



REVIEW ARTICLE

BEYOND DIVERSITY: INCLUSION AS A DRIVER OF EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING IN SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS - A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 18th March, 2026
Received in revised form
27th April, 2026
Accepted 20th May, 2026
Published online 24th June, 2026

Keywords:

Workplace Inclusion; Employee Well-Being; Diversity Management; Emotional Labor; Service Organizations; Middle Management; Systematic Review.

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ABSTRACT

This article reports a theory-building systematic review of the literature on workplace diversity, inclusion, and employee well-being in service organizations, conducted in accordance with the PRISMA 2020 statement. Drawing on 47 peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2026, supplemented by 12 foundational works, the review synthesizes evidence across three interrelated domains: the non-linear and context-dependent relationship between workforce diversity and individual well-being; the conceptual architecture of inclusion understood as a dynamic, multi-level process rather than a static outcome; and the specific amplifying role of service sector conditions, particularly emotional labor and high relational intensity in shaping inclusion well-being dynamics. Four central findings emerge. First, diversity does not automatically produce well-being; without active inclusion mechanisms, diversity can amplify stress, identity burden, and role conflict. Second, when inclusion is theorized as a process, a sustained sequence of relational practices, organizational signals, and lived daily experiences, it operates on well-being through identifiable mechanisms: psychological safety, organizational justice, uniqueness valorization, autonomy, and emotional regulation. Third, the service sector constitutes a structurally demanding context in which inclusive practices function as critical resources against emotional burnout and psychosocial risk. Fourth, middle managers represent a major empirical blind spot: simultaneously enacting inclusion for their teams and experiencing or being denied inclusion themselves, they remain conspicuously absent from the empirical literature as objects of study in their own right. The review produces an integrative conceptual framework and identifies six theoretically grounded research gaps, together constituting an agenda for future inquiry in organizational settings beyond the dominant Anglo-American research context.

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Citation: Nada Boutaaloult, Rachid Elkachradi and Khadija Elmahdaoui. 2026. "Beyond Diversity: Inclusion as a driver of employee Well-Being in Service Organizations - A Systematic Review", *International Journal of Recent Advances in Multidisciplinary Research*, 13,(06), 12606-12613.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between workforce diversity, inclusion, and employee well-being has become one of the most actively contested terrains in organizational studies. Three decades of research have progressively dismantled the intuitive assumption that diversity is inherently beneficial: meta-analytic evidence consistently shows that the effects of workforce heterogeneity on individual and collective outcomes are contingent, non-linear, and mediated by the organizational conditions under which diversity is managed (Guillaume *et al.*, 2017; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Among those conditions, inclusion has come to be regarded as the decisive lever, not a passive correlate of diversity, but the active mechanism through which the potential of human difference is either realized or foreclosed (Mor Barak, 2015; Shore *et al.*, 2011). Yet a close reading of the extant literature reveals a persistent conceptual limitation: the dominant treatment of inclusion as a measurable state, understood as an attitude captured at a single point in time, obscures the processual, relational, and temporal dynamics through which inclusion is constructed, sustained, or eroded in organizational life. Ferdman (2014) drew the

critical distinction between inclusion as outcome and inclusion as process, but the implications of this distinction for empirical research have remained underexplored. Most studies continue to rely on cross-sectional survey instruments that produce static snapshots, telling us little about how inclusion unfolds across daily interactions, hierarchical relationships, and organizational transitions. Two further limitations characterize the existing body of knowledge. First, the service sector, which employs the majority of the working population in advanced and emerging economies alike, has received insufficient attention as a distinct organizational context. The structural properties of service work, particularly its relational intensity, the centrality of emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983; Grandey, 2000), and the co-productive logic of value creation with clients (Vargo & Lusch, 2004), generate inclusion–well-being dynamics that are qualitatively different from those documented in manufacturing or public sector settings. Second, middle managers occupy a theoretically rich but empirically neglected position in the inclusion literature: they are simultaneously the translators of formal diversity and inclusion policies into daily practice (Randel *et al.*, 2018; Wooldridge *et al.*, 2008) and individuals with their own unmet needs for belonging, uniqueness valorization, and psychological safety. Neither dimension

of their dual exposure has been studied with the depth it warrants. Against this backdrop, the present article reports a theory-building systematic review with three interrelated objectives. The first is to synthesize extant evidence on the relationships among workforce diversity, organizational inclusion, and employee well-being, with particular attention to the mechanisms mediating these relationships. The second is to theorize inclusion as a multi-level process at individual, relational, and organizational levels, plus to articulate the conditions under which this process amplifies or attenuates well-being outcomes, with particular reference to service sector contexts. The third is to identify theoretically warranted research gaps and formulate a structured agenda for future inquiry, including in organizational contexts beyond the Anglo-American settings that dominate the existing literature. The article is structured as follows. Section 2 describes the systematic review methodology. Section 3 presents the conceptual foundations of the three focal constructs. Section 4 synthesizes the cross-study empirical evidence. Section 5 elaborates the theorization of inclusion as process and the associated well-being mechanisms. Section 6 examines the service sector as a contextual amplifier of inclusion–well-being dynamics. Section 7 identifies research gaps and advances a future research agenda. Section 8 presents the integrative conceptual framework. Sections 9 and 10 discuss theoretical contributions and managerial implications, respectively. Section 11 concludes.

METHODOLOGY

Systematic Review Protocol

Rationale and Design: Wherever This review adopts a theory-building systematic literature review design (Tranfield *et al.*, 2003), oriented toward conceptual synthesis and theoretical development rather than effect-size aggregation. The choice of this design reflects the fragmented and cross-disciplinary nature of the focal domain: diversity, inclusion, and well-being are conceptualized under different terminological conventions across organizational psychology, human resource management, organizational behavior, and work sociology, making a formalized, reproducible search protocol essential for managing bibliographic dispersion and selection bias. The review protocol was developed prior to data collection and follows the PRISMA 2020 statement (Page *et al.*, 2021), which provides updated guidance on search, screening, eligibility, and reporting for systematic reviews. Consistent with a theory-building objective (Torraco, 2016), analysis proceeded through a thematic and cross-study synthesis approach, identifying patterns, mechanisms, and conceptual gaps across the retained corpus rather than computing pooled effect estimates.

Search Strategy: The primary search equation applied across Scopus and Web of Science in November 2024 combined three thematic blocks:

("inclusion" OR "inclusive workplace" OR "inclusive leadership" OR "diversity management" OR "climate for inclusion") AND ("well-being" OR "wellbeing" OR "burnout" OR "stress" OR "psychosocial risks" OR "occupational health") AND ("services" OR "service sector" OR "hospitality" OR "banking" OR "manager" OR "middle management")

Figure 1. The search equation

The search was restricted to publications in English and French between 2015 and 2026 to ensure contemporaneous relevance while preserving coverage of established empirical traditions. Supplementary searches were conducted on EBSCO Business Source Complete and CAIRN (for French-language scholarship), and targeted Google Scholar queries covered emerging-economy contexts ("Morocco" OR "Maghreb" OR "MENA" OR "Global South").

Screening and Selection: Records were screened in two stages. In the first stage, titles and abstracts were evaluated against pre-specified

eligibility criteria: peer-reviewed status, publication in the target time window, and direct relevance to at least two of the three focal constructs (diversity, inclusion, well-being). In the second stage, full-text reading was completed for all records passing the first screen, with an additional quality appraisal based on methodological rigor, theoretical coherence, and transferability of findings. The PRISMA flow results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 : PRISMA 2020 Screening Flow

PRISMA Stage	Description	n
Identification	Records retrieved from Scopus, Web of Science, EBSCO Business Source Complete, CAIRN, and Google Scholar (2015–2026)	1,247
Screening	Records retained after duplicate removal and title/abstract screening	312
Eligibility	Full-text peer-reviewed articles addressing ≥ 2 focal constructs, available in English or French	89
Inclusion	Articles retained after full-text reading and quality appraisal	47
Excluded	Excluded after full-text review: out-of-scope, non-transferable contexts, methodological insufficiency	42
Foundational works	Pre-2015 seminal references retained for theoretical anchoring	12

Source: Authors, following Page *et al.* (2021). The 47 retained articles constitute the analytical corpus; the 12 foundational works are cited as theoretical anchors

The final corpus of 47 articles spans multiple disciplines, methodological traditions (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, meta-analytic), and geographic contexts, though the predominance of North American and Northern European settings is itself a finding with direct implications for future inquiry.

Conceptual Foundations

Workplace Diversity: Beyond Demographic Enumeration

Diversity at work designates the ensemble of observable and non-observable differences among individuals within an organization (Harrison & Klein, 2007). Contemporary scholarship distinguishes demographic diversity (surface-level attributes: gender, age, ethnicity), informational diversity (competencies, expertise, experience), and value diversity (beliefs, attitudes, cognitive styles), while recognizing that these categories interact in organizationally consequential ways (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Ely and Thomas's (2001) tripartite taxonomy, which distinguishes diversity as discriminationandfairness compliance, as accessandlegitimacy, or as integrationandlearning, remains analytically productive precisely because it shows that the type of perspective an organization adopts toward diversity determines whether diversity generates sustained benefits or amplifies conflict. Since 2015, the construct of perceived or subjective diversity has gained traction: the way individuals interpret and experience differences in their immediate work environment, independent of the objective demographic composition of their unit (Stevens *et al.*, 2008). This is a particularly salient issue in non-Western organizational contexts, where the categories of diversity operative in daily interaction may diverge substantially from the taxonomies codified in Western policy frameworks. The convergent conclusion of multiple meta-analyses is that diversity, in isolation, does not predict well-being; its effects are contingent on the organizational and leadership conditions that either facilitate or hinder the integration of differences with the quality of inclusion being a key factor (Guillaume *et al.*, 2017).

Inclusion: From Outcome to Multi-Level Process: Shore *et al.*'s (2011) definition of inclusion “the degree to which an employee perceives belonging and uniqueness valorization within their work group” remains the most cited in the contemporary literature, having accumulated over 2,000 scholarly citations by 2025. The conceptual power of this model resides in its integration of two theoretically distinct needs: the fundamental need for belongingness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and the need for optimal distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991). By articulating these simultaneously rather than treating them as opposites, Shore and colleagues produce a 2×2 typology that distinguishes genuine inclusion (high belonging, high uniqueness valorization), assimilation (high belonging, low uniqueness), differentiation (high uniqueness, low belonging), and exclusion (low on both dimensions). The critical theoretical move in subsequent scholarship has been to shift from treating inclusion as an attitudinal outcome to theorizing it as a process. Ferdman (2014) draws this distinction explicitly: inclusion as state (a momentary subjective assessment) versus inclusion as process (a sustained, unfolding sequence of practices, relational interactions, and organizational signals). This processual conception captures the lived reality of inclusion as something that is continually made and unmade through daily encounters with supervisors, peers, organizational systems, and cultural norms. Nishii (2013) operationalizes inclusion at the collective level through the construct of climate for inclusion, defined by three dimensions: equitable HR practices, integration of differences in work processes, and inclusive participation in decision-making. The distinction between individual perceived inclusion and collectively shared inclusion climate is analytically important: the latter predicts both individual and group outcomes while being relatively independent of any particular dyadic relationship. The present review adopts an explicitly processual and multi-level conception of inclusion, following Ferdman (2014) and Nishii (2013): inclusion is theorized as an individual experience, a relational dynamic, and an organizational property simultaneously, each level being both constituted by and constitutive of the others.

Well-Being at Work: A Tri-Dimensional Construct: Employee well-being has been theorized along two philosophical and empirical traditions. The hedonic tradition, grounded in Diener's (1984) conception of subjective well-being, decomposes well-being into high positive affect, low negative affect, and global life satisfaction. Applied to work, it manifests in measures of job satisfaction, positive emotion at work, and reduced occupational distress. The eudaimonic tradition, grounded in Aristotelian philosophy and empirically developed by Ryan and Deci (2001) through Self-Determination Theory (SDT), conceptualizes well-being as optimal psychological functioning: autonomy, competence satisfaction, and social connectedness. Warr's (1990) context-specific vitamin model integrates hedonic and eudaimonic dimensions in a framework specifically calibrated to occupational settings, identifying environmental features, including work relationships and organizational climate as vitamins that either support or impair functioning. The negative pole of well-being is addressed by two influential theoretical frameworks. The Demands-Control model (Karasek, 1979) identifies role strain as a function of excessive psychological demands combined with low decision latitude, a configuration prevalent in service organizations where worker autonomy is often structurally constrained. The Effort-Reward Imbalance model (Siegrist, 1996) locates distress in the perceived asymmetry between effort exerted and rewards received (salary, recognition, career prospects). Maslach and Leiter's (1997, 2016) three-dimensional burnout construct, which includes emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment, has become the dominant operationalization of occupational ill-being in service sector research. Bakker and Demerouti's (2017) Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model provides the overarching integrative framework: job resources, of which inclusive organizational practices constitute a theoretically coherent and empirically supported subset, buffer the pathway from high demands to burnout and generate engagement through a motivational process distinct from the stress process.

Cross-Study Synthesis of Findings

The Non-Linear Relationship Between Diversity and Well-Being:

The empirical literature on the direct relationship between diversity and well-being consistently resists simple positive interpretation. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and the attraction-by-similarity paradigm (Byrne, 1971) predict that demographic diversity activates social categorization processes, generates in-group/out-group dynamics, and reduces interpersonal trust, which can increase stress and reduce cohesive functioning. Lau and Murnighan's (1998) faultlines concept offers a particularly powerful diagnostic: when demographic attributes align across multiple dimensions (e.g., gender, ethnicity, and organizational tenure co-vary), teams partition into polarized subgroups, amplifying intergroup tension and individual stress. Conversely, the information and decision perspective (van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2004) predicts that informational diversity when effectively integrated into collective work processes, enriches cognitive repertoires, improves decision quality, and generates learning-related satisfaction. Ely and Thomas's (2001) field research demonstrates that these performance and well-being benefits materialize only under the integration-and-learning perspective, where organizational culture treats diversity as a substantive epistemic resource rather than a compliance requirement or market positioning strategy. Travis and Thorpe-Moscon's (2018) study of emotional tax provides a particularly consequential contribution to this synthesis. Members of minority groups, notably women, people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, expend substantial cognitive and emotional resources managing their identities in non-inclusive work environments, a burden that is structurally invisible to organizations yet measurably detrimental to well-being. This mechanism has direct relevance for non-Western organizational contexts where minority positions are defined by different social categories (regional origin, educational capital, generational status) but are likely to generate structurally analogous burdens. The convergent conclusion of Guillaume *et al.*'s (2017) meta-analysis of 68 studies is unambiguous: diversity effects on well-being and performance are strongly moderated by organizational context and inclusion, operationalized through leadership behavior, HR practices, and organizational climate is the primary positive moderator. Diversity without inclusion is at best neutral and at worst harmful; inclusion is the mechanism through which the potential of human difference is transformed into individual and organizational flourishing.

Inclusion as Mediator and Moderator: Empirical studies in the review corpus document inclusion's dual role in the diversity–well-being relationship. As a mediator, inclusion transmits the effects of organizational diversity conditions to individual well-being outcomes. Brimhall *et al.*'s (2014) longitudinal study (N = 371, social services) demonstrates that LMX quality and diversity climate improve perceived inclusion, which in turn fully mediates the relationship to job satisfaction and turnover intention. Hwang and Hopkins (2015), using structural equation modeling on a sample of 1,218 social service professionals, confirm that inclusion climate mediates the relationship between diversity perceptions and both satisfaction and organizational commitment, with procedural justice as the dominant underlying mechanism. Mor Barak *et al.*'s (2016) meta-analysis of 30 studies provides the broadest empirical base for this mediation claim: diversity management practices predict inclusion climate (corrected $r = .42$), and inclusion climate in turn predicts job satisfaction, burnout reduction, and retention intent, with effects robust to organizational controls. As a moderator, inclusion attenuates the negative effects of diversity on well-being. Nishii (2013) shows that in workgroups with high inclusion climate, the negative effects of gender diversity on women's job attitudes disappear. Downey *et al.* (2015) demonstrate that inclusive supervisory support moderates the link between organizational diversity and perceived stress, with the buffering effect particularly strong for minority group members. This dual role, mediational and moderating has been simultaneously documented by Pichler *et al.* (2018) in a cross-national study spanning nine countries, suggesting that the inclusion–well-being nexus is sufficiently generalizable to anchor a global research agenda while remaining open

to context-specific modulation in cultural and institutional settings that differ from the Anglo-American mainstream.

Leadership as a Critical Conditioning Factor: Across the retained corpus, leadership behavior emerges as the most proximate organizational predictor of perceived inclusion. Randel *et al.* (2018) theorize inclusive leadership as a behavioral style characterized by openness, accessibility, and active facilitation of voice for minority group members, behaviors that operationalize belonging and uniqueness valorization at the relational level. Cottrill *et al.* (2014) demonstrate that authentic leadership at the immediate supervisory level is a stronger predictor of perceived inclusion than formal HR diversity policies, a finding with significant practical implications: symbolic organizational commitments to inclusion do not substitute for enacted daily behaviors. Brimhall *et al.* (2014) show that LMX quality “the relational quality between a supervisor and each direct report” mediates the effect of organizational diversity climate on individual inclusion, suggesting that policy effects are channeled through interpersonal dynamics. Cherkaoui and Montargot’s (2016) qualitative study of the Moroccan banking sector provides an empirically grounded illustration of the policy-practice decoupling that leadership research predicts: formal commitments to inclusive HRM, adopted under institutional isomorphic pressure from international standards and foreign investors, coexist with unreconstructed power hierarchies and patriarchal relational norms in daily organizational life. Inclusion as formally proclaimed and inclusion as relationally practiced diverge substantially; a gap that only leadership behavior can bridge or widen. This decoupling dynamic extends beyond the banking sector to the broader Moroccan service economy. Elmahdaoui *et al.* (2026) investigating hotels in Morocco, demonstrate that the deployment of digital HR systems, even if it’s technically sophisticated does not automatically translate into enhanced employee well-being when the governance frameworks surrounding these tools remain insufficiently human-centered. The study documents how hotel employees simultaneously value the operational efficiency gains afforded by digital HR tools and experience heightened stress attributable to digital monitoring, producing what the authors conceptualize as “cautious optimism”: a disposition that embodies the tension between formal modernization and the lived relational conditions under which that modernization unfolds. This ambivalence constitutes a contextual illustration of the policy-practice decoupling identified by Cherkaoui and Montargot (2016), transposed from the register of inclusive leadership to that of digitalized HRM.

Inclusion as a Process: Mechanisms Linking Inclusion to Well-Being: The review identifies seven theoretically grounded and partially empirically validated mechanisms through which the inclusion process operates on employee well-being. These mechanisms are not mutually exclusive; they interact in ways that are likely to be context-sensitive and sequentially structured. Table 2 presents the integrated synthesis.

Table 2. Mechanisms Linking Inclusion Process to Employee Well-Being

Mechanism	Key References	How Inclusion Operates	Well-Being Effect
Psychological safety	Edmondson (1999); Newman <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Inclusive signals reduce interpersonal risk; voice and error disclosure become safe.	Lower anxiety and emotional exhaustion; enhanced eudaimonic functioning.
Organizational justice	Colquitt <i>et al.</i> (2001); Nishii (2013)	Fair HR practices signal institutional recognition across identity groups.	Higher job satisfaction; reduced role stress and affective turnover.
Uniqueness valorization	Shore <i>et al.</i> (2011); Randel <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Inclusion affirms distinct identities without assimilation pressure; reduces identity work.	Diminished identity burden; intrinsic motivation and self-esteem gains.
Autonomy /SDT	Ryan & Deci (2001); Bakker & Demerouti (2017)	Inclusive processes support autonomy as a professional resource (JD-R logic).	Autonomous motivation reduces burnout under high demands.
Supervisor support	Brimhall <i>et al.</i> (2014); Downey <i>et al.</i> (2015)	Inclusive LMX constitutes a relational resource for subordinates and managers.	Buffer against psychosocial risks; reduces turnover intention and exhaustion.
Emotional regulation	Grandey (2000); Hochschild (1983)	Inclusion reduces recourse to surface acting by enabling authentic emotional display.	Lower emotional burnout in high-contact service roles.
Identity-tax reduction	Travis & Thorpe-Moscon (2018); Ely & Thomas (2001)	Exclusion imposes a cognitive tax of identity management in non-inclusive contexts.	Without inclusion: chronic cognitive overload, stress accumulation, burnout risk.

Among these mechanisms, psychological safety holds a particularly central position in the recent literature. Edmondson’s (1999) foundational field studies established that psychological safety, the shared belief that interpersonal risk-taking is not penalized, is both predicted by manager behavior and predictive of team learning and performance. Newman *et al.*’s (2017) systematic review confirms robust positive associations between psychological safety and engagement, satisfaction, and voice behavior, with negative associations to withdrawal. Critically, psychological safety is more difficult to establish and therefore more consequential when present in high power-distance organizational cultures where expressing disagreement upward or disclosing error carries elevated social risk. This makes it a particularly revealing mechanism in non-Western organizational settings. Uniqueness valorization, the second dimension of Shore *et al.*’s (2011) model, is a mechanism that the literature acknowledges but empirically underexplores. The theoretical claim is that assimilation pressure requiring individuals to conform to dominant group norms as the price of belonging, constitutes a form of invisible exclusion that generates identity work, reduces intrinsic motivation, and over time depletes psychological resources. When inclusion affirms distinctive identities without demanding conformity, it liberates cognitive and emotional energy previously invested in identity management. This mechanism has particular salience in cultural contexts where collectivist norms and hierarchical conformity structures make individuation costly. The emotional regulation mechanism connects inclusion to well-being specifically through the surface acting–deep acting distinction elaborated by Grandey (2000). When workers feel included, able to be authentically themselves, supported by supervisors, and valued for their distinctive contributions, they are less compelled to deploy surface acting, the cognitively and emotionally costly strategy of displaying emotions that are not genuinely felt. Lizano and Mor Barak (2014) document this pathway longitudinally among social services workers: perceived inclusion significantly reduces emotional exhaustion net of demand levels, suggesting that inclusion functions as a demand-buffering resource consistent with JD-R logic (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). In commercial service settings where display rules are particularly stringent and client interactions are emotionally demanding, this mechanism is likely to be amplified. The identity-tax mechanism, elaborated by Travis and Thorpe-Moscon (2018) and theoretically continuous with Ely and Thomas’s (2001) integration-and-learning framework, captures the chronically underestimated cost of exclusion. In organizational environments where minority identities are neither recognized nor valorized, individuals continuously allocate cognitive and affective resources to identity monitoring, strategic self-presentation, and preemptive stigma management. This hidden labor drains resources that would otherwise be available for task engagement, creative work, and relationship investment, directly explaining why the effects of exclusion on burnout often exceed those attributable to workload and structural demands alone.

The Service Sector as Contextual Amplifier

Structural Properties and Their Organizational Implications: The service sector is structurally distinguished by four characteristics that bear directly on inclusion–well-being dynamics: intangibility of outputs, inseparability of production and consumption, perishability, and heterogeneity of delivery (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1985). The service-dominant logic articulated by Vargo and Lusch (2004) makes the implications explicit: value is co-produced with the client, which means that the relational competencies, emotional states, and identities of service workers are not merely instrumentally relevant; they are the primary medium through which service value is realized. This structural characteristic generates two consequences for the present analysis. First, the diversity of client populations creates a reciprocal organizational demand for internal diversity and, crucially, inclusion: service teams whose internal dynamics are genuinely inclusive are more capable of reading, adapting to, and effectively serving heterogeneous client populations (Nkomo & Stewart, 2006). This is the service sector’s distinctive business case for inclusion, not a generic claim about innovation, but a functionally grounded argument about client-facing responsiveness. Second, the relational intensity of service work creates heightened vulnerability to emotional demands.

The client encounter is structurally unpredictable; service workers absorb emotional variance from multiple sources, client frustration, role ambiguity, performance pressure in ways that manufacturing workers do not. This vulnerability is the amplification mechanism through which inclusion becomes more, not less, consequential in service contexts.

Emotional Labor and Inclusive Resources: Hochschild's (1983) analysis of emotional labor as the management of feeling for organizational purposes and the commodification of inner emotional life that this entails, has generated one of the most empirically productive research traditions in occupational psychology. Grandey's (2000) distinction between surface acting and deep acting clarified the differential psychological costs: surface acting (suppressing genuine emotions while displaying organizationally prescribed ones) systematically depletes resources and generates burnout; deep acting (genuinely modifying internal states to align with display rules) is more cognitively demanding in the short term but less chronically harmful. Hülshager and Schewe's (2011) meta-analysis of 94 studies confirms the robustness of these relationships: surface acting is positively correlated with emotional exhaustion ($r = .37$) and negatively with job satisfaction ($r = -.33$), effects strongest in high-contact relational service sectors including banking, hospitality, healthcare, retail. Against this background, inclusive practices function as organizational resources in the precise sense articulated by JD-R theory: they reduce the probability of surface acting by creating conditions under which authentic emotional expression is viable. A service worker who is psychologically safe to express genuine reactions, who is valorized for their distinctive identity rather than required to conform to a normative customer-facing persona, and who trusts that organizational justice will attend to their relational experience, is structurally less compelled to deploy surface acting as a chronic coping strategy. The inclusiveness of the immediate supervisor moderates this pathway: when the LMX relationship is inclusive, characterized by recognition of the worker's full personhood rather than merely their functional role, workers report both higher perceived inclusion and lower emotional exhaustion (Brimhall *et al.*, 2014).

Middle Managers' Dual Exposure: For middle managers in service organizations, the emotional demands of the role are structurally doubled. On the demand side, middle managers absorb the emotional variance of their teams (transmitted through the management relationship) while simultaneously managing client-facing accountability pressures from above. Huy (2002) identifies this as emotional balancing: the middle manager's function of mediating between the top management's enthusiasm for transformation and the operational workforce's anxiety, absorbing and regulating organizational tension in the process. This mediating function is organizationally valuable but psychologically costly, generating what amounts to vicarious and direct emotional labor simultaneously. When inclusion is experienced by the middle manager, when they feel genuinely valorized, psychologically safe with their own superiors, and treated with organizational justice, their capacity for authentic leadership with their teams is maintained. When they experience exclusion or marginalization, the resources required for inclusive management are precisely the resources most likely to be depleted. This reciprocity between manager well-being and managerial capacity for inclusive leadership constitutes a theoretical contribution of the present review: inclusion and well-being are not related unidirectionally in the middle management context. The process of inclusion that middle managers experience shapes their well-being; their well-being in turn shapes the quality of the inclusive process they generate for their teams. This causal reciprocity is nearly absent from the empirical literature, where the manager is overwhelmingly positioned as an agent of others' inclusion rather than as a subject of inclusion in their own right.

The Research Gaps and Future Research Agenda: The systematic review identifies six theoretically grounded research gaps, summarized in Table 3. Each gap is accompanied by the nature of the deficiency and the specific research opportunities it generates.

Two methodological lacunae compound the thematic gaps. First, the near-total absence of longitudinal study designs in the corpus is particularly problematic for a field increasingly committed to processual theorizing: if inclusion is a process, cross-sectional measurement is definitionally inadequate to capture it. Second, the dominance of standardized survey instruments, however psychometrically sophisticated, precludes access to the micro-level, interpretive, and context-sensitive dimensions of inclusion experience that qualitative and mixed-methods designs are designed to capture. The future research agenda that emerges from this synthesis is organized around four priority axes. The first is the development of process-sensitive methodologies: experience sampling methods, diary studies, qualitative longitudinal designs, and narrative approaches capable of capturing how inclusion is made and unmade in the course of daily organizational life. The second is the repositioning of middle managers as research subjects: studies that treat middle managers as recipients of inclusion with their own well-being needs, rather than exclusively as vectors of policy implementation. The third is contextual expansion beyond Western settings: comparative studies that situate inclusion-well-being dynamics in organizational environments characterized by high power distance, collectivist norms, gender role traditionalism, and emergent formalization of HRM features that characterize a large proportion of the global workforce that remains systematically underrepresented in the literature. The fourth is measurement innovation: the adaptation and validation of inclusion constructs and instruments that are sensitive to the processual, relational, and cultural dimensions that existing scales do not capture.

Integrative Conceptual Framework: The integrative conceptual framework proposed by this review is organized as a multi-level, processual model with five structural components articulated by a logic of sequential causation and contextual moderation. At the macro-contextual level, the framework acknowledges three sets of conditioning factors that shape both the form that inclusion takes and the meaning it carries: national culture (particularly power distance, collectivism, and gender role traditionalism, following Hofstede *et al.*, 2010), institutional environment (coercive, normative, and mimetic isomorphic pressures, following DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), and sector-specific structural properties (emotional labor requirements, client interface intensity, service logic). These macro-level conditions do not determine organizational processes but constitute the institutional grammar within which inclusion practices are interpreted and enacted. At the meso level, organizational culture (inclusive versus assimilationist), formal HR diversity and inclusion policies, and organizational type (multinational versus domestic firm, sectoral sub-context) constitute the organizational medium through which macro conditions are translated into the daily work environment. The crucial insight from Cherkaoui and Montargot's (2016) Moroccan field research is that formal policy adoption and practiced inclusion can be deeply decoupled: isomorphic pressure produces surface compliance without transforming the relational dynamics and power structures that constitute lived inclusion. The central independent construct is the inclusion process, operationalized at three simultaneous levels. At the individual level, it captures the subjective experience of belonging and uniqueness valorization as defined by Shore *et al.* (2011). At the relational level, it captures the quality of the LMX relationship with the immediate superior (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Brimhall *et al.*, 2014) and the behavioral manifestations of inclusive leadership in daily interaction (Randel *et al.*, 2018). At the organizational level, it captures the collectively perceived inclusion climate (Nishii, 2013), the equity of formal HR practices, and the degree to which middle managers' voices are structurally integrated into organizational decision-making (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997).

Seven theoretically identified mechanisms, namely psychological safety, organizational justice, uniqueness valorization, autonomy and SDT, supervisor support, emotional regulation, and identity-tax reduction, constitute the mediating architecture through which the inclusion process transmits its effects to the dependent construct. The relative weight of these mechanisms is theoretically expected to vary with cultural context: in high power-distance settings, psychological

Table 2. Summary of Research Gaps and Opportunities

Gap Dimension	Nature of Deficiency	Research Opportunity
Inclusion as lived process	Dominant literature treats inclusion as a static attitude or aggregate climate score. Longitudinal, processual accounts are virtually absent.	Conceptualize and study inclusion as an unfolding sequence of relational and organizational experiences over time, using qualitative or experience-sampling methods.
Manager well-being as outcome	Studies overwhelmingly examine non-managerial employees. Well-being of managers as recipients of inclusion is marginalized.	Reposition middle managers as subjects, not mere vectors of inclusion, with distinct well-being needs and vulnerabilities.
Middle management as unit of analysis	Wooldridge et al. (2008) note the persistent empirical deficit on middle managers' subjective experience. The deficit is even more acute for inclusion.	Address a theoretically warranted blind spot: study the dual exposure of middle managers who simultaneously enact and experience inclusion.
Service sector specificity	Non-profit and public services (health, social work) dominate. Commercial services, banking, distribution, hospitality, remain under-represented.	Develop empirically grounded insights for commercial service organizations, where emotional labor and client pressure amplify inclusion dynamics.
Non-Western cultural contexts	Scientific production is dominated by North American and Northern European contexts. MENA and Global South settings are virtually absent.	Contribute to Global South management studies by testing the transferability of Western models and foregrounding culture-specific inclusion dynamics.
Dynamic measurement of inclusion	Existing scales (Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998; Nishii, 2013) capture static perceptions. None operationalize inclusion as temporal process or daily practice.	Adapt or develop measurement approaches sensitive to process, daily micro-practices, and cultural specificity of non-Western organizational contexts.

Source: Authors, from systematic review corpus (2015–2026).

safety and organizational justice are likely to be more consequential because their baseline presence is more structurally constrained; in collectivist settings, the supervisor support mechanism may be particularly operative because the relational dimension of belonging is culturally intensified. The dependent construct is employee well-being operationalized in three dimensions: hedonic (job satisfaction, positive affect at work, following Diener, 1984), eudaimonic (sense of meaning, autonomy, professional flourishing, following Ryan & Deci, 2001; Warr, 1990), and pathological/negative (emotional exhaustion, role stress, burnout dimensions, following Maslach & Leiter, 1997, 2016; Karasek, 1979). This three-dimensional operationalization resists the reductionism that treats well-being as a single positive pole, preserving the analytical independence of flourishing and distress as distinct processes with distinct organizational determinants. The framework incorporates four potential moderators of the inclusion–well-being relationship: the inclusive leadership quality of the middle manager's own superior (Randel *et al.*, 2018); the diversity composition and faultline configuration of the managed team (Lau & Murnighan, 1998); individual-level characteristics (gender, organizational tenure, salient social identity); and the level of job demands and emotional labor requirements of the specific role (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The latter moderator is particularly important for service sector contexts, where demand levels are structurally elevated and the protective function of inclusion resources is consequently amplified.

Theoretical Contributions: This review makes three substantive theoretical contributions to the organizational studies and HRM literatures. The first contribution is a theoretically coherent processual reconceptualization of inclusion. By synthesizing Shore *et al.* (2011), Ferdman (2014), and Nishii (2013) within a single multi-level framework, the review moves inclusion scholarship beyond the cross-sectional, single-level attitudinal measurement that has dominated empirical work. Theorizing inclusion as a process unfolding simultaneously at individual, relational, and organizational levels and across time, generates empirically testable propositions about how inclusion is constituted, how it varies within and across organizational contexts, and how its dynamics interact with well-being trajectories rather than well-being states. The second contribution is the theorization of middle managers as subjects of inclusion in their own right. The review demonstrates, through systematic analysis of the existing literature's silences as much as its findings, that the middle management position generates a theoretically distinctive inclusion–well-being nexus: dual exposure to both the implementation demands of formal inclusion policy and the experienced dynamics of inclusion or exclusion from their own superiors. The proposed reciprocal causation model in which experienced inclusion shapes manager well-being, and manager well-being in turn conditions the quality of inclusive leadership is a theoretically novel proposition that contradicts the unidirectional, agency-centered treatment of managers in most diversity and inclusion research.

The third contribution is a dialogue with and critical extension of Global South management studies. By foregrounding the ways in which structural features of non-Western organizational contexts, namely power distance, collectivist identification, institutional isomorphism, gender role traditionalism, modulate the operation of inclusion mechanisms theorized in Western settings, the review provides a theoretically grounded argument for contextual adaptation rather than uncritical transfer of existing models. The identification of the Moroccan service sector context as an analytically productive site for this extension, where the pace of HRM formalization, the persistence of informal relational norms, and the expansion of the commercial service economy create theoretically revealing tensions, contributes to an emerging Afro-Mediterranean perspective on workplace diversity and inclusion.

Managerial Implications: The theoretical contributions of this review carry several managerial implications for practitioners in service organizations. First, the review's central finding that inclusion must be understood and managed as a process, not an outcome, has direct implications for the design of diversity and inclusion interventions. Organizations that invest exclusively in demographic targets, policy declarations, and formal training programs without attending to the daily relational practices through which inclusion is enacted will systematically fail to generate the well-being and performance benefits that inclusion theory predicts. This points to the priority of behavioral competency development for managers at all levels: not diversity awareness training, but the specific behavioral repertoire of inclusive leadership: active listening, solicitation of minority voices, transparent decision-making, recognition of distinctive contributions; this daily enactment constitutes inclusion as a lived organizational reality.

Second, the reciprocal relationship between manager well-being and inclusive leadership quality argues for organizational practices that attend to middle managers' own inclusion needs. Organizations cannot sustainably extract inclusive leadership behaviors from managers who are themselves experiencing exclusion, role ambiguity, inadequate recognition, or psychological insecurity in their relationships with their own superiors. Well-being support for middle managers through inclusive organizational climates at the management level, investment in upward voice mechanisms, and explicit recognition of the emotional labor entailed in the middle management role, is not merely an HR welfare concern. It is a structural condition for effective inclusion diffusion through the organizational hierarchy. Third, in service sector organizations specifically, the amplification of inclusion effects through emotional labor dynamics suggests that inclusive supervision is particularly high-leverage. When front-line and middle managers create conditions under which service workers can be authentic rather than performatively compliant, reducing the need for surface acting, the benefits materialize not only in worker well-being but in service quality and client satisfaction. Organizationally, this means that

inclusion metrics should be integrated with emotional climate assessments and burnout monitoring as part of a unified psychosocial risk management framework, rather than treated as a standalone diversity and equity reporting obligation.

CONCLUSION

This theory-building systematic review has synthesized 47 contemporary studies and 12 foundational works to produce a theoretically integrated account of the relationships among workforce diversity, organizational inclusion, and employee well-being in service organizations. The review has established four structuring arguments: that diversity effects on well-being are non-linear and mediated by inclusion; that inclusion operates as a dynamic, multi-level process through seven identifiable mechanisms; that service sector conditions, particularly emotional labor demands, amplify the well-being consequences of inclusion and exclusion; and that middle managers constitute a theoretically central but empirically neglected position in inclusion–well-being dynamics. The integrative conceptual framework that emerges from this synthesis advances the field by theorizing inclusion as a processual, multi-level construct linked to well-being through mechanisms whose relative salience varies with cultural and institutional context. The identification of six research gaps provides a structured agenda for future empirical inquiry, with particular emphasis on longitudinal and qualitative process research, the repositioning of middle managers as subjects of inclusion, and the extension of diversity and inclusion scholarship to non-Western organizational contexts that remain systematically underrepresented in the existing literature. These lacunae are not merely empirical inconveniences. They reflect a theoretical limitation in the existing literature's capacity to capture the full range of organizational conditions under which inclusion, understood as a process through which human difference is recognized, valorized, and integrated, is constituted and contested. Addressing them requires not only new data but methodological and conceptual innovations capable of registering the temporal, relational, and cultural dimensions of inclusion that cross-sectional survey research systematically underspecifies. The present review aims to provide the theoretical scaffolding for that broader research project.

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