

FOSTERING HARMONY IN DIVERSITY: ROLE OF INCLUSION IN MITIGATING TURNOVER INTENTIONS

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Purpose: In today's interconnected and global landscape, a strategic approach to diversity management and inclusion seems to be essential for an organization's sustainable success. This study investigates the phenomenon of diversity, inclusion, and intention to quit among employees in Poland's business services sector.

Design/methodology/approach: The research tested a conceptual model of the relationship between perceived diversity practices, quitting intention, and the mediating role of workplace inclusion in the business services sector in Poland. The study illustrated these dynamics using data from 542 respondents.

Findings: This study's results illustrate the mediating role of inclusion in the relationship between employees' perceived diversity practices and their intentions to quit.

Research limitations/implications: This research's limitation relates to the model's reliance on self-report measures. The answers could have been biased due to the limited response options on a 5-point Likert scale. The study does not directly consider other sources of influence that could have affected its results and is limited to a specific sector only.

Practical implications: This study's insights offer new perspectives for business practitioners and provide empirical evidence of workplace inclusion's mediating role. Findings suggest that companies should develop a climate of inclusion rather than solely focusing on diversity practices and policies.

Originality/value: The research fills a gap in the academic literature by examining the mediating role of workplace inclusion. It provides a unique perspective on the relationship between diversity practices and quitting intentions in the business services sector in Poland. The implications of this research offer valuable guidance for business practitioners aiming to foster an environment lowering turnover intentions.

Keywords: diversity, diversity management, inclusion, quitting intention, business services sector.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

The importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in organizations has become a significant focus worldwide. The benefits of DEI are discussed widely, from corporations to governments and national to global organizations (Soni, 2000). For many companies, emphasizing DEI is a question of social justice, CSR, regulatory compliance, and a successful strategy (Hunt et al., 2018). A “noninclusive and unwelcoming community” was considered one of the top reasons employees quit their jobs globally in 2021-2022 (De Smet et al., 2022, p. 7). Therefore, DEI plays a crucial and pivotal role in attracting and retaining employees during periods of significant employee turnover (McKinsey & Company, 2021).

Thus far, research has explored the relationships between diversity and inclusion and their effects on organizational commitment, innovation, and performance. To date, limited research has been conducted on the relationships between the perception of diversity practices, inclusion, and intentions to quit. Therefore, this paper identifies the studies on their relationship with organizational outcomes. The authors in this research hypothesized a positive relationship between diversity practices and inclusion and a negative relationship between diversity practices and quitting intentions. In the context of inclusion, a negative relationship between inclusion and quitting intentions was hypothesized, as well as the mediating role of inclusion in the relationship between diversity practices and quitting intentions. To verify these hypotheses, a survey was conducted on a sample of 542 employees in the BSS sector, which is characterized by a high degree of employee diversity in Poland. The study confirmed the relationship between diversity practices and quitting intentions with a mediating role of inclusion.

2. Literature Review

Diversity is defined as the distinction of one group of people from another, divided into primary and secondary dimensions. Differences can concern race, gender, sexual orientation, age, or religious beliefs (Loden, Rosener, 1991). Few theories can help explain the significance and need for a strategic approach to diversity management (DM). The social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978) suggests that individuals tend to categorize their perceptions based on social groups and shared attributes. The similarity-attraction theory (Byrne, 1997) emphasizes that people are inclined to develop closer relationships with those with similar attributes and attitudes and willingly engage in challenging situations with individuals with different perspectives, values, and experiences.

Despite progress in increasing the representation of diverse and underrepresented groups in the workplace, the exclusion of these groups prevents them from making their entire contribution to the organization (Mor Barak, 2008). Organizations' efforts to enhance workplace diversity may increase tensions and impact performance. Therefore, fostering inclusion is seen as a method to realize the promises of diversity practices (DP) (Downey, van der Werff, 2015).

The concept of inclusion (IN) emerged in the organizational literature almost 20 years ago (Roberson, 2006). Based on the optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991), people need to be both similar and different from others. Therefore, inclusion can be seen as needing “belongingness and uniqueness” (Shore, Chung, 2022, p. 2). Although inclusion can be treated as a “basic human psychosocial need”, the collective experience of inclusion can be explained as “the aggregated degree to which members of a group feel valued (...) and can express themselves authentically within their work group” (Ferdman et al., 2010, p. 7).

Diversity management practices and inclusion can generate many benefits for the employer, one of which may be a lack of intention to quit. According to the research, HR practices had strong negative associations with employees' turnover intention (Rana et al., 2021). The turnover (or quitting) intention (QI) is the desire to stop working for an organization or the deliberate compliance of employees who leave the firm (Tett, Meyer, 1993). In early studies, researchers mainly focused on organizational commitment, tenure, and demographic variables influencing turnover intention. Later, it also concerned the organizational issues (Thatcher et al., 2006; Hwang, Chang, 2008).

3. Hypothesis and conceptual framework

The studies suggested that the climate for diversity should be viewed as another dynamic influencing the perceptions of inclusion (Mor Barak, Cherin, Berkman, 1998). The research illustrated the link between a supportive work environment and employee retention (Eisenberger et al., 2002). It also revealed the significance of DM and leadership practices in promoting inclusion (Brimhall, 2021). As a result, the below hypothesis was developed:

H1: There is a positive relationship between diversity practices and inclusion.

The research confirmed the relationship between perceived inclusion and employees' intention to quit (Brimhall, Lizano, Mor Barak, 2014; Hwang, Hopkins, 2015) and that the employees who feel more socially included would have higher organizational identification and lower quitting intentions (Avery et al., 2008). Based on the previous findings, the authors propose that:

H2: There is a negative relationship between the perceptions of inclusion and quitting intentions.

Previous researchers have found a strong relationship between employees' perception of the diverse climate and their QI (Baruch, Humbert, Wilson, 2016; Kundu, Mehra, Mor, 2020). It was proved that there is a significant relationship between successfully implemented DP and job satisfaction (Stazyk, Davis, Liang, 2012), which had a negative impact on employees' QI (Brimhall, Lizano, Mor Barak, 2014; Alam, Asim, 2019). Thus, the hypothesis is proposed:

H3: There is a negative relationship between the perception of diversity practices and quitting intentions.

Diversity practices might lead to positive perceptions of diversity climate (Brimhall, Lizano, Mor Barak, 2014), improving perceptions of IN, which influence employee engagement and turnover (Ariani, 2014). A recent study revealed a mediation effect of inclusion in the relationship between diversity characteristics and QI (Sharma, Panicker, 2022). Therefore, the authors propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Inclusion mediates the relationship between the perception of diversity practices and quitting intentions.

In the conceptualized model, the relationship between diversity practices (DP), inclusion (IN), and quitting intentions (QI) is tested statistically.

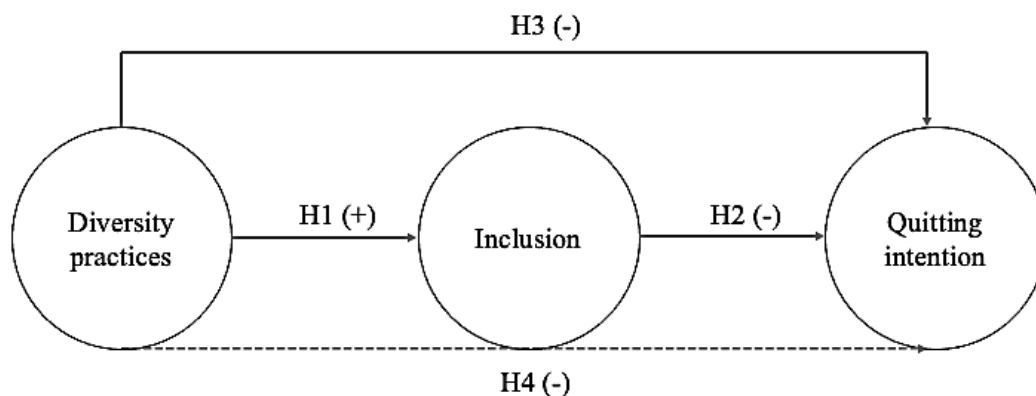


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework.

Source: own.

3.1. Data and methods

Our quantitative study used a questionnaire to gather data on employee perception of DP, IN, and QI from 542 respondents working in Poland's BSS. The choice of sector was intentional, driven by the large cultural diversity of the workforce in Poland (ABSL, 2022). Respondents were approached via the researchers' professional networks, including contacts within DEI domains. Data for this study were collected using a web-based tool from 28 July to 28 October 2022. The questionnaire incorporated scales from previous research (Colarelli, 1984; Mor Barak, Cherin, Berkman, 1998; Mor Barak, 2005; McKay, Avery, Morris, 2008; Pugh et al., 2008). The authors used a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Due to the study's exploratory nature and the non-normal distribution assumption of the analyzed variables, the PLS-SEM method, which allows for verifying models incorporating mediating effects, was employed for analysis (Nitzl, Roldan, Cepeda, 2016; Carrión, Nitzl, Roldán, 2017). The variables in the models are treated as latent (hidden) constructs (Hair Jr et al., 2022). The SmartPLS software (V.4.0.9.9) was used for the research (Ringle, Wende, Becker, 2022).

3.2. Verification of the Measurement Model and Hypothesis

Structural equation modeling was tested in two stages (Hair Jr et al., 2022). Firstly, the measurement model was scrutinized, allowing for an assessment of the correctness of its construction. Later, the structural model was employed to validate specific research hypotheses. The measurement model evaluates whether the considered constructs are accurately assessed using selected indicators (Klarner et al., 2013). The outcome is depicted below.

Table 1.
Measurement model evaluation results

Constructs	Item	λ	VIF	α	rho_A	CR	AVE
DP	DP1	0.775	1.418	0.702	0.704	0.834	0.626
	DP2	0.774	1.274				
	DP3	0.824	1.499				
IN	IN1	0.873	1.767	0.795	0.818	0.879	0.708
	IN2	0.870	2.021				
	IN3	0.779	1.527				
QI	QI1	0.951	2.562	0.877	0.887	0.942	0.89
	QI2	0.936	2.562				

Note. λ – outer loading; VIF – variance inflation factor; α – Cronbach's alpha; Rho_A – reliability coefficient; CR – composite reliability; AVE – average variance extracted.

Source: own.

Table 1. displays the outer loadings for each construct. The minimum acceptable value for such indicators is 0.5, and the expected value is 0.7 (Hair et al., 2022). All outer loadings meet the stringent assumption, with values exceeding 0.7. All constructs were examined for collinearity problems among the indicators. All Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values are below 3, indicating the absence of collinearity (Diamantopoulos, Winklhofer, 2001). All applied measures, verifying the reliability and validity (Campbell, Fiske, 1959), meet the expected values, namely Cronbach's alpha, reliability coefficient, and composite reliability, which fall within the range of 0.7 to 0.9, and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) is greater than 0.5.

Each variable's AVE square root was analyzed and compared to the correlation coefficient with other variables to assess discriminant validity. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), the criterion is met if the square root of AVE is greater than each variable's correlation coefficient with any other variable in the model. Henseler et al. (2015) indicated that the lack of discriminant validity is better detected using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, where

values must be below 0.9. In the considered model, both conditions are satisfied (Table 2), indicating the discriminant validity of the constructs.

Table 2.

Assessment of discriminant validity of the constructs of the Fornell-Larcker and Henseler (HTMT) criterion

Constructs	Fornell-Larcker criterion			Henseler (HTMT) criterion		
	DP	IN	QI	DP	IN	QI
DP	<i>0.791</i>					
IN	0.66	<i>0.842</i>		0.866		
QI	-0.317	-0.378	<i>0.943</i>	0.403	0.443	

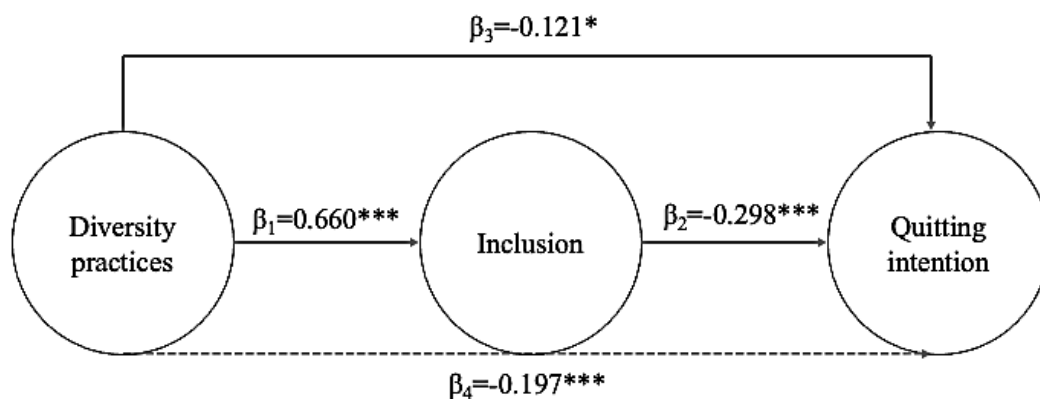
Note. elements in italics on the diagonal show the square roots of AVE.

Source: own.

The analysis results lead to the conclusion that the variables proposed in the model are appropriately constructed. To verify the model, the Standardized Root Mean Square of Residuals (SRMR) was calculated, allowing for an estimation of the model's fit to the data (Henseler, Ringle, Sarstedt, 2015). The SRMR value of 0.082 indicates an acceptable model fit to the data (Hu, Bentler, 1999).

3.3. Hypotheses verification with structural model

To assess the significance of path coefficients, 'bootstrapping' was employed as a resampling technique to evaluate path coefficients and t-statistics (Lee et al., 2011). Due to the one-sided nature of the hypotheses, a one-sided test with the standard 5% significance level was assumed (see the results in Figure 2 and Table 3).



Note. *** p-value < 0.001; ** p-value < 0.01; * p-value < 0.05.

Figure 2. Structural model.

Source: own.

All the studied path coefficients were statistically significant, as the values of the test probabilities are less than 0.05 (Table 3). This leads to the conclusion that all the hypotheses have been confirmed.

Table 3.
Results for direct and indirect effect evaluation

Hypothesis	Path	Original sample (β)	Bootstrapping				Hypothesis testing
			Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P value	
Direct effect							
H1	DP \rightarrow IN	0.660	0.661	0.026	25.233	0.000	Confirmed
H2	IN \rightarrow QI	-0.298	-0.297	0.058	5.133	0.000	Confirmed
H3	DP \rightarrow QI	-0.121	-0.122	0.056	2.143	0.016	Confirmed
Indirect effect							
H4	DP \rightarrow IN \rightarrow QI	-0.197	-0.196	0.038	5.16	0.000	Confirmed (partial mediation)

Note. DP – diversity practices; IN – Inclusion; QI – quitting intentions.

Source: own.

It should be stated that in the studied group of employees, DP has a positive effect on IN, and both IN and DP have a significant negative impact on QI. The influence of DP on QI is direct and indirect through IN as a mediator (partial mediation). The signs of the path coefficients obtained mean we are dealing with complementary mediation (Ramayah et al., 2018).

4. Discussion

The study confirms a significant positive relationship between the perception of diversity practices and the perception of a sense of inclusion. H1 was supported, which aligns with the previous literature (Brimhall, Lizano, Mor Barak, 2014). The authors found a significant negative relationship between workers' perception of inclusion and their quitting intentions. Hence, H2 was supported, which aligns with the previous findings (Hwang, Hopkins, 2015; Gupta, Gomathi, 2022). A significant relationship was also confirmed between the employees' perception of diversity practices and their quitting intentions. Therefore, H3 was supported, which aligns with prior research (Kundu, Mehra, Mor, 2020). We found a mediation path from perceived diversity practices to quitting intentions, which supports H4 and the crucial role of inclusion in the relationship between diversity management and turnover intentions. The mediating role of inclusion emphasizes the need to foster an inclusive climate in diverse organizations.

The research extends previous findings on the criticality of inclusion (Mor Barak et al., 2016; Ferdman, 2017; Jer, Henriques, Carvalho, 2021). The limitation of this research relates to the reliance on self-report measures of the model. The answers could have been biased due to the limited response options on a 5-point Likert scale. Furthermore, the sample characteristics used in this research do not represent all the workforce in this country. Additionally, the data

analyzed was collected in 2022. The emergence of hybrid working changes as the pandemic conditions vary. As a result, careful further studies and monitoring could benefit future studies.

5. Conclusions

COVID-19 impacted a sense of freedom among many employees who started to think of their career paths elsewhere (De Smet et al., 2022). Workplace diversity has amplified for companies expanding globally (Cletus et al., 2018). Therefore, DEI has gained significant attention in research and the business environment due to the battles between companies to attract talent, staffing, and retention problems. It is particularly problematic in the BSS sector in Poland, driven by the large cultural diversity of the workforce, mostly Ukrainian, Belarussian, and Russian staff, that “may be marginalized” due to this military crisis (ABSL, 2022, p. 6). Therefore, management from the BSS should focus on reinforcing inclusion efforts to remain vigilant to uphold diversity standards, strengthen the focus on inclusion, and create employee retention within the organization.

This paper provides significant insights into the impact of workplace inclusion on intentions to quit. Building upon previous empirical findings and a proposed research model, the study confirms the mediating role of inclusion in the relationship between diversity and turnover intentions in the BSS in Poland. The proposed study helps advance the understanding of how diversity management and inclusion can affect quitting intentions in different organizations, considering employees representing various diversity dimensions. The paper has limited generalizability as it solely focuses on the BSS in Poland. The findings of this study contribute to the existing body of literature and emphasize the significance of DEI, which in turn can mitigate employee turnover intentions.

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