



# A structural equation model of the effects of diversity characteristics and inclusion on organizational outcomes in the child welfare workforce



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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of diversity characteristics and organizational inclusion on organizational outcomes (e.g., organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and intention to leave) among public child welfare workers. The study used secondary data collected from public child welfare workers across a diversified Mid-Atlantic state. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used to test the conceptual model. The results indicated that workers' higher perceptions of inclusion resulted in significantly higher levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction. Furthermore, higher levels of workers' organizational commitment played a role in significantly reducing their intention to leave. The findings of the study provide practical implications for enhancing diversity management and organizational commitment, including instituting more participative decision-making structures and processes, and creating more accessible organizational information networks.

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## 1. Introduction

Public child welfare agencies have historically been plagued with high turnover, and despite efforts to combat the problem, approximately one-fifth of public child welfare workers are still estimated to leave their organizations per year (Faller, Grabarek, & Ortega, 2010). This level of turnover has consequential direct and indirect effects on the quality, consistency, and stability of both the workforce and the services provided to families and children (Faller et al., 2010). A direct effect (or outcome) of the high turnover is cost to the organizations (Moynihan & Pandey, 2008). Loss of existing workers results in a large financial cost for recruitment, hiring, and training of new workers, and additional costs associated with increased caseloads.

Employee turnover has an indirect negative effect through the constant influx of new caseworkers into the workforce that can result in multiple challenges and risks in maintaining the safety of children within the system. Employee turnover disrupts the continuity of services and delays the timeliness of investigations and placement decisions (Strolin, McCarthy, & Caringi, 2007). Although there is consensus on improving current child welfare workplace conditions to tackle the high turnover problem (Boyas, Wind, & Kang, 2012; Lee, Forster, & Rehner, 2011; Williams, Nichols, Kirk, & Wilson, 2011), more research is needed to investigate how the interaction of certain employee perceptions and attitudes and organizational conditions impact employee turnover. While several prominent models have been proposed to explain the process

leading to voluntary employee turnover (Aarons & Sawitzky, 2006; Glisson, Dukes, & Green, 2006; Kruzich, Mienko, & Courtney, 2014; Lance, 1991; Landsman, 2007; Mor Barak, Levin, Nissly, & Lane, 2006; Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1982; Schneider, 1987; Smith, 2005), there is a limited amount of research that has focused on contextual variables, such as organizational inclusion, in the child welfare workforce. This gap in the literature can be large, given contextual factors' importance in influencing individual attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction, commitment) and behaviors in organizations (Johns, 2006). For example, organizational inclusion is an understudied but potentially critical factor in child welfare retention efforts that involves the extent to which workers perceive that they are a part of critical organizational processes.

The purpose of the study was to develop and validate a conceptual, integrative structural model linking worker perceptions (i.e., inclusion), work-related affects (i.e., organizational commitment, job satisfaction), and turnover intention (i.e., the cognitive or behavioral precursor to actual turnover). The conceptual model was finally tested and identified using structural equation modeling.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Conceptual framework

With its emphasis on cultural sensitivity and its ethical approach to diversity issues in organizations, the social work profession is well positioned to contribute to a theoretical framework for diversity management (Mor Barak, 1999). The child welfare workforce has become more diverse over time due to a steady increase in the number

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of women, minorities, ethnic backgrounds, and intergenerational workers in the workforce, in general. In line with this, workforce diversity management has also become an important research imperative across business and the social sciences, including social work. In particular, social identity and organizational culture/climate theories have provided a contextual backdrop for research related to workforce diversity, and provides a theoretical framework for this study.

### 2.1.1. Theoretical background of social identity theory for turnover in child welfare workforce

Social identity theory is used to connect the relationship between individual identity and social structures through the meaning people attach to their membership in identity groups (i.e., race/ethnicity, gender, age, etc.). As an underlying theory of the proposed model, social identity theory provides a relevant theoretical foundation for the connection between social context and individual identity through the meaning people attach to their organizations. The study model is consistent with social identity theory's assumptions that "people tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories" and "the extent to which they relate to and identify with others in their social environment" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, pp. 20–21). Several studies, initiated by Mor Barak, have examined the relationship between individual and organizational characteristics and turnover intention by building on this theory (Cho & Mor Barak, 2008; Fidler, Wind, & Mor-Barak, 2007; Mor Barak et al., 2006). In particular, Cho and Mor Barak (2008) identified the relationship between child service employees' perception of inclusion and their commitment to the organization based on social identity theory, specifying that social identity theory "indicates that employee perceptions of organizational actions and policies are influenced by their belonging to specific groups" (p. 106).

### 2.1.2. Theoretical background of organizational culture/climate theory for turnover in child welfare workforce

The organizational culture and climate theory provides a fundamental philosophy for the proposed model. The theory is essentially based on the assumption that behavior is a function of person and environment (Schneider, Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002). Although there are still debates on the distinction between culture and climate and multiple definitions of culture and climate have evolved (Denison, 1996), there exists some consensus that climate refers to "the way people perceive their work environment" and culture refers to "the way things are done in the organization" (Glisson & James, 2002, p. 769). A series of studies have examined the relationship between organizational climate/culture, individual factors, and turnover intention in child welfare (Cohen-Callow, Hopkins, & Kim, 2009; Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998; Glisson & James, 2002). In particular, Glisson and James (2002) empirically examined cross level effects, linking individual variables to organizational ones through multilevel analysis.

## 2.2. The influence of organizational inclusion on organizational outcomes

Organizational inclusion is a new concept in the organizational literature and still in its infancy. Although inclusion has started to gain popularity among diversity scholars, it still remains a new concept without consensus on the construct (Shore et al., 2011). Unlike other concepts such as social integration, social exclusion, and social cohesion, the concept of organizational inclusion particularly focuses on employee involvement and the integration of diversity characteristics into organizational systems and process (Downey et al., 2015; Roberson, 2006).

As Fiske and Taylor (1991) have pointed out, "people initially categorize each other automatically on the basis of noticeable physical cues" or diversity characteristics such as gender, race/ethnicity, and age (p. 137). These diversity characteristics have a significant effect on employees' affective experiences in the workplace, including the sense of isolation and exclusion from support networks (Fidler et al., 2007; Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998). Relatedly, inclusion is regarded as "a

potential bridge concept" that can enhance our understanding of how people from diverse backgrounds and different personal characteristics perceive the organizational environment (Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998, p. 57). For example, given the research finding that individuals from diverse social and racial groups are often excluded from access to information and opportunity in organizations, inclusion can be utilized to improve their participation and empowerment. Thus, inclusion facilitates each individual's ability to contribute fully and effectively to an organization (Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998). Moreover, Mor Barak and Levin (2002) stated that the concept of inclusion can serve as an important underpinning, expanding organizational antecedents of understanding and working with today's diverse workforce.

Employee perception of inclusion is conceptualized as the extent to which a worker feels a part of the critical organizational processes: access to information and resources, involvement in the work group, and the ability to participate in and influence decision-making (Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998). In the management field, Roberson (2006) simply states that inclusion refers to "the removal of obstacles to the full participation and contribution of employees in organizations" (p. 217).

Recently, Shore et al. (2011) developed an analytic framework of inclusion that categorizes it along a continuum of inclusion–exclusion according to "the degree to which an employee perceives his or her level of satisfaction in terms of 'belongingness' and 'uniqueness' within the work group" (p. 1265). Specifically, at one end of the continuum minority members (who are unique) with developed networks (a sense of belongingness) are more likely to be included within organizations than non-minority members because, at the group level, diverse work groups have the potential to create a feeling of inclusion by incorporating both uniqueness (through viewing diversity as a resource) and belongingness (through members feeling valued and respected). On the other end of the continuum is the low-belongingness and low-uniqueness combination named 'exclusion,' which happens when the individual is not treated as an organizational insider and is perceived as having low unique value in the work group.

Several researchers reported that employee perception of inclusion is related to organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employee well-being (Fidler et al., 2007). Lawler (1994) supported the connection between employee perception of inclusion, degree of job satisfaction, and level of commitment to the organization. There is some evidence to imply that inclusion is related to either job satisfaction or turnover intention (Acquavita, Pittman, Gibbons, & Castellanos-Brown, 2009; Mor Barak & Levin, 2002; Mor Barak et al., 2006). Acquavita et al. (2009) showed that inclusion was associated with job satisfaction in a study of social workers. Mor Barak et al. (2006) found that perceptions of inclusion were significant in predicting social workers' job satisfaction, which, in turn, was related to turnover intentions. Leary and Downs (1995) found that the degree to which other people include a coworker is associated with the employee's psychological well-being. Hitlan, Clifton, and DeSoto (2006) found that workplace exclusion was detrimental to work attitudes and psychological well-being. Additionally, inclusion has been indirectly associated with enhanced job performance and higher levels of organizational citizenship behavior (Wayne, Shore, & Liden, 1997). Research by Cho and Mor Barak (2008) showed that perception of inclusion predicted both organizational commitment and job performance.

### 2.3. The influence of organizational commitment on organizational outcomes

The organizational literature describes organizational commitment as a form of attitudinal commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Mowday et al., 1982). Mowday et al. (1982) defined organizational commitment as the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization. Conceptually, it can be characterized by at least three factors: 1) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organization's goals and values; 2) a willingness to exert

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