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Strategic Workforce Diversity Management and Innovation Performance: The Moderating Effect of Inclusive Organizational Climate in Zowasei, Lagos

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of strategic workforce diversity management on innovation performance and the moderating role of inclusive organisational climate at Zowasei, Lagos, Nigeria. The research specifically investigated how deliberate diversity management practices influence an organization's ability to generate new ideas, products, and processes. A descriptive quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted. Given the small population size of 78 employees, a census sampling technique was used, resulting in 78 valid responses (100% response rate). Data were collected using a structured five-point Likert-scale questionnaire and analysed with Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 4.0. The measurement model showed strong reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.82$), composite reliability (> 0.88), convergent validity (AVE > 0.65), and discriminant validity (HTMT < 0.85). The structural model revealed significant positive direct effects on innovation performance: strategic workforce diversity management ($\beta = 0.298$, $p < 0.001$) and inclusive organizational climate ($\beta = 0.261$, $p = 0.001$). The model explained 60.1% of the variance in innovation performance ($R^2 = 0.601$), with good predictive relevance ($Q^2 > 0$). A significant moderating effect was found. Inclusive organisational climate strengthened the relationship between strategic workforce diversity management and innovation performance ($\beta = 0.219$, $p = 0.002$), indicating that the positive impact of diversity management is amplified in the presence of a supportive, inclusive work environment. The findings demonstrate that in small and medium-sized firms operating in competitive environments like Lagos, strategic management of workforce diversity alone is insufficient; it must be supported by a strong inclusive organisational climate to drive innovation performance effectively. Zowasei's context highlights the importance of combining diversity initiatives with inclusion practices for sustained innovation. Recommendations include implementing structured diversity management policies, fostering psychological safety and fairness, and integrating inclusion into leadership and HR strategies to maximise innovation outcomes.

KEYWORDS: Strategic Workforce Diversity Management, Inclusive Organisational Climate, Innovation Performance.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the modern globalised and knowledge-based economy, workforce diversity is becoming an important strategic resource that organisations are appreciating in terms of promoting innovation and competitiveness. The term workforce diversity is used to refer to the existence of disparities amongst workers in gender, age, ethnicity, education, skills, and views. When managed well, diversity allows organisations to take advantage of a wide variety of ideas, experiences, and methods of solving problems and, thus, embrace creativity and performance of innovation (Tessema et al., 2023; Østergaard & Timmermans, 2023).

Strategic workforce diversity management is not just about representation but is a demonstration of the intentional creation and execution of policies and practices aimed at fostering inclusion, fairness, and collaboration among diverse employees. Companies that implement strategic diversity management tend to be more successful in improving the quality of decisions, triggering creativity, and achieving innovation results (Okatta et al., 2024). There is empirical evidence that diversity management is an important factor in innovative work behaviour, as it fosters the sharing of knowledge and employee interaction (Elamin et al., 2024).

Innovation performance, in turn, is the capacity of an organisation to generate new products, services, processes, or ideas that provide value and allow it to maintain a competitive advantage. The performance of innovation in contemporary organisations is becoming more associated with internal human resource practices, specifically diversity and inclusion policies. Research has indicated that companies that have increased the levels of diversity and inclusion have a better innovative potential because they combine their different views and ideas (Chaudhry et al., 2021; Finance Research Letters, 2025).

Nevertheless, the success of diversity in the workforce in boosting the level of innovation is highly influenced by the availability of an inclusive organisational climate. Inclusive organizational climate is defined as a state of work organisation where there is equity, respect, psychological safety, and a level of equal opportunity of every employee to make contributions. It has been found that diversity itself cannot be related to better performance but must be complemented by an inclusive climate in which employees can work together and eliminate interpersonal conflict (Chakraborty and Biswas, 2021; Khumalo and Zondo, 2024). Inclusiveness also increases staff engagement, confidence, and collaboration to boost the beneficial effect of diversity on the organisation (Jankelová et al., 2021).

In developing economies like Nigeria, especially in dynamic cities like Lagos, organisations are operating in a very competitive and ever-changing environment. Companies like Zowasei have to depend on human resources and innovation in order to be competitive. Considering the rising diversity of the workforce and the ever-growing need of the workforce to operate on an innovation-led basis, it is necessary that organisations strategically manage the diversity and maintain an inclusive climate that helps promote creativity and cooperation.

In spite of the increased significance of diversity and inclusion, a lot of organisations have trouble converting diversity in the workforce into actual results of innovation because of poor management practices and poor climates in the organisation. This highlights the importance of studying the effect that strategic workforce diversity management has on innovation performance, as well as analysing the degree to which inclusive organisational climate enhances this connection.

In the recent years, organisations have adopted the concept of workforce diversity as a way of improving the level of innovation, and organisational performance. Nonetheless, the benefits as outlined in the implementation of diversity programs have not been entirely achieved by most organisations in regard to the level of innovation. This implies that diversity in itself might not be enough to make innovation performance successful unless properly handled and conducive organisational environments are present.

Failing to manage workforce diversity strategically in a manner that will promote collaboration, knowledge sharing, and creativity is one of the greatest challenges that organisations have to cope with. Diversity can also cause barriers to communication, tensions, and fragmentation in most instances unless it is managed correctly, thus reducing its potential to enhance innovation (Tessema et al., 2023). Moreover, diversity representation is the aspect organisations usually concentrate on without giving enough attention to inclusion, which is essential in facilitating diverse workers to play an active role in achieving the organisational objectives.

Another sensitive matter is the absence of an inclusive organisational climate in most workplaces. Research has established that the organisational climate where employees work greatly determines the effects of diversity management on the organisational outcomes. In the absence of an inclusive atmosphere of fairness, trust, and psychological safety, employees will feel marginalised or under-appreciated, thus deterring innovation behaviour (Okatta et al., 2024; Kolb et al., 2024). This has seen the possible advantages of diversity not being maximised.

As it applies to the case of the Nigerian situation and specifically to Lagos, an organisation competes in a complex environment where only innovation can help it survive and grow. Nonetheless, the empirical evidence connected to the impacts of strategic workforce diversity management on innovation performance is insufficient in such contexts. It is more critical that little research has investigated the moderating effect of the inclusive organisational climate to reinforce this relationship, particularly in companies like Zowasei.

Thus, the gap that the current study will address is the unclear understanding of the impact of strategic workforce diversity management on innovation performance and the degree of influence on this correlation that the inclusive organisational climate can have or moderate. This lack of knowledge is an obstacle to the capacity of organisations to develop effective diversity and inclusion strategies to propel innovation and sustainable performance. The main objective of this study is to examine the effect of strategic workforce diversity management on innovation performance in Zowasei, Lagos, with particular emphasis on the moderating role of inclusive organisational climate. The specific objectives of the study are to:

i. Examine the effect of strategic workforce diversity management on innovation performance in Zowasei, Lagos.
ii. Assess the effect of inclusive organisational climate on innovation performance in Zowasei, Lagos.
iii. Evaluate the moderating effect of inclusive organisational climate on the relationship between strategic workforce diversity management and innovation performance in Zowasei, Lagos.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Strategic Workforce Diversity Management

Strategic workforce diversity management is the process in which an organisation knowingly and systematically recruits, manages and retains a diverse workforce in a manner that adds value to the organisation. It not only represents but also encompasses policies and practices that foster inclusion, equity, and effective exploitation of diverse talents. Effective diversity management is the one that allows the use of gender, ethnic, age, cultural, and experience differences as strategic resources that can promote creativity and decision-making (Okatta et al., 2024). According to the scholars, diversity managed in the right way will culminate to collaborative work, conflict minimisation, and improvement of organisational performance in terms of innovation and productivity. Nevertheless, diversity is not a sufficient precondition of improved performance, and inclusive practices and commitment of leadership should support it to deliver positive results (Chaudhry et al., 2021).

Innovation Performance

Innovation performance can be described as the capacity of an organisation to generate new ideas, products, services, or processes of greater efficiency and competitiveness. Mostly, it is quantified on the basis of indicators like creativity, product development, process improvement and technological advancement. Diverse workforces are associated with higher innovation performance as employees in the organisation provide diverse perspectives, knowledge, and problem solutions. These distinctions contribute to the creation of more ideas and the creation of innovative solutions (Elamin et al., 2024). Empirically, it has been revealed that companies that have high diversity and inclusion in the workplace record more successful results in terms of innovation than other companies that hire employees with a homogeneous workforce (Okatta et al., 2024).

Inclusive Organisational Climate

Inclusive organisational climate is a set of perceptions that employees share in relation to their workplaces as being fair, belonging, supported, and respected. It shows how much employees feel appreciated and trusted to do anything irrespective of their background. Diversity of workforce can be effectively converted into positive organisational results through an inclusive climate. It promotes psychological safety, participation and sharing of knowledge, which are critical in innovation. It has been demonstrated that diversity-driven initiatives become more productive in the context of an organisation with an inclusive climate in which employees are allowed to voice their opinions and cooperate (Bangura et al., 2025; Okatta et al., 2024).

Connection of Diversity Management, Inclusion and Innovation.

Innovation performance is not necessarily directly related to workforce diversity. Although diversity may bring different views, it may cause conflict and inefficiencies unless well handled. An inclusive organisational climate is, thus, a very important process that can help organisations to enjoy the fruits of diversity. Studies have shown that inclusive practices enhance the interaction between diversity and innovation through facilitation of collaboration and minimisation of interpersonal conflicts. When diversity management is accompanied by inclusive climates in organisations, the latter is more likely to reach greater levels of creativity, innovation, and overall performance (Chakraborty and Biswas, 2021; Khumalo and Zondo, 2024; Chaudhry et al., 2021).

2.2 Theoretical Review

Social Identity Theory

The Social Identity Theory is the idea that people categorise themselves and others into social groups depending on factors like race, gender and age. These groupings may result in in-group favouritism and out-group discrimination, which can strangle cooperation in diverse workplaces (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). This theory can be applied in the context of workforce diversity in that diversity does not always work out well as it may end up in conflict and poor performance. Nevertheless, if organisations contribute to the creation of an inclusive climate, employees become more inclined to the relationship with the organisation as a unit than with subgroups, which leads to increased cooperation and innovation.

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View (RBV) holds that competitive advantage is attained by organisations with valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources (Barney, 1991). Diversity in human capital has been regarded as a strategic resource that may lead to improved performance and innovation of the organisation. A diverse workforce offers a broad pool of skills, knowledge, and viewpoints when properly managed that competitors can be hard-pressed to match.

Categorisation Elaboration Model (CEM)

The Categorization-Elaboration Model describes how diversity affects team performance through two competing processes: social categorisation and information elaboration (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Categorisation can cause conflict, while information elaboration increases creativity and knowledge sharing. This minimises negative categorisation effects and encourages information flow through an inclusive organisational climate, which enhances innovation performance.

2.3 Empirical Review

Empirical research has constantly demonstrated that diversity management of workforce has a positive impact on innovation and organisational performance. As an example, Elamin et al. (2024) discovered that diversity management greatly strengthens

innovative work behaviour due to the higher engagement of employees in an emerging economy. Equally, Chaudhry et al. (2021) also found out that firms that have high diversity and inclusion practices are more innovative, and this is to confirm that inclusive settings are more creative and generate ideas. Another study conducted by Wolor et al. (2025) developed the fact that diversity inclusion practices are highly effective in enhancing organisational innovation through the generation of collaboration and sharing of knowledge among employees.

Moreover, it has been demonstrated that diversity of workforce has a positive impact on the employee performance and organisational performance, especially under the condition of effective management practices (Khumalo & Zondo, 2024; Chakraborty & Biswas, 2021). Moreover, meta-analytic data also show that diversity and inclusion programs enhance innovation, employee engagement, and overall organisational performance through the establishment of favourable workplaces (Okatta et al., 2024). Notably, the moderating role of inclusive organisational climate is pointed out as important in studies. It has been found that diversity, in itself, does not lead to innovation, however, it is only effective when an inclusive climate is present to promote collaboration, psychological safety, and knowledge sharing (Chaudhry et al., 2021; Bangura et al., 2025). In spite of such findings, the majority of empirical studies have been carried out either in developed or non-African contexts, although little research has been carried out on Nigerian firms. This leaves a loophole in how diversity management and inclusive climate affect innovation performance together in companies like Zowasei in Lagos.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this research, a descriptive quantitative cross-sectional survey design was used. It is suitable for studying the relationship between variables at one point in time and it is commonly employed in the study of organisations and management. It is consistent with the existing research on workforce diversity management and innovation in developing economies (Okatta et al., 2024; Elamin et al., 2024).

The research is based on the positivist research paradigm, which affirms the application of structured tools and statistical methods to test a hypothesis (Hair et al., 2022).

The study population was all employees and managerial employees of Zowasei (Zowasel), Lagos with an estimated strength of 78 employees taking part in this study. This number is within the range of the 51 to 200 employees that have been documented in company profiles (Zowasel, 2025). By the fact that the population in question is relatively small, the chosen study method was a total enumeration (census sampling method), with all 78 members of staff serving as the sample. This method will remove sampling bias and provide total representation of the population (Saunders et al., 2019). The structured questionnaire was used to collect data on a five-point Likert scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Seventy-eight questionnaires were sent and returned, which can be termed as 100 percent response rate, which is deemed sufficient enough to conduct statistical analysis when conducting research in social science (Hair et al., 2022).

Measurement Instruments

The survey tool was designed into four sections that represented the study variables:

Strategic Workforce Diversity Management (SWDM): The measure consists of four items based on Okatta et al. (2024) and Tessema et al. (2023).

• Innovation Performance (IP): The scale consists of four items based on the adaptation of Elamin et al. (2024) and Chaudhry et al. (2021).

• Inclusive Organisational Climate (IOC): An item measured on four questions based on Khumalo and Zondo (2024) and Bangura et al. (2025) items.

Measurement of all constructs was done using reflective indicators on a Likert scale.

Instead, expert review ensured content validity, and the criteria of PLS-SEM measurement models allowed measuring construct reliability and validity (Hair et al., 2022).

Analytical Strategy: PLS-SEM 4.0

The analysis of data was performed with the help of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM 4.0) according to the recommendations of Hair et al. (2022).

PLS-SEM was selected due to:

i. Its applicability in predictive and exploratory study.
ii. It is capable of dealing with small samples.
iii. Its ability to work with non-normal data distributions.
iv. The extent to which it can use complex models with moderating effects.

The analysis was done in two stages:

Measurement model evaluation: reliability and validity.

• Structural model test: hypothesis test.

Statistical significance was tested by bootstrapping 5,000 resamples. The product indicator approach was employed in the analysis of the moderation effect (Ringle et al., 2022).

4. RESULTS

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 78)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	41	52.6
	Female	37	47.4
	Total	78	100.0
Age Group	Below 25	9	11.5
	25–35	34	43.6
	36–45	20	25.6
	46–55	10	12.8
	Above 55	5	6.4
	Total	78	100.0
Qualification	O'Level	5	6.4
	OND/HND	13	16.7
	B.Sc.	33	42.3
	Master's	21	26.9
	Ph.D.	6	7.7
	Total	78	100.0
Work Experience	Below 2 yrs	11	14.1
	2–5 yrs	27	34.6
	6–10 yrs	23	29.5
	Above 10 yrs	17	21.8
	Total	78	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2026

The results indicate balanced gender representation. The dominant age group (25–35 years) reflects a youthful workforce typical of technology-driven firms in Lagos. Most respondents possess at least a bachelor's degree, ensuring adequate understanding of organisational practices.

4.2 Measurement Model Assessment

Following Hair et al. (2022), reliability and validity were assessed.

Table 2: Measurement Model Results

Construct	Item	Loading	A	CR	AVE
SWDM	SWDM1	0.801	0.826	0.885	0.659
	SWDM2	0.822			
	SWDM3	0.784			
	SWDM4	0.809			
IOC	IOC1	0.829	0.838	0.892	0.673
	IOC2	0.815			
	IOC3	0.808			
	IOC4	0.821			
IP	IP1	0.841	0.854	0.902	0.698
	IP2	0.853			
	IP3	0.826			
	IP4	0.844			

All loadings exceed 0.70, Cronbach's Alpha values are above 0.70, CR values exceed 0.80, and AVE values are above 0.50, confirming convergent validity (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 3: Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Construct	SWDM	IOC	IP
SWDM	—		
IOC	0.472	—	
IP	0.639	0.671	—

All values are below 0.85, confirming discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015).

4.3 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Table 4: Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Path	B	t-value	p-value	f^2	Decision
H1	SWDM → IP	0.298	3.912	0.000***	0.152	Supported
H2	IOC → IP	0.261	3.441	0.001***	0.131	Supported

Note: *** p < 0.001.

The model explains $R^2 = 0.601$ of innovation performance, indicating substantial explanatory power (Hair et al., 2022).

Table 5: Moderation Effect

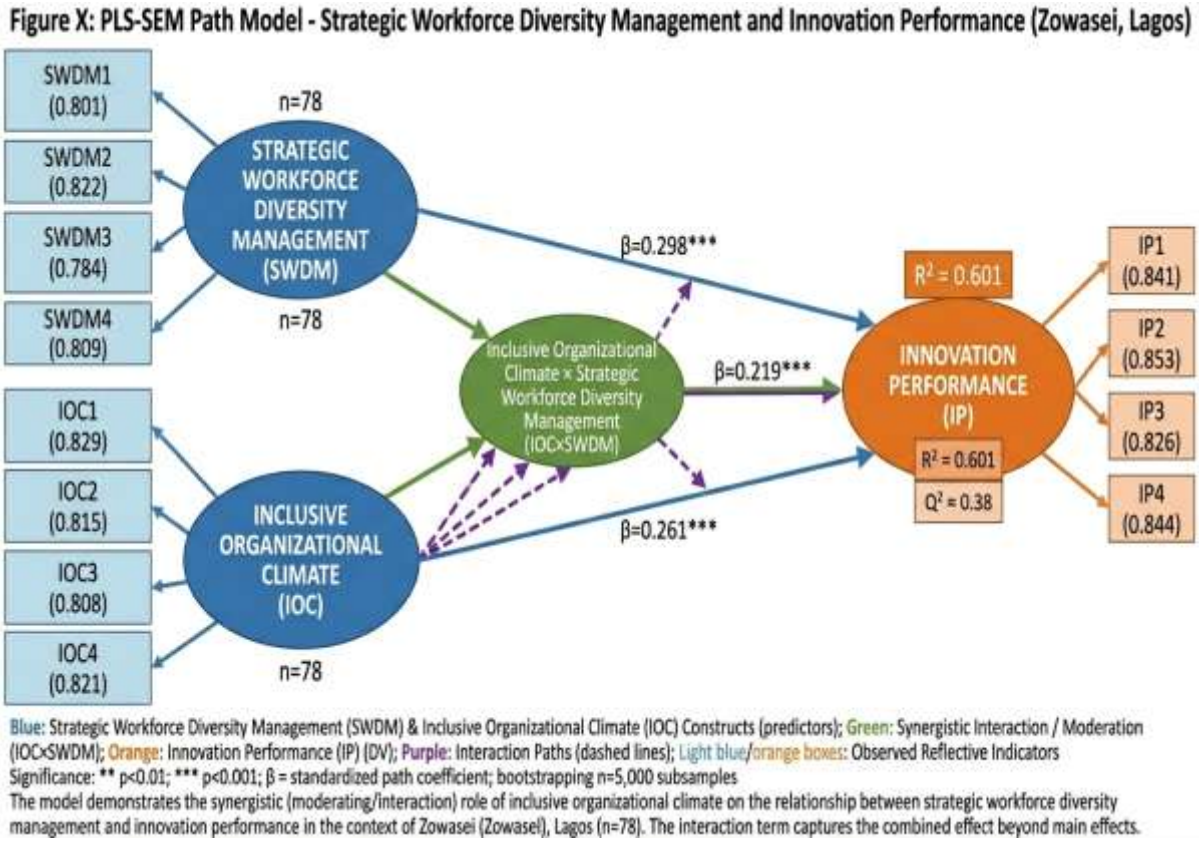
Path	B	t-value	p-value	f^2	Decision
SWDM × IOC → IP	0.219	3.102	0.002***	0.084	Supported

Note: *** p < 0.001.

The results confirm that inclusive organisational climate significantly moderates the relationship between workforce diversity management and innovation performance.

4.4 PLS-SEM Path Model

Figure X: PLS-SEM Path Model - Strategic Workforce Diversity Management and Innovation Performance



DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of the present study show that strategic workforce diversity management and the presence of an inclusive organisational climate serve as key factors of innovation performance at Zowasei, Lagos. The findings also support the existence of an important

moderating role of inclusive organisational climate, where the existence of this moderator enhances the connection between diversity management and innovation.

The positive impact of strategic workforce diversity management on the performance of innovation is high. Organisations that consciously adopt policies and practices that appreciate differences in gender, age, ethnicity, education and experience are able to create an atmosphere that encourages creativity, sharing of knowledge and enhances problem-solving. This result is consistent with the available literature that demonstrates that the effective management of diversity positively impacts innovative work behaviour and organisational creativity as a whole, especially in the emergent economies (Elamin et al., 2024; Okatta et al., 2024).

The organisational climate is also inclusive, and it has a strong positive direct impact on innovation performance. An equitable, respectful, psychologically safe and equal opportunity work environment will help employees share ideas freely, work in a team, and participate in innovative work. It is corroborated by research, which highlights the relevance of favourable climates in facilitating the transformation of workforce disparities into certain innovation deliverables (Chaudhry et al., 2021; Khumalo and Zondo, 2024).

Nevertheless, the greatest revelation is the huge moderating nature of inclusive organisational climate. The interaction effect (SWDM × IOC → IP: $\beta = 0.219 = -p= 0.002$) is statistically significant which shows that the positive impact of strategic workforce diversity management on the performance of innovation is stronger when it is supported by a highly inclusive organisational climate. This is to say that diversity in itself is not good but its advantages are enhanced when the employees perceive that they are important, respected and free to express themselves without fearing rejection or intimidation. This confirms the opinion that an inclusive climate is an important boundary condition that can be used to mobilise the creative resources of a diverse workforce to the fullest (Bangura et al., 2025; Chakraborty and Biswas, 2021).

The structural model explains significant differences in innovation performance ($R^2 = 0.601$), and predictive relevance is supported ($Q^2 > 0$). To some extent these findings contrast with the views that diversity management inherently enhances innovation, but on the other hand they point out that the efficiency of diversity practices is significantly improved when a strong inclusive climate is found (Chaudhry et al., 2021; Wolor et al., 2025).

In general, organisations that are strategic in managing diversity of workforce and at the same time developing a truly inclusive organisational environment like Zowasei in Lagos are at a better position to realize greater performance in terms of innovation. Diversity initiatives complemented with an inclusive practice are an effective channel to sustainability in business-level innovation and competitive edge in a competitive business environment like that of Nigeria.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has already determined that strategic workforce diversity management and inclusive organisational climate are the most important factors that drive innovation performance at Zowasei, Lagos. Strategic diversity management brings diversity in opinion and ideas whereas an inclusive climate makes sure that the differences are properly utilised with the help of collaboration, trust, and psychological safety.

More to the point, the organisational climate of inclusivity is an important moderator that enhances the influence of diversity management on innovation performance. Companies with a purposeful diversity policy coupled with a conducive inclusive culture have a better basis for innovativeness and long-term competitiveness, particularly in a dynamic industry in emerging economies such as Nigeria.

On the findings and conclusions, the recommendations are as follows:

i. Design and enact effective strategic policies covering all levels of workforce diversity management that extend beyond representation to cover adequate employee recruitment, training and career advancement.
ii. Participatively encourage an organisational environment that is inclusive and welcoming through fostering fairness, respect, psychological safety, and open communication so that every employee will feel important and empowered to contribute.
iii. Conduct periodic diversity and inclusion training for leaders and employees to create awareness and competencies required to deliver effective leadership in diverse teams.
iv. Include the idea of diversity management and inclusion efforts within the overall organisational strategy, and make sure that leadership engages in them and constantly controls their joint impact on the performance of the innovation process.

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