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**Constructing inclusion and  
exclusion in and through  
leaders' communication  
discourses and practices**

***A construção da inclusão e  
da exclusão nos e através  
dos discursos e práticas de  
comunicação dos líderes***

***La construcción de  
la inclusión y la exclusión en  
y a través de los discursos y  
prácticas de comunicación  
de los líderes***

**ABSTRACT**

This study explores the discourses and communication practices of five leaders working in elderly care units in a mid-size city in Sweden and the construct of inclusion and exclusion by examining their daily communicative leadership practices with their work groups, consisting of Swedish-born and foreigner-born migrants. The results were drawn from an analysis of interviews with five leaders and the observation of eight meetings led by three of them. The findings indicate that leaders' different strategies of inclusion are related to the engagement and participation of workers in discussions and decision-making. Some salient practices and discourses are pertinent to leaders' cultural biases that can lead to ethnocentrism and essentialism, which might have a negative impact on inclusion. Leaders who practice inclusiveness through connecting, relating, and giving space for engagement and participation might better contribute to workplaces. The aspects and strategies of inclusion and exclusion are embedded in leaders' practices and discourses and present them as bridge builders, empathetic and supportive, and culture enhancers. This study presents leaders' communication styles to include and exclude migrant workers and their strategies for engagement and participation in workplace issues. The leaders' communication styles emerged from the data and were defined as bridge builders, empathetic and supportive, and culture enhancers.

**Keywords:** Inclusion; Leadership inclusiveness; Engagement; Communication style; Elderly care.

**RESUMO**

Objetivos: Este estudo explora os discursos e práticas comunicacionais de cinco líderes que trabalham em unidades de cuidados a idosos numa cidade de médio porte da Suécia, e os paradigmas de inclusão e exclusão, examinando suas práticas comunicativas diárias de liderança com suas equipes de trabalho, constituídas por colaboradores nascidos na Suécia e colaboradores imigrantes. Os resultados surgiram da análise de entrevistas com cinco indivíduos em cargos de liderança e da observação de oito reuniões lideradas por três delas. Os resultados indicam que as diferentes estratégias de inclusão dos líderes estão relacionadas ao comprometimento e à participação dos trabalhadores nas discussões e na tomada de decisões. Algumas práticas e discursos proeminentes são relevantes para os preconceitos culturais dos líderes e podem levar a sua atividade ao etnocentrismo e ao fundamentalismo, gerando um impacto negativo na inclusão. Líderes que praticam a inclusão, conectando, relacionando-se e dando espaço para compromisso e participação, poderiam contribuir melhor para os espaços de trabalho. Os aspectos e estratégias de inclusão e exclusão estão enraizados nas práticas e discursos dos líderes, apresentando-os como acessíveis, empáticos e solidários, e promotores da cultura. Este estudo apresenta os estilos de comunicação dos líderes para incluir e excluir os trabalhadores migrantes e as suas estratégias de compromisso e participação nas questões laborais. Os estilos de comunicação dos líderes emergiram dos dados empíricos e eles foram definidos como construtores de pontes, empáticos e solidários, e potenciadores de cultura.

**Palavras-chave:** Inclusão; Inclusão de liderança; Compromisso; Estilo de comunicação; Cuidados com idosos.

**RESUMEN**

Este estudio explora los discursos y las prácticas de comunicación de cinco líderes que trabajan en unidades de asistencia a personas mayores en una ciudad mediana de Suecia, y los paradigmas de inclusión y exclusión, examinando sus prácticas diarias de liderazgo comunicativo junto a sus equipos de trabajo, formados por miembros nacidos en Suecia y por extranjeros. Los resultados surgieron a partir del análisis de entrevistas a cinco mujeres en puestos de jefatura y de la observación de ocho reuniones lideradas por tres de ellas. Los resultados indican que las diferentes estrategias de inclusión de los líderes están relacionadas con el compromiso y la participación de los trabajadores en las discusiones y la toma de decisiones. Algunas prácticas y discursos destacados son pertinentes a los prejuicios culturales de los líderes y podrían conducir su actividad hacia el etnocentrismo y el fundamentalismo, generando un impacto negativo en la inclusión. Los líderes que practican la inclusión, conectando, relacionándose y dando espacio para el compromiso y la participación, podrían aportar de mejor manera a los espacios de trabajo. Los aspectos y estrategias de inclusión y exclusión están arraigados en las prácticas y discursos de los líderes, presentándolos como accesibles, empáticos y solidarios, y promotores de la cultura. Este estudio presenta los estilos de comunicación de los líderes para incluir y excluir a los trabajadores migrantes y sus estrategias en pro del compromiso y de la participación en temas laborales. Los estilos de comunicación de los líderes surgieron de los datos empíricos y se definieron como constructores de puentes, empáticos y solidarios, y potenciadores de la cultura.

**Palabras-clave:** Inclusión; Inclusión de liderazgo; Compromiso; Estilo de comunicación; Cuidado de adultos mayores.

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## Introduction

Although a globalized world gives us an assumption that it demands more understanding among people and ways to create relationships towards belongingness in workplaces with diversity (CASTLES, 2010), studies concerning the inclusion of minorities in workplaces are under-represented in several fields (RANDEL *et al.*, 2018). Scholars highlight several gaps in some of the existing approaches taken in these studies. The persistent focus of human resources departments on affirmative diversity initiatives does not prevent inequalities (cf. JANSSENS; ZANONI, 2014; ROMANI *et al.*, 2019). These initiatives are created to avoid inequalities but reinforce them instead. They might be supporting organizations since they make them more attractive in the situation of recruitment (JANSSENS; ZANONI, 2014). Since these initiatives are not successful and continue to reproduce workplace stereotypes and inequalities (LAHTI; VALO, 2017), critical diversity scholars orient themselves towards inclusiveness and discourses of diversity that are more relevant to positive workplaces that include all, both minorities and majorities (ZANONI; JANSSENS, 2015).

Traditionally, the literature suggests that work groups with ethnic diversity can suffer from low productivity and less effective integration (STAHL *et al.*,

2012), while creativity and satisfaction are more significant compared to homogenous teams (TING-TOOMEY; OETZEL, 2001). Leading these groups demands competencies and understandings congruent with diversity to facilitate the integration of the workers. The literature on leadership even suggests that follower-oriented leaders are more suitable leaders for diverse groups (GOTSIS; GRIMANI, 2015).

Gotsis and Grimani (2015) consider theories such as servant and spiritual leadership better contributions because they value, affirm, and support diversity within organizations more than others. Amongst the traditional psychological leadership theories, the mentioned theories are regarded as more co-worker oriented. That is, leaders are more concerned about co-workers' well-being than results. Even though these theories are not problem-free, are grounded on leaders as the main representation of leadership and still see co-workers as passive agents (LIU, 2017), they have been shown to be more pertinent to diversity, referring to values that facilitate inclusion in the workplace.

Regarding values, the Nordic countries are known to allow workers' participation and influence in the workplace, which positively influences foreigners' perception of these countries. However, these perceptions cannot cover existing problems whereby certain workplaces have to include and integrate foreigners. In Sweden, the population with backgrounds other than Swedish is approximately 20%, comprising first-generation migrants (SCB, 2020). Consequently, some workplaces have a higher concentration of migrants than others, such as education and health care. Leadership is one of the most critical factors influencing staff turnover rates, sick leave and well-being in work-

places (POELS *et al.*, 2021; BÄCKSTRÖM *et al.*, 2016). Leadership impacts nurses, nurses' assistants, and managers in senior nursing homes (SULIMAN *et al.*, 2020). In Sweden, professions such as assistant nurses within social care are already one of the most common professions among foreign-born females (SCB, 2020a); in 2015, it was the 10th most popular professions among migrants (STRÖMBÄCK, 2016). According to one of the latest reports on trends and forecasts from the Swedish Statistic Agency (SCB, 2020b), which analysed market needs until 2035, there is a critical need for the migrant workforce in health care in the country.

In this study, I explore five leaders' accounts and leadership and inclusive practices for ethnic migrant workers in elderly care units. The study analyses leaders' constructions of inclusion and exclusion by exploring leaders' discourses and communication dynamics that can hinder or facilitate the inclusion of ethnically diverse work groups (LARSON *et al.*, 2022).

## **Leadership and diversity (previous studies)**

The process of globalization and individuals' social, economic or demographic mobility worldwide emphasizes intercultural knowledge as necessary to improve relationships among people with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The consequent diversity caused by mobility in several societies increases the need for an arena for interactions and shaping identities, and workplaces are an essential arena for the negotiation of migrants' identities in a new country (VALENTA, 2008; SCHNURR; ZAYTS, 2012). In this space, leaders' influence on workers and workplaces is well established in the literature on leadership. Regarding ethnic diversity in workplaces, the leader holds a fun-

damental position for the feeling of inclusion (RANDEL *et al.*, 2018). This study acknowledges and agrees with the critiques to traditional leadership theories that present leaders as the hegemonic representation of leadership, disregarding the dynamic, distributed and mutual characteristics of leadership constructions through interactions and through (and in) discourses (ALVESSON; KÄRREMAN, 2003; FAIRHURST, 2007). However, the study proceeds from an awareness of leaders' influence in today's society and focuses on the experience of the individuals in leadership positions.

According to Western (2019), leading an ethnically diverse workforce demands specific competencies and behaviours from individuals who are liberated from the bias that can marginalize or oppress others. The role demands that leaders be aware and strive to be free from prejudices and ethnocentric biases that categorize and stereotype humans who are different from themselves. The literature on spiritual leadership mentions that leaders must be able to inspire individuals to be like themselves (GOTSIS; GRIMANI, 2015). Transformational leadership (TL) also presents similar aspects of leaders being role models. Among several traits of TL, leaders inspire by being role models of high morals and ethics (PARRY; BRYMAN, 2006; NORHOUSE, 2020). Finally, participative leadership adds behaviours and attitudes that stress workers' uniqueness and belongingness (MICHELL *et al.*, 2018) to the long list of leaders' competencies, encouraging a climate of inclusion (NISHII, 2013). The literature suggests that these competencies influence workplaces and reflect in the work climate through how organizational members connect and interact with one another and with the leader.

Scholars have also suggested that certain leadership styles and communication behaviours favour workplace inclusiveness (GOTSIS; GRIMANI, 2015; NISHII; MAYER, 2009). Studying leader–member exchanges at the group level, Nishii and Mayer (2009) suggested that leaders influence the relationship between diversity and turnover through workplace inclusion patterns. Gotsis and Grimani (2015) discussed the characteristics of four leadership styles that could effectively be combined with values that are beneficial to diversity. Despite the already mentioned spiritual leadership, the authors stressed that ethical, authentic and servant leadership are favourable to diversity. What these four styles have in common are certain virtues such as integrity, respect, humility, benevolence, motivation, morality, encouragement of well-being and a more visible follower-oriented process.

Identifying leadership characteristics that foster inclusiveness is important for the well-being and happiness of workers and healthy relationships in the workplace. Such leaders work to produce a supportive climate and high-quality relationships that reflect trust and fairness. In addition, such leaders encourage other positive and altruistic behaviour that leads to self-awareness and a sense of community (GOTSIS; GRIMANI, 2015). These types of leadership bring outcomes such as enhanced performance and work engagement and support diversity to produce a better response to the experience of discrimination in the workplace (GOTSIS; GRIMANI, 2015).

However, these theories and approaches are not focused on inclusiveness and its practices, and they barely extend our understanding on the constructions of inclusion and exclusion in workplaces with

ethnic diversity. But it appears that some results of a few studies in the literature bring a contribution to inclusiveness among an ethnic workforce, finding that communicating empathy facilitates migrant workers' integration (RAJENDRAN *et al.*, 2017), and that certain behaviours are inhibitors of individual integration. Amongst these inhibitors are ethnocentrism, racism, the use of cultural differences as barriers to interactions and diversity in workplaces (DREACHSLIN *et al.*, 2004; RAJENDRAN *et al.*, 2017) and a lack of cultural knowledge (VALENTA, 2008).

## **Leader inclusiveness**

The notion of inclusion is essential in workplaces with cultural diversity, and an approach that concentrates on explaining leadership inclusiveness might help to explain inclusion. Very often, the word is intrinsically related to the tension between inclusion and exclusion (LARSON *et al.*, 2022) and power relations (WODAK, 2008), since it is not unusual for migrants to have their human capital reduced (VAN LAER; JANSSENS, 2011) only by being non-locally born. Inclusion and exclusion, however, can be experienced in different ways depending on individuals' interpretation of the experience. Wodak explained exclusion in Bourdieu's terms as the 'deprivation of access through means of explicit or symbolic power implemented by social elites' (2008, p. 60). These deprivations of access can concern language, position, job, education and access to participation, among other examples given by Wodak (2008). On the other hand, inclusion implies acceptance that an individual is part of 'our' in-groups and will have 'access' and participate in different levels of society (WODAK 2008).



According to the literature on diversity and inclusiveness, leader inclusiveness is a set of behaviours aiming to make workers feel included in the workplace. These behaviours consider workers' uniqueness and feeling of belonging (MITCHELL *et al.*, 2015). Leaders' inclusiveness has an important role in avoiding the exacerbation of differences among professions (or other aspects) in the workplace that can negatively impact the groups' social identity and performance. The enhancement of differences in workgroups that are characterized by diversity can create in-groups and out-groups. These differences in a study by Mitchell *et al.* (2015) created an intragroup, since the sample consisted of diverse professions inside health care in Australia. The perception of equality and fairness is fundamental to groups with diversity, and it can enhance social identity. On the other hand, the enhancement of differences can negatively impact positions and hierarchies inside the groups (MICHEL *et al.*, 2015).

Although Mitchell *et al.* (2015) investigated professions' diversity and not ethnic diversity, their reasoning regarding communicating differences is relevant to the present study. Through communicating the differences, there are risks of hindrances to including individuals with different ethnicities rather than the dominant ethnicity in the workplace. In workplaces where only one majoritarian group is privileged, the feeling of unfairness and position differentiation in disadvantage to ethnic minorities can increase. In addition, communicating differences can increase the gap between individuals' values, making them less likely to share with one another (CHO; MOR BARAK, 2008) and more likely to divide themselves into in- and out-groups.

Shareability is a condition to inclusion because it involves our social identity that becomes validated when we feel attached to others who are demographically more similar and show similar values (CHO; MOR BARAK, 2008). This shareability makes individuals perceive their communication as more effective and a positive inclusion (CHO; MOR BARAK, 2008) and feel comfortable in collaborating with one another, which contributes to inclusion (HAMRIN, 2019).

The experience of inclusiveness depends partially on effective leadership, according to Randel and colleagues (2018). Leaders are not only formally responsible for facilitating inclusion, but they also influence the work environment. Leader inclusiveness thus can bridge the gaps when those similarities and values do not match among individuals, reducing risks of misunderstandings (RANDEL *et al.*, 2018). In their conceptualization of inclusive leadership, Randel *et al.* (2018) stated that the style contributes to the groups' better functioning compared to other leadership styles. These inclusive leaders can influence workers directly and create a context that favours inclusiveness.

Randel *et al.* (2018) proposed that inclusive leaders facilitate belongingness and indicate a value of being unique. They explained that there are three aspects for facilitating belongingness: supporting members through communicating that they have members' best interest first; ensuring justice and equity; and helping members feel they are a valuable part of the group in terms of sharing decision making and stimulating participation. The authors also proposed that showing value for uniqueness is about self-definition and self-work. The value of uniqueness can be explained through the leader's encouraging diverse contri-

butions, soliciting and encouraging workers to provide a different point of view and helping group members to fully contribute, encouraging them to prepare their ideas and making spaces so they can speak and find alternative ways to allow all members to communicate and participate (RANDEL *et al.*, 2018).

The framework presented by Randel *et al.* (2018) is elucidative and indicates an ideal leadership for diversity in workplaces that would contribute to organizations, private and public, in different societies that strive to cope with diversity issues, assuming that leaders are trained to implement a leadership oriented to inclusiveness. However, the line is extremely blurred between leaders' and organizations' inclusiveness that facilitates belongingness and promotes everyone's uniqueness, and benevolent (or discriminatory) behaviours. The latter type of behaviour stems from inequalities created by organizations' affirmative initiatives (ROMANI *et al.*, 2019), thus by classic management of diversity that reinforces the differentiation between members of groups and makes it inevitable that the minorities became representatives of certain ethnic groups (cf. JANSSENS; ZANONI, 2015). Migrants and other individuals categorized as representing diversity are workers more exposed to acts of benevolence in workplaces. Romani *et al.* (2019) stressed that it is important to conceptualize these acts as discriminatory, not benevolent, despite the fact that they are practiced without leaders or organizations realizing they are reinforcing discrimination.

Following this reasoning, we opted to qualitatively explore five leaders' accounts and practices toward the inclusion of ethnically diverse members in their work groups within elderly care units in Sweden. The aim is

to analyse leaders' constructions of inclusion and exclusion through their discourses and practices that can hinder or facilitate the inclusion of ethnically diverse work groups (LARSON *et al.*, 2022). To achieve this aim, the following research questions will guide the study: How do leaders communicate inclusion and exclusion in their daily leadership practices? What aspects of inclusion and exclusion are salient in leaders' discourses?

## **Method and data**

This study used collected data through interviews and observations (KVALE; BRINKMANN, 2009) to understand leaders' constructions of inclusion and exclusion through their discourses and practices that can hinder or facilitate the inclusion of ethnically diverse work groups (LARSON *et al.*, 2022). The five leaders interviewed were responsible for work groups consisting of natives and migrants. These Swedish and non-Swedish-born workers were local in a small- to medium-sized city in Sweden in which 10% of the population was born abroad. The Social Services Office in the municipality had 10% of its permanent and 25% of its temporary job positions filled by migrant workers.

The leaders from the five senior home units with Swedish and non-Swedish-born in their permanent staff agreed to participate in interviews and observations; only two of these leaders were interviewed (not observed). The municipality was responsible for providing a list of all city units and the contact person's email address. The researchers emailed leaders from all senior home units in the city, informing them about the project's aim and soliciting their participation. Five of 30 individuals answered the email.

The interviews were conducted in the offices of these leaders and occurred in an interactive climate (cf. TRACY, 2013). The data used specifically for this paper consisted of eight interviews (the three first leaders were interviewed twice each) and eight observations (Appendix A) with these leaders. One researcher and a research assistant conducted the interviews. The researcher is a migrant in Sweden. The researcher assistant has previous work experience within the elderly care sector. The interviews and the observed meetings were held in Swedish. The first three interviews were background interviews in which the researcher and assistant made annotations, and they were not recorded. The interview guide was adjusted using information from these first three interviews and explored leaders' communicative everyday practices with employees; among other questions, leaders reflected on how they communicate with their employees and in what situation. They were asked how they handle different situations and their strategies to engage employees in participation. The respondent interviews were conducted using a semi-structured guide; they were recorded and transcribed. The leaders are identified in this paper by numbers, not names. The researcher and research assistant had meetings after each observation and interview to report any deviation or salient moment and discuss the efficiency of the interview questions and observation guides.

The observations were also used to gain insights into the interviewees' discourses. Two researchers observed formal meetings led by three of these five leaders and their work groups (L1, L2, L3). The researchers were the only observers during these meetings (Gold, 1957), and the workers participating in the me-

etings received information about the reason for the researchers' presence. In addition to the researchers' general notes, an observation guide was used to monitor which issues engaged workers primarily, whether leaders made space for workers to express themselves and participate (including providing input and feedback), and how these formal leaders included them in discussions and decisions where those occurred during the meetings. The duration of each meeting was between 100 and 120 minutes, and recordings were not allowed. The numbers of employees for the observed leaders were: L1: 26 (8 migrants), L2: 41 (8 migrants) and L3: 40 (9 migrants).

Although the study includes human participants, it does not fall under the Ethics Review Act<sup>1</sup> or gather sensitive personal data according to the description of the act (2003:460) (Etikprövningsmyndigheten.se).

## Data analysis

For this paper, an inductive analysis was conducted on the interviews and observations. The first step in the analysis was a careful reading of the transcribed pages and the meeting notes, and the observation guides. In this first reading, the raw data were coded manually, emphasizing leaders' discourses of their practices that lead to inclusion and exclusion. The labels were sentences or words (cf. TRACY, 2013) that summarise situations in the case of observations)

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<sup>1</sup> The Ethics Review Act includes principles such as informed consent, voluntary participation, minimizing harm, confidentiality, and participants' overall well-being. The mention to sensitive data considers personal information such as ethnicity, religion and political ideology. For more information at the link: <https://etikprovningsmyndigheten.se/en/what-the-act-says/>

or discourses of leaders' practices. The most frequent codes (already collapsed here) were the following:

- Alertness and monitoring of the environment: leaders' discourses and practices in which they were aware of practices of inclusion and exclusion and were constantly paying attention to signs of exclusion.
- Creation of space for engagement: practices or discourses—whether with awareness or unawareness—in which leaders create space for connection of workers (Swedish-born and foreigners); engagement and participation in discussions and/or decision making.
- Cultural bias and conflicts: situations in which the leader communicates ethnocentric or discriminatory views and situations of disagreement in which leaders' communication style caused the conflict or helped to handle it.
- Empathy and support: situations in which leaders communicate understanding for migrants' situation and highlight employees' development potential.

The second reading aimed to elucidate the initial labels and understand their correlation with discourse and/or practices, particularly concerning the inclusion or exclusion of migrant workers. The ultimate labels are derived from interpreting the initial codes, specifically about leaders' communication styles. These styles encompass the constructions of inclusion and exclusion, along with salient aspects internalized in discourses and practices.

The final categories presented in the results section encapsulate the process of delineating strategies for either including or excluding migrant workers. These categories manifest as the roles of a bridge-builder leader, an empathetic and supportive leader, and a culture enhancer leader. To further clarify, excerpts illustrating the main themes were extracted and translated from the local language into English, following the approach outlined by Titscher et al. (2000).

## **Results**

This study explores how five leaders in the elderly care sector in a mid-size city in Sweden construct inclusion, departing from their daily communicative leadership practices in their work groups, consisting of Swedish-born and migrant members. The data indicate that leaders have different ways to include and exclude migrant workers, but none have a strategy that fully benefits inclusiveness. The constructions of inclusion and exclusion of migrant workers and salient aspects are related to the strategies for participation and engagement in the workplace. The findings indicated that the ways to include and exclude are presented through leadership styles that emerged from the data: bridge builder, empathetic and supportive leader, and culture enhancer leader.

### **Bridge builder leader**

Leaders had to facilitate or mediate understanding and cooperation among workers so that they could assist one another within the group. L1 emphasized that the temporary workers had a more significant influence on the work environment. L1 worked with inclusion in her daily leadership as she participated



in the workers' coffee break by facilitating the inclusion of some members: "I usually say [to the person sitting outside the group]: 'Come, sit here. You should sit around the table. One has to be part'. We will then move the seats and open the ring wider [to make a place for this new person]." (L1).

In this example, the leader alludes to a situation where a new temporary worker sat alone while the rest of the group members sat and talked together. During the observations of meetings, L1 repeated the attitude of attempting to include migrant workers when she believed they needed help to get into the group or participate in something. The moving of the seats and the opening of the circle indicate to workers that they are welcome. For L1, 'One has to be part' of the group, and the most symbolic way to invite someone to belong is by making them physically closer to others and inside the in-group. To avoid exclusion, she had to intervene verbally and move the chair in the group dynamic, inviting the person to sit with them.

During the workplace meetings, L1 included the workers in a dialogue about the agenda. She deliberately made space for each member of the group to talk. Everyone had an opportunity to speak; when they did not, she asked them for their opinions. Although she said she did not have a different strategy for communicating with migrants in the workplace, she did not allow interruptions from other members when a migrant was talking. She stopped interruptions by saying, 'Now [name of the person] is speaking, let us listen to her'. She did not behave in the same way while the Swedes were talking. This same leader facilitated the reading and understanding of the meeting agenda. She had a PowerPoint presentation with the themes to

be discussed during the meetings, and she also had a printed version of the presentation to help the person who was to write the meeting minutes. Her workplace also had a pairing strategy of migrants pairing during work. When she was asked how she knew that workers felt included in the workplace, she replied:

We see it when they are interacting with their colleagues. You sit together, for example, at a coffee shop. You work together. For example, [name of an immigrant worker] and [name of a Swedish worker] are working together. It is not just [name of the immigrant worker] doing things alone. They work in pairs instead. One ensures that you talk and laugh and have a good climate with each other. Well, I hope they are.... When they are not included, they don't sit side by side. There is no togetherness in the group. (L1)

L4 also worked with a mentoring program for the better management of new workers, trainees and those from different ethnic backgrounds (although the main concern was language skills) in the workplace.

Now I am trying to mix people.... I selected two persons with a Swedish background and two staff with a foreign background so that they could complement, sharing, creating and learning. In fact, those people with Swedish as a second language can share a lot of their experience and knowledge just during the mentoring. (L4)

L4 mentioned that small groups give better conditions for the inclusion of migrants because such groups facilitate relationships, and individuals can get to know one another more profoundly.

Learning about one another might improve their communication. L5 believes that when people talk to

one another, they avoid unnecessary irritation in the workplace. L5 gave an example of ineffective communication in the group. She said they had agreed to have the radio on at a low volume, and then suddenly, the radio was too noisy, and people were getting irritated.

### **Empathetic and supportive leader**

L2's discourses about her leadership emphasized two attitudes in her behaviour towards migrants: empathy and support. She mentioned that migrants have to start in a host society from somewhere, and Swedes have to help them and not complain about their language limitations.

We have to have an open workplace; we must receive people with immigrant backgrounds with difficulties, language difficulties, and we need to help one another.... These individuals, over time, get integrated very well into the group ... you need a chance, and I'm proud of the people who work here. They are absolutely amazing. (L2)

The data indicated that the leader has empathy with the migrant's situation, mentioning that everyone has the right to a change even if they have certain limitations in the workplace. However, language issues that caused problems were recurrent in leaders' discourses, even during formal meetings with the group and interviews. The leader praised her workers several times and highlighted the essentiality of migrants getting help from colleagues (for instance, with the language) and trusting them to ask for assistance in executing a task that demands verbal competence. All five leaders concurred that cooperation transforms

a nursing home into an effective workplace, impacting patients positively.

[I]n addition to the language issue, it is important to interact and help others ... and you dare to ask: 'can you help me to book an appointment on the phone since it is hard to talk on the phone and make myself understood at once?'. Then if you need to write a note ..., I have told the staff that there are also people with dyslexia or, for other reasons, cannot write.... It does not matter. This must be de-dramatized. It does not matter if you make a spelling mistake and so on. The main thing is understanding... what the person wants to convey. (L2)

L2 alluded that there is drama because only some in the group are proficient in Swedish. She also mentioned that there is tension between Swedish and migrants that causes a fear of asking for assistance. Since local-born workers feel disturbed when migrants ask for help, and most of those who can help are Swedes, the tension did not favour migrant workers.

L4 gave an example of how the native workers can express themselves when they are irritated with migrants asking for help: 'But, man, we repeated [the information] a hundred times' (L4). According to the leader, migrant workers could say that they understood what was said during meetings, and then, the next day, they would do something different from what was informed. Tasks such as those mentioned by L2, like talking on the phone, are also reasons for complaints. Workers have to talk on the phone with patients' relatives or book appointments (dental, medical, and other types) for patients. These tasks produce difficulty for some migrants with limited language competence. Leader 3 seemed to agree with workers

sharing how she felt, saying, 'Yes, one is like an old LP (long-playing) record that has got stuck. It feels like repeating all the time'. She is metaphorically referring to a scratched LP that repeats the same message several times.

In these nursing homes, however, the work was planned in collegial cooperation with the participation of all group members. Although some migrants had language difficulties, L4 stressed that migrants are an asset in the workplace because it would be challenging to make nursing homes operate in this municipality without them. L4 explained that not enough Swedish individuals are interested in working in elderly care. Migrant language difficulties are not an issue during recruitment. This leader said that her perception of someone does not change because of language skills.

Leaders must be actively aware of workers' needs for development in workplaces consisting of diversity and be prepared to facilitate them. L4 highlighted that workers have to feel they are valuable to the group because this feeling has an impact on how well one feels they are included in a workplace. This leader's meetings were not observed, but she mentioned that workers from her unit get an introduction period to help them become autonomous. They worked with a mentor for a few days to learn the routines of cooperation faster. The main challenge was the common language in the workplace, as L5 put it:

Sometimes you may need some more time [to learn], getting one extra day's introduction. However, if there are fewer language deficiencies, then it is easier. And then you try to encourage those who can speak better and are very good at work to try to improve it. (L5)

L5 said that she encouraged workers to write and to do collegial proofreading afterward. L2 also compared migrants' language competence to functional variations such as dyslexia, which, according to her, can make certain types of work difficult even for Swedish-born workers.

In one observation, L2 had gathered all her staff (representing two groups) into one meeting. There were about 20 people present in the meeting, and all but four of them engaged in discussing several topics. As in the other two-workplace meetings, the staff engaged most in subjects related to the patients' health status. Each worker was the contact person for one or more patients. The contact person was responsible for the patient's appointments and for contact with the patient's relations. When the subject was the patients' health, everyone had something to report. Native speakers participated more than non-native speakers in these meetings, but L2 did not try to involve migrants or Swedes. L2 posed a question, did not wait for answers, and immediately answered her questions. The unit nurse also participated in these meetings, and L2 answered her questions on the group's behalf or interrupted someone else. The meeting was about to end, but L2 had two topics left on her agenda.

The last topic seemed to be sensitive and controversial, but the leader had left only seven minutes. It was about the criteria for sharing a pay rise based on a recent performance appraisal of the workers. The migrant workers did not engage in this discussion, but the non-migrants still wanted to influence this issue. Two of them showed their dissatisfaction and left the meeting in protest. In her debriefing to the researcher, the leader said that the subject had been sufficiently

discussed previously and that the workers got upset every time. She also mentioned that the union and the employer had already decided on this issue. Workers could no longer have influence on the issue; that is the reason she did not prioritize the issue in that meeting.

L2 did not give any response or reaction to the workers' discontent. Commenting on the good work of the migrants, she emphasized their loyalty, which, according to her, could be related to the fact that they needed their jobs and would have difficulty entering the labour market elsewhere.

### **Culture enhancer leader**

Collaborative planning was essential to create more cooperation. Still, leaders needed to be available in these workplaces for practical problem-solving of simple and complex issues and to mediate the organizations and employees' interests. Regarding conflict among members, L3 perceived that more conflicts and misunderstandings among members could arise in groups with ethnic diversity. These misunderstandings can be a misinterpretation of behaviours or even what the person is saying, more often than in homogenous groups:

The group operates in a different way depending on the cultures involved in it.... Then, you must be strategic. Thus, the meetings are different; they look different. However, the workers' culture tells me.... We say, Chilean, Colombian.... So, you know that the heat there [she is talking about a stereotype of Latin Americans as hot tempered], communicate differently. And then give a response differently, too. It [the ways Chileans and Colombians communicate] may sound very harsh for some— 'Oh my God, that person pissed me off' [made me angry]—but it is not about that. They talk that way,

but we have to try to raise attention that this is different from our way, but we must make it work. Therefore, we must work consciously and strategically because the groups are different. (L3)

In the quote above, the leader alludes to cultural differences among her staff. According to her, different communication styles can cause tension and irritation in the group. L3 was managing hostilities between two migrant workers. She blamed the misunderstanding between them on cultural behaviour. L1 was also involved in conflict management between two migrant workers during one of the observed meetings. The conflict was work-related and involved three migrants. During the meeting, one of these workers told the leader that she needed a meeting between the leader and two other migrant colleagues [whom she pointed to and said the names]. The leader arranged the meeting or asked for the reason for the meeting at once. She explained that one of the participants in the conflict was going on leave the next day. They would solve the issue after the worker had returned. During a debrief, the leader informed the researcher/observer that the worker would go on leave with a concern about what would be discussed during the meeting with the three of them. Still, the leader concluded that this was the best that could be done, and there was nothing she could do before she returned from her holiday. She said that conflict among migrants was not unusual.

L1, L2 and L3 reported during the interviews that they did not have any strategy to adapt their communication to migrants. The observations, though, showed otherwise. L3 was observed during two meetings with different groups; in the first, two of the six employees



were immigrants. The first meeting had one migrant male. The leader tried to cut off this worker from the conversation since he was encouraging other workers to contact L3's manager directly with complaints about their work schedule. L3 did not debate the issue with him but was forced back to her agenda and dismissed/ignored the subject the worker had initiated. She asked the workers to remind her of information from earlier meetings about a certain subject. She visibly considered the information that another Swedish worker reminded her of. Another Swedish worker wrote the minutes and, most of the time, answered the questions that the leader placed for the entire group. This worker was active, even bringing up information the leader had missed or forgotten. In the second meeting, there was again only one male migrant worker in the group, but this time, the employee was very quiet, and the other five workers elected him to write the minutes. This group also had only two migrants during the meeting. The leader started the meeting by telling the group something personal, updating them about a situation they seemed to have discussed in the previous meeting. All the female workers reacted with disappointment, since the update was about an outcome that the leader was not expecting. The climate between the leaders in this group was friendlier than the climate in the first group. In the first group, the migrant workers talked more and gave opinions and comments as frequently as the Swedes. In this meeting, the Swedish workers talked as much as the leader. The migrant workers barely participated. One of them only focused on writing the minutes that had been imposed on him.

Migrants in the first group participated more than those in the second group, in which the dynamic was generally friendlier among workers. There was greater consensus in the second meeting, and the workers talked simultaneously. The leader spoke less in the second meeting. In the first meeting, she spoke most of the time, giving information and her viewpoint.

## Discussion and implications

The participating leaders construct inclusion and exclusion depending on their strategies of including and/or excluding foreign workers in processes that demand participation and engagement in the workplace. Leaders involved co-workers in decisions related to their situation in different ways and used different strategies to engage them. Overall, migrant workers had to be encouraged to give input, comments, or a simple reply on issues related to the workplace during the meetings. The only subject on which all of them engaged without encouragement was discussions and information about the health status of their current patients.

Leaders' discourses highlight different aspects of inclusion and exclusion. None of the styles indicated in the data seemed to be fully efficient in facilitating inclusion in the workplace, but some were more efficient than others. The most salient discourses and practices reinforcing exclusion occurred because a leader stressed cultural differences among workers and did not act with fairness to give opportunity to participate to everyone, giving space only to those with whom she shared a similar culture. The salience of these differences can lead to an implicit inequality (Michell *et al.*, 2015); situations of benevolent acts, if not discriminatory ones (Romani *et al.*, 2021); and distance in the feeling of belongingness (Randel *et al.*, 2018).

Although the research literature that informed this study emphasized leaders' role in creating this feeling of belongingness, helping workers feel unique, and helping them feel included in the workplace (Randel *et al.*, 2018, participating leaders fulfil different aspects of inclusion. The main aspects emphasized by leaders' discourses were building bridges (relations, connections), providing empathy and support (understanding and development of workers' needs and potential), and enhancing the avoidance of cultural bias and providing conflict management. Leaders' accounts about their daily communication practices are not always favourable to migrant workers and inclusion. Even leaders who believe that they are helping through answering on behalf of workers might instead be disempowering and disengaging these workers. These acts are also acts of benevolence.

A relevant aspect in leaders' discourses is that inclusion or exclusion in workplaces has to be an ongoing strategy in leaders' communication. The data indicated that leaders must be actively aware and work towards inclusion and constraining exclusion. Inclusiveness demands being alert and monitoring/controlling the work environment for situations affecting migrants' and non-migrants' commitment and engagement to the group's goals.

Leader 3 is an informative example, showing that a leader-centric approach in an environment of ethnic diversity can raise the feeling of unfairness and exclusion among migrant workers.

Leader 1 provided an example of leaders who bridged the cultural gaps and stressed the workplace culture to bridge the differences. The leader communicated as a bridge builder, showing positively relevant

aspects to migrants. The leader's style communicated that participation and engagement are allowed in that workplace; the leader showed fairness and pointed to co-workers, stating that what they say is important to the whole group. The encouragement to participate and create space for workers' contribution is a conscious strategic action that can contribute to the feeling of belongingness and acceptance in the group (Randel *et al.*, 2018). Still, this strategy demands that the leaders be aware the whole time and be alert to avoid exclusion; it also means that leaders should avoid putting migrants (against their will) in the spotlight, which could expose them negatively in front of the group.

Leaders who communicate empathy and supportiveness to co-workers seem relevant in an environment of diversity. The data showed that leaders 4 and 5 worked to develop their co-workers. At the same time, L2 presented a leader-centric orientation, acting with power over co-workers and deciding their priorities alone, which negatively influenced the whole group. However, the literature indicates that leaders in Sweden encourage co-workers to engage and participate in decision-making and other issues related to the workplace; they are different in style, stimulating an open workplace. The data indicated that leaders who enhance differences have biases and dismiss migrant workers' agenda or their desire to influence workplace issues. The data also presented examples of leaders who give employees the time and space to participate in the conversation, to discuss priorities and to focus on their own agenda. As mentioned earlier, inclusion is an everyday exercise.

The findings indicate that the communication of inclusion begins with leaders being aware of the conditions migrant workers have to go through to do their jobs. These conditions also facilitate or hinder inclusion. The data from this small sample showed that these five leaders, despite the Swedish workplace in which they are inserted, have different ways of approaching co-workers who do not share the same values.

The data indicated that cultural behaviours are the differences to be considered between Swedish-born and migrant co-workers' contribution to the work and the work environment. The enhancement of these aspects only contributes to exclusion, which might reduce migrants' capital, preventing these workers from self-development and restricting other access that could be achieved with influence.

The findings of this study have theoretical implications for the literature on leadership and inclusion and diversity management. Leadership aspects can lead to more exploration of leadership discourses and practices that help leaders to communicate in a style that inspires co-workers to engage and participate in issues related to workplaces, which might improve the feeling of being worthy and belonging to the group for foreigner workers. The study contributes to diversity management by presenting a small sample of how inclusion and exclusion can occur independently of organizations' diversity policy in terms of daily communication practices. One practical implication of the study is the understanding that diversity initiatives must focus on even more organizational actors. Human resources can support the initiatives, but leaders and co-workers must legitimize them so they can work.

## Conclusion

The literature on diversity management, leadership, and inclusion highlights several leadership aspects that might positively impact inclusion in workplaces consisting of diversity and making these places more open, creative, and cooperative. In addition, these leadership aspects make workers more participative and engaged (Hearnden, 2008; Nam *et al.*, 2009; Nichols *et al.*, 2015; Parker, 2005). Leaders represent a class of key actors who can make inclusiveness possible, since they mediate values and help workers to become part of the workplace, integrating their identity and sharing values with others (Randel *et al.*, 2018). This study explored how five leaders in elderly care in a mid-size city in Sweden construct inclusion, by examining their daily communicative leadership practices with their work groups, consisting of Swedish-born and foreign members. The findings indicate that leaders' different strategies of inclusion are related to the engagement and participation of workers in discussions and decision-making. Some salient practices and discourses are pertinent to leaders' cultural biases that can lead to ethnocentrism and essentialism, which might have a negative impact on inclusion. Leaders who practice inclusiveness through connecting, relating and giving space for engagement and participation might better contribute to workplaces. The present study can be expanded qualitatively with a larger sample and quantitatively with several contexts and samples within and outside the elderly to increase the knowledge of leaders' leading diversity with the object of improving workplaces.

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CONSTRUCTING INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN AND THROUGH LEADERS'  
COMMUNICATION DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES

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