Workplace well-being: making a case for "psychological" diversity and inclusion

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Introduction

In the current competitive times, an organization's human capital offers a competitive advantage. Owing to cultural exchanges and globalization, organizations employ individuals from varied demography, including gender, race, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Further, while diversity encompasses the composition of an organization, inclusion entails integrating employees' diversity (similarities and differences) into the organization. To reap the benefits, however, organizations need to ensure the inclusion and well-being of their diverse workforce.

Although research has delved into demographical diversity and inclusion, it remains limited with respect to the diversity of personality (extraversion-introversion), i.e. "psychological" diversity (Mallia, 2019). Moreover, extraversion has been emphasized at the workplace (Blevins et al., 2022). Hence, based on an integrative review of the extant literature, the study conceptualizes the case for "psychological" diversity to promote workplace well-being by focusing on introverts. In doing so, it investigates the definitions of extraversion-introversion and differences in the meaning and measurement parameters of well-being. The social identity theory and broaden and build theory formed the theoretical basis for the relationships. Further, practical suggestions and strategies are discussed. Appendix-1 in the supplementary material outlines the key papers from those reviewed and their findings.

Workplace well-being: the happy/productive worker thesis

Historically, organizational research has fixated on the negative aspects of work (stress, burnout, resistance to change), with organizations adopting the "repair shop" perspective to minimize costs due to an unhappy workforce. However, the advent of positive psychology has brought a paradigm shift by emphasizing people's strengths and the contributing factors toward their resilience and well-being. Positing a business case for employee well-being, all things considered, "happy" workers are likely to have higher job performance. This is based on the broaden-and-build theory, whereby satisfied and psychologically well employees are more likely to possess the essential resources for enhanced job performance (Fredrickson, 2001).

"Psychological" diversity and inclusion for workplace well-being

Diversity extends to the invisible forms of differences, i.e. educational background, expertise, thinking styles, and personality. Remarkably, introverts constitute at least a third of the world's population and represent a significant portion of the workforce (Cain, 2013). However, the literature studying personality at the workplace has focused mainly on the benefits of extraversion (Blevins et al., 2022). Moreover, the "extravert ideal" is connoted with well-being and calls for corrective actions among introverts. Thus, introverts at the workplace are inadequately represented and ascribed to minority status. This study focuses on introverts via

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the diversity of personality (extraversion-introversion), represented as "psychological" diversity (Mallia, 2019). Figure 1 depicts the conceptual framework comprising psychological diversity and inclusion in the context of happy/productive worker thesis.

Premised on the social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 2004), individuals determine their identity through membership with a group. Inclusion engenders a sense of justice and belongingness, which is related to employees' well-being and, consequently, to job performance. Therefore, "psychological" inclusion is imperative for organizations to duly accredit the introverts' perspective of well-being in light of the following.

Introversion not a "stark opposite" of extraversion

The shift in the definition from *types*, based on the manner one draws energy, i.e. extraverts (outer) and introverts (inward), to *traits* (continuum: less or more) has led to the notion of introversion as the opposite of extraversion. E.g., limited social activity equated to social awkwardness (Blevins *et al.*, 2022). However, introversion comprises multiple distinct facets: social, anxious, thinking, and restrained introversion.

Differences in views and measurement of well-being

Extraverted behavior reflecting the core of self-improvement and experiencing happiness has influenced the beliefs among introverts about their true selves and well-being (Cain, 2013). Contrary to the extravert's high arousal and gregariousness, happiness for introverts involves mellow emotions of interest, contentment, and tranquility and a preference towards thoughtfulness, silence, and solitude.

Further, the inventories measuring well-being (e.g. Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule) capture only the activated and high arousal positive feelings (enthusiasm, alertness). The low arousal positive feelings of introverts (calmness, serenity) are either absent or misrepresented as low negative feelings.

Managerial strategies and suggestions

The strategies and social conditions that can promote introverts' well-being and facilitate notable contributions include:

"Inclusive" Office Space: Office plans have evolved from closed spaces to open-concept office designs. Open offices enable extraverts to recharge their energy. However, the

Figure 1 Conceptual framework

Source: Author's own
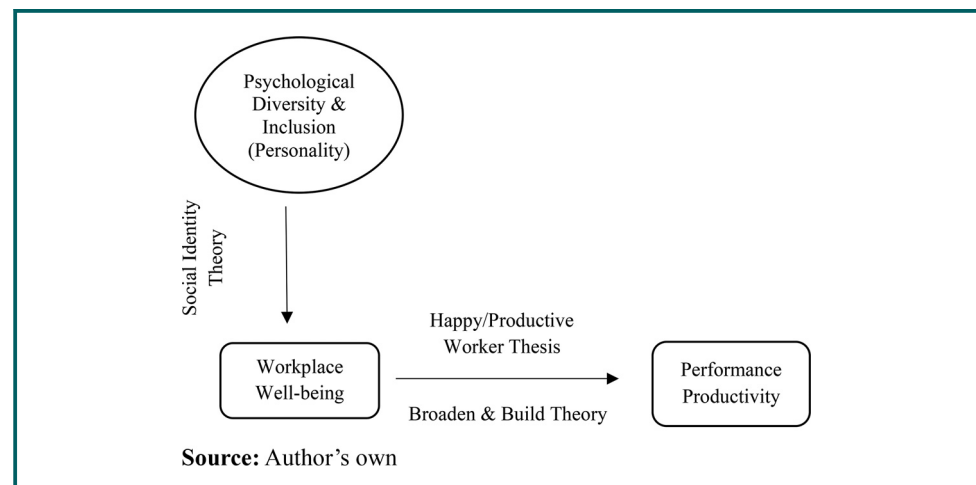
constant commotion leads to overarousal among introverts, depleting their energy. For effective "psychological" inclusion, along with the open spaces, organizations can provide designated "quiet zones," meditation pods, private work rooms, and remote work options.

Collaboration, Communication, and Recognition: Brainstorming, open communication, and public recognition are credible ways of functioning in organizations, yet they are adversarial to the introverted workforce. Further, specific creative and complex endeavors require focused thinking. To ensure a fair opportunity to introverts, one-on-one sharing of ideas, virtual/written modes of communication, a buddy system, and silent/personal recognition of work would be suitable.

Well-being Interventions: Team outings and offsite activities promote team spirit. Although preferable for extraverts, introverts have less desirability for such settings. Organizations can offer inward-oriented mindfulness programs and silence retreats for introverts. Further, they can invest in an organization-wide "person-activity" fit mapping to sponsor aligned activities (pottery, journaling/writing). Also, a holistic approach needs to be adopted to measure well-being (both high-low arousal states).

Future research can examine the impact of these strategies at individual, group, and organizational levels. Culture-specific conditions in individualistic/collectivist societies can be examined from the introverted perspective. To conclude, organizations need to ensure an inclusive environment to its employees, wherein they are happy and can contribute towards the organizational goals.

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Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

About the author

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