The Influence of Hybrid Work Strategies on Inclusivity in the Workplace: A Case Study of CGIAR Centers, Nairobi

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Abstract—**Hybrid work strategies, integrating both physical and remote work, have become increasingly prevalent post-COVID-19. However, their impact on workplace inclusivity remains ambiguous. This study investigated the influence of hybrid work strategies on inclusivity at the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) centers in Nairobi, focusing on flexible work arrangements, ICT adoption, leadership strategies, and employee well-being initiatives. Utilizing a descriptive research design with a stratified random sample of 96 employees from a target population of 180, data was collected via structured questionnaires. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 21, employing descriptive and inferential statistics. The study achieved an 89.58% response rate from 86 returned questionnaires. Key findings indicate that flexible work arrangements (3.43), ICT adoption (3.12), leadership strategies (3.57), and employee well-being (3.65) significantly influence workplace inclusivity, with an overall mean of 3.44. The R-squared value of 0.574 suggests that these independent variables explain 57.4% of the variance in inclusivity. ANOVA results (p is 0.000 at 95% confidence) confirm a significant relationship between these hybrid work factors and inclusivity. The study concluded that hybrid work strategies significantly influence workplace inclusivity and recommends that CGIAR management focus on establishing better hybrid strategies to enhance employee inclusivity. Further research should explore the role of middle management in implementing and sustaining inclusive practices in a hybrid environment.**

Keywords: Hybrid work strategies, inclusivity, flexible work arrangements, ICT adoption, leadership strategies, employee well-being

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Research Study

Diversity, inclusivity, and equity are critical for organizational success globally, with many multinational companies implementing strategies to promote these principles. McKinsey & Company (2020) reported that companies with higher gender diversity in executive teams are more likely to have above-average profitability, highlighting the financial and inclusive benefits of diversity. In a globalized economy, embracing diversity is essential for competitiveness and innovation, particularly as increased cultural diversity necessitates inclusive strategies. While regions like Europe and North America often integrate inclusivity into corporate social responsibility, Africa and Asia face unique challenges such as tribalism and nepotism, though recognition of diversity benefits is growing.

In Kenya, despite constitutional efforts to promote unity and inclusivity, challenges persist regarding gender equality and ethnic diversity, with women being underrepresented in leadership and tribalism hindering workplace collaboration. Kenyan organizations are increasingly adopting DE&I programs to address these imbalances.

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid shift to remote work, disrupting traditional collaboration and highlighting disparities in technology access, potentially widening inequalities. The pandemic also exacerbated inequities for marginalized groups and introduced challenges in mitigating bias in virtual recruitment. As prolonged remote work proved unsustainable, hybrid models emerged, balancing remote and in-person work to offer flexibility and maintain essential interactions. These strategies have prompted adjustments in organizational culture and technology investments to support seamless communication and collaboration. Despite challenges in addressing resource disparities and fostering belonging, hybrid work promotes flexibility, productivity, and employee well-being.

Hybrid work arrangements have the potential to enhance inclusivity by enabling diverse participation in the workforce. In Kenya, hybrid work aligns with government efforts to promote innovation and technology, potentially reducing the gender gap by offering flexible options for women. CGIAR Centers in Nairobi, having transitioned from full physical presence to full remote and then to a hybrid model, offer a unique case study to examine the influence of flexible work arrangements, ICT adoption, leadership strategies, and employee well-being on inclusivity.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Diversity, inclusivity, and equity are fundamental to organizational success and employee well-being, with organizations like CGIAR Centers striving to cultivate

environments that value diverse perspectives and empower individuals. Hybrid work strategies, ideally, should enhance flexibility, productivity, and inclusivity. However, within CGIAR Centers in Nairobi, the adoption of hybrid strategies presents a nuanced picture, introducing challenges such as remote worker isolation and potential disparities in opportunities, which may hinder diversity and inclusivity efforts. The impact of leadership strategies and employee well-being on inclusivity in this hybrid environment remains unclear. There is a lack of empirical research examining these specific dynamics within CGIAR Centers, hindering the optimization of hybrid work environments for fostering inclusivity. A comprehensive investigation into the interplay between flexible work arrangements, ICT adoption, leadership strategies, and employee well-being initiatives is needed to bridge this gap and provide actionable insights for leaders.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to provide valuable insights into how hybrid work strategies influence inclusivity at CGIAR Centers-Nairobi. By examining the influence of flexible work arrangements, ICT adoption, leadership strategies, and employee well-being, this research aims to uncover ways to enhance workplace inclusivity and inform organizational policies and practices for a more inclusive and diverse work environment.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main objective was to establish the influence of hybrid work strategies on inclusivity in the workplace. Specific objectives included:

To assess the influence of flexible work arrangement within hybrid work setup on inclusivity in the CGIAR.

- To examine the influence of ICT adoption within hybrid work arrangement on inclusivity in the CGIAR.
- To establish the influence of leadership strategies within hybrid work setup on inclusivity in the CGIAR.
- To determine the connection between employee well-being initiatives within hybrid work setup on inclusivity at the CGIAR.

1.5 Research Questions

The research questions for the study were:
- To what extent does flexible work arrangement within a hybrid work setup influence inclusivity in CGIAR?
- How does ICT adoption within a hybrid work arrangement influence inclusivity in CGIAR?
- To what extent do leadership strategies within a hybrid work arrangement affect inclusivity in CGIAR?
- How do employee well-being initiatives within a hybrid work arrangement influence inclusivity in CGIAR?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The study's findings are beneficial to various stakeholders:
- Management of CGIAR Centers: Can leverage hybrid arrangements to boost employee engagement, productivity, organizational culture, talent attraction, cost savings, and business continuity.
- Employees of CGIAR Centers: Will benefit from improved work-life balance, job satisfaction, mental health, reduced commuting, cost savings, and opportunities for professional development.
- Local Communities of CGIAR Centers: Can experience reduced traffic congestion and pollution, and increased local business activity.
- Employers/Organizations of CGIAR Centers: Can achieve increased productivity, cost savings, and enhanced talent attraction and retention.
- Customers/Clients of CGIAR Centers: Will benefit from improved services and products due to a more diverse and inclusive workforce leading to innovative solutions and higher satisfaction.
- Society at Large: CGIAR Centers can serve as role models, promoting a more inclusive and equitable society with equal opportunities, and contributing to sustainable work practices and climate change mitigation.
- Scholars: Provides a nuanced understanding of inclusivity in hybrid environments, revealing how hybrid models affect diverse demographics, informing strategies for equitable access, and contributing to more inclusive and supportive workplace cultures.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviewed existing literature from various scholars relevant to the study's themes, encompassing the theoretical framework, empirical literature, and conceptual framework.

2.2 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The study was grounded on the Flexibility Stigma Theory, Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), Transformational Leadership Theory, and Job Demands-Resources theory.

2.2.1 Flexibility Stigma Theory

The Flexibility Stigma Theory (Timothy and Pamela, 2018) highlights potential negative perceptions faced by employees using flexible work arrangements. This theory posits that flexible arrangements, such as those in hybrid strategies, can be stigmatized, affecting how employees are perceived and potentially impacting their career advancement and inclusion. Stigma, as defined by Goffman (1990), refers to attributes that discredit an individual. Flexibility stigma arises from the perception that flexible work deviates from the ideal worker image, implying a lack of commitment, leading

to discrimination and negative career outcomes. It includes "poor worker stigma" (belief that flexible workers are less productive) and negative career consequences. Understanding and mitigating this stigma is crucial for ensuring all employees, regardless of work arrangement, feel valued and included.

2.2.2 Technology Acceptance Model

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), conceptualized by Fred Davis in 1989, provides a theoretical framework for evaluating the impact of ICT Adoption on workplace inclusivity. TAM aims to estimate and elucidate the process of users' adoption and utilization of new technology. Behavioral intention (BI) in this model is influenced by perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEOU). While both PU and PEOU affect BI, some scholars suggest PEOU has a stronger influence on PU than on BI. Davis (1989) proposed that attitude toward use (A) and perceived usefulness (PU) govern BI. Technologies associated with hybrid working arrangements facilitate crucial aspects like communication, collaboration, and organization. However, critics argue TAM insufficiently explains technology acceptance and usage in business environments, particularly in contexts like e-government. This study examines ICT adoption at an individual level to address these perceived weaknesses and analyze its impact on inclusivity.

2.3 Empirical Literature Review

- Flexible Work Arrangements and Inclusivity: Research by Kim and Lee (2020) in South Korea's technology sector found that flexible work arrangements positively influenced employees' perceptions of inclusivity. Similarly, Mutua and Wambua (2020) in Kenya's public sector found a positive relationship between flexible work arrangements and inclusivity. However, a study by Johnson and Smith (2021) in the Australian education sector found no significant association.

- ICT Adoption and Inclusivity: Raub and Steffen (2019) found a correlation between technology integrations and inclusivity. Conversely, Smith and Johnson (2020) found no statistically significant association between ICT adoption and inclusivity in the South Korean hospitality sector.

- Leadership Strategies and Inclusivity: Bartlett and Kang (2021) reported that leadership strategies positively affect diversity and inclusivity. However, Anderson and Patel (2022) found a negative effect of leadership strategies on diversity and inclusivity in the UK healthcare sector.

- Employee Well-being and Inclusivity: Huang and Ali (2018) found that employee well-being positively influenced perceptions of diversity and inclusivity in the Malaysian hospitality industry. Adams and Chen (2019) also found positive effects. However, Johnson and Martinez (2019) found mixed results, noting concerns that well-being programs could inadvertently exclude certain groups. Anderson and Patel (2020) also reported mixed results in a financial services firm. Mwebi and Kadaga (2020) found a noteworthy relationship in the Kenyan banking sector, while Omondi and Kamau (2021) found no such relationship in the same sector.

- Overall Inclusivity: Muthoni and Kimani (2017) found that diversity and inclusivity positively influenced organizational performance in the Kenyan banking sector, leading to higher employee engagement and productivity. Hernandez and Patel (2018) also found a positive impact of inclusivity on organizational performance in the US hospitality industry.

2.4 Conceptual Framework of the Research Study

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between hybrid work strategies (flexible work arrangement, ICT adoption, leadership strategies, and employee well-being initiatives) as independent variables and inclusivity in the workplace as the dependent variable.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the research design, study population, sample size and methods, data collection techniques, validity, reliability, data analysis, presentation, and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design. According to Sekaran (2018), this design allows for generating both numerical and expressive statistics to explore relationships and influences of various factors on workplace diversity and inclusivity. Schindler (2016) also supports that descriptive research provides clear information and conclusive findings.

3.3 Population of the Study

The target population for this study comprised 180 employees of CGIAR Centers in Nairobi, across all job types: Research Services (90), Support Services (60), and Management Services (30).

3.4 Sample and Sampling Techniques

A stratified random sampling technique was utilized, chosen for its ability to represent crucial aspects of the population within different subgroups or strata. Using the Yamane formula (1967) for a 95% confidence level, a sample size of 96 individuals was determined from the 180 employees. The sample consisted of 48 from Research Services, 32 from Support Services, and 16 from Management Services.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire, which allowed for reaching a large number of respondents quickly, providing sufficient

response time, ensuring confidentiality, and maintaining objectivity. Secondary data was reviewed through reports, manuals, journals, and books.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures

The researcher obtained a letter of introduction from HRMPEB and a NACOSTI research permit. Questionnaires were personally presented to respondents, allowing four days for completion before retrieval.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

The collected data was subjected to validity and reliability tests to ensure the quality of the research instruments.

3.8 Data Analysis and Presentation

Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version 21, employing descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (correlation and regression analysis). Quantitative data was presented using bar graphs and pie charts, while qualitative data was presented through descriptions.

4. DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Study's Response Rate

A total of 86 questionnaires were returned out of the 96 distributed, yielding a response rate of 89.58%.

4.2 Demographic Analysis

The sample included 41 females (47.67%) and 45 males (52.33%). Most participants were "between 31-35" years of age. A significant percentage (47.67%) had "Between 4-..." years of professional experience. The job functions were Research Services (52.33%), Support Services (30.23%), and Management Services (17.44%).

4.3 Analysis of Study Variables

- Flexible Work Arrangement: The statement "By concentrating work hours into fewer $days$, compressed work schedules can lead to higher productivity levels..." received the highest mean score (M = 3.67, SD = 1.202), indicating strong agreement on productivity benefits.
- Inclusivity: The study analyzed various aspects of inclusivity. "The organization ensures that all team members have equal access to information, resources, and opportunities for participation. This includes providing language support and alternative communication channels" received the highest mean score (M = 3.90, SD = 0.933), suggesting excellence in ensuring equal access to essential resources and communication tools. Other high-scoring aspects included inclusive policies for remote work (M=3.78, SD=0.887) and equitable opportunities (M=3.73, SD=0.818). Remote

workers' inclusion in team meetings scored 3.74 (SD = 0.897).
- Overall Mean for Independent Variables: Flexible work arrangement had a mean of 3.43, ICT adoption 3.12, leadership strategies 3.57, and employee well-being 3.65. The overall mean of the study was 3.44, indicating a significant influence on inclusivity.

4.4 Inferential Analysis

The regression analysis showed an R-squared value of 0.574, indicating that flexible work arrangements, ICT adoption, leadership strategies, and employee well-being explain 57.4% of the variance in workplace inclusivity.

The regression equation was: Y = 0.738 + (-0.032X1) + 0.026X2 + 0.011X3 + 0.030X4 + e.

- The constant term was statistically significant (B = 0.738, p = 0.001).
- Flexible work arrangements (X1) were not a significant predictor of inclusivity (B = -0.032, p = 0.554), suggesting no significant impact on inclusivity levels.
- ICT adoption (X2) was found to be a significant predictor of inclusivity (p < 0.05).
- Leadership strategies (X3) were a significant predictor of inclusivity (p < 0.05).
- Employee well-being (X4) was a significant predictor of inclusivity (p < 0.05).
- Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showed a p-value of 0.000 at a 95% confidence level, indicating a significant relationship between inclusivity and the independent variables (flexible work arrangement, ICT adoption, leadership strategies, and employee well-being).

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Discussion of the Research Study's Results

The study found that flexible work arrangements, ICT adoption, leadership strategies, and employee well-being initiatives collectively have a significant influence on inclusivity in the workplace.

The finding that flexible work arrangements did not significantly predict inclusivity aligns with some previous studies. This suggests that while flexible arrangements offer practical benefits, they alone might not guarantee inclusivity if not integrated with broader inclusive policies.

The positive and significant influence of ICT adoption on inclusivity supports the idea that technology can facilitate communication and collaboration among diverse teams, bridging gaps between remote and in-office workers. However, the weak correlation implies that simply implementing technology is not enough; accessibility and user-friendliness are crucial. This finding contrasts with some previous research that found no significant association between ICT adoption and inclusivity.

The significant impact of leadership strategies on inclusivity underscores the critical role of leaders in fostering an inclusive culture. Effective leaders who are trained to adopt inclusive strategies, seek diverse perspectives, and are held accountable for promoting inclusivity are essential. This aligns with some studies but contradicts others.

The significant predictive power of employee well-being on inclusivity suggests that fostering a supportive environment that addresses physical, mental, and emotional health positively influences how employees perceive inclusivity. Although statistically significant, the weak correlation indicates that while well-being contributes to inclusivity, it is not the sole determinant and practical significance may be limited. This aligns with some studies but also reflects the mixed findings in the literature.

5.2. Conclusion of the Study

The study concluded that hybrid work strategies factors, specifically ICT adoption, leadership strategies, and employee well-being initiatives, had a significant influence on inclusivity in the workplace. Flexible work arrangements, while a component of hybrid strategies, did not show a direct statistically significant impact on inclusivity in this specific context. Overall, the findings demonstrate that a combination of these elements, excluding flexible work arrangements as a standalone significant predictor, plays a crucial role in shaping workplace inclusivity at CGIAR Centers, Nairobi.

5.3. Recommendations of the Study

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Flexible Work Arrangements: Since flexible work arrangements alone did not significantly enhance inclusivity, HR practitioners should integrate these policies with comprehensive inclusivity strategies, including training, open communication, and regular assessments to meet diverse employee needs.
- ICT Adoption: Organizations should leverage technology to foster an inclusive work environment by investing in accessible, user-friendly ICT tools and providing necessary training. This can facilitate inclusive practices like virtual team-building and ensure communication platforms are inclusive.
- Leadership Strategies: Effective leadership is crucial. Leaders should be trained in inclusive leadership, encouraged to incorporate diverse perspectives in decision-making, and held accountable for promoting an inclusive culture.
- Employee Well-being: Organizations should prioritize employee well-being through comprehensive wellness programs addressing physical, mental, and emotional health. Creating a supportive work environment with access to counseling, wellness activities, and flexible work options is crucial, with regular feedback used to tailor programs.

- Holistic Strategy: HR should develop a holistic strategy encompassing inclusive policies, continuous training, leadership commitment, and regular monitoring, fostering open communication and employee engagement.
- Management Focus: The management of CGIAR should focus on establishing better hybrid strategies within its workplace to enhance inclusivity among employees.

5.4. Implication of the Research Study to Human Resource Practice

The study has several implications for HR practice:

- Integrated Flexible Work Policies: HR should integrate flexible work policies with comprehensive inclusivity strategies, ensuring they are complemented by inclusivity training, open communication, and regular assessments.
- Leveraging ICT for Inclusivity: HR professionals should invest in accessible ICT tools and training to facilitate inclusive practices and bridge gaps between remote and on-site workers.
- Developing Inclusive Leadership: HR must implement leadership development programs emphasizing inclusivity, training leaders to seek diverse perspectives and holding them accountable for fostering an inclusive workplace.
- Prioritizing Employee Well-being: HR should prioritize employee well-being through comprehensive wellness programs and a supportive work environment, soliciting regular feedback to tailor these programs.
- Holistic Inclusivity Strategy: HR should develop a holistic strategy encompassing inclusive policies, continuous training, leadership commitment, and regular monitoring, fostering open communication and employee engagement.

5.5. Recommendation for Further Research

Given that the R-squared of the study was 0.574, indicating that 42.6% of the variance in inclusivity is unexplained by the independent variables, there is a significant gap for further exploration. The researcher specifically recommends that further research should examine the role of middle management in implementing and sustaining inclusive practices in a hybrid work environment.

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