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# Organisational Inclusion, Employee Voice, and Wellbeing in Remote Working Environments

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## Abstract

This project investigates the impact of employees' perceptions of organisational inclusion on their voice opportunities and subjective wellbeing within remote working environments, driven by the Covid-19 pandemic's acceleration of telework. The significance of organisational commitment to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) has been underscored by rising employee expectations for inclusivity and the opportunity to contribute to decision-making processes. Research highlights the potential challenges of remote work, such as increased interpersonal distance and diminished trust, counterbalanced by digital communication's capacity to mitigate these effects. The study emphasises that perceptions of an inclusive climate, rather than mere policies, significantly influence employees' wellbeing and productivity. Employee voice is framed as a crucial element, suggesting that inclusive voice opportunities can lead to numerous benefits, including enhanced employee wellbeing. The research questions explore how remote working environments influence perceptions of organisational inclusion and its subsequent effects on voice opportunities and employee wellbeing. The methodology will involve an online survey with 500 participants, examining perceptions of organisational inclusion, voice opportunities, subjective wellbeing, and perceived outcomes like productivity at work and service quality. The study aims to contribute to remote work and organisational inclusion literature by offering insights for developing inclusive and engaging remote work cultures, outlining strategies to overcome digital barriers, and understanding how demographic variables affect perceptions of inclusion and voice opportunities in remote work settings.

## Introduction

This project aims to explain the impact of employees' perceptions of organisational inclusion on their opportunities for voice and subjective wellbeing within the realm of remote working environments. Notably, the Employee Expectations Report 2021 indicates that in 2020, the proportion of employees who expect their employers to demonstrate a strong commitment to

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, to communicate new initiatives, and listen to every voice across all levels has risen to 38%, up from 19% in 2019. Despite the escalating trend towards remote work, scholars have started to investigate the effect of virtual spaces on interpersonal relations, with a focus on the potential increase in interpersonal distance (e.g., Han et al., 2022). Previous research highlighted that the lack of employee voice can severely undermine wellbeing (Sherf et al., 2020). In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a transformative shift in work practices and environments, rendering it imperative to examine the influences of remote work on employees' perceptions of organisational inclusion, and of opportunities for voice, and their subjective wellbeing. This project's overarching goal is to explore how employee perceptions of organisational inclusion influence their voice opportunities and wellbeing among employees, specifically within the context of remote working arrangements in organisations.

### **Background literature**

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally altered the traditional workspace, catalysing a shift towards remote working — leveraging technology to perform work tasks outside the conventional office setting. However, research investigating the impact of this trend on employees' work experiences has produced mixed findings (Vincenzi et al., 2022). Many organisations have embraced a hybrid model, frequently entailing remote work for three or more days a week. Due to the rising trend of remote work, scholars have initiated studies into the effects of virtual spaces on interpersonal relationships, particularly focusing on the potential for increased interpersonal distance (e.g., Han et al., 2022). Earlier studies suggest that team members who rely primarily on digital communication without face-to-face interactions may experience heightened psychological distance and diminished trust levels (Wilson et al., 2013). However, another study indicates that digital communication technologies have the potential to mitigate interpersonal distance (Norman et al., 2016). It is, therefore, crucial to explore employees' experiences under these new work modalities.

The climate of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion rather than mere policies is described as “employees' perceptions about the extent to which their organisation values diversity, as evidenced in the organisation's formal structure, informal values, and social integration of under-represented employees” (Dwertmann et al., 2016, p. 1137). In recent years, the emphasis has shifted towards inclusion, underlining that diversity alone is insufficient unless its benefits are effectively harnessed (Nishii, 2013). It appears that individual perceptions of the climate, rather than the policies themselves, significantly influence work-related attitudes such as wellbeing (Perry and Li, 2019).

These individual perceptions of organisational inclusion are likely to influence voice. Employee voice refers to the opportunities for employees not only to express dissatisfaction or complaints but also to share ideas and contribute to organisational decision-making (Wilkinson et al., 2018). Studies have shown that voice opportunities vary among diverse individuals (Hatipoglu and Inelmen, 2018). Therefore, it is even more important to study such differences in experience in the new way of remote working in organisations. Where voice opportunities are inclusive, a myriad of benefits accrues to both employees and employers (Özbilgin & Syed, 2015), such as enhanced employee wellbeing (Holland et al., 2011; Brooks and Wilkinson, 2022). Improved wellbeing is associated with greater productivity at work (e.g., Vecchi et al., 2022; DiMaria et al., 2020) and superior service quality (Clake and Hill, 2012), as satisfied employees tend to create satisfied customers (Grandey et al., 2011).

### **Research questions**

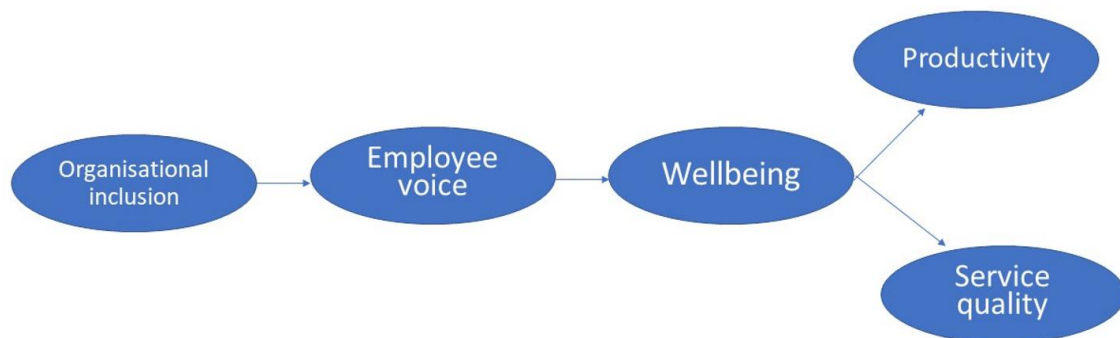
Our study is centred around one overarching research question: how does employee perceptions of organisation inclusion impacts on their perceived level of voice opportunities in the organisation and which subsequently influence on their subjective wellbeing in the remote working environment? This question is elaborated upon through two specific inquiries:

RQ 1. Does the remote working environment support and strengthen an employee perception of an organisational inclusion, thus impacting their voice and wellbeing and ultimately productivity and service quality positively?

RQ 2: Alternatively, does the remote working environment exacerbate workplace inequalities by diminishing perceived voice opportunities, thereby adversely affecting employee wellbeing and, consequently, productivity and service quality?

This project aims to interpret how remote working has reshaped employee perceptions of inclusion within their organisations. It seeks to explore the nature of voice opportunities available to employees in a remote setting, their experiences of these opportunities, and the effects on their wellbeing, which, in turn, influence perceived productivity and service quality (see Fig 1).

Fig 1. Conceptual framework



## Methodology

In this research, we will employ an online survey to examine our conceptual framework. Using a panel company, we will collect data from 500 employees across sectors with significant adaption of remote work practices. This online survey instrument will cover the following dimensions: (i) perceptions of organisational inclusion, (ii) perceptions of voice opportunities, (iii) subjective wellbeing, and (iv) perceived outcomes (productivity, service quality). To ensure the reliability of our survey instrument, we will adopt scales that have been previously validated and shown reliability in related studies. For Perceived Organisational Inclusion, we will use the Inclusion-Exclusion scale (Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998; Shore et al., 2018). To assess Perceptions of Voice Opportunities, we will rely on Bryson et al. (2006) and Cox et al. (2006). For measuring Subjective Wellbeing, we will employ the scales used by Dennis et al. (2016) and Vecchi et al. (2022). For Outcomes such as productivity and service quality, we will utilise scales adopted in the studies of Vecchi et al. (2022), DiMaria et al. (2020); and Ramseook-Munhurrun et al. (2009), Mortimer et al. (2021) respectively. We will use SPSS to analyse the data and AMOS to test the conceptual model.

## **Intended Contributions**

This study aims to provide significant insights and practical contributions to the field of remote work and organisational behaviour by:

1. Developing insights to inform organisational strategies that promote an inclusive, engaging, and healthy remote work culture, thereby enhancing employees' perceptions of inclusion, voice opportunities, and subjective wellbeing. This contribution is aimed at benefiting employees across diverse demographic profiles, ensuring that remote work practices are equitable and supportive for diverse individuals.
2. Outlining actionable strategies to mitigate digital barriers in the remote workforce, thereby ensuring equitable access to voice opportunities and fostering a sense of inclusion among remote employees. This aims to address inequalities that may arise in remote work environments and suggest ways to enhance employee wellbeing and productivity through improved digital communication and collaboration platforms.
3. Enriching the remote work literature by integrating demographic trends with psychological theories to unravel the complex dynamics of the modern workplace. Specifically, this research seeks to understand how demographic variables influence employees' perceptions of organisational inclusion and voice opportunities in remote settings and how these perceptions impact their wellbeing, productivity, and service quality.

## **A plan to develop the paper prior to discussion/presentation at the conference**

To advance the project in preparation for the conference, our initial step involves formulating hypotheses and refining the conceptual framework. This process will be grounded in a thorough review of existing literature to identify research gaps and align the project's objectives. Subsequent to this, we will embark on designing and finalising the questionnaire based on the refined conceptual framework and hypotheses, ensuring that the questions are clear, unbiased, and directly relevant to the research objectives. Upon finalising the questionnaire, we will proceed to submit the ethics approval form to the lead applicant university, ensuring our research adheres to the highest ethical standards. Following the ethical clearance, a pre-test will be conducted with a small sample to identify any issues with question clarity, order, or scale measurement. Based on the analysis of pre-test responses, scale items will be refined as necessary to improve reliability and validity. With the questionnaire refined, we will collect data through a panel company, targeting employees in remote working settings. The next phase is the analysis of quantitative data using SPSS for descriptive statistics and preliminary analyses, followed by testing the conceptual framework with AMOS for structural equation modelling or Hayes' PROCESS macro for mediation and moderation analyses. Therefore, if this paper is accepted for the conference, we will be able to present a preliminary if not full analysis.

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