

Equal Work for All: The Lived Experiences of the Marginalized Workers on the Diversity and Inclusion Approach of Business Establishments

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ABSTRACT

This paper unfolded the lived experiences of marginalized workers in a diverse and inclusive workplace and how business establishments implement diversity and inclusion in employing marginalized workers. It encompassed discovering how various organizations define the concept of equal work for all and to what extent it covers.

Despite emerging literature on workplace diversity and inclusion, marginalized workers face many forms of discrimination before, during, and after employment. Most of them revealed being outnumbered by the majority, still having a feudalistic nature, having limited social mobility, lack of company protection, mismatched jobs, access concerns, and discrimination.

The researchers aim to pave the way for business establishments to uphold the significance of implementing diversity and inclusion that could bring value to organizations. From there on, this study may serve as a foundation for developing and reviewing the existing policies of business establishments eliminating the margin towards cultivating a society that embraces all.

Keywords: Equal Work for All, Inclusion, Diversity, Marginalized Workers, Business Establishments

INTRODUCTION

Diversity in the workforce refers to an organization's hiring of a varied team that reflects the society in which it operates. While there are infinite differences between people, most of us subconsciously define diversity by a few social categories such as gender, race, age, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinions, national or social origin, property, birth or other statuses (*What Is the Meaning Of Diversity & Inclusion in the Workplace in 2021?* | Built In, n.d.). Diversity and inclusion are intertwined concepts, but they are not interchangeable. Diversity refers to an entity's representation or make-up while inclusion refers to how well different groups of people's contributions, presence, and perspectives are valued and connected to the environment (Bush, 2021). Several organizations have established diverse and inclusive workplace cultures. The more organizations and institutions that promote one another's variety, the more valued and acceptable it may become (Stahl, 2021).

Every citizen has the right to obtain equitable employment opportunities hence, the International Labor Organization (ILO) as the sole tripartite United Nations agency since 1919, brought together governments, employers, and workers from 187 member states. The agency has the function to establish labor standards, formulate policies, and design programs that promote decent employment for all women and men (About the ILO, n.d.). Together with its partners, the ILO aims for decent employment for all. It advocates worldwide human and labor rights and social justice. The Philippines as its member state has established an

ILO Country Office for the Philippines (CO-Manila) which offers assistance through its Decent Work Country Programme, which tackles inadequacies in decent work in the nation. To develop bridges between its position as a standard-setter of services and programs for the nation's people, the ILO implements initiatives using financing from international donors and cooperation with local actors (International Labour Organization, n.d.)

On the local scale, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) mandates Equal Work Opportunities for All which provides that the state shall ensure protection to labor, encourage full employment, give equitable job opportunities regardless of gender, race, or creed, and regulate employee-employer interactions (*Rights of employees / GOVPH*. (n.d.). Further enforcing this policy, Former President Rodrigo Roa Duterte signed Executive Order No. 100, which institutionalizes the government's diversity and inclusion program. It intends to remove barriers to employment and foster equal opportunities for all Filipinos without any distinctions (Executive Order No. 100, 2019). Specifically, in the Philippines, there are workers who belong to the marginalized sectors, which are defined according to Republic Act 8425 as the *basic sectors that are disadvantaged or marginalized sectors of the Philippine local communities, particularly farmer-peasants, artisanal fisherfolk, formal and migrant workers, informal workers, indigenous peoples, and cultural communities, women, differently-abled persons, senior citizens, victims of calamities and disasters, youth and students, children, cooperatives, and non-government organizations* (Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Act. (1998).

With several governments and non-governmental campaigns, initiatives, and programs, society has made progress toward providing marginalized workers and employees with an inclusive and diverse workplace on a local and global scale. There are still places for development, such as not accommodating or acknowledging other underprivileged workers and employees.

Highlighted in this study are some narrations of the lived experiences shared by some of the marginalized workers in their workplaces. Catherine Joy Guinto, who joined Holcim Philippines' nationwide network of ready-mix concrete plants five years ago as an administrative assistant, is now in-charge of the production of the said company. She asserted that she was the only female and the youngest worker in the crew at that time. She initially found it challenging since she felt the need to constantly demonstrate her abilities. On the other side, her coworkers were very encouraging, frequently sharing their experiences and pointing out areas where she might improve (Holcim Philippines Shares Success Stories of Female Employees For, 2017). Another case of an amazing experience of Andy Kneen, a Human Resources Manager for Gas in Projects and Technology and Chair of the enABLE Network in the Netherlands was published by Shell Philippines (n.d.). Andy was first drawn to Shell because of its capacity to recognize and accept diversity because he was involved in a car accident not long after receiving his university degree. After treatments and recuperation, he said that Shell was the first company to get back to him even though he was in a wheelchair, but Shell made it clear it wasn't an issue.

On the other hand, Mira, a deaf, shared how challenging and frustrating it is to apply for a job because there are no interpreters during the interview even though she indicated in the resumé that she is deaf. Others would say directly that they are seeking "normal persons" for the position. In a documentary series, COCONUTS TV on IFLIX, Glorian Tomen, a little person shared her narrative as someone who is of short stature due to a medical condition. She said that there is a lack of awareness, as evidenced by certain people/TV networks using the "M Word" or "midget" to refer to people with dwarfism which is considered a pejorative term. They are still unaware that it is unacceptable. However, the difficulties of Filipino minorities extend beyond derogatory slurs. Little people have been challenged all across the world, from a lack of access to basic facilities to a lack of media exposure, but Tomen believes it is even worse in the Philippines. No law that directly protects little people is implemented and they are simply considered as people with disabilities or PWDs (Coconut Manila, 2018).

Different kinds of discrimination are experienced by marginalized workers before, during, and after employment (ILO Helpdesk Factsheet No. 5, 2009). For instance, requiring applicants to be a certain height, could disproportionately disqualify women and people from certain ethnic groups. This would be indirect discrimination unless the specified height is necessary to do the specific job. Additionally, some firms require employees to retire early due to their old age (Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, 2021). Service establishments such as malls and restaurants rarely employ anybody above the age of 25. There have also been complaints that returning Overseas Filipino Workers, or OFWs, are having trouble finding work since employers prefer younger workers according to Harding et al. (2018). Discrimination emerges in judgments against religious names or cultural identifying marks for Indigenous Peoples, such as tattoos and ornaments according to International Alert (2017). One big issue with slurs and microaggressions, including jokes, is that they are not usually taken seriously by the management. “Negritos,” “terrorist,” “dibidibidi” (a term referring to pirated DVDs sold on sidewalks), and “moklo” are all slurs that are frequently used as derogatory designations for IP or Muslim personnel. Regarding LGBTQIA+ workers, discrimination persists throughout the hiring process and throughout the employment cycle with them being intimidated, mobbed, and sexually or physically assaulted in severe circumstances (International Labour Organization, 2015).

All things considered, this study unfolds the lived experiences of marginalized workers in a diverse and inclusive workplace environment; the business establishments that acknowledge and embrace the implementation of diversity and inclusion and the extent it covers.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the Qualitative method and used virtual interviews to gather data from the informants. The researchers’ goal is to gather first-hand data from the participants to arrive at reasonable conclusions and recommendations.

The tradition of inquiry that guided this study is the Narrative approach. It pertains to biographic experiences as narrated by an individual who has lived with them and can be a story that indicates a specific event, reflects on important life issues, or an individual’s whole life. The unique aspect of the contemporary narrative approach is its focus on meaning-making rather than just the documentation of an experience or a history (SAGE Publication, 2015).

The researchers made use of a semi-interview guide questionnaire in collecting data from the informants of the study. This centers on unfolding the lived experiences and recommendations of marginalized workers in a diverse and inclusive workplace environment, unraveling how business establishments embrace and implement diversity and inclusion in employing the so-called marginalized workers. Lastly, how various institutions and organizations define the concept of equal work for all and to what extent it covers.

The participants of this study are as follows: a chief labor and employment officer, a labor advocacy officer from the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines, a company president, a human resource manager, and a relationship manager as the study’s key informants; the secondary informants are the employees coming from management and the sectors of elderly workers, LGBTQIA+ members, former Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), Persons with Disability (PWDs), Out of School Youth (OSY), and lastly, solo parents. The fourteen (14) informants came from different industries considered as marginal workers

The study is conducted in selected industries in the Philippines however, one (1) informants works overseas. The researchers conducted an online interview given the constraint of the face-to-face set-up due to the pandemic. Through the use of online platforms, the researchers were able to connect with the participants of this study.

In order to guarantee the validity and accuracy of the information from the participants of this study, the following criteria was set to the informants of the study, to wit must be:

- 18 years old and above
- Working in any industry
- At least 2 years of working in their current company
- Should represent the following sector:
 - Elderly Workers
 - LGBTQIA+ members
 - Former Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL)
 - Persons with Disability (PWD)
 - Out of School Youth (OSY)
 - Solo Parents

The key informants included in this study consist of five (5) participants that represents the labor sectors. Two (2) from the government sector while the three (3) came from the private sector. This aided in uncovering the lived experiences of the marginalized workers in a diverse and inclusive workplace environment, unraveling how business establishments embrace and implement diversity; mainstreaming the concept of equal work for all and the extent it covers as representatives of their chosen institution.

The study is deemed sensitive hence, the researchers made sure to protect and minimize potential risks by ensuring that the classified sets of open-ended questions has undergone evaluation by the University Ethics Committee. The researchers also prepared a Filipino-translated version of the guide questionnaire.

The relevant data were collected through various methods digitally and virtually. Certain study procedures and ethical considerations were also observed to ensure the validity and reliability of the data.

Most of the interviews made use of Google Meet, Zoom Meetings, and Messenger video calls for the convenience of the informants, hence, one (1) participant were interviewed via phone call conversation.

Given that this study is qualitative research, it highlighted the most significant answers collected from the participants during the interview. The informants' responses serve as a strong basis for the researchers and were the primary source of the raw data that serves as the foundation of the research study.

Through the use of thematic analysis, the narrative review as the primary technique was employed by the researchers in gathering the key responses of the informants. By combining many sources of information and evidences, the researchers were able to create an informative collection of themes that academically addresses the major point of this study.

RESULTS

The Concept Equal Work for All – The definition in this section was broken down into four (4) primary subheadings, such as, it must be given regardless of demographic background; skills and capabilities; discrimination-free; and unique perspectives. Given that the concept was defined as such by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), *“the state shall safeguard labor, encourage full employment, give equitable job opportunities regardless of gender, race, or creed, and regulate employee-employer interactions.”* Among the definitions drawn from the participant narratives, the most prevalent view is that it must be given regardless of an employee's age, gender, religion, social background, race, color, or disability. According to DOLE, several employers and employees from diverse sectors in the Philippines accept and share the same basic idea of this statement. Employees who suffer from or have conditions that are viewed as strange by society must be provided the same opportunity or chance as those normal employees.

Disparities should not be taken into account when hiring or employing employees. Participants also mentioned it's highly dependent on the skills and capabilities of the employees. Numerous participants emphasized in their personal narratives that an employee's opportunity depends on what they can bring to the table, how much they contribute to the job, and how competent they are at the task at hand. As a result, opportunities vary based on the skills, capabilities, and even character of an employee. An additional definition that surfaced is being able to work and be hired without facing any prejudice. Discrimination in the workplace is related to equal employment opportunities for all. The participants were adamant that the presence of discrimination among marginalized workers is when being casted of equal employment opportunities for all. Particularly, vulnerable workers responded that this idea may protect them against feeling discriminated against at any stage of employment.

Equal work opportunities for all is a concept that must be deep-rooted in the corporate DNA of every organization. Another participant defined it as the existence of equal work opportunities for all because employees must be heard by their management. This is one of the more intriguing definitions that some of the participants have offered.

The Importance of Equal Work Opportunities for All. There are six (6) major reasons why this concept is significant to the participants. *First, this enhanced and improved employee performance, productivity, confidence, and morale; employees gained access to employment; it reduced unfairness; improved recruitment by increasing the pool of employment; inclusive growth; and the feeling of "No one is left behind."*

One of the major points made by participants regarding the need for equal work opportunities is that it boosts and improves the employees' performance. They believe that having this concept in place has an impact on employee's performance, especially for marginalized employees who believe that the organization values them and does not discriminate against them. It also leads them to give their all at work and increase their productivity compared with organizations with a toxic environment because according to them various participant accounts that their performance is affected when the environment is toxic. Another opinion mentioned is gaining access to employment, which is also a considerable reason for the participants why equal work opportunities for all is beneficial to them. One of our participants said that with equal employment opportunities for all, applicants will feel less intimidated about applying for a job because they will know that employers will hire them regardless as to who they are and the background they have. As a result, more applicants will find employment because anti-discrimination measures are put in place to help them realize their potential. The third justification according to the informants is that it promotes the concept of fairness. According to their narratives, the unfair practice experienced by the informants is manifested in the hiring procedure, the benefits they received from their employers, promotion, and all other opportunities when they are being evaluated. As we all know, biases and stigmas exist in society, and they may affect someone who has the authority to hire and manage marginalized groups. As a result of the factors listed, they are vulnerable to unfairness and inequality at the workplace.

On the other hand, participants believe that equal work opportunities for all are important because they improve recruitment by increasing the pool of applicants. One participant mentioned that when they opened for hiring, specifically looking for people with disabilities, within 24 hours, more than six hundred applicants flooded their company. Participants also agreed that providing everyone with equal opportunities is crucial because it fosters inclusive growth. One participant said that equal work opportunities for all has a cascading effect on the entire company. In particular, if marginalized workers were given equal opportunity, it would affect their performance, which would help the company to make profit since the biggest asset of the company is valued and treated fairly. Finally, participants believe that "no one is left behind." The idea of equal work opportunities provides employees a sense of belonging in their workplace.

The Concept of Diversity and Inclusivity in the Workplace. Most of the participants said that having a diverse and inclusive workplace benefits the marginalized workers, business establishments, and society

because it raises employees' morale knowing that they are valued, treated equally and has a sense of security. Participants explained that a workplace is considered diverse and inclusive if it promotes equal rights and opportunity to all employees regardless of their gender, race, age, ethnicity, physical ability, sexual orientation, religious views, and so on. One informant said if a company welcomes its employees genuinely, perceive them as more than just a number but also see in them their abilities underlying those characteristics. One informant described how they create diversity and inclusivity in their company, claiming that they do not base the hiring decision on the person's religion or the type of family they came from, whether they are from the LGBTQIA+ community or have tattoos, as long as they are qualified. Another mentioned he was welcome with open arms from person with disabilities, and he also had coworkers who are single parents and even members of the LGBTQIA+ community and added it was never an issue in their organization as long as they perform their job well.

The Benefit of Inclusion and Diversity in the Workplace. The informants reiterate that it boosts the morale of the employees; Also, it maximizes the employees' potential, thirdly, it creates a feeling of sense of belongingness, It also gives them the benefit to learn from each other since they have different specializations. The organization also gains from increasing employee productivity with more sales, increased capacity, and business expansion and growth. Most participants mentioned that because each marginalized worker has unique skills and expertise, they are allowed to openly share their knowledge with one another, not only would this be beneficial for the marginalized workers but also for the business establishments and society as a whole. And lastly, it reduced the social problems, preventing the marginalized workers from committing crimes. Most secondary informants claim that they feel valued by their company which helps them to bring out the best in them without being judged or discriminated against. They are given the opportunity to learn from each other which contributes to the growth of the company and maintaining the balance in the society.

Criteria to be considered as Marginalized Workers. The key informants define that the disadvantaged workforce is being considered as a minority group from the agriculture and fishing industries; the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW); Persons with Disabilities (PWD); former Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL). On the other hand, the secondary informant said it also includes the Solo Parents, members of the LGBTQIA+ Community, and People with Disabilities (PWD). Some of the participants continue to be hated due to their toxic workplace and a lack of diversity and inclusion awareness in their workplaces. However, the participating businesses are inclusive of their employees and kind toward them, ensuring that they are not maltreated at work. The majority of participants feel and think that because the business has an inclusion and diversity program, they are not underrepresented in their institution.

The Marginalized Workers. The following are the factors that the key informants identifies an employee as marginalized at work: being outnumbered by the majority, having a feudalistic personality, having poor social mobility, having a criminal record, being unique or isolated, and not having company protection. However, an informant said that while the programs and HR perks are well-detailed and targeted at an individual level; the participants of the study mentioned they don't see themselves as marginalized as long as the company benefits covers everyone; guarantees employee are understood and taken cared of; sets a clear mission and vision that promotes opportunity for everyone in the workplace. Secondary informants said that the corporate economy, job mismatch, issue on accessibility and discrimination form part to being considered marginalized at work; the initiatives of the organization to attend to the needs of the personnel, clear-cut policies and regulations which ensure every employee feels welcome at work, and the fact that they receive similar benefits led to some informants feel they are not excluded at work.

The Companies Initiative to Promote Inclusion and Diversity in Workplaces. According to the informants, there are two major categories that promotes inclusion and diversity in workplaces, One, is the presence of clear policies in the business for marginalized workers and secondly, initiatives that promote diversity and inclusion at workplaces.

The following are some of the existing laws according to the informants that supports inclusion and diversity in workplaces implemented by business establishments, to wit: the Gender and Development Program (GAD), the policies on wage increase, expanded maternity leave, anti-discrimination against sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression.

Providing the marginalized workers job opportunities especially the sectors of the elderly, PWDs, solo parents, and out-of-school youth promotes a diverse and inclusive work environment.

On the other hand, a significant portion of these initiatives are primarily focus on the LGBTQIA+ community, according to them, receive efforts that addresses their basic needs. The fact that some businesses don't have clear policies for marginalized employees is even stressful according to some interviewed participants.

The Challenges Encountered by Organization and Individuals beyond Inclusion and Diversity. The two (2) perspective presents the challenges encountered by organizations and individuals i.e. access to tools and services, appropriate information dissemination on the concept of diversity and inclusion, wide discrimination among the LGBTQIA+ community and the like are those considered by the informants. The business also bears the expenses for the marginalized workers, the elderly, the indigenous people, the LGBTQIA+ community, and having solo parents at workplaces.

With the collected data, one idea stands out: prejudice against marginalized employees, including PWDs, the elderly, former PDLs, indigenous people, and the LGBTQIA+ community. Our investigation also found management replies that stereotyped and denigrated minority workers. Discrimination still exists, even from employers. "Palakasan System" or Padrino System is another unanticipated barrier to diversity and inclusion.

Strengthening the Human Capital uncovers the reasons why companies should keep on employing marginalized workers. This explains why marginalized employees stay in their jobs. Diversity and inclusion at work help people, companies, and society. Letting them work helps their family and allows them gain financially and have social mobility. Hiring and keeping underrepresented individuals from varied origins gives organizations diverse viewpoints and methods.

Inclusive workplace see them as qualified individuals who can bring value whether a "culture fit" or a "culture add" and contribute to the overall success of the organization. KI 3 believes that some corporations recruit underprivileged individuals as part of their corporate social obligation to assess who performs better. Workers keep working because of the salary, income to support their family, and the chance to work. They stay because of the company's culture, atmosphere, pleasant coworkers, competent management, and employer treatment.

Key informants stated that being alive implies being in a "We" world, not a "Me" world. Allowing marginalized workers to work has a rippling effect from the worker himself to the whole society. Success comes from everyone working together to tackle the nation's concerns. Terminating workers leads the next employer to question why they were dismissed, which may prevent them from getting recruited again. This can lead to criminality and broader social problems. They were dismissed for transgression, not for being marginalized.

Raising Platforms for Underprivileged workers. Explores the involvement of Agencies or other institution/s in employing the marginalized workers. This includes how the marginalized employees secure jobs and if the agency or institution helps them. A representative from a government led agency – the Department of Labor and Employment or DOLE said they advocate for employers to offer suitable employment for everybody; efforts from other informants said that their call center firm trains deaf employees. On the other hand, testimonials from secondary informants who is a PWD stated that she was

referred to her current job by a former co-worker who happens to be a little person also; A former PDL said the HLAFF seminar and allowances helped when she visited an agency. The LGBTQIA+ participants mentioned they were assisted by the DILG personnel. The two (2) Solo Parents were accepted as weavers and sewer at Development Action Women Network – an NGO protecting the welfare of migrant women.

DISCUSSION

This study focused on the lived experiences of marginalized workers in business establishments' diversity and inclusion approach. It built a narrative based on the experiences of marginalized workers, employers, human resource managers, and representatives from various government and non-government institutions.

This study revealed several revelations. The researchers discovered how different institutions and organizations define equal employment opportunities and their scope. Beyond the International Labor Organization's definition of the notion, which stipulates that it is regardless of the demographic backgrounds of the employees—which most participants agreed with—participants also underscores that skills and competencies are necessary for employment. Also, there must be no discrimination in employment.

The presence of the Union, support from government agencies, and business establishments with clear-cut advocacies for employing the disadvantaged employees provided the participants the well acknowledged support.

Because of a robust diversity and inclusion initiative, some workers do not feel excluded. Workers are marginalized for several reasons, including being outnumbered by the majority, continuing to follow feudalistic nature, having limited social mobility, not having company protection, how the corporate economy operates, mismatched employment, access concerns, and discrimination.

Businesses promote diversity and inclusion following the existing laws, policies, and programs in the workplace. Acknowledging diversity and inclusion in the workplace has far-reaching benefits to employees, organizations, and society as a whole.

The researchers hope this study will help businesses recognize the importance of diversity and inclusion and find untapped applicants that should be valued. This study may also be used to assess company policies that create a sound and inclusive culture.

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