US VS THEM: INGROUP PRIVILEGE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

Rezki Perdani Sawai
Fakulti Kepimpinan dan Pengurusan, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia
Email: rezki@usim.edu.my

Umi Hamidaton Soffian Lee
Fakulti Ekonomi dan Muamalat, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia
E-mail: umihamidaton@usim.edu.my

Joki Perdani Sawai
Fakulti Psikologi dan Pendidikan, Universiti Malaysia Sabah,
E-mail: joki@ums.edu.my

Anita Ismail
Fakulti Ekonomi dan Muamalat, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia
E-mail: anitaismail@usim.edu.my

ABSTRACT

Ingroup privilege has a major impact on employee wellbeing in the workplace. Psychological wellbeing is a core element in the overall wellbeing of employees and is linked to individual physical and mental health and longevity. Ingroup privilege refers to benefits enjoyed by an organization's dominant or majority group. It can significantly affect employees' psychological wellbeing as it tends to increase interpersonal tensions, reduce cooperation between different groups, and has a negative impact on employee and organizational performance. This study sought to understand how ingroup privilege affects the mental health and job satisfaction of employees. Organizations should consider implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives that promote equality and foster an inclusive culture that values the contributions of all employees. This issue is essential to maintain a healthy workplace environment and culture. Hence, this research emphasized the importance of organizational efforts to mitigate the negative impacts of ingroup privilege and promote a culture of inclusion and equality.

Keywords: Ingroup privilege, psychological wellbeing, employee wellbeing

1. Introduction

Organizations constantly strive to minimize negative work-related stress, pressures, and stressors, among their employees although completely eliminating such issues can be a challenge. Understanding and promoting employee wellbeing and workforce sustainability is a key responsibility of human resources and management in ensuring that appropriate decisions are made to minimize negative impacts on employees and to safeguard their long-term benefits.

Employee wellbeing has been much researched by organizational psychologists who studied indicators such as job satisfaction, burnout, work engagement, and their impacts (Bakker, 2015). Understanding psychological requirements facilitates awareness of the impact that ingroups can have on the wellbeing of employees, whether positive or negative. Ingroup privilege can have significant impacts in the workplace and adversely affect employees and organization bottom lines (Hornsey & Jetten, 2004). In addition, employee wellbeing may also be influenced by the work environment, which consists of stable and variable elements. Therefore, it is important to examine various strategies that managers might employ to oversee the psychological wellbeing of employees and their capacity to express thoughts and apprehensions.

Privileges are complex and multifaceted issues, and are often contentious topics to discuss. As such, it is important to begin with a common understanding of what it means to be privileged. In general, privileges are defined as the special advantages, unique benefits, rights, or entitlements accorded to individuals based on their association with groups that hold status and power in society (McIntosh, 2012). Bailey (1998) defines them as assets or resources acquired through personal or other efforts that enable individuals to gain an advantage over others. Ingroup privilege refers to benefits enjoyed by members of the dominant group or the majority in the organization (Tajfel & Turner, 1978).

Ingroup privilege can significantly affect the psychological wellbeing of employees at work. Its existence affects work-related wellbeing, leads to increased interpersonal tensions, reduces cooperation between different groups in the workplace, and negatively affect employee and organizational outcomes. Exploring employee wellbeing allows management to appreciate how special practices affect workers. The inability to manage ingroup privileges can have negative effects on employee wellbeing, such as a deterioration in their physical, mental, and social health (Madera et al., 2019). Thus, the impact of such earned and unearned advantages on employee well-being is critical for organisational performance. Specific indicators of physical and mental wellbeing and interventions can lead to changes in individual or organizational performance and output. This research attempts to understand the idea behind and practice of ingroup privilege and how it impacts employee wellbeing.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theories Related to Ingroups Vs Outgroups

The concepts of ingroup and outgroup, derived from social identity theory and group dynamics, allow us to understand employee behaviour in organisational set-ups. The following sections explore these concepts and their implications for the workplace.

2.1.1 Social Identity Theory

According to Tajfel and Turner (1979) social identity theory argues that individuals categorize themselves and others into groups. Such categorization helps them develop a sense of identity and belonging. In the workplace, this can manifest itself in the formation of ingroups and outgroups.

According to this theory, ingroup refers to a group which an individual identifies with and feels a sense of belonging. In the workplace, this can be a team, department, or group of colleagues who share common interests, values, or goals. Meanwhile, the outgroup refers to a group with which the individual does not identify and may feel opposition or in competition against. In the workplace, this could be other teams, departments, or individuals perceived as different or competing for resources.

Members of an ingroup tend to trust each other more, leading to better cooperation and communication. There is often a higher level of support and loyalty within the group thereby enhancing team cohesion and effectiveness. Furthermore, members of an ingroup are likely to coordinate their efforts toward a common goal, increasing overall productivity and job satisfaction.

2.1.2 Relational Inequality Theory

Relational inequality theory (RIT) emphasizes the how social relationships and organizational arrangements create unequal access to position and status and rewards (Pickett & Brewer, 2005).

According to this theory, employees differ in their ability to access resources and use others in production and exchange relations based on their different power levels. Culture, status, and material resources in such relationships often are due to gender, race, citizenship, occupation, and education.

2.2 Ingroup Privilege

Although various concepts and issues of privilege, such as stereotypes, implicit and explicit forms of prejudice, and old and current forms of discrimination have been studied extensively (Ehrke, Ashoee, Steffens, & Louvet, 2020; Case, Iuzzini, & Hopkins, 2012) their direct impacts have received scant attention. The focus of previous researches has primarily been on how disadvantaged groups were discriminated against rather than the impact on privileged groups. Of late, however, there have been some investigations by social psychologists on how privilege endows discriminatory benefit on advantaged group members and its impacts (Case et al., 2012; McIntosh, 2012).

Privilege can be "defined in relational terms and to social groups, and involves unearned benefits granted to powerful social groups in systems of oppression" (Case et al., 2012). It focuses on macro-level systems that develop and sustain benefits for particular groups and thus challenge issues such as equality and meritocracy. According to McIntosh (2012), "we all have both privileges and disadvantages", implying that benefits are accorded to some (e.g., Whites) while others (e.g., women) face handicaps.

As assets, privileges are either merited or not, and aid in advancing or benefiting persons, often to the detriment of others (Bailey, 1998). An acquired privilege is "any acquired condition, skill, asset, or talent that benefits its possessor" (Bailey, 1998). Acquired privileges are often achieved from work, education, or through the acquisition of specific skills (Rocco & West, 1998), while unearned ones derive from being members of a particular group.

The more individuals identify with their ingroups, the further they stay from outgroup members (Pickett & Brewer, 2005). Moreover, members of ingroups tend to raise the stature of their group, a condition defined as ingroup favouritism or bias (Tajfel, 1978), where their members are given priority while those outside their group are discriminated against based on traits that they cannot change (Ruggs et al., 2011). Ingroup bias not only endows some with greater rewards but can lead to their mistreatment outside. Under such social discrimination (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999), the subjective perspectives of ingroup members make them discriminate against outsiders. Such social discrimination can seriously undermine employees belonging to groups that are unlike their leaders and colleagues (Heilman, 2012).

2.3   Employee Wellbeing

Employee wellbeing refers to the physical and mental health condition of workers covering both their life and work experiences (Danna & Griffin, 1999). According to Warr (1987), work-related wellbeing is the overall quality of work experienced by employees (Grant et al., 2007).

Individual satisfaction is closely related to employee wellbeing factors such as salary, relationships with colleagues and supervisors, working conditions, job security, opportunities for training, personal development, and teamwork (Baptiste, 2008; Edgar et al., 2017). Happy and healthy employees are assets that provide the foundation for sustainable and profitable companies, especially in times of crisis (Baptiste, 2008).

According to Page and Vella-Brodrick (2009), employee wellbeing has three facets. Subjective wellbeing involves life satisfaction and disposition effect, workplace wellbeing comprises job satisfaction plus work-related effects, and finally psychological wellbeing that is related to self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, mastery of the environment, autonomy, purpose in life and personal growth. Employee wellbeing is important as it reduces employee turnover and promotes high employee performance (Cotton & Hart, 2003). In addition, there is a positive correlation between wellbeing and performance (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009).

2.4   Ingroup Privilege and Employee Wellbeing

Ingroup privilege has a critical effect on employee wellbeing in workplace settings. This can manifest itself in various ways, affecting the psychological and physical health of employees together with their overall job satisfaction and performance.

Crises tend to exacerbate group-based inequalities (Salin, 2003). Johnston and Lordan (2016) found that though highly-skilled, black men often received less pay and were less likely to be employed compared to whites during times of economic crises. They noted that racial prejudice increased about 4% with each percentage increase in the unemployment rate, suggesting that the disadvantaged faced increased discrimination with rising unemployment. In a more competitive labour market, black men are perceived as a threat to the advancement of ingroup members. This finding is supported by SIT which stated that when outgroup members are seen as threats, individuals will identify themselves more strongly with their ingroup and more likely promote their group counterparts (Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999). In summary, ingroup privilege can significantly impact employee wellbeing by creating gaps in stress levels, career advancement, social support, and overall health. To overcome such issues, strong efforts should be made to promote diversity, inclusion, and equality in the workplace towards creating an environment that values and supports all employees.

2.5 How Ingroup Privilege Affects Employee Mental Health

Ingroup privilege refers to the advantages and preferential treatment received by dominant or favoured group members in an organization or society. These privileges can seriously affect the mental wellbeing of both ingroup and outgroup workforce members.

Ingroup members often receive more recognition, support, and opportunities, which can boost their self-esteem and confidence. This is because privileged access to resources and advancement opportunities can lead to higher job satisfaction, less workplace stress due to a supportive environment, and reduced barriers to success.

Ingroup privilege members may experience fear of losing their privileges. Concerns about maintaining their privileged status can cause stress, especially if they feel their positions may be threatened. In addition, ingroup members may feel pressure to conform to group norms and expectations, which can lead to stress and anxiety. Constantly having to prove themselves and facing systemic obstacles can lead to increased stress and anxiety.

Furthermore, ingroups may compete with outgroups for resources, recognition, or advancement opportunities, leading to tension and conflict. They may create stereotypes and biases against outgroups, leading to misunderstandings and reduced cooperation.

Conversely, outgroup members may feel marginalized and left out, leading to feelings of loneliness and isolation. By not addressing ingroup privilege, organisations may create negative consequences for the physical, mental, and social wellness of employees (Madera et al., 2012; WHO, 2020). Negative self-esteem amongst workers can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, and even suicide (Bernstein & Trimm, 2016). Chronic stress and lack of support can contribute to depression and burnout among outgroup members. Moreover, ample research points to the nexus between race, gender, age, and sexual orientation discrimination and employee burnout (Volpone & Avery, 2013).

2.6 How Ingroup Privilege Affects Employee Job Satisfaction

Low job satisfaction and withdrawal behaviours such as tardiness, absenteeism, and high turnover are often caused by the existence of ingroup privilege (Madera et al., 2012; Volpone & Avery, 2013). Perceived inequality can lead to job dissatisfaction and disengagement. Feelings of being unappreciated and neglected can reduce enthusiasm and motivation to perform well. Persistent discrimination and lack of recognition can erode self-esteem and self-worth, which can negatively impact job satisfaction and performance.

2.7 Importance of Organizational Efforts in Reducing the Negative Effects of Ingroup Privilege

Organizational initiatives to reduce the negative effects of ingroup privilege are essential to fostering a fair, inclusive, and productive work environment. Such efforts not only improve employee wellbeing and satisfaction but also promote overall organizational performance, strengthen culture, ensure legal compliance, and enhance reputation. By prioritizing these initiatives, organizations can create a more equitable and thriving workplaces for all employees.

 Organizations must develop a sense of belonging and inclusion in the workplace. By creating a safe psychological climate, leaders allow outgroup members to feel "included, safe to learn, safe to contribute, and safe to challenge the status quo-all without fear of being embarrassed, marginalised, or punished in some way" (Clark, 2020, p.13). Organizations should provide fair treatment and opportunities to all employees. Minority employees who feel valued and psychologically safe have greater motivation to be more committed to their organisation (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Regular surveys of employees' sense of psychological safety should be conducted, and leaders held responsible for the results of their performance (Tjan et al., 2017). Diverse teams that feel inclusive are more likely to collaborate effectively and bring innovative solutions to the table. Valued employees who feel included will be more loyal to organizations that demonstrate a commitment to fairness and equality.

In addition, by reducing inequality, organizations can reduce the stress and anxiety that outgroup members often experience. Ensuring fair treatment and opportunities for all employees can strengthen relationships and build trust between employees and management. A fair and inclusive workplace can increase motivation and productivity when employees feel recognized and valued for their contributions. Organizations need to create a space where workers from marginalised groups feel free to voice their concerns about the injustices they encounter (Morrison & Milliken, 2003). Some might be reluctant to bring up problems at work for fear of unfavourable outcomes, such being labelled troublemakers. Regularly assessing the voice climate, where an employee believes that speaking up at work is encouraged, should be a regular feature (Morrison, Wheeler-Smith, & Kamdar, 2011). A high voice climate allows employees to share their opinions or concerns and should be evaluated at workgroup levels (Frazier & Bowler, 2015). It entails supporting employees in raising

issues and are beneficial to organisations, such as contributing to improved performance (Frazier & Bowler, 2015).

Moreover, research indicates that outgroup members are more inclined to suppress knowledge that could foster creativity if they were less appreciated and rewarded than other group members (Lin & Huang, 2010). Leaders wishing to gain from the ideas of outgroup members must address this issue (Newman et al., 2017). Genuine self-expression of members at work can be affected by the attitudes and behaviours of leaders and peers towards outgroups, thus impinging on their welfare (Ragins et al., 2007). Real satisfaction at work enhances self-esteem and sense of fulfillment among employees and helps reduce their levels of anxiety and depression (Goldman & Kernis, 2002).

3.   Conclusion

The influence of ingroup privilege on employee wellbeing is profound and multifaceted, affecting both ingroup and outgroup members in different ways. For outgroup members, it often results in feelings of exclusion, increased stress, and barriers to career advancement, all of which negatively impact their mental health and job satisfaction. On the other hand, ingroup members may enjoy greater security and confidence, although they may also experience stress related to pressures to conform and maintain their privileged status.

Organizational dynamics are also significantly affected by the presence of ingroup privilege, which leads to workplace tensions, reduced trust, and lower overall morale. To foster a healthier and more inclusive work environment, organizations must actively recognize and address these differences. This can be achieved through comprehensive diversity and inclusion initiatives, awareness and sensitivity training, equitable access to opportunities, and cultivating a workplace culture that values and respects all employees equally. The road to reducing the negative effects of ingroup privilege is challenging but essential to creating a fair and thriving workplace.

hidup bersama dalam masyarakat majmuk serta membuang tohmahan yang mengatakan bahawa buruh-buruh India adalah golongan pemabuk malah fakta baru ini akan menunjukkan perbuatan British yang menjadi dalang kepada masalah ketagihan todi dan arak masyarakat India sehingga kini.

Kajian mengenai penglibatan British dalam perniagaan todi hanya menumpukan perhatian kepada kedai todi kerajaan di negeri Kedah sahaja. Kajian ini perlu dikembangkan lagi dan melihat kepada maklumat dan peranan kedai todi kerajaan di peringkat negara serta memerlukan kajian-kajian yang mendalam mengenai hasil perolehan kedai todi kerajaan memberikan sumbangan kepada kerajaan British di Tanah Melayu serta Kerajaan British secara amnya. Kajian juga perlu dilakukan untuk melihat sektor -sektor kerajaan yang menerima saluran perbelanjaan hasil dari Kedai Todi Kerajaan di seluruh negeri. Akhirnya kajian harus dilakukan tentang maklumat sama ada kaum India mendapat manfaat atau bantuan hasil daripada perbelanjaan yang mereka lakukan terhadap ketagihan todi.

4.   References

Adams, M., Bell, L. A., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (2007). *Teaching for diversity and social justice,* (Vol. 2). New York: Routledge.

Arnold B. Bakker (2015). Towards a multilevel approach of employee wellbeing. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology,* doi: 10.1080/1359432X.2015.1071423

Bailey, A. (1998). Privilege: Expanding on Marilyn Frye's oppression. *Journal of Social Philosophy,* 29(3), 104-119.

Baptiste, N. R. (2008). Tightening the link between employee wellbeing at work and performance: A new dimension for HRM. *Management decision*, *46*(2), 284-309.

Bernstein, C., & Trimm, L. (2016). The impact of workplace bullying on individual wellbeing: The moderating role of coping. *Journal of Human Resource Management*, 14(1), 1-12.

Case, K. A. (2007a). Raising male privilege awareness and reducing sexism: An evaluation of diversity courses. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *31*(4), 426–435. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2007.00391.x

Case, K. A. (2007b). Raising white privilege awareness and reducing racial prejudice: Assessing diversity course effectiveness. *Teaching of Psychology*, *34*(4), 231–235.

Case, K. A., Iuzzini, J., & Hopkins, M. (2012). Systems of privilege: Intersections, awareness, and applications. *Journal of Social Issues*, *68*(1), 1–10.

Clark, T. 2020. The 4 stages of psychological safety: Defining the Path to inclusion and Innovation. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Danna, K., & Griffin, R. W. (1999). Health and wellbeing in the workplace: A review and synthesis of the literature. *Journal of Management*, *25*(3), 357-384.

Edgar, F., Geare, A., & Zhang, J. A. (2017). A comprehensive concomitant analysis of service employees' wellbeing and performance. *Personnel Review*, 46(8), 1870-1889.

Ehrke, F., Ashoee, A., Steffens, M. C., & Louvet, E. (2020). A brief diversity training: Raising awareness of ingroup privilege to improve attitudes towards disadvantaged outgroups. *International Journal of Psychology*, 55(5), 732-742.

Ely, R.J. and Thomas, D.A. (2001) Cultural Diversity at Work: The Effects of Diversity Perspectives on Work Group Processes and Outcomes. Administrative Science Quarterly, 46, 229-273.https://doi.org/10.2307/2667087

Fletcher, L. & Beauregard, T. (2021). The psychology of diversity and its implications for workplace (in)equality: Looking back at the last decade and forward to the next. *The British Psychological Society*, 577-594.

Frazier, M. L., & Bowler, W. M. (2015). Voice climate, supervisor undermining, and work outcomes: A group-level examination. *Journal of Management, 41*(3), 841–863. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206311434533

Grant, A. M., Christianson, M. K., & Price, R. H. (2007). Happiness, health, or relationships? Managerial practices and employee wellbeing trade-offs. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, *21*(3), 51-63.

Goldman, B. M., & Kernis, M. H. (2002). The role of authenticity in healthy psychological functioning and subjective well-being. *Annals of the American Psychotherapy Association, 5*(6), 18–20.

Heilman, M. E. (2012). Gender stereotypes and workplace bias. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 32, 113-135.

Hill, N. S., Axtell, C., Raghuram, S., & Nurmi, N. (2024). Unpacking virtual work's dual effects on employee wellbeing: An integrative review and future research agenda. *Journal of Management,* 50 (2), 752-792.

Johnston, D. W., & Lordan, G. (2016). Racial prejudice and labour market penalties during economic downturns. *European Economic Review*, *84*, 57-75.

Hornsey, M. J., & Jetten, J. (2004). The individual within the group: Balancing the need to belong with the need to be different. *Personality and Social Psychology Review, 8*(3), 248–264.

Madera, J. M., Hebl, M. R., Dial, H., Martin, R., & Valian, V. (2019). Raising doubt in letters of recommendation for academia: Gender differences and their impact. *Journal of Business and Psychology,* 34, 287-303.

McIntosh, P. (2012). Reflections and Future Directions for Privilege Studies. *Journal of Social Issues,* 68(1), 194–206.

Mummendey, A., & Wenzel, M. (1999). Social discrimination and tolerance in intergroup relations: Reactions to intergroup difference. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *3*(2), 158-174.

Nielsen, K. (2022). Organizational Interventions. In Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Psychology.

Nixon, S. A. (2019). The coin model of privilege and critical allyship: implications for health. *BMC Public Health,* 19(1), 1637.

Rocco, T. S., & West, G. W. (1998). Deconstructing privilege: An examination of privilege in adult education. *Adult Education Quarterly,* 48(3), 171-184

Owuamalam, C. K., Caricati, L., & Bonetti, C. (2024). A large-scale test of the reality constraint and ingroup bias accounts of women's support for male privilege. *Psychology of Women Quarterly,* 48(1), 38-55.

Page, K. M., & Vella-Brodrick, D. A. (2009). The 'what', 'why' and 'how' of employee wellbeing: A new model. *Social Indicators Research*, *90*, 441-458.

Pickett, C. L., Silver, M. D., & Brewer, M. B. (2002). The impact of assimilation and differentiation needs on perceived group importance and judgments of ingroup size. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28(4), 546-558.

Pickett, C. L., & Brewer, M. B. (2005). The role of exclusion in maintaining ingroup inclusion. In D. Abrams, M. A. Hogg, & J. M. Marques (Eds.), *The social psychology of inclusion and exclusion*, 89–111). Psychology Press.

Ruggs, E. N., Martinez, L. R., & Hebl, M. R. (2011). How individuals and organizations can reduce interpersonal discrimination. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass,* 5(1), 29-42.

Salin, D. (2003). Ways of explaining workplace bullying: A review of enabling, motivating and precipitating structures and processes in the work environment. *Human relations*, *56*(10), 1213-1232.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1978). Intergroup behavior. *Introducing social psychology,* 401, 466.

Volpone, S. D., & Avery, D. R. (2013). It's self defense: How perceived discrimination promotes employee withdrawal. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology,* 18(4), 430.

Warr, P. (1987). *Work, unemployment, and mental health*. Oxford University Press.