



# Umbrella Summary

## Diversity and Inclusion Climates

A Summary of Workforce Research Evidence Relevant to the Child Welfare Field

### What are diversity and inclusion climates?

Diversity climate and inclusion climate are separate but related concepts, and there are various definitions of each. For the purposes of this review, diversity climate refers to “employees’ shared perceptions that an employer utilizes fair personnel practices and socially integrates underrepresented employees into the work environment” (McKay et al., 2008, p. 350).

Inclusion climate goes one step farther to value and leverage diversity, such that “individuals of all backgrounds—not just members of historically powerful identity groups—are fairly treated, valued for who they are, and included in core decision making” (Nishii, 2013, p. 1754).

A variety of measures exist for diversity and inclusion climates, and some measures include aspects of both. One measure that captures both fairly well is the *Climate for Inclusion* scale, which has three dimensions: 1) equitable employment practices, 2) integration of differences, and 3) inclusion in decision making (Nishii, 2013). The first dimension includes questions that align well with the definition of diversity climate, in that they focus more on fairness. Example items for this dimension include “The performance review process in this organization is fair” and “Employees in this organization receive equal pay for equal work.” The other two dimensions more closely align with the definition of inclusion. The dimension that assesses integration of differences includes items such as “Employees of this organization are valued for who they are as people, not just for the jobs that they fill” and “This organization has a culture in which employees appreciate the differences that people bring to the workplace.” Finally, the dimension that assesses involvement in decision making includes items such as “In this organization, everyone’s ideas about how to do things better are given serious consideration” and “In this organization, people’s ideas are judged based on their quality, and not based on who expresses them.” The full version of the scale is 31 items, and the short version is 15 items.

Note that to truly constitute an index of organizational climate, results must indicate a minimum level of consensus among employees; otherwise, the results are just a reflection of individual perceptions, which may be valuable but do not technically represent organizational climate (Schneider et al., 2013). Consensus is typically examined at a unit level of some sort, which may vary in number and type by organization. In spite of this fairly well-established distinction, the majority of the research on diversity and inclusion climates has focused only on individual attitudes, without assessing agreement (Holmes et al., 2021). These individual perceptions are sometimes referred to as psychological climate, which is distinct from organizational climate (e.g., Dwertmann et al., 2016).

## Why are diversity and inclusion climates important?

Diversity and inclusion climates are important because they are associated with several important job attitudes and behaviors. More specifically, they are moderately connected with higher job satisfaction, organizational commitment, employee engagement, and performance. They are also moderately related to lower employee withdrawal, defined as turnover intentions or turnover (Holmes et al., 2021). Overall, these connections are stronger 1) for inclusion climate than for diversity climate, 2) for job attitudes than for job behaviors, 3) when climate is strong (i.e., there is more agreement among employees), and 4) when there is greater racioethnic diversity among employees (Holmes et al., 2021). In short, though climate is likely important in all cases, it appears to be most important when the workforce is diverse and there are strongly shared perceptions about inclusion.

## How can diversity and inclusion climates be improved?

Meta-analytic research on diversity and inclusion climates thus far has focused on assessing factors that are merely associated with climates, not on testing strategies for improving them or on examining whether improving them affects outcomes like job attitudes and turnover. Before launching an effort to improve climate, a first step is to assess the current climate. This is also a recommended step before trying to increase workforce diversity through adjusted hiring processes (Holmes et al., 2021). Relative to other measures, the *Climate for Inclusion* scale mentioned above is fairly well rounded, so it is a recommended measure (Nishii, 2013). One limitation of this measure, however, is that it does not explicitly mention diversity characteristics (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, age), so respondents may not always consider those factors, and the results may be a little vague. A more direct measure of diversity climate is the six-item Organizational Fairness factor of the *Diversity Perceptions Scale* (Mor Barak et al., 1998). Example items include “I feel I have been treated differently here because of my race, sex, religion, or age” and “Managers here give feedback and evaluate employees fairly, regardless of the employee’s ethnicity, gender, age, or social background. This scale also includes a dimension around inclusion, but the items are limited in scope and are a poor fit for child welfare agencies, so it is not recommended.

Regardless of the specific scale used, assessing the extent of agreement among employees requires more advanced analyses, so in the absence of that, it can be valuable to instead explore potential differences in responses based on various diversity characteristics, such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, or other important social identities. This will provide insights about how different groups feel about the organization’s diversity and inclusion. Depending on the size and structure of the agency, regional differences may also exist, which would provide further insight into where efforts should be focused.

If the results suggest a need to improve diversity and/or inclusion climates, further discussion with employees, such as through interviews or focus groups, could reveal more specifics about the types of practices and dynamics that need attention. More generally, there are strategies

that, by definition, should create paths for improved climate—ensuring fairness of all personnel practices and promoting recognition and integration of underrepresented groups.

## QIC-WD Takeaways

- ▶ Diversity and inclusion climates are moderately connected with higher job satisfaction, organizational climate, employee engagement, and performance.
- ▶ Diversity and inclusion climates are also moderately related to lower employee withdrawal, defined as turnover intentions or turnover.
- ▶ The connections between climates and outcomes are stronger 1) for inclusion climate than for diversity climate, 2) for job attitudes than for job behaviors, 3) when climate is strong (i.e., there is more agreement among employees), and 4) when there is greater racial/ethnic diversity among employees.
- ▶ Before launching an effort to improve climate, a first step is to assess the current climate.
- ▶ Practitioners or researchers that would like to assess diversity and inclusion climate should consider the [\*Climate for Inclusion scale\*](#) by Nishii (2013). For a more direct measure of the role of diversity characteristics in diversity climate (not inclusion climate), see the Organizational Fairness factor of the [\*Diversity Perceptions Scale\*](#) by Mor Barak et al. (1998).
- ▶ Assessment of organizational climate requires a minimum level of consensus among employees, usually at a unit level; otherwise, the results are just a reflection of individual perceptions, which are sometimes called psychological climate. Calculation of this consensus requires more advanced analyses.
- ▶ To get insights about how different groups feel about the organization's diversity and inclusion, it is valuable to explore responses based on various diversity characteristics, such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, or other social identities.
- ▶ Meta-analytic research on diversity and inclusion climates thus far has not focused on interventions for improving them, but general recommended strategies involve ensuring fairness of all personnel practices and promoting recognition and integration of underrepresented groups.

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