

October 2025

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Recommended Citation

Ferrazza, Alessandro Dr (2025) "Beyond Compliance: Investigating the Motivational Power of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in European Hospitality," *ICHRIE Research Reports*: Vol. 10: Iss. 6, Article 3.
DOI: www.doi.org/10.61701/556443.208
Available at: https://via.library.depaul.edu/ichrie_rr/vol10/iss6/3

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Beyond Compliance: Investigating the Motivational Power of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in European Hospitality

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Executive Summary: The base concept of this study is to explore the interrelationship between Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) practices, employee motivation and performance within the European Hospitality Industry. The research aims to identify the barriers and facilitators that shape motivational synergies stimulating performance outcomes, particularly for underrepresented employee groups. The researcher employed a mixed-methods approach underpinned by a pragmatic interpretivist framework. The findings revealed that there is wide use of discriminatory practices, limited career progression and poor work-life balance which act as significant demotivators (Siu et al., 1997). The study also reconceptualizes EDI not merely as a compliance requirement, but as a strategic enabler of motivation and performance where organizations include EDI as part of the company's ethos. The research provides actionable insights for hospitality leaders aiming to align EDI practices with organizational resilience, innovation, and sustainable performance.

KEYWORDS: *Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, Employee Motivation, Individual Performance, Hospitality Industry*

INTRODUCTION

In Europe the European hospitality industry is the most culturally diverse and economically significant sector and, according to Ariza-Montes et al. (2019), the hospitality industry in fact accounts for approximately 4.4% of the total labor force across Europe therefore making this

industry a critical source of employment contributing to the economic growth of the region. More so globally, the industry's relevance was recognized at the International Labour Organization (ILO) Conference in September 2024 (ILO, 2024), where it was acknowledged as integral and critical to the global economy and vital not only for job generation but also for

promoting inclusivity, cross-cultural collaboration and sustainable tourism.

Nevertheless, despite this high relevance and importance, the industry continues to face growing scrutiny regarding its practices related to EDI, where workplaces are typically characterized by complex workforce compositions with presence of multiple nationalities, languages, genders and ethnicities, these are often subjected to cultural intersections and are both a strength and a source of friction. Within this context, this study delves into the effective implementation of EDI principles which can not only create a moral imperative but a strategic necessity too. Whereas organizations that neglect these dimensions risk undervaluing talent, reducing staff engagement and compromising both service quality and, by consequence, organizational performance.

It is recognized that many hospitality organizations do formally endorse EDI values, however, the reality on the ground often reveals a disparity between the stated intentions and the actual practice. Whereas employees from minority backgrounds frequently face barriers to advancement or limited access to professional development or are subject to implicit biases in managerial decision-making processes. These challenges are exacerbated by the sector's inherent features such as high staff turnover coupled with irregular working hours and a significant reliance on seasonal or casual labor which create further complications to embed inclusive and

supportive practices. As such, EDI must be re-evaluated not as a peripheral human resources function, but as organizational ethos and the central pillar for operational resilience and sustained workforce motivation.

This study critically investigates the interrelatedness between EDI practices and employee motivation within the European hospitality industry and how these can support performance. It also recognizes that motivation is a contextually conditional structure, shaped by micro-level psychological dynamics and macro-level organizational influences. More specifically, the study focuses on the barriers that hinder motivation such as discrimination and lack of recognition as well as the facilitators that enhance this including elements such as inclusive leadership, equitable recognition systems and transparent advancement opportunities.

The primary aim of this research is twofold, firstly it seeks to examine what enables or constrains motivational factors for employees considering the EDI lens (Stoke, 1999; Van Der Kolk et al., 2019), the second objective is the aim to develop a conceptual framework that integrates both internal organizational practices and external institutional forces such as employment law, labor policy and regulatory standards into a unified strategic model. Drawing on a mixed-methods design, the study combines qualitative data from 24 structured interviews with senior, operational and HR managers and

quantitative data from 166 employees across multiple European hospitality organizations.

This research makes both a practical and theoretical contribution as it offers hospitality sector leaders, HR professionals and policy makers actionable insights for embedding EDI in ways that go beyond compliance and symbolism. More significantly, it reconceptualizes EDI as a catalyst for motivation and engagement and, by consequence, enhancing performance. Arguing that inclusive work environments are not only fairer but also more productive and by positioning EDI at the heart of strategic decision-making, this study responds to the urgent need for transformation within one of Europe's most dynamic yet inequitable industries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace: EDI practices are integral to creating an equitable and productive work environment. Evidence from this research demonstrates that organizations that adopt proactive diversity policies achieve higher levels of employee satisfaction and organizational innovation (Gursoy & Maier, 2023). However, the implementation of EDI policies often encounters resistance due to deeply rooted biases and inadequate managerial support (Kalargyrou & Costen, 2016). Participants in the study noted that policies alone are insufficient; effective cultural integration and leadership commitment are also critical.

Motivation Theories and Employee Performance: Theories such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Herzberg's two-factor theory highlight the importance of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators (Robbins & Judge, 2013). The data collected in this study affirm that within the hospitality sector, recognition, fair compensation and career development opportunities are pivotal to sustaining employee motivation and enhancing performance. Employees noted that environments promoting inclusivity increased their intrinsic motivation by promoting a sense of belonging (Bryman, 2013).

Connecting EDI and Motivation: According to Bloudoff-Indelicato's (2016) study, which was referenced in (Wen & Liu-Lastres, 2021), there is a direct correlation between inclusive workplace policies and employee motivation. Policies that are inclusive raise work cultures where employees feel appreciated, which increases engagement and lowers the likelihood that they will leave. Some of the participants indicated that by removing discriminatory practices and introducing open communication channels, such regulations support the reduction in workplace stress. This evidences a route to a more favorable relationship between enhanced performance outcomes and perceived inclusion.

METHODOLOGY

This study's design adopts a mixed-methods research, aimed at exploring the nuances between EDI and employee motivation and the relationship with performance within the European Hospitality Industry. The methodological choice was guided by the complex and context-dependent nature of the research problem, where both quantifiable trends and lived experiences were essential to understanding organizational dynamics.

Philosophical Orientation - The study is grounded in a pragmatic interpretivist paradigm, informed by the works of Fearon et al. (2021) and Stake (2006), the pragmatism element allowed for the combination of qualitative and quantitative strategies, combining practical outcomes and real-world relevance. The research also adopted an interpretivist lens to explore participants' subjective understandings of motivation and EDI. This combination aligns with the study's emphasis on exploring meaning-making and power structures inequalities and more specifically as experienced by underrepresented groups in hospitality workplaces. Additionally, the interpretivist stance acknowledges the co-construction of knowledge between the researcher and the participants as fundamental key to the research process.

Research Design and Rationale – Initially, conceptualized as a single-case

study of a single organization, the research evolved into a study of the European sector to better reflect the diversity of organizational structures and leadership models found across the European hospitality sector. This evolution enabled the researcher to capture a wider spectrum of practices and to identify cross-patterns as well as context-specific divergences. Each participating organization and individual, ranging from hotels and restaurants to contract catering companies, represented a distinct identity embedded within a shared industry context, thus enabling analytical generalization while respecting uniqueness. The mixed-methods approach combined qualitative interviews and a structured quantitative survey, this combination facilitated triangulation allowing the strengthening and the validity of the findings, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation. The qualitative data provided the relevant depth, capturing rich narratives about inclusion, motivation and perceived performance from the leadership perspective, whilst the quantitative data added breadth by identifying trends and statistical patterns across a broader respondent base.

Participant Selection and Sampling – The sampling strategy employed was to ensure relevance and depth in both strands of the research, more specifically, in the qualitative phase, 24 valid participants were selected based on their managerial role, experience with EDI practices and geographical spread across Europe and,

most participants, were drawn from professional networks within the Institute of Hospitality (IoH) and the European Hotel Managers Association (EHMA). These participants held senior, middle or HR management positions, providing insight into both strategic-level thinking and day-to-day operational challenges. The quantitative survey received 166 valid responses from hospitality employees working across multiple European countries, the sample was intentionally diverse in terms of role encompassing the frontline and administrative teams, contract type (full-time, part-time, seasonal) and demographics. This variation enabled a cross-sectional examination of EDI perceptions and motivational factors from multiple perspectives within the same sector.

Data Collection Methods - For the qualitative element, structured interviews were conducted via email, video calls and in person, each lasting approximately 45 to 70 minutes. The interview schedule was consistent across participants and designed to prompt in-depth reflections on EDI implementation, leadership behaviors, motivational barriers and opportunities for organizational improvement. Ethical protocols, including informed consent, anonymity and the right to withdraw were strictly followed. For the quantitative survey, a structured online survey was developed and distributed through professional channels associated with the IoH and EHMA. The survey included closed-ended questions (using Likert scales) and a

limited number of open-text prompts to allow for brief qualitative elaboration, the instrument was firstly piloted with a small group to ensure clarity and alignment with research objectives, this pilot group was not included in the final data collection.

Data Analysis - Qualitative data were analyzed implementing a thematic analysis in NVivo 14 and MS Excel. All of the transcripts were coded through inductive and deductive practices, allowing themes to emerge organically and supported by current literature on EDI and motivation. Coding focused primarily on identifying common patterns related to discrimination, leadership style, recognition and employee experiences of inclusion. To understand if there were any underlying assumptions and workplace tensions, particular attention was paid to the language used by participants. In the following stage, the quantitative survey responses were analyzed using SPSS primarily and supported by Excel, with a focus on descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations underpinned by frequency distributions. This allowed the researcher to compare motivation by a large quantity of factors such as ethnicity, gender and role, as well as to identify patterns in promotion, engagement and satisfaction levels. While regression analysis was considered, the focus on interpretative validity and the complexity of interrelated social variables led to a preference for relational over predictive analysis.

Ethical Considerations – The Ethical Approval for the research was granted by

the University of Sunderland's UK Ethics Committee. All of the participants were supplied with an information sheet and were asked to sign a consent form, at the same time anonymity and confidentiality were assured, with all identifying information removed from transcripts and survey records. More so as the potentially sensitive nature of the research, discussing workplace discrimination or inequity could potentially stop participant from being candid in their contribution, care was taken to build a strong rapport and ensure that participants felt safe throughout the research process. The researcher's dual identity as a former industry executive and academic was also disclosed at the onset of each interview to enhance transparency and mitigate power imbalances in the interview setting.

Methodological Limitations - Despite the mixed-methods approach did allow for solid triangulation and depth, certain limitations must be acknowledged, such as the qualitative sample which, while rich, was also limited in scope and did not include C-suite executives from large multinational hospitality organizations. The survey also relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias and, additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the study may limit the ability to observe long-term changes in motivation or EDI impact due to the relatively short time of the data collection. Despite these constraints however, the chosen methodology does offer a robust and credible basis for analysing the role of EDI in

shaping motivation and performance in one of Europe's most dynamic yet inequitable industries.

INTERVIEW DATA COLLECTION

The researcher identified participants through professional connections with international hospitality organizations, specifically the Institute of Hospitality (*The Institute of Hospitality*, ND), which includes members from the UK and the European Hotel Management Association (EHMA, 2024), comprising members across mainland Europe and the UK. This section outlines the demographic profile of participants engaged in both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study. Key

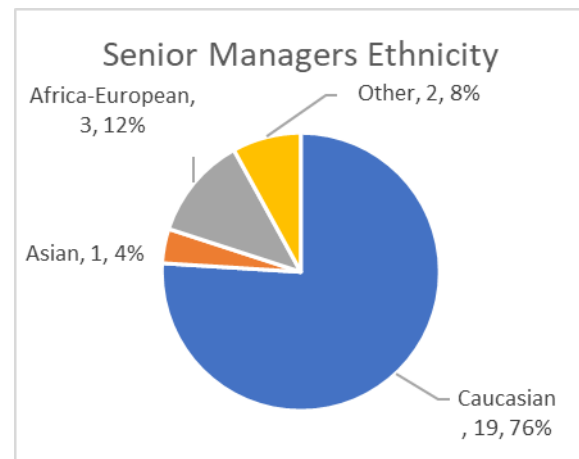


Figure 1 - Senior Managers Ethnicity Source: Author, 2024

demographic attributes such as age, gender, ethnicity, job roles and geographical distribution are examined to provide context and highlight diversity within the sample.

The qualitative phase predominantly involved senior managers from the European hospitality sector, where disparities in gender and ethnic representation were evident. Executive roles were primarily occupied by Caucasian males, underscoring persistent challenges in achieving inclusivity at senior levels. Conversely, the quantitative survey encompassed a wider range of employees, including operational staff, middle managers and human resource professionals. While most respondents were full-time employees in hotels, the sample also included significant representation from the restaurant and contract catering sectors. The findings highlighted notable underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in leadership roles and unequal promotion opportunities, particularly affecting women and non-Caucasian employees.

The insights of the demographic are critical to contextualize the study's findings and aligning these with its objectives. Tables and visual representations are provided to further illustrate the composition and diversity of the sample.

SURVEY DESIGN

The researcher designed the survey to effectively explore the experiences and perceptions of frontline employees working in the European Hospitality Industry, and more particularly in relation to EDI practices, motivation and self-assessed individual performance. The design process was grounded within the thematic findings emerging from the qualitative interview

phase, thus allowing for a greater degree of confidence and contextually relevant set of questions. This ensured a strong degree of complementarity between the qualitative and quantitative strands of the research.

The questionnaire consisted of five key sections. The first captured demographic data, including age, gender, ethnicity, nationality and role. The second section addressed employment information, type of establishment and type of employment conditions. The third element focused on motivational factors, hinging on established theoretical models such as Herzberg's two-factor theory and Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory, at the same time however allowing space for context-specific observations. The fourth section included open ended questions exploring the perception of recognition and benefits, with items designed to elicit respondents' self-assessment. The final section also included open-ended questions inviting narrative reflections on any personal experiences with EDI practices, positive or negative, that had impacted their work experience. And personal perception of motivation in relation to performance.

To guarantee it's clarity, the survey was piloted with a small group of employees working in hospitality organizations similar to those involved in the main study, the piloted group was excluded from the final study to remove possible cloudiness of data. The feedback from this pilot phase led to some refinements in questions and its wording and structure, this was to minimize

possible ambiguity and cognitive load. The final version was then distributed electronically via an anonymized link, through the organizational gatekeepers who facilitated the dissemination across their members and teams. The participation was voluntary and ethical safeguards, including informed consent, anonymity, and data protection protocols, were strictly observed in accordance with University of Sunderland research ethics guidance and policy.

The number of participants who adhered to the research produced a total of 166 valid responses, these were from employees representing a range of European countries, including the UK, France, Italy, Spain, Germany and the Netherlands. This sample provided sufficient diversity to support the exploration of patterns across different cultural and operational contexts within the hospitality sector.

The survey was designed to capture attitudes toward EDI initiatives, workplace inclusivity and motivation. Survey respondents were drawn from various hospitality organizations across Europe, ensuring representation from different hierarchical levels and demographics. The survey included both closed and open-ended questions to balance quantitative precision with qualitative depth.

DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative data collected from the survey was analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), with the

primary aim of identifying patterns and associations between employees' experiences of EDI, their levels of motivation and their self-reported performance. Instead of pursuing predictive modelling or complex inferential statistics, such as regression or structural equation modelling, the researcher prioritized descriptive and exploratory approaches. The researcher's decision was aligned to the pragmatic and interpretivist underpinnings of the research itself, which aimed to highlight the lived experiences and contextual variation rather than establish universal causal relationships.

The first part of the analysis involved the cleaning of the dataset, checking for inconsistencies and participants incomplete responses. Implementation of frequency distributions and cross-tabulations were then selected to explore and understand the relationships between demographic variables (e.g., gender, ethnicity, language, etc.) and perceptions of EDI, motivation and performance allowing for the identification of trends and notable disparities within and across groups.

Key variables were coded and categorized thematically, particularly for Likert-scale items that measured perceptions of fairness, leadership inclusivity, recognition, and career progression. For example, responses to items such as "I feel valued by my employer" or "I believe I have equal access to development opportunities" were analyzed in conjunction with motivation-

related items such as “I am motivated to go above and beyond in my role” or “My performance is recognized fairly.” The analysis revealed both enabling and inhibiting factors that aligned with findings from the interview phase, further strengthening the case for triangulation.

At the same time, the open-ended responses were subjected to a light thematic coding using NVivo, to include some illustrative participant quotations alongside contextual nuances which added richness to the numerical trends. This qualitative integration helped reinforce the voices behind the data, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in participants’ lived experiences rather than abstracted statistics.

Finally, results were visually represented through tables and charts, particularly to demonstrate differences across demographic groups in their responses to key EDI and motivational indicators. These visualizations were used not only to clarify patterns but also to support the development of the conceptual framework that emerged in the discussion chapter.

In sum, the analytical strategy was deliberately interpretive, reflective of the study’s broader methodological orientation, and focused on generating practical insights rather than statistical generalizations. The analysis underscored the complex interplay

between inclusion, motivation, and performance—and, critically, revealed the differential impact of EDI practices across various staff segments in the European hospitality workforce.

FINDINGS

a. Barriers to Motivation

Discriminatory Practices (Figures 2 and 3): Like Participant 9 and 11, many interviewees cited discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, or age as a significant barrier to motivation. For instance, Participant 7, a middle manager, stated, “It’s challenging to remain motivated when opportunities seem to be reserved for a select group.” Survey data revealed that 64.7% of White employees had been promoted within the past 24 months, compared to just 10.3% of Black employees, highlighting significant ethnic disparities in career progression.

Lack of Career Development

Opportunities: Both interview and survey data pointed to limited career progression as a demotivating factor. Fifty-eight percent of survey respondents reported dissatisfaction with growth opportunities in their organizations. Participant 16 highlighted the absence of mentorship programs as a major hindrance to achieving their career goals.



Figure 3 - Promotion by Ethnicity Source: Author, 2024

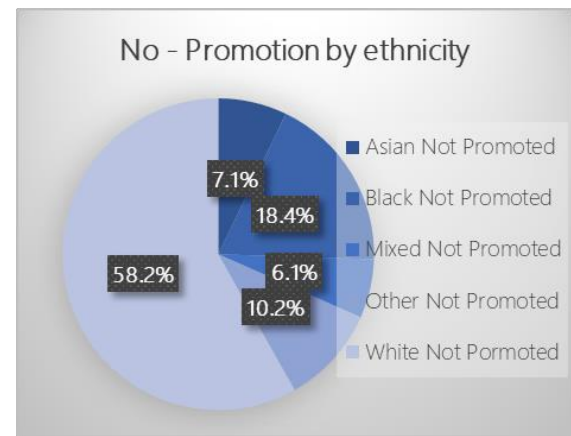


Figure 2 - No promotion by Ethnicity Source: Author, 2024

High Workplace Stress: Long working hours and high-pressure environments were consistently mentioned as barriers to motivation. Many participants, including P2 and P24 reported experiencing burnout at least once in the past year, with many attributing it to poor work-life balance which directly affected performance and morale.

Facilitators of Motivation

Inclusive Policies: Organizations with robust EDI frameworks were perceived as more supportive and fair. Participants such as P5 and P19 identified open communication and anti-discrimination policies as critical to enhancing engagement. Survey data reinforced this with high motivational scores tied to “relationship with employer” (Table 1; Mean = 3.38).

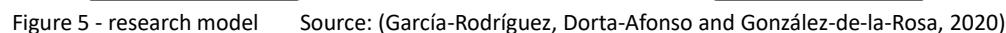
Ranking	Motivational factor	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness
1	Working Environment	3.71	1.323	-0.458
2	Relationship with the employer	3.38	1.208	-0.284
3	Pay / Salary	3.23	1.192	-0.060
4	Interesting Job	3.16	1.322	-0.086
5	Relationship with the Manager	3.09	1.458	+0.023

Table 1 - Motivational Factors Top 5 Motivators Source: Author, 2024



a. Proposed Framework

Building upon the research by (García-Rodríguez et al., 2020), which presented a model linking Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Figure 5).



Recognition and Reward Systems: some of the middle and HR managers reported that the recognition programs and wellbeing initiatives seem to be effective in enhancing motivation. The findings suggested that fair and inclusive recognition plays a key role in encouraging individual engagement and team cohesion.

This study seeks to enhance and expand that foundational framework. Their model, published in the *International Journal of Hospitality Management* under the title "Hospitality Diversity Management and Job Satisfaction: The Mediating Role of Organizational Commitment Across Individual Differences," provides valuable insights but primarily focuses on internal organizational elements.

While the original framework is impactful, this study identified the need for a broader, more dynamic perspective. Specifically, the proposed framework extends the scope by integrating external elements alongside internal organizational dynamics, recognizing the importance of aligning strategic decision-making processes with the organization's vision and long-term goals. By situating the organization at the center of this alignment, the enhanced model considers external influences such as international and national employment

policies, organizational employment strategies and EDI management practices. These external factors act as pivotal drivers that interact with internal strategies to enhance employee motivation and performance, while embedding EDI principles into the workplace.

The proposed framework also highlights the critical role of regulatory and cultural contexts. For example, international employment policies can be used to introduce opportunities for workforce planning, equally national policies can be used to define standards for equitable treatment. Organizational EDI policies, as catalysts for adopting inclusive workplace cultures, can stimulate employee engagement and motivation, ultimately boosting individual and organizational performance. By addressing these external factors, the framework offers a comprehensive approach that enables organizations to achieve their strategic objectives while navigating external complexities effectively. This multidimensional perspective supports agility, innovation and sustained competitive advantage in an increasingly dynamic and diverse global environment (Figure 6).

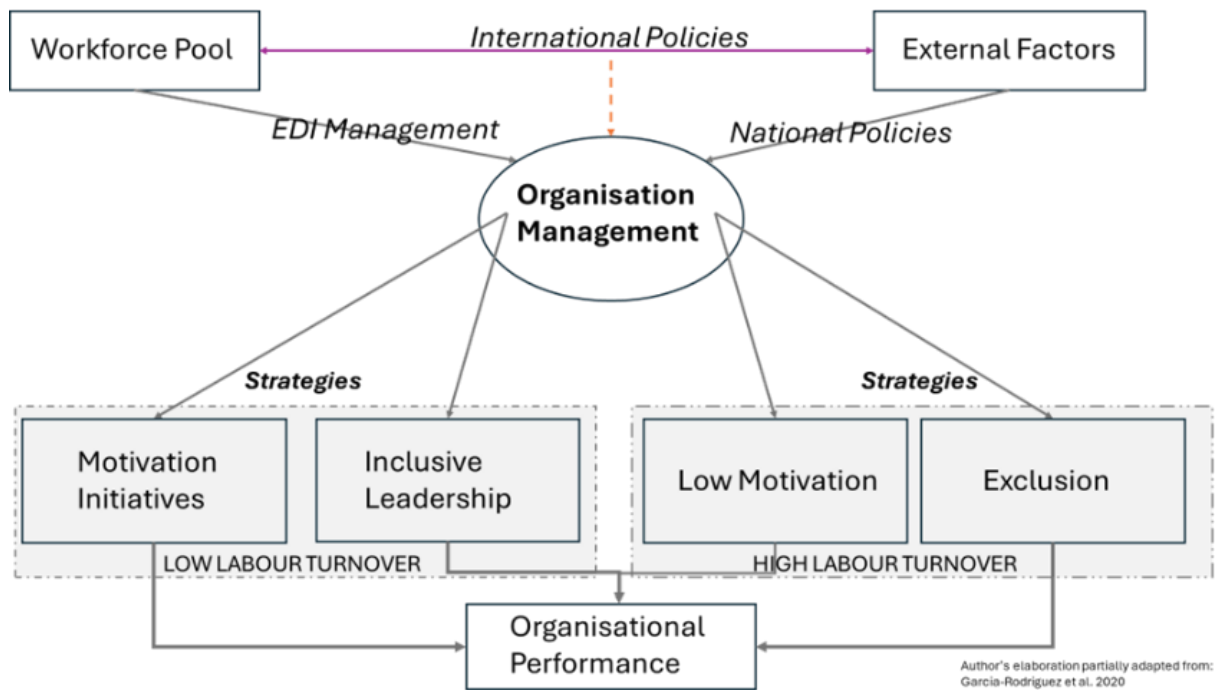


Figure 6 – Conceptual Framework 1: Generic Model

Source: Author (2024)

As illustrated in Figure 7 – Conceptual Framework: Assumption 1, some organizations may prioritize profitability and operational simplicity over inclusivity and motivational initiatives. These strategies typically deprioritize EDI efforts, focusing instead on local workforce recruitment and minimizing reliance on external employment policies. While this approach may offer short-term financial stability, it often results in a restricted talent pool, limiting diversity and innovation. Furthermore, overburdening existing teams due to reduced workforce availability can negatively affect employee well-being, engagement and productivity. Research indicates that motivation is a critical driver of individual performance; therefore, neglecting motivational and inclusive leadership initiatives risks creating disengaged teams (Tsusaka et al., 2020).

Organizations employing this strategy may maintain stable performance in the short term but are less likely to succeed in navigating globalized market complexities or achieving long-term sustainability (García-Rodríguez, Dorta-Afonso and González-de-la-Rosa, 2020).

In contrast, organizations that adopt Figure 8 – Conceptual Framework: Assumption 2 focus on inclusivity and motivation as central components of their operational strategies. These organizations align with findings that highlight the positive correlation between inclusive practices and employee performance (Manoharan et al., 2023). By embracing EDI principles and aligning with national and international employment policies, they gain access to a broader, more skilled talent

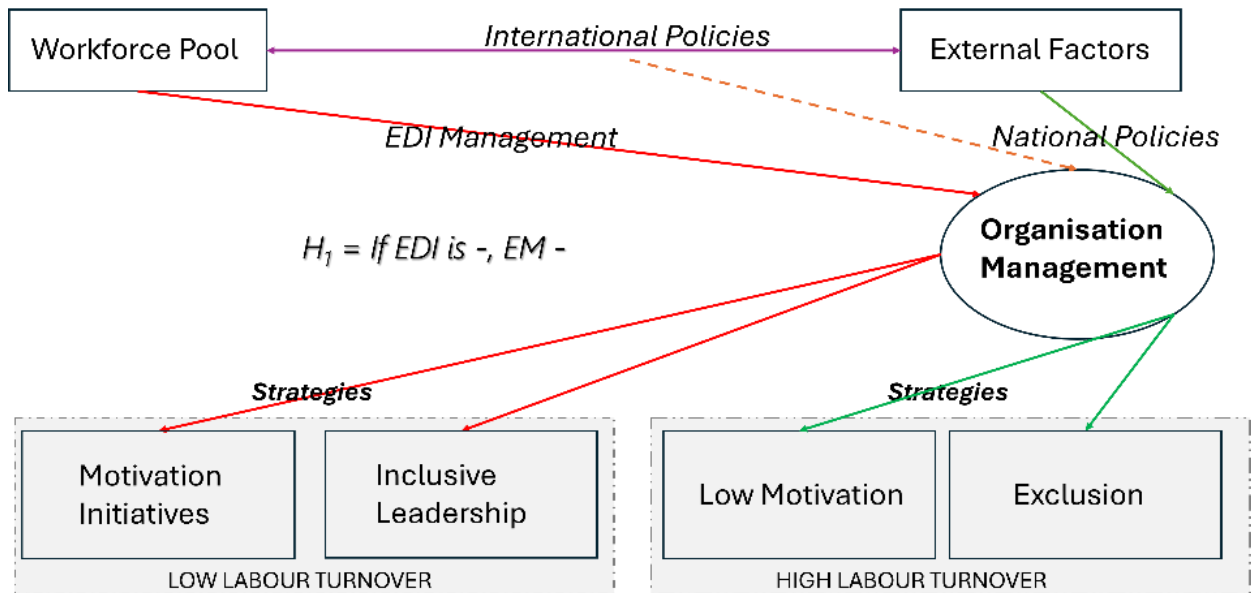


Figure 7 - Conceptual Framework - Assumption 1

Source: Author (2024)

resilience, innovation and adaptability. Such strategies are associated with higher employee engagement, reduced turnover and improved productivity (Díaz-Carrión et al., 2020). Although managing a diverse

workforce introduces operational complexities, these organizations are better equipped to maintain compliance with regulatory standards, strengthen their reputation and achieve competitive advantage in the global economy.

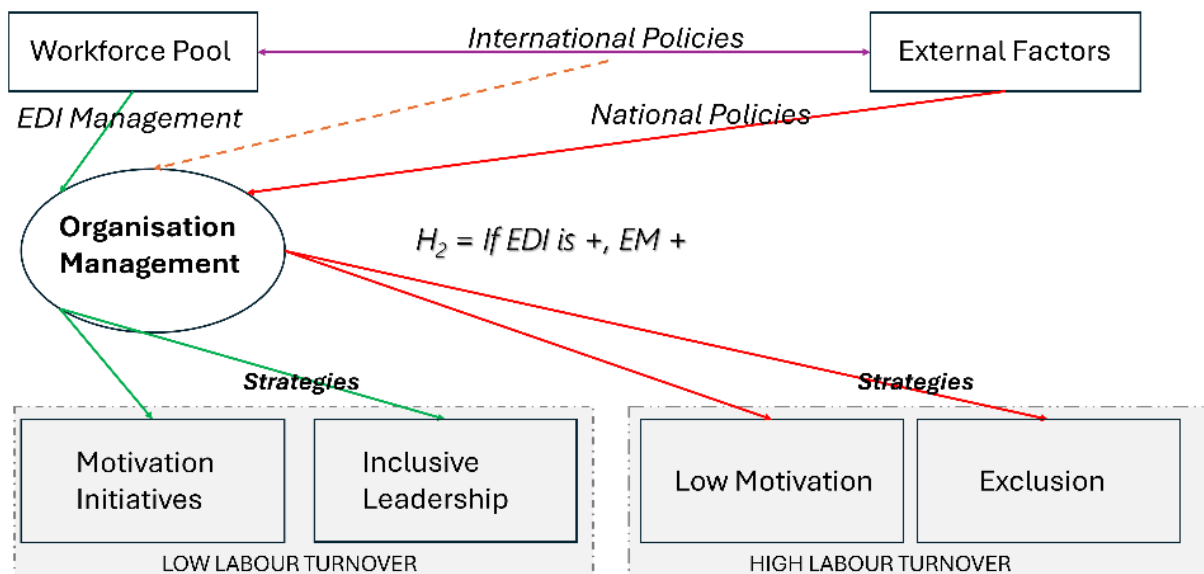


Figure 8 - Conceptual Framework - Assumption 2

Source: Author (2024)

The proposed framework highlights the trade-offs and implications of the two strategic pathways. Organizations focusing on Assumption 1 may achieve short-term profitability but risk undermining long-term innovation and workforce stability. Conversely, those adopting Assumption 2 are likely to benefit from sustained employee motivation and performance, albeit with increased management complexity. By integrating EDI management as a core element, the framework underscores its influence on organizational culture, motivation and performance outcomes. This multidimensional perspective equips organizations to strategically navigate employment dynamics, ensuring alignment with their aspirations and long-term goals. The framework's flexibility allows for evaluation of inclusivity, motivation and profitability trade-offs, enabling organizations to adapt to diverse regulatory, cultural and market conditions. Arguably, this can be used as a transparent and robust model to support organizational performance in an evolving global landscape.

The proposed framework for integrating EDI, motivation and performance builds on four core components:

Foundational Policies: These include anti-discrimination measures, equitable recruitment processes and diversity training programs. Survey data revealed that organizations implementing anonymous hiring processes experienced a greater increase in diversity within leadership roles.

Cultural Integration: Embedding EDI principles into the organizational culture requires active leadership and employee involvement. Survey respondents believed that adopting open dialogue about diversity challenges strengthened workplace cohesion.

Feedback Loops and Adaptation: Continuous evaluation of EDI initiatives ensures their relevance and effectiveness. Data from quarterly diversity audits and employee engagement surveys can inform strategic adjustments, maintaining alignment with organizational goals.

Measurable Performance Outcomes: By tracking metrics such as employee retention, engagement scores and innovation indices, organizations can measure the tangible benefits of EDI initiatives.

DISCUSSION

The findings and results of the study examine the interplay between employee motivation, individual performance and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) within the European hospitality sector. The research began with a critical review of existing literature on employee performance, motivation and EDI, providing a foundation for the study. Insights from structured interviews informed the development of a comprehensive set of measurement items, which were further

refined and evaluated through quantitative analysis. This approach ensured the validity and reliability of the findings and facilitated an assessment of the relationships within the conceptual framework.

The focus of the research is the key challenges within the hospitality industry that hinder employee motivation and limit performance development. Particular attention is given to change management, operational and structural challenges and cultural nuances that uniquely influence motivational dynamics. Additionally, the analysis identifies motivational factors specific to the hospitality industry (Zopiatīs et al., 2016) and explores how EDI initiatives can encourage an environment that promotes individual achievement and supports the progression of EDI employees into senior management roles.

To highlight effective strategies for enhancing employee commitment and productivity, the study examines practical mechanisms that drive motivation. It also investigates the direct and indirect impacts of EDI on employee performance, uncovering complex relationships between inclusive practices and performance outcomes at both individual and organizational levels. This comprehensive exploration offers insights into how inclusive strategies can influence performance and contribute to organizational success.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into account the findings of this study, there are several actionable recommendations proposed to improve the motivation element via Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) practices in the European Hospitality Industry.

In order, the first step would be that organizations should implement regular EDI training and unconscious bias workshops aimed to the specific realities of the organization and its employees. Embedding these as the organization's ethos and not only part of the policy package, where the senior management becomes the backbone of EDI promotion. The training sessions should become the core part of an ongoing top down professional development strategy.

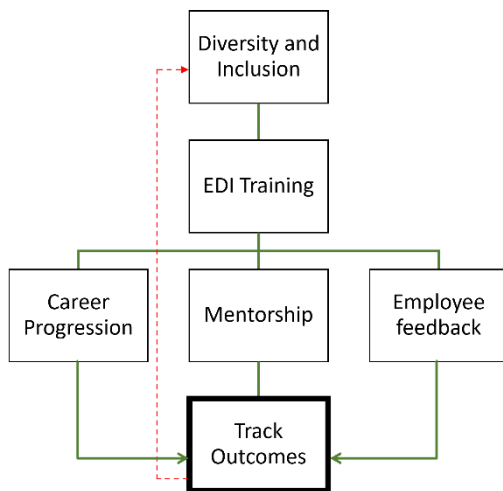
Secondly, as a direct consequence of the organizational ethos the establishing of transparent and equitable career progression pathways. Arguably one of the study's core findings was in fact the staff being demotivated by the unclear or the perceived unequal promotion opportunities, particularly for ethnic minorities and women. Businesses therefore ought to develop a more formalized framework with transparent and achievable criteria which is then clearly communicated to all staff. This level of transparency will enhance employee trust, promoting motivation reducing the perception of nepotism or discrimination.

Furthermore, hospitality organizations should consider launching mentorship programs which are targeted at all staff but with specific relevance to underrepresented employee groups. The programs can support the employees in bridging the knowledge gaps, suggest career guidance and uncover access to influential network connections within the organization and beyond. If implemented strategically and systematically, mentorship schemes can contribute to personal development, building self confidence among marginalized employees reinforcing the organizational ethos of cultural inclusion, supporting succession planning and, demonstrating a firm commitment to developing internal talent across diverse backgrounds.

departmental focus groups and or diversity panels can provide an invaluable insight into employee experiences and perceptions. It is also critical that these mechanisms are followed by visible action and communication from the senior management and leadership teams, firmly demonstrating accountability and reinforcing psychological safety.

Finally, organizations should implement a track and analyze system to measure performance and diversity outcomes and assess the effectiveness of the EDI initiatives embedded into the company's ethos. Some of the key metrics may include staff retention rates, engagement scores, internal mobility and promotion patterns disaggregated by demographic indicators. The data should be reviewed systematically and periodically to identify disparities and trends, supporting the strategic decisions and resource allocations. By embedding EDI in an evidence-based reality with regular and in-depth analysis, organizations can refine interventions, measure impact and build a robust business case for continued investment in inclusive practices.

Ethos Flowchart



It is moreover suggested that organizations develop and integrate candid employee feedback mechanisms into the talent evaluation strategy. A feedback systems like anonymous surveys or inter-

CONTRIBUTION TO INDUSTRY

While this study offers robust insights into the interrelationship between Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), employee motivation, and individual performance within the European hospitality industry, further clarification of its unique contributions can significantly enhance its

theoretical significance and practical utility. The research goes beyond reiterating existing motivational theories by reconceptualizing how EDI functions not merely as a contextual factor but as a strategic catalyst embedded within motivational frameworks. This reconceptualization positions EDI not as a peripheral HR initiative but as an essential lever of performance and engagement, particularly in sectors marked by high workforce heterogeneity and operational complexity, such as hospitality.

Theoretically, the proposed framework bridges micro-level psychological drivers with macro-level institutional forces, thereby enriching the limited literature that explores the interaction between external regulatory environments (e.g., employment policies, cultural norms) and internal organizational strategies (e.g., inclusive leadership, recognition systems). This dual-layered approach responds to a gap in existing hospitality management theory, which often neglects the systemic and structural determinants of motivation, especially across diverse and underrepresented employee groups.

From an industry standpoint, the study contributes a pragmatic, evidence-based model that offers decision-makers a clearer blueprint for aligning EDI efforts with operational outcomes. For example, the identification of high-impact motivators, such as inclusive leadership, transparent promotion pathways, and equitable

recognition systems, provides tangible levers for hotel operators and HR leaders seeking to enhance staff retention, reduce turnover, and build resilient team dynamics. Importantly, the framework's adaptability to both local cultural norms and international labor regulations makes it relevant for multinational chains and independent operators alike.

By connecting performance management with diversity agendas, this research underscores the economic rationale for inclusion, demonstrating that EDI is not only ethically necessary but operationally advantageous. In doing so, it provides a theoretically grounded yet practically applicable model that advances both academic inquiry and managerial practice, thereby contributing a novel lens through which hospitality organizations can achieve sustainable competitive advantage in an increasingly diverse and globalized market.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Despite the valuable contributions of this research, several limitations must be acknowledged to enhance the transparency, credibility, and contextual integrity of the findings. First and foremost, participant selection was largely based on voluntary responses accessed through professional networks within the hospitality sector, which may have introduced selection bias. Individuals with heightened awareness of or strong opinions about Equality, Diversity

and Inclusion (EDI) were potentially more likely to participate, thereby influencing the thematic balance of the findings. This self-selection effect, coupled with the underrepresentation of certain employee groups, particularly front-line staff and underrepresented identities such as LGBTQ+ individuals, persons with disabilities, or those from lower socio-economic backgrounds, may have skewed the diversity of perspectives captured.

In addition, while the study employed a robust mixed-methods design, the qualitative phase predominantly included middle managers and operational employees, with only limited engagement from senior executives, particularly within large multinational hospitality organizations. This limited contribution from high-level leadership constrains the study's ability to critically assess how strategic decisions regarding EDI are conceptualized, implemented, and cascaded throughout organizational hierarchies. Since senior leaders are instrumental in shaping organizational culture, performance incentives, and EDI priorities, their absence represents a significant gap in understanding the top-down mechanisms that influence motivation and performance outcomes across diverse teams.

Another core limitation concerns the generalizability of the findings across the wider European hospitality landscape. While the research incorporated participants from multiple European

countries, the heterogeneity of socio-political contexts, regulatory frameworks, and cultural interpretations of diversity poses challenges in extrapolating findings uniformly. For instance, national attitudes towards gender equity, ethnic representation, or meritocracy may differ significantly between Western, Northern, and Southern European markets, thereby affecting how inclusive strategies are received and operationalized. As such, while the study offers valuable insights and a novel conceptual framework, its applicability across all European contexts should be approached with caution and cultural sensitivity.

Furthermore, a cross-sectional design restricts the ability to assess long-term impacts of EDI interventions on employee motivation and performance. Motivation is a dynamic construct, and its relationship with inclusive practices may evolve over time due to organizational change, external pressures, or shifting leadership priorities. Longitudinal research would be necessary to determine whether the positive outcomes identified, such as increased engagement, reduced turnover intentions, and enhanced performance, are sustainable without continuous reinforcement.

Finally, although the study acknowledged the importance of intersectionality, the scope was limited in its ability to systematically examine how overlapping identities (e.g., ethnicity, gender, disability, age, and socio-economic background)

interact to shape workplace experiences. This limitation highlights the need for future research to incorporate more nuanced, intersectional frameworks and to explore how structural inequalities manifest differently across identity groups.

Taken together, these limitations point to several opportunities for further inquiry. Future studies should seek to involve a broader spectrum of participants across organizational hierarchies and identity categories, engage senior leadership more directly, adopt longitudinal designs, and explore sector-specific and cross-cultural comparisons. By addressing these areas, future research can strengthen the external validity of the findings and deepen our understanding of the strategic and human implications of embedding EDI into motivation and performance frameworks across global hospitality settings.

FUTURE RESEARCH

This study's findings do offer a valuable insight into the relationship between Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) practices and employee motivation in the European hospitality industry. However, the study also emphasizes the need for further exploration, specifically considering the evolving socio-political context and the operational dynamics of hospitality organizations operating on a global scale. Future research should therefore build on this foundation and examine the nuanced

perspectives, consider extending the geographical and sectoral scope and, but not only, incorporating emerging theoretical and methodological approaches.

- Longitudinal Analysis of EDI Interventions

While this study presents a snapshot of EDI impacts, a longitudinal research design would enable scholars to evaluate the sustainability and long-term efficacy of inclusive initiatives. Such research could assess how motivation and performance outcomes evolve over time in response to changing policies, leadership styles or organizational restructuring. This would be particularly useful in understanding whether initial improvements in engagement are maintained or diminish in the absence of continuous EDI reinforcement.

- EDI and Organizational Justice through Intersectional Lenses

Although this study highlighted ethnic and gender disparities, further investigation is needed into intersectionality, the overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. Future research could examine how combinations of identity characteristics (e.g., race, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic background) influence employees' experiences of fairness, motivation and performance. Such inquiry would support the development of more

sophisticated, equity-driven EDI policies that account for complexity beyond single-axis diversity dimensions.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study reveal nuanced intersections between EDI and employee motivation, with conceptual models indicating that EDI principles underpin motivational factors by adopting a sense of belonging and fairness. However, the practical application of these principles in the hospitality industry often falls short of theoretical ideals. Managers acknowledged gaps between organizational EDI rhetoric and actual practices, which negatively impact trust and motivation. Thus, while EDI can enhance performance, its effectiveness relies on consistent and visible implementation.

The study identified significant obstacles to motivation, including job segregation, low pay, lack of recognition and limited career advancement opportunities. Systemic barriers, such as unequal access to opportunities for women and ethnic minorities, exacerbate these challenges. Participants noted that these issues often lead to disengagement and reduced motivation, compounded by managerial and cultural practices that devalue diversity and provide inadequate support for employee performance. Inexperienced management and insufficient adherence to EDI principles were highlighted as direct contributors to

these issues, negatively affecting both motivation and performance outcomes.

Facilitators of motivation identified in the study include inclusive leadership, professional development opportunities and tailored recognition systems. EDI practices that celebrate diversity and establish equitable, transparent career progression pathways were identified as critical enablers. Psychological safety, where employees feel respected and heard, was also emphasized as essential, alongside, practical solutions highlighted include ongoing EDI training, involving diverse groups in decision-making and transparent leadership. While some managers viewed these elements as integral to their operations, others favored meritocracy, though its practical definition was not articulated in interviews.

The research demonstrates that effectively implemented EDI initiatives positively influence employee performance. Employees who perceive fairness and inclusion report higher job satisfaction, stronger organizational commitment and enhanced performance. However, inconsistent application of EDI policies undermines their potential impact. Overall, the findings underscore the deep interconnectedness of EDI, motivation and employee performance, with significant implications for the European hospitality industry.

Despite clear barriers, the study offers actionable solutions and recommendations

for better aligning the industry with EDI principles and supporting ethnic minorities in advancing to managerial positions. By addressing these challenges, the industry can create a more inclusive and equitable environment.

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