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DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION METRICS AND THEIR EFFECT ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Although there is growing interest in measuring diversity and inclusion within organizations, the extent to which such measures are related to (or can inform) organizational performance is still unclear. Diversity representation data alone cannot indicate if workers enjoy fair access, feel included and able to share their ideas at work. Here we set out how diversity and inclusion metrics may be constructed to offer greater insight into organization performance. We conduct a narrative critique and synthesis of pertinent theory, meta-analysis and applied work. We separate various forms of workforce diversity and inclusion from opportunity and measurement considerations, and propose a model whereby inclusion moderates the effect of diversity on performance, and idea-sharing and worker involvement may underpin this. Corresponding measurement constructs, a panel data regression form, a mediation model and a worked example are described. Our survey of the literature finds that any link between diversity and performance will vary according to the specific setting, diversity metric(s) considered, and underlying operating dynamics. Worker sentiment toward the organization seems most likely to be affected by inclusion, but no clear inference can be drawn regarding company results. Overall, we contend that a range of diversity representation, worker-focused, career and externally-validated measures must be used together. We offer a novel basis for linking diversity and inclusion metrics to key internal factors, including methods to overcome issues of scale, endogeneity and common-source bias. Finally, we suggest that only where diversity and inclusion metrics prompt further internal activity will they hold strategic value.

Keywords: Workforce diversity; inclusion climate; organizational performance; diversity metrics; opportunity equity; employee engagement; knowledge sharing; moderated mediation.

1. INTRODUCTION

People are now employed in many organizations across a range of demographics, levels of qualification, experience, capability, language and point of view. This diversity has the potential to bring additional information into decision processes and enhance insight into the wider employee base, customer and community. But simply having this diversity in place says nothing about whether all employees enjoy parity in terms of opportunity, or ability to affect decisions.

As such, diversity and inclusion are distinct concepts. The former relates to what differences exist and how they are spread across the organization. The latter pertains to the extent to which individuals feel included, represented and empowered to drive change based on their unique attributes. It is possible to build a diverse workforce but continue to operate (formally or otherwise) processes that preclude them from influencing the business.

Shore et al. (2011) propose that individuals feel included when both their needs for belonging and uniqueness are met. Under this view, an individual will feel included if they

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are able to fit in within a team and have their idiosyncrasies recognized. If however, they need to compromise their identity in order to fit in, they will undergo a process of assimilation.

As a result, we would expect the link between diversity and performance to take various forms. While there are potential benefits to receiving a wider range of information and insight from a diverse workforce, there will also be associated costs such as reduced interaction and increased sub-grouping and conflict. The categorization-elaboration framework links the above issues to the processes of information processing and social categorisation.

Adequate measurement will therefore be key to teasing out the links between diversity, inclusion and performance. One measure, e.g. % female staff, provides no insight into the fairness of recruitment and selection practices, availability of promotion routes or degree of input from employees towards key outputs. Equally, an overall positive picture of inclusion across an organization could mask significant variation between teams and other segments.

Here we propose a comprehensive suite of measures of diversity and inclusion, and investigate how each set of variables relates to different aspects of performance. We consider the various forms of performance to be inter-related yet separate. We argue that diversity and representation measures speak to the make-up of an organization, and that measures of inclusion and opportunity allow us to understand to what extent the organization can harness its people.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Diversity as a source of information and organizational complexity

There are 2 key explanations for diversity in the literature. Under the informational explanation, diverse groups will consider a wider pool of information as a consequence of their varied knowledge and experience. Alternatively, from the social-categorization view, salient (real or imagined) group differences may lead to subgroups forming and impede group interaction.

Van Knippenberg et al. (2004) build on these approaches in their categorization-elaboration theory. They suggest that group performance will vary as a function of the degree to which members can share, appraise and combine information pertinent to the task. As intergroup bias may impede this, the effects of diversity are contingent upon subsequent group dynamics.

In turn, when considering metrics, it follows that the focus must extend beyond simple representation of staff in the workforce to consider levels of information-sharing, engagement and influence over key decisions.

2.2 Inclusion as belongingness and recognition of uniqueness

Shore et al. (2011) offer one possible rationale as to why inclusion differs from workforce diversity. They suggest that individuals require feeling welcomed but also valued for what makes them different.

Accordingly, items measuring how friendly co-workers are or employee happiness may be insufficient proxies of inclusion. Instead, an effective scale would seek to determine if people feel free to voice opposition, feel rewarded, know pertinent information and work openly about salient identity features.

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2.3 Context and the diversity–performance relationship

Joshi and Roh (2009) compiled data from 8,757 teams spanning 39 meta-analyses. They reported negligible overall effects of diversity on team outcomes, but observed significant heterogeneity across the different samples. This was affected by industry, occupational sector and some aspects of team composition.As such, it does not seem reasonable to assume a given form of diversity will lead to comparable levels of performance impact. We would expect the role of functional diversity to differ between research, manufacturing, government and contact centres for example. An adequate theory needs to reflect this.

2.4 Diversity climate and inclusion climate

Holmes et al. (2021) combined 109 effect sizes across 94 studies. They found that the association between climate and outcomes was moderated by: climate type; outcome domain; sample characteristics; employee consensus; and data source.

They further report that inclusion climates had larger effects than general diversity climates, and effects were greater when considering employees' attitudes vs. their productivity and withdrawal. Of course, increased feelings of inclusion and job satisfaction will not map 1:1 onto firm profits.

2.5 Diversity management and organizational practices

Mor Barak et al. (2016) collated findings from 30 research papers covering 496,740 employees. Overall they highlight the role of policy and practice in driving a diverse and inclusive organization, as opposed to simply seeking to increase the number of under-represented groups.

This suggests that when looking at these topics, it is beneficial to consider the 'system' in place. E.g. recruitment, access to training and learning, progression, line manager responsibility, staff voice... all can give insights beyond raw figures.

2.6 Financial performance and the interpretation of business evidence

According to McKinsey's 2023 report, there is a correlation between senior leadership diversity and company outperformance. In particular, they find that companies with the top quartile of gender diversity are 39% more likely to outperform their peers (i.e. bottom quartile).

Of course, this should be read as a comparison of likelihood of outperformance. There is no claim of a 39% increase in profitability from being in the top quartile, nor can we conclude from this result alone that diversity drives improved performance. It could well be that higher performing firms have more capacity to implement diversity and inclusion practices; alternatively, the caliber of senior leaders could drive both.

2.7 Literature synthesis

Table 1. Selected literature and implications for measurement

Study	Main contribution	Implication for this paper
van Knippenberg et al. (2004)	Explains competing information and categorization processes	Measure knowledge exchange and cooperation alongside representation
Joshi and Roh (2009)	Demonstrates the importance of organizational context	Include industry, occupation, and team characteristics
Shore et al. (2011)	Defines inclusion through belongingness and uniqueness	Measure employee experience separately from composition

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Mor Barak et al. (2016)	Connects diversity management with inclusion climate	Assess organizational practices and access to opportunities
Holmes et al. (2021)	Identifies moderators of climate–outcome relationships	Separate attitudinal outcomes from objective performance
McKinsey & Company (2023)	Reports diversity–financial performance associations	Treat financial correlations cautiously

Source: *Author's synthesis of the cited literature.*

3. RESEARCH GAP

From the literature, there are a number of shortcomings which need to be accounted for by an integrated model of measuring D&I. As discussed above, D&I are often conflated, even though a highly diverse population can still feel excluded within their workplace.

A further shortcoming is that most existing metrics capture only the extent to which individuals are represented at various stages in the business, without indicating anything about process. For example, if all staff have access to equivalent learning and training, and can feed into decision-making?

Similarly, some studies consider the effect of staff perceptions and feelings on performance. While these may be desirable in themselves, they require explicit testing against metrics of performance and profit. Individual level findings will also struggle to extrapolate to the broader organization.

Lastly, it can be difficult to establish directionality from cross-sectional data. It is possible that better business performance drives greater D&I activity. In this study, we therefore aim to disentangle the above considerations, articulate potential intervening variables, and apply a repeated measures approach.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

4.1 Objectives

1. Develop a multidimensional framework for diversity and inclusion measurement.
2. Explain the mechanisms connecting diversity and inclusion with performance.
3. Propose models for testing direct, mediating, and moderating relationships.
4. Demonstrate metric interpretation through transparent numerical examples.
5. Identify methodological conditions required for credible empirical evaluation.

4.2 Research questions

1. Which metrics distinguish workforce representation from substantive inclusion?
2. Does inclusion strengthen the relationship between diversity and performance?
3. Do knowledge sharing and engagement explain part of this relationship?
4. How do organizational context and measurement choices affect interpretation?

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research design

We have adopted a narrative review and the construction of a conceptual framework, drawing from a range of pertinent theory, meta-analysis and practice papers relating to workforce diversity and organizational outcomes.

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As such, this work does not constitute a full systematic literature review or further meta-analysis. There is also no primary data collection (i.e. staff questionnaire), firm-level analysis, regressions or tests of hypotheses.

5.2 Source selection

The key criteria underpinning source selection included:

- Conceptualizations of diversity and inclusion;
- The link(s) between diversity and performance;
- Differences across studies;
- Organisational climate; and
- Performance data.

The bulk of these will be peer reviewed, academic theory and reviews, with some practitioner work included where it features prominently in the wider literature.

5.3 Analytical procedure

This involves reviewing how each study has operationalised its variables, differentiating levels of data, establishing underlying theoretical processes and deriving an associated measurement suite and hypotheses to be tested.

All numerical examples below are hypothetical teaching illustrations. They are not empirical findings.

6. DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK

6.1 Diversity metrics

Table 2: Recommended diversity indicators

Indicator	Calculation	Interpretation	Main limitation
Group representation	Group employees ÷ total employees × 100	Workforce composition	Does not measure influence or opportunity
Leadership representation	Group leaders ÷ all leaders × 100	Composition of decision-making positions	Depends on the definition of leadership
Representation ratio	Group share in organization ÷ group share in a relevant benchmark	Representation relative to an appropriate comparison	Benchmark choice strongly affects interpretation
Hiring rate	Group hires ÷ group applicants × 100	Conversion from application to appointment	Applicant pools may already reflect barriers
Promotion rate	Group promotions ÷ eligible group employees × 100	Progression among eligible employees	Eligibility rules require scrutiny
Voluntary turnover rate	Group voluntary exits ÷ average group headcount × 100	Retention patterns	Reasons for departure require investigation
Functional	Distribution across	Variety of work-related	Categories may

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diversity	professional or disciplinary categories	expertise	conceal differences in skill

Groupings should make sense in the relevant situation, be made available on a voluntary basis (if applicable) and protected to an appropriate degree of confidentiality.

6.2 Blau's diversity index

For a categorical characteristic:

$$D = 1 - \sum_{g=1}^{G} P_g^2$$

where p_g is the proportion of employees in category g.

For a hypothetical distribution of 50%, 30%, and 20%:

$$D = 1 - (0.50^2 + 0.30^2 + 0.20^2) = 0.62$$

The index equals the probability that two independently selected employees belong to different categories under this distribution.

Its maximum depends on the number of categories:

$$D_{max} = 1 - \frac{1}{G}$$

So for 3 categories, D will be at most ~0.667. It is important to have a fixed set of categories across comparisons. Large values reflect diversity, not fairness or representation.

6.3 Inclusion metrics

Table 3: Proposed inclusion dimensions

Dimension	Illustrative survey statement	Organizational meaning
Belonging	"I feel accepted as a member of my team."	Social acceptance
Voice	"My suggestions receive fair consideration."	Participation and influence
Uniqueness	"My different perspectives are valued."	Recognition of distinctive contributions
Respect	"People treat me with dignity."	Quality of interpersonal treatment
Information access	"I receive the information needed to contribute."	Access to organizational resources
Opportunity fairness	"Development opportunities are allocated fairly."	Perceived procedural equity

These are proposed items, not a validated scale. They require pilot testing and construct validation before research use.

For responses on a five-point scale, a descriptive 0–100 transformation is:

$$I = \frac{\bar{x} - 1}{4} \times 100$$

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A mean response of 3.8 becomes:

$$I = 70$$

This score describes the selected response scale. It is not an externally validated threshold of successful inclusion.

6.4 Inclusion gaps and opportunity equity

An average score should be accompanied by subgroup comparisons:

$$I_g = I_g - \Delta I_{comparison}$$

If one group has a score of 64 and the comparator group has a score of 78, there will be a gap of -14. This will flag something to look into, but will not on its own explain why.

Promotion parity can be expressed as:

$$PR_g = \frac{Promotion\ rate_g}{Promotion\ rate_{comparison}}$$

If the ratio is less than 1, this suggests that promotions have been observed at a reduced rate. More detail on grade, pool membership, service, applicant actions and selection process will be required to draw conclusions.

Any pay comparison should include a raw result as well as results for appropriately defined adjustments. However, statistical control cannot ensure fairness across all relevant factors.

6.5 Organizational performance indicators

Table 4: Performance outcomes

Dimension	Possible indicators	Interpretation requirement
Financial	Operating margin, return on assets	Account for industry and economic conditions
Operational	Output per employee, defect rate, service time	Match measures to comparable tasks
Innovation	Implemented ideas, new-product revenue	Distinguish idea quantity from value
Workforce	Absence, engagement, voluntary turnover	Combine administrative and survey data
Customer or beneficiary	Satisfaction, complaints, service access	Examine relevant stakeholder groups

Performance measures will first need to be considered on their own. Pooling performance measures together risks masking contradictory impacts and imposing ad-hoc weights.

7. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

Inclusion is then considered here as a) an antecedent that may have some bearing in its own right, and b) a moderating variable between diversity and performance.

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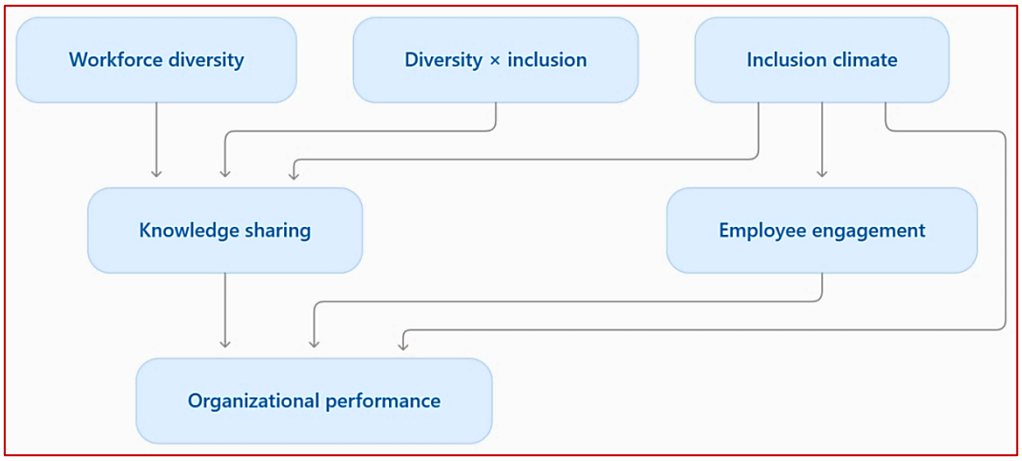


Figure 1: *Proposed framework. Arrows represent hypotheses, not established causal effects.*

The model suggests that diversity increases the range of ideas accessible to an organization, and inclusion determines if those can be shared and utilized by staff. Alternatively, engagement offers another route along which inclusion can impact firm performance.

The hypotheses for a future empirical study are:

- **H1:** Inclusion climate is positively associated with subsequent organizational performance.
- **H2:** Knowledge sharing mediates the association between diversity and performance.
- **H3:** Employee engagement mediates the association between inclusion and performance.
- **H4:** Inclusion positively moderates the diversity–performance relationship.
- **H5:** Inclusion positively moderates the association between diversity and knowledge sharing.

The direct effect of demographic diversity is left open rather than assumed to be universally positive.

8. STATISTICAL MODELING FRAMEWORK

8.1 Panel model

A longitudinal specification is:

$$P_{j,t+1} = \alpha + \beta_1 D_{jt} + \beta_2 I_{jt} + \beta_3 (D_{jt} I_{jt}) + \gamma' X_{jt} + \mu_t + \tau_t + \varepsilon_{j,t+1}$$

where:

- $P_{j,t+1}$: subsequent performance of organization or unit j.
- D_{jt}: diversity measure.
- I_{jt}: inclusion climate.
- $\boldsymbol{X}_{jt}$: theoretically justified controls.
- μ_j: organization or unit fixed effects.
- τ_t: time effects.

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Examples of possible control variables are the number of workers, their occupations, level of capital and exogenous industry-level characteristics. Ideally, these would be justified based on some causal link to firm outcomes.

This suggests a conditional relationship between diversity and firm:

$$\frac{\partial P}{\partial D} = \beta_1 + \beta_3 I$$

If $\beta 3 > 0$, then we can conclude that diversity will be associated with improved performance as inclusion increases. However, this does not imply that diversity will be positively related to performance for all levels of inclusion.

8.2 Mediation through knowledge sharing

$$K_{jt} = a_0 + a_1 D_{jt} + a_2 I_{jt} + \left(a_3 D_{jt} I_{jt}\right) + \boldsymbol{\delta' X_{jt}} + u_{jt}$$

$$P_{j,t+1} = b_0 + c' D_{jt} + b_1 K_{jt} + b_2 I_{jt} + \boldsymbol{\theta' X_{jt}} + v_{j,t+1}$$

The conditional indirect association is:

$$IE(I) = (a_1 + a_3 I) b_1$$

Confidence intervals can be obtained using bootstrap methods to reflect uncertainty in the indirect effect. Further, causal inferences depend on key assumptions regarding confounding and time sequence.

8.3 Measurement and estimation requirements

These analyses should only be undertaken after:

- Confirm validity for each included variable.
- Check reliability and equivalence of measurement across units.
- Ensure adequate level-1 intraclass correlation.
- Use appropriate SEs given the design.
- Address issues of attrition, non-response and robustness to variable choice.
- Include measures of magnitude and precision.

Note that the use of FE and lags will only partially address concerns over time-varying omitted variables and endogeneity.

9. HYPOTHETICAL ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

9.1 Diversity and inclusion interaction

Consider this invented model:

$$P = 50 + 2D + 3I + 4DI$$

Here, D and I are standardized scores. The coefficients are chosen only to demonstrate interpretation.

Table 5: Hypothetical predicted performance

Diversity	Inclusion	Predicted performance
Low: −1	Low: −1	49
High: +1	Low: −1	45
Low: −1	High: +1	47

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High: +1	High: +1	59

At low inclusion:

$$\frac{\partial P}{\partial D} = 2 + 4(-1) = -2$$

At high inclusion:

$$\frac{\partial P}{\partial D} = 2 + 4(1) = 6$$

This example highlights the danger of using one overall mean diversity coefficient. The model implies an inverse relationship between diversity and performance for lower levels of inclusion, and positive at higher levels.

Naturally these numbers cannot be taken to represent the true distribution of firms. We would need to estimate coefficients, their uncertainties and confirm the appropriateness of the model.

9.2 Hypothetical indirect association

Suppose a future study estimates:

$$a_1 = 0.30, \qquad b_1 = 0.40$$

The implied indirect association is:

$$a_1 b_1 = 0.12$$

With standardized coefficients and an appropriately fitted model, this implies a 0.12 SD change in performance for a 1 SD change in diversity via the predicted effect of knowledge sharing.

However, this by itself gives no indication of significance or causal inference.

9.3 Representation and progression

Suppose women constitute 40% of an organization's workforce but 15% of its senior leadership:

$$Leadership - to - workforce\ representation\ ratio\ = \frac{0.15}{0.40} = 0.375$$

The resulting figure of 37.5% will form the basis of an investigation into past recruitment, work classifications, access to promotion, continuity of service and opportunities for advancement.

However, it gives no insight as to why this disparity exists.

10. DISCUSSION

Based on the preceding discussion, we would expect measurement to sit somewhere between the make-up of an organization, its people's perceptions and how the organization operates. Each category of indicator has a role to play. We will know what proportion of our workforce falls into various groups using representation metrics. If they can work for and within the organization, we will learn from inclusion metrics. Through opportunity metrics, we can understand the spread of career progression and other benefits. And finally, if any aspect of the organization is impacted, performance metrics will indicate this. All of these need to be

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considered at suitable levels. It is not self-evident that an improved relationship at the individual level will translate to improved organizational outcomes. Nor that the success of an organization is attributable to the diversity of its senior employees.

Furthermore, aggregate values can mask important information about sub-populations of interest. It could be the case that an organization meets some benchmark on an aggregate inclusion metric but individuals (or a sub-unit) are still excluded. By reporting further breakdowns, confidence intervals and non-response, potentially salient findings can emerge. In the context of India, suitable variables to consider would depend on the objectives of the research and the researcher's position and ethics. However, as above, there is no justification for combining multiple variables to produce one metric unless there is a theoretical rationale.

Of course, ensuring that all staff are treated fairly continues to lie with organizations, regardless of the extent to which this can be linked to improved performance. But the latter can help drive managerial action.

11. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are 5 steps an organization can take to implement this:

1. Create an integrated set of measures covering diversity representation, perceptions, mobility, tenure and productivity.
2. Look behind the process. From hiring through to access, inclusion at meetings, learning etc.
3. Make suitable 'like-for-like' comparisons across job, business area and point in time.
4. Trial changes and monitor. Ideally with progressive roll-out or an equivalent benchmark.
5. Close the loop on actions. Someone must lead the analysis of shortfalls and track the effect of any remedial measures.

Recording training undertaken and publishing diversity policies will tell us something, but need to be complemented by measures of people's perceptions and practice within the organization.

12. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The review builds on existing work but does not produce any novel quantitative findings, comprehensive review of the literature, or establish causality. All figures presented serve solely as illustrations to help readers understand the proposed approach. Survey questions will need to be further developed, and the various metrics will likely need to be modified to suit individual organizations. Subsequent work would benefit from multi-source (survey, HR, business) data over time. Further work can also address if these constructs work similarly for different population subgroups, and whether there are organizational-level effects on these measures that in turn predict externally validated results.

Finally, this line of research would be well served by considering smaller firms, government bodies, charities etc., rather than the large organizations featured in many commercial publications.

13. CONCLUSION

There are many distinct types of metric available to measure aspects of how organizations operate. Metrics relating to diversity tell us something about the characteristics of the organization's people, whereas those focusing on inclusion or access to opportunities help to

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establish the extent to which people are able to engage. Based on this body of work, it appears that any effect of diversity will be contingent on factors within the organization and its approach to difference. Therefore, metrics capturing levels of diversity cannot in themselves form a reliable predictor of organizational performance. In our conceptual model, diversity feeds into the process of knowledge exchange, and inclusion is posited to have some direct impact, and also mediate the effects of diversity. Rigorous testing will require time-series evidence, sound measurement and scaling, and exogenous dependent variables. As such, these metrics are most useful as a means to inform further actions. Any conclusions regarding organizational performance must be made cautiously.

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