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Leadership Evaluations and Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Perceptions: Moderation by Employee Status and Nonlinear Associations with

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Abstract

Background: Leadership evaluations may signal organizational priorities, but their association with workplace diversity and inclusion (D&I) may vary by employees' organizational position and experience. **Objective**: This study examined associations of CEO approval and senior leadership evaluations with D&I, employee status as a moderator, and the nonlinear association of tenure with D&I. **Method**: We analyzed 100,000 Glassdoor reviews from 9,017 organizations using multilevel linear models with organization-level random intercepts. Tenure was modeled using natural cubic splines, with multiple robustness analyses. **Results**: More favorable leadership evaluations were associated with higher D&I ratings. These associations were modestly stronger among former employees, although CEO-approval moderation was evident mainly for the Approve–Disapprove contrast. Tenure showed a nonlinear cross-sectional association, with larger differences at shorter tenure and a flatter pattern thereafter. **Conclusion**: Leadership evaluations were strongly associated with D&I perceptions, while employee status modestly conditioned these relationships. The findings support a receiver-dependent perspective on organizational signaling and highlight the value of distinguishing current and former employee feedback.

Keywords: Diversity and inclusion; employee status; glassdoor; leadership evaluations; tenure

Abstrak

Latar Belakang: Evaluasi kepemimpinan dapat menjadi petunjuk mengenai prioritas organisasi, tetapi hubungannya dengan keberagaman dan inklusi (D&I) dapat berbeda menurut posisi dan pengalaman karyawan. **Tujuan:** Penelitian ini menguji hubungan evaluasi CEO dan kepemimpinan senior dengan D&I, status karyawan sebagai moderator, serta hubungan nonlinier masa kerja dengan D&I. **Metode:** Sebanyak 100.000 ulasan Glassdoor dari 9.017 organisasi dianalisis menggunakan model linier multilevel dengan random intercept organisasi. Masa kerja dimodelkan menggunakan natural cubic splines dan dilakukan beberapa analisis ketahanan. **Hasil:** Evaluasi kepemimpinan yang lebih positif berhubungan dengan D&I yang lebih tinggi. Hubungan ini sedikit lebih kuat pada mantan karyawan, meskipun moderasi persetujuan CEO terutama terlihat pada perbandingan Approve–Disapprove. Masa kerja menunjukkan hubungan nonlinier potong lintang, dengan perbedaan lebih besar pada masa kerja awal dan pola yang semakin landai setelahnya. **Simpulan:** Evaluasi kepemimpinan berhubungan kuat dengan D&I, sedangkan status karyawan hanya sedikit memengaruhi kekuatan hubungan tersebut. Temuan ini mendukung perspektif receiver-dependent dalam signaling organisasi dan pentingnya membedakan umpan balik karyawan aktif dan mantan karyawan.

Kata Kunci: Evaluasi kepemimpinan; glassdoor; keberagaman dan inklusi; masa kerja; status karyawan

Introduction

Workplace diversity and inclusion (D&I) have become central concerns in contemporary organizations because employee's perceptions of fairness, belonging, and inclusion influence important work outcomes, including job satisfaction, commitment, psychological safety, and collaboration (Edmondson, 1999; Hofhuis et al., 2016; Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2011). Yet employees do not evaluate organizational inclusion solely from formal policies. They also rely on observable organizational cues to infer whether inclusion is genuinely supported and enacted. Leadership is particularly salient in this process because leaders represent organizational priorities, allocate resources, implement policies, and communicate what is valued through both symbolic and behavioral actions (Eisenberger et al., 2010; Nishii & Mayer, 2009). Recent evidence likewise links inclusive leadership with more favorable diversity-climate perceptions (Lee & Shin, 2024).

Signaling theory provides a useful framework for explaining this process. When important organizational characteristics are not directly observable, individuals rely on visible cues to infer underlying organizational qualities and intentions (Connelly et al., 2011; Spence, 1973). Leadership evaluations may therefore serve as cues from which employees infer broader qualities of the workplace, including fairness, credibility, and commitment to inclusion. In the present study, CEO approval represents a relatively distal evaluation of top-level leadership, whereas senior leadership ratings provide a more proximal evaluation of organizational management. Thus, leadership evaluations are treated empiricaly as employee ratings and theoretically as potential organizational signals.

However, signaling processes depend not only on signal but also on the receiver. Connelly et al. (2011) emphasize that receivers differ in their access to information and in how they attend to and interpret available cues. This receiver-side perspective is particularly relevant when comparing current and former employees. Current employees remain embedded in ongoing organizational relationships and continue to receive information through supervisors, colleagues, HR practices, informal norms, and daily workplace experiences. Former employees, by contrast, evaluate the organization retrospectively after organizational exit and no longer have access to the same stream of ongoing workplace information

This differences may affect psychological weight assigned to leadership evaluations. Current employees can appraise leadership information alongside multiple contemporaneous cues, which may reduce reliance on any single global evaluation. Former employees, in contrast, may reconstruct their organizatinal exerience retrospectively, a process in which salient and summary-level cues can become prominent (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995). Online-review research also suggests that organizational attachment and reviewer status are associated with how workplace experiences are expressed and evaluated (Kim et al., 2026; Piercy & Carr, 2020). Employee status may therefore represent a theoretical meaningful positional boundary condition: it captures whether the receiver remains embedded in the organization or evaluates it after exit.

Tenure represents a different form of context. Whereas employee status concerns the receiver's current position relative to the organization, tenure reflects accumulate exposure to organizational practices. Organizational socialization research suggests that employess acquire knowledge about norms, expectations, and workplace routines as experience accumulates (Bauer et al., 2007; van Maanen & Schein, 1977). Employees with very short tenure may therefore have relatively limited information on which to base evaluations of D&I, whereas employees with greater tenure have had more opportunity to observe whether organizational practices are consistent over time. However, additional years of experience may provide diminishing amounts of new informations once employees become familiar with organizational routines. Tenure is therefore conceptualized as a temporal context for D&I perceptions rather as a moderator of leadership signals.

Three gaps follow from this framework. First, although prior research has established associations between leadership and diversity-related outcomes, less attention has been paid to whether the informational relevance of leadership evaluations differs across receivers occupying different organizational positions(Guest et al., 2021; Lee & Shin, 2024; Nault et al., 2026; Shore et al., 2011). Second, current and former employees are commonly combined in analyses of online workplace evaluations, even though their access to organizational information and retrospective perspective differ in theoretically meaningful ways (Kim et al., 2026; Piercy & Carr, 2020). Third, tenure is often incorporated as an employee characteristic, but the possibility that its association with D&I perceptions is nonlinear remains insufficiently examined, particularly in large-sample employee-review data (Chi et al., 2009; Park & Kim, 2025).

The present study address these gaps using 100,000 Glassdoor reviews from 9,017 organizations. It examines whether CEO approval and senior leadership evaluations are associated with workplace D&I perceptions, whether these associations differ between current and former employees, and whether tenure exhibits a nonlinear association with D&I. In doing so, the study extends signaling theory by emphasizing the receiver's organizational position, treats employee status as a positional boundary condition rather than merely a control variable, and distinguishes this positional context from the temporal context represented by tenure. This distinction is important because employee status and tenure capture different sources of heterogeneity in workplace perception: one concerns the receiver's relationship with the organization, whereas the other concerns accumulated organizational exposure. Accordingly, the study tests the following hypotheses and research question:

H1a. More favorable CEO approval is associated with higher perceived workplace D&I.

H1b. More favorable senior leadership evaluations are associated with higher perceived workplace D&I.

H2a. Employee status moderates the association between CEO approval and perceived workplace D&I.

RQ1. Does employee tenure exhibit a nonlinear association with perceived workplace D&I?

Method

This study used a publicly available Glassdoor Job Reviews 2 dataset hosted on Kaggle and compiled by Gauthier (2024) The dataset contains employee-generated reviews and structured workplace evaluations, including overall employer rating, CEO approval, senior leadership, diversity and inclusion (D&I), employment status, tenure, organization identifier, and review date. The dataset was accessed on April 1st, 2025.

Glassdoor allows current and former employees to provide anonymous evaluations of their employers. Previous research has demonstrated that online employee-review data contain meaningful information about workplace experiences and organizational evaluations (Piercy & Carr, 2020; Symitsi et al., 2021). Because multiple reviews can refer to the same employer, observations are hierarchically structured, with employee reviews nested within organizations. The study involved secondary analysis of a publicly available dataset and no direct interaction with reviewers. No personally identifying information was used in the analyses. Accordingly, the study was considered exempt from additional institutional ethics review.

Sample or Population

The Kaggle dataset was preprocessed by converting review dated and structured workplace ratings into appropriate analytical formats. Organization identifiers were extracted from Glassdoor firm links, employment status was classified as current or former, and tenure was derived from the review-status field and converted into numeric years. After the initial cleaning step, 2,459,151 reviews remained. Reviews without identifiable tenure information were then excluded (n=666,846), leaving 1,792,305 eligible reviews.

Because employee status was a primary moderator, stratified random sampling was used to ensure comparable representation of current and former employees and sufficient precision for estimating interaction effects. As the eligible dataset was highly imbalanced by status, 50,000 reviews were randomly selected from each group, yielding a final analytical sample of 100,000 reviews from 9,017 organizations.

Data Measurement

Perceived workplace D&I. The outcome was the structured Glassdoor D&I rating, measured on a five-point scale, with higher scores indicating more favorable evaluations. The measure was treated as an employee-reported workplace evaluation rather than as a validated multi-item diversity-climate scale. Although single-item platform ratings do not provide the psychometric information available from multi-item instruments, they are appropriate for the present secondary-data context because they capture respondent's global evaluations of specific workplace domains and have been used in prior large-scale research using online employee-review data (Piercy & Carr, 2020; Symitsi et al., 2021). Accordingly, the D&I rating is interpreted narrowly as a platform-based employee evaluation rather than as a comprehensive psychometric measure of inclusion.

CEO Approval. CEO approval contained three categories; Disapprove, No Opinion, and Approve. It was modeled categorically, with Disapprove as the reference group. It was treated as the more distal leadership evaluation.

Senior Leadership. Senior leadership was measured on a five-point scale, with higher scores representing more favorable evaluations of senior management. The variable was grand-mean centered before analysis.

Employee Status. Employee status distinguished current from former employees. It was modeled both as a main effect and as a moderator of the associations between the two leadership evaluations and D&I. Employee Tenure. Tenure represented years worked in the organization and ranged from 0 to 10 years. Because theory did not justify a specific quadratic or other polynomial form, tenure was modeled nonlinearly using a natural cubic spline with three degrees of freedom.

Control and Robustness Variables. Review year was included as a categorical control . Overall employer rating was not included in the primary models because of its conceptual overlap with the focal workplace evaluations. Instead, it was introduced in a robustness model to assess whether the focal associations persisted after accounting for generalized employer evaluations.

Data Analysis

The analysis proceeded in several stages. Because reviews were nested within organizations, the primary analyses used linear mixed-effects models with organization-specific random intercepts. This approach allows the baseline level of D&I ratings to vary across organizations while estimating employee-level associations using information from both within- and between-organization variation (Bates et al., 2015).

First, an unconditional random-intercept model was estimated to quantify organization-level clustering in D&I ratings. The intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was calculated by dividing the between-organization variance by total variance. This analysis indicated that approximately 9.3% of the variance in D&I ratings occurred between organizations, providing empirical justification for accounting for organizational clustering in subsequent models.

Four primary models were estimated using the same analytical sample. M1 included CEO approval, senior leadership, employee status, linear tenure, and review-year controls. M2 added interactions between employee status and both leadership indicators. M3 replaced linear tenure with a natural cubic spline with three degrees of freedom, allowing the tenure–D&I association to vary flexibly without imposing a predetermined quadratic or U-shaped form. M4 combined the interaction terms and nonlinear tenure specification.

$$D\&I_{ij} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 CEO_{ij} + \beta_2 Leadership_{ij} + \beta_3 Status_{ij} + \beta_4 (CEO_{ij} \times Status_{ij}) + \beta_5 (Leadership_{ij} \times Status_{ij}) + f(Tenure_{ij}) + \gamma Year_{ij} + u_j + \epsilon_{ij}$$

where i denotes an employee review, j denotes the organization, f(Tenure_ij) represents the natural cubic spline function, u_j is the organization-specific random intercept, and ϵ_ij is the review-level residual. The three-degree-of-freedom spline was specified as a natural cubic spline across the observed tenure range. Natural splines constrain the function to become linear at the boundaries, reducing unstable extrapolation at the extremes. Individual spline coefficients were not interpreted substantively; nonlinearity was evaluated through model comparison and adjusted predicted D&I values across tenure. Models used for fixed-effect comparison were estimated using maximum likelihood. Model fit was compared using AIC, BIC, and likelihood-ratio tests, with marginal and conditional R^2 used to summarize explanatory performance.

Three robustness analyses were conducted. First, the full model was re-estimated after adding overall employer rating. Second, organization fixed-effects models with organization-clustered standard errors were estimated to account for all time-invariant organization characteristics. Third, senior leadership ratings were decomposed into within-organization and between-organization components to distinguish reviewer-level variation from differences in average leadership evaluations across organizations. Because leadership and D&I ratings were reported by the same reviewer, these analyses reduce some alternative explanations but do not eliminate common-source covariance.

Result

Sample Characteristics and Descriptive Statistics

The final analytical sample comprised 100,000 employee reviews representing 9,017 organizations. The sample included equal numbers of current and former employees, with 50,000 observations (50%) in each group. This balanced distribution provided comparable representation of both employee-status groups for subsequent moderation analyses. As shown in Table 1, the mean diversity and inclusion (D&I) rating was 3.86 (SD = 1.30) on the five-point scale. Senior leadership ratings averaged 3.35 (SD = 1.44). The overall employer rating had a mean of 3.69 (SD = 1.30). Employee tenure averaged 2.69 years (SD = 2.86). D&I ratings were strongly and positively correlated with senior leadership evaluations ($r = .71$, $p < .001$) and overall employer ratings ($r = .71$, $p < .001$). Senior leadership was also strongly correlated with overall employer ratings ($r = .81$, $p < .001$), indicating substantial shared variation across employee's evaluations of workplace dimensions. By contrast, tenure showed only negligible bivariate associations with D&I ($r = .01$, $p = .02$), senior leadership ($r = -.04$, $p < .001$), and overall employer rating ($r = .02$, $p < .001$). Thus, despite statistical significance for several tenure correlations, their substantive magnitudes were minimal.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Continuous Study Variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Diversity and inclusion	3.86	1.30	—			
2. Senior leadership	3.35	1.44	.71***	—		
3. Employee tenure	2.69	2.86	.01*	−.04***	—	
4. Overall employer rating	3.69	1.30	.71***	.81***	.02***	—

Note. N = 100,000.
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

As shown in Table 2, CEO approval was distributed across the three coded categories, with 15.6% of reviews classified as Disapprove, 32.9% as No Opinion, and 51.5% as Approve. Organizations contributed a mean of 11.09 reviews, whereas the median was only 2 reviews per organization, with a maximum of 2,504 reviews from a single organization

Table 2. Sample Composition and Organizational Structure

Characteristic	n / Value	%
Sample composition		
Former employees	50,000	50.0
Current employees	50,000	50.0
CEO approval: Disapprove	15,563	15.6
CEO approval: No Opinion	32,910	32.9
CEO approval: Approve	51,527	51.5
Organizational structure		
Number of employee reviews	100,000	—
Number of organizations	9,017	—
Mean reviews per organization	11.09	—
Median reviews per organization	2	—
Minimum–maximum reviews per organization	1–2,504	—

Before estimating the substantive models, an unconditional random-intercept model was fitted to assess whether D&I ratings were clustered within organizations. The model included organization as a random intercept and no individual-level predictors. Table 3 shows that the estimated between-organization variance was 0.159, whereas the residual within-organization variance was 1.558.

The resulting intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) was 0.093, indicating that approximately 9.3% of the total variance in employee D&I ratings was attributable to differences between organizations, while the remaining 90.7% reflected variation among reviews within organizations. Thus, although most variation occurred at review level, a meaningful proportion of D&I-rating variance was associated with organizational membership. Given the hierarchical structure of the dataset; 100,000 employee reviews nested within 9,017 organizations, and the observed ICC of .093, subsequent analyses used multilevel linear models with

organization-specific random intercepts. This specification accounts for the dependency among reviews from the same organization and adjusts the estimation of standard errors accordingly.

Organizational Clustering and Multilevel Model Justification

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Table 3. Variance Components of the Unconditional Multilevel Model

Variance component	Variance	SD	Proportion of total variance
Between organizations	0.159	0.399	9.3%
Within organizations / residual	1.558	1.248	90.7%
Total variance	**1.717**	—	**100.0%**
Intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC)	**0.093**	—	—

Note. N = 100,000 employee reviews nested within 9,017 organizations. The ICC was calculated as the ratio of between-organization variance to total variance.

Main Effects of Leadership Evaluations and Employee Status

Table 4 presents the results of the multilevel linear model examining the associations of CEO approval, senior leadership evaluations, employee status, and tenure with diversity and inclusion (D&I) ratings, while accounting for review year and organization-level clustering. The model included random intercepts for organizations, with 100,000 employee reviews nested within 9,017 organizations.

Table 4. Primary Multilevel Models Predicting D&I Ratings

Predictor	M1 (Main effects)	M2 (+ Status interactions)	M3 (+ Nonlinear tenure)	M4 (Full model)
Intercept	3.341*** (0.015)	3.338*** (0.016)	3.297*** (0.016)	3.295*** (0.017)
CEO approval: No Opinion	0.387*** (0.010)	0.392*** (0.012)	0.385*** (0.010)	0.391*** (0.012)
CEO approval: Approve	0.482*** (0.010)	0.504*** (0.013)	0.479*** (0.010)	0.502*** (0.013)
Senior leadership (centered)	0.571*** (0.002)	0.588*** (0.003)	0.572*** (0.002)	0.589*** (0.003)
Current employee	0.060*** (0.006)	0.104*** (0.017)	0.061*** (0.006)	0.105*** (0.017)
Linear tenure	0.013*** (0.001)	0.012*** (0.001)	—	—
No Opinion × Current	—	−0.033 (0.020)	—	−0.034 (0.020)
Approve × Current	—	−0.062** (0.021)	—	−0.062** (0.021)
Senior leadership × Current	—	−0.039*** (0.005)	—	−0.037*** (0.005)
Natural spline for tenure (df = 3)	—	—	Included***	Included***
Review-year controls	Included	Included	Included	Included
Random Effects and Model Fit				
Organization-level variance	0.032	0.032	0.032	0.032
Residual variance	0.791	0.790	0.790	0.789
Organizations	9,017	9,017	9,017	9,017
Observations	100,000	100,000	100,000	100,000
AIC	262,511.6	262,377.7	262,411.1	262,287.1
BIC	262,616.2	262,510.9	262,534.8	262,439.3
Marginal R^2	0.513	0.514	0.514	0.515
Conditional R^2	0.532	0.533	0.533	0.534

Note. Entries are unstandardized coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Former employees and CEO approval = "Disapprove" are the reference categories. Senior leadership was grand-mean centered. M1 includes main effects with linear tenure; M2 adds leadership evaluation × employee-status interactions; M3 replaces linear tenure with a natural cubic spline (df = 3); and M4 combines the interaction and nonlinear tenure specifications. All models include review-year controls and organization-specific random intercepts. Individual spline coefficients are not shown because they are not directly interpretable; the nonlinear tenure pattern is presented using adjusted predictions in Figure 2.

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Both indicators of leadership evaluation were positively associated with D&I ratings. Relative to employees who selected "Disapprove" for CEO approval, those who selected "No Opinion" had D&I ratings that, on average, 0.387 points higher (β = 0.387, SE = 0.010, 95% CI [0.368, 0.405], p < .001). Employees who selected "Approve" had D&I ratings that were, on average, 0.482 points higher than those who selected "Disapprove" (β = 0.482, SE = 0.010, 95% CI [0.462, 0.501], p < .001). The magnitude of these contrasts indicates a substantive difference in D&I ratings across CEO-approval categories, beyond their statistical significance. Senior leadership evaluations showed a particularly strong positive association with D&I ratings. A one-point increase in the senior leadership rating was associated with an estimated 0.571-point increase in D&I rating (β = 0.571, SE = 0.002, 95% CI [0.566, 0.575], p < .001), holding the other variables constant. Given the five-point rating scale, this coefficient was comparatively large relative to the other predictors. Because senior leadership was grand-mean centered prior to estimation, centering altered the interpretation of the model intercept but not the substantive scale of the leadership coefficient.

Employee status was also associated with D&I evaluations. Current employees reported slightly higher D&I ratings than former employees after adjustment for leadership evaluations, tenure, review year, and organization-level clustering (β = 0.060, SE = 0.006, 95% CI [0.048, 0.071], p < .001). Despite its statistical significance, this difference was substantively small, particularly compared with the leadership coefficients. Tenure showed a small positive linear association with D&I ratings in this baseline specification (β = 0.013, SE = 0.001, 95% CI [0.011, 0.015], p < .001). This estimate corresponds to only a small difference in predicted D&I ratings per additional year of tenure. This coefficient should, however, be interpreted as a preliminary linear estimate because subsequent models explicitly evaluate whether the tenure–D&I association is better represented nonlinearly. Most review-year contrasts were small. The coefficients for 2021 and 2022 did not differ significantly from the omitted reference year, whereas reviews posted in 2023 were associated with slightly higher D&I ratings (β = 0.054, SE = 0.015, 95% CI [0.026, 0.083], p < .001). Overall, the main-effects model indicated that leadership evaluations were most substantively prominent correlates of D&I ratings, whereas the adjusted associations for employee status, tenure, and review year were comparatively small.

Employee Status as a Moderator of Leadership Evaluations—D&I Associations

To examine whether the associations between leadership evaluations and diversity and inclusion (D&I) ratings differed between current and former employees, interaction terms between employee status and both CEO approval and senior leadership were added to the multilevel model. The model retained organization-specific random intercepts and adjusted for tenure and review year. Former employees served as the reference group, "Disapprove" was the reference category for CEO approval, and senior leadership was grand-mean centered. Results are presented in Table 4.

CEO Approval. Among former employees, both "No Opinion" and "Approve" responses were positively associated with D&I ratings relative to "Disapprove." Specifically, former employees selecting "No Opinion" had D&I ratings approximately 0.392 points higher than those selecting "Disapprove" (β = 0.392, SE = 0.012, 95% CI [0.368, 0.415], p < .001), while those selecting "Approve" had ratings approximately 0.504 points higher (β = 0.504, SE = 0.013, 95% CI [0.478, 0.529], p < .001). Employee status did not significantly moderate the contrast between "No Opinion" and "Disapprove" (β = −0.033, SE = 0.020, 95% CI [−0.072, 0.006], p = .098). Thus, there was insufficient evidence that the association between a "No Opinion" response and D&I ratings differed between current and former employees. By contrast, the interaction between "Approve" and current-employee status was negative and statistically significant (β = −0.062, SE = 0.021, 95% CI [−0.103, −0.022], p = .002). This indicates that the positive difference in D&I ratings associated with CEO approval was weaker among current employees than among former employees. Based on the estimated coefficients, the "Approve" versus "Disapprove" contrast was approximately 0.504 points among former employees and 0.441 points among current employees. However, the difference between

these contrasts was modest in absolute magnitude. Accordingly, employee status provided partial evidence of moderation for CEO approval, with moderation evident for the "Approve" versus "Disapprove" contrast but not for "No Opinion" versus "Disapprove."

Senior Leadership. Senior leadership evaluations were strongly and positively associated with D&I ratings among former employees (β = 0.588, SE = 0.003, 95% CI [0.582, 0.595], p < .001). However, this relationship differed significantly by employee status. The interaction between senior leadership and current-employee status was negative (β = −0.039, SE = 0.005, 95% CI [−0.048, −0.029], p < .001), indicating that the positive association between senior leadership evaluations and D&I ratings was modestly weaker among current employees. Based on the model coefficients, a one-point increase in senior leadership rating was associated with an estimated 0.588-point increase in D&I ratings among former employees, compared with approximately 0.550 points among current employees. The difference in slopes was approximately 0.04 points per one-point increase in senior leadership, indicating a statistically reliable but substantively modest moderation effect. Accordingly, senior leadership remained strongly associated with D&I ratings in both groups, with employee status producing only a slight attenuation among current employees.

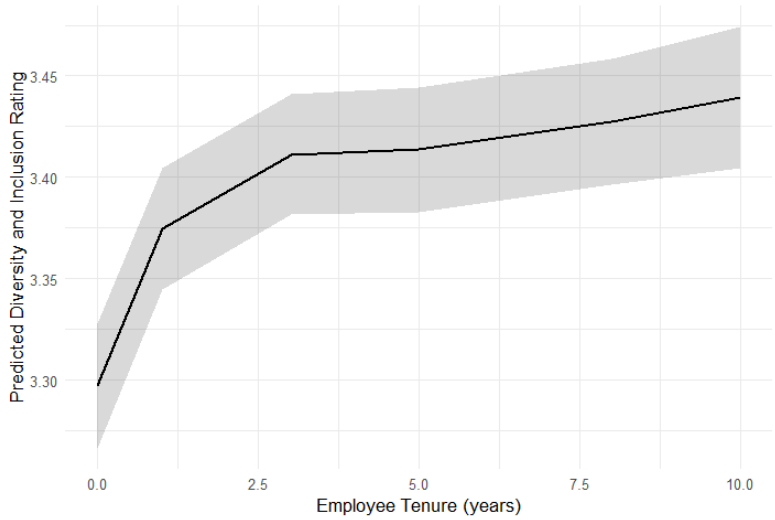
Nonlinear Association Between Tenure and D&I Ratings

To examine whether the association between employee tenure and diversity and inclusion (D&I) ratings was better represented as nonlinear rather than strictly linear, tenure was modeled using a natural cubic spline within the multilevel framework. The model adjusted for CEO approval, senior leadership evaluations, employee status, and review year, while including organization-specific random intercepts to account for clustering of employee reviews within organizations. As shown in Table 4, the substantive associations for the other focal predictors remained stable after incorporating the nonlinear tenure specification.

Model comparison indicated that the nonlinear specification provided a significantly better fit than the corresponding linear-tenure model. Specifically, the spline model yielded lower information criteria (AIC = 262,411.1; BIC = 262,534.8) than the linear model (AIC = 262,511.6; BIC = 262,616.2), and the likelihood-ratio test showed that allowing tenure to vary nonlinearly significantly improved model fit, χ^2 (2) = 104.47, p < .001. Thus, the tenure—D&I association was better represented by a nonlinear than a simple linear specification. Because individual spline coefficients are not directly interpretable, the nonlinear pattern was summarized using adjusted predicted values. Predicted D&I was 3.30 at zero years of tenure (95% CI [3.27, 3.33]), 3.37 at one year (95% CI [3.34, 3.40]), and 3.41 at three years (95% CI [3.38, 3.44]). The predicted value remained approximately 3.41 at five years and increased only slightly to 3.43 at eight years and 3.44 at ten years. The total predicted difference across the observed tenure range was therefore small, with most of the increase concentrated at shorter tenure and a flatter pattern thereafter.

Importantly, this pattern is cross-sectional and should not be interpreted as evidence of within-person change over time. Rather, employees reporting longer tenure tended to report slightly higher D&I ratings, with the association becoming weaker at higher tenure values. Consistent with the earlier models, both CEO approval and senior leadership evaluations remained positively associated with D&I ratings, while the adjusted difference between current and former employees remained small. Overall, the nonlinear tenure specification improved model fit, but its substantive contribution was modest compared with the stronger associations observed for leadership evaluations.

Figure 2. Adjusted Predicted D&I Ratings Across Employee Tenure



Note. The solid line represents model-predicted D&I ratings from the multilevel model with tenure modeled using a natural cubic spline (df = 3). The shaded area represents 95% confidence intervals. Predictions are adjusted for CEO approval, senior leadership, employee status, review year, and organization-level clustering.

Figure 2 illustrates the adjusted nonlinear association between employee tenure and predicted D&I ratings. Predicted D&I ratings increased most sharply during the early years of tenure, rising from approximately 3.30 at zero years to 3.38 after one year and approximately 3.41 by three years. Beyond this point, the curve flattened considerably, with only modest increases through ten years of tenure. The widening confidence interval at longer tenure values indicates greater uncertainty in the estimates, likely reflecting fewer observations among employees with longer tenure. Overall, the pattern is consistent with a diminishing marginal association between tenure and D&I ratings rather than a constant linear increase.

Full Multilevel Model

The full multilevel model simultaneously incorporated the interactions between employee status and both leadership indicators, the nonlinear tenure specification, review-year controls, and organization-specific random intercepts. As shown in Table 4, the substantive findings remained consistent after these components were estimated jointly. Among former employees, the reference group, both CEO approval categories were positively associated with diversity and inclusion (D&I) ratings relative to "Disapprove." Selecting "No Opinion" was associated with a 0.391-point higher D&I rating ($\beta = 0.391$, SE = 0.012, 95% CI [0.368, 0.415], $p < .001$), whereas selecting "Approve" was associated with a 0.502-point higher rating ($\beta = 0.502$, SE = 0.013, 95% CI [0.476, 0.527], $p < .001$). These remained among the larger associations observed in the full model.

Senior leadership evaluations also remained strongly positively associated with D&I ratings among former employees ($\beta = 0.589$, SE = 0.003, 95% CI [0.582, 0.595], $p < .001$). The interaction between senior leadership and current-employee status was negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -0.037$, SE = 0.005, 95% CI [−0.046, −0.027], $p < .001$), indicating that the positive association between senior leadership evaluations and D&I ratings was modestly attenuated among current employees. Thus, although statistically reliable, the moderation represented only a modest attenuation of an otherwise strong positive association in both groups Employee status also moderated the association between CEO approval and D&I ratings, although the pattern differed across approval categories. The interaction between "Approve" and current-employee status was negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -0.062$, SE = 0.021, 95% CI [−0.102, −0.022], $p = .002$), indicating that the "Approve" versus "Disapprove" contrast was weaker among current than former employees. In contrast, the interaction between "No Opinion" and current-employee status did not reach conventional statistical significance ($\beta = -0.034$, SE = 0.020, 95% CI [−0.073, 0.005], $p = .084$). Accordingly, the evidence for employee-status moderation of CEO approval was partial and was concentrated in the "Approve" versus "Disapprove" contrast.

The coefficient for current-employee status was positive ($\beta = 0.105$, SE = 0.017, 95% CI [0.072, 0.139], $p < .001$). Because the model contains interaction terms, however, this coefficient represents the difference between current and former employees specifically at the reference CEO approval category ("Disapprove") and the mean level of senior leadership, rather than an unconditional overall difference between the two employee groups. The nonlinear tenure terms remained jointly relevant in the full model. Consistent with the preceding spline analysis, the tenure association was characterized by larger differences at shorter tenure and a flatter pattern at longer tenure. Because the spline basis coefficients are not independently interpretable, their individual estimates are omitted from Table 4 and the tenure effect is interpreted using the model-based predicted values presented in Figure 2. Overall, the full model confirmed that leadership evaluations remained the most prominent correlates of D&I ratings, whereas employee-status moderation and nonlinear tenure contributed comparatively modest additional variation.

Model Comparison and Explanatory Performance

Comparison of the four multilevel specifications indicated that the full model provided the best overall fit. Adding the leadership-by-employee-status interaction terms reduced AIC from 262,511.6 in the baseline model (M1) to 262,377.7 in M2, while modeling tenure nonlinearly reduced AIC to 262,411.1 in M3. The model combining both interaction effects and nonlinear tenure produced the lowest AIC (262,287.1) and BIC (262,439.3) of all specifications (see Table 4).

The likelihood-ratio comparison between M2 and M4 further showed that replacing the linear tenure term with the natural spline significantly improved model fit, $\chi^2(2) = 94.62$, $p < .001$. Thus, the nonlinear tenure specification improved model fit even after accounting for employee-status differences in the leadership evaluation–D&I associations.

The fixed effects explained a substantial proportion of variance across all models. Marginal R^2 increased from 0.513 in M1 to 0.515 in M4, while conditional R^2, which incorporates both fixed effects and organization-level random effects, increased from 0.532 to 0.534. Although M4 showed the best relative fit according to AIC and BIC, the increase in explained variance was small in absolute terms. Accordingly, the interaction and nonlinear terms provided statistically detectable but modest incremental explanatory value beyond the main-effects model. M4 was therefore retained as the primary model for interpretation and subsequent robustness analyses.

Robustness Analysis

Adjustment for Overall Employer Rating

The full model was re-estimated with overall employer rating included as an additional covariate (Table 5). Overall employer rating was positively associated with D&I ratings (β = 0.355,SE = 0.004,p < .001). Adjustment attenuated the leadership coefficients, with the senior leadership estimate decreasing from 0.589 to 0.361, while both CEO approval contrasts also became smaller. The senior leadership × Current interaction was reduced from −0.037 to −0.018, indicating that the moderation effect remained statistically detectable but was weaker after accounting for generalized employer evaluations. Overall, the primary leadership–D&I associations remained evident, although part of their magnitude overlapped with employees' broader evaluations of the employer.

Table 5. Robustness Analysis Adjusting for Overall Employer Rating

Predictor	**Main model Estimate (SE)**	**Overall-rating adjusted Estimate (SE)**
CEO approval: No Opinion	0.391*** (0.012)	0.215*** (0.012)
CEO approval: Approve	0.502*** (0.013)	0.263*** (0.013)
Current employee	0.105*** (0.017)	0.088*** (0.017)
Senior leadership (centered)	0.589*** (0.003)	0.361*** (0.004)
No Opinion × Current	−0.034 (0.020)	−0.062** (0.019)
Approve × Current	−0.062** (0.021)	−0.087*** (0.020)
Senior leadership × Current	−0.037*** (0.005)	−0.018*** (0.005)
Overall employer rating	—	0.355*** (0.004)
Nonlinear tenure	Included	Included
Review-year controls	Included	Included
Organization random intercept	Included	Included
Observations	100,000	100,000
Organizations	9,017	9,017
Marginal R^2	0.515	0.558
Conditional R^2	0.534	0.574

Note. Estimates are unstandardized coefficients; standard errors are shown in parentheses. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Organization Fixed Effects

The full specification was also estimated using organization fixed effects with standard errors clustered by organization (Table 6). Because singleton organizations provide no within-organization variation, 3,279 organizations were excluded, leaving 96,721 reviews from 5,738 organizations. The results were broadly consistent with the multilevel model: CEO approval and senior leadership remained positively associated with D&I, and the Approve × Current and Senior leadership × Current interactions remained negative. The No Opinion × Current interaction was not significant. These findings indicate that the main associations persisted when comparisons were restricted to employees reviewing the same organization, although the moderation effects remained modest.

Table 6. Organization Fixed-Effects Robustness Model Predicting D&I Ratings

Predictor	Estimate	SE	95% CI
CEO approval: No Opinion	0.408***	0.018	[0.373, 0.443]
CEO approval: Approve	0.517***	0.018	[0.481, 0.552]
Current employee	0.103***	0.023	[0.057, 0.148]
Senior leadership (centered)	0.576***	0.006	[0.565, 0.587]
No Opinion × Current	−0.030	0.026	[−0.081, 0.021]
Approve × Current	−0.063*	0.026	[−0.115, −0.011]
Senior leadership × Current	−0.030***	0.006	[−0.042, −0.018]
Natural spline for tenure	Included		
Review-year controls	Included		
Organization fixed effects	Included		
Clustered SEs by organization	Yes		
Observations	96,721		
Organizations	5,738		
Adjusted R^2	0.532		
Within R^2	0.491		
RMSE	0.859		

Note. Estimates are unstandardized coefficients from an organization fixed-effects regression with standard errors clustered at the organization level.
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Within- and Between-Organization Leadership Effects

Senior leadership ratings were decomposed into within- and between-organization components (Table 7). Both components were positively associated with D&I ratings, with β = 0.577 (95% CI [0.570, 0.583]) for the within-organization component and β = 0.633 (95% CI [0.621, 0.644]) for the between-organization component. The within-organization leadership × Current interaction was negative but small (β = −0.027, 95% CI [−0.037, −0.017], p < .001). Thus, more favorable senior leadership evaluations were associated with higher D&I ratings both within and across organizations, while employee-status differences in the within-organization association were modest. Because leadership and D&I were rated by the same reviewer, this analysis does not eliminate common-source covariance.

Table 7. Within- and Between-Organization Associations of Senior Leadership With D&I Ratings

Predictor	Estimate	SE	95% CI
Senior leadership: within organization	0.577***	0.003	[0.570, 0.583]
Senior leadership: between organizations	0.633***	0.006	[0.621, 0.644]
Current employee	0.125***	0.017	[0.093, 0.158]
CEO approval: No Opinion	0.398***	0.012	[0.375, 0.422]
CEO approval: Approve	0.512***	0.013	[0.487, 0.537]
Within leadership × Current	−0.027***	0.005	[−0.037, −0.017]
No Opinion × Current	−0.056**	0.019	[−0.094, −0.018]
Approve × Current	−0.093***	0.020	[−0.132, −0.055]
Nonlinear tenure	Included		
Review-year controls	Included		
Organization random intercept	Included		
Observations	100,000		
Organizations	9,017		
AIC	262,203.1		
BIC	262,364.8		

Note. Estimates are unstandardized coefficients from a multilevel linear model with organization-specific random intercepts. The within-organization leadership component represents each reviewer's deviation from the organization's mean senior leadership rating. The between-organization component represents the organization mean relative to the grand mean. Former employees and CEO approval = "Disapprove" are the reference categories. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Discussion

This study examined how leadership evaluations relate to workplace diversity and inclusion (D&I) ratings and whether these associations vary by employee status and tenure. Analyzing 100,000 reviews across 9,017 organizations yielded three central findings: CEO approval and senior leadership ratings positively relate to D&I perceptions; these associations are slightly stronger among former than current employees; and tenure exhibits a nonlinear association with D&I ratings, with larger differences at shorter tenure and a flatter pattern thereafter. These findings contribute to the literature in three ways. First, they extend prior work showing that leadership is relevant to inclusion-related workplace experiences. Inclusive leadership has been linked to psychological safety and employee involvement (Carmeli et al., 2010), while broader inclusion scholarship emphasizes belongingness, uniqueness, and inclusive work-group climates as central features of employee's workplace experiences (Nishii, 2013; Shore et al., 2011). The present findings complement this literature by showing that favorable leadership evaluations are also closely associated with D&I ratings in large-scale, unsolicited employee reviews.

From a signaling perspective, this pattern is theoretically plausible because signaling theory emphasizes that receivers use observable cues to interpret less directly observable organizational qualities (Connelly et al., 2011). More recent HRM applications similarly conceptualize managers as signal senders and employees as active receivers who interpret organizational messages rather than responding uniformly (Guest et al., 2021). Accordingly, CEO approval and senior leadership ratings can be understood as employee evaluations that may function as cues when employees form broader judgments about organizational inclusion. The stronger coefficient for senior leadership is also consistent with the idea that more proximal managerial experiences may provide especially salient information about how organizational priorities are enacted, although the present study did not directly measure signaling processes.

Second, the findings support a receiver-dependent interpretation of organizational signaling. Signaling theory explicitly recognizes that receivers differ in the information available to them and in how they interpret signals (Connelly et al., 2011), while HRM signaling research similarly emphasizes employees as active interpreters of managerial messages (Guest et al., 2021). Current employees remain embedded in ongoing workplace interactions and can draw on supervisors, colleagues, routines, and daily organizational practices. Former employees, by contrast, evaluate the organization retrospectively. Sensemaking research suggests that individuals construct meaning from organizational experiences, particularly when interpreting past events and ambiguous situations (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). One plausible explanation, therefore, is that former employees may place slightly greater weight on salient global leadership evaluations when reconstructing their workplace experience because they no longer have access to the same stream of ongoing organizational cues. This mechanism, however, was not directly measured and should be treated as a theoretical interpretation rather than an empirical finding.

The within- and between-organization decomposition adds nuance to this interpretation. More favorable senior leadership evaluations were associated with higher D&I ratings both among reviewers within the same organization and across organizations. This indicates that the observed association was not confined solely to stable differences between organizations. However, because leadership and D&I were rated by the same reviewer, common-source perceptual covariance remains a plausible alternative explanation and cannot be eliminated by this decomposition.

Third, the nonlinear tenure pattern adds a temporal dimension that is broadly compatible with organizational socialization theory. Classic socialization work conceptualizes organizational entry and adjustment as processes through which newcomers learn roles, norms, and expected behavior over time (Jones, 2017). In the present data, employees with longer reported tenure tended to provide slightly higher D&I ratings, but most of the difference occurred at shorter tenure and flattened thereafter. This pattern is consistent with the possibility that additional organizational exposure provides relatively more new information early in employment and less incremental information later. Because the data are cross-sectional, however, the results do not demonstrate that individual employees' D&I perceptions improve as their tenure increases.

The robustness analyses further qualify the interpretation of the main findings. Leadership evaluations remained positively associated with D&I after adjustment for overall employer rating and in organization fixed-effects models. At the same time, the attenuation after controlling for overall employer rating indicates that part of the association overlaps with employees' broader evaluations of the organization. Given the large

sample, the employee-status interactions should also be interpreted in terms of substantive magnitude rather than statistical significance alone. The moderation effects were small relative to the main leadership associations, suggesting that employee status modestly conditions the strength of these relationships rather than producing fundamentally different patterns for current and former employees.

Practically, the findings suggest several cautious implications. First, organizations may benefit from ensuring that stated D&I commitments are reflected in everyday leadership and managerial practices, because leadership evaluations are closely aligned with employees' inclusion-related assessments. Second, HR analytics and employer-branding functions may consider distinguishing current- and former-employee feedback rather than assuming that both groups provide interchangeable evaluations, because they occupy different informational positions relative to the organization. Third, the nonlinear tenure pattern suggests value in examining D&I feedback across tenure groups, particularly among employees earlier in their organizational experience, rather than relying exclusively on a single organization-wide average. These implications should remain proportionate to the evidence because the observational design does not establish causal effects of leadership, employee status, or tenure on D&I perceptions

Conclusion

Leadership evaluations were strongly associated with workplace D&I ratings across a large sample of online employee reviews. These associations varied only modestly by employee status, while tenure showed a nonlinear cross-sectional association characterized by larger differences at shorter tenure and a flatter pattern thereafter. The principal contribution of this study is to extend a receiver-dependent perspective on organizational signaling by showing that the association between leadership evaluations and D&I perceptions differs according to the employee's organizational position, while distinguishing employee status from tenure as separate contextual dimensions. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that organizations may benefit from examining current- and former-employee feedback separately and from considering tenure when interpreting D&I evaluations. These implications should remain proportionate to the observational evidence, as the study does not establish causal effects of leadership, employee status, or tenure on D&I perceptions.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study is cross-sectional and observational, so causal conclusions cannot be drawn. Leadership evaluations and D&I ratings were reported by the same employees, creating the possibility of common-source and halo effects, although robustness analyses adjusting for overall employer rating reduced this concern. In addition, Glassdoor reviewers are self-selected and may not represent the broader employee population. The D&I outcome is also a single platform-based rating rather than a validated multi-item measure of inclusion or diversity climate. Furthermore, the nonlinear tenure findings are cross-sectional and should not be interpreted as evidence that individual employees' perceptions change in the same way over time. Future research could address these limitations using longitudinal designs, validated D&I measures, and independent indicators of leadership practices.

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