

# Progressive Initiatives for Work Culture Transformation Towards Sustainable Equality in Indonesia

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## ABSTRAK

Studi kualitatif ini mengeksplorasi inisiatif progresif yang bertujuan untuk mengubah budaya kerja untuk mencapai kesetaraan berkelanjutan di Indonesia. Wawancara mendalam dilakukan dengan lima informan utama, termasuk manajer SDM, petugas keragaman dan inklusi, eksekutif senior, dan konsultan pengembangan organisasi. Temuan ini mengungkapkan bahwa transformasi yang berhasil bergantung pada komitmen kepemimpinan, partisipasi karyawan, pengembangan kebijakan yang jelas, dan program pendidikan berkelanjutan. Tantangan seperti resistensi terhadap perubahan, kesadaran terbatas akan prinsip-prinsip kesetaraan, dan kendala sumber daya diidentifikasi, menyoroti perlunya strategi yang disesuaikan secara kontekstual. Studi ini memberikan wawasan praktis bagi organisasi yang ingin menanamkan kesetaraan ke dalam budaya kerja mereka dan berkontribusi pada pemahaman yang lebih luas tentang praktik kesetaraan berkelanjutan di tempat kerja Indonesia.

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores progressive initiatives aimed at transforming work culture to achieve sustainable equality in Indonesia. In-depth interviews were conducted with five key informants, including HR managers, a diversity and inclusion officer, a senior executive, and an organizational development consultant. The findings reveal that successful transformation relies on leadership commitment, employee participation, clear policy development, and continuous education programs. Challenges such as resistance to change, limited awareness of equality principles, and resource constraints were identified, highlighting the need for contextually adapted strategies. The study provides practical insights for organizations seeking to embed equality into their work culture and contributes to the broader understanding of sustainable equality practices in Indonesian workplaces.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the discourse on sustainable equality in the workplace has gained significant attention globally, including in Indonesia, as organizations are increasingly expected to create environments that not only ensure fairness and inclusivity but also foster long-term social sustainability. Despite progressive policies and regulatory frameworks, many Indonesian workplaces continue to face challenges related to gender inequality, hierarchical rigidity, and limited participation in decision-making processes, which highlight the urgent need for transformative initiatives that can reshape organizational culture toward more equitable practices. Gender inequality in Indonesia is strongly influenced by cultural norms and patriarchal structures that limit women's access to certain jobs and fair wages (Arzuliany & Abdullah, 2024; Nuraeni & Suryono, 2021), while the gender pay gap remains a significant issue—globally women earn on average 23% less than men, and in Indonesia, women receive only 78% of men's wages (Triadi & Maryanto, 2024). These cultural perceptions of gender roles also contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership, where only 30% of managerial positions in Indonesia are held by women (Triadi & Maryanto, 2024). Although the government has introduced regulations such as UU Nomor 12 Tahun 2022 to reduce gender discrimination, their implementation is hindered by weak enforcement and limited political commitment (Triadi & Maryanto, 2024), thus requiring stronger law enforcement and better coordination between central and local governments to enhance gender equality in employment (Nuraeni & Suryono, 2021). Furthermore, regional disparities remain visible, as areas like DKI Jakarta show higher gender empowerment compared to regions such as Papua, while socio-economic conditions and governance frameworks also shape gender dynamics across Indonesia, necessitating targeted interventions (Muthmaina, 2024). At the same time, technological and strategic interventions are emerging, with artificial intelligence and other digital tools seen as promising means to address workplace inequalities, alongside the adoption of proactive strategies and a culture of diversity and inclusion that are crucial for advancing gender equality in Indonesia (Juca-Maldonado & Mocha-Román, n.d.).

Work culture transformation involves altering the shared values, norms, and behaviors within an organization to support inclusivity and equality (Schein, 2017), and in Indonesia, such efforts must consider the socio-cultural context, including traditional hierarchical structures, local customs, and varying awareness levels regarding workplace equality. Previous studies emphasize that effective transformation requires active leadership, employee engagement, diversity-sensitive policies, and continuous evaluation (Sharma & Dhar, 2021), as organizational change in Indonesia's work culture must navigate complex socio-cultural landscapes characterized by strong hierarchies and diverse local traditions. Transformational leadership plays a pivotal role in driving cultural change, encouraging innovation and employee involvement in decision-making processes, and has been shown to enhance creativity and efficiency, particularly in the public sector (Mudhoffar & Frinaldi, 2024). Active leadership commitment is also essential for integrating diversity and inclusion, as it sets the tone for organizational priorities and values (Santosa et al., 2022). At the same time, implementing inclusive recruitment and equal access policies is crucial for fostering workplace diversity, with Human Resource Management (HRM) serving as a strategic driver in ensuring these policies are effectively designed, monitored, and evaluated through regular diversity assessments to create a harmonious and productive environment (Rahayu et al., 2025). Furthermore, cultivating cultural awareness and sensitivity through diversity and inclusion training at all organizational

levels is necessary to manage Indonesia's diverse workforce effectively, while creating an inclusive workplace culture demands a holistic approach to people management that integrates best practices supporting diversity and inclusion (Santosa et al., 2022).

This study seeks to explore progressive initiatives undertaken by organizations in Indonesia to foster sustainable equality. By employing a qualitative approach and interviewing five key informants from diverse sectors, this research aims to identify strategies, successes, and challenges associated with work culture transformation. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for organizations striving to implement equality-focused initiatives while contributing to the broader discourse on sustainable work culture development in Indonesia.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 *Work Culture and Organizational Transformation*

Transforming work culture is a multifaceted process that requires a strategic approach to align organizational values with goals such as inclusivity, equality, and sustainability, as it is crucial for enhancing employee engagement, performance, and overall workplace harmony. Successful cultural transformation involves leadership commitment, employee participation, and continuous monitoring to ensure that changes are internalized across all organizational levels. Leadership plays a pivotal role in internalizing work culture values, as demonstrated in the case study of PT Elevena Kreatif Abadi, where consistent application of work culture by leaders led to a positive work environment and increased productivity (Sumiarthini & Yudharta, 2024), while leaders are also expected to leverage organizational culture as a social control mechanism to guide employee behavior toward beneficial organizational goals (AKINOLA, 2023). Equally important, employee engagement fosters a sense of ownership and commitment to new cultural norms (LUPȘA-TĂTARU et al., 2025), with active participation enhancing collaboration and motivation, thereby contributing to a more productive and satisfying work environment (Ceaćîr & Balașa, 2024; Sumiarthini & Yudharta, 2024). Continuous monitoring further ensures that cultural changes are effectively internalized and remain aligned with organizational objectives (LUPȘA-TĂTARU et al., 2025), while also enabling organizations to adapt and refine their cultural strategies to meet evolving demands and maintain competitive advantages (LUPȘA-TĂTARU et al., 2025).

### 2.2 *Sustainable Equality in the Workplace*

Achieving sustainable equality in Indonesia involves addressing cultural and structural challenges that hinder inclusivity in organizational practices, as the country's diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious landscape presents unique barriers to gender equality and broader inclusivity efforts. Despite some progress, traditional norms and hierarchical workplace systems continue to impede the full realization of equality, with deeply rooted cultural and religious beliefs shaping workplace attitudes that affect hiring, promotion, and compensation, particularly disadvantaging women (Farsia, 2024; Manalu et al., 2024). To overcome these barriers, effective strategies such as diversity training and participatory decision-making are necessary to help organizations recognize and value differences, moving beyond a one-size-fits-all approach to inclusivity (King et al., 2023), while mentorship programs and transparent promotion processes are crucial for breaking down barriers to leadership roles for marginalized groups, especially women (Farsia, 2024). Proactive HR strategies also play a vital role in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), as they enhance employee engagement and organizational performance (Halder & Saha, 2023), with HR departments serving as the key drivers of DEI initiatives that foster inclusive cultures, improve employee well-being, and stimulate innovation through tailored policies and practices designed to address specific organizational needs (Halder & Saha, 2023).

### 2.3 *Progressive Initiatives for Work Culture Transformation*

Progressive initiatives in organizations aim to reshape work culture toward equality by implementing innovative strategies that emphasize leadership engagement, employee participation, policy development, and continuous education. Leadership engagement is crucial, as leaders model

inclusive behaviors and signal organizational commitment to equality (Cheruiyot et al., 2024; Vigren & Eriksson, 2025), with leadership commitment further fostering inclusivity and driving innovation (Cheruiyot et al., 2024; Leuhery et al., 2024). At the same time, employee participation through involvement in decision-making processes cultivates a sense of ownership and reinforces inclusive practices (Cheruiyot et al., 2024; Leuhery et al., 2024), while initiatives such as employee resource groups and cultural awareness programs enhance engagement and inclusivity (Cheruiyot et al., 2024; Leuhery et al., 2024). Policy development provides structural support by establishing clear regulations on diversity, anti-discrimination, and equal opportunities (Leuhery et al., 2024; Vigren & Eriksson, 2025), with inclusive policies ensuring the creation of supportive work environments and the effective implementation of diversity initiatives (Cheruiyot et al., 2024). Finally, continuous education through training on unconscious bias, inclusivity, and ethical conduct helps employees understand and internalize equality principles (Cheruiyot et al., 2024; Leuhery et al., 2024), while ongoing learning and development are vital for sustaining inclusive cultures and enhancing organizational performance (Adjo et al., 2021; Kostanek & Khoreva, 2018).

#### **2.4 Conceptual Framework**

Based on the literature, the study focuses on the relationship between progressive initiatives and sustainable equality through work culture transformation. The conceptual framework emphasizes that leadership commitment, employee engagement, policy support, and education serve as key mechanisms driving cultural change toward equality. The framework also acknowledges external and internal challenges as moderating factors influencing the effectiveness of these initiatives.

### **3. METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore progressive initiatives for work culture transformation toward sustainable equality in Indonesia. Qualitative research is considered suitable for examining complex social phenomena, particularly when the objective is to gain in-depth insights into experiences, perceptions, and strategies (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By focusing on rich and descriptive data, the study seeks to uncover the mechanisms, challenges, and outcomes associated with organizational initiatives that aim to promote equality. This approach allows the research to capture the multidimensional aspects of cultural transformation that cannot be adequately represented through quantitative methods alone.

To ensure diverse perspectives, five key informants were purposively selected, representing different organizational contexts and roles in implementing equality initiatives. These include two human resource managers from medium-sized companies, one diversity and inclusion officer from a multinational corporation, one senior executive from a public sector organization, and one organizational development consultant who works with multiple companies on equality initiatives. Purposive sampling was chosen as the most appropriate method because it ensures that participants have direct experience and knowledge relevant to the study, thus enabling the collection of meaningful and contextually rich insights into organizational efforts to achieve sustainable equality practices.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, both face-to-face and via online platforms, with each interview lasting approximately 60–90 minutes. The interviews covered topics such as strategies for work culture transformation, challenges faced in promoting equality, perceived effectiveness and outcomes of initiatives, and recommendations for sustaining equality-focused practices. All interviews were recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Thematic analysis was then applied, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step procedure: familiarization, coding, generating themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting. This structured approach enabled the identification of patterns across the data, resulting in nuanced insights into how organizations in Indonesia implement progressive initiatives to transform work culture and achieve sustainable equality.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 *Descriptive Findings*

The study involved five informants representing diverse organizational contexts in Indonesia, including two HR managers, one diversity and inclusion officer, one senior executive, and one organizational development consultant. Each informant was purposively selected based on their direct experience with initiatives promoting work culture transformation and equality, ensuring that the perspectives gathered were both relevant and insightful. Specifically, the informants comprised I1, an HR Manager from a medium-sized private firm with 10 years of experience; I2, another HR Manager from a medium-sized private firm with 8 years of experience; I3, a Diversity & Inclusion Officer from a multinational corporation with 6 years of experience; I4, a Senior Executive from a public sector organization with 15 years of experience; and I5, an Organizational Development Consultant with 12 years of experience.

Across the interviews, all informants emphasized that organizational initiatives aimed at promoting equality are ongoing processes that demand continuous adaptation to remain effective. They consistently highlighted several critical factors necessary for success, including strong leadership support, active employee engagement, the establishment of clear and inclusive policies, and the implementation of training programs tailored to foster awareness and inclusivity. These findings suggest that sustainable equality in Indonesian workplaces relies on a multifaceted approach that integrates both structural and cultural strategies, requiring long-term commitment from organizations at all levels.

### 4.2 *Thematic Analysis*

Thematic analysis of the interviews identified four main themes: Leadership Commitment, Employee Participation, Policy Development, and Continuous Education.

#### **Theme 1: Leadership Commitment**

All informants emphasized that leadership plays a pivotal role in driving cultural transformation within organizations. Leaders who actively model inclusive behaviors and endorse equality initiatives were seen as the main drivers of change, as their actions not only establish organizational priorities but also influence employee attitudes toward inclusivity. When leaders consistently demonstrate commitment to equality, they create an environment where employees feel encouraged to adopt inclusive practices and contribute to a more equitable workplace culture.

The importance of leadership support was strongly reflected in the informants' statements. As one HR Manager stated, "Without leaders who truly value equality, any initiative will struggle to gain traction" (I1). Similarly, a Diversity & Inclusion Officer highlighted that, "Top management support is non-negotiable; it sets the tone for the whole organization" (I3). These insights underscore that leadership commitment is not only symbolic but also a practical necessity for ensuring that equality-focused initiatives are effectively implemented and sustained.

#### **Theme 2: Employee Participation**

Involving employees in decision-making and feedback processes is essential for building a sense of ownership and accountability in the implementation of equality initiatives. When employees are given the opportunity to contribute their perspectives, they become more engaged and invested in sustaining inclusive practices within the organization. This participatory approach not only enhances employees' sense of belonging but also strengthens the overall effectiveness of cultural transformation efforts by ensuring that initiatives are relevant to the workforce's needs and experiences.

The value of employee involvement was clearly emphasized by the informants. One HR Manager noted, "When employees contribute ideas on inclusivity, they feel a sense of responsibility to uphold it" (I2), while an Organizational Development Consultant explained, "Participation encourages practical solutions that management may overlook" (I5). These insights illustrate that inclusive decision-making not only empowers employees but also provides organizations with

innovative and grounded strategies that might otherwise be missed, making it a critical factor in driving sustainable equality.

### **Theme 3: Policy Development**

Formal policies such as anti-discrimination rules, diversity hiring protocols, and transparent promotion procedures play a crucial role in reinforcing cultural transformation at the structural level, as they provide a clear framework that legitimizes equality initiatives and safeguards employees' rights. As one senior executive emphasized, "Policies give legitimacy to initiatives and protect employees' rights" (I4), while a diversity and inclusion officer stressed the importance of implementation by stating, "It's important that policies are not just documents but actively enforced" (I3). Together, these perspectives highlight that well-designed and consistently applied policies are indispensable for embedding inclusivity into organizational practices and ensuring that cultural transformation efforts move beyond rhetoric to tangible and sustainable change.

### **Theme 4: Continuous Education**

Training programs on inclusivity, unconscious bias, and ethical behavior are essential for enhancing employee awareness and sustaining cultural change, as they ensure that equality principles are continuously reinforced and integrated into daily organizational practices. One HR Manager explained, "Regular training ensures that equality is embedded in daily practice, not just a one-time effort" (I1), while an Organizational Development Consultant added, "Education changes mindsets gradually, which is essential in a culture that resists sudden change" (I5). These insights underline the importance of ongoing education as a strategic tool for shifting organizational mindsets, fostering inclusivity, and supporting the long-term success of equality initiatives.

#### **4.3 Challenges in Implementation**

The informants identified several challenges to achieving sustainable equality, including resistance to change from employees who are accustomed to hierarchical norms, limited awareness of equality principles that hampers engagement, and resource constraints faced by smaller organizations in allocating sufficient time and funds for training and policy enforcement. Despite these obstacles, they emphasized that consistent leadership, participatory practices, and tailored education programs serve as effective strategies to mitigate resistance and gradually foster a culture of inclusivity and equality within organizations.

#### **4.4 Discussion**

The findings demonstrate that transforming work culture toward sustainable equality is a multifaceted process requiring both structural and behavioral interventions, with leadership commitment and employee participation emerging as pivotal elements in driving organizational change. Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping organizational culture by defining core values, fostering innovation and inclusivity, and managing resistance effectively, positioning leaders as cultural architects who guide organizations through transformation by communicating vision and aligning behaviors with organizational goals (Jerab & Mabrouk, 2023; Meyer & Beletski, 2023). At the same time, employee participation in decision-making enhances organizational commitment by fostering trust, ownership, and accountability, which not only improves morale and job satisfaction but also strengthens inclusivity and reduces potential conflict (Kostanek & Khoreva, 2018; Ogu, 2024). Together, leadership commitment and employee engagement create a synergistic dynamic in which structural changes are reinforced by behavioral adaptation, ensuring that cultural transformation toward equality is both sustainable and embedded within the organizational fabric.

Policy development and continuous education function as structural and cognitive mechanisms that reinforce organizational transformation, with policies providing formal frameworks to legitimize inclusivity initiatives while education shapes attitudes and mindsets to ensure long-term cultural change. This dual approach is consistent with findings in entrepreneurship education, where integrated frameworks combining mindset development, skills acquisition, and ecosystem engagement are emphasized as critical for empowerment (Oberer & Erkollar, 2023). Experiential and engaged learning methods have also been shown to influence mindsets in line with the Entrepreneurial Attitude Orientation (EAO) model (Robinson & Gough,

2020), while institutional support and technology integration play a vital role in embedding inclusive concepts into practice (Ali et al., 2024). Similarly, exposure to successful role models and hands-on experiences fosters intentions and commitment to inclusivity (Cekule et al., 2023), with cultural inclusivity further enhancing creativity, resilience, and adaptability as core components of mindset transformation (Ali et al., 2025). Thus, just as entrepreneurial education leverages structural frameworks and mindset development, workplace equality initiatives require policy enforcement and continuous education to embed inclusivity into both organizational systems and employee values.

Challenges such as resistance to change and limited awareness reflect the cultural and systemic complexities in Indonesia, suggesting that interventions must be contextually adapted and culturally sensitive to be effective. This aligns with prior studies that emphasize the importance of culturally sensitive approaches in equality initiatives, as seen in various fields. For instance, culturally sensitive curricula have been shown to enhance student interest and engagement among minoritized groups by ensuring diversity representation, positive depictions, and inclusive interactions (Quinlan et al., 2024). Similarly, culturally sensitive strategies in sexual violence prevention (SVP) recognize the role of cultural norms in shaping perceptions of consent and gender roles, highlighting the need for educational efforts that challenge stereotypes and debunk myths to create safer environments (Kennedy et al., 2024). Gender sensitization initiatives also demonstrate how transformative approaches can address societal and cultural barriers, fostering inclusivity and more equitable attitudes (Arathi, n.d.). Moreover, cultural dimensions significantly affect work-life balance, as seen in studies of women entrepreneurs in Dubai, where Eastern women face challenges from high power distance and collectivist values while Western women struggle with cultural adaptation, underscoring the necessity of culturally sensitive interventions to support diverse entrepreneurial and organizational contexts (Tahir, n.d.).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that progressive initiatives for work culture transformation are essential for promoting sustainable equality in Indonesian organizations. Leadership engagement, employee participation, policy support, and continuous education emerge as critical drivers of successful cultural change. While challenges such as resistance to hierarchical norms, limited awareness, and resource constraints persist, organizations that implement contextually sensitive strategies can foster more inclusive, equitable workplaces. The findings underscore the importance of integrating behavioral, structural, and educational interventions to achieve long-term equality. This research offers practical guidance for organizations seeking to develop sustainable equality initiatives and contributes to the growing discourse on organizational transformation in Indonesia.

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