing, and participatory mechanisms. Tang et al. [13] further identified culturally distinct manifestations of these practices within Chinese organizational contexts.

3. Structural dimensions and measurement of inclusion

While numerous scholars have examined the structural dimensions and measurement tools of inclusion, the lack of standardized scales significantly hinders cross-study comparability. To address this limitation, the present study systematically reviews and analyzes the dimensional structures and measurement instruments for three key aspects of inclusion: perception of inclusion, inclusion climate, and inclusion practices, as summarized in Table 1.

3.1. Structural dimensions of perception of inclusion

Berkman et al. [4] developed the 14-item Inclusion-Exclusion Scale comprising three subscales: decision-making process participation, work team involvement, and access to information/resources. Building upon Mor Barak's work and Roberson's [15] diversity management framework, Downey et al. [14] developed an employee inclusion measurement instrument.

Jansen et al. [16] employed inductive-deductive methods to conceptualize inclusion as two dimensions (belongingness and authenticity), creating a 16-item measure. Chung et

al. [17] developed a 10-item work team inclusiveness scale based on Shore et al.'s [8] definition, capturing belongingness and uniqueness components.

Several unidimensional scales exist: Pearce and Randel's [18] 3-item Workplace Social Inclusion Scale; Gajendran and Joshi's [19] 5-item team decision-making inclusion measure; Bernstein and Bilimoria's [20] 4-item minority board member inclusion scale; Andrews and Ashworth's [21] 4-item workplace inclusion measure from UK Civil Service data; and Tremblay's [22] 6-item organizational inclusion scale adapted from Stamper and Masterson [23]. Pan et al. [24] proposed a 7-item bidimensional scale measuring online community newcomers' social identity and uniqueness perception.

Table 1: Summary of structural dimensions and measurement scales of inclusion

variable	Investigator (Time)	dimension	content	project
Sense of content	Pearce and Randel（2004）	Unidimensional	Social inclusion in the workplace	3 pcs
	Gajendra and Joshi（2011）	Unidimensional	Inclusion in team decision-making	5 pcs
	Bernstein and Bilimoria（2013）	Unidimensional	Inclusion of minority members on the board	4 pcs
	Downey et al（2015）	Unidimensional	Organizational inclusion	10 pcs
	Andrews and Ashworth（2015）	Unidimensional	Inclusion in the workplace	4 pcs
	Tremblay（2017）	Unidimensional	Organizational inclusion	6 pcs
	Jansen et al（2014）	two-dimensional	A sense of belonging, a sense of authenticity	6 pcs
	Chung et al（2020）	two-dimensional	A sense of belonging, uniqueness	10 pcs
	Pan et al（2014）	two-dimensional	Social identity, perception of uniqueness	7 pcs
Inclusive atmosphere	Mor Barak and Cherin（1998）	three-dimensional	Access to information and resources, participation in work teams, and the ability to influence decision-making processes	4 pcs
	Dwertmann and Boehm（2016）	Unidimensional	An inclusive atmosphere that reconciles disability differences with LXL	10 pcs
	Nelissen et al（2017）	Unidimensional	Inclusive atmosphere for people with disabilities	5 pcs
	Li et al（2017）	Unidimensional	Inclusion in the context of a diverse team	14 pcs
	Li et al（2019）	two-dimensional	Equity at the individual level, inclusiveness at the organizational level	4 pcs
	Nishii（2013）	three-dimensional	Equity in employment practices, integration of differences, and inclusive decision-	31 pcs

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variable	Investigator (Time)	dimension	content	project
			making	
	Kossek et al(2017)	three-dimensional	Treat women fairly, leverage women's talents, and support women's values, interests, and needs in the workplace	—
	Pelled, etc（1999）	three-dimensional	Decision-making influence, work safety, access to sensitive work information	8 pcs
Inclusive practices	Sabharwal（2014）	three-dimensional	Senior leadership is committed to promoting inclusion, employees having the ability to influence organizational decisions, and treating employees fairly	23 pcs
	Tang et al.2016）	Seven dimensions	Inclusive Teamwork, Inclusive Communication, Inclusive Decision-Making, Fair Treatment, Inclusive Leadership, Tolerance, Inclusive Adaptation	—

Note: This paper compiled.

3.2. Structural dimensions of inclusive climate

Nishii et al. [7] identified three core dimensions of inclusive climate through organizational change research: (1) organizational practices shaping perceptions of valued behaviors, (2) employee interactions creating shared environmental meanings, and (3) objective work environment features including norms and policies. They emphasized that true organizational inclusion requires equitable access to resources and belonging across all groups, not just privileged subsets.

Kossek et al. [11] specifically examined gender inclusion, proposing three interrelated dimensions to address women's career inequality: fair treatment, talent utilization, and workplace support for women's values and needs.

Li et al. [25] addressed the contemporary challenge of creating inclusive workplaces in diverse environments, particularly for disadvantaged groups. Their work established a two-dimensional framework for inclusion climate, operationalized through a four-item measurement scale.

3.3. Structural dimensions of inclusive practices

Pelled et al. [26] identified three key indicators of inclusion (decision-making influence, information access, and job security), developing an 8-item measurement scale. Sabharwal [27] established a 23-item scale measuring three organizational inclusion dimensions: senior leadership commitment, employee decision-making influence, and equitable

employee treatment. Tang et al. [13] conceptualized inclusive management practices as comprising seven factors (inclusive teamwork, communication, decision-making, fair treatment, leadership, tolerance, and adaptation), though without developing a corresponding measurement instrument.

4. Relevant theoretical and modeling architectures for inclusive research

4.1. Theoretical foundations of inclusive research

4.1.1. Social comparison theory

Festinger's [28] Social Comparison Theory elucidates how inclusion-exclusion dynamics influence individuals' self-assessment of their positionality within social hierarchies. Members of heterogeneous groups identify with organizational peers who exhibit similar attributes, resulting in enhanced inclusion when organizational affirmation corresponds to their self-concept. To attain or maintain advantageous positionalities, individuals employ boundary-demarcation strategies. High-status group members generally exhibit receptivity toward individuals perceived as socioeconomically equivalent or superior, while concurrently and systematically excluding those categorized as lower in social standing. These exclusionary dynamics reinforce social stratification through the establishment of categorical boundaries, ultimately perpetuating intergroup mistrust and divergent perceptual frameworks.

4.1.2. Social identity theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT), a cognitive-social psychological framework [29], examines the interplay between social structures and personal identity through the symbolic meanings individuals ascribe to their group affiliations (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender). Initially formulated by Tajfel [29] to explain intergroup dynamics, SIT asserts that individuals systematically classify themselves into socially salient categories such as race, ethnicity, or gender. This self-categorization mechanism subsequently governs behavioral patterns in intragroup cohesion and intergroup relations.

4.1.3. Need to belong theory

Need to Belong Theory [30] posits that the fundamental human need for belonging motivates individuals to establish and maintain enduring, effectively rewarding, and substantively meaningful interpersonal connections. This theoretical framework elucidates two defining attributes of belongingness needs—their pan-cultural universality and existential primacy—which critically explain core human motivational systems and behavioral patterns. While subsequent theoretical developments have expanded the construct's explanatory scope, Baumeister and Leary's [30] original formulation remains the dominant and most rigorously empirically validated paradigm in contemporary

belongingness research.

4.2. Relevant modeling architecture for inclusive research

4.2.1. Diversity and organizational culture influence employee behavior

Mor Barak et al. [31] advanced the Inclusion-Exclusion Scale by developing a conceptual framework that differentiates between surface-level and deep-level diversity dimensions. Their study investigated the relationship between these diversity dimensions and both positive/detrimental outcomes across human service systems. The researchers further elaborated this theoretical connection by examining how organizational diversity management initiatives—specifically in terms of protocol implementation and climate cultivation—mediate positive and negative organizational outcomes through workforce perceptions.

4.2.2. The confronting prejudice response model

Leslie et al. [32] propose that organizational inclusive climates emerge exclusively through systematic engagement with discrimination, formalized through their Confronting Prejudice Response (CPR) model. Their research demonstrates that individuals from historically non-marginalized groups frequently exhibit perceptual limitations in identifying prejudicial incidents, thereby enabling systemic discrimination perpetuation. The CPR framework constitutes not merely cognitive awareness but rather intentional evaluative processes requiring deliberate activation. When encountering discriminatory situations, individuals navigate five sequential challenges: accurate event classification as discriminatory, severity appraisal to justify intervention, assumption of accountability for response, strategic selection of countermeasures, and subsequent behavioral enactment. This procedural model provides an analytical framework elucidating the disjuncture between discrimination manifestation and effective remedial action.

4.2.3. A more comprehensive framework covering six themes

Shore [6] advanced Ferdman's [1] taxonomic analysis of inclusion scholarship by developing an integrative framework for theoretical advancement, empirical validation, and implementation practices. This multidimensional construct delineates six core components: psychological safety, collaborative engagement, perceived esteem and valuation, systemic decision-making deficiencies, identity congruence, and diversity acknowledgment coupled with proactive cultivation.

5. Empirical studies related to inclusion

5.1. The antecedent study

5.1.1. Impact of demographic characteristics on perception of inclusion

Demographic determinants of perceived inclusion include gender, age, organizational

tenure, hierarchical position, and organizational membership affiliations. Mor Barak and Cherin's [4] seminal work documented systemic disparities in perceived organizational inclusion between majority and minority group members. Traavik's [33] cross-stratified analysis of Norwegian professional service employees revealed gender-based disparities in inclusion perceptions, with male participants reporting more favorable career advancement opportunities and less frequent discriminatory experiences compared to female colleagues. These gendered disparities demonstrate career-stage specificity, peaking during the early-to-mid career transition phase where disparities in promotion trajectories and inclusion metrics reach maximum divergence.

5.1.2. Impact of leadership and coworker behavior on perception of inclusion, climate of inclusion

Subordinates' perceptions of organizational inclusion are significantly shaped by leadership behaviors that promote workplace dignity. Shore et al. [8] postulated that effective leaders must simultaneously address employees' dual psychological needs for social belonging and individual uniqueness to foster inclusive environments. Brimhall et al. [34] found that leader-member exchange quality robustly predicts perceived organizational inclusion, underscoring the critical role of optimized interpersonal interactions. Conversely, Tremblay [22] demonstrated that leaders who foster toxic humor environments undermine perceived respect and inclusion. Complementing these findings, Brimhall [35] established that transformational leadership practices enhance inclusionary mechanisms, subsequently improving workforce engagement and team operational effectiveness.

5.1.3. Impact of diversity approaches, climate, and practices on perception of inclusion, climate of inclusion, and practices of inclusion

Diversity management represents a strategic organizational mechanism for fostering inclusive workplace environments, as demonstrated by seminal research [4][7]. This paradigm involves systematically implemented initiatives designed to integrate employees from diverse backgrounds into organizational hierarchies and social networks through targeted policy frameworks [36]. Scholarly consensus underscores executive leadership's critical role in designing equitable ecosystems that ensure authentic representation and equitable treatment across social identity dimensions. Through inclusive policy implementation, organizational decision-makers effectively mitigate structural discrimination while establishing sustainable talent development pathways for historically marginalized groups.

5.2. The impact outcome studies

5.2.1. The impact of inclusion on performance

Ahmed et al. [37] posit that organizational inclusion serves as a critical determinant of workforce productivity enhancement. This performance linkage operates through dual mechanisms: motivational intensification and knowledge optimization. Employees experiencing substantive organizational integration demonstrate heightened work engagement and task proficiency, as evidenced by Pearce and Randel's [18] empirical findings. The inclusion-performance nexus further manifests through enhanced knowledge dissemination systems, enabling personnel to acquire role-specific competencies that improve operational efficiency. Such organizational knowledge capital—particularly regarding institutional protocols and workflow optimization strategies—directly accelerates task completion rates while elevating output quality.

5.2.2. The impact of inclusion on behavior

Perceived organizational integration demonstrates conflict-attenuating effects while enhancing workforce stability, as substantiated by Nishii's [7] longitudinal analysis. Chung et al. [17] identified social belonging and personal uniqueness as dual psychological anchors underpinning inclusion, finding these dimensions positively correlate with leadership ratings of innovative capacity and task execution quality. Conversely, unmet organizational integration needs to demonstrate significant negative correlations with workforce retention metrics. Empirical evidence indicates that perceived exclusion often precipitates voluntary attrition through psychological contract breaches. The cultivation of inclusive ecosystems facilitates interpersonal boundary spanning, strengthens shared cognitive schemas, and enhances organizational relational connectivity.

5.2.3. The impact of inclusion on attitudes

Organizational integration dynamics significantly influence multidimensional employee attitudes encompassing self-concept valuation, role fulfillment satisfaction, organizational commitment, career investment intensity, psychological well-being, and perceived institutional support. Jansen et al. [16] longitudinally validated inclusion as a critical determinant of employee motivation optimization, task performance efficacy, and comprehensive well-being enhancement. Expanding this paradigm, Innstrand and Grodal [38] established robust correlations between inclusion metrics and both organizational commitment constructs and work engagement levels, further demonstrating positive correlations with work-life integration mechanisms and negative correlations with work-family role conflict.

Perceived institutional inclusivity frameworks enhance employees' contextual evaluations, facilitating comprehensive employee integration and optimal utilization of

human capital competencies [4]. This paradigm significantly improves psychological contract fulfillment, as evidenced by Shore et al.'s [8] empirical validation of inclusion-commitment dynamics. Employees within inclusivity-oriented systems exhibit heightened perceptions of organizational accountability in diversity mandate implementation, correlating with strengthened affective organizational commitment. Contemporary research confirms that systemic inclusion mechanisms foster enhanced job satisfaction, with Mor Barak et al. [31] further demonstrating that strategic climate development initiatives deepen employees' psychological investment in organizational citizenship behaviors.

Creating an inclusive organizational climate can enhance positive outcomes of promoting diversity, such as job satisfaction, creativity, and retention while reducing negative consequences like mistrust and misunderstanding [8]. Jonasson et al. [39] surveyed local and expatriate academics and found that inclusive management practices favorably impact job engagement and reduce stress.

5.3. Intermediary moderation studies

5.3.1. The moderating role of inclusion

(1) The perception of inclusion mediates several critical relationships: between authentic leadership and organizational citizenship behaviors, workplace dignity and task performance, and demographic diversity and organizational outcomes. Ahmed et al. [37] demonstrated that workplace dignity and inclusion climate jointly enhance employee performance, with inclusion climate significantly strengthening the dignity-performance relationship under high inclusion conditions. Inclusion also moderates the diversity-performance linkage [7][8], with empirical evidence showing that while diversity may contribute to intergroup friction, such negative outcomes are substantially mitigated in inclusive organizational contexts [6].

(2) Regarding the moderating role of inclusion climate, Nishii [7] posited that inclusion climate reduces gender relational conflict. She found it significantly moderates the relationship, with high gender diversity or low inclusion climate units showing high relational conflict, while in high-inclusion - climate units, gender diversity is negatively related to relational conflict. Dwertmann and Boehm [40] showed that an inclusion climate can promote the quality of leader-member exchange (LMX) and performance when group/binary oppositions influence them. Bentley et al. [41] argued inclusion climate buffers the workplace bullying-turnover intention relationship. So, employees exposed to high bullying but perceiving an inclusion climate are less likely to leave than those in low-inclusion-climate settings. Adamovic et al. [42] empirically found that ethnic minorities have higher work self-efficacy and fewer depression symptoms when they perceive a highly inclusive climate.

(3) Inclusive practices (e.g., influencing decision-making, being heard) can moderate the relationship between diversity practices and trust climate, as well as between trust climate and engagement. Downey et al. [14] found that inclusive practices create a climate of trust, and the level of inclusion affects the link between diversity practices and trust climate. Chung et al. [43] revealed a positive relationship between inclusive values and inclusive HR practices, as well as a positive correlation between inclusive HR practices and organizational-level outcomes.

5.3.2. The mediating role of inclusion

Tremblay [22] found that a sense of inclusiveness mediates the effect of a humor climate on citizenship behavior. Brimhall [35] demonstrated that transformational leaders can create an inclusive climate, enhancing employees' affective commitment and positively impacting workgroup performance. Jaiswal and Dyaram [44] identified inclusiveness as a key mediator between knowledge diversity and employee well-being. Meng et al. [45] discovered that ambivalent leadership significantly predicts team adaptation and performance, with an inclusive climate mediating this relationship.

5.3.3. Mediating and moderating variables affecting the outcome of inclusion

Le et al. [46] demonstrated that organizational inclusivity exhibits significant positive associations with both distributive justice and procedural fairness, functioning as critical mediating mechanisms between systemic integration and psychological well-being outcomes. Extending this theoretical framework, Fan et al. [47] identified age-related diversity climate and perceived organizational support as key mediators linking age-inclusive HR practices to work engagement levels. Their analysis further confirms the moderating role of diversity-focused cognitive frameworks in the relationship between age-inclusive talent management strategies and perceived organizational sustainability.

6. Future prospects

The study of inclusivity has already produced many significant outcomes. However, there still exist potential gaps for further development. The following are some ways in which future research can expand:

(1) Future research progression requires systematic scale development and psychometric validation of organizational inclusion metrics, accompanied by theoretical refinement through multidimensional construct decomposition and structural equation modeling. Scholars must prioritize conceptual alignment across inclusion literature while developing culturally calibrated measurement instruments. To enhance contextual relevance in domestic settings, rigorous empirical examination of inclusion phenomena within Chinese organizational ecosystems remains imperative. This scholarly trajectory

seeks to produce validated indigenous scales measuring perceived inclusion, contextual inclusivity, and implementation effectiveness, thereby establishing robust psychometric tools for cross-cultural management research.

(2) Scholarly inquiry should prioritize methodological advancement through innovative research designs and objective empirical indicators. First, progress requires expanding sample diversity across demographic strata, occupational sectors, and geographic regions to enable advanced statistical modeling while ensuring representative heterogeneity. Second, advancement involves the systematic incorporation of observational metrics and behavioral analytics to operationalize organizational inclusion constructs, thereby enhancing ecological validity and evidentiary rigor. This dual-pronged approach facilitates robust hypothesis testing using psychometrically validated instruments, complementing traditional self-report measures with multi-method evidentiary sources.

(3) Future research can be enriched by exploring the antecedents, influencing factors, and mediating roles of inclusive climate and practices, as well as variables that affect the moderating role of inclusive practices. Further development of inclusion-related theoretical research and model architecture is needed, with these models tested empirically across different contexts. Additionally, synthesizing various research methods (e.g., case studies, field surveys, experiments) can cross-validate the findings' reliability. Many findings require further empirical testing to better generalize from the evidence through studies using other samples.

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