

Inclusive Meeting Design and the Quality of Collective Decisions

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Abstract

Meetings are central sites of organizational coordination and collective decision making, yet bringing diverse individuals into the same discussion does not ensure that their knowledge, concerns, and alternative interpretations influence the eventual decision. Participation can be constrained by hierarchy, status differences, conversational dominance, psychological insecurity, agenda design, premature consensus, and the disproportionate discussion of information already shared by most members. This study conceptualizes inclusive meeting design as a deliberate organizational practice for structuring participation, information exchange, dissent, facilitation, and decision closure so that collective judgments can draw more effectively on distributed knowledge.

The study integrates meeting-science research with psychological safety, information-sharing theory, diversity and information elaboration, minority influence, and collective-intelligence scholarship. Because no primary organizational dataset was provided, a transparent simulation-based explanatory design was adopted. A synthetic dataset of 300 hypothetical organizational teams was generated using inclusive meeting design, psychological safety, participation equity, information elaboration, and collective decision quality as seven-point constructs.

The simulation produced a positive association between inclusive meeting design and collective decision quality ($r = 0.696$). Participation equity ($r = 0.712$) and information elaboration ($r = 0.701$) were also strongly related to decision quality. A multivariate model containing inclusive meeting design, participation equity, and information elaboration explained approximately 62.3% of the simulated variation in collective decision quality. Mean decision quality increased from 3.29 among very-low-inclusion meeting profiles to 5.29 among very-high-inclusion profiles. These numerical results are synthetic and do not represent evidence obtained from actual organizations. The study argues that inclusive meetings improve collective judgment not merely when everyone is permitted to speak, but when meeting architecture increases the probability that distinctive expertise, minority perspectives, uncertainties, and dissenting information are surfaced, examined, and meaningfully incorporated before decisions are finalized.

Keywords: inclusive meeting design, collective decision making, participation equity, psychological safety, information elaboration, employee voice, meeting science, team effectiveness



1. Introduction

Meetings are among the most visible mechanisms through which organizations coordinate activities, exchange information, solve problems, interpret uncertainty, and authorize decisions. Yet their frequency does not guarantee their effectiveness. Meeting-science scholarship has demonstrated that meetings constitute consequential organizational events rather than administrative interruptions and that their preparation, structure, interaction patterns, and information-utilization processes can influence what teams accomplish. The development of a dedicated meeting-science literature has consequently shifted attention from whether organizations hold meetings toward how meetings can be designed and facilitated more effectively.

The quality of collective decisions depends particularly on how information is distributed and processed. Members commonly enter meetings with partly overlapping knowledge, specialized expertise, contextual experience, and different interpretations of the same problem. Stasser and Titus demonstrated a fundamental difficulty in group decision making: unstructured discussion can disproportionately reproduce information already shared among members while failing to surface distinctive information held by individual participants. Their work showed that groups can therefore possess collectively sufficient information for a better judgment while failing to use that informational advantage during discussion. Meeting design is consequential because the structure of discussion can determine whether collectively available knowledge actually becomes decision-relevant knowledge.

Participation is also influenced by interpersonal and hierarchical conditions. Edmondson's research established psychological safety as an important condition for interpersonal risk taking and team learning, while Nembhard and Edmondson subsequently demonstrated that leader inclusiveness can help shape psychological safety in teams characterized by differences in professional status. Inclusive meeting design must therefore address more than formal access. A participant who technically has permission to speak may still withhold a concern, uncertainty, contradictory observation, or challenge when the anticipated interpersonal cost appears high.

A further issue concerns the difference between demographic or functional diversity and the actual utilization of diversity. Van Knippenberg, De Dreu, and Homan's categorization–elaboration model emphasizes that diversity can contribute to performance through the elaboration of task-relevant information, but diverse groups can also experience social-categorization processes that prevent this potential from being realized. Research on collective intelligence similarly indicates that group performance cannot be reduced simply to the individual intelligence of participants; teams display meaningful differences in their capacity to perform collectively across tasks. These perspectives shift the managerial question from “Who is present?” toward “How does the meeting enable the available cognitive diversity to influence the decision?”

The present study develops inclusive meeting design as an organizational capability for improving collective decision quality. It defines inclusive meeting design as the intentional structuring of preparation, participation, facilitation, information exchange, dissent, evaluation, and decision closure so that relevant perspectives have a credible opportunity to affect collective judgment. The study proposes that participation equity and information elaboration constitute two central mechanisms, while psychological safety provides an enabling interpersonal condition. Because no real meeting observations or organizational survey data were provided, the numerical analysis is explicitly simulation based. The

objective is not to claim empirical validation but to develop a transparent and testable framework suitable for later field investigation.

2. Objectives of the Study

2.1 To Conceptualize Inclusive Meeting Design Beyond Equal Attendance

The first objective is to distinguish inclusive meeting design from simple demographic representation or open invitations. Attendance is a necessary access condition, but it does not reveal whether participants possess meaningful opportunities to introduce information, question assumptions, seek clarification, challenge dominant views, or influence final decisions. Inclusive meeting design therefore concerns the distribution of influence within the meeting process, rather than the numerical presence of different participants alone.

This conceptual distinction is supported by research showing that uneven participation and social or political dynamics can limit the use of expertise during meetings. Littlepage's synthesis of information utilization in meetings emphasizes that meeting effectiveness depends partly on whether procedures encourage the use of member expertise and whether unique rather than merely common information receives adequate consideration. The study therefore treats inclusion as a process characteristic whose value should ultimately be assessed through information quality and decision quality.

2.2 To Examine Participation Equity and Collective Decision Quality

The second objective is to examine whether meeting structures associated with more equitable participation correspond with stronger collective decision quality. Participation equity does not require identical speaking time. Expertise, relevance, and responsibility legitimately influence contribution patterns. The central issue is whether conversational opportunities are systematically restricted by status, assertiveness, seniority, demographic position, communication style, or facilitator preference rather than by the substantive relevance of available knowledge.

Research outside conventional organizational meeting studies also demonstrates that participation rules can interact with group composition to shape who gains voice and authority in deliberation. Karpowitz, Mendelberg, and Shaker showed experimentally that decision rules and group composition can influence inequalities in deliberative participation. The present framework therefore treats equitable participation as an intentionally designed procedural condition rather than assuming that fairness emerges spontaneously from open discussion.

2.3 To Assess Information Elaboration and Psychological Safety as Decision Mechanisms

The third objective is to examine two mechanisms connecting inclusive meeting design with decision quality. The first is information elaboration, meaning the exchange, comparison, clarification, and integration of task-relevant knowledge and perspectives. The second is psychological safety, which affects whether participants perceive sufficient interpersonal security to contribute uncertain, dissenting, or potentially inconvenient information.

These mechanisms are theoretically complementary. Psychological safety increases the probability that information is voiced, while information elaboration determines whether voiced information is seriously processed. A meeting can therefore be psychologically comfortable yet



intellectually weak if alternative perspectives are not critically examined. Conversely, a technically rigorous decision process can remain informationally incomplete if participants withhold concerns. Inclusive meeting design must support both voice and substantive processing.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Meeting Architecture, Participation, and Facilitation

Meeting science increasingly treats meeting effectiveness as a design problem involving premeeting preparation, participant selection, agenda construction, temporal management, facilitation, communication processes, and follow-up. Odermatt, König, and Kleinmann's treatment of meeting preparation and design characteristics situates these elements within a broader evidence-based meeting framework. The implication for inclusive design is that inclusion begins before discussion starts. Who receives information in advance, how agenda items are framed, whose expertise determines participant selection, and whether individuals can prepare alternative analyses can all affect subsequent participation.

Interaction processes during the meeting also matter. Lehmann-Willenbrock, Allen, and Kauffeld analyzed procedural communication in organizational meetings and found that such behaviors can structure discussion, facilitate goal-directed interaction, and inhibit dysfunctional meeting behaviors. Their field research examined 59 team meetings across 19 organizations and reported that more evenly distributed procedural facilitation was associated with greater satisfaction with discussion processes and outcomes. This evidence supports the view that facilitation need not remain exclusively the responsibility of the formal chair.

Inclusive design therefore concerns both procedural structure and interactional access. Useful practices can include advance circulation of decision questions, explicit identification of information required, structured opening contributions, invitation of independent assessments before group debate, facilitator monitoring of conversational concentration, and separation of information generation from final judgment. The theoretical objective is not procedural uniformity but reduction of avoidable barriers that prevent relevant knowledge from reaching collective evaluation.

3.2 Information Sharing, Diversity, and Collective Intelligence

Information sharing is one of the strongest theoretical foundations for inclusive meeting design. Mesmer-Magnus and DeChurch's meta-analysis found meaningful relationships between team information-sharing processes and team outcomes, reinforcing the proposition that team effectiveness depends partly on whether distributed knowledge becomes collectively accessible. Yet Stasser and Titus demonstrated why merely allowing discussion is insufficient: common information has a structural advantage in group conversation because multiple members can introduce and reinforce it.

Diversity theory complements this insight. Van Knippenberg, De Dreu, and Homan proposed that diversity can enhance decision processes when differences generate task-relevant information elaboration, but categorization dynamics can simultaneously interfere with this mechanism. Inclusive meeting design can be interpreted as one organizational response to this tension because procedures can be deliberately created to make unique knowledge visible before interpersonal status and majority preferences narrow the discussion.

Collective-intelligence research further demonstrates that group-level performance has properties that cannot be inferred solely from the abilities of individual members. Woolley and colleagues identified a general collective-intelligence factor associated with group performance across different tasks. From an inclusive-meeting perspective, this suggests that assembling talented participants does not automatically create a high-quality collective decision system. The interaction architecture through which those participants coordinate attention and knowledge remains consequential.

3.3 Psychological Safety, Status, and Constructive Dissent

Psychological safety addresses the interpersonal-risk dimension of participation. Edmondson's foundational study conceptualized team psychological safety as a shared belief concerning whether interpersonal risk taking is safe within the team and connected the construct with team learning behavior. Meeting inclusion depends on this condition because many decision-relevant contributions inherently involve risk: identifying an error, disagreeing with a senior colleague, admitting uncertainty, questioning accepted assumptions, or proposing that an attractive initiative should be discontinued.

Nembhard and Edmondson extended this argument by examining leader inclusiveness and professional status in healthcare teams. Their study established leader inclusiveness as an important leadership behavior associated with psychological safety and improvement-related engagement across status differences. For meeting design, this means that the chair's behavior can either reinforce hierarchical silence or signal that contributions are evaluated according to informational value rather than rank.

Constructive dissent provides another necessary element. Nemeth's minority-influence research distinguishes the cognitive effects of majority and minority positions and demonstrates why exposure to dissent can have consequences beyond whether the minority view ultimately prevails. Inclusive meetings should therefore not define success as immediate interpersonal agreement. Decision quality can require procedural protection for disagreement so that alternatives are examined before consensus becomes socially self-reinforcing.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Analytical Framework

The study adopts a quantitative simulation-based explanatory design. No observational recordings, employee questionnaires, organizational meeting transcripts, or independently scored collective decisions were supplied. It would therefore be methodologically inappropriate to present the study as completed empirical organizational research. Instead, synthetic data are used to demonstrate how the theoretical framework could be operationalized and statistically tested.

The analytical dataset contains 300 hypothetical organizational team profiles. Each profile represents a conceptual decision-making team rather than an identifiable organization or participant. Five constructs were represented on seven-point scales: inclusive meeting design, psychological safety, participation equity, information elaboration, and collective decision quality.

Table 1: Operationalization of the Simulation Framework

Construct	Scale	Conceptual Operationalization	Analytical Role
Inclusive Meeting Design	1–7	Degree to which meeting preparation, facilitation, participation rules, dissent procedures, and decision closure provide meaningful access to influence	Primary explanatory construct
Psychological Safety	1–7	Perceived interpersonal safety for questions, concerns, disagreement, uncertainty, and corrective voice	Enabling condition
Participation Equity	1–7	Extent to which relevant participants have realistic opportunities to contribute without systematic dominance or exclusion	Explanatory mechanism
Information Elaboration	1–7	Degree to which distinct information is surfaced, compared, questioned, integrated, and connected with decision alternatives	Explanatory mechanism
Collective Decision Quality	1–7	Quality of the final collective judgment in terms of informational completeness, reasoned evaluation, and adaptive appropriateness	Dependent variable

Note: All observations are synthetic. The numerical analysis represents methodological demonstration rather than evidence collected from real organizations.

4.2 Synthetic Data Generation

Inclusive meeting design was generated first as the principal independent construct. Psychological safety was modeled as positively but imperfectly related to inclusive meeting design because meeting procedures can influence perceived safety while broader leadership and organizational culture would also affect psychological safety independently.

Participation equity was modeled as a function of inclusive design and psychological safety with residual variation. Information elaboration was then modeled as depending partly on inclusive meeting design, participation equity, and psychological safety. This sequence reflects the theoretical proposition that information must first become expressible and accessible before it can be integrated effectively into collective judgment.

Collective decision quality was generated as a function of inclusive meeting design, participation equity, information elaboration, and stochastic error. Random variation was deliberately retained to acknowledge that real decision quality would also depend on expertise, environmental uncertainty, available evidence, decision complexity, cognitive biases, time pressure, leadership competence, and implementation constraints not included in the simplified simulation.

4.3 Statistical Procedures and Evaluation

Descriptive statistics were calculated to examine the simulated distributions. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to evaluate bivariate relationships among constructs. An ordinary least squares multiple-regression model was subsequently estimated using collective decision quality as the dependent variable and inclusive meeting design, participation equity, and information elaboration as simultaneous predictors.

The 300 synthetic profiles were additionally divided into five equal inclusive-meeting maturity categories containing 60 cases each: very low, low, moderate, high, and very high. Mean construct scores were compared across these categories. Statistical significance within the regression model reflects only the behavior of the generated dataset and should not be interpreted as inferential evidence regarding actual organizations.

5. Analysis

5.1 Correlational Pattern of Inclusive Meeting Processes

The pattern is theoretically meaningful because it suggests that inclusive design is not valuable merely as a fairness-oriented procedural characteristic. Within the constructed model, the strongest decision outcomes emerge when inclusion changes what happens informationally during the meeting—particularly who contributes and how distinctive knowledge is processed.

5.2 Inclusive Meeting Maturity and Collective Decision Quality

The maturity comparison demonstrates a progressive improvement in collective decision quality as inclusive meeting design becomes stronger.

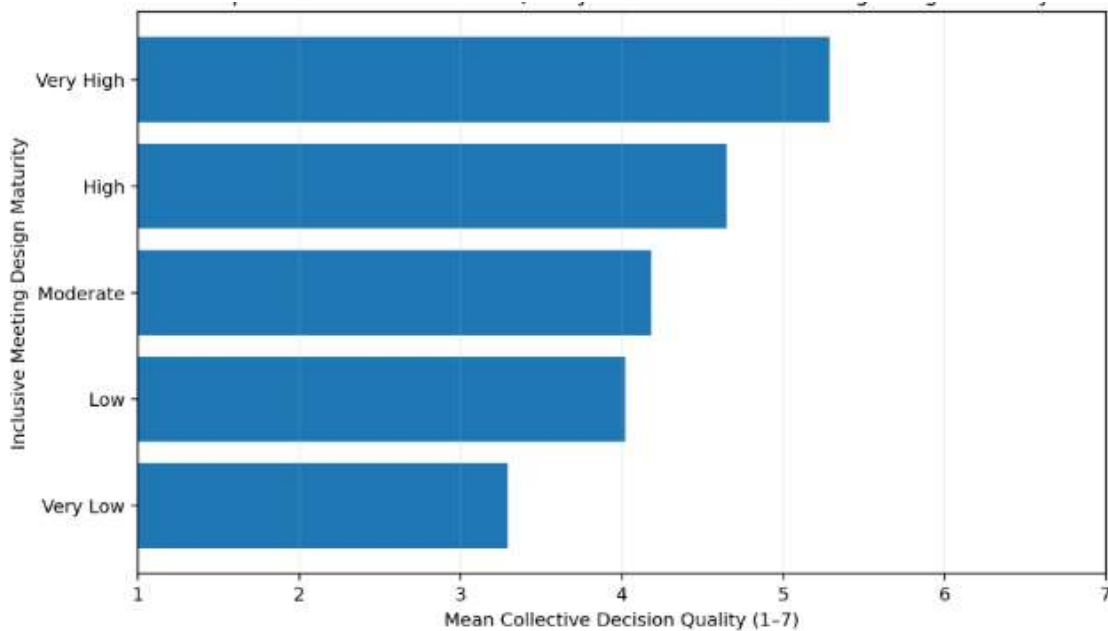
Table 2: Simulated Outcomes Across Inclusive Meeting Design Maturity

Inclusive Meeting Maturity	Synthetic Teams (n)	Mean Inclusive Design	Mean Psychological Safety	Mean Participation Equity	Mean Information Elaboration	Mean Decision Quality
Very Low	60	2.56	3.26	3.35	3.32	3.29
Low	60	3.51	3.69	4.15	4.09	4.02
Moderate	60	4.06	4.36	4.61	4.46	4.18
High	60	4.65	4.53	5.07	4.74	4.65
Very High	60	5.69	5.10	5.72	5.54	5.29

Mean collective decision quality increased from 3.29 among very-low-inclusive-design profiles to 5.29 among very-high-inclusive-design profiles, producing a difference of 2.00 points on the seven-point scale. Participation equity and information elaboration increased alongside meeting-design maturity.

The comparatively modest increase between the low and moderate categories is also conceptually useful. It illustrates that greater procedural inclusion does not necessarily generate proportionally greater decision quality at every incremental level. The effectiveness of meeting structures depends on whether participants actually use the additional opportunities to surface consequential information.

Graph 1: Simulated Collective Decision Quality Across Inclusive Meeting Design Maturity



Interpretation: The horizontal-bar graph demonstrates progressively stronger collective decision quality as inclusive meeting design maturity increases. The largest overall contrast occurs between the very-low and very-high maturity groups.

Key Finding: Within the simulated analytical framework, teams characterized by highly inclusive meeting structures achieve substantially stronger collective decision-quality scores than teams characterized by weak inclusive design.

5.3 Multivariate Assessment of Decision Quality

Multiple regression was used to assess whether inclusive meeting design retained an independent association with collective decision quality after participation equity and information elaboration were included. The simulated model generated an R^2 of 0.623 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.620, indicating that the three predictors jointly accounted for approximately 62.3% of the variation in collective decision quality.

Information elaboration produced an unstandardized coefficient of approximately 0.294, participation equity approximately 0.287, and inclusive meeting design approximately 0.219. All three coefficients were positive and statistically distinguishable from zero within the synthetic dataset.

The reduced independent coefficient for meeting design after the two process mechanisms entered the model is conceptually consistent with the proposed framework. Inclusive procedures should not be



expected to improve decisions simply because they exist. Their value is partly realized through whether those procedures create more equitable participation and more rigorous use of distributed information.

6. Discussion

6.1 Inclusion Should Be Evaluated Through Informational Influence, Not Speaking Opportunity Alone

The first implication is that inclusive meeting design should not be reduced to ensuring that every participant says something. Equal airtime can be administratively simple to measure, but it does not establish whether unique expertise influences collective reasoning. Meeting-science research explicitly identifies uneven participation and overreliance on shared rather than unique knowledge as barriers to effective information utilization. Stasser and Titus's experimental work provides an especially important warning: groups may possess all the information required for a better decision while discussion reproduces initially shared knowledge and existing preferences.

The implication is that inclusive facilitation should actively search for informational asymmetry. Before closing discussion, decision leaders can ask which relevant knowledge is possessed by only one function, location, professional group, customer-facing employee, or technical specialist. Written premeeting assessments can reduce the tendency for early speakers to anchor subsequent contributions. Similarly, collecting initial judgments before open discussion can preserve independent information that might otherwise disappear after a dominant opinion becomes visible.

Inclusive design therefore serves both fairness and epistemic purposes. Participants should possess credible access to influence because exclusion is procedurally problematic, but the organizational case extends further: unequal participation can prevent the team from using knowledge for which the organization has already paid through recruitment, professional expertise, operational experience, and diverse representation. Inclusion becomes strategically valuable when it converts that latent knowledge into decision-relevant evidence.

6.2 Psychological Safety and Status-Sensitive Facilitation Are Necessary but Not Sufficient

The second implication concerns psychological safety. Edmondson's research explains why interpersonal risk influences team learning, and Nembhard and Edmondson demonstrate how leader inclusiveness can matter where professional-status differences are present. Meetings often concentrate these status differences in a highly visible setting. Participants can immediately observe whose ideas are acknowledged, interrupted, questioned, attributed correctly, or ignored.

Inclusive chairs therefore influence future participation through micro-level meeting behavior. When disagreement from a junior participant receives a defensive response, the immediate consequence may affect only one discussion, but the informational consequence can persist into later meetings. Conversely, when leaders respond to challenge with substantive inquiry rather than status assertion, they demonstrate that disagreement is legitimate. This is especially important when the information concerns failure, risk, customer dissatisfaction, technical uncertainty, or problems created by senior decisions. Psychological safety, however, should not be confused with interpersonal comfort. High-quality collective decisions can involve disagreement, difficult tradeoffs, and critical examination. Nemeth's minority-influence work demonstrates why dissent can stimulate cognitive processes different from

those created by majority influence. Inclusive design should therefore make dissent safer without making rigorous disagreement socially unacceptable. The objective is respectful intellectual challenge rather than conflict avoidance.

6.3 From Representation to Information Elaboration and Decision Accountability

The third implication is that the value of diversity is mediated by what groups do with differences. Van Knippenberg, De Dreu, and Homan's categorization–elaboration perspective explicitly connects diversity with information and decision-making processes while recognizing that social categorization can undermine these benefits. A diverse meeting that quickly converges around the most senior participant's initial position may therefore extract little decision value from its diversity.

Inclusive meeting architecture can strengthen elaboration through procedural sequencing. Teams can separate problem definition from solution advocacy, require evidence both for and against leading options, assign explicit responsibility for identifying overlooked information, and record unresolved assumptions rather than disguising them as consensus. Littlepage's meeting-science synthesis similarly indicates that procedures supporting problem analysis, multiple ideas, candid evaluation of alternatives, and action planning can enhance the utilization of member expertise.

Decision closure must also remain accountable. Inclusion does not require unanimous agreement or acceptance of every contribution. Leaders remain responsible for selecting among alternatives when authority requires a decision. However, participants should be able to understand which evidence was considered, how competing considerations were evaluated, where uncertainty remains, and why the final option was preferred. This distinction separates genuine inclusion from symbolic consultation. Participants need not control every outcome, but the process should provide a credible pathway through which relevant knowledge can alter the decision.

7. Conclusion

This study conceptualized inclusive meeting design as an organizational practice through which participation structures, psychological conditions, information-processing routines, and decision procedures can improve the quality of collective judgment. The central argument is that inclusion cannot be assessed adequately through attendance or formal permission to speak. A genuinely inclusive meeting creates meaningful opportunities for distributed knowledge, minority perspectives, questions, uncertainties, and dissent to influence collective reasoning before commitment occurs.

The simulation-based analysis provided an internally coherent illustration of this proposition. Inclusive meeting design was positively associated with collective decision quality, while participation equity and information elaboration showed particularly strong relationships with the outcome. Very-high-inclusive-design profiles achieved substantially higher simulated decision-quality scores than very-low-inclusive-design profiles. These numerical results are intentionally identified as synthetic and should not be interpreted as evidence obtained from actual organizations.

The theoretical contribution lies in integrating meeting science with psychological safety, information sharing, diversity-based information elaboration, minority influence, and collective-intelligence research. This integration shifts inclusive-meeting scholarship from a narrow concern with voice opportunity toward a broader concern with the epistemic architecture of collective decisions.



Inclusion has strategic value when it expands the evidence available to the group, protects independent judgment long enough for alternatives to emerge, and ensures that information from lower-status or minority participants is evaluated according to its relevance rather than the social position of its source.

Future empirical research should validate the framework using recorded organizational meetings, behavioral coding, independent decision-quality assessment, and longitudinal designs. Particularly valuable studies could compare structured and unstructured meetings, examine the effects of anonymous premeeting input, analyze conversational concentration across hierarchical levels, and test whether participation equity improves decisions through information elaboration. Hybrid and virtual meetings also require specific investigation because technological interfaces can simultaneously broaden access and create new forms of visibility, interruption, and participation inequality. The ultimate criterion for inclusive meeting design should therefore not be whether everyone appears equally involved, but whether the meeting enables the organization to make better collective use of what its members actually know.

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