



School of Social Sciences

Master in Business Administration (MBA)

Postgraduate Dissertation

**Assessing the impact of Diversity and Inclusion Programs on
Team Performance and Innovation:
A Systematic Literature Review and Conceptual Synthesis**

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Patras, Greece, March 2026

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Georgia Falara, Assessing the impact of Diversity and Inclusion Programs on Team Performance and Innovation: A Systematic Literature Review and Conceptual Synthesis

Abstract

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) have become important topics in modern organizations. Many companies view D&I as a key factor for improving performance, innovation, and long-term sustainability. Inclusive workplaces allow employees to share ideas openly and collaborate more effectively. However, despite the growing adoption of diversity policies, inequalities still exist in many sectors. Women and minority groups often face barriers in hiring, promotion, and recognition, especially in male-dominated industries such as construction and engineering (Arditi et al., 2013; Bryce et al., 2019). Research also shows that many diversity programs remain symbolic and are not fully integrated into organizational culture (Baker et al., 2021). As a result, their impact on performance and innovation is often limited. Furthermore, workplace inequalities are frequently intersectional, combining factors such as gender, race, and socioeconomic background (Bailey et al., 2022). This study reviews existing literature to examine how D&I programs influence team performance and innovation and identifies conditions that support effective inclusion strategies.

Keywords

Diversity, Inclusion, Team Performance, Innovation.

Περίληψη

Η ποικιλομορφία και η ένταξη (D&I) έχουν καταστεί σημαντικά ζητήματα στις σύγχρονες επιχειρήσεις. Πολλές εταιρείες θεωρούν την D&I ως βασικό παράγοντα για τη βελτίωση της απόδοσης, της καινοτομίας και της μακροπρόθεσμης βιωσιμότητας. Οι χώροι εργασίας που προάγουν την ένταξη επιτρέπουν στους εργαζομένους να μοιράζονται ιδέες ανοιχτά και να συνεργάζονται πιο αποτελεσματικά. Ωστόσο, παρά την αυξανόμενη υιοθέτηση πολιτικών ποικιλομορφίας, εξακολουθούν να υπάρχουν ανισότητες σε πολλούς τομείς. Οι γυναίκες και οι μειονοτικές ομάδες συχνά αντιμετωπίζουν εμπόδια στην πρόσληψη, την προαγωγή και την αναγνώριση, ειδικά σε κλάδους που κυριαρχούν οι άνδρες, όπως οι κατασκευές και η μηχανική (Arditi et al., 2013; Bryce et al., 2019). Η έρευνα δείχνει επίσης ότι πολλά προγράμματα διαφορετικότητας παραμένουν συμβολικά και δεν είναι πλήρως ενσωματωμένα στην οργανωτική κουλτούρα (Baker et al., 2021). Ως αποτέλεσμα, ο αντίκτυπός τους στην απόδοση και την καινοτομία είναι συχνά περιορισμένος. Επιπλέον, οι ανισότητες στον χώρο εργασίας είναι συχνά διατομεακές, συνδυάζοντας παράγοντες όπως το φύλο, η φυλή και το κοινωνικοοικονομικό υπόβαθρο (Bailey et al., 2022). Η παρούσα μελέτη εξετάζει την υπάρχουσα βιβλιογραφία για να διερευνήσει πώς τα προγράμματα D&I επηρεάζουν την απόδοση της ομάδας και την καινοτομία και προσδιορίζει τις συνθήκες που υποστηρίζουν αποτελεσματικές στρατηγικές ένταξης.

Λέξεις – Κλειδιά

Ποικιλομορφία, Ένταξη, Απόδοση Ομάδας, Καινοτομία.

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1. Introduction

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) are important topics in modern organizations. Many companies now see D&I as a strategic factor for performance, innovation, and long-term sustainability. In many industries, there is growing attention to diversity programs. Organizations understand that inclusion is not only a moral issue. It is also part of how organizations function and develop. When workplaces support inclusion, employees feel more comfortable to share ideas. Teams can work better together. They can also solve problems more effectively. Inclusive environments may also help organizations respond better to global challenges and complex problems (Kirton & Greene, 2021).

However, even though many organizations adopt diversity policies, inequalities still exist in many workplaces. Representation gaps remain a serious issue. This problem is very clear in male-dominated sectors. These sectors include construction, engineering, and other technical professions. Research shows that women and minority groups often face barriers in their careers. These barriers appear in hiring, promotion, and recognition. Many women report limited opportunities for advancement. Minority groups may also experience exclusion or discrimination. These structural barriers make career progress more difficult (Arditi et al., 2013; Bryce et al., 2019). Because of these problems, it is important to study how D&I programs work in real organizational environments.

Many empirical studies show that organizations often introduce diversity policies. However, the impact of these initiatives is not always strong or clear. In many cases, diversity programs exist mainly at a symbolic level. They may appear in official documents but have limited effect on everyday organizational practices. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) argue that some diversity initiatives are poorly integrated into organizational culture. As a result, they do not create real cultural change. Their impact on workforce outcomes remains limited. Gupta (2019) also explains that women leaders often support diversity initiatives. They may encourage inclusive practices and support minority employees. However, institutional structures often limit their influence. This means that their contribution to diversity is not always fully recognized or supported.

These findings reveal an important challenge in modern organizations. Many companies publicly support diversity values. However, real inclusion is often difficult to achieve. Programs may focus on representation numbers but ignore deeper cultural issues. If organizations do not address structural barriers and workplace culture, diversity policies may not produce meaningful change.

Research also shows that D&I programs do not always improve team performance or innovation. Positive results appear only under specific conditions. For example, inclusive environments can support creativity and psychological safety. Employees feel more comfortable sharing ideas and participating in discussions. Teams may collaborate more effectively in such conditions. This can lead to better problem solving and innovation (Fritz & Gresham, 2024; Gutierrez, 2023).

However, not all organizations provide supportive cultures. Some workplaces still follow traditional and hierarchical norms. These cultures may discourage open communication and participation. In sectors such as construction, traditional masculine cultures remain strong. These environments may limit the participation of women and minority employees. As a result, the potential benefits of diversity cannot fully develop (George & Loosemore, 2019).

Another important issue is the intersectional nature of inequality in workplaces. People may experience exclusion for several reasons at the same time. These reasons may include gender, race, disability, or socioeconomic background. When these identities combine, the experience of inequality becomes more complex. For this reason, simple diversity approaches are often not enough. Researchers must examine how different forms of inequality interact in organizations (Bailey et al., 2022).

Overall, previous research presents mixed results about the real impact of D&I programs. Some studies show positive outcomes. Others show limited or unclear effects. Because of these contradictions, further analysis is necessary. This systematic review aims to examine existing research on D&I programs. It seeks to identify the conditions that support stronger team performance and innovation. It also aims to propose a conceptual model that can help organizations develop more effective inclusion strategies.

1.1 Conceptual Foundations of Diversity and Inclusion

The conceptual foundations of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) start from the idea that organizations are social systems. In these systems, rules, identities, and power relations influence access to opportunities, recognition, and influence. Diversity usually refers to differences inside the workforce. These differences may include gender, race, age, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and professional knowledge. A diverse workforce means that people come from different backgrounds and experiences. However, diversity alone does not ensure equal participation. People may be present in the organization but still feel excluded. Inclusion is therefore a different concept. Inclusion refers to the conditions that allow people to participate fully at work. It means that employees feel respected, valued, and able to contribute their ideas. Inclusive environments allow employees to take part in decision making and express their opinions without fear. According to Kirton and Greene (2021), inclusion is related to the experience of employees in the organization. Diversity describes who is present in the organization, while inclusion describes how people experience the workplace.

Social identity theory is an important framework for understanding diversity and inclusion. This theory explains how people define themselves and others through social categories. These categories include gender, nationality, and social group. People often form expectations about others based on these categories. These expectations influence workplace behavior and communication. Sometimes they also reproduce power differences between groups. This situation is common in male-dominated industries such as construction and engineering. Chan (2013) explains that traditional masculine norms often shape workplace culture in these sectors. These norms create barriers for women and other minority groups. The barriers can be symbolic, such as stereotypes, or structural, such as limited promotion opportunities. As a result, simply increasing the number of women in the workforce does not always lead to real equality.

Another important concept in D&I research is intersectionality. Intersectionality refers to the idea that people have multiple identities at the same time. For example, a person can experience inequality because of gender, ethnicity, or social class. These identities can interact and create more complex experiences of discrimination. Research shows that women in technical professions often face multiple challenges in their careers. They experience gender bias but also professional stereotypes and cultural expectations (Aydin &

Erbil, 2022; Bryce et al., 2019). These challenges affect their career development and professional recognition. Gupta (2019) notes that women leaders can support diversity in organizations. However, their influence is sometimes limited by traditional structures and cultural expectations.

Psychological safety is another key element of inclusion. Psychological safety means that employees feel safe to express their ideas and concerns. They do not fear punishment or negative reactions. Fritz and Gresham (2024) explain that inclusive environments promote trust and open communication. These environments support teamwork, creativity, and learning. When employees feel safe, they share knowledge and collaborate more effectively. In contrast, hierarchical or exclusionary cultures discourage participation and limit innovation.

Many organizations today introduce D&I policies. However, some programs do not produce real change. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) argue that diversity initiatives often fail when they focus only on numbers. Increasing representation is important, but it is not enough. Organizations must also change their culture and practices.

For this reason, inclusion should be seen as a continuous learning process. Organizations must review their norms and practices regularly. D&I is therefore not only a policy but also a process of cultural change that supports better leadership, collaboration, innovation, and sustainable organizational development.

1.2 Impact of D&I Programs on Team Performance

The impact of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) programs on team performance has become an important topic in organizational research. Many organizations today try to create more diverse teams. Diversity means that people in a team come from different backgrounds. They may have different experiences, skills, and perspectives. These differences can help teams think in new ways. Diverse teams can bring more ideas and different solutions to problems. Because of this, diversity can improve decision-making, adaptability, and problem solving.

However, research shows that diversity alone is not enough to improve team performance. A team may include people from different groups, but this does not always lead to better results. Positive outcomes appear only when diversity is combined with inclusion. Inclusion means that all members of the team feel respected, valued, and safe to express their ideas.

Important inclusion mechanisms include psychological safety, fair participation, and supportive leadership (Fritz & Gresham, 2024). When these conditions exist, diversity can support better collaboration and better performance. For this reason, the relationship between D&I programs and team performance is not automatic. It depends on how organizations apply inclusive practices.

Studies from different sectors support this argument. Research in healthcare and education shows that inclusive workplaces improve communication and trust among employees. When people feel included, they work together more effectively. They also report higher job satisfaction and stronger commitment to their organization (Gurková et al., 2021; Kamau et al., 2021). Similar findings appear in the work of Inuwa (2017a, 2017b). His research shows that when employees believe that their workplace is fair, they feel more motivated. Trust and fairness increase their willingness to contribute to team goals. Employees who feel respected are more open to sharing ideas and supporting team decisions.

In contrast, some organizational cultures do not support inclusion. In these environments, traditional hierarchies and rigid norms can limit the positive effects of diversity. George and Loosemore (2019) describe this situation in the construction industry. In this sector, strong masculine cultures often dominate the workplace. These cultures may limit open communication and reduce the participation of women and minority workers. Similar problems exist in other male-dominated sectors. Cultural resistance may block D&I initiatives and reduce their positive impact on teamwork (Arditi et al., 2013; Bryce et al., 2019). These studies show that diversity programs work only when organizations also remove exclusionary practices.

Leadership also plays an important role in the success of D&I programs. Leaders connect policy with everyday practice. Gupta (2019) explains that women leaders often support inclusive work environments. They encourage cooperation, communication, and employee engagement. These actions can improve collective team performance. However, leadership efforts may face limitations. Some organizations support diversity in theory but not in everyday practice. In such cases, D&I programs remain symbolic and have little real effect on team functioning (Baker et al., 2021).

Intersectional inequalities also affect team dynamics. Some employees face multiple barriers because of gender, ethnicity, age, or disability. These barriers can limit their access to resources or reduce their ability to share ideas (Bailey et al., 2022). If organizations ignore these issues, team cohesion can decrease and productivity can suffer.

Overall, research shows that D&I programs can improve team performance when inclusion is strong. Programs must support fairness, psychological safety, and cultural change. Effective initiatives increase representation and improve communication between team members. Inclusion allows diverse teams to use their full potential. Therefore, the literature explains that inclusion is the key mechanism that connects diversity with higher performance outcomes.

1.3 Impact of D&I on Innovation

Innovation is a social process. It grows through interaction between people. It also depends on ideas and experiences. The work environment is also important. Diversity and Inclusion programs help this process. Many researchers study their role in innovation. These programs increase the variety of ideas in teams. People from different backgrounds work together. They bring different perspectives. They also bring different experiences. They think in different ways. This diversity can help teams solve problems. It can also help them produce more ideas. Studies show that cognitive diversity improves creativity. It also improves adaptability in changing environments (Gupta, 2019; Kundu et al., 2020). However, diversity alone is not enough. It must work together with inclusion. When inclusion exists, employees feel safe. They feel comfortable to share ideas. They also feel free to express opinions. This environment supports discussion and creativity.

Psychological safety is very important. It connects D&I with innovation. Psychological safety means respect in the workplace. Employees believe that others respect their ideas. They do not fear unfair criticism. When employees feel safe, they take more interpersonal risks. They share new ideas more easily. They also suggest unusual ideas. This behavior helps creative thinking. Inclusive leadership is also important. Leaders shape the work environment. They influence how employees communicate. Leaders can listen carefully to employees. They can invite employees to participate in decisions. They can also recognize different opinions. Fritz and Gresham (2024) explain that these actions support inclusive workplaces. In these workplaces people collaborate more. They test new ideas. They learn from mistakes. Research in organizational behavior supports this idea. Teams in inclusive environments experiment more. They also adapt faster to change (Gutierrez, 2023).

Gender diversity in leadership also influences innovation. Women leaders often support communication. They support cooperation between employees. Many women leaders use participatory leadership styles. These styles encourage knowledge sharing (Gupta, 2019; Baker et al., 2023). Women leaders also support collaboration between teams. This helps organizations learn new things. It also helps them respond to challenges. However, many barriers still exist. Some industries remain male dominated. Construction is one example. Cultural norms and stereotypes still exist. These stereotypes limit women's participation. They also limit the expression of different perspectives. This situation reduces innovation in teams (Bryce et al., 2019; Galea et al., 2015). These studies show something important. Innovation is not only a technical activity. It is also social and cultural.

Technology also affects innovation. Modern communication tools help cooperation. Digital platforms allow fast information exchange. Artificial intelligence systems also support communication. Hermansyah (2023) explains that communicative AI systems improve transparency. They also improve collaboration. Employees share information more easily. These tools support inclusive decision making. However, technology alone is not enough. Organizations must support diversity. They must also support fairness. Employees must have equal access to technology.

Many organizations now adopt D&I programs. However, several challenges still exist. Some programs focus only on numbers. They increase demographic diversity. But they ignore deeper problems in organizations. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) explain this problem. Many diversity strategies remain superficial. They do not change power relations. They also do not change organizational culture. Without these changes, innovation is limited.

Research shows an important conclusion. Inclusion activates the benefits of diversity. Inclusive workplaces build trust and cooperation. Employees feel free to share ideas. Barriers become weaker. Diversity then becomes a source of innovation. Organizations that support inclusion improve creativity. They also improve adaptability and long-term competitiveness.

1.4 Barriers to Effective D&I Implementation

Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) programs exist in many organizations today. Many companies say they support diversity and equal opportunities. However, many barriers still prevent these programs from working well. These barriers appear in structures, culture, leadership, and evaluation systems. Because of these problems, D&I initiatives often do not produce strong results in practice.

At the structural level, many organizations continue to reproduce old inequalities. These inequalities exist in recruitment systems, promotion processes, and performance evaluation procedures. Even when companies introduce formal equality policies, hidden biases still influence decisions. Research shows that these biases affect who gets hired, who receives promotions, and whose work is recognized inside the organization (Keen & Salvatorelli, 2016; Arditi et al., 2013). As a result, some social groups remain underrepresented in many sectors. Women, minority groups, and people with disabilities often face disadvantages in the workplace. This situation is common in industries such as construction, engineering, and finance (Bryce et al., 2019; Bailey et al., 2022). These structural barriers slow down progress toward real inclusion.

Cultural resistance is another important problem. Many industries are traditionally male dominated. In these workplaces, professional identity often connects with strong masculine norms. These norms create exclusion and discourage the participation of marginalized employees. Chan (2013) explains that masculine workplace cultures shape everyday communication and behavior. These cultural expectations often make diversity more difficult to accept. George and Loosemore (2019) studied construction workers in Australia. They found that many workers follow traditional social norms that limit open communication and reduce acceptance of diversity. Because of this environment, many D&I programs struggle to succeed even when official policies support them.

Another common issue is the existence of symbolic diversity initiatives. Many organizations create D&I programs mainly to satisfy formal requirements. These initiatives often look progressive in official documents. However, they rarely change real organizational practices. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) argue that many diversity policies exist mostly on paper. They do not change important factors such as power relations, workload distribution,

or leadership structures. When employees notice this gap between official messages and everyday reality, they often become skeptical about diversity programs. Trust inside the organization becomes weaker. As a result, D&I initiatives lose credibility and support among workers.

Intersectionality creates additional challenges for D&I implementation. Workers often experience discrimination through several identity factors at the same time. These factors include gender, ethnicity, race, and disability. Research shows that women from minority groups face multiple barriers during their careers in fields like construction and engineering (Barreto et al., 2017; English & Hay, 2015). Standard diversity policies usually address only one dimension of inequality. Therefore, they cannot solve these complex problems. Occupational health and safety policies also create difficulties. Many safety systems in construction are designed mainly for male workers. Hasan and Kamardeen (2022) explain that safety equipment and work practices often assume male physical characteristics. Because of this design, women and other nontraditional workers may face higher risks at work.

Leadership also plays an important role in the success of D&I initiatives. Inclusive leadership can improve employee participation and support cultural change. However, many organizations show weak commitment to diversity goals. Gupta (2019) explains that women leaders often support diversity initiatives strongly. Yet their influence may remain limited because existing power structures resist change. Without continuous leadership support, D&I initiatives can become fragmented or underfunded. In some organizations, diversity programs receive lower priority than other strategic goals.

Finally, many organizations lack strong evaluation systems for diversity programs. Few companies use long-term data or multiple indicators to measure inclusion results (Hasan et al., 2021). Without clear measurement tools, it becomes difficult to assess progress accurately. Ineffective programs may continue for years without improvement.

Overall, research shows that successful D&I implementation requires structural change, cultural transformation, strong leadership commitment, and effective evaluation systems. Without addressing these barriers, organizations cannot fully achieve the benefits of diversity and inclusion.

1.5 Organizational Outcomes of D&I

The organizational outcomes of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) programs are important for modern organizations. These programs are not only about ethics or social justice. They also affect performance, employee attitudes, and long-term sustainability. Many studies show that organizations that apply D&I practices often achieve better results. They improve operational performance, innovation capacity, and workforce stability. These results do not appear only because of demographic diversity. They appear when organizations create inclusive environments. In such environments employees feel respected and safe. They can express ideas and contribute to organizational goals. When workers feel included, they participate more actively in daily tasks and decision processes.

One important outcome of D&I programs is higher employee engagement and job satisfaction. Research from different sectors such as healthcare, education, and business shows similar results. Inclusive workplaces often increase employee commitment and reduce turnover intention. For example, Gurková et al. (2021) studied nurses in healthcare organizations. Their study shows that nurses working in inclusive and supportive environments report higher job satisfaction. They are also less likely to leave their job. Similar results appear in studies about public organizations. Kamau et al. (2021) explain that when employees believe that organizations respect their expectations and promises, their performance becomes stronger. This idea is related to the concept of psychological contract. When workers feel that the organization treats them fairly, they show stronger commitment. Inuwa (2017a, 2017b) also argues that fairness and equity are key predictors of employee performance and organizational commitment.

D&I programs also improve team and organizational performance. Diverse teams include people with different experiences, knowledge, and perspectives. This cognitive diversity helps teams produce more ideas and solutions. As a result, organizations become more flexible and adaptable. Studies in construction and engineering support this idea. Baker et al. (2023) and Hickey and Cui (2020) show that teams with gender diversity and inclusive leadership often make better decisions. Women leaders are especially important in this context. Research suggests that women leaders often promote collaboration and open communication. These leadership styles support knowledge sharing and collective learning. As a result, organizations can improve their performance and innovation capacity.

At the organizational level, companies with strong D&I systems often perform better than others. Research from different countries supports this conclusion. Mahdi Abaker et al. (2023) examined firms in the United Arab Emirates. Their results show that positive employee perceptions about diversity management are related to higher performance and organizational effectiveness. Hernandez-Nicolas et al. (2022) present similar findings in the Spanish construction sector. They report that companies led by women CEOs often demonstrate better financial results. These examples suggest that inclusive leadership and diversity management can improve competitiveness. Organizations benefit because they use a wider talent pool and encourage better communication and problem solving.

Inclusive workplaces also reduce interpersonal conflict. When employees feel respected and valued, communication becomes easier and more open. In such environments trust grows between colleagues and managers. Trust is a very important factor for organizational success. It connects D&I practices with performance outcomes. Trust also increases psychological safety. Employees feel more comfortable sharing ideas, discussing problems, and proposing new solutions. Fritz and Gresham (2024) explain that psychological safety helps employees participate in creative and complex work activities.

However, positive outcomes appear only when D&I programs are implemented seriously. Symbolic or superficial initiatives usually do not create real change. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) warn that many organizations adopt diversity policies only for image reasons. When programs do not address structural inequality or cultural resistance, their impact remains limited. Real inclusion requires deeper reforms in organizational systems. Examples include transparent promotion systems, fair workload distribution, and inclusive communication structures.

In conclusion, research shows that effective D&I programs produce many positive organizational outcomes. These include stronger performance, higher employee retention, greater innovation, and improved competitiveness. Inclusive practices help organizations build stronger teams and healthier work environments. For this reason, many scholars argue that D&I should be a strategic priority for modern organizations. Inclusive systems support long-term sustainability and organizational success.

1.6 Conceptual Synthesis

This section presents the conceptual synthesis of the literature on Diversity and Inclusion (D&I). The aim is to combine the main ideas from previous studies and build a clear framework. This framework explains how D&I programs influence team performance and innovation in organizations.

Many studies show that diversity is an important resource for organizations. Diversity means that employees have different backgrounds, skills, and experiences. These differences create more ideas and more ways to understand problems. Diversity can increase cognitive variety in teams. This helps teams see problems from different perspectives (Kundu et al., 2020).

However, diversity alone is not enough. Organizations also need inclusion. Inclusion means that employees feel respected and able to participate. It also means that they feel safe to express their ideas. Psychological safety is very important in this process. Employees need to feel that they can speak without fear. They also need equal opportunities to contribute to decisions.

Without inclusion, diversity may not create positive results. Differences between employees may remain unused. In some cases, diversity can even create tension or conflict. For this reason, inclusion works as the mechanism that activates diversity. It helps organizations use the potential of different employees (Fritz & Gresham, 2024).

Many researchers describe inclusion as a mediating factor between diversity and outcomes. This means that inclusion connects diversity with performance and innovation. When employees feel included, they are more willing to share ideas. They also challenge existing assumptions. This improves collective problem solving and creative thinking (Gutierrez, 2023).

Leadership is also very important in this process. Leaders influence the climate of the organization. Inclusive leaders support open communication. They encourage participation from all team members. They also respect different viewpoints. Gupta (2019) explains that women leaders often use relational leadership styles. These styles support cooperation and collaboration in teams.

Another important dimension in the conceptual framework is structural equity. Structural equity means fair systems and fair opportunities in the organization. For example, employees should have fair access to promotions, training, and recognition. Workload should also be distributed fairly.

When equity is missing, D&I programs often fail. Organizations may introduce diversity policies, but real change does not happen. In this case, D&I initiatives become symbolic actions. They show commitment to diversity but do not change daily practices (Baker et al., 2021).

On the other hand, organizations with equitable systems often show better results. Employees feel respected and valued. This improves motivation, cooperation, and productivity. Studies show that equity is connected with stronger organizational performance and better workplace climate (Mahdi Abaker et al., 2023).

Culture also plays a very important role. Organizational culture influences how diversity is perceived and managed. Some workplaces have inclusive cultures. Others have exclusionary norms or traditional hierarchies.

In some sectors, masculine cultures are still strong. This is especially true in industries such as construction and engineering. In these environments, women and minority employees often face barriers. They may have fewer opportunities to participate in decision making (Chan, 2013; George & Loosemore, 2019).

Because of this, leadership must actively support inclusion. Leaders should challenge exclusionary norms. They should promote respectful communication and equal participation. When leaders support inclusion, diverse perspectives become more visible and valuable.

Another important idea in the conceptual synthesis is intersectionality. Intersectionality explains how different identities interact. People do not have only one identity. They may experience multiple identities at the same time. These identities include gender, race, class, disability, or age.

Employees with multiple marginalized identities may face more barriers. These barriers can reduce their participation in the workplace. Even when organizations have diversity policies, these employees may still feel excluded (Bailey et al., 2022).

For this reason, the conceptual model must consider different social identities. Inclusion does not work in the same way for all employees. Different groups may experience the workplace differently.

When all these elements are combined, a multi-level model appears. In this model, diversity provides the basic resource for innovation and performance. Inclusion enables employees to express their ideas and collaborate. Equity provides the structural support for fair participation.

Organizational learning also plays a role in this process. Organizations learn from their experiences and improve their practices. Over time, inclusive behaviors become part of everyday routines. This process strengthens the impact of diversity and inclusion.

In general, the literature shows that D&I outcomes depend on many interacting factors. Structural systems, cultural norms, and leadership behaviors all influence these outcomes. Effective D&I programs require alignment between policies, leadership practices, and daily interactions.

When this alignment exists, diversity becomes a real organizational asset. It is not only a demographic characteristic of the workforce. Instead, it becomes a driver of creativity, collaboration, and innovation.

1.7 Research Gaps and Future Directions

Although many studies examine Diversity and Inclusion (D&I), important research gaps still exist. These gaps limit our understanding of how D&I programs influence performance and innovation.

One important gap concerns research design. Many studies use cross-sectional data. This means they collect data at one specific moment. These studies provide useful information,

but they cannot show long-term change. They do not explain how inclusion develops over time.

Longitudinal research is therefore necessary. Longitudinal studies follow organizations for longer periods. They can show how D&I programs influence culture and behavior over time (Hasan et al., 2021). Without this type of research, it is difficult to evaluate the long-term success of D&I initiatives.

Another research gap concerns intersectionality. Many studies examine gender or ethnicity separately. However, real life experiences are more complex. People belong to multiple social groups at the same time.

For example, a woman in construction may also belong to an ethnic minority group. She may also have a different socioeconomic background. These combined identities influence workplace experiences. However, many studies do not examine these interactions (Bailey et al., 2022).

Research on construction often focuses on gender inequality. These studies show that women face barriers in technical fields (Bryce et al., 2019; Aydin & Erbil, 2022). However, fewer studies examine how race, disability, or class interact with gender.

Future research should therefore adopt intersectional frameworks. These frameworks can better represent the complexity of modern workplaces.

Another limitation concerns measurement tools. Many organizations measure diversity using simple indicators. For example, they count the number of women or minority employees. Some organizations also use employee satisfaction surveys.

However, these indicators do not measure deeper aspects of inclusion. They do not show whether employees feel safe, respected, or empowered. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) explain that this problem often leads to symbolic diversity programs.

Future research must develop better measurement systems. These systems should include multiple dimensions. For example, they should measure equity, psychological safety, communication quality, and innovation outcomes.

Another research gap concerns structural equity. Some studies show that equitable systems improve performance (Inuwa, 2017a; Mahdi Abaker et al., 2023). However, few studies explain how specific organizational reforms create equity.

For example, transparent promotion systems or fair workload distribution may improve inclusion. Yet more research is needed to understand these mechanisms.

Leadership is another important research area. Many studies show that leadership commitment is necessary for successful D&I programs (Gupta, 2019; Baker et al., 2023). However, few studies examine the everyday behaviors of leaders.

Future research should explore how leaders create psychological safety. It should also examine how leaders encourage participation and reduce power imbalances.

Technology also creates new research questions. Digital tools are increasingly used in modern workplaces. These tools include communication platforms, remote collaboration systems, and artificial intelligence.

However, little research examines how these technologies influence inclusion or knowledge sharing. Hermansyah (2023) suggests that digital communication tools can improve transparency and collaboration. At the same time, technology may also create new inequalities if access is not equal.

Finally, geographical diversity in research is limited. Most studies focus on a small number of countries. These include Australia, Europe, and the United States. As a result, global understanding of D&I is incomplete (Chan, 2013; Keegan, 2021).

Future research should examine D&I in different cultural and institutional contexts. Comparative international studies can provide valuable insights.

In conclusion, future research should use multiple research methods and longitudinal designs. It should include intersectional analysis and better measurement tools. It should also examine structural equity, leadership behavior, and technological change.

By addressing these gaps, researchers can develop stronger evidence for effective D&I strategies. This knowledge can help organizations design programs that support sustainable inclusion, better performance, and continuous innovation.

2. Diversity and Inclusion as Drivers of Organizational Performance and Innovation: A Conceptual Synthesis.

Main Idea

Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) are very important ideas in modern organizational studies. Many organizations today work in global and complex environments. Their employees come from many different backgrounds. Workers may differ in gender, ethnicity, age, culture, and education. Because of this situation, diversity has become a common feature of modern workplaces. In the past, organizations focused mostly on equality rules and legal compliance. Today, many organizations see diversity as part of their strategy for better performance, innovation, and long-term sustainability.

However, research shows that diversity alone is not enough. Simply having different people in a workplace does not automatically improve results. Diversity can help organizations only when it is combined with inclusion. Inclusion means that all employees feel respected, safe, and able to participate in decisions. Inclusive structures, supportive leadership, and fair rules help employees share ideas and work together (Kirton & Greene, 2021). Because of this, many researchers now focus on the conditions that allow diversity to work effectively in organizations.

Even though many organizations use diversity programs, inequalities still exist. Many workplaces continue to show structural and cultural barriers. This situation is clear in male-dominated sectors such as construction, engineering, and technical professions. In these sectors, women and minority groups often face discrimination and limited career opportunities (Arditi et al., 2013; Bryce et al., 2019). Cultural expectations and stereotypes often shape how people see leadership and competence. These ideas create barriers for employees who do not fit traditional norms.

Many organizations have formal diversity policies. However, informal practices often continue to exclude some employees. For example, important decisions may happen in informal networks or social spaces where some workers are not included. As a result, a gap appears between official policies and real everyday experience in the workplace.

Another issue in the literature is a clear paradox. Many organizations say that diversity improves creativity, innovation, and team performance. At the same time, research shows that the results of diversity depend strongly on context. In many cases, diversity programs remain symbolic. They exist mainly to show compliance or social responsibility. They do

not change real power relations inside organizations (Baker, French, & Ali, 2021). When diversity initiatives are superficial, they may create frustration, resistance, or misunderstanding among employees.

Another important factor is intersectionality. Employees do not experience work through only one identity. Each person has multiple identities such as gender, ethnicity, class, age, or disability. These identities interact and create different experiences for each employee (Bailey et al., 2022). For example, a woman from a minority background may face both gender and ethnic discrimination. Traditional diversity policies often focus on only one dimension of inequality. Because of this, they may fail to address complex experiences of disadvantage.

For this reason, modern research emphasizes the importance of inclusion. Inclusion is the process that allows diversity to create positive outcomes. In inclusive environments employees feel psychological safety. Psychological safety means that people can speak freely, share ideas, and express concerns without fear. Workers can question existing practices and suggest new solutions. This environment helps teams solve problems and generate innovative ideas.

On the other hand, exclusion creates silence and fear. Employees may avoid sharing ideas or criticism. Learning becomes limited. Creativity also decreases. In these conditions, diversity cannot produce positive results.

This paper therefore presents a conceptual synthesis of the literature on diversity and inclusion. The aim is to explain how diversity, inclusion, and equity interact to influence organizational performance and innovation. The paper integrates structural, cultural, and relational perspectives. It also presents D&I as a continuous learning process rather than a simple policy. Organizations must adapt over time. They must align formal rules with daily practices. Only then can diversity and inclusion create real and sustainable organizational change.

2.1 Understanding Diversity and Inclusion: Organizational Culture, Social Identity and Structural Barriers in the Workplace

Diversity and inclusion are related but different concepts. Diversity describes the variety of people inside an organization. Employees may differ in gender, race, age, culture, education,

and professional experience. Diversity also includes less visible characteristics such as values, skills, and thinking styles.

Inclusion has a different meaning. Inclusion describes how people feel inside the organization. Employees feel included when they are respected, valued, and able to participate in decisions. Inclusion is therefore a social and relational experience (Kirton & Greene, 2021). This difference is important. An organization can be diverse but still not inclusive.

Research shows that numerical diversity alone cannot reduce inequality. If organizations do not change structures and cultures, diversity may even reinforce existing hierarchies. For example, minority employees may be present in small numbers but remain excluded from leadership positions.

Social identity theory helps explain these processes. According to this theory, people classify themselves and others into social groups. These groups influence perceptions of belonging, trust, and competence. Individuals often favor members of their own group. At the same time, they may distrust or exclude people from other groups.

These processes are strong in male-dominated sectors. In industries such as construction and engineering, traditional masculine norms shape workplace culture (Chan, 2013). These norms influence how people define leadership, authority, and professional competence. Research shows that women and minority groups often experience informal exclusion in these environments. They may face stereotypes, limited networks, and fewer career opportunities (Arditi et al., 2013; Bryce et al., 2019).

Intersectionality adds another layer to the analysis. Individuals experience inequality through multiple social identities. Gender, ethnicity, disability, and socioeconomic background interact in complex ways. These interactions create unique experiences of disadvantage.

For example, women from ethnic minority backgrounds often face additional barriers. Similarly, employees with disabilities may face structural obstacles that limit participation. Diversity policies that focus only on gender representation cannot address these complex realities (Bailey et al., 2022; English & Hay, 2015). Effective inclusion therefore requires deeper structural change.

Another important concept is psychological safety. Psychological safety describes a shared belief that team members can express ideas without negative consequences. In teams with

strong psychological safety, employees speak openly. They discuss problems and suggest new ideas.

Research shows that psychological safety improves learning, collaboration, and innovation. Teams become more creative because people combine different perspectives (Fritz & Gresham, 2024). However, hierarchical and rigid cultures often reduce psychological safety. In such environments employees may fear criticism or punishment.

Leadership plays a crucial role in this process. Leaders influence organizational norms and behaviors. They shape communication patterns and decision processes. Inclusive leaders encourage participation and respect diverse opinions.

Gupta (2019) argues that women leaders often adopt participatory and relational leadership styles. These styles support collaboration and learning. However, women leaders may face structural barriers and resistance inside organizations.

Baker, French, and Ali (2021) also argue that many diversity programs remain symbolic. Organizations may promote diversity values publicly but fail to change internal structures. Without structural reform, diversity policies cannot create meaningful change.

For this reason, diversity and inclusion should be understood as continuous processes. Organizations must constantly examine their practices and cultures. Inclusion requires ongoing learning and adaptation.

In this perspective, diversity offers a wide range of experiences and knowledge. Inclusion activates this potential. When both elements work together, organizations can improve performance, creativity, and long-term sustainability.

2.2 Diversity and Inclusion as Determinants of Team Performance: The role of Inclusive Leadership, Organizational Culture and Workplace Structures.

The relationship between Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) and team performance is complex. Many factors influence this relationship. These factors include organizational culture, leadership behavior, and workplace structure. Diversity means that employees have different backgrounds. These backgrounds may include gender, ethnicity, education, experience, and culture. Diverse teams bring many ideas and perspectives. However, diversity alone does not guarantee better team performance. Many studies show that inclusion is the key factor that helps diversity improve team results (Kundu et al., 2020; Fritz & Gresham, 2024).

Diverse teams have many cognitive resources. Members may think in different ways. They may also use different problem-solving approaches. Because of this, teams can analyze problems from many perspectives. This situation can improve decision making. Diverse teams are also less likely to experience groupthink. Groupthink happens when team members think in the same way and avoid disagreement. In diverse teams, employees often challenge existing ideas. This process can help teams adapt to complex and uncertain environments (Kundu et al., 2020).

However, diversity also creates challenges. Team members may have different communication styles. Cultural differences can also cause misunderstandings. Without inclusive practices, diversity may increase conflict. Employees may feel excluded or ignored. When this happens, team cohesion becomes weaker. Team performance may decline instead of improving. For this reason, organizations must create inclusive environments where all employees feel respected and valued.

Research from many sectors supports this argument. Studies in healthcare and education show that inclusive workplaces produce positive outcomes. Employees who feel included report higher job satisfaction. They also show stronger commitment to the organization. These employees are more motivated to perform well in their roles (Gurková et al., 2021; Kamau et al., 2021). When employees feel respected and valued, they become more engaged in their work.

Employee engagement is closely related to performance. Engaged employees are more willing to contribute effort to their tasks. They collaborate more easily with colleagues. They also support team goals. Inuwa (2017a, 2017b) explains that perceptions of fairness and equality strengthen the relationship between employees and organizations. This relationship is often called the psychological contract. When employees trust their organization, they work harder and support team success.

On the other hand, exclusion reduces team effectiveness. Some industries still have strong traditional cultures. Examples include construction and engineering. These sectors are often male-dominated. Cultural norms may discourage open communication. Women and minority employees may feel marginalized. Their ideas may not receive the same attention as others (George & Loosemore, 2019). In these environments, informal networks often influence decision making. These networks may exclude employees who are different from the dominant group (Bryce et al., 2019).

As a result, organizations cannot fully use the benefits of diversity. Employees from minority groups may hesitate to express their ideas. They may feel that their opinions are not valued. This situation limits creativity and problem solving within the team. It also maintains existing power differences between employees.

Leadership is a very important factor in this process. Leaders influence how employees interact with each other. Inclusive leaders create environments where employees feel safe to express their ideas. They encourage respectful communication and equal participation in discussions (Gupta, 2019). When leaders support inclusion, employees feel comfortable sharing knowledge and experiences. This behavior improves collaboration and learning within teams.

Inclusive leaders also encourage constructive disagreement. They allow employees to question ideas and propose alternatives. This approach helps teams explore different solutions to problems. However, not all organizations implement inclusive leadership effectively. Some organizations only create symbolic diversity policies. These policies may include diversity statements or representation targets. However, they do not change everyday practices.

Baker, French, and Ali (2021) explain that many D&I programs remain superficial. Organizations may promote diversity in their public communication. However, internal power structures remain unchanged. Decision-making processes may still favor dominant groups. When this happens, diversity initiatives have limited impact on team performance. Another challenge involves intersectionality. Intersectionality means that employees may experience multiple forms of disadvantage at the same time. For example, a person may face discrimination because of gender and ethnicity. Other factors may include disability or socioeconomic background. These overlapping identities can create additional barriers in the workplace (Bailey et al., 2022).

Employees who face these barriers may struggle to participate fully in team activities. They may feel less confident to express their opinions. This situation can reduce team cohesion and productivity. For this reason, organizations must design inclusive policies that recognize different employee experiences.

Overall, research shows that inclusion is the key factor that connects diversity with performance. Diversity alone only changes the composition of the workforce. Inclusion changes how employees interact and collaborate. Effective D&I programs create

environments where employees feel safe, respected, and valued. In these environments, teams can use their diverse knowledge and experiences to improve performance.

2.3 Diversity, Inclusion, and Psychological Safety as Drivers of Innovation in Modern Organizations

Innovation is an important goal for modern organizations. Innovation helps organizations adapt to change and remain competitive. Many scholars describe innovation as a social process. It develops through interaction between employees. It also depends on knowledge sharing and organizational culture (Gutierrez, 2023).

Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) programs can support innovation. Diverse teams include employees with different experiences and perspectives. These differences may involve culture, gender, education, or professional background. When people with different ideas work together, they can generate creative solutions to problems.

However, diversity alone does not automatically produce innovation. Research shows that inclusive environments are necessary. Inclusion allows employees to share their ideas openly. It also encourages discussion and constructive disagreement. Without inclusion, employees may hesitate to propose new ideas.

A key concept in this process is psychological safety. Psychological safety means that employees feel comfortable expressing their ideas. They do not fear criticism, punishment, or rejection. When psychological safety exists, employees are more willing to take risks. They may propose unusual ideas or test new solutions (Fritz & Gresham, 2024).

Psychological safety is closely connected to leadership. Inclusive leaders listen carefully to employees. They encourage participation in decision making. They also respect different viewpoints. Gupta (2019) argues that inclusive leaders transform differences into opportunities for creativity. They create environments where employees feel confident sharing ideas.

Gender diversity in leadership also influences innovation. Research shows that women leaders often use collaborative leadership styles. They encourage teamwork and knowledge sharing. These behaviors support innovation because employees feel comfortable contributing their ideas (Baker et al., 2023).

Hernandez-Nicolas et al. (2022) found that companies with women in senior leadership positions often show stronger innovation performance. These organizations may also

achieve better financial results. However, gender diversity in leadership is still limited in many industries.

Male-dominated sectors such as construction and engineering often maintain traditional workplace cultures. These cultures may discourage women from participating fully in decision making. Stereotypes about leadership roles may also restrict opportunities for women and minority employees (Bryce et al., 2019; Galea et al., 2015). When organizations exclude these perspectives, they lose valuable ideas that could support innovation.

Technology also plays an important role in modern organizations. New digital tools can improve communication and collaboration. Hermansyah (2023) highlights the potential of communicative artificial intelligence systems. These systems can support knowledge sharing and information exchange between employees.

However, technology alone does not create inclusion. Organizations must ensure equal access to technological resources. Employees must also feel comfortable using these tools to share ideas. Without inclusive cultures, technology may reinforce existing inequalities. Dominant groups may control information and decision making, while marginalized employees remain excluded.

Another important issue is the implementation of diversity policies. Some organizations focus only on demographic representation. They may increase the number of women or minority employees. However, they do not change internal decision-making structures. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) argue that such policies often remain symbolic.

When diversity initiatives focus only on numbers, innovation benefits remain limited. Employees from minority groups may still lack influence in important decisions. They may also remain outside key professional networks. As a result, organizations fail to use their full creative potential.

In conclusion, diversity and inclusion play an important role in innovation. Diverse teams provide a wide range of ideas and experiences. However, these resources become valuable only when organizations create inclusive environments. Inclusion encourages participation, trust, and knowledge sharing. Psychological safety and inclusive leadership help employees express their ideas freely.

When organizations combine diversity with inclusion, they create conditions that support creativity and learning. These conditions allow teams to generate innovative solutions to complex problems. In this way, D&I programs contribute not only to innovation but also to long-term organizational success and resilience.

2.4 Explanation of the Model

The model explains how workforce diversity works inside organizations. Diversity means that employees have different backgrounds, ideas, and experiences. These differences can give many new perspectives to a company. But diversity alone does not automatically create good results. Many studies show that diversity needs inclusion to work well. In this model inclusion is the key connecting factor. Inclusion links diversity with performance and innovation.

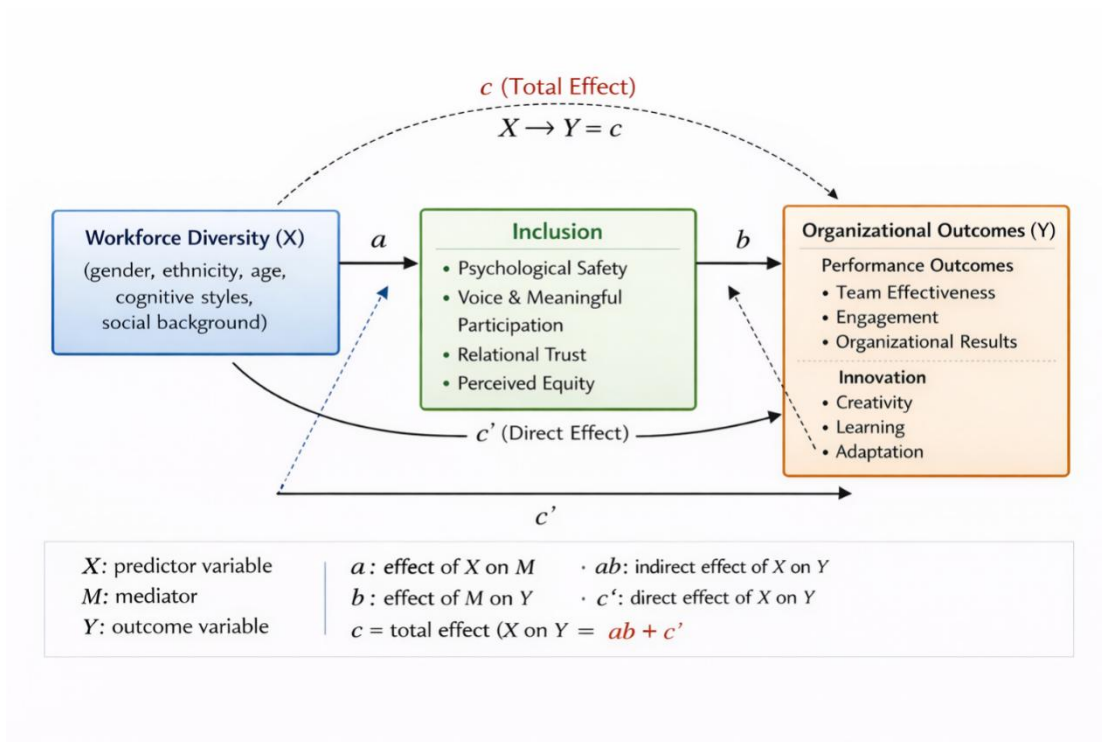
Inclusion means that employees feel respected and safe. They can speak freely and share ideas. They can question old practices and suggest new solutions. This situation supports teamwork and learning inside the organization. In this way diversity becomes real participation and shared value. Many researchers support this idea (Kirton & Greene, 2021; Fritz & Gresham, 2024).

The model also includes moderating factors. The first factors are organizational culture and leadership. Culture shapes daily behavior and workplace norms. Leadership influences decisions and employee participation. Supportive leaders can strengthen inclusion. Negative cultures and rigid hierarchies can weaken inclusion. This problem often appears in male dominated industries (Chan, 2013; George & Loosemore, 2019).

The model also considers intersectionality and structural inequality. Employees have different identities and social positions. Gender ethnicity disability age and class can shape experience. Some workers have more opportunities and voice. Others face barriers even inside inclusive organizations (Bailey et al., 2022).

The final outcomes in the model are performance and innovation. These outcomes depend on how well the elements work together. Organizations need real commitment to diversity and inclusion. Symbolic programs without change will not create results. Companies must connect values structures and daily behavior. This process requires long term effort and clear leadership.

When alignment exists organizations achieve better innovation and performance. Sustainable diversity and inclusion practices create stronger teams and better decisions over time (Baker, French, & Ali, 2021; Mahdi Abaker et al., 2023). This supports organizations.



2.5 Research Propositions

Research Proposition 1

Workforce diversity means that employees are different from each other. These differences can include gender, ethnicity, age, education, culture, and social background. People may also have different ways of thinking and solving problems. Many organizations today try to increase diversity in their workforce. They believe that diversity can improve performance and creativity. However, diversity alone does not automatically create positive results in an organization. When diversity exists without support, problems may appear inside teams. For example, employees may feel excluded or not respected. Communication problems may also appear between different groups of workers.

For this reason, organizations need inclusive structures and practices. Inclusion means that employees feel respected and accepted in their workplace. It also means that everyone has the opportunity to participate in discussions and decisions. When employees feel included, they are more willing to share ideas and work with others. Inclusive practices include fair promotion systems, open communication, and equal opportunities for all employees. These practices help diverse teams work together more effectively.

Research shows that diversity produces positive results only when inclusion is present. Without inclusive policies, diversity may create tension instead of cooperation. Therefore, organizations must combine diversity with strong inclusion strategies. This combination helps employees use their different experiences and knowledge in productive ways. In this way, diversity becomes a real advantage for the organization (Kirton & Greene, 2021).

Research Proposition 2

Many industries are still dominated by men. Construction and engineering are clear examples of these sectors. In such industries, women and minority groups often face many challenges. These challenges may include stereotypes, cultural barriers, and limited career opportunities. Even when organizations introduce diversity policies, these problems may still exist in everyday work practices.

Structural barriers also limit diversity initiatives. For example, recruitment processes may favor traditional career paths that are more common among men. Informal networks inside organizations may also exclude women or minority employees. In some cases, promotion systems are not fully transparent. These factors create an environment where diversity policies exist in theory but not always in practice.

Cultural norms inside organizations can also affect diversity outcomes. Some workplaces still value traditional masculine behaviors, such as competition or long working hours. These expectations can make it harder for different groups of employees to succeed. As a result, diversity initiatives may not produce the expected results.

Research shows that organizations must address these structural and cultural barriers to make diversity effective. Without real cultural change, diversity programs remain symbolic. They may improve representation but not inclusion. Therefore, organizations must focus on changing both policies and workplace culture to support diversity (Arditi et al., 2013; Bryce et al., 2019).

Research Proposition 3

The relationship between diversity and organizational performance is complex. Many organizations believe that diverse teams automatically perform better. However, research shows that this relationship depends on the organizational context. In some cases, diversity improves creativity and problem solving. In other cases, it may create misunderstandings or conflicts.

The success of diversity initiatives depends on how they are implemented. Some organizations adopt diversity programs mainly to follow regulations or improve their public image. These programs are often symbolic and do not change everyday practices. When employees notice this gap between policy and reality, they may lose trust in management.

Symbolic diversity programs can also increase tension inside teams. Employees may feel that diversity policies are not sincere or fair. This situation can reduce cooperation and communication. As a result, the expected benefits of diversity may not appear.

Effective diversity initiatives require real organizational commitment. Leaders must support inclusive practices and encourage collaboration between employees. Organizations must also create systems that promote fairness and equal participation. When diversity policies are integrated into daily organizational practices, they are more likely to improve performance and innovation (Baker, French, & Ali, 2021).

Research Proposition 4

Employees do not experience diversity and inclusion in the same way. Each person has multiple identities that shape their experiences at work. These identities may include gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and socioeconomic background. The interaction of these identities creates different experiences for different employees.

This idea is known as intersectionality. It explains how different social categories combine and influence workplace experiences. For example, a woman from a minority ethnic group may face different challenges than a man from the same group. Similarly, employees with disabilities may experience additional barriers in the workplace.

Intersectional dynamics affect how employees perceive inclusion. Some employees may feel fully included in organizational activities, while others may feel marginalized. If

organizations ignore these differences, diversity initiatives may not address the real challenges faced by employees.

For this reason, organizations must consider intersectionality when designing diversity and inclusion policies. Policies should recognize the different needs and experiences of employees. Inclusive workplaces must support all individuals and provide equal opportunities for participation and development. When organizations understand intersectional dynamics, they can create more effective and fair diversity initiatives (Bailey et al., 2022).

Research Proposition 5

Inclusion plays a central role in connecting diversity with positive organizational outcomes. Diversity increases the number of perspectives and experiences inside teams. However, these perspectives can only be used effectively when employees feel safe and respected in their workplace.

Psychological safety is an important element of inclusion. It means that employees feel comfortable sharing ideas without fear of criticism or punishment. When psychological safety exists, employees are more willing to speak openly and participate in discussions. This environment supports collaboration and learning.

Trust is another important factor. Employees who trust their colleagues and managers are more likely to cooperate and share knowledge. Equitable participation is also necessary. All team members should have equal opportunities to contribute to decisions and projects.

When inclusion exists, diverse teams can use their different perspectives in productive ways. This situation improves problem solving, creativity, and innovation. Without inclusion, diversity may remain unused or even create conflicts inside teams.

Therefore, inclusion acts as a mediating mechanism between diversity and organizational outcomes. It transforms diversity from a simple demographic characteristic into a valuable organizational resource. Organizations that promote inclusion are more likely to achieve better team performance and innovation outcomes (Kirton & Greene, 2021).

3. Measurement map (mediators/ moderators)

3.1 Workforce Diversity as an Antecedent Condition

Workforce diversity is an important idea in Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) research. Many studies discuss diversity in modern organizations. This is especially true in sectors such as construction and engineering. These sectors often have demographic imbalance and structural inequality. Diversity means that workers have different characteristics. These characteristics include gender, ethnicity, age, disability, education, and career background. Workers may also have different experiences and skills.

However, diversity should not be seen as a final result. It is not an outcome by itself. Many studies show that diversity is a condition that exists before other processes start. Diversity creates a context in organizations. This context influences how people work together. It also affects innovation and performance. Diversity can create positive results. At the same time, it can create challenges. Because of this, diversity alone is not enough to improve organizational effectiveness. Other factors must also exist. These factors include inclusion, leadership, and organizational culture. In this sense, workforce diversity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for success.

Research from the construction sector shows strong inequality in workforce composition. Women and other marginalized groups are often underrepresented. National labor statistics show this imbalance clearly. For example, women represent a very small percentage of workers in construction roles in countries such as Australia and China. The situation is even more visible in technical and leadership positions (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022; China National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). These numbers show that the problem is not random. It reflects deeper structural issues inside the industry.

These patterns are connected with long-term institutional and cultural factors. Construction work has strong traditions and occupational norms. These norms influence who enters the profession and who stays in it. They also influence who can move to leadership roles. Historical exclusion also plays an important role. Many groups had limited access to these

professions in the past. As a result, the workforce composition today reflects systemic structures. It is not only the result of personal choice.

Many studies describe barriers that reduce workforce diversity in construction and similar sectors. Research about women's careers in construction shows many structural problems. One problem is limited access to informal professional networks. Networks are very important for career advancement. Another problem is biased promotion practices. Women may not receive the same opportunities as men. Work arrangements are also often inflexible. Construction jobs may require long hours or travel. These conditions make it difficult to balance work and family life. In addition, many construction sites have male-dominated cultures. This environment may discourage women from entering or staying in the field (Arditi et al., 2013; Bryce et al., 2019; Aydin & Erbil, 2022).

These barriers appear in many stages of a professional career. They can start at the education stage. Young women may choose not to study engineering or construction. They may believe that the field is physically demanding or unstable. They may also think that it does not support work–life balance. Carnemolla and Galea (2021) explain that these beliefs influence career decisions early in life. As a result, many women never enter the sector. This process strengthens occupational segregation long before diversity policies can have an effect.

Diversity barriers also affect different social groups in different ways. Diversity is not only about gender. It also relates to ethnicity, disability, and socioeconomic background. These factors often intersect. For example, research about disability employment shows many difficulties in construction. Jobs may not be designed to support workers with disabilities. Safety regulations may also be interpreted very strictly. Organizations may not be willing to adapt workplaces or job tasks (Bailey et al., 2022).

Studies about ethnic minority women in construction show similar patterns. Black women or women from minority groups often face both gender and racial stereotypes. These stereotypes influence how others evaluate their competence and legitimacy. Workers may feel excluded from networks or decision-making processes (English & Hay, 2015; Keegan, 2021). These examples show that diversity is complex. It is not one single dimension. Instead, it includes many layers of identity and inequality.

Social identity theory helps explain why diversity remains limited in some sectors. According to this perspective, organizations often reproduce dominant cultural norms. In construction, these norms are often masculine. Chan (2013) explains that the “ideal worker” in construction is often seen as physically strong, emotionally tough, and always available

for work. Workers who do not fit this image may face disadvantages. Recruitment processes, performance evaluations, and everyday interactions may reinforce these expectations.

Over time, these norms create self-reinforcing patterns. Organizations may continue hiring people who look similar to existing workers. As a result, diversity remains low. Lack of diversity becomes normal. Alternative identities are seen as unusual or problematic. Because of this, diversity gaps should not be understood as accidental results. They are produced by structural and cultural systems.

Even with these barriers, research also shows the potential benefits of workforce diversity. Diverse teams bring different experiences and perspectives. Workers may use different approaches to solve problems. This variety can improve decision making. It can also help organizations adapt to complex environments (Kundu et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2019). In knowledge-based and project-based industries, this diversity of ideas can be especially valuable.

However, these benefits do not appear automatically. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) explain that many organizations expect quick positive results from diversity policies. They assume that simply hiring a diverse workforce will improve performance. This assumption is too simple. Diversity may also increase complexity inside teams. Workers may have different communication styles or expectations. Coordination may become more difficult. Misunderstandings or conflicts may also appear if inclusive practices do not exist.

The construction industry is a useful example for understanding diversity as an antecedent condition. Many construction projects are temporary. Teams are often created quickly for a specific project. Organizations may prefer workers they already know. They may also rely on traditional networks when selecting staff (Baker et al., 2021). This practice reduces opportunities for new or underrepresented groups to enter the workforce.

Research also shows that career pathways in construction remain strongly gendered. Hickey and Cui (2020) and Hickey et al. (2022) explain that women often leave technical roles after some years. Others remain in mid-level positions without promotion. This pattern creates vertical segregation inside organizations.

At the same time, recent studies show some positive changes. Women leaders and managers can help support diversity. They may encourage more inclusive practices. They may also challenge traditional norms in organizations. Baker et al. (2023) show that women leaders often support the entry and advancement of other women.

However, these efforts cannot solve structural problems alone. Leadership support is important, but the overall workforce composition still depends on larger social systems. Education systems, labor markets, and cultural expectations all influence diversity pipelines. From a conceptual perspective, defining workforce diversity as an antecedent condition has two main benefits. First, it shows that diversity is an input variable. It is shaped by social structures, education systems, and recruitment practices. Second, it reminds researchers that diversity does not automatically create positive results. The relationship between diversity and outcomes such as performance or innovation is complex. It depends on mediating and moderating factors. This idea supports arguments that criticize simple “business case” approaches to diversity (Kirton & Greene, 2021).

In research models, workforce diversity is often measured as a multidimensional concept. It includes visible characteristics such as gender and ethnicity. It also includes less visible factors such as education, career experience, and professional background. Researchers may examine gender representation at different hierarchical levels. They may also analyze minority representation in leadership roles or technical positions.

These indicators help describe the structural context of organizations. However, they do not automatically show effectiveness. Instead, they provide information about the starting conditions for inclusion and equity processes.

Overall, the literature shows that workforce diversity is a foundational condition for organizational performance and innovation. However, it is not a complete solution by itself. In male-dominated sectors such as construction, diversity is influenced by structural barriers, cultural norms, and institutional practices. These factors limit access and career progression for many groups.

Increasing diversity expands the pool of available talent and perspectives. However, this potential remains unused without inclusive environments. Organizations must create systems that support participation, fairness, and collaboration. Understanding diversity as an antecedent condition helps researchers and managers examine how inclusion, leadership, and organizational culture influence outcomes in diverse workplaces.

3.2 Inclusion as a Mediating Mechanism

Inclusion has an important role in research about Diversity and Inclusion (D&I). Many scholars see inclusion as the main mechanism that connects workforce diversity with real organizational results. Diversity means that workers have different backgrounds, identities, and experiences. For example, employees may differ in gender, culture, age, or education. Inclusion is different from diversity. Inclusion focuses on how people feel and how they experience their work environment. It shows if employees feel respected and valued in their organization.

Inclusion also shows if workers can participate in decisions and everyday activities. Employees must feel that their ideas matter. They must also feel that their voices are heard. Inclusion therefore describes the real experience of workers inside an organization. It shows how diversity works in practice. It also affects how employees understand their role in teams and in the wider organization.

Research shows that diversity alone does not guarantee positive results. Many organizations increase diversity but do not create inclusive environments. In these cases, diversity may stay only a structural characteristic. It does not automatically create better performance or innovation. Sometimes diversity without inclusion may even increase tension or inequality inside organizations.

Many studies explain that inclusion works as a bridge between diversity and organizational outcomes. Inclusion creates psychological safety, equal participation, and open communication. Psychological safety is very important for teamwork and learning. It means that employees feel safe to speak and share ideas. Workers can express opinions without fear of punishment or criticism. When psychological safety exists, employees can question decisions or propose new ideas.

Inclusive environments support these behaviors. Employees believe that their colleagues and managers will respect their opinions. This encourages people to participate in discussions and decision processes (Fritz & Gresham, 2024). When psychological safety does not exist, employees may stay silent. They may avoid sharing ideas or avoid challenging existing practices. This situation reduces creativity and limits the benefits of diversity.

Workers from minority or underrepresented groups are especially affected by this problem. These employees may feel pressure to adapt to dominant norms. They may hide their real

opinions or reduce participation in discussions. This behavior is called self-censorship. When it happens, organizations lose valuable knowledge and perspectives.

The importance of inclusion becomes even clearer in male-dominated industries. Construction and engineering are common examples. Research shows that women and minority employees often appear included in official policies. Organizations may have diversity programs or representation targets. However, these employees are sometimes excluded from informal networks or important decisions (Francis & Michielsens, 2021; Baker, French, & Ali, 2021).

This situation shows that inclusion is not only about presence or representation. Employees may be present in the organization but still feel excluded from power structures. True inclusion requires changes in everyday interactions and organizational culture. It also requires fair access to opportunities and professional networks.

Inclusion therefore affects not only results but also the meaning of diversity itself. When inclusion is strong, diversity becomes a real resource. When inclusion is weak, diversity may remain symbolic and ineffective.

Equity and fairness are also important parts of inclusion. Employees must believe that rules and decisions are fair. Transparent procedures and equal reward systems help create this belief. Research on job equity shows that fairness improves motivation and commitment (Inuwa, 2017a; Inuwa, 2017b). Workers who feel treated fairly are more willing to contribute effort and support organizational goals.

Fairness also strengthens trust between employees and managers. When people trust their organization, they become more engaged in their work. They also cooperate more with colleagues. In contrast, perceived unfairness reduces motivation. It weakens trust and damages the psychological relationship between workers and the organization.

For employees who already belong to marginalized groups, unfair treatment is even more harmful. These employees may feel excluded from career opportunities or recognition. As a result, they may lose motivation and commitment. In this way, equity becomes a key foundation of inclusion.

Another important role of inclusion is its effect on emotional attachment to the organization. Researchers call this affective organizational commitment. Cao et al. (2020) studied construction professionals and found that commitment mediates the relationship between work–family conflict and job outcomes.

Their research does not focus directly on diversity, but it still provides useful insights. Work–family conflict often affects women and caregivers more strongly. Long working hours and rigid schedules can create serious challenges in construction work. Inclusive policies can help reduce these problems.

Flexible working arrangements are one example. Supportive supervision is another example. Organizations can also recognize non-traditional career paths. These practices help employees balance professional and personal responsibilities. As a result, workers feel more committed to the organization.

Higher commitment leads to better performance and stronger retention. Employees who feel committed are more willing to invest extra effort in their work. They also stay longer in their organizations. This process shows again how inclusion mediates the relationship between diversity and outcomes.

However, inclusion does not affect all employees in the same way. Different identities interact and shape individual experiences. Gender, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation all influence perceptions of inclusion. This perspective is called intersectionality. Bailey et al. (2022) show that workers with disabilities in construction often face hidden barriers. Organizations may claim to support inclusion. However, rigid job designs and assumptions about productivity create exclusion in practice. Employees with disabilities may therefore struggle to participate fully in work activities.

English and Hay (2015) present another example. They study Black South African women in professional environments. Their research shows that gender policies alone cannot solve racial inequalities. Women may benefit from gender programs, but racial discrimination may continue. This situation shows that inclusion policies must address multiple identities at the same time.

Leadership also plays a major role in creating inclusive environments. Leaders shape organizational culture through their behavior. Inclusive leaders encourage participation and respect different opinions. They listen to employees and support open communication.

Gupta (2019) suggests that women leaders often use collaborative and relational leadership styles. These approaches support teamwork and reduce hierarchical barriers. Inclusive leadership can therefore strengthen participation and trust inside organizations.

Research in construction and engineering also supports this idea. Leaders who mentor minority employees and challenge exclusionary norms help connect diversity with positive

outcomes (Baker et al., 2023). However, leadership support must go beyond symbolic statements.

Organizations must also align their systems and policies with inclusive values. Performance metrics, promotion systems, and accountability structures must support inclusion. When leaders talk about inclusion but do not change institutional practices, inclusion remains weak.

Many diversity initiatives fail for this reason. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) show that diversity programs in project-based organizations often focus only on representation. They emphasize numbers rather than real cultural change. Organizations may increase diversity statistics but keep the same power structures.

In these situations, diversity does not improve performance or innovation. Employees may even become skeptical about diversity initiatives. This skepticism reduces trust and weakens inclusion further.

Researchers also emphasize that inclusion must be measured carefully. It cannot be captured by a single indicator. Instead, scholars must use multiple dimensions. These include psychological safety, fairness, voice, belonging, and opportunity.

Karakhan et al. (2021) highlight the importance of reliable indicators in the construction industry. Measuring inclusion helps organizations understand workforce sustainability and employee well-being. It also allows researchers to test whether inclusion truly connects diversity with outcomes like innovation or retention.

Another important feature of inclusion is time. Inclusion does not appear immediately after a policy change. It develops slowly through everyday interactions and organizational learning.

Shields et al. (2015) explain that reward systems and performance management play a key role in this process. Organizations must recognize and reward inclusive behaviors. When inclusive actions are rewarded repeatedly, they become part of organizational culture.

However, when exclusionary behavior is ignored, inclusion deteriorates. Diversity may then create frustration instead of value. Employees may feel that diversity programs are symbolic rather than meaningful.

From a theoretical perspective, the concept of inclusion helps researchers understand how diversity creates value. Earlier models often assumed a simple relationship between diversity and performance. However, modern research shows that this relationship is complex.

Inclusion explains the mechanisms behind this relationship. It focuses on social processes such as power, communication, and organizational culture (Kirton & Greene, 2021). Through this perspective, diversity becomes meaningful only when employees can truly participate and contribute.

In conclusion, many studies support the idea that inclusion is the main mediating mechanism between workforce diversity and organizational outcomes. Inclusion influences how employees express ideas and share knowledge. It also shapes psychological safety, commitment, and engagement.

In industries with strong inequalities, such as construction and engineering, inclusion becomes especially important. Without inclusion, diversity initiatives remain symbolic and ineffective. With inclusion, diversity can become a source of creativity, innovation, and organizational sustainability.

3.3 Organizational Culture and Leadership as Moderating Factors

Organizational culture and leadership are very important factors in the relationship between diversity, inclusion, and organizational outcomes. They influence the environment where diversity and inclusion practices operate. They also shape how people understand and apply these practices in everyday work. Inclusion helps diversity create positive value in organizations. However, the strength of this effect depends strongly on the culture of the organization and on leadership behavior. Culture and leadership do not directly create innovation or performance results. Instead, they shape how diversity and inclusion work in practice. Research shows that the same diversity programs may have different results in different organizations. These differences often come from cultural norms and leadership styles.

Organizational culture refers to shared values, beliefs, and rules inside an organization. It also includes common behaviors and expectations about how employees should act. Culture tells employees what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in the workplace. In some industries, such as construction and engineering, culture has historically been male dominated. These sectors often value physical strength, long working hours, and strong hierarchy (Chan, 2013; George & Loosemore, 2019). These cultural norms influence how people evaluate competence and leadership ability. They also influence how employees see

commitment and professional success. Because of these norms, some employees may feel excluded even when diversity policies exist. Therefore, culture can reduce the positive effects of inclusion if organizations do not challenge traditional norms.

Research studies show that organizational culture can strongly influence inclusion outcomes. Arditi et al. (2013) studied the Swedish construction sector. They found that managers often evaluate leadership using gender stereotypes. Behaviors connected with male workers are often seen as more appropriate for leadership positions. This situation creates barriers for women in management roles. Bryce et al. (2019) studied the Australian construction industry. They found that informal practices also create barriers. Networking after work and social meetings at construction sites are common practices. These activities often exclude women or make participation difficult. As a result, women may have fewer opportunities to build professional networks. This situation limits career development even when formal diversity policies exist. These examples show that policies alone cannot create real inclusion. Cultural practices inside organizations also matter.

Leadership influence becomes very clear when organizations implement diversity initiatives. Many organizations introduce diversity programs but fail to create real change. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) studied project-based organizations. They found that diversity initiatives are sometimes symbolic. Leaders support diversity publicly but do not change everyday practices. They often focus more on cost control, speed, and short-term results. In these situations, inclusion becomes a secondary priority. Employees notice this contradiction between official policies and real behavior. This gap weakens trust and engagement in the organization. When employees see that leaders do not truly support inclusion, diversity programs lose their effectiveness.

Organizational culture also affects communication patterns in the workplace. Communication style is very important for teamwork and productivity. Johari and Jha (2021) studied communication practices in construction organizations. They found that communication often reflects hierarchy and gender expectations. In some organizations, assertive behavior is valued more than cooperation. In these environments, employees may avoid expressing different opinions. Employees from minority groups may feel especially uncomfortable speaking openly. As a result, valuable ideas and knowledge remain unused. When employees do not feel safe to share their views, organizations cannot benefit from diversity.

The relationship between culture, leadership, and inclusion becomes more complex when intersectional inequalities exist. Employees have different identities such as gender, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation. Cultural norms may affect these groups in different ways. For example, research on disability in construction shows important challenges. Safety rules are very important in this industry. However, strict safety practices sometimes exclude workers with disabilities. Hasan and Kamardeen (2022) and Bailey et al. (2022) explain that safety systems often assume a standard worker profile. When organizations do not adapt procedures, employees with disabilities may face exclusion. In these cases, leadership decisions are very important. Leaders must decide whether to adapt rules to support inclusion or maintain rigid practices.

Organizational culture is not fixed or permanent. Culture changes slowly through everyday actions and leadership decisions. Galea et al. (2015) argue that gender equality policies require cultural support to work effectively. Written policies alone cannot create change. Leaders must demonstrate inclusive values in daily practices. They must reward inclusive behavior and challenge discriminatory practices. Over time, these actions can reshape organizational culture. When leaders consistently support inclusive practices, employees gradually adopt new norms. This process strengthens the positive effects of inclusion on performance and innovation.

Researchers also study culture and leadership as moderating factors using measurement tools. This approach helps explain why diversity programs work better in some organizations than others. Instead of assuming that inclusion has the same effect everywhere, scholars analyze contextual differences. These differences include leadership style, openness to change, and organizational maturity. Indicators such as inclusive leadership behavior and flexible cultural norms help researchers test these relationships. Karakhan et al. (2023) emphasize that workforce sustainability in construction depends on these factors. Structural diversity indicators alone cannot explain employee satisfaction and retention.

Leadership influence also appears in the adoption of new workplace technologies. Choi et al. (2017) studied wearable technologies in construction sites. They found that employees accept new technologies when leaders actively support them. Organizational support increases employee trust and willingness to use innovations. This example shows how leadership moderates the success of new initiatives. The same principle applies to diversity

and inclusion policies. When leaders support them strongly, employees are more likely to adopt inclusive behaviors.

From a theoretical perspective, culture and leadership highlight the contextual nature of diversity and inclusion processes. D&I initiatives do not operate independently from organizational environments. Instead, they interact with social norms, power structures, and leadership practices. This idea challenges simple assumptions that diversity automatically improves performance. Critical scholars argue that institutional context must always be considered (Kirton & Greene, 2021). Inclusion depends on everyday interactions and power relations within organizations.

3.4 Intersectionality and Structural Inequality as Contextual Moderators

Intersectionality and structural inequality are important ideas in diversity and inclusion research. They help explain why diversity programs do not affect all employees in the same way. Some workers benefit more than others. Some workers remain excluded even when organizations say they support inclusion. Because of this, researchers see intersectionality and structural inequality as contextual moderators. They shape how diversity and inclusion work inside organizations.

Organizational culture and leadership also influence inclusion. However, intersectionality focuses more on the connection between personal identity and social structures. People have many identities at the same time. For example, a person can be a woman, from a minority ethnic group, and also from a low socioeconomic background. These identities interact with each other. Because of this interaction, some people face more barriers in the workplace than others.

Research shows that diversity and inclusion policies do not affect everyone equally. The impact of these policies depends on the combination of identities that employees have. In organizations with long histories of inequality, some groups continue to face hidden barriers. Therefore, intersectionality is important for understanding why some inclusion policies lead to uneven results.

Intersectionality was first developed in critical social theory. The concept explains that people hold multiple identities at the same time. These identities include gender, race, class, disability, and sexual orientation. These identities interact with each other. Because of this interaction, people experience advantage or disadvantage in different ways.

In organizations, these identity intersections affect access to resources and opportunities. They influence how workers are seen by managers and colleagues. They also affect promotion chances and participation in decision making. Research in construction and engineering shows that women's experiences cannot be explained only by gender. Race, disability, and social class also influence workplace experiences (English & Hay, 2015; Bailey et al., 2022). For this reason, intersectionality helps explain who benefits from inclusion policies and who does not.

Structural inequality also plays an important role. Structural inequality refers to systems, rules, and practices that give advantages to some groups and disadvantages to others. Often these systems operate without clear intention. However, they still create unequal outcomes. In male-dominated industries such as construction, structural inequalities are very visible. Recruitment practices may favor certain groups. Job design may assume male physical characteristics. Health and safety rules may ignore the needs of diverse workers. Promotion systems may depend on informal networks (Hasan & Kamardeen, 2022; Bryce et al., 2019). These systems shape the level of diversity inside organizations.

These structures also influence how inclusion policies work. For example, mentoring programs may help employees who already have access to strong professional networks. Leadership programs may favor workers who already fit dominant cultural expectations. Instead of reducing inequality, these initiatives may unintentionally reinforce it.

Empirical research provides strong evidence for these problems. Bailey et al. (2022) studied disability employment in the construction sector. Their research shows that workers with disabilities often face exclusion. This exclusion is sometimes justified by safety concerns or productivity arguments. Even organizations that claim to support inclusion may create barriers through strict interpretations of safety rules.

In such situations, inclusion policies may appear progressive but remain superficial. They may not address the deeper structural problems that limit participation. As a result, the positive impact of inclusion on performance and innovation becomes weaker.

Research also shows the importance of intersectionality in the experiences of Black women in construction. English and Hay (2015) explain that Black South African women face both racial and gender barriers. They encounter stereotypes about competence. They also face doubts about their leadership ability.

Because of these overlapping barriers, simple gender equality policies may not be enough. Policies that focus only on women may ignore racial inequality. As a result, inclusion

becomes incomplete and uneven. Intersectionality helps reveal these differences in voice, legitimacy, and career advancement.

Intersectionality also appears in work–family relations. Cao et al. (2020) show that work–family conflict affects construction professionals strongly. Long working hours and inflexible schedules are common in this industry. These conditions often create problems for employees with family responsibilities.

Women are especially affected by these expectations. Many women combine professional work with caregiving responsibilities. When organizations do not support work–life balance, women may face career disadvantages. In this way, gendered expectations inside organizations moderate the impact of inclusion policies.

Sexual orientation and gender identity also show how intersectionality operates in organizations. Research in construction is still limited. However, studies in other sectors show that LGBTQ+ employees often experience conditional inclusion (Jang et al., 2020). Their participation may depend on workplace culture and perceived safety.

In very masculine environments, employees may hesitate to disclose non-heteronormative identities. Fear of discrimination or social exclusion may limit open communication. This situation reduces participation and voice. Therefore, inclusion mechanisms may not function equally for all identity groups.

Structural inequality also begins before individuals enter the workplace. Educational systems and career pathways shape who enters certain professions. Keen and Salvatorelli (2016) and Carnemolla and Galea (2021) show that perceptions of engineering and construction careers form early in life.

These perceptions are influenced by gender stereotypes and social expectations. Young women or individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may avoid these careers. As a result, workforce diversity remains limited even before recruitment begins.

These early inequalities affect later workplace experiences. Employees from marginalized backgrounds may lack professional networks. They may also lack access to mentors and informal knowledge. This situation influences promotion opportunities and professional development. Intersectionality therefore affects the entire career lifecycle.

From a research perspective, intersectionality also changes how diversity and inclusion should be measured. Simple diversity statistics may hide important differences between groups. For example, organizations may report increased female representation. However, the experiences of women may vary significantly depending on race, class, or disability.

Karakhan et al. (2021) suggest using more detailed indicators of inclusion. These indicators should measure belonging, fairness, and opportunity. Intersectional analysis helps researchers understand how inclusion policies work in practice.

Intersectionality also explains why some diversity initiatives create unintended consequences. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) argue that symbolic diversity programs may increase tensions inside organizations. These programs may focus on representation without changing deeper power structures.

From an intersectional perspective, these programs may help some groups while leaving others behind. For example, gender equality initiatives may benefit white middle-class women more than women from minority backgrounds. In this way, new hierarchies may appear inside diversity categories.

In theoretical terms, intersectionality fits well with critical approaches to diversity and inclusion. These approaches focus on power relations and social inequality (Kirton & Greene, 2021). They show that inclusion is not simply about numbers or representation.

Inclusion also depends on who is heard and whose ideas are respected. Structural conditions influence who participates in decision making. Intersectionality therefore acts as a contextual moderator that shapes the strength and direction of diversity outcomes.

Recognizing intersectionality does not mean creating confusion or fragmentation. Instead, it improves the quality of analysis. It allows organizations to design better inclusion strategies. These strategies can address the real needs of different employee groups.

Hamad et al. (2024) suggest combining diversity policies with career counseling and targeted support programs. These initiatives can help employees from different backgrounds develop their careers. They also recognize that inclusion must respond to structural inequality.

In conclusion, intersectionality and structural inequality are powerful contextual moderators in diversity and inclusion research. They shape how inclusion policies are experienced by different employees. They also influence whether diversity initiatives create real benefits or reproduce existing inequalities.

In sectors such as construction and engineering, structural barriers remain strong. Ignoring intersectionality may lead organizations to overestimate the success of their diversity programs. By including intersectionality and structural inequality in conceptual models, researchers can better understand how inclusion works in practice. This approach supports more effective strategies for improving organizational performance and innovation.

3.5 Performance and Innovation Outcomes as Dependent Variables

Organizational performance and innovation are the main dependent variables in this conceptual model. They represent the final results of diversity and inclusion processes in organizations. Many studies show that diversity alone does not automatically lead to better performance or innovation. The relationship is more complex. It works through several mechanisms inside the organization. Diversity increases the variety of knowledge, experiences, and perspectives in the workforce. Inclusion allows employees to use these differences in a positive way. It creates conditions where employees feel respected and safe to share ideas. Contextual factors, such as leadership style and organizational culture, also influence these outcomes. Because of this, performance and innovation should not be seen as direct results of diversity policies. They are gradual outcomes that develop over time in inclusive organizational systems.

Motivation is another important factor that connects inclusion with performance. When employees feel that they are treated fairly and equally, they develop a stronger psychological contract with the organization. The psychological contract refers to the expectations and trust between employees and employers. When this relationship is strong, employees show higher levels of commitment and responsibility. Inuwa (2017a, 2017b) shows that perceptions of job equity improve employee performance. This improvement happens because equity increases motivation, trust, and organizational commitment. Other studies support this idea. For example, research shows that affective organizational commitment can mediate the relationship between supportive management practices and job performance (Cao et al., 2020; Silitonga et al., 2017). In the conceptual model of this study, inclusion is therefore an important factor that leads to better performance outcomes. It works mainly through attitudes, trust, and positive relationships between employees and organizations.

At the team level, inclusion also affects performance through communication and coordination. Teams work better when members feel comfortable speaking openly. Johari and Jha (2021) show that communication skills are closely related to productivity in construction projects. Workers must share information quickly and clearly. They must also feel safe to express concerns about problems or risks. Inclusive team environments support this type of communication. Employees do not fear negative judgment or criticism when

they express ideas. Mutual respect and trust improve teamwork and coordination. On the other hand, exclusionary environments reduce communication. In hierarchical or discriminatory workplaces, employees from minority groups may hesitate to speak or share opinions. This silence can lead to misunderstandings, mistakes, delays, and conflicts. As a result, team performance decreases.

Innovation is another important organizational outcome. Although innovation is related to performance, it represents a different process. Innovation reflects an organization's ability to learn, adapt, and solve problems creatively. It involves developing new ideas, improving processes, and introducing new technologies or methods. Many scholars describe innovation as a social process that depends on collaboration between people with different backgrounds and perspectives (Gutierrez, 2023). Diversity can support innovation because it brings different experiences and knowledge into the organization. However, diversity alone is not enough. Inclusion determines whether employees feel safe enough to share creative ideas. Psychological safety is very important for innovation. Employees must believe that they can express new or unusual ideas without fear of punishment or criticism. When this safety exists, teams are more willing to experiment and explore alternative solutions. These behaviors are key components of innovative work processes (Fritz & Gresham, 2024).

Technology and organizational systems also influence the relationship between diversity, inclusion, and innovation. Modern organizations increasingly use digital tools and communication technologies. Hermansyah (2023) explains that artificial intelligence communication systems can improve collaboration and information sharing between employees. These technologies can support inclusive innovation processes because they allow people to exchange ideas quickly and efficiently. However, technology alone does not guarantee inclusion. Access to technology must be fair and equal for all employees. Leadership support and an open organizational culture are also necessary. In organizations with exclusionary cultures, new technologies may actually reinforce existing inequalities. For example, dominant groups may control digital communication channels and exclude minority voices. Therefore, innovation outcomes should be understood as results of complex socio-technical systems rather than simple technological solutions.

Researchers also warn that organizations should not exaggerate the benefits of diversity initiatives. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) show that many diversity and inclusion programs remain symbolic. Some organizations introduce these policies mainly to improve their public image or to comply with regulations. However, they do not change their internal

culture or management practices. In such situations, diversity increases numerically, but inclusion does not improve. Employees may become skeptical about the organization's commitment to fairness. This skepticism can reduce motivation and trust. As a result, performance and innovation do not improve even though diversity has increased. This finding supports the main argument of the conceptual model. Diversity creates potential value, but this value appears only when real inclusion exists.

Measuring performance and innovation also requires careful methodological approaches. Researchers usually combine objective and subjective indicators. Performance indicators may include productivity levels, project completion rates, employee retention, and formal performance evaluations. Innovation indicators may include the number of new ideas generated, improvements in processes, or adoption of new technologies and methods (Shields et al., 2015; Singh, 2024). These indicators should always be analyzed together with inclusion measures and contextual factors. Otherwise, the analysis may produce misleading conclusions about the real impact of diversity and inclusion.

The construction industry provides a useful example for studying these outcomes. Construction projects require teamwork, coordination, and continuous adaptation to new conditions. Workers must solve unexpected problems and follow strict safety regulations. Karakhan et al. (2020) argue that workforce sustainability in construction depends on combining performance, innovation, and inclusion strategies. Companies that ignore these factors may face skill shortages, lower productivity, and weaker competitiveness. These risks become even greater as construction projects become more complex and technologically advanced.

In theoretical terms, treating performance and innovation as dependent variables completes the causal chain of the conceptual model. Diversity represents the structural input. Inclusion acts as the mediating mechanism that activates this potential. Contextual factors such as leadership and culture moderate the strength of these relationships. Finally, performance and innovation appear as the final organizational outcomes. This framework reflects systems-based perspectives that emphasize complex interactions rather than simple linear relationships (Kirton & Greene, 2021).

In conclusion, organizational performance and innovation are important outcomes of diversity and inclusion processes. However, they do not appear automatically. Inclusive environments increase motivation, trust, collaboration, and learning. These conditions support both productivity and creativity. At the same time, leadership behavior,

organizational culture, and structural inequalities strongly influence these processes. Understanding performance and innovation as dependent variables helps researchers analyze the complex mechanisms that connect diversity and inclusion with organizational success. This perspective also highlights the importance of building inclusive organizational systems that support long-term sustainability and development.

4. Performance and Innovation Outcomes

4.1 Conceptualizing Performance and Innovation as Organizational Outcomes

Performance and innovation are two important outcomes in modern organizational theory. Many researchers study these outcomes when they discuss diversity, inclusion, and equity. These two ideas are different, but they are also connected. Performance shows how well an organization uses its people, knowledge, and resources to reach its goals. Innovation shows the ability of an organization to create and use new ideas, new methods, or new solutions. Both outcomes are important for long-term organizational success. In the field of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I), these results do not appear automatically. They develop through social processes inside organizations. These processes influence participation, recognition, and knowledge sharing among employees (Kirton & Greene, 2021).

Organizational performance can be studied at three main levels. These levels are the individual level, the team level, and the organizational level. At the individual level, performance includes the ability of employees to complete their tasks well. It also includes motivation, work engagement, and extra effort. At the team level, performance includes good cooperation between team members. It also includes the ability of teams to solve problems together and share responsibility. At the organizational level, performance refers to productivity, financial success, employee stability, and long-term sustainability.

Performance is not only about numbers or production results. It is also related to social relationships and organizational context. Employees work better when they feel respected and treated fairly. Perceptions of fairness and inclusion influence employee motivation. They also influence trust and commitment to the organization. When employees believe that the organization supports them, they are more willing to work hard and contribute new ideas. Several studies support this view. For example, research shows that perceptions of fairness strengthen the psychological contract between employees and organizations. This improves employee commitment and performance behavior (Inuwa, 2017a; Inuwa, 2017b; Kamau et al., 2021).

Diversity increases the number of different experiences and perspectives in teams. People may have different genders, cultures, education levels, or professional experiences. These differences increase the range of ideas that teams can use when they solve problems or make

decisions. In theory, this diversity can improve team performance and creativity. However, research shows that diversity alone does not guarantee better results. Sometimes diversity can create communication problems or conflicts. This may happen when organizations do not have inclusive practices or fair structures (Kirton & Greene, 2021).

Because of this, inclusion is very important. Inclusion means that employees feel respected and accepted in their workplace. It also means that employees have equal access to opportunities and decision-making processes. Inclusive environments create psychological safety. Psychological safety means that employees feel comfortable sharing ideas or expressing different opinions. When employees feel safe, they participate more in teamwork and knowledge sharing. They also cooperate more with colleagues.

Empirical studies confirm this relationship. Research shows that employees perform better when they feel included and treated fairly. Inclusive practices increase trust between employees and management. They also improve teamwork and motivation. For example, Kundu et al. (2020) show that diversity at management levels improves performance when organizations also support inclusive leadership and inclusive practices.

The construction and engineering sectors provide good examples for studying these issues. These industries are becoming more diverse, but they still have strong traditional cultures. Many workplaces in these sectors are dominated by masculine norms and hierarchical structures. These conditions often limit participation by women and minority professionals (Arditi et al., 2013; Bryce et al., 2019).

Research shows that women and minority professionals often face barriers in these sectors. They may have fewer opportunities for promotion. They may also have limited access to informal professional networks. In some cases, stereotypes about competence also affect their careers (Aydin & Erbil, 2022; Barreto et al., 2017). These barriers reduce the potential benefits of diversity. Even when organizations recruit diverse employees, unequal systems may still limit their contribution.

Arditi et al. (2013) found that management abilities are not related to gender. However, biases in evaluation systems influence career opportunities. These biases affect employee development and organizational outcomes. This shows that representation alone is not enough. Organizations must also create fair evaluation systems and inclusive development opportunities.

Inclusion also supports workforce sustainability. Workforce sustainability refers to the long-term ability of organizations to maintain a stable and motivated workforce. Karakhan et al.

(2020) explain that sustainable workforce systems require attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion. These three elements strengthen organizational resilience.

Later research by Karakhan et al. (2021) identifies important indicators for improving diversity and inclusion in construction organizations. Inclusive systems improve employee morale and retention. They also increase long-term productivity. These findings show that performance is not only a final result. Performance is also an ongoing process that depends on social relationships and organizational structures.

Innovation is another key organizational outcome. Innovation means the development and implementation of new ideas. These ideas may improve products, services, or organizational processes. Innovation usually depends on cooperation between people. It also depends on communication and knowledge exchange.

Diversity can help innovation because it introduces different perspectives. Diverse employees may question traditional assumptions and suggest new solutions. Cognitive diversity expands the range of ideas available to teams (Gutierrez, 2023). However, diversity alone does not guarantee innovation. Inclusion is necessary for innovation to occur.

Psychological safety is very important for innovation. Employees must feel safe when they share new or unusual ideas. If employees fear criticism or punishment, they will avoid expressing creative ideas. Inclusive environments encourage employees to participate in discussions and propose new solutions.

Leadership style also plays an important role. Gupta (2019) explains that inclusive leadership supports innovation. Inclusive leaders listen to employees and encourage participation in decision making. They also respect different viewpoints and support collaboration. These behaviors help transform diversity into creative outcomes.

Empirical studies also show the positive effects of women's leadership. Research shows that companies with women leaders may achieve better performance and stronger innovation capacity (Hernandez-Nicolas et al., 2022). Baker et al. (2023) also show that women leaders often support the career development of other women. This increases diversity in leadership positions and decision-making processes.

However, research also shows that many diversity policies remain symbolic. Some organizations create diversity programs mainly to follow regulations. These programs often focus on representation numbers rather than structural change. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) show that diversity initiatives in project-based organizations often remain superficial. Structural inequalities may continue even when diversity programs exist.

Galea et al. (2015) argue that real organizational change requires strong equality policies. These policies must be continuously evaluated and improved. Without structural change, diversity initiatives may not influence innovation outcomes.

Intersectionality adds another important dimension to this discussion. Employees may face multiple forms of inequality at the same time. These inequalities may relate to gender, ethnicity, disability, or socioeconomic background. Employees who belong to multiple marginalized groups often face additional barriers to recognition and participation (Bailey et al., 2022; English & Hay, 2015).

If organizations ignore these intersectional barriers, they may lose valuable perspectives. Employees who face exclusion may have unique experiences that support innovation. Therefore, equity is essential for innovation. Organizations must create systems that distribute opportunities and resources fairly.

Technology also influences innovation processes. Hermansyah (2023) explains that communication technologies and artificial intelligence systems can support collaboration. These tools improve information sharing and transparency in organizations. They may help create inclusive innovation environments.

However, technology alone cannot solve social problems. Digital systems may reproduce existing inequalities if organizations do not address cultural barriers. Inclusive organizational norms are necessary for technology to support innovation.

Overall, research shows that performance and innovation are deeply connected to social and organizational processes. Diversity increases the range of available perspectives and experiences. Inclusion allows these perspectives to be expressed and integrated into decision making. Equity provides the structural conditions that support fair participation.

When these three elements work together, organizations become more effective and creative. Teams cooperate better and employees feel more engaged. Organizations also become more adaptable in changing environments. When these elements are not aligned, diversity may remain only a formal characteristic without real impact.

For this reason, organizations should move beyond simple diversity metrics. They should focus on inclusive collaboration and equitable systems. Performance should be understood as the result of inclusive teamwork. Innovation should be understood as the outcome of diverse ideas being shared and recognized.

This perspective highlights the central role of inclusion. Inclusion acts as the key mechanism that connects diversity with organizational outcomes. When inclusion is present, diversity can support both performance and innovation in sustainable ways.

4.2 Diversity, Inclusion, and Team Performance

The relationship between diversity, inclusion, and team performance is an important topic in organizational research. Many studies examine how diversity affects work outcomes in teams and organizations. However, research shows that the relationship is not simple. Diversity does not automatically improve performance. A team may have many different people, but this does not guarantee better results. Diversity increases the variety of experiences, ideas, and ways of thinking in a team. It can provide more knowledge and more possible solutions to problems. Still, diversity alone is not enough. Inclusion is necessary to make diversity useful in practice.

Inclusion means that employees feel respected and able to participate in work processes. It also means that their ideas are heard and considered in decision making. When inclusion exists, diversity can support cooperation, motivation, and productivity. When inclusion is weak, diversity may create misunderstandings and tension. Therefore, diversity must work together with inclusive practices. Inclusion helps transform different perspectives into collaboration and shared work results. According to Kirton and Greene (2021), organizations must look beyond simple demographic representation. They must examine how people interact and how organizational structures support equal participation.

Team performance depends on several important factors. These include communication, knowledge sharing, coordination of tasks, and trust among members. Diverse teams can be very effective because they contain people with different skills and viewpoints. These teams are often better at solving complex problems. They can look at an issue from several angles and avoid simple thinking patterns. However, this advantage appears only when the team environment supports inclusion. Employees must feel psychologically safe to speak and share ideas. When inclusive practices are missing, diversity can produce conflicts or communication problems. Subgroups may appear inside the team, and cooperation becomes difficult. For this reason, inclusion is a key condition for successful diverse teams (Kundu et al., 2020).

Research evidence supports this argument. Kundu et al. (2020) show that diversity in management positions can improve organizational performance when inclusive leadership practices are present. Their study explains that fair treatment and participatory decision making are important. When employees feel respected, the positive effect of diversity on performance becomes stronger. Similar findings appear in another study by Ngalo et al. (2023). Their research focuses on the banking sector in Nigeria. The authors report that workplace diversity improves employee performance when organizations apply inclusive policies. These policies reduce discrimination and encourage teamwork. Therefore, diversity can produce positive outcomes when it is supported by fair structures and collaborative work practices.

Fairness and equity also influence employee behavior in organizations. When workers believe that evaluation and promotion processes are fair, they feel more motivated. They also show stronger commitment to their work. Inuwa (2017a, 2017b) explains that job equity increases employee motivation and effort. Workers are more willing to contribute to team goals when they experience fair treatment. This behavior can be explained through the idea of the psychological contract. Employees expect fairness and respect from the organization. When this expectation is satisfied, they respond with greater effort and engagement (Kamau et al., 2021). On the other hand, unfair conditions reduce trust and commitment. Employees may feel excluded or undervalued. This situation often decreases productivity and team cooperation.

The relationship between diversity and performance is especially complex in industries with strong traditional cultures. Examples include construction and engineering sectors. In these fields, work environments often follow hierarchical structures and traditional gender roles. Arditi et al. (2013) study the Swedish construction industry and show that managers are sometimes evaluated through gender stereotypes. Male and female managers may receive different evaluations even when their skills are similar. Such bias limits career opportunities for women and reduces their influence in teams. As a result, the potential benefits of gender diversity remain unused.

Bryce et al. (2019) report similar findings in the Australian civil construction industry. Their research shows that female engineers face barriers in career development. These barriers include limited access to professional networks and fewer leadership opportunities. Such exclusion reduces individual development and also affects team effectiveness. When organizations fail to integrate diverse employees, teams lose valuable knowledge and skills.

Therefore, the problem is not diversity itself. The problem is organizational cultures that do not support inclusion.

George and Loosemore (2019) explain that traditional masculine cultures in construction environments may reduce open communication. These cultures may marginalize individuals who do not fit dominant identities. When employees feel excluded, they hesitate to share knowledge or new ideas. This situation reduces cooperation and affects team productivity. Diversity without inclusion may increase divisions in the workplace and weaken collective performance.

Leadership plays an important role in solving these problems. Inclusive leadership behaviors help create supportive work environments. These behaviors include listening to employees, encouraging participation, and making transparent decisions. Gupta (2019) explains that inclusive leaders help employees feel respected and valued. When workers believe that their opinions matter, they are more willing to participate actively in team activities. Baker et al. (2023) also show that women leaders in construction and engineering often support the development of other women. Their leadership increases participation and strengthens team capability.

However, leadership commitment must be real and not symbolic. Some organizations introduce diversity programs only to appear progressive. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) warn that diversity initiatives sometimes remain superficial. Companies may create formal policies but fail to change everyday practices or organizational culture. Without deeper structural changes, diversity programs cannot produce long-term performance improvements.

Another factor that influences team performance is intersectionality. Employees have multiple social identities such as gender, ethnicity, disability, or socioeconomic background. These identities shape their experiences in the workplace. Bailey et al. (2022) examine disability employment in construction and find that many barriers still exist. Even when diversity policies are present, employees with disabilities may face difficulties in participation. These challenges reduce engagement and weaken team cohesion.

Human resource management systems also influence the success of diversity initiatives. Performance evaluation and reward systems can either support or weaken inclusive behavior. Shields et al. (2015) explain that evaluation criteria should recognize teamwork and knowledge sharing. When organizations reward cooperation and fairness, inclusive

practices become stronger. If reward systems focus only on individual competition, inclusion may decline.

Studies in different countries show similar results. Mahdi Abaker et al. (2023) find that employees in the United Arab Emirates perform better when they believe that diversity management is fair and transparent. Singh (2024) also argues that inclusive performance evaluation systems increase trust among employees. When workers believe that assessments are fair, they remain engaged and committed to organizational goals.

Long-term workforce sustainability also depends on inclusive practices. Karakhan et al. (2020) develop assessment tools for workforce sustainability in construction. Their research identifies diversity and inclusion as important indicators of organizational resilience. Inclusive work environments help organizations keep skilled employees and maintain safety standards. They also support long-term stability and productivity.

Finally, scholars warn that the relationship between diversity and performance should not be oversimplified. Khan et al. (2019) explain that diversity can create mixed results if communication and conflict management are weak. Diverse teams need clear coordination and trust. Without these elements, misunderstandings may appear and reduce efficiency.

Overall, research shows a clear conclusion. Diversity can provide valuable knowledge and perspectives. However, its positive effect on performance depends on inclusion. Inclusive work environments encourage participation, trust, and collaboration. When organizations create psychological safety and fairness, diverse teams can reach high performance levels. In contrast, exclusion reduces motivation and prevents employees from using their skills.

Therefore, diversity should not be viewed only as demographic representation. It should be combined with inclusive leadership, fair human resource systems, and supportive organizational cultures. When these conditions exist, diversity becomes a strategic advantage. It strengthens team performance and helps organizations remain resilient in changing environments (Kirton & Greene, 2021).

4.3 Innovation as an Outcome of Inclusive Organizational Systems

Innovation is an important outcome for modern organizations. Many researchers say that innovation is not only an individual activity. It is also a social and organizational process. It happens through interaction between people inside organizations. In this context, diversity

and inclusion (D&I) are important conditions that influence innovation. They shape how people share knowledge and ideas. They also affect how teams solve problems. However, research shows that diversity alone does not automatically create innovation. Innovation appears when diversity exists together with inclusion. Inclusive systems help employees feel safe and respected. They also support equal participation and collaboration inside teams (Kirton & Greene, 2021).

One important factor for innovation is cognitive diversity. Cognitive diversity means different experiences, ideas, and ways of thinking. When people have different backgrounds, they may see problems in different ways. This can help teams produce new ideas. Diverse teams can combine knowledge and create new solutions. They can also challenge traditional thinking inside organizations. However, this positive effect does not always happen. If the organization is not inclusive, diversity may create tension. Employees may disagree in negative ways. Some people may not express their opinions. Minority employees may stay silent. In these situations, diversity may reduce cooperation and creativity. Because of this, inclusion becomes very important. Inclusion helps organizations use diversity in productive ways. It supports knowledge sharing and constructive discussion (Baker, French, & Ali, 2021).

Psychological safety is another important concept that connects inclusion and innovation. Psychological safety means that employees feel safe to speak openly. They can share ideas and opinions without fear. They do not worry about criticism or punishment. When teams have psychological safety, people are more willing to try new ideas. They may suggest unusual solutions. They may also question existing practices. These behaviors support innovation. Many organizations today operate in environments with rapid technological change. They must adapt quickly. Employees must experiment and learn continuously. Inclusive environments help this process. Employees feel confident to participate in innovation activities. However, when employees feel excluded or ignored, they may stop sharing ideas. They may also reduce their participation in team discussions. This situation limits innovation potential (Fritz & Gresham, 2024).

Leadership is also very important for creating inclusive environments. Leaders influence team culture and behavior. Inclusive leaders encourage open communication. They listen carefully to employees. They involve team members in decision making. They also recognize contributions from different employees. These behaviors show that diversity is valued. Employees feel that their ideas are important. Gupta (2019) explains that inclusive

leaders often use collaborative leadership styles. They promote dialogue and cooperation. They also allow constructive disagreement. In many organizations, traditional hierarchies still exist. Employees may hesitate to challenge authority. Inclusive leadership can reduce this problem. It creates a climate where employees feel comfortable sharing new ideas.

Research also shows that gender diversity in leadership can influence innovation and performance. Some studies focus on organizations in construction and engineering industries. Hernandez-Nicolas et al. (2022) found that companies with women chief executive officers often show stronger organizational performance. These organizations also show higher levels of strategic adaptation. This adaptation is related to innovation activities. Women leaders may introduce different management styles. They may also encourage inclusive practices. Baker et al. (2023) also show that women leaders often support the career development of other women. This support increases diversity in leadership positions. More diverse leadership teams may generate more diverse ideas. These ideas can support innovation and strategic change inside organizations.

However, the positive effects of diversity are not equal in all sectors. Some industries remain strongly male dominated. Examples include construction and engineering sectors. These industries often have traditional cultures and stereotypes. Women and minority employees may face barriers. They may have less access to leadership positions or technical projects. These projects are important for innovation. Bryce et al. (2019) and Galea et al. (2015) explain that cultural norms in these industries often limit participation. Even when diversity increases in numbers, real participation may remain limited. When employees do not have access to important roles or networks, their ideas may not influence decision making. This situation reduces innovation potential.

Another problem is that many organizations adopt diversity policies only for formal reasons. These policies may exist on paper but not in practice. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) explain that some organizations use diversity policies to appear legitimate or socially responsible. However, they may not change internal culture or structures. Decision making processes remain the same. Power remains concentrated in the same groups. In these cases, diversity does not lead to innovation. Employees from diverse backgrounds may not participate in strategic decisions. Without inclusion, their ideas remain unused. Therefore, innovation does not depend only on demographic diversity. It depends on inclusive structures and leadership commitment.

Intersectionality also influences innovation processes. People have multiple identities. These identities include gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and social class. These factors interact and shape workplace experiences. Bailey et al. (2022) explain that employees may face multiple forms of inequality at the same time. For example, women from ethnic minority groups may face more barriers than other employees. English and Hay (2015) studied women in construction industries. They found that women from minority backgrounds often face both gender and racial discrimination. These barriers reduce their opportunities for participation in innovation projects. Organizations must recognize intersectionality when they design inclusion strategies. Otherwise, diversity initiatives may support only a small group of employees.

Technology also plays a role in innovation and inclusion. Digital tools and communication technologies influence how employees collaborate. Hermansyah (2023) discusses the role of artificial intelligence systems in organizational communication. These systems can support knowledge sharing and collaboration. They may also help employees solve problems together. However, technology alone does not guarantee inclusion. Organizations must ensure equal access to digital tools. If some groups do not have access to information or decision making, technology may increase inequalities. Therefore, technological innovation and social inclusion must develop together.

Human resource management practices also support inclusive innovation. Organizations use performance evaluation systems to assess employee contributions. When these systems are fair and transparent, employees trust the organization. They feel respected and valued. Shields et al. (2015) explain that reward systems should recognize collaboration and team contributions. Inclusive reward systems encourage employees to participate in creative activities. Singh (2024) also explains that diversity sensitive evaluation systems reduce bias. When employees believe that evaluation processes are fair, they are more willing to take risks. Risk taking is important for innovation.

Innovation is not always about radical technological change. Sometimes innovation means small improvements in processes and practices. Incremental innovation can also create significant benefits. In industries like construction, safety and efficiency are very important. Teams must improve processes step by step. Karakhan et al. (2023) explain that diverse teams often produce better solutions for safety and sustainability challenges. When teams communicate openly, they integrate different perspectives. This improves project outcomes and organizational learning.

However, some barriers still exist. Organizational structures and traditions may limit change. Hasan and Kamardeen (2022) explain that occupational safety rules and traditional career systems sometimes reinforce existing hierarchies. Informal networks may also exclude minority employees. These structural barriers reduce opportunities for innovation. Organizations must address these barriers through systemic reforms.

In conclusion, innovation develops most strongly in inclusive organizational systems. Diversity provides different perspectives and experiences. However, inclusion determines whether these perspectives are used effectively. Psychological safety, inclusive leadership, and fair structures support collaboration and creativity. Organizations that want innovation must invest in inclusive cultures and practices. Diversity alone is not enough. Innovation appears when organizations create systems where all employees can contribute ideas and participate in decision making.

4.4 Sectoral Constraints and Structural Moderators of Performance and Innovation Outcomes

The relationship between diversity, inclusion, and organizational outcomes is complex. It cannot be understood without examining the sector where an organization operates. Many studies show that inclusive organizations often have better performance and more innovation. However, these results do not appear automatically. They depend on cultural norms, institutional structures, and working conditions inside each sector. Some sectors support diversity and inclusion. Others make this process more difficult. These structural conditions influence how diversity affects team performance and innovation.

This situation is very clear in male-dominated sectors such as construction and engineering. These sectors have strong traditional cultures. They also have long-standing structural inequalities. These conditions influence how diversity and inclusion programs work in practice. Many organizations adopt diversity policies. However, the organizational environment sometimes limits their real impact. In these sectors, professional roles, leadership expectations, and career paths often follow traditional patterns. These patterns make it difficult for new groups to participate equally in decision-making processes.

Research in the construction industry shows that women and other underrepresented groups still face many barriers. These barriers include limited access to leadership roles and fewer opportunities for professional recognition. Studies by Arditi et al. (2013) and Bryce et al.

(2019) describe these challenges clearly. The problem is not only individual bias. Structural factors inside organizations also create these barriers. Recruitment systems, promotion processes, and evaluation standards sometimes favor existing professional networks. As a result, diversity may increase in numbers, but real participation may remain limited. When this happens, diverse ideas do not fully influence team decisions or organizational strategy. Traditional masculine cultures also influence communication inside organizations. George and Loosemore (2019) show that many construction workplaces follow strong masculine norms. These norms value hierarchy, authority, and strong individual behavior. In such environments employees may hesitate to express alternative ideas. They may fear negative evaluation from colleagues or managers. This situation reduces psychological safety in teams. Psychological safety means that employees feel comfortable sharing opinions and ideas. When psychological safety is low, diverse employees may remain silent. Innovation becomes more difficult because different perspectives are not expressed openly.

Another problem is the use of symbolic diversity policies. Many organizations adopt diversity and inclusion policies because they want to appear responsible and modern. However, these policies sometimes remain symbolic. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) explain that many organizations implement diversity policies mainly for legitimacy. They may publish diversity statements or representation goals. However, they do not always change leadership practices or evaluation systems. When policies remain symbolic, employees notice the gap between words and actions. This situation reduces trust and motivation inside teams.

Structural conditions also appear in occupational health and safety systems. Hasan and Kamardeen (2022) explain that safety rules in construction often reflect gendered assumptions. Many tasks are designed with male physical standards in mind. These assumptions influence job allocation and promotion opportunities. When performance standards are based on biased expectations, diversity cannot produce equal outcomes. Employees may be evaluated according to criteria that do not consider different capabilities or experiences. In such situations inclusion requires changes in evaluation and reward systems.

Intersectionality also influences organizational outcomes. Employees do not have only one identity. They have many identities at the same time. Gender, ethnicity, disability, and social background interact with each other. These intersections influence opportunities and professional experiences. Bailey et al. (2022) show that workers with disabilities in

construction often face multiple barriers. Diversity policies that focus only on gender may ignore these complex realities. As a result, many employees remain excluded from important professional networks and knowledge exchange processes.

Leadership diversity is another important factor. Leadership positions influence organizational culture and decision making. However, leadership diversity in construction remains limited. Hickey and Cui (2020) show that women remain underrepresented in leadership roles in the U.S. construction sector. This situation limits the spread of inclusive leadership practices. Hernandez-Nicolas et al. (2022) also found that companies led by women CEOs often show stronger performance outcomes. However, these cases remain relatively rare. When leadership diversity increases, organizations often create more inclusive environments that support collaboration and innovation.

Educational and social processes also shape workforce diversity. Career expectations start early in life. Carnemolla and Galea (2021) show that many female high school students perceive construction careers as unsuitable for them. These perceptions come from cultural stereotypes about gender and work. When fewer women enter the sector, the industry loses potential talent and ideas. Over time this reduces the diversity of perspectives inside organizations. This situation can limit creativity and long-term innovation capacity.

Networking practices inside organizations also influence career progress. English and Hay (2015) describe how Black South African women in construction often rely on informal networks to succeed professionally. Informal mentorship and personal relationships become important tools for career advancement. However, these practices also show structural weaknesses. When career success depends on personal networks instead of transparent evaluation systems, equality becomes difficult to achieve. Innovation may also suffer because only a limited group of professionals participates in important discussions.

Despite these challenges, performance and innovation improvements are still possible in male-dominated sectors. Structural change can support more inclusive organizational systems. Karakhan et al. (2021) propose practical indicators for measuring diversity, equity, and inclusion in construction organizations. These indicators help organizations evaluate workforce sustainability and participation. Karakhan et al. (2020) also emphasize the importance of integrating equity into workforce management strategies. When organizations measure inclusion carefully, they can identify structural problems and implement targeted reforms.

Communication skills are another important factor for performance. Johari and Jha (2021) show that communication competence strongly affects productivity in construction teams. Inclusive environments encourage open dialogue and collaboration. When team members share information and ideas freely, projects run more efficiently. Diverse teams can solve problems more effectively because they combine different experiences and viewpoints.

Technological systems also influence innovation outcomes. Hermansyah (2023) discusses the role of communicative artificial intelligence systems in organizational decision making. Digital tools can support collaboration and information sharing. However, technology alone cannot create inclusion. Organizations must ensure equal access to digital systems and training opportunities. Without inclusive governance, new technologies may reinforce existing inequalities instead of reducing them.

Overall, sectoral conditions influence how diversity and inclusion affect performance and innovation. Cultural norms, institutional structures, and leadership practices shape these relationships. In male-dominated sectors traditional hierarchies often limit the benefits of diversity. However, structural reforms can change this situation. Organizations can revise evaluation criteria, diversify leadership pipelines, and improve accountability systems. These reforms help transform diversity from a symbolic goal into a practical organizational resource.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings support the idea of moderated mediation. Inclusion mediates the relationship between diversity and organizational outcomes. However, sectoral and structural conditions influence the strength of this relationship. Organizational culture, leadership behavior, and institutional systems determine whether inclusion becomes real practice or only a formal statement.

In conclusion, performance and innovation depend not only on workforce diversity but also on structural alignment inside organizations. Sustainable results appear when diversity, inclusion, and equity are integrated into everyday practices and organizational systems. Without structural support, diversity initiatives may remain symbolic and produce limited results. For this reason, organizations in male-dominated sectors must move beyond representation goals. They must adopt long-term institutional reforms that support inclusive participation and innovation.

4.5 Integrative Discussion: From Inclusion to Sustainable Performance and Innovation

This discussion explains how diversity and inclusion affect organizational performance and innovation. Many organizations today try to increase workforce diversity. They believe diversity improves creativity, productivity, and competitiveness. However, research shows that diversity alone does not automatically improve performance. Diversity becomes useful only when organizations also create inclusive environments. Inclusion allows employees to participate, share ideas, and feel respected. Without inclusion, diversity may even create conflict or misunderstanding.

Workforce diversity refers to differences between employees. These differences include gender, ethnicity, age, disability, education, and cultural background. Organizations often try to increase diversity by hiring people from different groups. However, diversity describes only the composition of the workforce. It does not describe how people experience the organization. Inclusion refers to the experience of employees inside the organization. It describes whether employees feel respected, valued, and able to contribute to decisions and teamwork (Kirton & Greene, 2021).

Research shows that diversity improves performance only when organizations develop inclusive systems. These systems support psychological safety, fairness, and trust. Psychological safety means that employees feel comfortable sharing opinions without fear of punishment or criticism. When employees feel safe, they speak openly and share new ideas. This process improves decision making and problem solving. Teams become more adaptable and creative.

Inclusive environments also increase employee motivation. Employees who feel respected usually show stronger commitment to their organization. They also show higher job satisfaction and engagement. Many studies confirm this relationship. For example, research shows that fair treatment and equal opportunities strengthen the psychological contract between employees and organizations (Inuwa, 2017a, 2017b; Kamau et al., 2021). The psychological contract refers to the expectations employees have about fairness and respect in their workplace.

Employees who believe that diversity policies are real and meaningful often perform better. They also feel more satisfied with their jobs. Studies show that organizations with strong diversity management practices report higher employee performance (Mahdi Abaker et al.,

2023; Ngalo et al., 2023). In addition, research shows that diversity in management positions improves organizational performance when employees experience inclusive working environments (Kundu et al., 2020). Inclusive environments reduce power differences and allow more employees to participate in decisions.

However, these positive results do not appear in every organization. The organizational context plays an important role. In some industries, cultural traditions make inclusion difficult. For example, construction and engineering are traditionally male dominated sectors. In these sectors, cultural norms often support traditional masculine values. These norms may limit the participation of women and minority employees. Research shows that women in construction often face limited career opportunities and reduced access to leadership roles (Arditi et al., 2013; Bryce et al., 2019; George & Loosemore, 2019).

In such contexts, diversity policies may exist on paper but not in practice. Informal practices may still exclude minority employees. As a result, diversity initiatives may have only small effects. Baker, French, and Ali (2021) argue that many diversity programs focus mainly on representation numbers. Organizations often measure success by the number of diverse employees they hire. However, they do not always change deeper structures such as promotion systems, leadership behavior, or accountability mechanisms. When this happens, diversity programs become symbolic rather than transformative.

Innovation shows a similar pattern. Innovation usually comes from teamwork, learning, and knowledge sharing. Teams need different perspectives to create new ideas. Diversity increases the number of perspectives inside a team. This variety helps teams develop creative solutions. However, diversity alone does not guarantee innovation. Employees must feel comfortable sharing unusual ideas and challenging existing practices.

Psychological safety again plays an important role in innovation. Employees need an environment where they can experiment and discuss new ideas freely. They must not fear punishment for mistakes or criticism. Inclusive leadership behaviors help create such environments. Leaders who listen carefully and encourage participation create stronger innovative cultures. They also support collaboration and knowledge sharing (Gupta, 2019). Leadership diversity can also support innovation. Research shows that women leaders may introduce different leadership styles. These styles often focus on collaboration, communication, and mentoring. For example, Hernandez-Nicolas et al. (2022) found that companies led by women chief executive officers in the construction industry showed

stronger performance indicators. This result suggests that leadership diversity may improve strategic thinking and creativity.

Women leaders can also support mentoring and professional networks. These networks help younger employees develop skills and confidence. Baker et al. (2023) show that women leaders often promote inclusive practices inside organizations. These practices increase opportunities for different employee groups. As a result, organizations improve learning and knowledge exchange.

However, the innovative benefits of diversity are not equal in all organizations. Structural barriers may limit the participation of minority employees. Cultural resistance and stereotypes may prevent employees from sharing their ideas. Galea et al. (2015) argue that gender equality policies must remain flexible and adaptable. Organizations should regularly evaluate and update these policies. Otherwise, diversity programs may become symbolic and lose effectiveness.

Intersectionality also affects innovation and inclusion. Intersectionality refers to the combination of multiple social identities. Employees may experience discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, disability, or other characteristics. When these identities combine, the barriers become stronger. Research shows that employees with multiple minority identities often face greater challenges in organizations (Bailey et al., 2022; English & Hay, 2015). Inclusion policies must therefore consider these complex identities.

From this perspective, inclusion should be seen as a continuous learning process. Organizations must constantly review their practices and structures. Inclusion requires reflection, adaptation, and alignment across different organizational systems. These systems include leadership behavior, human resource management, and organizational culture.

Technology may also support inclusion and collaboration. New digital tools improve communication and information sharing. For example, Hermansyah (2023) suggests that artificial intelligence systems may improve organizational communication. However, technology alone cannot create inclusion. Organizations must ensure equal access to digital resources and encourage participation from all employees.

Sustainable performance and innovation depend on the alignment of several factors. Leadership commitment is very important. Leaders must support inclusion not only through words but also through actions. They must allocate resources, create accountability systems, and demonstrate inclusive behavior. Leaders influence organizational norms and shape employee attitudes.

Equity in human resource management is also necessary. Recruitment, promotion, and evaluation systems must be transparent and fair. Employees must believe that opportunities are based on merit rather than personal bias (Shields et al., 2015; Singh, 2024). Fair systems increase trust and encourage employees to contribute actively.

Organizational culture also affects inclusion. Some cultures promote open communication and collaboration. Others maintain rigid hierarchies and traditional identity models. Inclusive cultures challenge stereotypes and encourage diverse voices (Chan, 2013).

Inclusion also interacts with contextual factors. Leadership and culture influence how diversity affects organizations. Intersectional identities influence how employees experience inclusion. When organizations create inclusive systems, diversity improves teamwork, engagement, and adaptability. When inclusion is absent, diversity may increase conflict and reduce cooperation.

Finally, organizations should not view inclusion only as a tool for financial success. Inclusion also improves organizational legitimacy and resilience. Employees who feel respected are more loyal and more willing to contribute to long-term goals (Mahdi Abaker et al., 2023).

In conclusion, diversity alone cannot guarantee better performance or innovation. Diversity provides potential, but inclusion transforms that potential into real value. Organizational culture, leadership behavior, and structural equality determine whether diversity becomes productive. Sustainable success appears when diversity, inclusion, and equity work together inside organizational systems. This approach allows organizations to build resilience, creativity, and long-term competitiveness.

5. Conclusion: Six Key Drivers Linking Diversity, Inclusion, Performance, and Innovation

This study examined the relationship between diversity, inclusion, organizational performance, and innovation. The literature review and conceptual synthesis showed that diversity alone does not automatically improve organizational outcomes. Instead, the positive effects of diversity appear only when organizations create conditions that allow employees to participate, collaborate, and contribute their ideas. In many organizations, diversity initiatives focus mainly on representation or recruitment. However, representation without inclusion does not necessarily lead to improved performance or innovation. Employees must also experience fairness, trust, and psychological safety in their workplace. The analysis of the literature revealed that diversity should not be viewed as a single solution for organizational challenges. Rather, it represents a resource that organizations can use when appropriate structures and practices exist. Without these structures, diversity may remain a symbolic goal instead of a productive organizational capability. The research discussed in this dissertation shows that organizations that invest in inclusive practices often achieve stronger performance outcomes and higher levels of innovation.

Workforce Diversity as a Foundational Resource

The first key driver identified in this study is workforce diversity itself. Diversity represents the presence of differences among employees within an organization. These differences may include gender, ethnicity, nationality, age, disability status, education, cultural background, and cognitive styles. Diversity also includes differences in professional experience, problem-solving approaches, and social perspectives. When organizations recruit employees with diverse backgrounds, they create a workforce that has access to a wide range of knowledge and experiences.

From a theoretical perspective, diversity expands the cognitive resources available to teams. Employees with different backgrounds often approach problems in different ways. This variety can improve decision making because teams consider multiple perspectives before reaching conclusions. Research in organizational behavior shows that diverse teams are more likely to challenge assumptions and avoid groupthink. This can lead to more creative solutions and stronger analytical outcomes.

However, diversity alone does not guarantee these benefits. Many organizations increase workforce diversity but still experience internal conflict or limited collaboration. When employees feel excluded or undervalued, they may not share their ideas or participate fully in team discussions. In such cases, diversity may increase misunderstanding rather than cooperation.

For this reason, diversity should be understood as a **necessary but not sufficient condition** for improved performance and innovation. It provides the potential for creativity and learning, but this potential must be activated through other organizational mechanisms. In the context of this study, inclusion is the mechanism that allows organizations to convert diversity into productive outcomes.

Inclusion as a Mediating Mechanism

The second key driver identified in this research is inclusion. Inclusion refers to the experience of employees inside the organization. It describes whether employees feel respected, valued, and able to contribute to organizational processes. Inclusive environments encourage participation, open communication, and collaboration among employees.

The literature consistently shows that inclusion plays a mediating role between diversity and organizational outcomes. This means that diversity affects performance and innovation only when inclusion is present. Without inclusion, the benefits of diversity remain limited. Inclusive practices create the conditions necessary for employees to share their perspectives and collaborate effectively.

A central concept related to inclusion is **psychological safety**. Psychological safety refers to the belief that individuals can express their ideas and concerns without fear of negative consequences. When employees feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to participate in discussions, ask questions, and propose new ideas. This environment supports experimentation and learning, which are essential components of innovation.

Another important dimension of inclusion is **equitable participation**. Employees should have equal opportunities to contribute to decision-making processes and team activities. Organizations that create transparent systems for communication and feedback allow employees from different backgrounds to participate in meaningful ways. This process reduces power imbalances and encourages collaboration.

Inclusion also improves employee motivation and commitment. When individuals feel respected and valued, they develop stronger emotional connections with their organization. This connection increases engagement and productivity. Employees become more willing to contribute discretionary effort, meaning they go beyond basic job requirements to support organizational goals.

In summary, inclusion transforms diversity from a structural characteristic into a functional organizational capability. It allows organizations to mobilize the diverse knowledge and experiences of their workforce. Without inclusion, diversity initiatives often remain symbolic and fail to produce meaningful outcomes.

Inclusive Leadership

The third key driver identified in this study is inclusive leadership. Leadership behavior plays a central role in shaping organizational environments. Leaders influence how employees interact, how decisions are made, and how conflicts are resolved. Because of this influence, leadership is critical for the success of diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Inclusive leaders demonstrate behaviors that encourage participation and collaboration. They actively listen to employees, respect different viewpoints, and create opportunities for dialogue. Inclusive leaders also recognize the value of diversity and communicate this value clearly within the organization. Their behavior signals that diversity and inclusion are not only symbolic commitments but also operational priorities.

Research suggests that inclusive leadership improves both employee engagement and team performance. Leaders who encourage open communication create environments where employees feel comfortable sharing ideas and asking questions. This process increases creativity and learning within teams. Employees are more likely to experiment with new approaches when they believe their contributions will be respected.

Leadership diversity also contributes to innovation. Studies have shown that organizations with diverse leadership teams often demonstrate stronger adaptability and strategic thinking. Leaders with different backgrounds may approach problems in different ways, which can enhance decision making. In particular, research suggests that women leaders often emphasize collaboration, mentoring, and inclusive communication practices.

However, inclusive leadership requires more than symbolic support. Leaders must integrate diversity and inclusion into everyday management practices. This includes allocating resources to diversity programs, developing fair evaluation systems, and ensuring

accountability for inclusive behavior. Without these actions, diversity initiatives may lose credibility among employees.

Therefore, inclusive leadership acts as a catalyst that activates the potential benefits of diversity and inclusion. Leaders shape the cultural and structural conditions that determine whether diversity becomes an advantage or a challenge for organizations.

Organizational Culture and Structural Equity

The fourth key driver identified in this research is the interaction between organizational culture and structural equity. Organizational culture refers to the shared values, norms, and behaviors that guide employee interactions. Culture shapes how employees interpret policies and respond to leadership decisions. It also influences whether diversity and inclusion initiatives are accepted or resisted.

In many organizations, cultural norms may unintentionally support exclusion. For example, industries that historically employ mostly men may maintain informal networks or communication patterns that limit access for women or minority employees. These informal practices may exist even when formal diversity policies are in place.

To create inclusive environments, organizations must actively challenge these exclusionary norms. This process requires cultural change. Leaders and employees must work together to promote respect, openness, and collaboration. Training programs, mentoring systems, and diversity awareness initiatives can help support this transformation.

Structural equity is another essential component of inclusive organizations. Structural equity refers to the fairness of organizational systems such as recruitment, promotion, performance evaluation, and compensation. When employees perceive these systems as fair and transparent, they develop greater trust in the organization.

For example, transparent recruitment processes reduce the possibility of bias during hiring decisions. Clear promotion criteria ensure that employees understand how career advancement occurs. Fair performance evaluations provide employees with constructive feedback and equal opportunities for recognition.

Organizations that fail to address structural inequalities often experience dissatisfaction among employees. Perceived unfairness can reduce motivation and increase turnover intentions. Therefore, structural equity is essential for sustaining inclusive environments.

Intersectionality and Contextual Awareness

The fifth key driver identified in this study is intersectionality and contextual awareness. Intersectionality refers to the interaction of multiple social identities, such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and socioeconomic background. Individuals often experience organizational life through several overlapping identities. These identities may create unique experiences of inclusion or exclusion.

Traditional diversity policies often focus on single categories such as gender or ethnicity. However, this approach may overlook the complexity of employees' experiences. For example, the challenges faced by women may differ significantly depending on their cultural background, disability status, or professional experience. Intersectional analysis recognizes these differences and highlights the importance of tailored inclusion strategies.

Contextual awareness is also important because diversity and inclusion practices operate within specific social and organizational environments. Different industries may have different cultural traditions and structural constraints. For instance, sectors such as construction or engineering often have long histories of male dominance. These cultural patterns may make inclusion more challenging.

Organizations must therefore adapt their diversity strategies to their specific contexts. Policies that work effectively in one sector may not produce the same results in another. Understanding the local context allows organizations to design more effective interventions and address the specific barriers faced by their employees.

By recognizing intersectionality and contextual diversity, organizations can develop more inclusive practices that respond to the real experiences of their workforce.

Organizational Learning and Long-Term Sustainability

The sixth and final key driver identified in this research is organizational learning and long-term sustainability. Diversity and inclusion should not be treated as short-term initiatives or temporary policy programs. Instead, they should be integrated into the long-term strategy of the organization.

Organizations that successfully manage diversity often view inclusion as a continuous learning process. They regularly evaluate their policies, collect feedback from employees, and adapt their practices based on new insights. This process allows organizations to respond to changing social expectations and workforce dynamics.

Technological developments also influence organizational learning. Digital communication tools and collaborative platforms can support knowledge sharing across teams and departments. When these tools are used in inclusive environments, they help employees exchange ideas and build innovative solutions.

Sustainability is another important dimension of this process. Organizations that promote inclusion often experience higher employee retention and stronger organizational reputation. Employees who feel respected and valued are more likely to remain committed to their organization and support long-term goals.

In addition, inclusive organizations often demonstrate greater resilience in times of change. Diverse teams can adapt more easily to new challenges because they possess a wider range of skills and perspectives. This adaptability is essential in today's complex and rapidly changing business environment.

Final Reflection

In conclusion, the analysis presented in this dissertation confirms that diversity alone does not automatically improve organizational outcomes. Diversity creates potential, but inclusion transforms that potential into real value. The relationship between diversity, performance, and innovation is shaped by multiple interconnected factors.

The six key drivers identified in this study—workforce diversity, inclusion, inclusive leadership, organizational culture and structural equity, intersectionality, and organizational learning—provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how diversity can support sustainable organizational success. When these drivers operate together, organizations can create environments that support collaboration, creativity, and long-term development.

Future research should continue to explore how these drivers interact in different organizational contexts. Understanding these dynamics will help organizations design more effective diversity and inclusion strategies. Ultimately, organizations that invest in inclusive systems will be better positioned to achieve sustainable performance, innovation, and resilience in an increasingly complex global environment.

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