

Workplace Inclusion and Employee Positive Behaviors: A Review of Organizational Citizenship Behavior, Engagement, and Commitment

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Abstract

The focus on workplace inclusion is gaining significance as a research focus in the field of organizational behavior because of the growing diversity of the workforce and the importance of providing supportive work environments. Workplace inclusiveness assumes more significance in the case of India since according to the Global Diversity and Inclusion readiness ranking of 2018, out of 47 countries, India ranked 41st in terms of its inclusiveness in the workplace. Perceived inclusion is defined as employees' sense of being valued, accepted, and recognized as a unique individual in their organization. This review paper aims at summarizing the literature on the link between perceived inclusion and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). The paper examines the influence of perceived inclusion on employee engagement, affective commitment, and on voluntary behaviours in the workplace. Furthermore, there is an inclusion of mediating variables such as engagement and affective commitment in the relationship between inclusion and OCB, as well as whether gender can be considered a moderator in the equation. The positive reactions of employees can be explained using theories like Optimal Distinctiveness Theory and Social Exchange Theory. From the review of literature, it is evident that employees who have high levels of inclusion tend to show commitment, engagement and citizenship behaviors. The findings presented in the literature review are useful for both scholars and practitioners working to develop inclusive practices in the work environment.

Keywords: *Perceived Inclusion; Organizational Citizenship Behaviour; Employee Engagement; Affective Commitment; Workplace Inclusion; Social Exchange Theory; Optimal Distinctiveness Theory.*

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I. Introduction

In today's organizations are paying more attention to developing workplaces that foster diversity, equality, and inclusiveness in the constantly evolving organizational setting. India is the 7th oldest nation of the world (World Population Review). India is very diversified nation as far as religion, caste, age, gender, personality traits and socioeconomic background etc. are concerned. India ranks 41st among 47 nations in global diversity readiness ratings in a survey conducted on global diversity and inclusion (D&I) by the Society for Human Resource Management in 2018 (Kuknor, 2023). Perceived inclusion is defined as employees' experience of being valued, accepted, and recognized as an individual member of an organization and still being able to be themselves. A positive attitude from workers towards their organization, due to an inclusive work environment, allows them to contribute beyond their main work duties (Leuhery et al., 2024).

Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) has attracted a lot of interest from the field of organisational behavior due to its implications for organizational efficiency. OCB is defined as any behavior by an employee that is not mandated by the formal job requirements, but is seen as helping the organization to function and be successful (Malekar, 2020). Assisting others, responsibility, involvement in organizational events, and cooperation are some of these behaviors. Zaccone & Pedrini (2024) state that the sense of inclusion could be an influential determinant that influences the attitudes and behavior of the employees. The culture of inclusion by an employer could enhance psychological safety and create an environment where the employees feel motivated to contribute to organizational endeavors. So, the relation between perceived inclusion and Organizational Citizenship Behavior is of great importance for scholars and practitioners.

Inclusion perceptions assume particular significance in the Information Technology field, whereby individuals function in an environment that involves diversity, knowledge-intensive and collaborative working conditions. Individuals involved in the IT sector usually work in teams, interact with other individuals at various hierarchical levels within the organizations, and are involved in projects requiring collaboration, exchange of knowledge and voluntary behavior beyond job descriptions (Yuming and Zhuoxin, 2022).

II. Theoretical Foundation

This review is based on two theories that are important: The Optimal Distinctiveness Theory and The Social Exchange Theory.

2.1 Optimal Distinctiveness Theory

The need for belongingness and the need for uniqueness are two basic psychological needs that people try to satisfy in an optimal way, as Brewer (1991) suggests in his Optimal Distinctiveness Theory. In this theory, people want to feel membership to a group, while at the same time keeping their own identity and unique traits (Leonardelli et al., 2010). Positive attitudes towards the workplace are more likely to take form when the organisations provide inclusion, and recognition of individuality (Giunchi et al., 2024). This theory gives a solid foundation on how perceived inclusion can impact on Organizational Citizenship Behavior. Employees who feel accepted and valued in their organizations, are more likely to feel attached and responsible to their organizations.

2.2 Social Exchange Theory

Blau (1964) theorized the relationship between individuals and organizations in terms of mutual exchange, as part of Social Exchange Theory. According to this theory, the relationship is established through a process of mutual interdependence whereby good behavior by one individual is rewarded with good behavior from another individual. In organizations, when employees feel that they are respected, valued, and accepted, there is every chance that they will reciprocate in kind. The sense of obligation towards his/her organisation can then be a result from perceived inclusion (Cook et al., 2013).

Social Exchange Theory provides a good account of the link between perceived inclusion and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (Nazir et al., 2018). Therefore, if inclusion is positive, it can inspire employees to act in a 'citizenship way' as a positive response to the organization. Social Exchange Theory focuses on the reciprocal nature between employees and organizations and Optimal Distinctiveness Theory focuses on the psychological significance of belongingness and uniqueness (Nazir et al., 2018).

Social Exchange Theory can provide a rationale for explaining how IT professionals reciprocate organizational inclusiveness in terms of positive workplace behaviors. If individuals see that the organization acknowledges their contribution, gives them equal opportunity, and feels included, they will have more affective commitment and involvement in their work. This will further motivate the individual to show OCB. Social Exchange Theory is therefore useful in understanding how affective commitment and involvement of employees can be used as mediating variables between inclusion and OCB.

III. Literature Review

3.1 Concept of Perceived Inclusion

Over the recent past, workplace inclusion has been receiving increased attention within the field of organizational behavior research. The organizations have been faced with the task of handling a diverse workforce and creating an environment that makes everyone feel valuable and respectable. Diversity relates to the differences among people while inclusion is related to how people feel while being in an organization (Lai et al., 2024). There can be a diverse workforce in an organization but for benefits of diversity to be reaped, everyone should feel included.

Perceived inclusion is how employees feel valued personally as valuable contributors to an organization, while still maintaining their individual identity. It is a degree to which staff members feels their organization values their idea, abilities and efforts. According to Giunchi et al. (2024), there are two main psychological needs that need to be satisfied in order for employees to experience inclusion and these are Belongingness and Uniqueness. Being accepted and feeling a sense of belongingness to others is called Belongingness while uniqueness involves being appreciated for their uniqueness.

An organization's inclusion enables its employees to speak out, take part in organizational functions, and build up relationships with others and their managers. The problem of inclusion is not only related to organizational policies but also how employees feel they are being treated (Muyideen, 2025). So, perceived inclusion is a significant psychological factor for various employee outcomes such as Organizational Citizenship Behavior. These relationships are studied keeping in view the case of IT professionals operating in Tricity region of Chandigarh, including Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula.

3.2 Organizational Citizenship Behavior

The organizational citizenship behavior is an important concept in organizational behavior due to its relevance for enhancing the effectiveness of the organization. OCB are the actions undertaken by employees that are not directly part of their job duties but rather demonstrate a positive attitude towards the social and psychological climate of workplace (Hyseni et al., 2023). OCB should incorporate discretionary behavior that employees engage in voluntarily to help their organization beyond their assigned duties. Citizenship behavior is

displayed by employees who are willing to support colleagues, be involved in organization activities and make extra effort to achieve organizational success.

There are five basic dimensions that are generally used to explain OCB (Rahman & Karim, 2022).

- Altruism is considered a voluntary behavior in which work assist other workers in work-related issues or help during crisis.
- Courtesy is actions designed to avoid conflict and develop positive relationships between staff.
- Conscientiousness is a measure of employee's desire to do more than their job requires, their levels of responsibility and commitment.
- Sportsmanship is the ability to keep a positive attitude in spite of challenges and difficult circumstances.
- Civil virtue consists of active involvement in organizational affairs or caring of general welfare of an organization.

3.3 Relationship Between Perceived Inclusion and OCB

Many studies indicate a positive correlation between sense of inclusion and Organizational Citizenship Behavior. A sense of belonging motivates employees to engage more positively with their organization, leading to increased loyalty toward organizational objectives. Cottrill et al. (2014) explored the connection between authentic leadership, perception of inclusion, and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour. In their research, they used 107 direct participants and 217 peer participants of different industries in the USA. Results showed that perception of inclusion fully mediated the connection between authentic leadership, self-esteem, and OCB. It was recommended by the researchers to conduct additional research on the effects of inclusion on group and organizational outcomes in various countries.

Kyei-Poku (2014), for his part, researched 141 pairs of subordinates and their supervisors from various Canadian rganizations and professions to find out how belongingness and interactional fairness affect interpersonal OCB. As the results showed, there is a positive correlation between belongingness and OCB, and belongingness mediates the link between interactional fairness and OCB. Previous studies suggest that inclusive environments foster employees to show positive behaviors towards the organization (Shams et al., 2020).

Supportive organizational cultures and inclusive leadership promote OCB. If leaders encourage fairness, respect, and equal participation, workers are more inclined to be committed to the positive impact they can have in order to help the organization succeed. However, the literature also suggests that other psychological factors influence the inclusion-OCB relationship. Employees can exhibit citizenship behavior as a result of feeling included, as well as being included because it increases their engagement and commitment towards the organization (Sajad Ullah et al., 2018). The feeling of being respected, valued and accepted at work may make them more open to contributing to the organization beyond the boundaries of their job descriptions. This means that perception of inclusion plays an important role for development of Organizational Citizenship Behavior as it motivates employees to reciprocate through their behaviors (Sumardjo et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, even though past research has examined into the link between inclusion and OCB in different organizational environments, there is still a requirement for research that focuses more on the context of India's IT sector (Worku & Debela, 2024). This is because the past literature does not provide much information on how perceptions about inclusion by IT workers lead to OCB in the Chandigarh Tricity region. It therefore becomes important to examine into the connection between inclusion and OCB among IT workers in Chandigarh, Mohali, and Panchkula.

3.4 Relationship between Perceived Inclusion and Employee Engagement

Inclusion and its impact on employee engagement become highly pertinent in regard to the IT professionals who are usually involved in constant collaboration, information exchange, problem solving and participation in organizational activities. If people feel included, respected and appreciated in the workplace, they will be ready to use their cognitive, emotional and behavioral resources for their work. Consequently, the inclusive environment can positively affect employee engagement as it allows them to be psychologically connected with the organization (Paldon, 2024). In IT organizations, employee engagement becomes highly important since the contribution and participation of the employees have an effect on teamwork, knowledge exchange and performance of organizational activities. Hence, inclusion can become an important aspect of the workplace environment that can motivate the IT professionals to get engaged into their work and role within the organization.

3.5 Perceived Inclusion, Affective Commitment, Employee Engagement and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

The psychological relationship between employees and the organization is impacted by how they feel included, as well as their behavior. Affective commitment is one of the key outcomes of an inclusive workplace and is the employee's emotional involvement and identification with their organization (Kumari & Tiwari, 2025). The research of Mor Barak and Wind (2001) focused on the link between inclusion perception, organizational

commitment and visible/hidden diversity variables. For the purposes of the research, data was obtained from 350 respondents employed in hi-tech companies in the Southern California region and 114 respondents residing in Israel's major metropolitan area. The results of the research showed that the level of inclusion perception varied depending on gender and age for both nations with men and older respondents having higher inclusion perception levels compared to women and young people respectively. Inclusion perception was positively correlated with organizational commitment. Respect, value and acceptance on the job are factors that can lead to better emotional connections between employee and work. Social Exchange Theory suggests that employee are likely to respond to positive acts from the organization with positive attitudes and behaviors (Chou, 2016).

Aliogullari (2025) suggest a link between perceived inclusion and organizational commitment, as well as positive employee outcomes. Aisah et al. (2025) examined inclusivity, fair treatment and organizational commitment in the context of a high tech business. Affective commitment has also been proposed as a key factor to understand Organizational Citizenship Behavior as employees who have higher affect commitment can be more willing to provide extra organizational efforts. The findings indicated that affective commitment is positively related to OCB, which confirms that affective commitment is a key psychological construct that influences discretionary work behavior. Another key way in which inclusion could affect the behavior of the employees is through employee engagement. The feeling of being a part of a team makes employees feel more connected and motivated to help achieve the organizational goals. In the same line, Wahyu Ariani (2013) studied the impact of the relationship between employee engagement, Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), and counterproductive work behavior of 507 employees from service industries through self-administered questionnaires. The study showed a positive relationship between employee engagement and OCB and a negative relationship between OCB and counterproductive work behaviour. The study proved the idea that employees in a positive work environment are more engaged in citizenship behaviors according to Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964).

Moreover, Shaaban (2018) carried out a study for 300 employees of Egypt's Ministry of Civil Aviation to find out the impact of employee engagement on the relationship between employee motivation and Organizational Citizenship Behavior. The results of the study found that employee engagement mediates fully the relationship between employee motivation and Organizational Citizenship behavior.

Finally, Patrick and Kumar (2012) researched the relationship between employee engagement and Organizational Citizenship Behavior of 235 IT professionals working at Indian and international IT firms. The results of the study showed a significant positive relationship between employee engagement and corporate citizenship behavior, also indicating that the involvement of the employees is linked to management practices, equal opportunities, rewards and job satisfaction. The researchers identified a positive relationship between employee engagement and OCB among IT professionals working in Indian and international IT companies (Ilyas et al., 2024).

3.6 Gender as a Moderator between Perceived Inclusion and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

The impact that gender has on the experience of inclusion and the reaction to the work environment may vary within employees. Employees from various gender groups can experience opportunities for acceptance, recognition and participation in different ways, potentially impacting on the nature of positive workplace behaviors as a result of inclusion.

Mousa (2020) indicates that relationship between workplace practices and employee outcomes can be affected by demographic characteristics like gender. Mousa et al. (2020) discussed gender and race with regard to inclusive practices and work performance and gender differences with regard to diversity initiatives, respectively. These studies suggest that there may be gender differences with how employees react to practices related to inclusion. The moderating role of gender between perceived inclusion and OCB for IT professionals is thus taken as a factor in the present study. Therefore, this study aimed to explore the influence of inclusion on the citizenship behavior of IT professionals by considering the role of gender as a moderator.

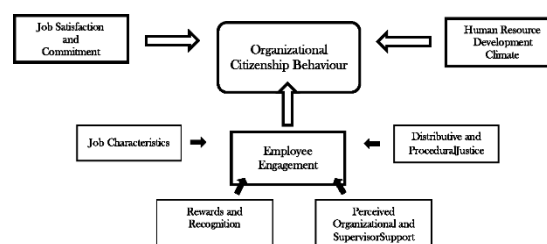


Figure 1: An Exploration of Predictors of Organizational Citizenship Behavior and its Significant Link to Employee Engagement (Ahmed et al., 2017)

IV. Discussion

The literature reviewed has found a general positive correlation between perceived inclusion and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB). There are numerous studies that have proven that individuals who feel good about themselves and have been valued and respected in their organizations are bound to exhibit positive behaviors outside of their formal duties as well. Giunchi et al. (2024) stressed the significance of inclusion that satisfies the needs of employees psychologically and brings about positive results at the workplace. Similarly, Zaccone and Pedrini (2024) argued that IORs help create an environment where citizens behave in the most positive manner.

In addition, the results of previous studies suggest that the relationship between perceived inclusion and OCB is mediated by employee engagement and affective commitment. Shams et al., (2020) emphasized the role of employee engagement in positive organizational behaviours and Sajad Ullah et al., (2018) discovered a positive correlation between employee engagement, organizational commitment, and OCB. Moreover, Nazir et al. (2018) proposed that positive social exchange relationships foster affective commitment, thereby motivating employees to respond to organizational support in positive ways.

Theoretically, the studies reviewed lend support to the application of Optimal Distinctiveness Theory and Social Exchange Theory in explaining the relationship between inclusion and OCB. According to the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, it is important for employees to achieve balance between belonging and uniqueness (Leonardelli et al., 2010). Positive attitudes about work environment are created where the organizations appreciate the uniqueness of their employees. Social Exchange Theory also suggests that employees respond to supportive and inclusive treatment by increasing their commitment, engagement and citizenship behaviours (Cook et al., 2013).

V. Conclusion

In today's workplaces, perceived inclusion has emerged as a significant area of knowledge on employee attitudes and behaviours. The literature reviewed suggests that staff who feel accepted, recognized and belong in an organization will report having positive relationships with their organizations and exhibit Organizational Citizenship Behaviour. Inclusion and OCB can also be explained through psychological theories involving engagement and affective commitment among other factors. Inclusive practices within organizations encourage employees to get involved beyond the scope of their jobs and contribute to organizational success. Overall, this review serves to advance the knowledge of the role of perceived inclusion on employee behaviour. Insightful lessons can be learned for companies interested in fostering inclusive workplaces that will enhance the experience of their employees. Such connections can be studied in other industries and even in different cultures.

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