

Adapting Organizational Inclusivity Through Empowering Gender-Diversity

Colton Nguyen

The Chicago School, Washington D.C., UA

ColtonGNguyen@gmail.com

Abstract: With an increasingly diverse workforce, organizational efficiency needs to consider the measurement of sustainability through the empowerment of social identities. When organizational leaders intentionally foster a culture that values their gender-diverse stakeholders, organizational efficiency increases. This article reviews how organizational leaders are able to increase their productivity, efficiency and overall organizational sustainability through adapting to inclusive practices. Sharma (2019) notes that initiatives to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion can significantly enhance a company's performance, resonating particularly with newer generations of employees who seek meaning and purpose in their work. The organization's environment has the opportunity to facilitate a stronger stakeholder-focused culture which emphasizes inclusivity. Through the evaluation of Diversity, Equity and Inclusivity principles as well as analyzing the intersectionality of Gender-Diversity, this article highlights how organizational inclusivity must empower its stakeholders. Social Identity Theory presents how individuals are able to thrive through their authenticity. This leads to workplace leaders being presented with the organizational need of adapting to include equitable practices for inclusivity. As social identity is a prevalent part of employee's psychological-safety, organizations need to measure their efficiency through efforts of inclusivity. Workplaces must value the psychological-safety of all of its stakeholders in order to thrive as an entire organization (Frazier et al., 2017). Current research demonstrates the need for organizations to practice alignment of stakeholders and collaboration for productivity (Zhenjing et al., 2022). However, the gap in current research presents that gender identity is not currently considered as a social identity that needs inclusivity efforts in the workplace. When organizations adapt their practices to enable all stakeholders to thrive through inclusive efforts, overall organizational efficiency increases. Stringer (1999) discusses how the facilitation and implementation of change as part of action research projects can help create systemic changes. This type of change to the systems of the workplace through equitable practices for gender-diversity would create change for future generations in the workplace.

Keywords: Organizational Efficiency, Gender-Diversity, Social Identity Theory, Empowerment

1. Introduction

As new emerging diverse employee populations continue to contribute to the growing workforce. Gender-diversity must be considered for efforts of inclusivity. Gender-diversity encompasses the intentional effort of diversifying a workforce through different social identities, and other underrepresented gender minorities (Keller et al., 2021). This can include those who identify as transgender, gender-expansive, queer, as well as cis-gender (not transgender identifying), when the social dominant group is not cis-gender identifying.

Sexism is a prevalent issue when organizations are seeking to improve their inclusivity efforts. Similar to experiences of sexism faced by cis women, Trans Feminine individuals also experience a pay gap. This is represented by a pay decrease of approximately 30% after transitioning (Carpenter et al., 2020).

Similar to inequitable workplace systems, workplace discrimination can exist in many forms preventing practices of inclusivity from existing. Those who are gender-diverse risk negative workplace psychological safety. A result of both cultural biases and a lack of policy defending the social identity of individuals (Martinez et al., 2017). Social identity must have a psychologically-safe workplace to exist successfully. This study is centered on the research question: how do gender-diverse individuals experience organizational inclusivity?

2. Review of Literature

Han & Roh (2020) discuss how job satisfaction influences how team members interact with an organization and the need for psychological safety. When this is overlooked, teams have lower satisfaction, alignment, and communication. Dowell et al. (2019) discuss how collaboration and alignment are needed in order for organizations to have more robust communication and better performance. Other researchers have presented that productivity and value are attributed to how one identifies in an organization and their level of trust and comfort (Arasli et al., 2020).

Other trends in research discuss how work efficiency is impacted by discrimination leading to anxiety and depression. In these examples, we can refer to the research by Cavanagh et al. (2021) to determine how policies, practices, and interventions determine how discrimination impacts employees' mental health. Workplace

psychological safety influences not just individuals but entire systems. Clark et al. (2020) argue that there is a greater cost for society as a whole when these issues are not acknowledged or addressed. There is a need for workplace psychological safety to be addressed at a foundational level. Volevakha et al. (2021) states that workplace psychological safety is a basic human need, which is why it should be a priority and an integral part of organizational policy. In workplaces where psychological safety is not a priority, there is a risk of negative performance for the overall organization (Clark et al., 2020). For organizations to have an inclusive workplace culture, participants must engage in collaboration and effective information sharing (Dowell et al., 2019).

3. Gender Diversity

Gender-Diversity can include anyone who identifies as a gender, outside of the norm of a social dominant group. Matsuno & Budge (2017) present that these issues extend to those who identify as gender expansive or non-binary, making up to 1/3 of the transgender community. As younger generations of gender-diverse individuals openly transition while already being hired or working in an environment, new lived experiences emerge. As a result of this, Beauregard et al. (2018) discuss how workplaces still exclude protections for gender-diversity in workplace policies. The lack of visibility has contributed to the stigma and discrimination faced by this group. Huffman et al. (2020) emphasize the need for more research to contribute to workplace lived experience accounts of the gender-diverse population. This study demonstrated how organizations who fail to adapt to gender-diversity impact their own organizational wellbeing. This aligns with (Martinez et al., 2017), who argue the need for more research and visibility to be conducted as it can predict work outcomes for gender-diverse workgroups. Other scholars argue that policing against gender-diverse bodies needs to be prioritized (Bolivar, 2017). The different variations of acknowledgment of the visibility of the community have impacted the way research, policies, and how gender-diversity is generally represented (Parmenter et al., 2020).

4. Workplace Contract Theory

A workplace psychological contract exists when stakeholders have trust, voice, and expectations with their organizations (Guo, 2017). Research by Wen et al. (2022) demonstrates that a violation of workplace psychological contracts among employees can lead to consequences in performance. Some employees may have negative feelings that convert to incivility, which can occur at any available opportunity for revenge. This research highlights the areas of negative repercussions and the impact of workplace contracts not being met. Counterproductive behavior can be a direct result of a breach of the workplace psychological contract. Parr & Howe (2021) discuss how probing questions or inappropriate comments by coworkers can be a breach of job expectations or workplace contracts. This may occur when stakeholders are not perceived or treated equally. Ghani et al. (2020) discuss how often, when employees experience negative or abusive behavior from their coworkers or management, misalignment and negative work performance are the result. This can be both intentional and unintentional. Arasli et al. (2020) define psychological contract violation as an indicator of potential favoritism, insecure job climate, or turnover intention. A positive workplace psychological contract would include employees feeling secure in the future of their organizations where they can be truthful in their identity and voice concerns, or organizations run the risk of a detrimental habit of information hiding (Ghani et al., 2020).

5. Employee Disengagement and The Cost to Organizations

When evaluating the impact of psychological safety in the workplace, the cost of employee disengagement is an indicator that has a financial impact. Mueller (2019) discusses how detrimental behaviors and reduced stamina contribute to organizations losing both employees and money. The concept of short-term benefits accompanied by long-term costs is often displayed by employees who are disengaged due to reasons such as low psychological safety or workplace contracts being breached. Research by Rasdi et al. (2021) presents that greater levels of financial insecurity and burnout are associated with greater levels of work disengagement. This pertains to both organizations as well as individuals. The psychological contract theory of reciprocal obligations between employees and the organization impacts the engagement level within the organization (Azim et al., 2020). This is also where financial implications take place. Deviant behavior, increasing or decreasing, has lasting effects.

On the contrary impact, other research suggests that high engagement can lead to positive team performance. In a study by Bakker & Albrecht (2018), predictors were discussed for team success and drivers of motivation. Employee engagement was demonstrated to be viewed as a good predictor of important employee, team, and organizational outcomes. Other research, such as Mueller (2019), discusses how environmental circumstances

and the individual's perception of these contextual factors is what contributes to the engagement of employees and its cost to organizations, such as organization costs like impaired logical reasoning, cognitive impairment, and foolish and disproportional risk-taking. Organizations that value crucial decision-makers need to consider the cost of disengaged employees. Disengaged employees may engage in avoidance, as well as poor coping mechanisms for conflict (Mostafa et al., 2021). In organizations that experience attrition as a threat, disengagement of employees has a considerable cost. Research by Rasdi et al. (2021) shows that the result of disengagement created a culture of resignation. This included organizations with employees who needed and wanted solutions to problems but did not feel a workplace safe enough to be engaged and seek resources.

6. Equity in the Workplace

Equity in the workplace looks different for different stakeholders. The term "equity" has been conceptualized as fairness, where individual or community needs are considered (Lanfranconi et al., 2020). Additional research demonstrates that psychological safety is a crucial determinant of equity in the workplace (McCluney et al., 2017). Equity encompasses numerous forms of intersectionality and identity. Organizations that value equity in the workplace traditionally have candidates who apply due to numerous factors. While organizations that lack equity face issues with both applying and hiring candidates (Flory et al., 2021). Another issue is that if intersectional identities lead to intersectional discrimination, then multiple discrimination may affect candidates' job search (Staiger et al., 2018). This contributes to similar demographics being perpetuated in the workforce (Isaacs, 2020). This research also demonstrated that skills, productivity, work, and leadership are judged differently on the basis of gender alone. This system creates inequity in the workplace. When experiences of equity involve prejudice, it can be defined by the person experiencing it as having more conscious feelings of negative affect (Stephens et al., 2019)

Equity encompasses multiple historically marginalized groups. For example, research by Isaacs (2020) discusses the narrative of female-identifying people. This entails how female-identifying people are significantly less likely than men to be promoted to senior management roles. In comparison, other researchers like Chaudhry (2020) discuss the intersectionality of being Black Transgender and Female identifying as it relates specifically to the sexual and class exploitation of all black women. Equity efforts in the workplace need to be inclusive to all demographics to be effective for all stakeholders. When equity is present in the workplace, intersectional identities are acknowledged, and resources are made present through previous intentional efforts. In research presented by Stephens et al. (2019), equity in the workplace is made present by actions taken to reduce workplace bias. However, it is important to note that different understandings of equity or equality and corresponding practices impact how perceived disparities are potentially perceived (Lanfranconi et al., 2020).

This requires multilevel interventions, such as transformational leadership interventions that are made with the intention of disrupting bias across all organization levels. Research by Onyeador et al. (2021) suggests that equity in the workplace looks like preparing stakeholders to engage with responses from dominant group members and to engage in implicit bias training.

7. Methods and Data Analysis

A dual-methodological approach comprising interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) and hermeneutic phenomenology was used for this study. Through semi-structured interviews as the primary investigative tool, the study sought to capture the nuanced lived experiences, reflective insights, and meaning-making processes of gender-diverse empowerment. The overarching objective was to explore the contextual dynamics surrounding the experience of empowerment derived from the need of efforts of inclusivity within organizational structures for eleven gender-diverse participants. A supplementary analytical lens was applied to scrutinize the influence of Transformational Leadership Theory and Intervention on the psychological safety of participants. The selection of an interpretive phenomenological approach was predicated upon its participant-centric and meaning-making attributes. This methodological choice was grounded in established frameworks and guidelines within qualitative research, drawing upon the works of Creswell (2017), Miles and Huberman (1994), and Saldana (2015).

The methodology of this study encompassed the utilization of Zoom Auto Transcription for the transcription of audio recordings. The obtained transcripts were meticulously examined in Data Analysis. Verification of the accuracy and fidelity of responses was ensured through the dissemination of transcripts to study participants and bracketing by the lead researcher. The organizational and coding process of the interview transcripts was executed through InVivo software to facilitate systematic data analysis. A thematic analysis methodology was

employed to discern patterns and commonalities in the responses and collective experiences of interviewees. Value-coding and phenomenological themes were used. This systematic analytical process afforded a comprehensive evaluation of the meaning-making responses provided by interviewees, thereby furnishing invaluable insights aligned with the overarching research objectives of the study.

8. Participants

This study examines gender identity within a complex spectrum. Participants remain anonymous through assigned numbers. Limitations include a small sample size due to individuals comfortable discussing workplace discomfort, trauma, or discomfort without causing further harm. Access is limited to those willing to disclose their gender identity. All 11 participants provided oral consent, and their recordings were deleted after coding, aligning with Creswell & Creswell's (2018) recommendation for qualitative research sample sizes. For IPA studies, a sample size ranging from 3 to 10 is appropriate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Small sample sizes, as suggested by Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), enhance the richness and understanding of each participant's world. Assigned numbers protect intersectional identities during the discussion of data findings.

9. Findings

The three core themes that were developed demonstrated the most consistent patterns of meaning-making across the narratives of all 11 participants. Data analysis revealed three emerging themes from the participant's narratives. The first theme discusses the organizational need to adapt to inclusivity. The second theme presents the cost of not adapting to organizational inclusivity. The third theme identifies how transformational leadership interventions empower gender-diversity.

10. Need for Adapting to Inclusivity

Table 1: First Theme: Organizational Need for Adapting to Inclusivity

Organizational Need for Adapting to Inclusivity	
Representative Quote	Interpretation
Participant 10: I know of people who have left their jobs due to discrimination and the difficulty that those individuals then have to endure in finding other means of employment is akin to criminality.	The risk of not adapting to inclusivity includes losing employees and high rates of turnover for gender-diverse individuals.
Participant 11: I need a work environment that honors my identity and truth. A place that lets me feel seen and heard and wants to celebrate me. Without that, I don't have a desire to be a part of that environment.	Empowering gender-diversity requires organizational adaptation that celebrates all identities.

In the mentioned excerpts, Participants Ten and Eleven discuss how their experience with an organization without inclusivity efforts facilitated their quitting process. Their previous organization's lack of implementing efforts of inclusivity has impacted both their psychological safety as well as ability to do their workplace responsibilities. This workplace environment is discussed by both participants that does not facilitate organizational growth, nor authenticity.

In this excerpt on Table 1, Participant Eleven describes their account of having management not "honor" their identity. To provide additional context, Participant Eleven mentioned in their interview that this quitting resulted in them taking their book of business to another organization. When organizations are not willing to treat their stakeholders with inclusive-centered processes, it leads to resentment and low morale. Research demonstrated by Cannonier & Galloway (2020) shows that in unfavorable work environments, there is a greater risk of demotions, discrimination, and termination of employment where the reasons do not document issues related to job performance. This demonstrates how lack of inclusivity ultimately resulted in stakeholders quitting and benefiting a different organization in the same industry.

11. The Cost of not Adapting to Organizational Inclusivity

Table 2: Second Theme: The Cost of not adapting to organizational inclusivity

The Cost of not adapting to organizational inclusivity	
Representative Quote	Interpretation
Participant 10: Discrimination in the workplace produces low self-esteem and a hazardous culture that negatively impacts the bottom line Participant 4: This would occur every day. It was jokes in zoom meetings they would just be so angry and going back and forth about people who listed pronouns in signature and coworkers would be so upset about how people identify and they would say I identify as a pineapple...It would be 30 mins out of an hour long meeting and it would really take the meeting off topic all the time. It was enjoyment to them.	Organizations experience a financial impact for enabling discrimination, The cost of lack of gender-diverse empowerment is real company time that converts to dollars after prolonged time periods.

The theme of “cost” for organizations that do not adapt for inclusivity is present in all eleven participants. All participants discussed how social identity has contributed to organizational financial impact through workplace experience. In participant ten’s account, they describe how their experience of discrimination in the workplace has impacted their psychological-safety and in turn impacts the culture and bottom line of their organization. When people do not

In Participant four’s account, they describe how through multiple team meetings a week, a team of five executives would constantly spend time making jokes about people putting their gender-identity or pronouns in their email signature. The total time amounted in being 30 minutes out of 60 minute long meetings, five days a week, across five team members. This results in an on average 50% lower productivity rate across an entire team due to not adapting to inclusive efforts for gender-diversity. When organizations empower their stakeholders, instead of enabling “othering”, organizational inclusivity can occur. These efforts have been shown to boost productivity and promote workplace loyalty and performance (Kundu & Mor, 2017). While these accounts both highlight the positive and negative effect of this, the phenomenon of the relationship between discrimination existing in the workplace in relation to how an organization is impacted financially is revealed. Contrarily, it also demonstrates how when workplaces value inclusivity there is also opportunity for growth and higher profits.

As shown in Table 2, Participant Ten mentions in their interview that “discrimination in the workplace produces low self-esteem and a hazardous culture that negatively impacts the bottom line.” They discuss this experience as it relates to the context of workplaces losing employees due to them facing discrimination. However, on the other side of this perspective, the theme of diversity being necessary in an organization to create positive financial impact was shared by Participant Four.

12. Need for Transformational Leadership Intervention

Table 3: Third Theme: Need for Transformational Leadership Intervention

Need for Transformational Leadership Intervention	
Representative Quote	Interpretation
Participant 1: I had one coworker pull everyone aside to make sure use the right pronouns. The original store manager didn’t feel comfortable correcting other employees and didn’t stand up for anyone and didn’t have the competence or guts to correct people or issue any warnings or ramifications. Participant 5: Being in a place that is ostracizing and othering makes me feel disconnected from my body and anxious mentally. This is how work makes me feel on the very worst days, when my identity is erased, or terrible things are happening in the news to my community that I cannot talk to my colleagues about. For this reason, I would appreciate community and visibility at work,	Leaders must make interventions in order to adapt their organization to inclusivity. Transformational Leadership Interventions can impact how their stakeholders experience their role, and contribution to the organization’s performance.

The emerging theme as present in Table 3 of “Need for Transformational Leadership Intervention” demonstrates an example of how participants in the study could have benefited through leadership intervention in their workplace. While Participant Five expressed feelings of being “anxious” and “being in a place that is ostracizing”, Participant one discusses how their manager didn’t stand up for them. These narratives represent how managers, clients, and coworkers can help facilitate an “equitable” treatment for everyone in the workplace through interventions. Specifically for management and leaders, a common recurring theme is using this intervention period to adapt other stakeholders to inclusivity.

Participant five describe how their identity feels “erased” as a result of individuals othering them in the workplace. In this account the focus is put on “visibility” as being a changing point for a different experience. While this account focuses on the inequity of gender-identity, it also highlights how leaders can better adapt their organization for future workforces by promoting visibility and inclusivity efforts.

13. Discussion

Organizations need to address how to create workplace psychological-safe environments for everyone’s identity. The participants in this study bring to life how there is a direct relationship of organizational efficacy through time and energy. These narratives capture the lack of organizational efficacy, as it relates to workplaces not adapting to inclusive efforts for their employees. The findings of this study also demonstrate the actual impact on the organizations’ own bottom line. Instead of organizations failing to adapt, gender-diverse empowerment practices could be implemented to create environments that encourage all stakeholders to thrive. This would lead to future positive “Organizational Financial Impact” and prevent cases of discrimination, job loss, and overall deductions from organizations’ “bottom line” from occurring. The conclusions that are evident from the analysis align with the concept of inequity, and lack of inclusivity leading to less psychological-safety in the workplace (Herndon & McCline, 2017). The salient evidence-based points effectively addressed how gender-diverse discrimination can exist at all levels of the workplace. To prevent this impacting an organization, organizational leaders must make interventions to adapt. The problem of lack of identifying gender-diversity as a category that exists in the workplace inclusivity culture currently, has facilitated this lack of organizational efficiency for everyone.

The findings of this study contribute to how leaders understand organizations as they relate to equitable and inclusive practices. Transformational Leadership change can occur when there is buy-in from all stakeholders at all levels (Thompson et al., 2018). Leaders must be informed and ready to make intentional efforts so that everyone experiences workplace psychological-safety.

14. Final Remarks

The purpose of this study was to understand how the empowerment of gender-diversity impacted a workplace by exploring how individuals experience their identity as it relates to efforts of inclusivity and psychosocial safety. These emerging themes emphasize the need for leadership intervention as it relates to protecting the psychological-safety of different social identities in the workplace, while benefiting the organization. As a result, recommendations have been advised to further the growth of the study of gender-diversity.

15. Recommendations

The recommendations for future studies include acknowledging that different gender identities exist and hold relevance for organizational empowerment and efficiency. As the discovered limitations present the nuances of different gender identities, it is notable that workplaces need to create changes as they specifically relate to emerging identities in the workplace.

15.1 Inclusive Environments

Leaders must create workplace environments that facilitate workplace inclusivity. This is not possible when inequitable treatment and processes exist. Workplace assessments and surveys can be used to evaluate current inclusivity efforts. The processes begin with pre-hiring practices and evaluating current policies that limit gender expression and bias.

15.2 Limit Bias Through Connection

An additional recommendation from the findings suggests that leaders must invest in intentional practices to limit biases associated with intersectional social identities. This can be done through storytelling methods, educational workshops, and team collaboration.

15.3 Transformational Leadership Intervention for Changed Culture

Based on my findings, it is apparent that Transformational Leadership could be a solution for organizational efficiency. A culture that values an appreciation for inclusivity and group alignment requires focusing on the individuality of stakeholders. Transformational leaders can increase their team's performance by increasing actions that value stakeholder diversity.

These recommendations are supported through the theme analysis of how participants experienced their workplaces with the intersectionality of gender-diversity. If implemented, these recommendations could have a direct impact on how gender-diversity psychological safety is experienced in the workplace. This recommendation also implies that by creating more work environments that are psychologically safe for gender diversity, other elements of diversity in the workplace will be able to thrive.

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