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Overcoming Diversity and Inclusion Barriers: Operationalising Intersectionality as Organisational Best Practice

Joana Gonçalves Faria

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Abstract

Abstract: Intersectionality has emerged as a valuable framework in organizational studies, addressing the persistent limitations of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) practices. Despite their widespread adoption, DEI initiatives often face criticism for tokenism and their failure to mitigate systemic inequalities. These shortcomings stem from a single-axis approach to identity, which focuses on individual demographic groups without considering the complex interplay of multiple identities. Intersectionality offers a more holistic perspective, helping organizations recognize how various sources of inequality and privilege interact within the workplace, potentially hindering inclusion efforts.

This study employs an inductive approach, rooted in grounded theory, deploying qualitative analysis through the Gioia methodology, to enquire into DEI initiatives implemented by five leading companies in the field. By examining these practices, the findings of the study allow us to identify key dimensions of DEI initiatives deemed crucial to pursue intersectional integration. Based on the latter, the study discusses a model of combined DEI efforts able to pursue intersectional integration, aiming to provide organizations with actionable managerial implications able to overcome existing DEI shortcomings.

The study makes three main contributions to the literature. First, it is one of the earliest empirical works to operationalize intersectionality within organizational research. Second, it innovates methodological approaches in intersectionality studies while strengthening its connection to business ethics. Third, it advances DEI literature by offering a practical model that moves beyond tokenism toward systemic and transformative strategies. This research provides actionable insights for organizations seeking to embed intersectionality in their DEI efforts, fostering more inclusive workplaces.

Title of the dissertation: Overcoming Diversity and Inclusion Barriers: Operationalising Intersectionality as Organisational Best Practice

Author: Joana Gonçalves Faria

Keywords: Diversity Equity Inclusion, Intersectionality, Business Ethics, Group Labelling, Marginalised Groups, Social Identities, Structural Barriers, Dismantling, Integration, Organisational Change

Resumo

Resumo: A interseccionalidade surgiu como um quadro relevante para os estudos organizacionais, com a abordagem às limitações persistentes das práticas de Diversidade, Equidade e Inclusão (DEI). Apesar da sua popularidade, estas práticas são frequentemente criticadas principalmente pela sua incapacidade de mitigar desigualdades sistémicas. Estas desigualdades resultam de uma abordagem numa centralidade em grupos sociais individuais sem considerar a complexa interação de múltiplas identidades. A interseccionalidade oferece uma perspetiva holística, ajudando as organizações a reconhecer a forma como as várias fontes de desigualdade e privilégio interagem no local de trabalho. O estudo utiliza uma abordagem indutiva, com base na teoria, e recorre à análise qualitativa através da metodologia Gioia, para analisar as iniciativas implementadas por cinco empresas líderes no setor. Ao examinar estas práticas, os resultados permitem identificar as iniciativas de DEI consideradas cruciais para este estudo. Assim, o estudo discute um modelo interseccional através da combinação de práticas DEI, com o objetivo de fornecer às organizações soluções para ultrapassar as desigualdades existentes. Este estudo faz três contribuições para a literatura. Primeiramente, é um dos primeiros trabalhos empíricos a operacionalizar a interseccionalidade no âmbito da investigação organizacional. Seguidamente inova as abordagens metodológicas nos estudos sobre interseccionalidade, enquanto reforça a sua ligação à ética empresarial. Finalmente, avança a literatura sobre DEI ao oferecer um modelo prático que vai além do tokenismo em direção a estratégias sistémicas e transformadoras. Esta investigação fornece conhecimentos práticos para as organizações que procuram incorporar a interseccionalidade nos seus esforços de DEI, promovendo locais de trabalho mais inclusivos.

Título: Superar as barreiras da diversidade e inclusão: Operacionalizar a Interseccionalidade como uma Melhor Prática Organizacional

Autora: Joana Gonçalves Faria

Palavras-chave: Diversidade Equidade Inclusão, Interseccionalidade, Ética nas empresas, Estereótipos de grupo, Identidades Sociais, Barreiras estruturais, Desmantelamento, Reconhecimento, Integração, Mudança organizacional

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List of Abbreviations

DEI	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
SDA	USC School of Dramatic Arts'
MFA	Master of Fine Arts
TEALS	Technology Education and Learning Support
CS	Computer Science
AANAPISIs	American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions
TCUs	Tribal Colleges and Universities
AISES	American Indian Science and Engineering Society
AI	Artificial Intelligence
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
AAPI	Asian American and Pacific Islander
ERG	Employee Resource Groups
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
D&I	Diversity and Inclusion
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized enterprises
MNCs	Multinationals

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Introduction

Background and Problem Statement

Diversity, equity, and inclusion policies, practices, and processes (from now on: “DEI initiatives”) have become a priority for organisations in response to the enhancement of stakeholder expectations for corporate social responsibility and social change (Carroll, 1999; Palazzo & Richter, 2005; Thomas, 1989). DEI aims to support disadvantaged groups in achieving better outcomes within organisations (Leslie, 2019). Organisations increasingly view DEI initiatives as fostering inclusive workplaces, increasing employee engagement, and aligning with ethical business practices (Ferraro et al., 2023). Despite the companies’ engagement for inclusion, DEI remains a debatable concept in the literature, susceptible to scepticism and criticism.

Scholars argue that many DEI initiatives are rather superficial than aimed at meaningful social change. Some see DEI as a phenomenon of tokenism, where organisations implement diversity programmes to improve their public image without addressing systemic inequalities (DiTomaso, 2024; Rixom et al., 2023).

Despite these analyses, research shows that DEI initiatives can significantly benefit organisations. Scholars have linked effective DEI practices to business productivity and performance improvements, employee satisfaction and engagement, reduced turnover, and improved collaboration across diverse teams (Ferraro et al., 2023).

However, a growing critique of the 'business case' for DEI (Ely & Thomas, 2020) argues that engaging in diversity efforts with the sole purpose of obtaining financial gains can result in upsetting results, both in terms of inclusion and economic goals. In fact, it overlooks the ethical humanistic imperative behind these initiatives (das Neves & Melé, 2013). From an ethical standpoint, organisations should not engage in DEI solely for performance-driven reasons, but as a commitment to addressing social inequalities and to abide by their responsibility of being proactive in promoting social justice (Gjesdal, 2024; Blanc & Al-Amoudi, 2013).

Among key shortcomings of DEI initiatives, this study will focus on what has been identified as 'group labelling' (Moncrieffe & Eyben, 2007), defined as categorising individuals solely based on single identity categories (such as gender, nationality, ethnicity etc.). Indeed, identity impacts widely how people behave in organisations (Kim & Meister, 2023), hence the need for organisations to design DEI initiatives to respect and reflect such critical dimensions of organised life.

When DEI initiatives fail to capture how social identities impact people's experience and behaviour, they risk misplacing DEI efforts, potentially running into heterogeneous unintended organisational consequences (Leslie, 2019; Prasad, 2023). Yet many DEI policies take a *one-size-fits-all* approach, neglecting how gender, race, class and other social factors intersect to create unique forms of discrimination (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024; Luiz & Terziev, 2024). Aiming to enhance our knowledge on how organisation can overcome such DEI shortcomings and design more holistic DEI initiatives, this study relies on literature on intersectionality theory.

Originally conceptualised by Crenshaw (1995), intersectionality emphasises the interconnected nature of social identities, enabling organisations to better understand and address inequalities in the workplace. The intersectionality approach has been recently proven relevant in organisational research, potentially supporting both enhanced employees' experiences of inclusion and organisational well-being (Acker, 1990; Atewologun et al., 2016; Holvino, 2010; Kaufmann & Derry, 2024; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015).

By moving beyond singular identity categories, intersectionality shifts DEI efforts from simply increasing demographic representation to a holistic DEI design, able to capture each person's uniqueness, thus facilitating one's path to human flourishing and evolution (Gruman & Budworth, 2022; Melé, 2024; Wittman et al., 2025).

Despite such theoretical relevance and given its novel introduction within organisational and management studies, there still limited empirical research on how to operationalise intersectionality in organisational settings, making it challenging for companies to implement this model effectively.

Aim and Scope

This study aims to address this gap by answering the research question of this research: "*How can organisations use an intersectional framework to avoid group labelling in DEI practices?*" To answer this question, an inductive, qualitative research approach was adopted using Gioia's methodology (D. Gioia, 2021; D. A. Gioia et al., 2013). The study examines the DEI strategies of five top-ranking MNCs recognised for their leadership in diversity and inclusion: Microsoft, Samsung Electronics, Adobe, Airbus and IKEA. Through an in-depth analysis of their DEI initiatives, discussed through an intersectional lens, the study identifies key dimensions that, when combined, can provide a model of intersectional integration.

Building on the findings of this study, this dissertation proposes and discusses an intersectional model aimed at informing actionable DEI strategies by organisations which seek to avoid potential DEI failings tied to group labelling (Amis et al., 2020).

From a theoretical perspective, this research contributes to current knowledge on the topic in three ways:

First, it advances current literature on intersectionality within organisation studies (Atewologun et al., 2016; Kaufmann & Derry, 2024) by providing an empirically based study to a growing but still scarce literature (Luiz & Terziev, 2024; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015).

Second, it novels methodologically the spectrum of intersectionality research, by bridging intersectional theoretical framework with organisational study methodological approach (Atewologun et al., 2016; Marfelt, 2016).

Third, it provides new insights into DEI literature, particularly within the field of business ethics, by laying the groundwork for future studies enquiring into how organisations can proactively reduce multiple sources of inequalities through cultivating fairer, more equitable workplaces (Amis et al., 2020; Bernstein et al., 2020).

1. Theoretical background: Diversity and Inclusion, a state of the art

1.1 Do we need Diversity & Inclusion?

In recent decades, DEI practices have become a crucial part of organisations structures (Gjesdal, 2024). DEI is understood as a set of practices, policies, and strategies, that aim to reduce inequalities in the workplace by guaranteeing equal opportunities for individuals from different social backgrounds (Amis et al., 2020; S. M. Nkomo et al., 2019).

DEI practices refer to specific initiatives designed to promote inclusion and diversity, often involving targeted actions (Gjesdal, 2024; Leslie, 2019). These initiatives aim to create immediate engagement. DEI policies represent formalised organisational rules that govern how diversity and inclusion principles are implemented within workplaces. DEI strategies encompass long-term organisational commitments that integrate diversity, equity and inclusion into core business functions (DiTomaso, 2024). Even though, these three types of operationalisation are related (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024), this dissertation focuses primarily on DEI practices, which encompass the day-to-day organisational efforts that shape inclusion in the workplace. DEI practices include both formal and informal ways in which diversity, equity and inclusion are enacted in organisations, influencing decision-making, leadership behaviours, employee interactions and workplace culture (Amis et al., 2020; Gruman & Budworth, 2022; Melé, 2024).

The increasing corporate engagement through DEI practices started to meet expectations from their stakeholders and shareholders to promote social change and enhance their social responsibilities (Kim & Meister, 2023; Palazzo & Richter, 2005; Thomas, 1989). This shift reflects an increasing recognition of corporations as key actors in society's welfare (Braithwaite & Drahos, 2000), beyond simply complying with legal requirements (Scherer & Palazzo, 2011; Van Der Wiele et al., 2001).

Within the academic debate, scholars have been arguing about different motives leading to DEI engagement by corporations. One perspective links DEI to business-driven objectives. It argues that inclusivity increases productivity and employee satisfaction by improving organisational structures and engagement (Aguilera et al., 2004; Gjesdal, 2024). Researchers like Katz, Kochan & Gobeille (1983) and Schuster (1983) demonstrated that inclusion practices such as cross-functional teams, quality of work like programs and job rotation directly impact firm performance by improving how these jobs are performed. Consequently, companies that adopt more inclusive and cooperative practices experience more benefits such as less scrap,

higher productivity, lower costs, and a greater return to direct labour hours than firms that use traditional “adversarial” labour relations practices (Cutcher-Gershenfeld, 1991; Huselid, 1995).

Other scholars have argued that because there is no clear evidence of a direct causal link between increased diversity - particularly the inclusion of women in leadership positions - and improved performance, the above considerations, collectively referred to as the 'business case', cannot be demonstrated (Ely & Thomas, 2020). Indeed, scholars have been discussing a vast spectrum of ethical theories and approaches underpinning DEI such as the ethical responsibility of corporations to promote social justice and address societal structural inequalities within their companies (Braithwaite & Drahos, 2000). Alongside this view, corporations must promote justice since they are part of the "basic structure" of society. According to Rawls’s theory of justice (1999), institutions- including corporations- have the task of ensuring the fair distribution of rights and responsibilities, as well as fostering social cooperation in a way that benefits every person.

Others, like Blanc and Al-Amoudi (2013) argue that, in contexts where income inequality is high and workers have limited opportunities, corporations must ensure that their governance allows employees to have a voice and some influence over their workplace.

1.2 When DEI fails

Scholars have criticised DEI from three main perspectives: Profit-driven motivations, structural biases in organisational processes and systemic discriminatory issues. Such criticism is underpinned by observable DEI shortcomings that undermine their intended goals. Table 1 summarises key DEI failings identified by scholars, outlining specific criticisms and systemic barriers that limit the effectiveness of DEI practices within organisations.

Despite the widespread adoption of inclusive practices and a growing body of research supporting the positive correlation between DEI policies and both social justice and productivity outcomes, the true impact of these policies remains debated. Many scholars still these efforts often fail to address the deeper systemic issues within organisations, which limits the foster of inclusion. (Aguilera et al., 2004; Gjesdal, 2024; Grosser & Tyler, 2022; Leslie, 2019; S. Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, and Ganapathi (2007) argue that a firm's motivation for implementing DEI practices may not always be for the benefit of others. This suggests their commitment to equality may be superficial, driven more by maintaining social legitimacy rather than a desire to promote inclusion (Gjesdal, 2024).

Table 1 - DEI Failings

Authors	DEI Failings	Reasons / Criticisms
<i>Grosser & Tyler (2021); Simons and Handl (2019); Baugh (1997)</i>	Lack of focus on gender violence within organisations and throughout the supply chains	Although there is a focus on women's representation, there is less attention to the diverse complexities many groups of workers face, particularly those whose status might limit their visibility.
<i>Amis, Mair & Munir (2020)</i>	Bias in hiring and promotion favor those with cultural similarity and informal networks, reinforcing privilege.	Workers are more likely to relate to and emphasise with colleagues who share similar backgrounds and life experiences, which can lead to differing preferences and choices among individuals.
<i>Barley (2007); Stiglitz (2013)</i>	Continuous concepts of efficiency, meritocracy, and positive globalization still perpetuate inequalities in DEI efforts.	Traditional concepts within organisations are used to justify differences between workers, leaving structural biases in place within hiring, promotions, and pay.
<i>Dennissen, Benschop & Van den Brink (2020); Grosser & Moon (2005); Grosser (2009)</i>	One-size-fits-all and general diversity initiatives	Fails to address various complexities of many workers' experiences.
<i>Uhlmann & Cohen (2007); Nkomo & Hoobler (2014); Kaufmann & Derry (2023), Fletcher (2004)</i>	Gendered roles perpetuated by gender labelling and stereotypes in DEI initiatives.	Patriarchal structures embedded in organisations still don't dismantle completely the systemic gender inequalities.
<i>Porter and Kramer (2002, 2006); Aguilera, Rupp, Williams, Ganapathi (2007); Gjesdal (2024)</i>	Many DEI initiatives are motivated by the belief that fostering diversity leads to improved company performance.	Profit-based diversity efforts fail to genuinely address systemic inequalities or historic exclusion.
<i>Hirsh & Kornrich (2008); Ozkahanc- Pan (2019)</i>	Inequitable representation of diverse demographic groups in DEI initiatives and leadership positions.	DEI initiatives often exclude marginalised groups from both the planning and execution stages, leading to a lack of inclusive decision-making.
<i>Castilla (2008, 2015; Elvira & Graham (2002); DiPrete & Soule (1988); Petersen & Saporta (2004)</i>	Bias on reward allocations based on social factors (e.g gender, race).	Pay and raises favor certain social groups, contributing to persistent wage gaps and inequalities.
<i>Koch et al. (2015)</i>	Bias in performance and eligibility evaluations.	Stigmatising regarding social factors influences on the attributing of opportunities. Don't acknowledge social and economic factors that are interconnected and influence social dynamics of marginalised groups.
<i>Tatli & Ozbilgin (2012)</i>	Focus on single identity categories	This perspective can undermine efforts to create truly inclusive workplaces, as it treats individuals as assets rather than recognising their inherent value.
<i>Greenwood (2002); Van Marrewijk & Timmers (2003); Honneth (2002) Foss (2008);</i>	Companies see employees as financial resources to be strategically utilised for the companies economic goals	

Among the many criticisms of DEI, this study focuses on its failure to function as a genuine organisational commitment to reducing social inequality. While DEI initiatives are often framed as instruments for fostering inclusion, many fall short by prioritising business

performance over meaningful structural change (Ely & Thomas, 2020). This approach frequently results in superficial diversity efforts that fail to address systemic inequalities embedded within organisations (Gjesdal, 2024). Furthermore, the research identifies persistent biases in organisational processes- such as hiring, promotion, and workplace culture- as additional factors that serve to undermine the potential of DEI to drive social transformation (Amis et al., 2020). Thus, this study highlights how its shortcomings contribute to maintaining, rather than dismantling, existing social inequalities.

1.3 DEI challenges in targeting social inequalities

To understand how inequality persists within organisations, Joan Acker's (2006) concept of inequality regimes provides a valuable framework. Acker describes inequality as a fluid system of practices closely tied to traditional structures, making them very difficult to dismantle (S. M. Nkomo et al., 2019). Similarly, Amis, Munir & Mair (2020) identify three dominant institutional myths that perpetuate inequality within organisations: efficiency, meritocracy, and positive globalisation. These myths function as rationalised but often unconscious ideals that shape corporate practices and reinforce structural inequalities (Barley, 2007; Stiglitz, 2012).

Firstly, the myth of efficiency justifies large pay gaps by assuming that organisations operate in a purely rational manner (Hargreaves, 2019). Second, the myth of meritocracy suggests that hiring and promotion are based solely on individual ability, when in fact social and cultural biases shape career progression (Friedman & Laurison, 2019; Rivera & Rivera, 2016). Finally, the myth of positive globalisation is used to rationalise exploitative labour practices, as companies favour economically and culturally privileged individuals while taking advantage of vulnerable workers (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Ruiz Castro & Holvino, 2016).

Building on these ideas, managers tend to prioritise the demands of groups that are most important to them to achieve better outcomes (Derry, 2012; Mitchell et al., 1997; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015), which can contribute to greater inequality within the workplace since their needs and demands are more considered (Meliou et al., 2024). In tailoring initiatives to the needs of a particular group, organisations often adopt standardised practices - such as mentoring programmes and employee networks - and apply a *one-size-fits-all* approach to all employees (Dennissen et al., 2020; Grosser, 2009; Grosser & Moon, 2005).

This approach overlooks a particularly critical shortcoming of DEI initiatives, and the central focus of this research is 'group labelling', whereby organisations categorise individuals

primarily according to singular, isolated identity markers such as gender, race, or class. This can reinforce exclusion by failing to recognise the complexity and intersection of employees' identities (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024; Ruiz Castro & Holvino, 2016). This research proposes a new framework that moves beyond surface-level diversity efforts and fosters systemic change, ensuring DEI initiatives contribute meaningfully to reducing social inequality.

2. Intersectionality in organisation studies

2.1 Intersectionality Theory: Definitions and Origins

Intersectional theory was first introduced by Crenshaw (1989) focused on the marginalisation of black women. Over the decades, intersectionality started to emphasise the need to understand power structures through multiple dimensions, thereby actively transforming both private and public institutions (Fotaki & Pullen, 2024; Luiz & Terziev, 2024; Prasad, 2023).

What makes intersectionality unique is its ability to frame systemic (social) sources of inequality while also understanding how they interplay in personal experiences (Acker, 1990; Kaufmann & Derry, 2024).

According to Kaufmann and Derry (2023), intersectionality is known as the study of “how multiple forms of social inequality interact to produce individuals’ unique experiences of marginalisation, as well as the study of the systemic practices that perpetuate these inequities”. This perspective is for understanding the shortcomings of DEI, as organisations often prioritise certain underrepresented groups while neglecting others, failing to consider the full range of social identities (Collins, 2019; Meliou et al., 2024). Intersectionality has shown that focusing on isolated social factors excludes marginalised groups from anti-discrimination policies (Collins, 2019).

The concept recognises that identity and sense of self (Wittman et al., 2025) shapes both individual experiences at the micro level and influences eager institutional, societal structures, and cultural ideologies at the macro level (Collins, 2019; Kaufmann & Derry, 2024). These intersections are understood as relations of power — privilege and disadvantage — that result in complex inequalities, which are more than the analysis of any one category by itself or the mere sum of various categories (Cho et al., 2013; Collins, 2019).

Organisations play a crucial intermediary role in this process (Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015). As institutions that shape employment, leadership, and workplace culture, organisations act as a bridge between systemic discrimination and individual experiences of marginalisation (Fotaki & Pullen, 2024). How organisations structure recruitment, promotions and inclusion

practices determine whether they mitigate or reinforce existing inequalities (S. M. Nkomo et al., 2019). Therefore, understanding intersectionality in the organisational context is essential for identifying how workplace structures reproduce social inequalities and what can be done to dismantle them.

2.2 Intersectionality in Organisational Studies

To date, in business studies, intersectionality has expanded to address how various forms of social discrimination are interconnected within a single workplace structure (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Collins and Bilge (2016) highlight that intersectionality tackles multiple axes of oppression, emphasising the importance of collective solidarity within institutions and social organisations when advocating for social justice. Individuals who identify with multiple social categories often find themselves excluded from meeting societal norms for "fitting in" or fulfilling expectations related to job performance (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024). Scholars have extended the concept of intersectionality to explore dimensions such as race, gender, and class (Bose, 2012), recognising that individuals' experiences are shaped by the interplay of their intersecting identities (Cole, 2008; Hall et al., 2019; Thatcher et al., 2023).

Research on intersectional theory has taken multiple approaches to articulate women's interests, while also addressing other social issues. Feminist movements, according to scholars like Acker (2006), must consider multiple intersecting identities which can lead to complex processes such as tensions between groups. Despite its theoretical embrace of intersectionality, this concept is not universally acknowledged (Grosser, 2009). Scholars like Weldon (2006), Evans (2005) and Laperrière & Lépinard (2016) argue that privileged groups still dominate policies, leaving little room to include the experiences of other marginalised groups (Atewologun et al., 2016). There remains a lack of representation of diverse demographic groups in DEI initiatives and leadership roles (Mitchell et al., 1997). While many diversity efforts aim to empower women, they often promote a limited perspective of empowerment, centring on individual entrepreneurship or self-care, rather than tackling the deeper structural inequalities that persist (Hekman et al., 2017; McCarthy, 2023).

However, strong applications of intersectionality can go beyond reporting different types of discrimination felt by women; they have the potential to uncover and address the structural barriers that hinder equity (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024). Strong intersectional approaches help deconstruct systemic bias and promote justice by focusing on dismantling these entrenched inequality systems. This leads to deeper, more meaningful changes in

organisational practices, ensuring that diversity initiatives are not just about inclusion but about reshaping power dynamics for true equity and fairness across all levels (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024).

Literature continues to focus on the accomplishment of individual rights of women, privileging gender over other social categories (McCarthy, 2023; Ely, 1999). In other perspectives, while policies may address various social factors, they often fail to consider social factors like gender or how these factors intersect with them (Ruiz Castro & Holvino, 2016). As a result, the connection between gender and other social categories remains overlooked, leading to incomplete and ineffective approaches to addressing inequalities (Grosser & Moon, 2019; Kaufmann & Derry, 2024). Additionally, intersectionality goes unnoticed by many individuals. People are often reluctant to engage with other social categories, as they believe these issues pertain to distinct groups. For instance, some may think that women's issues don't need to address topics like sexuality. (Holvino, 2010).

That's why scholars like Mohanty (2003) Carastathis (2008) and Hooks (1986) argue that intersectional solidarity requires acknowledging power differences both within and among diverse groups of women to create a more inclusive and just feminist movement (Ciccio et al., 2021). Research advocates for changes in the literature to better understand the differential impact that everyday practices have on different women in different organisations, As McCall (2005) highlights, "women" is not a universal concept, and the feminist theory must consider the varied experiences of women across different contexts. By adopting an intersectional approach, organisations can begin to recognise how social categories are interconnected, ensuring that diversity policies are inclusive of all social groups, rather than focusing on a single category in isolation (Amis et al., 2020). Intersectional feminism urges businesses to critically evaluate their internal power structures, shedding light on how systems of privilege and oppression influence key areas such as recruitment, career progression, and leadership roles (Atewologun et al., 2016)(This awareness enables companies to identify and dismantle the barriers that hinder the advancement of marginalised groups. In doing so, organisations can foster a more ethical and equitable workplace, where all employees have equal opportunities to thrive (Atewologun et al., 2016).

To address diversity and inclusion challenges, intersectionality—based on Kaufmann and Derry's (2023) "business case"—advocates for recognising and dismantling structural barriers. It challenges traditional diversity methods by going beyond increasing women's representation to addressing systemic problems that hinder marginalised groups (Holvino, 2010; Luiz & Terziev, 2024).

Some scholars like Nkomo et al. (2019) and Hall, Hall, Galinsky, and Phillips (2019) argue that intersectionality is inconsistently applied in theoretical frameworks since, recent studies emphasise its importance in understanding organisational inequality (Hall et al., 2019). Meanwhile, others like Clair et al. (2019) suggest exploring identities that defy categorisation (Meliou et al., 2024).

2.3 Intersectional Reproduction of Inequality in Organisations

Workplace inequalities are deeply structured by gender, shaping not only who has the power but also how authority, competence, and leadership are perceived (Acker, 1990; Derry, 2012). Feminists have long argued about how gender is not just a demographic characteristic but also a fundamental organising principle of society (Grosser & Moon, 2019). Within organisations, gendered and racial hierarchies remain embedded in workplace roles and leadership structures (Prasad, 2023). White men have occupied managerial positions, while women and black people were attributed lower-status roles, a dynamic that persists despite formal progress in gender inclusion (Acker, 2006; Prasad, 2023). Hiring and promotion decisions continue to be shaped by gendered stereotypes, reinforcing a perception that women are not inherently connected to leadership roles (Fletcher, 2004). Consequently, women are often expected to exhibit traits associated with rationality and dominance to be taken seriously in corporations (Atewologun et al., 2016; Pullen & Vachhani, 2021).

However, focusing on gender alone is not sufficient. Organisations not only reproduce gender hierarchies but also maintain historically intersecting forms of oppression based on race, class, and other social categories (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024; Luiz & Terziev, 2024). This highlights the need for an intersectional approach that moves beyond gender as a single-axis category (Crenshaw, 1989). While gender-based discrimination remains a key issue in organisations, research has shown that women of colour, lower class, as well as other marginalised groups, face compounded disadvantages that cannot be explained through gender alone (Ruiz Castro & Holvino, 2016).

For instance, hiring practices often appear neutral but disadvantage disproportionately individuals mainly from underrepresented groups (Amis et al., 2020; Friedman & Laurison, 2019). Researchers like Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) outlined how job applicants with names associated with black individuals were less likely to receive callbacks, which reinforces racial and gendered hiring biases. These findings highlight that bias is not simply about gender or race in isolation, but rather how social identities intersect in decision-making processes.

Similarly, promotion and pay structures also reflect these systemic inequalities. Women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds often struggle to advance in their career due to a lack of access to professional networks and social capital (Friedman & Laurison, 2019). Meritocracy is frequently cited as a justification for disparities (Amis et al., 2020), yet research shows that “merit” is often defined by the dominant groups in ways that exclude marginalized identities (Castilla, 2008).

Organisations reinforce inequality through recruitment, promotion, and leadership structures. Hiring practices, while often framed as meritocratic, serve as gatekeeping mechanisms that privilege certain social groups while restricting access for others (Amis et al., 2020). Research shows that managers tend to favour candidates who share similar experiences, cultural backgrounds, and interests - often unconsciously reproducing race and class barriers (Rivera & Tilsik, 2016; Ruiz Castro & Holvino, 2016). As Friedman and Laurison (2019) and Riviera (2015) argue, this issue continues to be shown to dramatically affect one's chances of moving beyond.

Similarly, pay structures reflect entrenched biases, with marginalised people often being assigned to lower-paid roles (Calas & Smircich, 2006; Castilla, 2008). Researchers like Becker, Kraus, and Rheinschmidt-Same (2017) show that individuals from lower-class backgrounds are significantly less likely to challenge workplace inequalities or salaries, further reinforcing the disparities. By defining job value through a framework that privileges dominant groups, organisations maintain systemic inequality (Acker, 2006).

Despite increasing attention to DEI initiatives, many of these efforts remain superficial and fail to address systemic power imbalances (Grosser & Moon, 2019). Traditional DEI policies often focus on increasing representation without fundamentally altering decision-making structures, hiring processes or pay systems (Gjesdal, 2024). As a result, they often reinforce existing inequalities rather than reduce them. For example, efforts to get more women into leadership roles often favour those who already have social and economic privilege, rather than creating equal opportunities for all women (Crenshaw, 1989). Similarly, many organisations treat diversity as a business case for improved performance rather than as a means of achieving social justice ((Grosser & Moon, 2019).

Castro and Holvino's (2016) research demonstrated how intersectional theory could be used to diminish or reduce these stereotypical approaches regarding minority groups. Intersectionality offers a way forward by addressing structural inequalities rather than simply increasing demographic diversity (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024). By shifting from representation-focused approaches to structural change, organisations can ensure that DEI policies lead to

meaningful, long-term change. To achieve this, organisations must incorporate intersectional principles into leadership structures, decision-making processes, and workplace initiatives. This means rethinking hiring practices, implementing pay equity measures, and creating fair career development opportunities that do not only benefit those who are already positioned for success.

There is still a lack of inclusion of feminist theory in diversity and inclusion analysis. Mainly due to the marginalisation of social-related issues and the exclusion of minorities' voices and perspectives. Social insights have been overlooked in DEI and academia, partly due to a failure to apply feminist theory to foster more inclusive practices (Grosser & Moon, 2019).

However, there has been progress and the solution lies in critically examining and changing discriminatory practices embedded in organisations by including the voices and experiences of underrepresented stakeholders (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024). Scholars now emphasise how feminist agendas have been co-opted by businesses, focusing on 'fixing' individual minorities as market actors while overlooking broader structural inequalities—inequalities that corporations themselves often perpetuate (Roberts, 2015).

Research Design and Methodology

Research Design

The third chapter provides a detailed overview of the research design suitable for answering intersectionality within organisation studies is mostly normative in nature and scope (Acker, 1990; Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989; Holvino, 2010; Kaufmann & Derry, 2024). This work seeks to enhance our knowledge of how companies can apply intersectional theory to avoid group labelling in their DEI practices.

The study followed an inductive approach rooted in grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2004). All the patterns and themes identified emerged directly from the data, relying on a qualitative methodology for data analysis(Naeem et al., 2023). Qualitative methodology is well-suited to answering the above-recalled research question, as it has been noted by Reinecke, Arnold, and Palazzo (2016), “qualitative methods are well poised to understand and explain complex and messy ethical phenomena.”.

The methodology deployed relies on Gioia’s thematic analysis process, a method designed to identify and report patterns within a dataset, enabling the development of new frameworks and uncovering fresh insights and understandings (D. Gioia, 2021; D. A. Gioia et al., 2013).

To address the research question, the study conducts an in-depth examination of the DEI practices of five companies recognised as part of the top-10 DEI performers by the World’s Best Employees 2024 by Forbes (Peachman, 2024). These organisations operate across diverse industry sectors and are globally recognised for their strong DEI workplace policies and practices. The database for this study is composed of publicly available data from five companies: Microsoft, Samsung Electronics, Adobe, Airbus, and IKEA.

This analysis is guided by intersectional variables grounded in the framework proposed by Kaufmann & Derry (2023), shown in *Figure 1*.

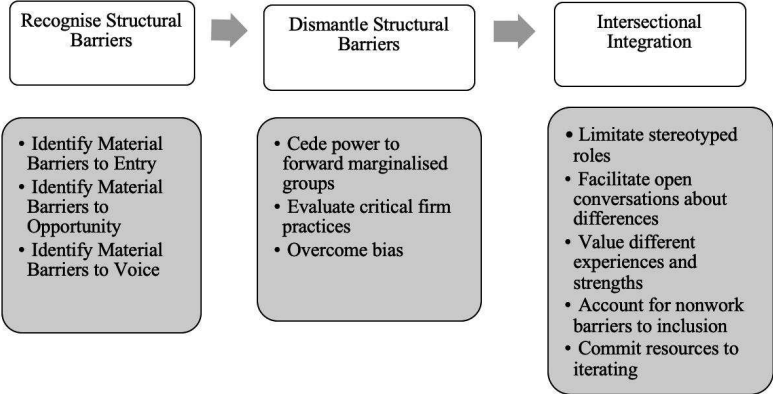


Figure 1 - Intersectional Variables. Based on the intersectional approach of Kaufmann & Derry (2023)

Data Gathering

Data gathering relied on secondary data, which refers to information gathered by other individuals, not directly intended for the current inquiry. The detailed composition of the dataset can be found in Appendix A and B.

The study relied exclusively on publicly accessible sources to conduct this analysis. The dataset includes fifty items, including nine company annual activity reports, forty company articles, and one video that outlines the different practices of the selected companies. The data sources can be found on Appendix C.

Empirical Setting

The Forbes World’s Best Employers List, released annually in collaboration with the research firm *Statista*, recognises top employers based on metrics like opportunities for talent development, employees’ level of contentment and working conditions. For the 2024 list, Forbes surveyed over 300,000 employees from multinational companies operating in at least two of seven continents. Employees rated their employers on various criteria, including salary and remote work options, and could evaluate companies based on personal experience. The resulting data, which emphasised recent responses, included 850 recognised companies from 48 countries.

Company Name	Industry Sector	Employee Count	Main DEI Policies and Practices
Microsoft	IT Software & Services	221,000	Involve minority groups in the development of products and software;
Samsung Electronics	IT Software & Services	270,372	Customised programs for professional growth and leadership capabilities;
Adobe	IT Software & Services	29,000	Involve minority groups in the development of products. Re-entry and midcareer transition support programs; Support and benefits programs for underrepresented groups.
Airbus	Aerospace & Defense	147,893	Partnerships to contribute to the economic and social development of underprivileged groups; External partnerships to promote careers in the area for women. Programmes to identify and address barriers to equal opportunities for underrepresented groups;
IKEA	Retail & Wholesale	208,000	Multiple editions of Accelerator Development Programs with social enterprises.

Table 2 - Companies Overview

Table 2 provides an overview of the companies chosen. The selected companies are headquartered across the Netherlands, South Korea, and the United States, offering a culturally diverse lens for the analysis. Additionally, the scale of these organisations varies significantly, with employee numbers ranging from 29,000 to 271,000, providing a broad perspective on how DEI initiatives are implemented in organisations of different sizes.

Data Analysis

This study followed the approach developed by Gioia (2020). The analysis unfolded in three main structured stages, leading to a fourth one, the creation of a detailed conceptual framework that summarises the findings.

Step 1: Data familiarisation and development of the first-order codes

The initial phase involved the review of the data sources, systematically organized by company. Initial coding was refined through a secondary review, merging similar codes and discarding irrelevant data. Consequently, patterns between these codes were used to formulate final first-order codes.

Step 2: Identifying second-order themes by iterating with existing literature

The second stage of the research concentrated on identifying themes by clustering related codes. This thematic analysis aimed to unveil broader patterns within the data, establishing connections between the organisational practices and the literature (Atewologun et al., 2016; Gruman & Budworth, 2022; Holvino, 2010; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015). In this phase, codes were clustered iterating with the intersectional variables highlighted by Kaufmann and Derry (2023).

Step 3: Aggregate dimensions into intersectional dimensions

The observed patterns were then categorised into key dimensions able to operationalize and, thus, novel, the intersectional framework proposed by Kaufmann and Derry (2023).

Findings

By examining the DEI policies of five multinational companies recognised for their leadership in diversity and inclusion, the findings illustrate how organisations shape and adopt their DEI practices and how this impacts society and employees.

In total, 31 first-order concepts were identified and represented by direct quotations to ensure the findings were grounded in the evidence provided by the interviews. These concepts were then categorised into 11 second-order themes, which were finally aggregated into 3 aggregated dimensions. Figure 3 illustrates a summarised visual display of the data, organised into three aggregated dimensions. The link to the detailed analysis, which was structured in an Excel file, can be found in Appendix A and B.

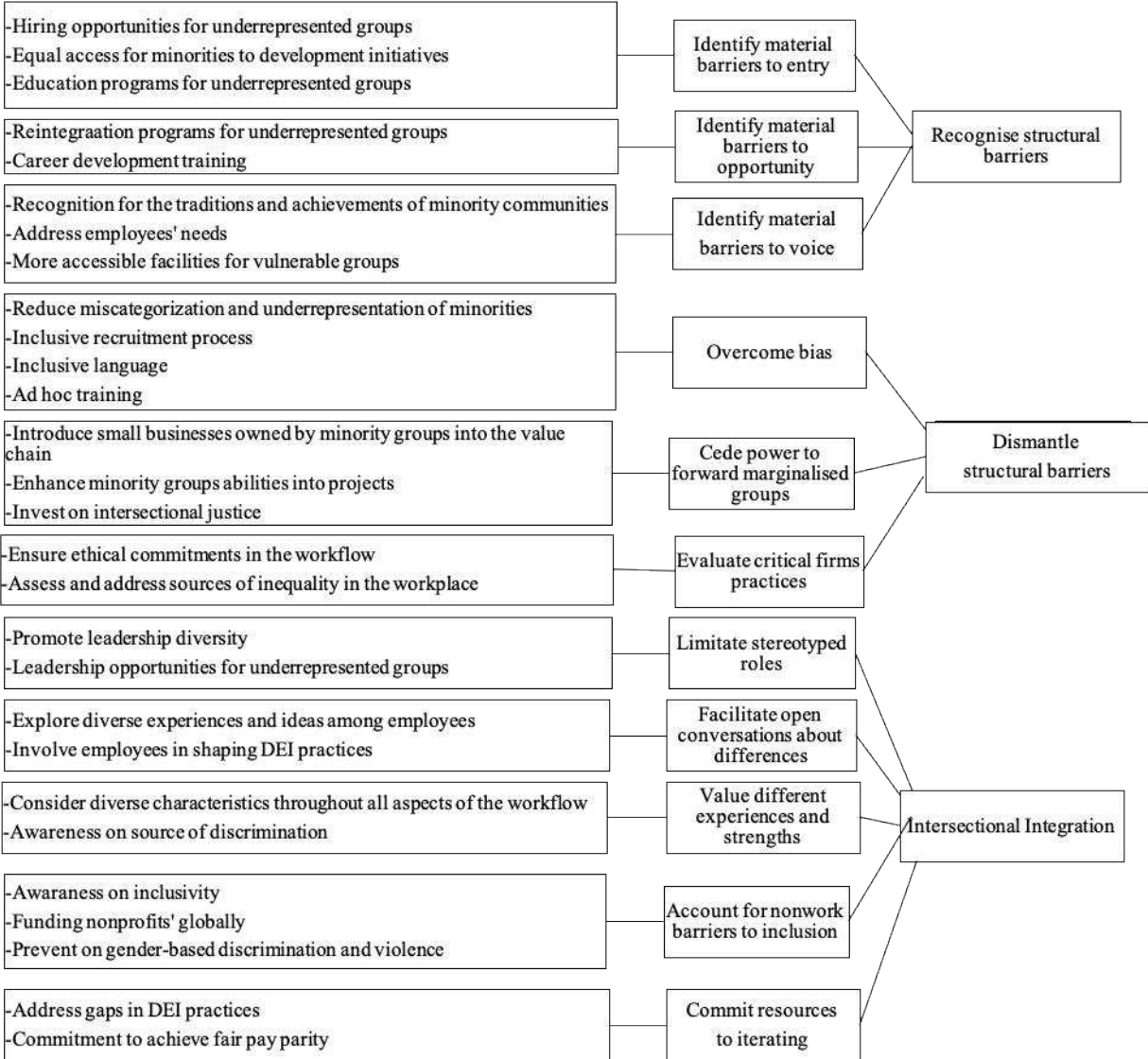


Figure 2 - Data Structure

Recognise structural barriers

Adopting an intersectional DEI framework requires identifying material barriers that affect marginalized groups. According to Kaufmann and Derry (2023), companies need to recognize that underrepresented people are more likely to identify these structural barriers than people who have not experienced them. Therefore, the goal should be to consider these people for DEI practices to be more effective. In this dimension, three key themes were identified in how companies approach structural barriers: (1) Identify material barriers to entry; (2) Identify material barriers to opportunity; and (3) Identify material barriers to voice.

1. Identify material barriers to entry

One of the patterns that emerged was the identification of barriers to entry for marginalised groups. As Amis, Mair and Munir (2020), entry practices tend to act as gatekeepers, facilitating career and educational opportunities for some while denying access to others.

Scholars like Riviera (2012) acknowledged hiring processes as one of the main processes that systematically disadvantage marginalised groups. These barriers are beginning to be broken by strategies that provide more opportunities to be able to enter the market:

A6. "(...) Ingka Group made a new commitment to support 3,000 refugees and asylum seekers by the end of 2027 through their Skills for Employment program in IKEA retail.

(...) Additionally, since 2022, the company has directly hired 332 forcibly displaced people through its Displaced Talent program."

C4. "We established Stellar Forest, a subsidiary-type standard workplace for employees with disabilities, in March 2023 through a 100% equity investment as an extension of our efforts to create jobs for persons with developmental disabilities. (...) Stellar Forest plans to diversify into other fields to create more jobs for persons with disabilities."

Both quotes illustrate companies' efforts to reduce barriers to employment for historically marginalised groups through targeted recruitment programmes. The data shows how the first company actively facilitates the economic integration of refugees and asylum seekers, a group often excluded from stable employment due to legal and social barriers. Similarly, the second programme presented by the citation represents a structural adjustment aimed at providing sustainable employment opportunities for people with developmental disabilities, demonstrating a long-term commitment to inclusive hiring beyond traditional workforce models.

By providing access to employment opportunities, these companies have removed an unnecessary barrier that often disproportionately affects low-income and disabled candidates. Typically, these types of candidates don't have the opportunity to acquire specific skills to enter the job market and are more likely to face economic inequality and social exclusion due to their status and abilities:

A6. "Ingkan successfully piloted a new program (...) which aims to identify and address barriers to equal opportunities for people from underrepresented ethnic and cultural backgrounds."

D1. "(...) the Adobe Foundation granted \$250,000 to the USC School of Dramatic Arts' (SDA) Master of Fine Arts (MFA) Acting Program to directly support the production of short films written, directed and performed by a diverse slate of third year MFA acting students. (...) Seventy-five percent of USC SDA's MFA Acting cohort identifies with an underrepresented racial/ethnic group, and this program is a critical pipeline for acting talent into the industry."

These quotations are pivotal because they show how companies are challenging traditional industry structures that have historically privileged dominant groups. By implementing targeted programs and initiatives, these organisations are not only acknowledging the structural barriers that exist within their industries but also taking concrete steps to dismantle the discriminatory practices that have perpetuated inequality.

Beyond these patterns, scholars such as Collins (2019) identify exclusion from knowledge production as one of the material barriers to entry. People with lower social and economic capacities are more likely to suffer from some form of educational access. (Friedman & Laurison, 2019).

Therefore, organisations have the power to reshape opportunities for underrepresented individuals by addressing both internal and external barriers. This ensures that companies not only mitigate structural limitations within their control but also actively contribute to reducing broader systemic inequalities to let new people enter the industry.

B16. "Since 2009, Microsoft has led Technology Education and Learning Support (TEALS), which builds sustainable computer science (CS) programs in high schools to support students excluded from learning CS because of race, gender, or geography."

E12. "Airbus supports education for the underprivileged in more than one way. Airbus is associated with Christel House India (...) The intent under this objective is to help children break the cycle of poverty, realize their hopes and dreams and become self-sufficient, contributing members of society. The support includes scholarship for

university education, development of job search, skills for those entering the workforce and networking opportunities for graduates looking to improve employment.”

These quotes highlight how companies are creating programmes to break a cycle and provide more opportunities for underrepresented individuals who typically wouldn't be able to reach higher positions in life due to systemic discriminatory factors. The programmes introduced by these two companies demonstrate a commitment to proactively addressing these barriers from a young age, not only providing access to resources and opportunities but also contributing to a broader cultural shift in talent acquisition and professional development—one that prioritises equitable access to success over traditional, exclusionary pipelines.

2. Identify material barriers to opportunity

Beyond recruitment, minority groups are continually excluded from opportunities as the ways in which they identify themselves and the situations in which they find themselves remain very important determinants when it comes to have an equal chance (Collins, 2019; Ruiz Castro & Holvino, 2016).

Processes related to social norms of childcare are a barrier to entering or re-entering the labour market. Scholars such as McCarthy (2018:339) have exposed how there are individuals, mainly women, who are systematically excluded from full labour market participation and the "time burden of unpaid care". Furthermore, people who take advantage of family support policies suffer as they are seen as less dedicated, and less deserving, of advancement (Amis et al., 2020):

D1."(...) SheSparks internship program enables women to successfully transition back to full-time work after a career break. Established in 2019, this six-month bridge program empowers returning women professionals with training, role-specific mentors, a supportive community and opportunities to grow with high-impact work. To date, more than 100 women have participated in the program, and nearly 60% have secured positions at Adobe including project managers, data engineers, solution architects, engineering program managers and more."

E3."In terms of retention, worthy of note is one of our innovative programs "Fly again", (...) This is a returnee program for women professionals who want to return to corporate careers after a period of maternity or sabbatical leave. It is aimed at ensuring that these women can make a smooth return to professional life through structured mentoring, up-skilling and on-boarding."

The data outlines corporate initiatives aimed at reintegrating women into the workforce after career breaks, particularly in the context of maternity leave or extended caregiving responsibilities. Nevertheless, the extract becomes even more revealing when we understand that these policies are aimed at a group of people who are systematically more excluded, namely women from poor countries who are more likely to face social and economic problems.

It is also clear that access to higher or more relevant positions is often not based on merit alone, but rather on social beliefs and privileged upbringing. Systemic barriers such as economic disadvantage, lack of educational resources, and discriminatory hiring practices continue to shape who gains access to opportunities and upward mobility within organisations. Kaufmann & Derry (2023) point out that company programmes often focus on short-term skills rather than addressing the structural constraints that prevent marginalised people from taking full advantage of opportunities in the workplace:

B16. "In addition to employee-focused initiatives, we engage with Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) through recruitment and professional development (...) We also collaborate with organizations like American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) to network, recruit, grow, and develop talent across our workforce."

C6. "The 'SheLEADs' program, the first women's leadership development program in SIEL-S(India), aims to identify and nurture female talent within Samsung, building a talent pipeline suitable for future leadership positions. We provide tools and support to enhance the capabilities of female employees, striving to create a leadership environment characterized by diversity and inclusivity."

The quote becomes insightful when we understand the broader context: companies began to focus more on how to create more opportunities to increase the social diversity of employees across teams. By providing tools and support to enhance the skills of underrepresented groups, typically excluded employees can develop their career prospects, which can lead to more opportunities quickly. Thus, companies can actively reduce the systemic barriers that have historically hindered the career advancement of marginalised employees.

3. Identify material barriers to voice

Among all the barriers that underrepresented groups can face, one of the most challenging is how to voice their needs and concerns. These individuals have a clearer

understanding of how the norms of the organization may systematically exclude people (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024).

When the voices of intersectional demographic groups are heard in identifying material barriers to inclusion, their experiences and knowledge can be honoured and valued by the company. Thus, companies should not only centre the voices of marginalised people but do so in a way that recognises and values their work (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024):

B6. "At Microsoft, I co-lead a group called NOODLE that's focused on professional development for AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) self-identified employees. (...) We meet once a month, and we go on different journeys. The idea behind the group is learning to talk about our accomplishments and speak up for the things we want in the workplace and otherwise."

D7. "(...) Our goal was to bring members of BEN and our many allies together to celebrate the talent, leadership, creativity, and stories from the Black community."

By recognising their ideas and achievements, companies can create a culture of belonging where all employees feel valued and empowered to make meaningful contributions. These quotes highlight how grassroots initiatives within organizations can provide underrepresented employees with the tools and confidence to overcome workplace challenges, amplify their voices, and advocate for career advancement.

Giving voice to underrepresented people also means addressing their needs. Scholars such as Meliou, et al. (2024) have argued that simply focusing on the needs of certain employee groups - often those with the most influence - devalues the sense of belonging of other groups. In doing so, it contributes to greater inequality in the workplace.

A3. "Replaced maternity and paternity leave with parental leave that includes same-sex couples. This followed the active participation in the public debate prior to the national vote on extended paternity leave and marriage for all."

C4. "(...) We also support work-life balance by providing non-statutory programs such as spousal miscarriage and stillbirth leave (3 days with pay). We operate the largest children's center in Korea and have introduced a reboarding program to support employees returning from parental leave with training, mentoring, and telecommuting."

The significance of these quotes lies in their ability to shed light on how companies are actively reshaping workplace policies to recognize diverse social identities and circumstances, moving beyond *one-size-fits-all* approaches (Grosser & Moon, 2005). By replacing gender-based parental leave with an inclusive model, same-sex couples receive equal recognition and

support, demonstrating a commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusion. Similarly, providing leave for all life events reflects an understanding of employee well-being beyond professional performance.

Together, these policies signal a shift toward embedding intersectionality into workplace structures. By addressing the intersecting dimensions of gender, disability, and caregiving responsibilities, companies are proactively addressing barriers to career advancement and fostering a more equitable and supportive corporate culture.

Dismantle structural barriers

Once discriminatory barriers have been identified, companies must remove them to ensure a meaningful systemic change. Kaufmann & Derry (2023) outlined that simply adding more women to higher organisational positions without dismantling any obstacle for other groups. These actions are not only additive but become part of the structures that perpetuate inequality. Intersectional work requires dismantling institutional barriers and deeply embedded structural practices that contribute to inequality. This will lead to more effective equity in the meantime. Therefore, this section identifies three key themes in how companies are breaking down structural barriers: (1) Overcoming bias; (2) Cede power to forward marginalized groups; and (3) Evaluating critical corporate practices.

1. Overcome bias

Scholars like Acker (2006) recognise that the barriers that prevent people from achieving a position or using a product are the result of systematic prejudice and stereotyping of those people. An intersectional approach requires that power structures that exclude different groups begin to misclassify minorities from equal consideration (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024).

Recently, organisations have begun to redefine traditional classification systems that are actively working to break down stereotypes made of underrepresented groups:

A6. "We started to set requirements for the responsible adoption of artificial intelligence and robotics for automation, began developing features in our digital interfaces for people with disabilities or impairments, and identified guidelines for online personalization."

B5. "Through my work with Microsoft's brand team, and with the rise in acts of hate towards the Asian community in the past few years, I have sought to increase visual representation of my community by sourcing more photos of people wearing turbans to

be used in marketing materials. This work in my opinion sends a message in the tech industry to be more inclusive of different identities and cultures."

These quotes highlight how companies are actively working to challenge bias and reshape stereotypical representations of certain groups in their digital products and corporate environments. On one hand, increasing visual representation is also creating more normal standards related to Asian communities. On the other hand, adopting digital accessibility features to serve a broader range of users, ensures that innovation does not reinforce existing bias, but instead accommodates diverse needs. Nevertheless, increasing the visual representation of Asian communities goes beyond symbolic inclusion and actively works to recognise and normalise diverse identities and challenge long-standing stereotypes in the workplace and the industry.

Overcome bias also reduces bias in the recruitment processes. Scholars like Castro and Holvino (2016), Rivera and Tilcsik (2016) and Friedman and Laurison (2019) demonstrated how people who didn't match the characteristics of the standardised processes propel inequality. However, these processes started to be deciphered:

D1. "(...) We continue to run our job descriptions through AI software to identify and address potentially biased language, proactively publish to diversity job boards, and employ inclusive recruitment practices to help us source candidates from diverse backgrounds."

E2. "The FullSpectrum@Airbus was created to advance racial diversity and inclusion at Airbus Americas. The program is focused on promoting: Recruitment from a more racially diverse candidate pool which results in hires."

In this context, the data demonstrates how companies are taking proactive steps to reduce bias in recruitment. By running job descriptions and posting more diverse job boards, companies appeal to a broader talent pool. Ultimately, these strategies indicate a shift from passive diversity commitments to structural interventions that challenge deeply embedded biases in hiring.

Furthermore, language plays a crucial role in shaping workplace culture. as it directly influences how employees perceive their inclusion and belonging within an organisation. Inclusive language ensures that all individuals, regardless of gender, ability, or background, feel represented and valued in corporate communication.

A2. "The language we use is central to embedding this culture, ensuring all co-workers recognise themselves in the pronouns and descriptions we use. Most recently, our

language around parental leave has developed to include the word 'co-mother to refer to partners in same-sex couples.'"

C1. "As part of our efforts to provide an inclusive work environment for employees in Brazil, we offer counseling services in sign language for hearing-impaired employees."

These quotes illustrate that inclusive language is about fostering an environment where all employees feel seen, respected, and included. By intentionally using language that is gender-neutral and accessible to all, organisations recognize the intersection of diverse identities and experiences.

Beyond adopting bias-free procedures, it is also important for organisations to use their relevance and power to influence managers and employers to replace or offset biased processes.

Scholars such as Kaufmann and Derry (2023) and Thatcher et al. (2023) describe how people in the workplace can resist these discriminatory practices to create environments "for those at the intersection of multiple identities" (Thatcher et al., 2023). Expanding on this insight, increasing the knowledge of these individuals about these barriers is more likely to result in the removal of these barriers.

A2. "All IKEA co-workers across the world can access online training modules to learn more about how to minimize unconscious bias, and how to create an LGBT+ inclusive culture as a member of the community or as an ally."

E3. "Airbus has started assessing training needs and is currently formalizing its competence strategy through a multi-year program focusing on digital accessibility. This plan has (...) with the aim of improving our teams' skills in this specific area of knowledge."

These citations provide valuable insight into how companies are actively implementing training programmes to educate employees on the importance of understanding diverse experiences and perspectives. By fostering empathy and awareness, these initiatives help employees recognise how different identities intersect, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive workplace.

2. Cede power to forward marginalised groups

This section explores the various ways in which companies are ceding power to systematically excluded groups and considers the impact of these initiatives on the intersection of social identities.

Scholars such as Crenshaw (1989) and Collins (2019) emphasise that structural inequalities persist when marginalised groups are included only in a symbolic manner without giving them real decision-making influence. So, ceding power to these groups means allowing them to have meaningful opportunities to lead and influence their organisations.

Integrating minority-owned small businesses into corporate value chains is a tangible step toward promoting economic inclusion. Kaufmann & Derry (2023) refers to the integration of "the previously excluded," emphasising the importance of actively creating opportunities for historically marginalised people:

A9. "Securing a more inclusive and diverse IKEA value chain by integrating social business, minority-owned enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)."
D1. "(...) we continue to invest in our Supplier Diversity Program to ensure that Adobe's purchasing strategy includes businesses certified as majority owned and operated by entrepreneurs from underrepresented groups. We work with vendors that prioritize DEI and have leveraged partnerships with organizations (...) To strengthen supplier relationships with small businesses (...), we are committed to improving their access to working capital through faster payment terms."

The significance of these quotations lies in the ability to shed light on how these supplier diversity initiatives serve as a powerful mechanism for bridging economic gaps and ensuring that minority-owned businesses gain broader and fair access to corporate supply chains. These programmes not only promote equity but also contribute to economic sustainability by empowering historically excluded business owners.

It is noticeable that the inclusion of minority skills and cultures in work projects also gives them the power and the acknowledgement to express themselves and feel seen.

A7. "(...) we launched the second MAVINN collection in collaboration with artisans from Bangladesh, India, and Jordan, showcasing traditional craftsmanship that changes lives."

B16. "Microsoft launched a one-of-a-kind project at the Kemps Creek datacenter in Western Sydney, partnering with Indigital and the Dharug people. This marks the first time an Indigenous cultural connection has been included in the design and building of a datacenter by a hyperscale cloud provider in Australia. The initiative combines traditional Indigenous practices, extensive community engagement, and machine learning to create artwork that is meaningful, while preserving Indigenous traditions in modern infrastructure projects".

These citations show how organisations allow underrepresented groups to share their ideas and talents. This leads to the disruption or reduction of biased stereotypes and increases knowledge about different identities and the intersections between them.

Another relevant paradigm of ceding power to advance marginalised groups is to invest in intersectional justice inside and outside the workplace. This gives these communities the power they need to move forward.

B8. "Microsoft, in collaboration with its employees, has donated more than \$16 million to organizations supporting LGBTQIA+ communities. (...) As part of its 2024 Pride campaign and product launches, Microsoft is further strengthening its commitment to LGBTQIA+ equity by pledging an additional \$200,000. This funding will support organizations (...) reinforcing efforts to ensure equality and empowerment for LGBTQIA+ individuals worldwide.

D1. "(...) we funded (...) 11 international and U.S. nonprofits to continue to foster racial and social justice worldwide, (...) Each of the 11 organisations is aligned with the priorities of our DEI team and Employee Networks, which participated in the selection of the nonprofits (...)"

3. Evaluate critical firm practices

To dismantle structural barriers, according to Kaufmann & Derry (2023), organisations must acknowledge what is wrong and use this evaluation to challenge practices and policies that may perpetuate discrimination within their structures.

Thereby, ensuring ethical commitments to operations is a mechanism for evaluating organisational practices, identifying areas for improvement, and promoting a fair and equitable workplace:

C3. "We assess the status of gender equality and women's empowerment at our major global business sites using the Women's Empowerment Principles Gender Gap Analysis Tool (...) we revise the systems and trainings on gender equality at these sites and plan to address additional room for improvement including strengthening communication with local stakeholders."

D1. "(...) AI Ethics Review Board, a cross-functional team of Adobe employees with diverse professional, gender, and racial backgrounds. Additional dedicated resources helping us meet our AI Ethics commitments include our AI Ethics Committee, which works with our development teams to understand and incorporate our AI Ethics principles throughout product development."

Regarding these quotes, it is possible to understand how companies are addressing issues of misconduct in their operations and ensuring that their practices and behaviours align with their DEI commitments. By systematically scrutinising these challenges, companies can create more inclusive and equitable environments. In addition, by recognising diverse experiences and lifestyles, companies are taking an intersectional approach and working to dismantle systemic barriers that prevent marginalised groups from having a fair and safe workplace.

Nevertheless, assessing and addressing other sources of inequity in the workplace is also relevant to removing any type of structural barriers.

C4. "We perform organizational culture consulting for departments with low SCI. Specialized consultants are engaged as needed to identify organizational culture issues through surveys and interviews with employees, and the department head and department members work together to come up with a plan to address identified issues. We check for actual improvements through pre- and post-consulting Pulse Surveys and provide the results to the department head to help them continue to improve the organizational culture of the department."

D3. "Dr. Stacy L. Smith and the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative collaborated with the Adobe Foundation to create a data-driven tool that would allow the public to understand who has taken inclusion seriously and been a driving force for industry change. We seek to inform, challenge, and congratulate the entertainment industry and point out where there is room to grow."

These citations, while very similar to the ones above, highlight how companies are engaging in assessments and targeted interventions to foster and demonstrate a more inclusive workplace culture within their teams and industry. These types of initiatives demonstrate a commitment to industry-wide change by holding organisations accountable for their diversity and inclusion efforts.

Intersectional Integration

Organisations must work towards the integration of groups that were not previously considered. Scholars like Ely and Thomas (2020) advocate that to have a successful integration there is a need to facilitate open discussions of differences and a revaluing of differences as strengths and assets, even if this requires organisational change (Thomas & Ely, 1996).

Following Kaufmann and Derry's (2023) approach, intersectional integration requires making the marginalised peers in the spaces of power where change happens.

This part outlines five key themes for how companies can move toward intersectional integration: (1) Limitate stereotyped roles; (2) Facilitate open conversations about differences; (3) Value different experiences and strenghts; (4) Account for nonwork barriers to inclusion; and (5) Commit resources to iterating.

1. Limitate stereotyped roles

Although diversity programs have shown significant efforts to change the systematic paradigm of organisations, they are still insufficient to avoid discrimination (Ely & Thomas, 2020). According to Kaufmann and Derry (2023), individuals are still very limited to certain positions that the leadership, often composed of dominant social groups, deems suitable. This contributes to reinforcing the stereotyping of their identity groups, which can mean fewer opportunities or being heard.

Therefore, organisations have begun to invest in and promote greater leadership diversity to strengthen inclusion and break down these barriers to create more opportunities for marginalised groups:

B2. "We have added \$150 million to strengthen inclusion and double the number of US Black and African American, and Hispanic and Latinx people managers, senior individual contributors, and senior leaders by 2025".

E8. "The Women@Airbus group hosts a series of online events on LinkedIn, highlighting the achievements and contributions of women in STEM fields.

These quotes support the previous statement by showing how companies have invested in and highlighted people from marginalised groups. This advocates a paradigm of intersectional inclusion where everyone is recognised as equal and fairly compensated for their work.

Moreover, intersectional integration goes beyond increasing representation; it demands the active inclusion of underrepresented groups in decision-making charts and leadership roles, ensuring they have influence over structural change. As Kaufmann and Derry (2023) have shown, for change to occur, it is necessary to include people who were previously excluded.

C4. "Samsung Electronics is continuing its efforts to increase the number and quality of female leaders (...) We do this by managing the representation of women in hiring, evaluation, and retirement, and by running programs like the Next Generation of

Women Leadership workshops and networking among women executives to help high-caliber women develop into leaders."
E2."Staff development and promotion to reflect racial diversity in management and leadership roles within Airbus Americas."

These quotes outlined how companies have been proactive in creating higher role opportunities for previously excluded groups to help them develop their professional careers and be seen, which illuminates the previous explanation.

2. Facilitate open conversations about differences

To integrate these intersectional perspectives, it is necessary to talk about the discrimination that occurs in the workflow. Ely and Thomas (2020) argue that successful intersectional integration requires facilitating open conversations and discussions about differences. Intersectionality uncovers hidden biases within organisations. Without open dialogue, discriminating practices remain unchallenged (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024).

Exploring the diverse experiences and ideas of employees among teams helps build a sense of community and awareness of inclusion and discriminatory practices:

B16."A global, all-employee learning experience designed to celebrate and deepen understanding of diverse workplace identities. (...) ERG Engage fosters engagement and collaboration across all levels of the organization (...) The initiative connects daily efforts with impactful learning, encouraging action and advancing inclusivity throughout the workplace."

D9."When people share their life experiences in honest and vulnerable ways, everyone gains a greater appreciation and understanding of those different from them. In celebration of Adobe For All Week, our annual internal diversity and inclusion event that happens in September, we're showcasing our diverse tapestry of employees and their unique stories. (...)"

These citations show how companies are fostering a more inclusive workplace. By creating spaces for employees to share their experiences, companies are enabling a deeper understanding of different identities and helping to bridge gaps between different social groups.

Additionally, involving employees in the design of DEI practices gives them a sense of belonging and power to promote change:

B16."Every employee set an annual D&I Core Priority goal, informed by the One Microsoft DEI Plan, to enable individual accountability and foster a collaborative, inclusive environment. (...) Leaders facilitated workshops that encouraged employees to

set a personalised D&I Core Priority."
D1. "(...) Adobe for All Week, our annual internal DEI event that uses the power of storytelling to help build empathy, strengthen inclusion and expand perspectives."

These quotations underline the involvement of employees in the design of DEI practices. These types of initiatives give them a sense of belonging and power to drive change. It allows them to share their opinions on how to do things better and what is good.

3. Value different experiences and strenghts

Diversity scholars such as Ely and Thomas (2020) have also argued that successful integration is facilitated by valuing differences as strengths and assets, even if this requires some change and adaptation in organisations.

Including diverse characteristics in all aspects of the workflow helps to consider different perspectives that can help to create a more inclusive service or environment:

C1. "(...) Samsung launched Samsung Family Supporters, a voluntary advisory group on product accessibility and usability comprised of our employees with disabilities and employee's family members who have disabilities (...)."

D1. "(...) We've incorporated hundreds of accessibility capabilities into our tools (...) These features help increase inclusion so people with disabilities can experience these tools with power, precision and ease of use."

These examples illustrate how companies can go beyond their efforts by actively engaging underrepresented people in shaping inclusive policies, tools, and experiences.

Furthermore, being able to advocate for different experiences creates awareness of sources of discrimination that can exclude people because of their characteristics.

B16. "An initiative focused on advancing the rights and inclusion of Indigenous communities worldwide, with efforts spanning digital inclusion, policy advocacy, procurement opportunities, and community support. Programs include (...), funding digital literacy through the TechSpark initiative for Tribes in North Dakota and supporting the revitalization of Indigenous languages (...)."

E5. "One easy way that Airbus employees can show support and allyship of the LGBTQIA+ community is by including one's preferred pronouns in the official Airbus email signature. (...) By using a person's correct pronouns, we show an affirmation and respect of everyone's identity."

These quotes demonstrate how companies are actively addressing sources of exclusion, particularly for more vulnerable communities. Together, these initiatives create standards that improve the work and opportunities for those who have been excluded.

4. Account for nonwork barriers to inclusion

For organisations to understand how to move forward with the inclusion of underrepresented groups, they need to understand the nature of the problems and crises these people face. Kaufmann & Derry, 2023 outlined that this acknowledgement is necessary to support those already employed and to integrate new hires in a safe and fair environment:

A6. "Sarton Group, the franchisee operating in the Spanish Islands, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, has implemented workplace and sexual harassment protocols in all locations and gender and domestic violence protocols in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, taking greater responsibilities beyond the workplace."

C4. "Samsung Electronics prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, pregnancy, etc. in our hiring and employment practices, including for workplace health and safety, promotions, rewards, and training opportunities related to the work of pregnant and nursing mothers, in accordance with the RBA Code of Conduct (...)"

These quotations provide insight into how companies recognise their role in fostering a safe environment and ensuring that employees - especially those from vulnerable groups - are protected and supported.

Companies are also expanding their commitment by actively engaging with external advocacy organizations and promoting awareness of inclusion initiatives within their operations:

A1. "We are members of Workplace Pride Foundation and Stonewall, two organisations focused on LGBT+ inclusion in the workplace. "We also joined Open for Business, a business coalition for advancing LGBT+ inclusion in society."

C1. "At the Campanas production site, we celebrate the Day of Persons with Disabilities every year by hosting special events that are mindful of accessibility".

These quotes highlight how companies are leveraging external partnerships and cultural events to be part of the advancement for a more inclusive society. By forming and participating in coalitions with advocacy groups and organising awareness-raising events, these organisations not only promote internal workplace inclusivity but also contribute to sustainable cultural and social progress that directly benefits marginalised communities.

Additionally, many organisations are expanding their commitments by financially supporting nonprofits that work directly with vulnerable and underrepresented groups:

A2. "Proceeds from the sales of STORSTOMMA rainbow bag during the summer of 2022 will be donated to UNHCR for its work with LGBT+ refugees and asylum seekers."

B1. "We've given more than \$3 million dollars to seven hispanic serving institutions and associations (...) to support curriculum development, recruiting and career mentorship."

These quotes illustrate how these initiatives drive systemic change by extending their impact beyond internal policies. By integrating social responsibility with corporate action, these approaches not only raise awareness but also actively work to break down barriers faced by marginalised communities.

5. Commit resources to iterating

Even though organisations need to deconstruct structures to create new ones, there is a need to continue to consider new and newly identified structural barriers. As Kaufmann and Derry (2023) advocate, intersectional integration requires the inclusion of people who were previously excluded, but there is a need to continue to foster this integration:

A1. "We launched global trans-inclusion guidelines to help managers build trans-inclusive teams and workplaces."

C5. "(...) DEI Advisory Group to strengthen internal diversity and introduce a DEI strategy that embodies our organization's core characteristics. We work closely with external experts in diversity and inclusion to set our direction and conduct seminars across all staff levels, including executives and management."

The data shows how companies have committed to closing the gaps that remain throughout the process. These highlights show how organisations are actively working to identify and address systemic gaps that contribute to inequality in the workplace.

On top of that companies are committed to recognising and compensating minority employees for their strengths, skills, and contributions:

C3. "We are committed to a policy of equal pay for all employees with equivalent levels of experience and performance, regardless of gender".

D5. "We define pay parity as ensuring that employees in the same job and location are paid fairly relative to one another, regardless of their gender or ethnicity."

These quotes outlined how companies are committed to continuing to address barriers to fair pay by breaking down stereotypes based on social identities and characteristics. Then intersectionality is more likely to be effectively integrated.

Discussion

The findings of this study show how companies have been implementing DEI initiatives that account for multiple social categories. While the organisations analysed in this research have not designed their DEI practices as intersectional initiatives, these practices engage with various social identities. Based on this analysis, this research introduces an empirically grounded model that illustrates how an intersectional framework can be integrated into organisational DEI practices to avoid group labelling.

This study argues for a holistic intersectional framework for DEI practices based on the practices of the organisations analysed previously. Individually, these organisations have started to implement DEI initiatives to address systemic barriers and follow a more inclusive approach. However, each of these practices primarily addresses specific issues related to particular social identities or barriers. To address these limitations, this model brings together the best practices of the findings of this research to create a structured pathway of how companies should start to implement intersectionality. By adopting this integrated approach, organisations can develop a more robust DEI strategy.

The model developed in this study comprises three interdependent dimensions: Recognising Structural Barriers, Dismantling Structural Barriers, and Intersectional Integration (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024) which together provide organisations with a structured approach to implement intersectionality in their operational and strategic processes.

These dimensions are interrelated and contribute to an iterative process that leads to intersectional integration. Identifying structural barriers serves as the starting point, facilitating the removal of these barriers and paving the way for meaningful intersectional integration. Simultaneously, intersectional integration reinforces the ongoing recognition and dismantling of the structural obstacles, ensuring that organisations maintain an adaptive and sustainable approach to inclusivity.

Building on the findings and subsequent analysis, it is possible to draw a model able to answer the research question: *How can organisations use an intersectional framework to avoid group labelling in DEI practice?*

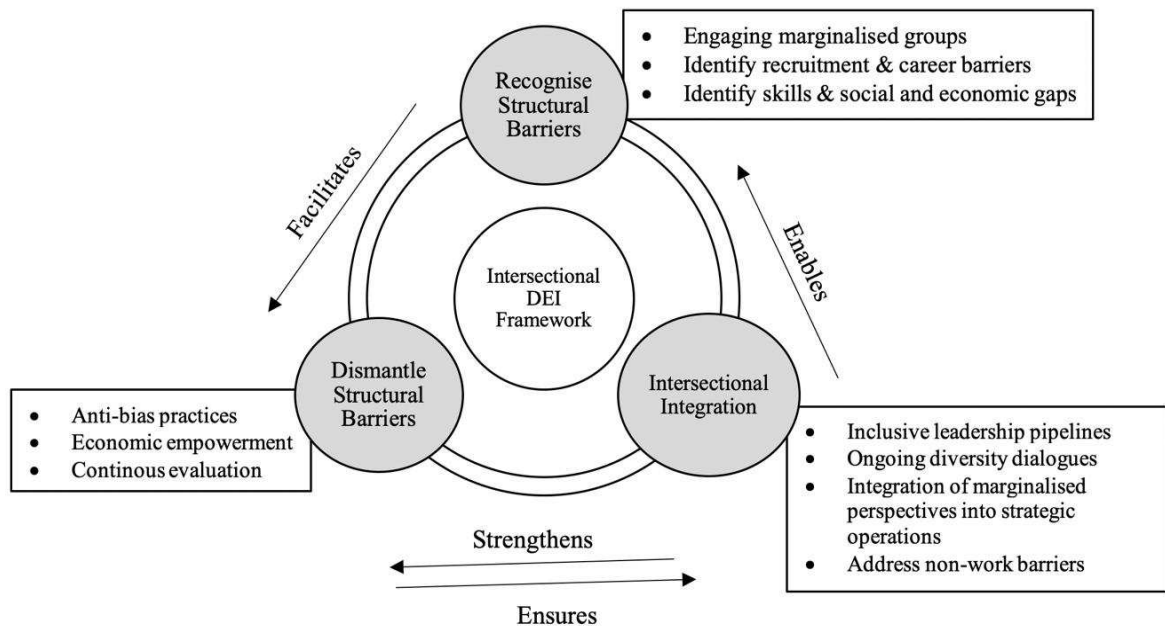


Figure 3- The dimensions correlation to explain how to achieve an effective intersectional framework

The Intersectional Framework: A New Approach

Key Dimension #1: Recognise Structural Barriers

One of the most common failures of DEI initiatives is their tendency to apply standardised solutions that fail to recognise the intersecting nature of social identities (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024; Leslie, 2019; Luiz & Terziev, 2024; Prasad, 2023). While many DEI practices focus on increasing representation of certain social groups, they often reinforce group labels by assuming that marginalised people experience the same inequalities in the workplace (Hirsh & Kornrich, 2008; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019). Thereby, these approaches oversimplify the barriers that underrepresented individuals face, since organisations prioritised some groups while neglecting other communities and other factors (Dennissen et al., 2020; Grosser & Moon, 2005; Meliou et al., 2024; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015).

Despite the growing research on intersectionality, there is still a gap in empirical research on how to operationalise it within DEI initiatives. This study introduces a model that outlines how organisations can actively incorporate intersectionality in their practices to mitigate group labelling.

The findings show how organisations, even though are not directly intersectional, are beginning to acknowledge the multiple barriers faced by marginalised people in the workplace. This model overcomes prior DEI failings and the lack of research on the operationalisation of intersectionality, by ensuring that inclusion efforts do not treat marginalised identities in isolation (Atewologun et al., 2016). Instead, it refuses the standard approach for all the barriers faced by minorities and focuses on multiple identity categories, and it prioritizes the reduction of bias and stereotypes in entry, opportunity, and voice level to these groups. By combining the most effective practices identified in the findings, this model not only shows how the companies should proceed, but how, by comprising the initiatives, companies can create more intersectional and diverse practices.

These findings extend previous critiques of workplace advancement bias by offering concrete organisational practices that, together, can mitigate these barriers, demonstrating that career advancement remains deeply influenced by class, race, or gender expectations. This study builds on and extends previous research by demonstrating how organisations can move from a standard DEI approach (Dennissen et al., 2020; Grosser, 2009; Grosser & Moon, 2005; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015) by proposing an inclusive framework that recognises how workplace barriers vary across different identity groups. This ensures that organisations do not categorise individuals under single identity features, but instead, develop practices that reflect and acknowledge the experiences of marginalised employees.

Key Dimension #2: Dismantle Structural Barriers

True intersectional inclusion also requires a proactive approach to dismantle these barriers to reduce group labelling and recognise the complex, intersecting experiences of marginalised individuals. As Kaufmann and Derry (2023) highlighted breaking institutional barriers is essential to ensuring equal access to resources.

However, inclusion cannot be achieved through superficial DEI practices (das Neves & Melé, 2013) that rely on single-axis identity categories (Gruman & Budworth, 2022; Melé, 2024), which reinforces the exclusions they seek to address (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024; Luiz & Terziev, 2024). Instead, intersectionality seeks to challenge ingrained organisational biases by ensuring that all intersections of identity are addressed.

This model addresses the limitations of previous DEI literature, which has primarily focused on isolated interventions such as bias reduction training or adding people with marginalised backgrounds in higher positions. These approaches have often overlooked the

compounded barriers confronted by multiple marginalised groups (Collins, 2019; Kaufmann & Derry, 2024).

By integrating best practices across DEI initiatives – including recruitment, career development and workplace culture – this model provides organisations with a structured approach to address systemic barriers. As Thatcher et al., (2023:14) highlighted, organisations “have the potential to use their power to proactively implement practices that empower managers to replace or offset biased organisational power structures”. Building on this, the proposed framework shows how companies can use their influence to overcome workplace inequalities by identifying, combining and implementing most DEI practices. By focusing on a broader range of experiences within marginalised communities, organisations can actively work to overcome bias, cede power to these communities, and continuously evaluate and refine their inclusion efforts.

By positioning bias reduction, power redistribution and DEI accountability as essential mechanisms for structural change, this research addresses the practices of group labelling and the DEI practices failings previously presented (Moncrieffe & Eyben, 2007). It shows how organisations can move beyond single identity-based DEI strategies (Atewologun et al., 2016; Ruiz Castro & Holvino, 2016) to a fully intersectional approach. The findings highlight the need for a continuous shaping of DEI initiatives, where inclusion is embedded in core business functions rather than treated as a symbolic initiative (Blanc & Al-Amoudi, 2013; Gjesdal, 2024). Furthermore, this study challenges the perception of DEI as a tool for enhancing business performance, advocating for a meaningful structural change in organisations (Ely & Thomas, 2020; Gjesdal, 2024).

Key Dimension #3: Intersectional Integration

Organisations must work, after recognising and dismantling structural barriers, to integrate the previously excluded as equal peers in organisations (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024). However, prior research emphasised the importance of recognising and compensating equally individuals only from certain groups (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024; Ruiz Castro & Holvino, 2016).

This research shows that true inclusion cannot be achieved if DEI practices continue to operate within the paradigms that confine individuals to predefined roles and exacerbate their struggle to be seen and heard (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024). Instead, these initiatives need to move beyond these stereotypes and address the complex, overlapping systems of disadvantage that shape workplace inequalities (Luiz & Terziev, 2024; Ruiz Castro & Holvino, 2016).

By examining how leading organisations are taking actions to restructure and integrate marginalised perspectives into decision-making, workplace culture and leadership pipelines, this research presents an intersectional model that combines the best DEI practices of leading companies to propose a cohesive, intersectional approach that ensures inclusion is free from the limitations of group labels and eliminate group-based stereotypes in corporation practices.

The findings of this study build on previous DEI shortcomings by combining the best standards and requirements to enhance opportunities amplify the voices of those historically excluded based on their social categories. This approach leads to intersectional integration that prevents group labelling by recognising, valuing, and empowering minorities by integrating them into the business core function of the organisations (Ely & Thomas, 2020).

Intersectional integration is the final step in eliminating group labels, ensuring that DEI practices do not default to broad, oversimplified identity categories (Luiz & Terziev, 2024). This approach actively considers the perspectives of underrepresented people, and promotes the well-being, inclusion, and equal participation of employees the workplace (Atewologun et al., 2016; Wasserman & Frenkel, 2015).

This model ensures that DEI remains ongoing and responsive, rather than being limited to static identity classifications that risk reinforcing rather than dismantling group labels. This facilitates the person's uniqueness and talent to be better (Gruman & Budworth, 2022; Melé, 2024).

Conclusion

Main Conclusion and Managerial Implications

Social identities – such as race, gender, class – shape individuals' experiences of inclusion or exclusion within organisations (S. M. Nkomo et al., 2019; Prasad, 2023). Unlike other approaches, intersectionality can inform organisational design of DEI initiatives by holistically addressing the interplay of such dimensions.

To address the gap in empirical research on how organisations can operationalise intersectionality, this research presents a new empirically grounded intersectional model. Rather than focusing on specific social drivers within minority groups, the model introduces an approach that considers a wider range of social identities, including diverse marginalised communities.

By moving from single-axis diversity models to an intersectional approach, this study introduces an empirically grounded model that illustrates how an intersectional framework can be integrated into organisational DEI practices.

The integration of these best practices within organisational frameworks provides a structural approach to identifying and addressing systemic barriers through an intersectional lens. This research contributes to the field by introducing an alternative intersectional framework that enables organisations to go beyond superficial representation diversity efforts towards structural inclusion. For companies to effectively promote intersectional inclusion, structural change is essential- recognising and addressing systemic barriers and ensuring the long-term integration of intersectionality (Kaufmann & Derry, 2024). These dimensions together provide organisations with a structured approach to embedding intersectionality in their operational process.

By identifying systemic barriers, companies can develop more effective DEI strategies that address exclusion and create pathways for historically marginalised individuals to enter industries where they were previously deemed "unqualified" due to structural disadvantages. This involves acknowledging past exclusion and valuing the skills, contributions, and lived experiences of marginalised groups. A holistic approach, as evidenced by IKEA's programme supporting underrepresented ethnic and racial groups and Microsoft's initiative for historically excluded students, demonstrates how companies can address workforce access and early educational inequities. This study supports the research question by showing that an intersectional DEI framework strengthens inclusivity by embedding long-term structural

change, ensuring that diversity efforts remove systemic obstacles rather than simply increasing demographic representation.

The findings also illustrate a shift from superficial diversity measures to systemic, long-term strategies that critically examine power structures and break down structural barriers. A combined approach, such as Airbus' data-driven anti-bias recruitment programme and Adobe's programme which includes diverse employees in decision-making, demonstrates how organisations can proactively embed bias mitigation into their operations. These practices ensure that DEI efforts remain dynamic, adaptive, and deeply embedded in organisational processes, rather than reinforcing static identity classifications.

Furthermore, intersectional inclusion needs to ensure that historically marginalised people are completely included as equals at all organisational levels and have access to decision-making spaces where meaningful change takes place. This requires a sustained commitment to refining DEI practices, fostering open dialogue about lived experiences, and addressing a broader group of barriers to inclusion. By combining the best DEI practices to enhance opportunities of those previously excluded based on their social categories, companies prevent group labelling by recognising, valuing, and empowering minorities by integrating them into the business core function of the organisations (Ely & Thomas, 2020).

This model provides a structured intersectional approach that companies can adopt to ensure their DEI strategies not only meet diversity targets but also proactively address systemic inequalities. Embedding intersectional DEI as a core business function empowers managers, HR teams and decision-makers to create environments where employees feel valued and supported and reinforces that deliberate action can drive transformative change.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite the contributions made by this study, research on intersectionality in business ethics and DEI remains underdeveloped. Scholars such as Kaufmann and Derry (2023) and Castro and Holvino (2016), emphasise the need for a more precise understanding of how intersectionality interacts with workplace structures. While this study presents an empirically based model, there is still a gap in the literature regarding the operationalisation of intersectionality in corporations.

Another limitation relates to the companies selected for this analysis. This study focused on MNCs recognised as leaders in DEI, which allowed for a comprehensive review of best practices. However, these organisations may have more resources and institutional support for

DEI than smaller companies. Future research could extend the research on how intersectionality can be integrated within different organisational contexts, such as small and medium-sized enterprises or industries with historically weak DEI practices.

Relying on secondary data sources is also a limitation of this study. The analysis of publicly available reports, policies and company statements provided some contextual information, but primary data, such as interviews with people from underrepresented groups, would have deepened the analysis. Future research could include first-hand accounts to assess whether DEI practices are genuinely workers' experiences and breaking down systemic barriers, rather than simply serving as corporate branding (Derry, 2012).

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Appendix A – First Order Codes

First Order Code	Description
<p>Equal access for minorities to development initiatives</p>	<p>A4."In India’s carpet belt in Uttar Pradesh, IKEA worked with UNICEF and the United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, to combat child labour, partly by supporting women’s self-help groups, where women jointly saved money and helped each other start up in business. Once mothers had a better chance to support themselves and their families, their children could go to school instead of working".</p> <p>A6."Ingkan successfully piloted a new programme called "Equal Up!", which aims to identify and address barriers to equal opportunities for people from underrepresented ethnic and cultural backgrounds."</p> <p>A6."(...) IKEA Supply Chain Operations partnered with Ashok Leyland, a leading truck manufacturer, and – using their database – identified six women from Northern India, who had already trained to drive heavy vehicles, to participate in further training at Ashok Leyland's Rajasthan facility. In May 2023, they relocated to the city of Pune to become our first-ever women truck drivers at an IKEA distribution centre."</p> <p>D1."(...) the Adobe Foundation granted \$250,000 to the USC School of Dramatic Arts’ (SDA) Master of Fine Arts (MFA) Acting Program to directly support the production of short films written, directed and performed by a diverse slate of third year MFA acting students. The MFA Acting program trains its artists to be media-agile, multihyphenate creators and entrepreneurs, which it believes is critical to making storytelling across all mediums more inclusive. Seventy-five percent of USC SDA’s MFA Acting cohort identifies with an underrepresented racial/ethnic group, and this program is a critical pipeline for acting talent into the industry."</p> <p>D6."Under the “I Heart Tech” initiative, the company annually invites underrepresented high school students to visit Adobe and “build a broader vision for themselves and for their futures,” Steinle says. The most recent group they hosted included teen mothers working on their GEDs."</p> <p>E10."The Airbus Foundation, together with its partners – The Little Engineer and The Travelling Telescope – has launched the Airbus Little Engineer programme in Kenya. The goal of the initiative is to encourage students between the age of 10 and 16 to understand and embrace technology, and ignite passion that could grow into an exciting career in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics."</p>

<p>Hiring programs for underrepresented groups</p>	<p>A6. "(...) Ingka Group made a new commitment to support 3,000 refugees and asylum seekers by the end of 2027 through their Skills for Employment programme in IKEA retail.(...) Additionally, since 2022, the company has directly hired 332 forcibly displaced people through its Displaced Talent programme."</p> <p>C4. "We established Stellar Forest, a subsidiary-type standard workplace for employees with disabilities, in March 2023 through a 100% equity investment as an extension of our efforts to create jobs for persons with developmental disabilities. As of December 2023, 150 employees with disabilities have been baking cookies, muffins, and more that are supplied to our in-house cafeterias. Stellar Forest plans to diversify into other fields to create more jobs for persons with disabilities."</p>
<p>Reintegration programs to underrepresented groups</p>	<p>A5. "Together with IKEA France, a services “micro-hub” was created and piloted in central Paris with the social enterprise Carton Plein who hire, train and coach people experiencing homelessness back into society. Carton Plein refurbishes and resells waste cardboard using electrical bike collection rounds."</p> <p>B4. "I was given the opportunity to lean into the matertiny program, which is grassroots, employee group that was created by women for other women in Microsoft (...) caregivers accross the company to support each other and to build communities in these individual organizations. I was able to lauch it for the Microsoft advertising division. I had a passion for it, finding a way to have returned to work care and return to work coaching so that we could hopefully retain some of this talent that was leaving the industry because they didnt have that support (...)"</p> <p>D1. "Across our India sites, our innovative SheSparks internship program enables women to successfully transition back to full-time work after a career break. Established in 2019, this six-month bridge program empowers returning women professionals with training, role-specific mentors, a supportive community and opportunities to grow with high-impact work. To date, more than 100 women have participated in the program, and nearly 60% have secured positions at Adobe including project managers, data engineers, solution architects, engineering program managers and more."</p> <p>E3. "In terms of retention, worthy of note is one of our innovative programs "Fly again", spearheaded by our India office. This is a returnee program for women professionals who want to return to corporate careers after a period of maternity or sabbatical leave. It is aimed at ensuring that these women can make a smooth return to professional life through structured mentoring, up-skilling and on-boarding."</p>

Education programs for underrepresented groups

B7."The BAM Scholarship was created to enable Black and African American students to attend college and pursue a career in technology. The goal is to empower future generations to do and be more."

B9. "The Microsoft Disability Scholarship seeks to empower students with disabilities to achieve more through access to education leading to a career in technology."

B11."Scholarships to support the growth of Hispanic and Latinx communities and encouraging the pursuit of a career in tech."

B12. "Empowering women and non-binary high school seniors to pursue a career in the technology industry."

B16."Since 2009, Microsoft has led Technology Education and Learning Support (TEALS), which builds sustainable computer science (CS) programs in high schools to support students excluded from learning CS because of race, gender, or geography. TEALS helps technology professionals learn to teach CS by pairing them with industry volunteers and proven curricula".

C2."In China, Samsung has launched a girls' talent development program for girls in the STEM fields in 2018. Since then, Samsung has collaborated with excellent local schools in China to empower girls in the fields of science and technology".

C4."(...) Samsung has been conducting various job-ready training programs for youth, vulnerable groups, and women to foster digital technology professionals. (...) helps young students and adults develop skills required for IT functions such as programming, AI, IoT, and big data through theoretical and hands-on training. It also provides various soft skills such as creative thinking, communication skills, and empathy."

C6."At the Samsung Innovation Campus, we support an array of programs aimed at nurturing the capabilities of diverse youth groups. We achieve this by providing equal educational opportunities and diversified learning formats. Our particular focus lies in promoting women's participation in technology and assisting diverse leaders to realize their full potential."

D1. "96K children ages 10 to 25 supported in creative learning through the expansion of the India Creative Clubs in 10,000 villages"

E9."In 2023, Phoenix Space and the Airbus Foundation partnered to co-design and deliver the STEM Spark course in Za'atari, the largest refugee camp in Jordan. The course was tailored to address the unique challenges faced by refugee children and aimed to spark interest in STEM among young students aged 9 to 13 years old. The course, implemented by local partner Alchemist Lab, provided 44 refugee children with an introduction to fundamental concepts of STEM in an engaging, accessible and culturally sensitive manner. The course was intended to instil a scientific mindset and teach problem-solving methodologies."

	<p>E9."Airbus Foundation has worked with CIEDS since 2019 to expand and improve education opportunities for 300 underserved children in the Itajubá municipality of Brazil. These students, aged 7 to 11, attend 3rd-5th grades at the Francisco Pereira Coutinho Municipal School and are the focus of the Discovery Space project. The project's goal is to engage young learners in aerospace-themed science education using a playful approach rooted in the STEAM methodology, which integrates Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics."</p> <p>E12."Airbus supports education for the underprivileged in more than one way. Airbus is associated with Christel House India- a not for profit organisation running free schools for underserved sections of the society providing high quality education having an established track record in undertaking similar programs or projects. The intent under this objective is to help children break the cycle of poverty, realize their hopes and dreams and become self-sufficient, contributing members of society. The support includes scholarship for university education, development of job search, skills for those entering the workforce and networking opportunities for graduates looking to improve employment."</p>
<p>Introduce small businesses owned by minority groups into the value chain</p>	<p>A9."Securing a more inclusive and diverse IKEA value chain by integrating social business, minority-owned enterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)."</p> <p>B16."Partnering with diverse suppliers allows those suppliers to have an outsized impact, empowering communities around the world, so businesses of all sizes can have shared success".</p> <p>D1."To further scale our reach and impact, we continue to invest in our Supplier Diversity Program to ensure that Adobe's purchasing strategy includes businesses certified as majority owned and operated by entrepreneurs from underrepresented groups. We work with vendors that prioritize DEI and have leveraged partnerships with organizations (...) To strengthen supplier relationships with small businesses (...), we are committed to improving their access to working capital through faster payment terms."</p> <p>D1."(..) we made progress on our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), a blueprint for contributing to impactful reconciliation outcomes across Australia and New Zealand with Indigenous communities. With guidance</p>

	<p>from our Global Supplier Diversity Program, the RAP Working Group took steps to grow our engagement with Indigenous businesses (...)."</p> <p>E11."The #Africa4Future initiative was created by Airbus BizLab with the objective to encourage and support entrepreneurship in Africa. The continent's young and increasingly techno-savvy population is likely to be the driving force behind Africa's socio-economic development. Setting up an entrepreneurship eco-system requires investment and collaboration. Through #Africa4future, Airbus seeks to build bridges between the aerospace industry and the different players in Africa."</p>
<p>Career development training</p>	<p>B16."In addition to employee-focused initiatives, we engage with Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions (AANAPISIs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs) through recruitment and professional development, partnering with institutions like the University of Washington Tacoma. We also collaborate with organizations like American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) to network, recruit, grow, and develop talent across our workforce."</p> <p>C6."The 'SheLEADs' program, the first women's leadership development program in SIEL-S(India), aims to identify and nurture female talent within Samsung, building a talent pipeline suitable for future leadership positions. We provide tools and support to enhance the capabilities of female employees, striving to create a leadership environment characterized by diversity and inclusivity."</p> <p>C3."In Italy, the Samsung Innovation Campus operates with the goal of fostering female engineers. It supports young female employees who want to develop their technical talents and skills."</p> <p>D1."Through the Sundance Ignite and Women to Watch x Adobe Fellowships, we support new voices and talents from the next generation of emerging documentary and narrative filmmakers by providing artistic and professional development. So far, 143 filmmakers have gone through the programs and 21 have premiered films at the Sundance Film Festival. Here are the stories of our fellows who were featured at Sundance in 2023."</p> <p>D1."Adobe Leadership Circles, which develops high-performing women leaders across our workforce; Women's Executive Shadow Program, which creates ways for people to connect and find mentorship across the company; and Adobe Leader Experience, a quarterly "learn it when you need it" sequenced training to advance people leadership skills at Adobe."</p> <p>D1."We also provide sponsorship to support the growth and development of our employees through external</p>

	<p>initiatives such as the McKinsey Connected Leaders Academy in the U.S., Women in Tech Forum career coaching program in EMEA, and Women Emerging Leaders Program in APAC."</p> <p>D1."Adobe partners with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) to offer mentorship and career development opportunities to more than 22,000 students for jobs in tech and creative industries".</p> <p>E1."(...) we place a strong focus on promoting STEM careers among women through external partnerships and the support of employee resource groups – for example with Capital Filles, Women in Aviation, IAWA."</p> <p>E1."In 2023, 75 apprentices were able to take part in FlightPath9, an apprenticeship programme for under-represented communities in the United States."</p> <p>E3. "(...) put in place executive mentorships and development actions (“ambition 25” roadmap) for our women talents, to support a robust pipeline that is ready and that feeds into our senior leadership".</p> <p>E4."In 2023, the MyWayWomen leadership programme, dedicated to women leaders of tomorrow, registered 100 women, maintaining the numbers as the previous year. To date, this programme has trained over 320 women, including the current cohort. The Company’s leadership development programme participation is balanced in terms of gender representation."</p>
<p>Reduce miscategorisation of minorities</p>	<p>A6. "We started to set requirements for the responsible adoption of artificial intelligence and robotics for automation, began developing features in our digital interfaces for people with disabilities or impairments, and identified guidelines for online personalisation."</p> <p>B2."An initiative to address the underrepresentation and miscategorization of disabilities in AI datasets. By collaborating with organizations like Be My Eyes, Microsoft aims to create more inclusive AI models that better serve the needs of the 340 million people worldwide who are blind or have low vision."</p> <p>B5. "Through my work with Microsoft’s brand team, and with the rise in acts of hate towards the Asian community in the past few years, I have sought to increase visual representation of my community by sourcing more photos of people wearing turbans to be used in marketing materials. This work in my opinion sends a message in the tech industry to be more inclusive of different identities and cultures."</p> <p>B15."An approach that prioritizes inclusivity by acknowledging biases and exclusions arising from mismatches between individuals and their experiences. Inclusive Design emphasizes learning from diverse perspectives by centering people throughout the design</p>

	<p>process, using their insights to foster innovation." B16."The Manito Ahbee Aki project immerses students in a virtual world representing historical Manitoba. Through this interactive Minecraft experience, students explore Indigenous traditions, community living, and significant cultural sites such as The Forks and Manitoba petroforms. The project fosters experiential learning, enhances understanding of Anishinaabe history, and promotes cultural reconciliation by encouraging respect and awareness of Indigenous heritage." B16."Katy Jo Wright, Head of Gaming for Everyone + Sustainability, Xbox, speaking on a panel discussion about product inclusion this year at Build. Wright's team applied these principles to update the game Forza Horizon 5 with character customization features, such as skin tone, hair types, race, ethnicity, and even pronouns that carry through the game". B17."Last year, Microsoft was the first to pilot their new 'Be My AI', with AI helping to solve technical support issues. Be My Eyes also recently developed a Windows app, available in the Microsoft Store. Collaborations like these allow us to improve representation and diversity of AI data and drive more authentic inclusion of disability in our technology."</p>
<p>Inclusive recruitment process</p>	<p>B13. "A program designed to provide an extended and comprehensive interview process, focusing on workability, interview preparation, and skill assessment." D1."(...) We continue to run our job descriptions through AI software to identify and address potentially biased language, proactively publish to diversity job boards, and employ inclusive recruitment practices to help us source candidates from diverse backgrounds." E2."The FullSpectrum@Airbus was created to advance racial diversity and inclusion at Airbus Americas. The program is focused on promoting: Recruitment from a more racially diverse candidate pool which results in hires."</p>
<p>Awareness on source of discrimination</p>	<p>A3. "We celebrate Pride in various cities with about 500 participants. We provide information to queer parents about same status for parental leave. Signed a positioning paper to the government on: LGBT+ blood donation and Selbstbestimmungs Act" B16."An initiative focused on advancing the rights and inclusion of Indigenous communities worldwide, with efforts spanning digital inclusion, policy advocacy, procurement opportunities, and community support. Programs include (...), funding digital literacy through the TechSpark initiative for Tribes in North Dakota, and supporting the revitalization of Indigenous languages (...)." E5."One easy way that Airbus employees can show support and allyship of the LGBTQIA+ community is by including one's preferred pronouns in the official</p>

	<p>Airbus email signature. This applies to any and everyone, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. By using a person’s correct pronouns, we show an affirmation and respect of everyone’s identity."</p>
<p>Inclusive language</p>	<p>A2. "The language we use is central to embedding this culture, ensuring all co-workers recognise themselves in the pronouns and descriptions we use. Most recently, our language around parental leave has developed to include the word ‘co-mother’ to refer to partners in same-sex couples."</p> <p>B16. "An initiative introduced to promote inclusion by helping Microsoft to better understand who employees are and what they need so that microsoft can tailor benefits, learning, offerings and leadership development."</p> <p>C1. "As part of our efforts to provide an inclusive work environment for employees in Brazil, we offer counseling services in sign language for hearing-impaired employees".</p>
<p>More accessible facilities for vulnerable groups</p>	<p>C1. "In Türkiye, Samsung started operating a sign language customer service for hard of hearing consumers in 2015. Since then, the sign language customer service for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing who cannot receive technical support despite inconvenience in using the product has expanded globally since 2021 and is now being operated in 57 countries".</p> <p>C4. "In 2023, we conducted inspections through the disability inclusive infrastructure guide in our overseas subsidiaries and improved facilities where needed. These improvements included adding accessible parking lots, restrooms, and incorporating braille signage in elevators and other key areas".</p> <p>C4. "Enhancing accessibility of facilities (e.g., low-floor buses, table bell system at in-house cafeterias, installation of standing desks)."</p> <p>E3. "Airbus will also create an intranet subsite dedicated to technical teams involved in the Disability Mission (HR teams, Occupational Medicine, etc.) and employees with OETH or in the process of acquiring hardware or software. This intranet subsite will contain tools, stocks of equipment for employees with disabilities, reference documents, various processes, recommendations and guidelines to help IT teams develop their skills. The intranet subsite is planned for May 2024 and will be updated every year."</p>

<p>Ad hoc training</p>	<p>A2. "All IKEA co-workers across the world can access online training modules to learn more about how to minimize unconscious bias, and how to create an LGBT+ inclusive culture as a member of the community or as an ally."</p> <p>A6."Launched holistic ED&I competence development training with management team workshops offered and facilitated across IKEA markets, including unconscious bias training and LGBTQ+ inclusion"</p> <p>C1."(...) as well as online and in-person sign language courses available to all employees at the Manaus production site".</p> <p>C4."(...) partnered with the Vietnam office of an international NGO and a local Vietnamese NGO to provide training on gender equality and reproductive health to internal trainers, who then train all employees to raise awareness of gender equality and women's rights."</p> <p>C6."We also developed DEI training videos to educate all employees".</p> <p>E3."Airbus has started assessing training needs and is currently formalising its competence strategy through a multi-year programme focusing on digital accessibility. This plan has been initiated since 2022 and is being conducted until 2026, with the aim of improving our teams' skills in this specific area of knowledge."</p>
<p>Enhance minority groups abilities into projects</p>	<p>A7."In August 2024, we launched the secon MAVINN collection in collaboration with artisans from Bangladesh, India, and Jordan, showcasing traditional craftmaship that changes lives."</p> <p>B16."Microsoft launched a one-of-a-kind project at the Kemps Creek datacenter in Western Sydney, partnering with Indigital and the Dharug people. This marks the first time an Indigenous cultural connection has been included in the design and building of a datacenter by a hyperscale cloud provider in Australia. The initiative combines traditional Indigenous practices, extensive community engagement, and machine learning to create artwork that is meaningful, while preserving Indigenous traditions in modern infrastructure projects".</p> <p>D1. "Partners like PSYDEH, an organization that invests in rural and Indigeneous women in Mexico, have leveraged Express to create portraits and narrations with local women while also developing a vast online catalog of videos, films and animations featuring their work."</p> <p>D2. "The Adobe Foundation is collaborating with world-renowned art institutions to further Adobe's commitment to Creativity for All and give underrepresented creators the opportunity to create and share their stories with the world. These institutions use their resources and platforms to increase arts education and the visibility of diverse creators through Creative Residents and creative programming."</p>

<p>Recognition for the traditions and achievements of minority communities</p>	<p>B6. "At Microsoft, I co-lead a group called NOODLE that's focused on professional development for AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) self-identified employees. It started with just me and two of my Asian colleagues, and it has grown to almost 70 members. We meet once a month, and we go on different journeys. The idea behind the group is learning to talk about our accomplishments and speak up for the things we want in the workplace and otherwise."</p> <p>D7."(...) Our goal was to bring members of BEN and our many allies together to celebrate the talent, leadership, creativity, and stories from the Black community."</p> <p>B16."Microsoft ERG helps build and support communities globally across its nine chapters through sharing knowledge and integrating Indigenous traditions and values into our Microsoft culture. The ERG has partnered with our Global Real Estate and Facilities team to source artwork from local artists and include Land Acknowledgments in the global playbook for any new locations. (...) also provide guidance for Land Acknowledgments to be incorporated into company events, promoting understanding of Indigenous Peoples and honoring the original stewards of the land."</p> <p>B16."Microsoft's Language Bank employs AI to safeguard endangered languages such as Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun, now integrated into Microsoft Translator, making them available across our products and services. Through partnerships with governments and language communities, we aim to prevent the extinction of the world's nearly 7,000 languages."</p> <p>D1."Adobe's annual MAX conference is all about the power of creativity. At the 2023 event, for the first time, more than 50 nonprofit leaders from around the world, across different issue areas, came together to show how creativity can change the world. Organizations shared stories about how creative tools and technology are critical to enacting change and giving voice to marginalized communities."</p>
<p>Address gaps in DEI practices</p>	<p>A1. "We launched global trans-inclusion guidelines to help managers build trans-inclusive teams and workplaces."</p> <p>B16."(...) the D&I community of practice unites leaders and managers across 10 countries to drive systemic D&I impact. By collaborating, sharing best practices, and integrating D&I into business operations through One Microsoft D&I Plan, the Community fosters accountability and embeds D&I into the core of the organisation".</p> <p>C5."In 2023, DS Division launched the DEI Advisory Group to strengthen internal diversity and introduce a DEI strategy that embodies our organization's core characteristics. We work closely with external experts in diversity and inclusion to set our direction and</p>

	<p>conduct seminars across all staff levels, including executives and management."</p>
<p>Ensure ethical commitments in the workflow</p>	<p>A6. "In order to set measurable, quantitative and qualitative targets, the development of people analytics and a co-worker insights survey has been prioritised and will be introduced in FY24."</p> <p>B16. "(...) Employee Signals, a twice-yearly survey focusing on the employee experience. This frequency helps us stay close to employee feedback and respond in a timely way."</p> <p>C3. "We assess the status of gender equality and women's empowerment at our major global business sites using the Women's Empowerment Principles Gender Gap Analysis Tool (WEPs Tool) and took remedial actions for the improvement points identified. As of this effort, we revise the systems and trainings on gender equality at these sites and plan to address additional room for improvement including strengthening communication with local stakeholders."</p> <p>C4. "The Samsung Culture Index (SCI) is an annual organizational culture assessment conducted among Samsung Electronics employees worldwide. The diagnostic areas of the SCI are Work Engagement', 'Team Collaboration', and 'Company Pride', and for each area, we provide 'outcome' questions to identify the current state of organizational culture and 'driver' questions to identify improvement points, making it easy to identify problems and draw improvements."</p> <p>C6. "In 2023, our DEI Office joined the Target Gender Equality (TGE) program, hosted by the UN Global Compact Network Korea, to learn how to set goals and bolster female leadership. TGE supports more than 1,500 companies in 50 countries to establish and attain gender equality through performance analysis, capacity-building workshops, and peer learning."</p> <p>D1. "(...) AI Ethics Review Board, a cross-functional team of Adobe employees with diverse professional, gender and racial backgrounds. Additional dedicated resources helping us meet our AI Ethics commitments include our AI Ethics Committee, which works with our development teams to understand and incorporate our AI Ethics principles throughout product development."</p>

<p>Promote leadership diversity</p>	<p>B2."We have added \$150 million to strengthen inclusion and double the number of US Black and African American, and Hispanic and Latinx people managers, senior individual contributors, and senior leaders by 2025".</p> <p>E8. "The Women@Airbus group hosts a series of online events on LinkedIn, highlighting the achievements and contributions of women in STEM fields.</p>
<p>Leadership roles for underrepresented groups</p>	<p>A8."A specific action plan has been prepared to build long-term female leadership succession and to map a succession pipeline. In addition, regular actions ensure the gender balance on other levels."</p> <p>C3."The Next-Generation Women Leadership Workshop has been operated since 2021 in Korea to provide support for our female executive candidates to take a successful leap from a working-level position to an executive position. The Workshop offers participants mentoring by female executives, coaching on leadership skills, and networking opportunities with their peers. This Workshop helps participants establish their own vision and goals and exchange valuable experiences and knowledge with their seniors of the same gender. We plan to continuously expand networking opportunities of this kind for our female employees."</p> <p>C4."Samsung Electronics is continuing its efforts to increase the number and quality of female leaders, with a goal of more than doubling our baseline number of women executives in 2022 by 2030. We do this by managing the representation of women in hiring, evaluation, and retirement, and by running programs like the Next Generation of Women Leadership workshops and networking among women executives to help high- caliber women develop into leaders."</p> <p>E1."Promoting gender parity is a top priority in our recruitment efforts. We are committed to facilitating the progression of women to leadership positions through our "Balance for Business" employee resource group. "</p> <p>E2."Staff development and promotion to reflect racial diversity in management and leadership roles within Airbus Americas"</p>

<p>Explore diverse experiences and ideas among employees</p>	<p>B16."(...) We developed a tailored program to enhance D&I awareness and capabilities across the topics of race, ethnicity, caste, religion, and faith. This program trained leaders and managers to lead contextualized, empathetic, and constructive conversations, fostering inclusiveness within their teams".</p> <p>B16."(...) the InclUSive initiative sparked meaningful discussions on topics such as accessibility, disability, allyship, identity, intersectionality, and privilege. Leaders and managers encouraged employees to engage in dialogue and reflection (...)"</p> <p>B16."A global, all-employee learning experience designed to celebrate and deepen understanding of diverse workplace identities. Produced in collaboration with Microsoft's Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), ERG Engage fosters engagement and collaboration across all levels of the organization, from the CEO to individual employees. The initiative connects daily efforts with impactful learning, encouraging action and advancing inclusivity throughout the workplace."</p> <p>D1."Another way in which we create inclusion is through the Adobe for All Cultural Calendar, an employee-driven initiative and on demand internal planning resource. The calendar highlights dates of cultural and religious significance to our employees as well as associated customs so that employees can be informed of ways to respect and support each other's days of significance year round."</p> <p>D9."When people share their life experiences in honest and vulnerable ways, everyone gains a greater appreciation and understating of those different from them. In celebration of Adobe For All Week, our annual internal diversity and inclusion event that happens in September, we're showcasing our diverse tapestry of employees and their unique stories. (...)"</p> <p>E1."Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) aim to create a diverse and inclusive workplace that reflects the communities they serve. Led and participated in by employees with shared characteristics—whether gender, ethnicity, religion, lifestyle, or interests—these groups offer support, personal and career development, and create a safe space where employees can be their authentic selves."</p> <p>E3."Reverse Mentorship 2022 scheme connects leaders and employees of ethnic minority backgrounds in order to learn from each other."</p>
<p>Involve employees in shaping DEI practices</p>	<p>B14."Resource hub designed to share knowledge, best practices, and tools related to diversity, equity, and inclusion."</p> <p>B16."Every employee set a annual D&I Core Priority goal, informed by the One Microsoft DEI Plan, to enable individual accountability and foster a collaborative, inclusive environment. (...) Leaders facilitated workshops that encouraged employees to set a personalised D&I Core Priority."</p>

	<p>B16."(...) The Ability Summit at Microsoft brings together thought leaders, innovators, and advocates from around the globe to push the boundaries of accessibility and inclusion."</p> <p>D1. "A powerful example of how we foster an inclusive workplace is Adobe for All Week, our annual internal DEI event that uses the power of storytelling to help build empathy, strengthen inclusion and expand perspectives."</p>
Awareness on inclusivity	<p>A1. "We are members of Workplace Pride Foundation and Stonewall, two organisations focused on LGBT+ inclusion in the workplace. "We also joined Open for Business, a business coalition for advancing LGBT+ inclusion in society."</p> <p>C1."At the Campanas production site, we celebrate the Day of Persons with Disabilities every year by hosting special events that are mindful of accessibility".</p>
Consider diverse characteristics throughout all aspects of the workflow	<p>C1."In September 2022, Samsung launched Samsung Family Supporters, a voluntary advisory group on product accessibility and usability comprised of our employees with disabilities and employee's family members who have disabilities.(...)"</p> <p>C4."Identifying functional roles – such as user experience research and accessibility features enhancement – that can benefit from the experiences and perspectives of employees with disabilities."</p> <p>C4."Procuring services from companies registered as a standard workplace for persons with disabilities (services include car wash, laundry, printing, software verification, and florists)."</p> <p>D1."Partnership: We co-create with the community of people with disabilities to enable everyone to fully engage in the art, culture and commerce of modern life. Transparency: We are open about Adobe’s accessibility philosophy, goals and progress. We bring our customers into the journey and work with our community to design and implement technology that respects our customers. Innovation: We invent new inclusive technologies and collaborate with communities dedicated to digital equity to deliver outstanding experiences."</p> <p>D1."(...) We’ve incorporated hundreds of accessibility capabilities into our tools (...). These features help increase inclusion so people with disabilities can experience these tools with power, precision and ease of use."</p>

Assess and address sources of inequity in the workplace

C1."Samsung Pioneer' initiative in October 2020, to promote gender equality and bring positive workplace changes to the IT industry through open forums, surveys, and media promotions".

C4."We do not discriminate against any current or prospective employees based on gender identity, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, age, marital status, sexual orientation, among others or in HR matters such as job assignment, promotion, compensation and disciplinary measures."

C4."We perform organizational culture consulting for departments with low SCI. Specialized consultants are engaged as needed to identify organizational culture issues through surveys and interviews with employees, and the department head and department members work together to come up with a plan to address identified issues. We check for actual improvements through pre- and post-consulting Pulse Surveys and provide the results to the department head to help them continue to improve the organizational culture of the department."

D3."Dr. Stacy L. Smith and the Annenberg Inclusion Initiative collaborated with the Adobe Foundation to create a data-driven tool that would allow the public to understand who has taken inclusion seriously and been a driving force for industry change. We seek to inform, challenge, and congratulate the entertainment industry and point out where there is room to grow."

E3."Airbus' objective is to identify the purchasing categories impacted by digital accessibility and to define specific criteria in this respect. Airbus is therefore actively committed to integrating digital accessibility into its relationships with its suppliers. These criteria will be deployed throughout Airbus' relevant digital activities and will be integrated into future calls for tenders, in order to reinforce our commitment to develop an inclusive digital accessibility."

E4. "Airbus Global Forum ("AGF"), reflecting the Company's engagement for a responsible social dialogue. AGF seat allocation for employee representatives is based upon Company's headcount distribution across the globe and conditional to existing legal employee representation as per applicable regulations and practices in the relevant countries."

<p>Address employees' needs</p>	<p>A3. "Replaced maternity and paternity leave with parental leave that includes same-sex couples. This followed the active participation in the public debate prior to the national vote on extended paternity leave and marriage for all."</p> <p>C1. "In Türkiye, Samsung started operating a sign language customer service for hard of hearing consumers in 2015. Since then, the sign language customer service for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing who cannot receive technical support despite inconvenience in using the product has expanded globally since 2021 and is now being operated in 57 countries".</p> <p>C4. "In 2023, we conducted inspections through the disability inclusive infrastructure guide in our overseas subsidiaries and improved facilities where needed. These improvements included adding accessible parking lots, restrooms, and incorporating braille signage in elevators and other key areas".</p> <p>C4. "Enhancing accessibility of facilities (e.g., low-floor buses, table bell system at in-house cafeterias, installation of standing desks)."</p> <p>C4. "(...) We also support work-life balance by providing non-statutory programs such as spousal miscarriage and stillbirth leave (3 days with pay). We operate the largest children's center in Korea and have introduced a reboarding program to support employees returning from parental leave with training, mentoring, and telecommuting."</p> <p>D8. "Make sure your family members are getting the care they need when you have to focus on work. Your Adobe benefits can help."</p> <p>E3. "Airbus will also create an intranet subsite dedicated to technical teams involved in the Disability Mission (HR teams, Occupational Medicine, etc.) and employees with OETH or in the process of acquiring hardware or software. This intranet subsite will contain tools, stocks of equipment for employees with disabilities, reference documents, various processes, recommendations and guidelines to help IT teams develop their skills. The intranet subsite is planned for May 2024 and will be updated every year."</p>
<p>Prevention on gender-based discrimination and violence</p>	<p>A6. "Sarton Group, the franchisee operating in the Spanish Islands, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, has implemented workplace and sexual harassment protocols in all locations and gender and domestic violence protocols in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, taking greater responsibilities beyond the workplace."</p> <p>C4. "We also use our Gender Equality Self-Assessment Toolkit, developed with reference to UN Women's Empowerment Principles, the RBA methodology, and the World Benchmarking Alliance's Gender Benchmark methodology to identify discriminatory practices in the workplace against female employees."</p>

	<p>C4."Samsung Electronics prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, pregnancy, etc. in our hiring and employment practices, including for workplace health and safety, promotions, rewards, and training opportunities related to the work of pregnant and nursing mothers, in accordance with the RBA Code of Conduct (...)."</p>
<p>Invest on intersectional justice</p>	<p>B8."Microsoft, in collaboration with its employees, has donated more than \$16 million to organizations supporting LGBTQIA+ communities. In the past year alone, the company contributed over \$1.3 million to advance initiatives promoting equity and inclusion.As part of its 2024 Pride campaign and product launches, Microsoft is further strengthening its commitment to LGBTQIA+ equity by pledging an additional \$200,000. This funding will support organizations such as the Transgender Law Center, Transconvida, ACCEPT Association – Romania, and The Trevor Project, reinforcing efforts to ensure equality and empowerment for LGBTQIA+ individuals worldwide.</p> <p>D1."(...) we funded (...) 11 international and U.S.nonprofits to continue to foster racial and social justice worldwide, bringing our overall investment to over \$30 million. Each of the 11 organizations is aligned with the priorities of our DEI team and Employee Networks, which participated in the selection of the nonprofits. (...)."</p> <p>E1."We have also signed charters that contribute to the economic and social development of underprivileged neighbourhoods."</p>
<p>Funding nonprofits' globally</p>	<p>A2. "Proceeds from the sales of STORSTOMMA rainbow bag during the summer of 2022 will be donated to UNHCR for its work with LGBT+ refugees and asylum seekers."</p> <p>B1."We´ve given more than \$3 million dollars to seven hispanic serving institutions and associations since 2022 to support curriculum development, recruiting and career mentorship"</p> <p>D1."The Adobe Employee Community Fund (ECF) is one way we give back to the communities where we live and work. Our employees invite eligible nonprofits to apply for ECF grants, and employee led grant review panels based in our largest office communities determine which local organizations best align with Adobe’s own philanthropic priorities (...)."</p> <p>D1."Our Hometown Commitment is a holistic approach to supporting local nonprofit organizations through employee engagement, volunteerism, product donations and advocacy along with financial commitments from the Adobe Foundation."</p>

<p>Commitment to achieve fair pay equity</p>	<p>A6. "In FY23, the gender balance improved in many IKEA businesses compared to FY22. During the year, 6 out of 12 franchisees took steps to increase the number of women co-workers, and 8 out of 12 increased the number of women managers."</p> <p>B16."As we continue to increase representation for women and racial and ethnic minority groups at more senior levels, and continue to ensure pay equity for all, the median unadjusted pay gaps will reduce."</p> <p>C3."We are committed to a policy of equal pay for all employees with equivalent levels of experience and performance, regardless of gender".</p> <p>D5."We define pay parity as ensuring that employees in the same job and location are paid fairly relative to one another, regardless of their gender or ethnicity"</p> <p>E1."(...)To foster pay equity, we are signatories to the UK Women in Aviation and Aerospace Charter, and we welcome the UK and French governments' Gender Pay Gap Reports."</p>
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Appendix B – Second Order Themes

Programs for underrepresented groups	Reintegration programs for underrepresented groups	Recognition for the traditions and achievements of minority communities	Reduce miscategorisation of minorities	Introduce small businesses owned by minority groups into the value chain	Ensure ethical commitments in workflow
Access for minorities development initiatives	Career development training	Address employees' needs	Inclusive recruitment process	Enhance minority groups abilities into projects	Assess and address sources of inequity in the workplace
Programs for underrepresented groups		More accessible facilities for vulnerable groups	Inclusive language	Invest on intersectional justice	

Limitate stereotyped roles	Facilitate open conversations about differences	Value different experiences and strengths	Account for nonwork barriers to inclusion	Commit resources to iterating
<p>Promote leadership diversity</p> <p>Leadership roles for underrepresented groups</p>	<p>Explore diverse experiences and ideas among employees</p> <p>Involve employees in shaping DEI practices</p>	<p>Consider diverse characteristics throughout all aspects of the workflow</p> <p>Awareness on source of discrimination</p>	<p>Awareness on inclusivity</p> <p>Funding nonprofits' globally</p> <p>-Prevention on gender based discrimination and violence</p>	<p>Address gaps in DEI practices</p> <p>Commitment to achieve fair pay equity</p>

Appendix C – Data Sources

B2	B16	A8	A7	A6	A5	A4	A3	A2	A1	Code
Organisational resource	Company Report	Company's Report	Company's Report	Company's Report	Organisational resource	Organisational resource	Organisational resource	Organisational resource	Organisational resource	Organisational resource
Inclusion	Microsoft 2024 Global Diversity	Inter IKEA Holding BV	IKEA Social Entrepreneurship	IKEA Sustainability Report	IKEA Social Entrepreneurship –	Social Initiatives	Give pride a shelter	At IKEA, Pride and equality are	Equality, diversity and inclusion	
English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English
2024	2024	2023	2024	2023	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024
Microsoft	Microsoft	IKEA	IKEA	IKEA	IKEA	IKEA	IKEA	IKEA	IKEA	IKEA
https://news.microsoft.com/inclusion/innovation	https://cdn-dynmedia-1.microsoft.com/inclusion/innovation/content/microsoftcorp/micros	https://www.interikea.com/media/interikea/igifinancial-reports/inter-ikea-holding-	https://preview.ikea.com/socialentrepreneurship.org/media/ikeasocialentrepreneurship/pu	https://www.ikea.com/global/en/image/s/IKEA_SUSTAINABILITY_Report_FY_23_2	https://www.ikea.com/gb/en/this-is-ikea/community-engagement/social-	https://ikeamuseum.com/en/explore/the-story-of-ikea/social-initiatives/	https://www.ikea.com/pt/en/this-is-ikea/community-engagement/pride-a-shelter	https://www.ingka.com/newroom/at-ikea-pride-and-equality-are	https://www.ikea.com/pt/en/this-is-ikea/work-with-us/equality-diversity-	
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B15	B14	B13	B12	B11	B10	B9	B8	B7	B6	B5	B4
Organisat ional resource	Organisat ional resource	Organisat ional resource	Organisat ional resource	Organisat ional resource	Organisat ional resource	Organisat ional resource	Organisat ional resource	Organisat ional resource	Article	Article	Video
Inclusive microsoft design	Inclusion journey - Content library	Neurodiv ersity hiring	Women at microsoft scholarshi	Hola scholarshi p	10 heroes from 10 years of Microsoft	Microsoft disability scholarshi p	Pride	BAM scholarsh hip	You can just be yourself	Embracin g difference s has a revolution	Erin's mission to revolution
English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English
2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024
Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft	Microsoft
https://inclusive.microsoft.de/sign/	https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/inclusion-journey/library?one-route=true	https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/diversity/inside-microsoft/cross-disability/	https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/diversity/programs/women-at-microsoft	https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/diversity/programs/hola-scholarship?onerout	https://military.microsoft.com/mssa/10-years/#hiring-partner-spotlight	https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/diversity/programs/microsoft-disability-scholarship	https://unlocked.microsoft.com/pride/	https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/diversity/programs/bam-scholarship?onerout	https://news.microsoft.com/feature/embracing-differences-has-a-revolution/	https://news.microsoft.com/inclusioninnovation/#video-ckn_YA	https://news.microsoft.com/inclusioninnovation/#video-ckn_YA

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D4	D2	D1	C6	C3	C5	C3	C2	C1	C4	B17	B1
Research article	Company's Program	Company's Report	Organisat ional resource	Organisat ional resource	Organisat ion website	Organisat ional resource	Organisat ional resource	Organisat ion website	Company' s Report	Article	Organisat ion website
The Inclusion List - Driving	Adobe Creativity Residency	Adobe CSR Report 2023	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion	Integrating Technology with	Empowering Young Women	Diversity and Inclusion	Samsung Electronics Sustainability	Disability Data: Improving	Investing in the future
English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English
2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2021	2022	2024	2024	2024	2024
Adobe	Adobe	Adobe	Samsung Electronic	Samsung Electronic	Samsung Electronic	Samsung Electronic	Samsung Electronic	Samsung Electronic	Samsung Electronic	Microsoft	Microsoft
https://www.inclusionlist.org/	https://www.adobe.com/about-adobe/creativity/residency/museums.html	https://www.adobe.com/content/dam/c/en/corporate/responsibility/pdfs/Adobe-	https://www.samsung.com/global/sustainability/people/diversity-inclusion/#AYUqrs	https://www.samsung.com/en/storyView.do?contentId=60	https://www.samsung.com/en/storyView.do?contentId=83	https://www.samsung.com/about-diversity-and-inclusion/	https://www.samsung.com/en/sustainability/media/pdf/Electronics_Sustainability	https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2024/10/17/innovative-hispanic-and-latinx-data-improving	https://news.microsoft.com/2024/11/20/ai-innovation/		
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E8	E9	E4	E3	E5	E2	E1	D9	D8	D7	D6	D5
Organisat ional resource	Company' s report	Company' s report	Company' s report	Organisat ional resource	Organisat ional resource	Organisat ional resource	Company' s Article	Company' s Program	Company' s Article	Article	Company' s Article
International Women at Airbus	Global workforce forecast release	UK Gender Pay Gap 2022	Gender Pay Gap France 2022	Pride at Airbus	Inclusion & Diversity	Inclusion and Diversity	Adobe for all: My story	Life Events	Celebrati ng Black Life, Love, and	The Diversity, Equity, and	Demonst rating a commit ment to
English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English	English
2025	2019	2022	2022	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2021	2021	2024
Airbus	Airbus	Airbus	Airbus	Airbus	Airbus	Airbus	Adobe	Adobe	Adobe	Adobe	Adobe
https://www.airbus.com/en/international-women-at-airbus	https://www.airbus.com/site/s/g/files/jlcbta136/files/2021-10/Global-Workforce-Forecast	https://www.airbus.com/site/s/g/files/jlcbta136/files/2023-03/UK-GENDER-PAY-GAP	https://www.airbus.com/site/s/g/files/jlcbta136/files/2023-02/Gender%20Pay%20Gap	https://us.airbus.com/en/inclusion-diversity/pride-at-airbus	https://us.airbus.com/en/sustainability/valuation-people/inclusion-and-	https://www.airbus.com/en/sustainability/valuation-people/inclusion-and-	https://www.adobe.com/diversity/my-story.html	https://benefits.adobe.com/us/enrollment-and-changes/life-and-quest	https://blog.adobe.com/en/publish/2021/03/02/celebrating-black-life-love-and-inclusion-	https://www.edcutah.org/recents/news/the-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-	https://www.adobe.com/diversity/pay.html
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E12	E11	E10
Organisat ional resource	Organisat ional resource	Organisat ional resource
Airbus in India Communi ty	#Africa4F uture: Airbus to foster	Airbus Foundatio n launches
English	English	English
2024	<u>2018</u>	<u>2018</u>
<u>Airbus</u>	<u>Airbus</u>	<u>Airbus</u>
https://w ww.airbu s.com/en/ our- worldwid e- presence/ airbus-in- india/com	https://w ww.airbu s.com/en/ newsroo m/press- releases/2 018-10- africa4fut ure-	https://w ww.airbu s.com/en/ newsroo m/press- releases/2 018-02- airbus- foundatio
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