



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Inclusive Organisational Behaviour: Bridging Workplace Diversity and Inclusion through a Paradigm-Based Lens

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examines how Inclusive Organisational Behaviour (IOB) bridges workplace diversity and inclusion practices, with particular emphasis on the role of research paradigms in shaping the meaning, interpretation, and ethical understanding of organisational research.

Design/methodology/approach: An interpretative literature review was conducted using 35 scholarly works from Google Scholar on inclusive workplaces, diversity management, and inclusion practices. The study applies a paradigm-based lens to analyse how inclusion is conceptualised and studied.

Findings: The review shows that diversity and inclusion are often treated separately, with diversity focusing on representation and inclusion on employee experiences. Inclusion emerges as a multi-level, context-dependent construct shaped by leadership, organisational culture, and psychological safety. Interpretative approaches provide deeper insight into lived experiences and ethical dimensions, while positivist approaches emphasise measurable outcomes but often overlook contextual complexity.

Implications: Organisations should integrate diversity and inclusion into cohesive organisational strategies while adopting context-sensitive research approaches to better understand and capture inclusive practices.

Originality/value: This study links research paradigms with IOB, offering an integrative framework for understanding and advancing inclusion in organisations.

JEL Classification: D91, J24, M12, M14

Introduction

Organisations today widely acknowledge the importance of workforce diversity; however, the greater challenge lies in transforming diversity into meaningful inclusion within the organisation (Morfaki & Morfaki, 2022). The concept of diversity describes how employees differ from each other through their distinct characteristics, which include gender, ethnicity, age, cultural background, skills, and different viewpoints. Organisations apply inclusion to measure how well they acknowledge and appreciate their workers' different traits while using those traits to shape their organisational functions and decision-making methods (Ferdman, 2013; Mor-Barak, 2013). Many organisations have improved their workforce diversity, but they still fail to create work environments where employees feel that their contributions matter, their opinions count, and they

can work at their best. Organisations must recognise that diversity alone does not guarantee improved business outcomes; rather, its benefits are realised when inclusive practices remove barriers to participation and foster a workplace characterised by belonging, equitable treatment, and meaningful involvement in decision-making (Shore & Chung, 2024; Basnet et al., 2024).

The academic literature and organisational practices still maintain a significant gap despite the increased focus on creating inclusive environments. The literature shows that organisations study diversity and inclusion as two separate concepts, which they implement separately from each other. Researchers in diversity studies primarily focus on measuring workforce demographics, examining who works within the organisation and the outcomes they achieve. In contrast, inclusion researchers emphasise

employees' perceptions of belonging, engagement, and recognition within the workplace (Davidson & Ferdman, 2002; Dhanani et al., 2024).

The separation of these two elements prevents organisations and researchers from discovering the methods that organisations use to build actual inclusive organisational cultures which go beyond mere demographic representation. The divide between the two groups becomes established when research paradigms approach their studies from opposing perspectives. Positivist traditions focus their research on collecting measurable information and conducting objective assessments, while interpretive approaches study how employees encounter inclusive practices during their daily work activities (Ahmed et al., 2025). Critical perspectives examine power dynamics and social inequalities and the systemic challenges that organisations establish in their work environments (Gleberman, 2021; Mitchell, 2018). The three viewpoints produce useful knowledge for research, but researchers face challenges in developing a comprehensive understanding of workplace diversity and inclusion because the three approaches remain disconnected from each other.

In response to this limitation, the introduction of IOB serves as a vital framework that helps researchers study organisational inclusion because of its capacity to demonstrate how organisations include people and how people experience inclusion. IOB emphasises that organisations should embed inclusion into their daily practices through inclusive leadership approaches and organisational policies that foster a supportive and equitable workplace environment for employees (Dhir et al., 2024; Kar et al., 2025). Scholars are currently examining inclusion as a process that evolves through individual, team, and organisational development across different organisational environments. The establishment of inclusive work environments depends on four key factors, which include adaptive leadership, employee decision-making involvement, psychological safety, and remote and hybrid work opportunities (Beijer & Knappert, 2024; Georgiadou & Özbilgin, 2024; Ressi et al., 2024). Organisations need to implement behavioural and structural methods that promote participation, respect, and equity at all organisational levels to create an inclusive environment.

Given this context, the process of researching inclusion needs equal focus with the research subject itself. Organisations will only achieve surface-level outcomes because they fail to select research paradigms that help them understand diversity through its visible aspects, while they fail to address fundamental needs, including belongingness, full participation, and equitable treatment (Randel, 2025). The choice of paradigm affects how organisations understand their work environments and the methods they use to create inclusive workplaces through their ethical and operational procedures. This study examines how IOB bridges workplace diversity and

inclusion practices, with particular emphasis on the role of research paradigms in shaping the meaning, interpretation, and ethical understanding of organisational research. This paper argues that selecting an appropriate research paradigm is essential for understanding and advancing workplace diversity and inclusion. Using an interpretative literature review, it synthesises existing theoretical and empirical evidence to develop a comprehensive understanding of IOB, highlighting its ethical foundations and practical implications for contemporary organisations.

Literature Review

Conceptualising Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)

While diversity and inclusion are closely interconnected, they constitute distinct dimensions of organisational functioning. Diversity refers to the presence of differences among individuals, including demographic, cultural, and cognitive characteristics, while inclusion focuses on how those differences are experienced within the workplace (Ferdman, 2013; Mor-Barak, 2013). Early research treated diversity as a structural outcome, emphasising representation, whereas inclusion was later introduced to address whether individuals feel valued and able to participate fully (Davidson & Ferdman, 2002). Recent studies argue that without inclusion, diversity initiatives remain incomplete, as representation alone does not ensure engagement or equity (Shore & Chung, 2024). This distinction highlights the need to understand diversity and inclusion as interconnected rather than separate constructs.

Building on this foundation, contemporary scholarship on IOB has expanded the framework to incorporate equity and belonging as critical success factors. Equity moves beyond equal treatment to ensure fair access to opportunities by addressing systemic barriers and "old patterns" that historically marginalised certain groups (Beijer et al., 2024; Ressi et al., 2024). Belonging is conceptualised as the ultimate psychological outcome, a "multi-level concept" where individuals feel a deep sense of connection to the organisation regardless of work modality, be it remote, hybrid, or in-person (Dhanani et al., 2024; Shore & Chung, 2024). Furthermore, the integration of the IOB suggests that modern DEIB must also account for ethical digital transformation to ensure that personalised learning and AI-driven systems do not inadvertently create new exclusionary dynamics (Embarak, 2025; Ofem, 2024).

Inclusive Organisational Behaviour

IOB has emerged as a framework that integrates diversity and inclusion through everyday organisational practices. It focuses on how behaviours, leadership actions, and organisational systems shape inclusive environments. Rather than viewing inclusion as a static outcome, IOB emphasises it as a dynamic process embedded in daily interactions and decision-making (Dhir et al., 2024; Kar et al., 2025). Research suggests that inclusive behaviour is

influenced by leadership adaptability, employee voice, and participatory practices that enable individuals to contribute meaningfully (Beijer & Knappert, 2024; Ressi et al., 2024; Sharma et al., 2025). This perspective positions inclusion as something organisations actively create through ongoing behavioural and relational processes.

Inclusion in Changing Work Contexts

The evolving nature of work has introduced new complexities to the study of inclusion. The rise of remote and hybrid work arrangements has challenged traditional assumptions about workplace interaction and belonging. Studies indicate that flexible work environments can both support and hinder inclusion, depending on how they are managed (Georgiadou & Özbilgin, 2024). For instance, remote work can increase access and participation for some groups, while also creating risks of isolation and psychological issues (Frączek, 2024). Additionally, technological advancements, including artificial intelligence and digital systems, are reshaping organisational behaviour and raising new questions about fairness, transparency, and participation (Ofem, 2024; Stry, 2020). These developments suggest that inclusion must be continuously redefined in response to changing organisational contexts.

Fragmentation in Diversity and Inclusion Research

Despite growing interest in inclusion, the literature remains fragmented, often treating diversity and inclusion as separate areas of study. Many empirical studies focus on diversity metrics, while others examine inclusion as an individual or psychological experience, with limited integration between the two (Dhanani et al., 2024). This separation can lead to inconsistent findings and fragmented organisational strategies. Furthermore, studies conducted across different contexts, industries, and social identities reveal that inclusion is not a uniform concept but varies depending on situational and cultural factors. This complexity highlights the need for a more integrated framework that connects diversity and inclusion in both theory and practice.

Role of Research Paradigms

A key factor contributing to this fragmentation is the influence of research paradigms. Different paradigms shape how researchers define, study, and interpret inclusion. Positivist approaches tend to focus on measurable outcomes such as performance, engagement, and representation, often seeking generalizable results. In contrast, interpretative approaches emphasise subjective experiences, exploring how employees perceive inclusion in their everyday work lives. Critical perspectives extend this analysis by examining power structures, inequality, and marginalisation within organisations (Mitchell, 2018; Gleiberman, 2021). These differing perspectives provide valuable insights but also contribute to varied and sometimes conflicting understandings of inclusion.

Towards an Integrated Understanding of Inclusion

Bridging workplace diversity and inclusion requires moving beyond fragmented perspectives toward a more integrated understanding. The literature suggests that inclusion is best understood as a multi-level, context-dependent, and dynamic process shaped by both organisational structures and human experiences (Shore & Chung, 2024). IOB offers a promising pathway by connecting diversity with everyday practices, leadership behaviours, and organisational systems. However, achieving this integration also requires greater awareness of the paradigmatic assumptions underlying research. By aligning research approaches with the complexity of inclusion, scholars and practitioners can develop more meaningful and effective strategies for fostering inclusive workplaces.

Research Methods

This study uses an interpretative literature review method to combine and evaluate current research about IOB and diversity and inclusion (D&I) together with research paradigms. An interpretative review examines inclusive research by exploring its underlying meanings, theoretical debates, and contextual complexities. This approach is essential for IOB research, as it enables scholars to examine not only the observable outcomes of inclusion but also employees' lived experiences of belonging, meaningful participation, and equitable treatment. The observation is that researchers study diversity and inclusion as separate fields, which developed through different research traditions that include positivist, interpretative, and critical approaches that provide various yet incomplete explanations of workplace inclusion.

Search Strategy and Selection Criteria

Scholarly literature was sourced primarily through Google Scholar, focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and conceptual papers. The search strategy used targeted keywords such as "inclusive organisational behaviour," "workplace diversity and inclusion," "DEIB frameworks," and "research paradigms." The literature was selected based on three criteria: relevance to the research issue, conceptual contribution, and methodological quality. Applying these criteria resulted in the inclusion of 35 secondary sources, with particular emphasis on publications from 2010–2025 that examine emerging work modalities, including remote and hybrid work environments, as presented in Table 1. The study primarily drew on recent publications to establish its theoretical foundation, reflecting the growing influence of remote and hybrid work environments on workplace inclusion practices. This approach ensured a balanced integration of established theories with contemporary developments in diversity and organisational behaviour research.

Table 1: Literature Review Matrix

Author(s) and Year	Study Focus	Methodology	Key Findings	Implications for IOB
Béal and Sabadie (2018)	Customer inclusion in firm governance	Empirical study	Customer involvement increases commitment and proactive voice behaviours	Highlights how inclusion beyond employees can enhance organisational engagement
Beijer and Knappert (2024)	Leadership adaptation to foster inclusion in disruptive contexts	Qualitative case study	Leaders must adjust behaviours dynamically to maintain inclusive environments	Emphasises adaptive leadership in IOB
Davidson and Ferdman (2002)	Organisational inclusion strategies	Conceptual analysis	Provides practical strategies for fostering inclusion	Foundation for linking theory to actionable IOB practices
Dhanani et al. (2024)	Inclusive behaviour across work modalities	Qualitative interviews	Inclusion varies by social identity and work context	Suggests tailored approaches for diverse teams in IOB
Dhir et al. (2024)	Early perspectives on IOB	Conceptual review	Emphasises collaboration and forward-looking inclusion strategies	Supports proactive development of inclusive workplace cultures
Embarak (2025)	IoB in personalised learning systems	Framework development	AI-driven behavioural insights can support inclusion	Integrates technology with IOB for adaptive learning environments
Ferdman (2013)	Practice of inclusion in diverse organisations	Literature synthesis	Inclusion practices improve performance and engagement	Reinforces theoretical foundations for IOB implementation
Frączek (2024)	IOB supporting disabled employees through remote work	Empirical study	Remote work can enhance inclusion for people with disabilities	Demonstrates the role of flexibility and accessibility in IOB
Georgiadou (2024)	Call for papers on IOB	Conceptual	Highlights emerging research trends	Guides future studies in IOB
Georgiadou and Özbilgin (2024, 2025)	Remote work and IOB	Conceptual and empirical	Work-from-anywhere models can foster inclusion	Shows structural changes in work impact IOB practices
Gleiberman (2021)	Decolonisation in IOB	Working paper	Decolonisation principles influence inclusive strategies	Encourages ethical and cultural sensitivity in IOB
Kar et al. (2025)	Dynamic rules for building inclusive workplaces	Conceptual	Inclusion requires continuous adjustment of organisational rules	Supports evolving IOB frameworks
Mitchell (2018)	Evolutionary view of organisational behaviour	Conceptual review	Positive and affective approaches enhance inclusion	Provides theoretical perspective on emotional and behavioural inclusion
Mor Barak (2013)	Beyond affirmative action	Conceptual framework	Inclusion is multi-faceted, beyond policy	Guides holistic IOB approaches
Muhammad et al. (2023)	IOB and innovation in Pakistan	Empirical study	Inclusive behaviour drives innovative employee actions	Connects IOB to organisational performance outcomes
Nelson and Cooper (2007)	Positive organisational behaviour	Conceptual	Inclusion enhances well-being and performance	Supports integrating IOB with positive psychology
Ofem (2024)	Ethical AI integration in IOB	Conceptual	AI can enhance inclusion if ethically applied	Encourages responsible technology use in IOB
Ressi et al. (2023)	Working from home and inclusion	Empirical	Remote work decision-making impacts inclusion	Suggests policy-level support for IOB practices
Ressi et al. (2024)	Participation in IOB	Empirical	Participation increases perceived fairness and inclusion	Reinforces participatory practices in IOB
Sadeqi-Arani and Vahidnia (2025)	IoB in educational businesses	Framework	IoB supports personalised, inclusive learning	Extends IOB application to education and technology
Shore and Chung (2024)	Multi-level concept of inclusion	Conceptual review	Inclusion operates at individual, team, and organisational levels	Encourages systemic approaches in IOB
Sтары (2020)	IoB as organisational transformation	Conceptual framework	IoB enables organisational change through behavioural insights	Highlights strategic use of IoB for inclusive transformation

2007). Furthermore, participatory decision-making, as described by Ressi et al. (2024), reinforces inclusivity by giving employees a voice in shaping policies and workplace practices. Collectively, these findings indicate that human drivers, particularly leadership behaviour and participatory structures, are essential for creating sustainable inclusive environments.

Technology-Enabled Inclusion

Technology is increasingly recognised as an enabler of IOB, offering tools to support equitable participation, personalisation, and inclusion at scale. The IOB provides multi-level behavioural insights that can inform targeted inclusion strategies (Molla et al., 2021; Stary, 2020). Embarak (2025) and Sadeqi-Arani and Vahidnia (2025) demonstrate that AI-driven systems can personalise learning and engagement opportunities, allowing organisations to accommodate diverse employee needs and preferences. However, Ofem (2024) emphasises that the ethical application of technology is essential, as AI systems may reinforce existing biases or create new inequities in the absence of appropriate governance and transparency. These studies suggest that technology can

significantly enhance IOB, but its implementation must be guided by ethical principles and aligned with organisational inclusion goals.

Work Modality and Contextual Factors

The mode of work, whether remote, hybrid, or in-person, has a substantial impact on inclusive behaviour. Dhanani et al. (2024) highlight that experiences of inclusion vary across work modalities and social identities, suggesting that inclusion strategies must be context-sensitive. Frączek (2024) demonstrates that flexible and remote work arrangements improve inclusion for employees with disabilities, showing that structural accommodations are essential for equitable participation. Georgiadou and Özbilgin (2024, 2025) extend this perspective, noting that “work-from-anywhere” models can foster inclusion if organisations invest in effective communication channels, participatory processes, and technological infrastructure. These findings highlights that inclusion is influenced not only by policies and behaviours but also by the structural and contextual realities of work, highlighting the need for adaptable strategies to ensure equity across diverse situations.

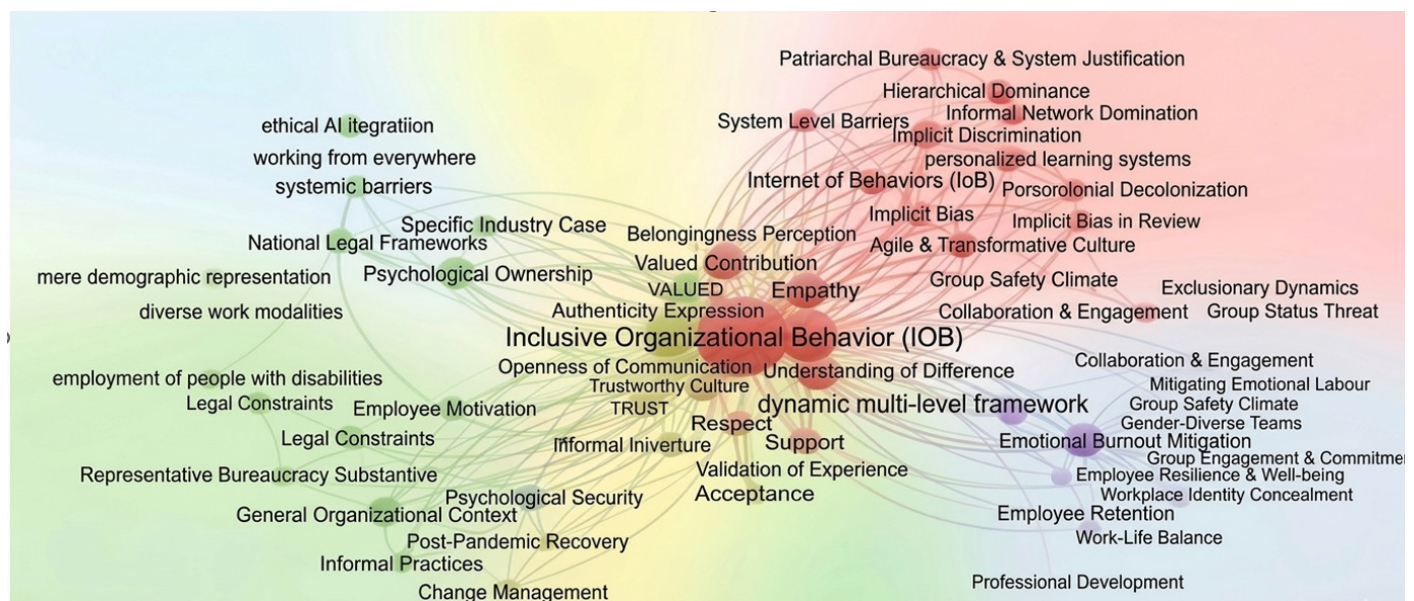


Figure 2: Conceptual Network of Challenges and Opportunities in IOB

Challenges to Implementing IOB

Despite the clear benefits of IOB, the literature identifies several practical and ethical challenges. Frączek (2024) and Ressi et al (2023) note that structural barriers, such as rigid policies, lack of managerial support, or insufficient access to resources, can limit the effectiveness of inclusion initiatives. Gleiberman (2021) points out that cultural and ethical complexities, including historical power dynamics and the need for decolonisation, must be addressed for inclusion efforts to be meaningful. Technological solutions also carry risks; without ethical oversight, AI and IOB tools may unintentionally reproduce existing biases or inequities

(Embarak, 2025; Ofem, 2024). These findings suggest that achieving genuine inclusion requires deliberate planning, continuous evaluation, and alignment with organisational values. Inclusion is not automatically attained through the implementation of policies or technologies alone, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Outcomes of IOB

Effective IOB is associated with positive outcomes at multiple levels. Muhammad et al. (2023) show that inclusive behaviours drive innovation by empowering employees to contribute ideas and participate in problem-solving. Employee engagement, commitment, and

proactive behaviours are consistently linked to inclusive practices (Béal & Sabadie, 2018; Ressi et al, 2024), while systemic, multi-level approaches enhance collaboration, equity, and long-term sustainability (Shore & Chung, 2024). Additionally, inclusive practices can extend benefits beyond employees; customer involvement in inclusive processes enhances trust and engagement, demonstrating that IOB can influence both internal performance and external relationships. These findings indicate that IOB is a strategic lever for organisations, contributing to both human and organisational capital.

Discussion

Integrating Multi-Level Conceptualisations of IOB

The findings reinforce that IOB is a multi-level construct,

operating at individual, team, and organisational scales. This aligns with Shore and Chung (2024), who emphasise that inclusion is systemic rather than isolated to single policies or initiatives. By integrating the perspectives of Ferdman (2013) and Mor Barak (2013), it becomes clear that IOB encompasses behavioural, relational, and structural dimensions. Organisations that focus solely on formal policies risk superficial compliance, whereas those that embed inclusive behaviours, participatory structures, and equitable practices across levels are more likely to achieve genuine inclusion. Furthermore, the extension of IOB to stakeholders beyond employees, as demonstrated by Béal and Sabadie (2018), highlights that inclusion can influence broader organisational engagement and performance, suggesting that inclusive practices have both internal and external impact, as shown in Figure 3.

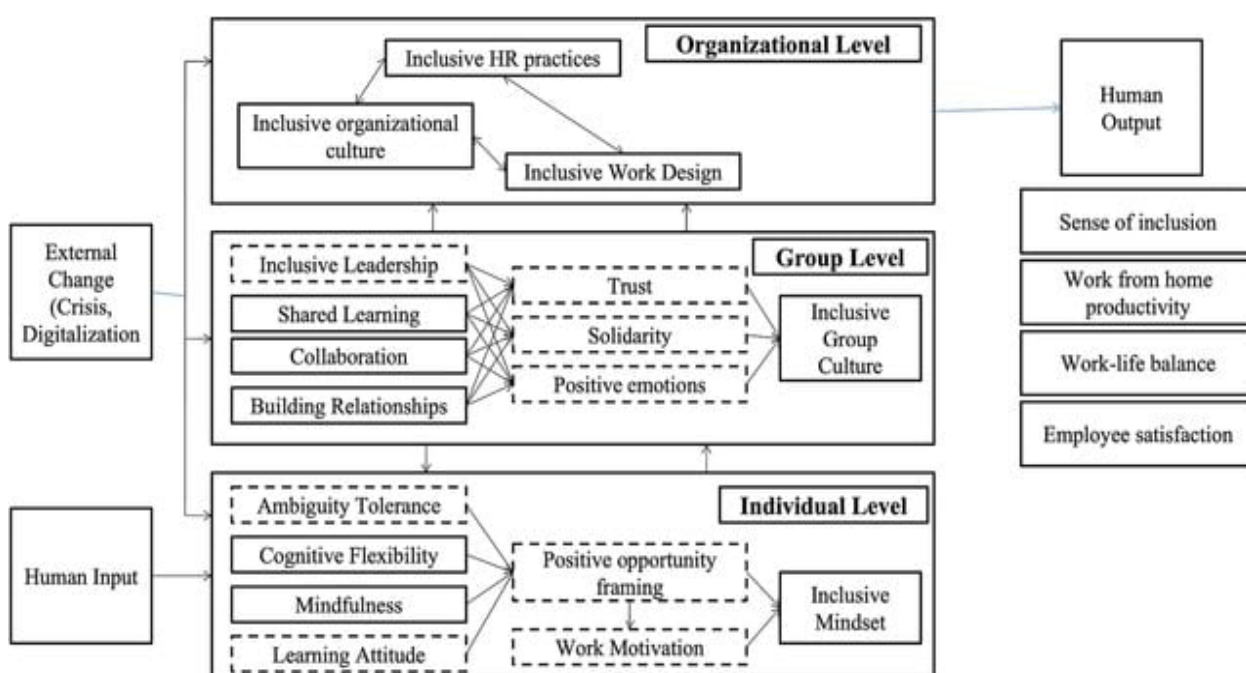


Figure 3: Model of IOB

Note. Proposed model of IOB by Dhir et al. (2024)

Leadership as a Catalyst for Inclusion

Leadership emerges as a critical catalyst in shaping and sustaining IOB. Adaptive and participatory leadership, as described by Beijer and Knappert (2024) and Kar et al. (2025), supports environments where employees feel psychologically safe and valued. Leaders' ability to model inclusive behaviours, facilitate participation, and respond flexibly to changing contexts strengthens organisational commitment and trust. These findings highlight that leadership is not merely a supporting factor but a primary driver that shapes organisational culture and the effectiveness of inclusion initiatives. This aligns with the broader theoretical perspective that human agency within organisations interacts dynamically with structures and processes to produce inclusive outcomes.

Technology-Driven Inclusion and Ethical

Considerations

The role of technology in enhancing IOB is increasingly prominent. IOB frameworks (Molla et al., 2021; Stary, 2020) and AI-driven systems (Embarak, 2025; Sadeqi-Arani & Vahidnia, 2025) provide opportunities for personalised, data-informed inclusion strategies. These tools can enhance participation, accessibility, and engagement, especially in complex or distributed work environments. However, Ofem (2024) highlights the ethical implications of these technologies, warning that unregulated AI could unintentionally reinforce biases or inequities. The discussion suggests that while technology can accelerate inclusive practices, its adoption must be guided by transparent governance, ethical frameworks, and alignment with organisational values to ensure equitable outcomes.

Contextual and Structural Factors

Work modality and organisational context significantly influence IOB. Studies by Dhanani et al. (2024), Frączek (2024), and Georgiadou and Özbilgin (2024, 2025) indicate that inclusion is experienced differently across remote, hybrid, and in-person settings, and that employees' social identities shape these experiences. Flexible policies, accessible communication channels, and participatory practices enhance inclusion, particularly for marginalised groups. These findings highlight that structural and contextual adjustments are essential for inclusive practices to be effective and sustainable. Organisations must consider the interplay between policies, technological infrastructure, and the social dynamics of work when designing inclusion strategies.

Challenges and Ethical Implications

Implementing IOB faces both practical and ethical challenges. Structural barriers, such as rigid policies or limited resources, and cultural factors, including historical inequalities and decolonisation issues (Gleiberman, 2021), can hinder effective inclusion. Integrating technology, while beneficial, introduces ethical considerations regarding data privacy, bias, and equity (Ofem, 2024; Embarak, 2025). These challenges indicate that IOB is not automatically achieved through policies or tools alone; it requires ongoing reflection, ethical oversight, and alignment with organisational values. The discussion highlights the importance of embedding ethical principles and context-sensitive strategies into the design and evaluation of inclusion initiatives.

Theoretical and Organisational Significance

Organisations should adopt multi-level strategies that integrate individual behaviours, team norms, and systemic policies to create meaningful inclusion (Shore & Chung, 2024). Leadership must be adaptive and participatory to facilitate engagement and psychological safety (Beijer & Knappert, 2024; Ressi et al., 2024). Technology and IOB frameworks can be leveraged to personalise inclusion strategies and support distributed work environments, provided ethical governance is applied (Embarak, 2025; Ofem, 2024). From a theoretical standpoint, the findings highlight the value of paradigm-informed research, demonstrating that inclusion is shaped by the interplay between human behaviour, organisational structures, and technological tools. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of IOB as a dynamic, contextually embedded, and ethically grounded phenomenon.

Conclusions and Implications

This study addresses the persistent gap between workplace diversity initiatives and the effective implementation of inclusive practices by examining IOB through multiple research paradigms. The findings show that diversity functions as an essential requirement, but it fails to create substantial inclusion when organisations do not implement

systematic and ongoing efforts. The process of inclusion develops through multiple organisational levels, which depend on structural elements, leadership methods, and employee experiences in particular company environments. The study uses positivist, interpretive, and critical research methods to develop a complete theoretical framework that explains how modern organisations establish, experience, and sustain inclusive environments. The analysis further highlights that leadership adaptability and psychological safety are central to fostering inclusive environments, particularly in hybrid and digitally mediated work environments. The use of technological tools can enhance access and connectivity for users, but these tools will create or amplify existing inequalities when their development lacks ethical design standards and inclusive design practices.

From a practical perspective, the research indicates that organisations need to implement inclusion as an essential part of their fundamental operations and everyday activities instead of implementing it as a separate human resources program or organisational policy. Organisations need to develop their leadership abilities to manage DEIB through educational programs that teach ethical decision-making, self-reflection practice, and collaborative problem-solving. The design of hybrid work systems and digital infrastructure needs to enable all employee groups to access work resources and participate in work activities without barriers. The study establishes a theoretical framework that connects research methods with organisational practices while showing how research methods determine the understanding and implementation of inclusion practices. Thus, the study advocates an integrated framework which helps people understand diversity and inclusion while offering organisational practical solutions to create equitable, inclusive, participatory, and resilient organisational environments.

The study is limited by its reliance on secondary literature and the absence of empirical validation of the proposed conceptual insights. Future research should empirically examine the proposed paradigm-based framework across diverse organisational and cultural contexts.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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