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Unveiling the 'Quiet Revocation': How Organizations Reframe DEI in an Anti-Inclusion Era

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Unveiling the ‘Quiet Revocation’: How Organizations Reframe DEI in an Anti-Inclusion Era

Abstract

Purpose:

This study examines how Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) practices are institutionally excluded and symbolically rejected in organizations in the current anti-inclusion political environment. Introducing the concept of ‘quiet revocation’, it theorizes the implicit, rationalized withdrawal of DEI through symbolic power, field repositioning, and ‘taken-for-granted’ assumptions, showing how organizations invoke inclusion while strategically undermining it under claims of neutrality.

Design/methodology/approach:

This conceptual analysis applies a Bourdieusian tripartite framework, critical theorizing, and abductive interpretation of existing studies, reports, and political developments. Abduction is used as a philosophical mode of conceptual inference to explain emerging, counterintuitive patterns of DEI retrenchment, integrating disparate observations into the theoretical construct of quiet revocation.

Findings:

The study identifies three interrelated mechanisms driving the subtle withdrawal of DEI: (1) symbolic reframing: where symbolic power redesigns DEI as divisive or reputationally risky; (2) managerial recolonization: field dynamics exclude equality actors and reinterpret inclusion through powerful institutional logics; and (3) epistemic disqualification: assumptions sustaining the myth of meritocracy and neutrality as objective truths, thereby discrediting equality-based perspectives and delegitimizing DEI retrenchment.

Practical Implications:

The paper offers critical guidance for practitioners and leaders, emphasising organisational activism, embedding DEI leadership within strategic structures, and building trans-institutional resistance. It urges rejecting neutral managerial framings in favour of sustained institutional reflexivity and redistributing resources, authority, and opportunity.

Originality/value:

Integrating Bourdieu’s framework with contemporary political developments, the paper explains how DEI retrenchment is rationalized and enacted through subtle symbolic, structural, and epistemic rollbacks rather than overt backlash.

Keywords:

Anti-DEI, epistemic disqualification, managerial recolonization, organizational doxa, quiet revocation, symbolic power

Introduction

The current backlash against Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives represents a critical juncture in the global trajectory of workplace equality (Ng *et al.*, 2025). **DEI is not merely a compliance tool, but an institutional project aimed at redressing structural inequalities across race, gender, caste, sexuality, and class (Holvino, 2010; Umeh *et al.*, 2023). It encompasses formal targets and the symbolic, epistemic, and affective work through which inclusion is promoted and enacted (Zanoni *et al.*, 2010).** Executive orders aimed at dismantling federal DEI structures, termed by President Trump as ‘illegal’ and ‘immoral’, have catalyzed a transnational backlash that echoes globally throughout public and private domains (Hsu, 2025).

As of 2023, prominent organizations that once publicly championed DEI, including Google and Meta, have discreetly reduced their DEI personnel by over 20% (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2023); often citing financial reprioritization or strategic alignment (Forsdick, 2025). **DEI job postings declined by 44% from 2020 to 2023 (Revelio Labs, 2023). Meta and other tech firms cut DEI roles during 2023 layoffs, reframing such moves as strategic recalibrations (Bloomberg, 2023; Reuters, 2023). The percentages and rollback figures cited (e.g., Conference Board, 2023; Kapor Center, 2024) refer primarily to U.S. corporate data, whereas U.K. and European patterns remain more stable (Institute of Directors, 2025). This difference illustrates that the anti-DEI backlash is not uniform globally. Furthermore, 69% of HR executives surveyed by Conference Board (2023) report no DEI cutbacks, underscoring wide variation in organizational responses rather than universal retrenchment.**

The rollback is not only economic or structural but also symbolic. DEI is increasingly portrayed as ideologically excessive, ineffective, or divisive, delegitimizing it in favor of neutrality and meritocracy discourses (Ng *et al.*, 2018, 2025). This rebranding is amplified through official prohibitions, subtler bureaucratic erosion, and discursive repositioning (Hsu, 2025). Elon Musk’s claim that “DEI is just another word for racism” (Gonzalez, 2024) epitomizes this rhetorical inversion, recasting anti-discrimination efforts as discriminatory. Such claims exemplify Orwellian ‘doublethink’: opposing racism is depicted as enacting it, and ‘newspeak’, where language is strategically reengineered to erode the moral clarity of inclusion (Orwell, 2000). In this discursive terrain, inclusion is reframed as a threat to societal cohesion, rather than a response to injustice (Gonzalez, 2024).

Beyond delegitimizing programs, the deeper issue involves the symbolic erasure of DEI practitioners, epistemologies, and interventions. For instance, a UK-based study by Ozturk *et al.* (2024) reveals the systematic undermining of efforts to advance nonbinary inclusion through appeals to ‘culture fit’, financial cost, or reputational risk—logics that perpetuate prevailing norms of whiteness, cis-heteropatriarchy, and managerial neutrality. Thus, DEI rollback is not merely political but epistemological (Lorde, 2017), narrowing the field of what is recognized as legitimate knowledge and acceptable intervention within organizational life.

This article examines how organizational DEI practices are both institutionally excluded and symbolically denied in the current anti-inclusion environment. **The analysis foregrounds inclusion because it has become the most rhetorically flexible of the DEI triad, frequently invoked as an organizational virtue despite the dilution of its transformative meaning (Ozturk *et al.*, 2024); it therefore provides a revealing site for examining symbolic rollback.** Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1977, 1991) concepts of symbolic power (the power to shape meaning, legitimacy, and perception through classification), field (a structured social arena where actors

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compete for authority, capital, and recognition), and doxa (taken-for-granted beliefs that appear natural and unquestionable within a field), we theorize DEI rollback as encompassing not only policy repeal but also epistemic and symbolic disqualification. **We conceptualize this process as the ‘quiet revocation’ of DEI: a subtle yet systemic form of organizational withdrawal that operates through symbolic delegitimization, institutional recoding, and epistemic marginalization, rather than overt prohibition or ideological confrontation.** Whereas visible backlash involves direct opposition or rescinding of policies, *quiet revocation* operates under the guise of neutrality, strategy, or reputation management, reframing inclusion as excessive, risky, or redundant (Lorde, 2017). This withdrawal keeps DEI structures nominally intact but stripped of critical and transformative capacity (Ahmed, 2012; Bourdieu, 1991; Noon, 2018). Although often framed as pragmatic restructuring, we contend that it strategically deploys symbolic power to delegitimize equality initiatives and render them organizationally obsolete. **While visible backlash denotes explicit state or political hostility, such as executive orders or legislative bans, quiet revocation within organizational routines is presented as neutrality or strategy; making retrenchment appear rational rather than ideological.**

Although some researchers describe backlash as cyclical, a pendulum of advancement and retreat (Thomas and Plaut, 2008), this risks normalizing DEI reversal and obscuring its structural causes. Notably, current retrenchments mark an unprecedented transnational convergence of corporate managerialism and authoritarian populism, reflecting a wider crisis of institutional legitimacy. **In the UK, former Equalities Minister Kemi Badenoch publicly dismissed unconscious bias training as ‘useless,’ while governments in Hungary and India have dismantled gender or anti-discrimination mandates under anti-‘woke’ rhetoric (BBC News, 2023; Biro-Nagy, 2022; Srivastava, 2015).** Resistance to inequity persists through transnational counter-movements, such as workers’ petitions, DEI advocacy groups, researchers, and activist shareholder interventions, which complicate any narratives of passive retreat (Just and Muhr, 2019; Meyersohn, 2024). Such resistance pushes back against what Ahmed (2012) terms non-performative institutions: organizations that discursively perform inclusion while structurally impeding it. In these contexts, DEI advocates face epistemic disqualification and precarious positioning. Against this backdrop, we ask: ***How are shifting political narratives around DEI reshaping organizational power structures and legitimizing the retreat from equality-oriented practices? In examining this question, we focus on the mechanisms through which inclusion is simultaneously invoked and undermined, conceptualized here as the quiet revocation of DEI. This framing provides a coherent analytical thread linking the symbolic, structural, and epistemic dimensions developed in this paper.***

This paper advances critical DEI and organizational scholarship by examining the mechanisms through which inclusion is simultaneously claimed and negated. First, it abductively extends growing literature on non-performativity (Ahmed, 2012; Kele and Cassell, 2023), symbolic legitimacy (Zanoni *et al.*, 2010), and managerial co-optation (Noon, 2018), theorizing rollback as a triadic process of dislocation in discourse, structure and assumptions. Second, it foregrounds the often invisible cognitive and affective labor of DEI practitioners in navigating institutional antagonism (Liu and Baker, 2016; Holvino, 2010). Third, it problematizes depoliticized accounts of inclusion by highlighting how discourses of pragmatism and neutrality serve as mechanisms of exclusion. Finally, it highlights an aspect that is often overlooked in organizational research: how symbolic and epistemic processes facilitate retreat from DEI initiatives while appearing to maintain organizational integrity. Fundamentally, we call for closer analysis of resistance that emerge in contexts where diversity is needed yet systematically rejected, and of how dominant power structures persist through seemingly neutral discourses that legitimize exclusion.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows: We first situate DEI rollback within a Bourdieusian conceptual triad, against the current anti-DEI political landscape. We then theorize three mechanisms of DEI retrenchment. The concluding discussion concerns the politics of ambivalent resistance, exploring how organizational actors negotiate tensions between complicity and critique, resistance and reproduction.

Bourdieu's Analytical Lenses: Symbolic power, Field, and Doxa

This section unpacks Bourdieu's interrelated concepts of *symbolic power*, *field*, and *doxa* to establish the paper's theoretical foundation. Together, these concepts illuminate the organizational and political processes that underpin the current rollback of DEI, conceptualized here as *quiet revocation*, through symbolic, structural, and epistemic mechanisms. This framework positions DEI withdrawal not as isolated or accidental but as an institutionally embedded, transnational process operating through organizational norms and practices. The three concepts are mobilized to analyze the core focus of this paper: How shifting political narratives around DEI reshape organizational power structures and legitimize the retreat from equality-oriented practices.

These concepts do not represent the entirety of Bourdieu's wider theoretical repertoire, such as *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1977), forms of *capital* (Bourdieu, 1986), *symbolic violence* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), and *illusio* (Bourdieu, 1990), but they most directly capture the relational mechanisms through which inclusion is invoked yet structurally undermined in the current anti-DEI climate. While Bourdieu's theorizing emerges from a wider Eurocentric, patriarchal. And colonial intellectual tradition characteristic of Northern social theory, as critiqued in postcolonial sociology (Bhambra, 2014; Connell, 2007), his concepts remain analytically powerful for exposing the normalization of domination in institutional life (Umeh et al., 2024). This paper engage these concepts (*symbolic power*, *field*, and *doxa*), to interrogate the transnational reproduction of organizational inequalities under emergent anti-‘woke’ politics.

Symbolic power, central to Bourdieu's theory of domination, refers to the capacity to impose categories, interpretations, and norms that are perceived as natural or objective (Bourdieu, 1977, 1991). It operates through misrecognition, obscuring its arbitrariness and recoding hierarchy as neutrality or merit (Umeh et al., 2024). In anti-DEI contexts, symbolic power reframes inclusion from a moral or strategic obligation to a source of ideological risk or unnecessary complexity. Discourses of neutrality, efficiency, or ‘cultural fit’ mask value systems structured by whiteness, managerial rationality, heteronormativity, and able-bodiedness (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008; Holvino, 2010). Institutions increasingly deploy progressive-sounding language, diversity dashboards, audit metrics, culture surveys, to present depoliticized versions of inclusion while delegitimizing lived experience as subjective, emotional, or divisive (DiAngelo, 2022; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019). Symbolic power therefore shapes whose concerns become intelligible and whose remain peripheral. Diversity is tolerated only when aligned with technocratic norms of performance, safety, and reputational management (Zanoni et al., 2010).

In Bourdieusian terms, a *field* is a structured social arena, such as the corporate, policy, or academic domain, where actors compete for legitimacy, resources, and recognition according to historically embedded rules. *Field-level pressures* describe the institutionalized norms and expectations that shape actors' behavior within and across these arenas, forming the basis of what can be called a “field-theoretic” analysis of organizational power. While *symbolic power* explains how meanings are imposed and misrecognized as legitimate, it is enacted, negotiated,

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and resisted within specific *fields*: structured social spaces where actors contest resources, legitimacy, and recognition (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). *Symbolic power* and *field* are co-constitutive: symbolic power derives strength from the field’s logic, while the field reproduces dominance by privileging certain forms of capital over others. Each field, whether academia, policy, or organizational life, possesses its own stakes worth pursuing (*illusio*) and is governed by historically sedimented rules favoring dominant actors. Actors within these fields mobilize varying forms of economic, social, cultural, and symbolic resources (*capital*), to assert authority, uphold hierarchies, or challenge the status quo (Umeh *et al.*, 2024). It is important to note that organizational fields are not closed systems: they are shaped by broader political and economic forces.

Recent transnational backlash against DEI, visible in US anti-‘woke’ laws, UK DEI restrictions (Cabinet Office, 2023; Department for Education, 2021; Malik, 2023), and right-wing populism in Brazil, India, and Hungary, has reset the “rules of the game.” Organizations increasingly reframe DEI from moral or political obligation to compliance or reputational strategy (Ng *et al.*, 2025; Tomlinson *et al.*, 2013a). In South Africa, some institutions dilute race-specific interventions in favor of “non-racial” approaches, depoliticizing equality discourse while re-legitimizing privilege (Steyn, 2010).

However, inequality persists in a field through *doxa*: ‘taken-for-granted’ or ‘commonsense’ assumptions that shape what can be thought, said, or contested. Doxa constitutes the silent architecture of belief: internalized norms so deeply embedded they escape scrutiny (Bourdieu, 1977). It arises when distinctions and hierarchies within a field are accepted as common sense through socialization and symbolic power, shaping not only what is said, but what can be thought, questioned, or imagined, and setting boundaries of intelligibility (Bourdieu, 1990; Grenfell, 2012).

These unspoken assumptions often operate ideologically, reinforcing dominant interests in the guise of neutrality. For instance, phrases like “We treat everyone the same” or “We are not political” appear inclusive, but in practice, reaffirm the status quo by foreclosing discussions of structural inequality. As Castilla and Benard (2010) argue, such framing invalidates knowledge rooted in lived experience, recoding it as subjective or emotional. This exemplifies what may be termed the emotional labor of inclusion (Liu & Baker, 2016): marginalized individuals must express discomfort in ways palatable to dominant norms; calm, measured critique may be tolerated, but urgent or dissenting expressions are dismissed as divisive (DiAngelo, 2022).

Bourdieu’s triadic framework demonstrates that the rollback and reconfiguration of DEI is neither accidental nor isolated but institutionally embedded and transnationally resonant. The following sections employ abductive reasoning to interpret emerging retreats and contradictions in DEI retrenchment. Abduction is a form of reasoning in which unexpected or puzzling observations, whether from primary data, existing studies, or real-world events, prompt the development of a new and plausible theoretical explanation by rethinking what we already know (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Locke *et al.*, 2008; Shepherd & Suddaby, 2017). The following analysis elaborates this abductive explanation through symbolic reframing, managerial recolonization, and epistemic disqualification and introduces *quiet revocation* as the conceptual lens for understanding organizational retreat.

Symbolic Reframing of DEI as Organizational Liability [Symbolic Power and the Construction of Risk]

The symbolic power outlined above sets the discursive terrain where DEI is increasingly reframed as a liability rather than an institutional necessity. Through symbolic processes, where dominant actors impose meanings misconceived as neutral or assumed as given (Bourdieu, 1991), inclusion efforts are recast as risk—endangering cohesion, objectivity, brand integrity, or shareholder value. The current anti-DEI era signals more than a political shift; it represents a deeper transformation in organizational legitimacy, with DEI transforming from moral imperative or strategic opportunity into reputational threat. A 2023 Deloitte survey found that nearly 60% of U.S. executives view DEI as a legal or ideological risk, mirroring declining DEI job trends (Revelio Labs, 2023). Such retreat is uneven, however: while many U.S. firms are scaling back DEI, most UK firms report no intention to reverse EDI policies (Institute of Directors, 2025).

This shift coincides with a broader redefinition of DEI's strategic role. The once-dominant 'business case for diversity', linked to performance, innovation, and market reach (Beech et al., 2017; Dobbin and Kalev, 2016), is increasingly supplanted by risk assessments focused on avoiding shareholder backlash, media scrutiny, or claims of reverse discrimination. This redefinition is not ideologically neutral but shaped by dominant symbolic structures that recast inclusion initiatives as destabilizing or excessive (Hsu, 2025; Ng et al., 2025). From a Bourdieusian perspective, the earlier business-case framing was itself a form of symbolic power, masking the political foundations of inclusion by claiming performance benefits, rather than justice. The authority to define DEI's strategic value is increasingly associated with dominant structural roles, typically legal counsel, fiscal administrators, and conservative trustees, who deploy legitimized managerial discourses ("We are apolitical," "We hire on merit," and "We treat everyone the same"), to deradicalize equality discussions, shifting them from a moral to a technocratic frame (Castilla and Benard, 2010; Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2017). As Bourdieu (1996) suggests, symbolic conflicts of legitimacy always occur within established fields, DEI's terms of acceptability are reconfigured, often through symbolic disqualification by actors with institutional capital, without overt confrontation.

The consequences for DEI professionals are both tangible and measurable. A recent Kapur Center report found that over 27% of DEI roles in tech were cut between 2022 and 2024, with the largest reductions in firms that had publicly committed to racial equality in 2020 (Kapur Center, 2024). Major corporations, including Meta and Amazon, have reduced DEI teams amid restructuring and litigation alleging reverse discrimination (Wong and Lee, 2025). This symbolic and material rollback has increasingly marginalized DEI practitioners, especially those with intersectional minoritized identities, within organizational hierarchies. Many diversity leaders face a 'glass cliff'—promoted during crises and sidelined afterward (Cook and Glass, 2013). This reclassification relies on organizational doxa: Claims such as 'Diversity should not be political' or 'We must prioritize performance, not identity' serve as epistemic closures, reframing DEI not as a reaction to systemic inequality but as an affront to institutional order and neutrality (Ahmed, 2012; Holvino, 2010).

Under this logic, retreat from DEI is misrecognized as restoring professionalism and rational governance, not ideological retrenchment. Factors leading to this symbolic recoding included a tripling of shareholder resolutions challenging DEI policies from 2022 to 2024, with institutional investors like Strive Asset Management urging Fortune 500 firms to abandon 'ideological ESG [environment, social and governance] mandates' (Directors Institute, 2025).

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These symbolic shifts are mirrored in tangible organizational responses. For example, in 2023, 31% of HR executives reported freezing or slashing DEI budgets in response to political pressure or reputational risks (Conference Board, 2023).

Even firms that once promoted DEI, such as Google, Meta, and BT, have rolled back earlier commitments amid restructuring and political pressure (Reuters, 2023; The Guardian, 2025). Nevertheless, most companies retain symbolic performances of inclusion: Sponsoring Pride celebrations, issuing Juneteenth statements, or launching Heritage Month campaigns creates a veneer of inclusivity, while companies are withdrawing from structural DEI commitments. As Kele and Cassell (2023) show, such employer branding forms a strategic façade, commodifying diversity for reputational gain while substantive transformation is deferred. This reflects Ahmed’s (2012) notion of *non-performativity*: diversity statements that shield institutions from accountability rather than enact change. These field-level changes illustrate symbolic power dynamics reshaping organizational agendas, not eradicating DEI, but reincorporating it into dominant institutional logics, rendering it inert but present, palatable yet powerless.

Reframing DEI as organizational risk represents more than a tonal shift: it signals a reordering of the symbolic and epistemic terrain, reflecting deeper ideological adjustments to political uncertainty, legal risk, and investor concerns. More fundamentally, it is an institutional recolonization of DEI: a retooling of its discourses, stakeholders, and agendas into frames premised on managing risk rather than justice. The implications of this recolonization, and how it enables institutional actors to disavow equality in implementing inclusion, are explored in the next section.

Managerial Recolonization of Inclusion [Field Dynamics and Organizational Control]

Discursive and structural reconfiguration of DEI as a liability does not signal the demise of equality work, but a shift in defining, governing, and controlling inclusion. It is less abandonment than recolonization: the assimilation of equality discourses into dominant managerial logics that disenfranchise their political, redistributive, and epistemic capabilities (Ahmed, 2012; Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019). As symbolic power enables domination while seeming neutral (Bourdieu, 1998), DEI is redefined through language of emotional safety, cultural cohesion, and strategic alignment, severed from its roots in justice movements and systemic critique. This is anchored in managerialism, an institutional ideology that equates legitimacy with efficiency, order, and rational control (Klikauer, 2013). Rather than being rejected outright, DEI is redefined in ways that depoliticize its aims: justice becomes a metric, redistribution a leadership style, and resistance a misalignment or cultural risk. By 2023, most Fortune 500 firms had relocated DEI functions into HR (McKinsey, 2023), shifting its role from change-making to compliance, and incorporating it into existing power and performance hierarchies.

Inclusive leadership models, popularized by consultancies and human resource certifications, exemplify this trend. These models emphasize interpersonal qualities—empathy, openness, and psychological safety—over institutional change (Ferdman and Deane, 2014; Roberson, 2019). Framed as progressive, they depoliticize exclusion by recasting it as individual behavior, deflecting attention from structural norms or organizational design. Most firms offer unconscious-bias training, yet only one in five address anti-racism (Paradigm IQ, 2023; World Economic Forum, 2025). Recolonized DEI also mirrors cultural change initiatives framed around belonging, branding, and ‘culture fit’. Google’s 2024 rebrand of its DEI programs as ‘employee experience and cohesion’, amidst political backlash and employee resistance,

illustrates this repositioning (Wong and Lee, 2025). Often celebrated, interventions like unconscious bias training remain largely performative—**symbolic but non-transformative**—signaling moral responsiveness without materially disrupting workplace inequalities (Dobbin and Kalev, 2016). The linguistic shift from ‘equality’ to ‘belonging’ reflects this symbolic logic, prioritizing dominant comfort while displacing the need for justice. This shift also reconfigures the role and authority of DEI actors.

As Ahmed (2007) argues, diversity practitioners are employed to show progress but discouraged from challenging structural power. This tension intensifies under managerial recolonization. DEI professionals are tasked with managing emotions and fostering cohesion, yet are systematically excluded from key decisions around budgeting, policymaking, or strategy (Ozturk *et al.*, 2024). **Chief Diversity Officer searches dropped by over 70% between 2022 and 2024** (Chief, 2024), and between 2022–24 DEI roles declined by roughly one-third globally (Telford, 2024). Such marginalization is sustained by doxic appeals to neutrality: critiques that invoke race, gender, class, among others, are repositioned as divisive or ideological. **In politics, U.S. governors like DeSantis depict DEI as a ‘Trojan horse for cultural Marxism’** (Eden, 2023). Defining ‘neutrality’ is itself a political act that legitimizes dominant perspectives while sidelining alternatives (Bourdieu, 1991).

Recolonized DEI is persuasive because it appears reasonable. Aligning inclusion with strategy enables organizations to claim progress without disruption. Its power lies in delivering the illusion of change: it obscures structural inequality and replaces meaningful accountability with performative compliance. Companies like Deloitte and PwC publish annual DEI reports while discreetly cutting DEI roles or removing identity-based hiring targets from executive performance metrics (McCulloch, 2025); inclusion rhetoric becomes a vehicle for strategic retrenchment. Such managerialization also invalidates critical, justice-oriented, or experiential epistemologies: Castilla and Benard (2010) show how meritocratic discourse paradoxically enhances bias by masking the mechanisms of inequality. Likewise, feminist, decolonial, or anti-racist paradigm-based DEI work are frequently dismissed as too radical, not strategic, or “not business aligned.” As Liu and Baker (2016) argue, such paradigms are consciously pushed to the margins, replaced by “safer” models of inclusion that prioritize dominant comfort over transformative justice.

Ultimately, the recolonization of DEI signals a more profound reordering of the organizational field, where field position determines not only who holds power but whose knowledge is considered legitimate. DEI is deemed intelligible only when it conforms to norms of civility, control, and reputational safety. The following section examines this epistemic terrain of what can be known, said, or done under the banner of inclusion.

The Epistemic Disqualification of DEI Knowledge [Doxa and the Delegitimization of Critical Perspectives]

DEI knowledge circulates in a highly stratified epistemic context. Research shows that knowledge derived from minoritized experience, such as racism, transphobia, or classism, is often delegitimized as anecdotal or subjective (Beech *et al.*, 2017; Liu and Baker, 2016). Conversely, knowledge expressed in terms of corporate risk, business metrics, or behavioral psychology is valued as objective and actionable. **Retailers like Target and Starbucks have scaled back supplier-diversity goals amid reverse-discrimination lawsuits** (Reuters, 2025a; 2025b), reflecting a filtering process, or institutional listening-without-hearing (Ahmed, 2012): organizations appear receptive through surveys, listening forums, and town halls, yet often

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absorb, minimize, or redirect critique to maintain the status quo. **Only a third of Fortune 500 companies now publish DEI reports, usually without evidence of structural change (McKinsey, 2023).** Such filtering also shapes DEI pedagogy, with corporate learning environments frequently marginalizing antiracist and intersectional practice in favor of “safe” content.

The \$1 billion global industry of unconscious bias training exemplifies this trend: stripped of structural and historical analysis, these interventions minimize discomfort but rarely alleviate disparities or improve hiring outcomes (Dobbin and Kalev, 2018). This enduring preference for politically neutral, decontextualized models reflects institutional unease with critical knowledge, particularly knowledge that demands structural reflection or directly addresses power. This erasure is also raced, gendered, and classed. Ozturk *et al.* (2024) document how queer professionals of color leading nonbinary inclusion projects in UK companies were dismissed on legal and reputational grounds, even when aligned with diversity goals. Similarly, Liu and Baker (2016) demonstrate how women of color who express frustration over discrimination are routinely cast as overemotional because they don’t conform to professional norms rooted in white, patriarchal notions of rationality and self-control.

These exclusions have significant implications. When the expertise of DEI practitioners is recoded in the language of civility and neutrality, organizational openness narrows to approaches that do not challenge power. **Recent evidence shows persistent racial inequities and weakened institutional commitment to racial justice (Runnymede Trust, 2023).** Ironically, such exclusions are justified as representing neutrality; institutions claim to be “open to all perspectives” while systematically privileging those that uphold institutional power. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) call this the hallmark of institutional whiteness: the ability to demand professionalism, reasonableness, and civility in ways that marginalize oppositional knowledge while presenting these terms as common sense. This epistemic doxa shields dominant actors from discomfort while casting equality-based criticisms as irrational, ideologically motivated, or lacking business relevance. At the intersection of symbolic power, doxa, and field positioning, DEI knowledge becomes stratified and sanitized.

Critical examination is excluded as too radical; experiential knowledge is permitted only when depoliticized, and expertise is recognized only in those fluent in managerial discourse. In this environment, working towards equality requires not only policy change but a fundamental challenge to the epistemic foundations of organizational life. The stakes are high: delegitimizing knowledge that is key to DEI preempts potential transformation. DEI becomes a curated performance of inclusion—contained, compliant, and stripped of political challenge. This epistemic invalidation is not merely a byproduct of managerialism; it is central to the way institutional power is maintained and resistance neutralized. The next section examines this resistance.

Ambivalent Resistance: Co-option, Complicity, and the Limits of Reform

The preceding sections have critiqued the convergence of symbolic power, field dynamics, and doxic assumptions, which reconfigures and marginalizes DEI amid political hostility and institutional risk aversion. This does not erase DEI but leads to its strategic retrenchment through symbolic delegitimization, structural sidelining, and epistemic disqualification. Even as DEI is recast as a reputational or legal risk, recolonized by managerialist logics and epistemically filtered through organizational doxa, resistance persists, though it remains ambivalent. It is shaped by constraints and institutional expectations, and is often repurposed for symbolic gain.

Resistance may manifest as truth-telling, refusal, or coalition-building (Collins, 2023), yet also cautious compliance, selective critique, or limitation of performance to approved spaces. Such ambivalence reflects positionality within the organizational field. Minoritized employees, leaders of employee resource groups (ERGs), and DEI practitioners frequently occupy subordinate positions, with limited decision-making power; **although most large firms host ERGs, fewer than one-fifth involve them in strategic decisions (McKinsey & Company and LeanIn.org, 2023).** As Ahmed (2012) suggests, diversity practitioners are institutional strangers, invited as a sign of progress but excluded when they provoke discomfort. The institutionalization of ERGs exemplifies this shift: once grassroots and liberatory, many are now absorbed into HR governance frameworks that value branding above disruption.

This reflects what Fleming and Spicer (2008) term the colonization of resistance; dissent encouraged only when symbolically useful and politically neutralized, such as in identity-themed campaigns or curated storytelling. By contrast, resistance that interrogates whiteness in leadership, challenges pay disparities, or demands reparative action is frequently recast as ideologically driven, militant, or strategically misaligned (Ozturk *et al.*, 2024). Tomlinson *et al.* (2013b) describe this as strategic complicity: institutionally approved approaches, such as unconscious bias training or inclusive leadership development, are adopted, often unintentionally, not for transformation but because they are fundable, palatable, and risk-free.

Furthermore, resistance is deeply affective. DEI actors are burdened with institutional transformation despite marginalization, reputational damage, and gaslighting. Norms of civility and emotional restraint, as Liu and Baker (2016) argue, are racialized and gendered, reinforcing exclusion under the banner of professionalism. Even when celebrated, resistance is often instrumentalized: organizations emphasize ‘safe’ dissent while discrediting critiques that expose complicity (Bloomberg, 2023; Young, 2025). This selective visibility confers symbolic visibility but withholds epistemic and strategic power, producing what may be termed exchangeable compliance: racialised actors are made legible as diversity assets while remaining excluded from consequential decision-making. This resonates with Bourdieu and Wacquant’s (1992) analysis of symbolic domination and the managed circulation of critique within fields.

Transnational networks like the Equality in Tech Coalition, activist shareholder movements like Majority Action, and industry associations such as Women in Banking and Finance offer alternative sites for organizing mobilization (Ehrnström-Fuentes and Böhm, 2023). These counter-fields provide material and symbolic support often denied within corporate boundaries. Yet they too face risks of co-optation: corporations increasingly appropriate DEI rhetoric to meet ESG metrics, deflect legal scrutiny, or restore brand reputation without enacting structural change (Conference Board, 2023).

Together, these forces explain the paradox of DEI resistance in the anti-DEI era. Organizational members are tasked with advocating for inclusivity within spaces that silence dissent, tokenize authenticity, and reward alignment rather than transformation. Resistance is expected to be polite, strategic, and non-disruptive—an expectation that undermines the very change it purports to advance. This persistent ambivalence demands a fundamental reconsideration of how resistance is conceptualized, who is authorized to define its terms, and under what conditions it may be voiced, legitimized, or silenced. Rather than attributing failure to individuals or DEI agendas (Ng *et al.*, 2025), this perspective situates ambivalence within the organizational field as a contested site where resistance is simultaneously solicited and suppressed. **In this sense, resistance and quiet revocation are intertwined: organizational**

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pushback both provokes and is contained by quiet revocation, creating what Stierncreutz and Tienari (2023, p. 1178) describe as “discursive politics” that shape and limit equality work. The challenge is not merely to preserve DEI but to reclaim it as a mode of epistemic rupture, institutional refusal, and ethical imagination. Hence, the paradox of DEI resistance refers to organizations simultaneously promoting inclusion discursively while retreating or withdrawing structural support for it. In this way, organizational retreat, denotes a legitimacy-driven, strategic withdrawal from equality commitments, disguised as pragmatism or fiscal responsibility. The following section advances this argument by introducing *quiet revocation* as a lens through which to theorize this organizational retreat.

The ‘Quiet Revocation’: A Relational Conceptualization

The current retrenchment of DEI in organizations, particularly in the prevailing political climate, requires explanation beyond budget cuts, ideological resistance, or leadership succession (Ng *et al.*, 2025). The phenomenon is better understood as *quiet revocation*: a strategic withdrawal from DEI and equality work enacted not through dramatic reversals but in bureaucratic reassignment, institutional sidelining, and epistemic closure (**Table 1**). Crucially, this revocation is not passive; it is actively sustained through symbolic power, field positioning, and doxic assumptions that dictate the conditions under which DEI can be seen, valued, or rendered obsolete.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE:
The ‘Quiet Revocation’ of DEI: A Relational Conceptual Framework

Fundamentally, this concept proposes that organizational retreat from DEI emerges from a complex, interdependent web of power relations. *Quiet revocation* explains how organizational exclusions occur without appearing exclusionary. Organizations do not dismantle DEI architectures outright: they maintain the symbolic infrastructure of inclusion but erode its transformative potential by relegating DEI work to other areas (e.g., HR or communications), limiting interventions to low-risk initiatives, rebranding equality efforts in corporate terms, or defunding initiatives under strategic realignment (Noon, 2018). These practices are seldom positioned as backlash but appear under the guise of strategic neutrality or non-performative diversity (Ahmed, 2012). The paradox of *quiet revocation* lies in coupling hyper-visibility with functional ineffectiveness. As Ozkazanc-Pan (2019) observes, organizations increasingly perform diversity through public statements, symbolic acts, and branding, while opposing substantive redistributive change. It is not merely hypocrisy but a result of the interaction of symbolic power, field structures, and doxa to create institutionalized ambiguity. DEI becomes visible enough to pre-empt criticism but is divested of the ability to disrupt the social order it seeks to transform.

This *quiet revocation* foregrounds the affective and embodied consequences of these institutional arrangements. DEI practitioners and marginalized employees who challenge dominant logics often face reputational risk and professional marginalization, with their knowledge claims potentially labeled sentimental, inappropriate, or excessive (Ahmed, 2012; Liu and Baker, 2016). Thus, the concept captures not only the structural barriers to transformation but also the increased cost of opposition, reinforcing domination through the very rules of the field (Bourdieu, 1977).

While intersecting conceptually with notions such as non-performative diversity (Ahmed, 2012), the rhetoric-implementation gap (Ozturk *et al.*, 2024), and institutional ambivalence (Zanoni *et al.*, 2010), among other related concepts (e.g., diversity fatigue, performative allyship or institutionalized managerialism [Applebaum, 2010; Noon, 2010; Thomas and Plaut, 2018]), *quiet revocation* provides a more relational, politically situated, and structurally embedded analysis of the dismantling of DEI (**Table 2**). For example, where *non-performativity* critiques the disjuncture between rhetoric and action, *quiet revocation* extends the analysis to capture how once-performative DEI infrastructures are now reframed, diluted, or absorbed into depoliticized categories like “People and Culture,” “belonging,” or “cultural fit” (Kapor Center, 2024), thereby legitimizing institutional retreat under progressive veneers.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE:

Conceptual Differentiation – *Quiet Revocation* in Relation to Anti-DEI Frameworks

Likewise, while *institutional ambivalence* highlights DEI’s contradictory presence, *quiet revocation* shows how such ambivalence is increasingly operationalized through risk reframing, structural repositioning, and epistemic marginalization. DEI roles, particularly in the public sector, are often relegated to peripheral domains or stripped of strategic influence, though inclusive language remains (Ozturk *et al.*, 2024). Related terms, *performative allyship*, *diversity fatigue*, *aesthetic inclusion* (Bell and Hartmann, 2007), address commodification and depoliticization of equality discourse, but *quiet revocation* goes beyond this to identify systemic, legitimized withdrawal from structural change, centering symbolic power, field dynamics, and doxic closure as the mechanisms that render DEI hyper-visible yet institutionally void (**Table 2**).

Quiet revocation shows how DEI initiatives are not merely paused or reversed but reconfigured as adaptive strategies of organizational self-preservation. This retreat operates through legitimacy discourses, marginalization within the field, and the reproduction of dominant ideologies. Its covert nature does not imply weakness; it has been normalized, institutionalized, and increasingly accepted as a rational strategy. In sum, *quiet revocation* offers a powerful analytic to show how DEI is undone and why this ‘undoing’ remains difficult to challenge and easily mistaken for rational governance, as DEI becomes both omnipresent and structurally inconsequential.

Contributions and Practical Implications

Theoretical Contributions

This paper contributes to contemporary debates on DEI retrenchment by clarifying how organizational rollback operates simultaneously at symbolic, structural, and epistemic levels, avoiding simplistic contrasts between administrative and political explanations. It reconceptualizes retrenchment as a process that is rationalized and normalized through organizational power relations rather than as a reactive or episodic response to external pressure. While existing literature has explored DEI’s uneven implementation (Kalev *et al.*, 2006), its depoliticization (Noon, 2018), resistance (Thomas and Plaut, 2008) and cyclical reversals amid political change (Ng and Stamper, 2018), less attention has been given to the mechanisms that rationalize and institutionalize the erosion of DEI. In particular, prior critical diversity studies have theorized depoliticization and performativity (Ahmed, 2012; Zanoni *et al.*, 2010), yet they have not fully examined how such symbolic processes are re-legitimized in

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the face of political backlash and reconstituted as neutral governance. This paper advances that discussion by identifying *quiet revocation* as a distinct, transnational mechanism of organizational depoliticization that links political hostility to field-level normalization and epistemic containment.

The paper employs a Bourdieusian framework to illuminate the symbolic, relational, doxic mechanisms and field logics underpinning what is theorized here as the *quiet revocation* of DEI under political backlash. Specifically, it extends the application of symbolic power, not only as a mechanism for dominant classifications (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008; Umeh *et al.*, 2024), but as a discursive and organizational driver for framing DEI as reputationally risky, legally contentious, or strategically inappropriate. Managerial tropes of meritocracy, neutrality, and apolitical efficiency recast DEI as divisive or unnecessary, making legitimation a contested domain. This moves beyond critiques of non-performative diversity (Ahmed, 2012) by identifying the symbolic means that render DEI rollback plausible and professionally responsible. In doing so, the paper extends critical diversity literature by demonstrating that symbolic neutralization, previously examined mainly as rhetorical, is now institutionalized through formal governance practices that redefine the parameters of acceptable equality discourse.

Second, the paper advances field theory by demonstrating how DEI retrenchment is not merely shaped by internal organizational ambivalence or failed implementation (Dobbin and Kalev, 2016) but by field-level pressures that redefine what is perceived as safe, legitimate, and strategically advantageous. While scholars have documented the structural marginalization of organizational DEI actors (Gündemir *et al.*, 2024; Ozturk *et al.*, 2024), few have explicitly linked this marginalization to broader external political forces, such as executive orders, high-profile public critiques, or populist framing devices and rhetoric that characterizes DEI work as elitist (Ng *et al.*, 2025). This paper shows how such symbolic currents reconfigure internal field dynamics, compelling actors to realign with what appears reputationally low-risk or publicly defensible, even if that entails abandoning previous DEI commitments. By tracing this interplay between external political discourse and internal organizational adaptation, the paper offers a more relational understanding of how field pressures naturalize the rollback of equality agendas across sectors and geographies.

Third, this paper re-centers doxa, the taken-for-granted assumptions that underpin organizational sensemaking, as a core mechanism of DEI rollback. Often overlooked in mainstream organizational scholarship, doxic beliefs about fairness, objectivity, and the notion of ‘treating everyone the same’ serve as gatekeepers of legitimacy (Umeh *et al.*, 2024), pre-empting equality work that challenges the status quo. Building on extant literature (e.g., Castilla and Benard, 2010; Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2017), the paper demonstrates that these assumptions are not passive but function ideologically to render critique as irrational, biased claims as unfounded, and transformative DEI knowledge as unprofessional. The invocation of neutrality, then, is not a retreat from politics but an articulation of institutional doxa that naturalizes dominant power relations. This re-centering of doxa marks a crucial theoretical contribution: it redefines neutrality as a productive mechanism of domination rather than a political void, thereby extending Bourdieu’s analysis of misrecognition to contemporary organizational settings characterized by symbolic rollback and legitimacy management.

Finally, by integrating symbolic power, field, and doxa, the paper offers a theoretically robust framework for understanding how DEI is recast, rather than merely rejected. It reframes DEI retrenchment as a multi-level reconstitution of organizational legitimacy, where dominant

actors redefine the boundaries of what is thinkable, sayable, and fundable under the guise of institutional responsibility. The concept of *quiet revocation* captures this process: an institutional rollback that does not explicitly reject DEI, but renders it inert through rationalized, reframed, and respectable means. This formulation explicitly aligns with the paper's research question of how inclusion is simultaneously invoked and undermined, by showing that these processes are co-produced through symbolic legitimation, field-level adaptation, and epistemic closure. Thus, this paper situates DEI retrenchment within the symbolic and epistemic dimensions of organizational power (Ozturk *et al.*, 2025) and contributes to growing scholarship that demands more critical engagement with legitimacy politics, the performativity of inclusion, and relational dynamics shaping equality outcomes (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019; Zanon *et al.*, 2010), particularly as political conditions evolve (Ng *et al.*, 2025). Thus, it extends critical diversity studies by conceptualizing the anti-DEI backlash not as a rupture but as a new, institutionally sanctioned phase in the ongoing depoliticization of equality work, maintaining inclusion as a symbolic value while neutralizing its transformative potential.

Practical Implications

The concept of *quiet revocation* developed in this paper reveals that the rollback of DEI efforts in the current political climate is not simply due to shifting priorities or budget constraints, but a deeper epistemic and symbolic reconfiguration of what equality means, who defines it, and how it is institutionally managed or contained. These DEI reversals often overlook the dismissal of concerns and aspirations of the very groups shaping the future of work. Generation Z and Millennials are not only large and growing in number; they also comprise the most diverse social and cultural demographic and demonstrate strong commitments to equality, representation, and accountability in the workplace (Runnymede Trust, 2023). A 2025 Deloitte survey across 44 countries found that over 70% of Gen Z and Millennial employees prioritize ethics and inclusion in career decisions. Yet, with growing resistance to DEI, these values become delegitimized and misrepresented. The result transcends policy failure; it signals a strategic disconnect between organizational priorities and evolving generational values.

This has several critical implications for DEI practitioners, senior leaders, policymakers, and those working across organizational and inter-organizational DEI structures. Rather than superficial fixes, the following six implications call for a recalibration of practice—one that recognizes the political, relational, and epistemic conditions within which DEI work is currently operating (Table 3).

These implications are not apolitical recommendations but contextually grounded responses to the politically charged environment in which *quiet revocation* operates. Each recommendation engages directly with the mechanisms theorized earlier—symbolic reframing, managerial recolonization, and epistemic disqualification—translating them into actionable strategies for sustaining equality work under conditions of institutional retrenchment and political hostility.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE: Resisting the 'Quiet Revocation' of DEI: Strategic and Epistemic Interventions

First, organizations must reject the façade of neutrality that casts DEI as a reputational risk; equality work must be re-politicized as a strategic, ethical, and epistemic imperative. This paper shows that DEI is increasingly re-coded as a liability through symbolic framings invoking meritocracy, apoliticism, or fiscal pragmatism (Ng *et al.*, 2025). This reframing is not value-

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neutral: it is an exercise of symbolic power that delegitimizes systemic interventions and reinforces dominant organizational norms. Practitioners and leaders must actively resist this by grounding DEI work in evidence-based understandings of structural inequality and explicitly naming organizational neutrality as a political stance that sustains inequality (Castilla and Benard, 2010; Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2017). **Thus, they counteract the symbolic reframing of inclusion as risk and reclaim equality as an essential component of institutional legitimacy rather than a discretionary or reputational concern.**

Second, DEI roles and units must be institutionally repositioned with formal authority, not merely symbolic visibility. Literature consistently highlights the structural marginalization of DEI practitioners, frequently siloed within HR or excluded from strategic decision-making (Dobbin and Kalev, 2016). Meaningful outcomes depend on integrating DEI into line management and core HR practices (Gündemir *et al.*, 2024), with DEI units best positioned as specialist support rather than sole implementers (Köllen, 2021). This paper demonstrates that political retrenchment deepens marginalization, as DEI actors are often the first defunded or displaced under the guise of restructuring or cultural realignment. Leaders must move beyond rhetoric to secure funding, executive sponsorship, and integration of DEI leads into decision-making, to enable proactive, not reactive, influence (Hsu, 2025). **Repositioning DEI actors within decision-making structures directly challenges the field-level dynamics of managerial recolonization that reduce equality work to a compliance function.**

Third, organizations must actively protect and legitimize non-dominant knowledge and counter-narratives, including lived experience, critical race analysis, and intersectional feminism. As shown in this paper, dominant doxic norms often dismiss such knowledge as unprofessional, emotional, or extreme (Liu and Baker, 2016). To mitigate this epistemic injustice, institutions must cultivate what Fraser (2000) terms participatory parity: conditions under which all stakeholders, regardless of positionality, can shape institutional priorities and policies. This includes formally recognizing experiential knowledge in decision-making, creating epistemically safe spaces for dissent, and challenging professional standards coded through whiteness, masculinity, and managerialism (Zanoni and Janssens, 2007). **This directly resists epistemic disqualification by validating marginalized knowledge systems as legitimate sources of institutional learning and accountability.**

Fourth, DEI strategies must move beyond performative efforts, such as calendar-based celebrations, voluntary workshops, or inclusive leadership training, and directly confront the structural architectures of inequality. Echoing prior critiques (Noon, 2018; Ozturk *et al.*, 2024), this paper emphasizes that performative programming often lacks material accountability. Organizations must instead focus on structural reforms like pay equality audits, equitable hiring and promotion policies, governance reforms, transparent grievance mechanisms, and promoting power-sharing in policy formulation (Beech *et al.*, 2017). These are not supplementary, but foundational equality practices. **Reorienting resources toward structural transformation rather than optics exposes how quiet revocation displaces justice-based interventions with symbolic gestures.**

Fifth, practitioners must build collective infrastructures of resistance that transcend the organizational field. As political pressures drive DEI retreat, internal actors face growing precarity and reputational risk when advocating for justice (Ozturk *et al.*, 2024). In response, inter-organizational alliances, including professional networks, transnational coalitions, and scholarly-activist collaborations, offer alternative sites of legitimacy, safety, and capacity-building. These counter-fields circulate critical knowledge and support for those navigating

organizational spaces that provide the language of inclusion, but not its conditions (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019). Moreover, they also function as generative sites for the cultivation of critical skills, epistemic reflexivity, and alternative expertise, often through peer mentorship, collective strategizing, and experiential knowledge-sharing: such processes are often disallowed or devalued within dominant institutional fields. **By strengthening these counter-fields, practitioners collectively resist institutional isolation and sustain equality work beyond the constraints of politically hostile or risk-averse organizations.**

Finally, organizations must adopt sustained institutional reflexivity. A recurring problem in DEI implementation is the tendency toward instrumentalism: treating diversity as a finite problem to be solved rather than an ongoing organizational project implicating power, history, and identity (Hsu, 2025). Equality cannot be delegated, depoliticized, or domesticated without undermining its transformative capacity. Leaders must commit to continual self-examination: who speaks, who decides, who is protected, and whose discomfort is prioritized. Without such reflexivity, inclusion risks becoming a hollow signifier, easily sacrificed amid political or reputational tensions. **Embedding reflexivity as governance practice directly challenges the doxic normalization of inequality and reinforces DEI as an enduring political responsibility rather than a managerial preference.**

These implications re-connect the practical agenda to the paper's theoretical foundations by demonstrating how symbolic, structural, and epistemic analyses of *quiet revocation* can inform organizational action. They move beyond conventional transformative DEI frameworks by foregrounding institutional resistance, epistemic pluralism, and the redistribution of symbolic and structural power necessary to sustain equality work in an anti-inclusion era.

Conclusion and Directions for Future Research

This paper reconceptualizes the rollback of DEI work in organizations amid political backlash as *quiet revocation*: a symbolic, structural, and epistemic retreat that unfolds not through overt rejection, but through legitimacy discourses, strategic sidelining, and the naturalization of dominant organizational norms. **Quiet revocation therefore constitutes an abductively derived theoretical explanation (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Locke et al., 2008; Shepherd & Suddaby, 2017) for how organizational retreat can occur without overt rejection, and why its contours are uneven across sectors and contexts.** At a time when the legitimacy of DEI faces calculated attacks **under TRUMP 2.0** (Ng et al., 2025), the most strategic response may not be moderation, but reassertion: positioning DEI as a political claim, a challenge to power, and an ongoing, necessarily disruptive practice of organizational transformation. Future research should investigate how reframing, recolonization, and epistemic disqualification unfold across various sectors, organizations, and geographies. Scholars should explore the affective and epistemic labor of resisting under constraint and the transnational politics shaping the erosion of DEI as a politically situated, transformative institutional practice. Finally, the clash between anti-DEI narratives and the normative commitments of younger generations, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, merits deeper investigation, especially regarding tensions between generational values and retrenchment logics. Indeed, future research can help illuminate what it might take to sustain DEI as a transformative, rather than tokenized, institutional practice.

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Table 1: The ‘*Quiet Revocation*’ of DEI: A Relational Conceptual Framework

Analytical Dimensions	Core Constructs / Relational Logics	Mechanisms and Descriptions
Core Mechanisms	Symbolic Power [<i>Power to name, frame, and legitimize meanings and norms through discourse and institutional authority (Bourdieu, 1991)</i>]	DEI is reframed as risky, divisive, or ideological and recoded through neutralized terms such as “belonging,” “fit,” or “culture.” These discursive shifts legitimize retrenchment while maintaining the symbolic appearance of inclusion (Ahmed, 2012; Bourdieu, 1991; CIPD, 2024).
	Field Positionality [<i>shifting structural location of DEI actors within organizational fields of power and influence (Bourdieu, 2005)</i>]	DEI practitioners are marginalized from strategic influence and repositioned as operational or compliance actors. Authority over DEI decisions shifts to legal or risk teams, prioritizing institutional liability over equity (Ozturk et al., 2024; OpenDemocracy, 2024).
	Doxa [<i>Taken-for-granted institutional norms that render inequality invisible or apolitical (Bourdieu, 1977)</i>]	Assumptions such as “we treat everyone equally” are institutionalized as common sense, depoliticizing identity-based critique and knowledge (Ahmed, 2012; Bourdieu, 1977; Zanon et al., 2010).
Organizational Processes	Symbolic Reframing [<i>DEI reframed into adjacent, less contentious categories (e.g., culture, sentiment)</i>]	DEI work is folded into generic HR or People and Culture portfolios, sanitized as “employee sentiment” to dilute political content (Kapor Center, 2024; CIPD, 2024).
	Managerial Recolonization [<i>formal removal or dilution of DEI from strategy s</i>]	DEI roles are defunded, downgraded, or reframed as operational rather than strategic or ethical concerns (Ozturk et al., 2024; OpenDemocracy, 2024).
	Epistemic Disqualification [<i>devaluation or exclusion of minoritized knowledge and lived experience (Spivak, 1988; Dotson, 2011)</i>]	Experiential knowledge dismissed as “subjective,” while managerial models displace critical perspectives. (Dotson, 2011; Ahmed, 2012).
Outcomes of Quiet Revocation	Inclusion is simulated [<i>Symbolic gestures replace substantive transformation</i>]	Structural change is abandoned, but the appearance of inclusion is retained through curated narratives, representation optics, or language change (Ahmed, 2012; Ozturk et al., 2024).
	DEI becomes performative [<i>Equity practices reduced to image maintenance</i>]	DEI work is reduced to serve reputational goals. Metrics, dashboards, and events substitute for redistributive or structural reform (Ahmed, 2012; Kapor Center, 2024).
	Retreat is legitimized [<i>Organizational withdrawal from DEI is framed as rational or necessary</i>]	Retrenchment is justified as good governance, risk mitigation, or budgetary necessity, even as institutions continue to use inclusive language (OpenDemocracy, 2024; CIPD, 2024).
	Disruption recoded [<i>Critique and resistance are pathologized as incivility or excess</i>]	Organizational dissent or equity-focused critique is reframed as disruptive, unprofessional, or emotionally charged and thus excluded from legitimate discourse (Zanon et al., 2010; Ahmed, 2012).
	Critical actors illegible [<i>Equity leaders lose institutional authority and recognition</i>]	Those who speak truth to power, often minoritized DEI professionals, lose visibility, access, and institutional credibility. Their influence is undermined even as symbolic inclusion persists (Ozturk et al., 2024; Dotson, 2011).

Note: “Core mechanisms” denote the underlying symbolic or structural logics driving DEI withdrawal, whereas “Organizational processes” capture how those logics manifest in practice within firms.

Table 2: Conceptual Differentiation: *Quiet Revocation* in Relation to Anti-DEI Frameworks

Similar Anti-DEI Concepts	How <i>Quiet Revocation</i> builds on and extends <i>similar anti-DEI Concepts</i>
Non-performative Diversity (Ahmed, 2012)/ Rhetoric-Implementation Gap (Noon, 2007) - <i>Diversity rhetoric that fails to materialize into action</i>	Goes further by showing how performative DEI infrastructures are restructured, absorbed, or re-legitimated under new discourses like “belonging” and “culture,” masking their withdrawal (Ahmed, 2012; Kapor Center, 2024).
Institutional Ambivalence (Zanoni et al., 2010; Ozturk et al., 2024) - <i>The coexistence of support and resistance to DEI within organizations.</i>	Captures how ambivalence hardens into institutional withdrawal, policy restructuring, and symbolic repositioning, (Zanoni et al., 2010; OpenDemocracy, 2024).
Diversity Fatigue (Plaut et al., 2018) [<i>Emotional and cognitive exhaustion from DEI work</i>]	Moves beyond emotional disengagement to theorize strategic organizational withdrawal driven by reputational or political risk (Kapor Center, 2024; Ozturk et al., 2024).
Performative Allyship (Applebaum, 2010; Bell & Hartmann, 2007) [<i>Symbolic alignment with DEI that lacks substance or accountability</i>]	Highlights how institutional logic creates symbolic legitimacy through norms, incentives, and discourses – not merely individual bad faith (Ahmed, 2012; CIPD, 2024).
Institutionalized Managerialism (Noon, 2010) [<i>Equality policies exist but are limited by business logics (e.g., efficiency, risk aversion, and procedural defensibility)</i>]	Captures how institutions actively retract or reabsorb DEI work while still performing inclusivity through discourse, optics, or metrics.

Table 3: Resisting the ‘Quiet Revocation’ of DEI: Strategic and Epistemic Interventions

Mechanism of Quiet Revocation	Intervention	Aim
DEI reframed as divisive, ideological, or risky	Repoliticize DEI language , centering discourses of injustice, marginalization, and redistribution (Ahmed, 2012; Noon, 2018; Ng et al., 2025).	Reclaim language as a site of ideological contest to prevent symbolic erasure through sanitized categories.
DEI actors sidelined	Reposition DEI with formal authority and strategic input, (Glass & Cook, 2020; Hsu, 2025; Dobbin & Kalev, 2023).	Secure influence beyond symbolic or advisory roles.
<i>Common-sense neutrality institutionalized (“We treat everyone equally”)</i>	Embed reflexive practices, and epistemic pluralism into training, onboarding, and leadership development (Bourdieu, 1977; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017; Liu & Baker, 2016).	Disrupt doxa that frames critique as bias.
<i>DEI folded into “belonging,” “people experience,” or “cohesion”</i>	Reassert terms like structural inequality, power, and justice across strategic documents, KPIs, and institutional messaging (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019; Ahmed, 2012; Noon, 2018).	Re-politicize organizational discourse to prevent symbolic inclusion from masking structural exclusion.
<i>Defunding, downsizing, or dissolving DEI units</i>	Embed DEI through constitutionalized mechanisms such as strategic planning cycles, ESG metrics, and protected budget lines (Ng et al., 2025; Fraser, 2000; Kapor Center, 2024).	Institutionalize DEI as a core governance function and safeguard resources and institutional memory for long-term resilience.
<i>Delegitimization of minoritized knowledge and lived experience</i>	Revalue lived experience, feminist, and critical race epistemologies by formalizing their inclusion in policy-making and internal research (Dotson, 2011; Ahmed, 2012; Holvino, 2010).	Counter epistemic injustice by legitimizing diverse forms of knowledge.
<i>Gestures replace transformation</i>	Track redistributive outcomes—not just optics or engagement metrics (Beech et al., 2017; Dobbin & Kalev, 2020; Ahmed, 2012).	Anchor inclusion in material change.
<i>DEI becomes branding, compliance, or HR adjunct</i>	Tie DEI goals to executive KPIs and structural reform (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Noon, 2007; Shore et al., 2018).	Embed DEI accountability into executive decision-making to convert performative optics into substantive reform.
<i>Framed as fiscal prudence or reputational management</i>	Expose rollback as an institutional choice by documenting and publicly naming strategic divestment from equity goals (Ng & Stamper, 2018; OpenDemocracy, 2024; Ozturk et al., 2024).	Confront retrenchment by making institutional withdrawal visible and contestable.
<i>Critique and dissent reframed as incivility</i>	Protect dissent through formal policies that institutionalize critical voice, ensure protection for whistleblowers, and legitimate emotional resistance (Ahmed, 2010; Liu & Baker, 2016; Fleming & Spicer, 2008).	Validate dissent as a sign of ethical integrity and institutionalize protection for emotional and truth-telling practices.
<i>DEI practitioners and minoritized leaders lose institutional voice</i>	Build external networks and alliances , (Ehrnström-Fuentes & Böhm, 2023; Zanoni et al., 2010; Ozturk et al., 2024).	Sustain transformative work, influence, and collective advocacy beyond the organization

Reviewer 1	
I am not a fan of Pierre Bourdieu's work, but it seems to work well in this paper. It is applied with professionalism and presented in an elegant manner, albeit somewhat uncritically. Drawing on work by a white man from a colonialist country may not be to everyone's liking in the context of discussing DEI, so perhaps a few words on this are in order.	We appreciate this insightful suggestion. In response, we have added a reflexive paragraph in the section previously titled "Bourdieu's Triadic Framework" (now Bourdieu's Analytical Lenses: Symbolic power, Field, and Doxa) that explicitly acknowledges the Eurocentric and colonial origins of Bourdieu's work while justifying its continued analytical relevance for examining domination and inequality. The revision references Bhambra (2014) and Connell (2007) to situate our use of Bourdieu within decolonial and critical traditions. This addition clarifies the reflexive stance of the paper and addresses the reviewer's concern about applying Bourdieu in DEI scholarship.
And what is the "field" referred to (as in e.g., "the persistence of inequality with the field" on p. 2)? What is "field theory" (p. 11)? "Field-level pressures" (p. 11)? It would also be useful to explain up-front what "doxic" means (the first time it is mentioned), for the benefit of those readers who are not familiar with Bourdieu speak.	We thank the reviewer for highlighting the need for definitional clarity. We have revised the Bourdieu's Triadic Framework section (now titled: Bourdieu's Analytical Lenses: Symbolic power, Field, and Doxa) to define a field as a structured social arena, such as the corporate or policy domain, where actors compete for legitimacy and capital according to historically embedded rules. We also define field-level pressures as the institutionalized expectations that shape organizational behaviour across arenas and describe how this reflects a field-theoretic lens. In addition, we now explain the term doxic parenthetically on first use ("taken-for-granted or commonsense assumptions"). These clarifications enhance readability for readers less familiar with Bourdieu's vocabulary.
The idea of "quiet revocation" is plausible and compelling, but I am left wondering how "quiet" and "subtle" it is... it takes different forms, and some are far from "quiet." The concept must be distinguished from – and situated vis-à-vis – what the Trump administration is not-so-quietly doing in the USA and others are mimicking elsewhere (i.e., the "visible backlash" or "political backlash").	We appreciate this helpful suggestion. To clarify, we have expanded the Introduction to explicitly distinguish between quiet revocation and visible backlash. We now explain that visible backlash refers to explicit state or political hostility (e.g., legislative bans or executive orders), whereas quiet revocation occurs within organizations through bureaucratic rationalization, depoliticized language, and managerial neutrality. This revision delineates the analytical scope of the concept and situates it in relation to—but distinct from—overt political retrenchments.
I would also like to see the concept of "resistance" more clearly situated vis-à-vis "quiet revocation." It is not clear what and whose resistance is addressed, and the meaning of resistance seems to shift. This recent paper may be helpful: Stierncreutz, M. & Tienari, J. (2023) Shaped by Resistance: Discursive Politics in Gender Equality Work. <i>Gender, Work and Organization</i> , 30(4), 1178-1198.	Thank you for this important suggestion. We have expanded the Ambivalent Resistance section to explicitly link resistance and quiet revocation, identifying the actors (e.g., DEI practitioners, ERGs, minoritised employees) and the form of resistance (discursive, symbolic, structural). We also cite Stierncreutz & Tienari (2023) to highlight how resistance shapes equality work by influencing its conditions of possibility. This revision clarifies how resistance both emerges within and is constrained by quiet revocation processes.
A few words on clarifying why "inclusion" is specifically focused on would also be helpful.	We appreciate this comment. We have clarified in the Introduction that inclusion is foregrounded because it constitutes the most discursively flexible yet institutionally diluted element of DEI frameworks. While diversity and equality often have measurable or legislative dimensions, inclusion functions symbolically, frequently invoked to signal moral commitment while masking retrenchment. Focusing on inclusion allows the paper to interrogate how symbolic power and doxic assumptions sustain performative rather than transformative forms of equality.
And what exactly is the "paradox" in the "paradox of DEI resistance" (p. 9)? What is "organizational retreat" (as opposed to "revocation") on p. 9?	We thank the reviewer for this helpful observation. We have expanded the Ambivalent Resistance section to clarify that the paradox of DEI resistance lies in the simultaneous promotion and containment of resistance, organizations encourage inclusion discourse yet silence disruptive critique. We also differentiate organizational retreat from quiet revocation: retreat refers to a visible, legitimacy-driven withdrawal framed as pragmatic or strategic, whereas quiet revocation captures the deeper symbolic, epistemic, and structural neutralization of DEI capacity. These clarifications make the conceptual distinctions explicit.

Table 1 offers an excellent overview of what “quiet revocation” can mean in the light of existing research. However, on what basis are “core mechanisms” and “organizational processes” distinguished? What does “performative” mean in “DEI becomes performative”? Also, please cut out the core constructs of “organizational processes” from the “analytical dimensions” column.	We thank the reviewer for these valuable suggestions. We have (1) clarified the distinction by adding a note below Table 1 stating that core mechanisms refer to the underlying symbolic or structural logics of DEI withdrawal, while organizational processes describe their manifestation in practice; (2) expanded the explanation of performative to denote symbolic displays of inclusion that replace structural reform; and (3) streamlined the table layout to remove overlapping constructs from the Analytical Dimensions column. These changes enhance theoretical precision, eliminate redundancy, and improve readability.
In Table 2, there is something missing in this sentence: “highlights how institutional logics create symbolic through norms, incentives, and discourses not merely individual bad faith (Ahmed, 2012; CIPD, 2024).”	We thank the reviewer for spotting this omission. The sentence in Table 2 has been corrected to read: “ <i>highlights how institutional logic creates symbolic legitimacy through norms, incentives, and discourses not merely individual bad faith (Ahmed, 2012; CIPD, 2024).</i> ”
In Table 3, “intervention” column, first box – bold text missing? All boxes in the “intervention” and “aim” columns could follow the same format... in the latter, for example, I would go for verbs such as “ensure,” “disrupt,” etc.	We thank the reviewer for this helpful suggestion. We have added the missing bold text in the first “Intervention” cell and revised Table 3 for consistency and clarity. All interventions now begin with strong action verbs (e.g., Repoliticize, Embed, Institutionalize, Protect) and are uniformly bolded. Several “Aim” statements were reworded from descriptive to directive form (e.g., Reclaim language as a site of ideological contest, Institutionalize DEI as a core governance function, Embed accountability, Validate dissent). Thus, the table now establish a clear parallel structure, ensure stylistic coherence, and strengthen the conceptual link between mechanisms, interventions, and intended outcomes.
The paper talks about the “current backlash against Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives,” and I was wondering whether more contextualized understandings are needed. This “backlash” is not one global and universal force, I think, although it is currently in vogue in the USA and some other countries.	We appreciate this valuable observation. We have revised the Introduction and Field Dynamics sections to emphasize that the anti-DEI backlash is contextually differentiated, not universal. We now note that most rollback data derive from the U.S. corporate sector, while patterns in the U.K. and Europe remain more stable, and that retrenchment manifests differently across regions such as South Africa, India, Brazil, and Hungary. These revisions situate the paper’s argument within a more nuanced, comparative, and globally reflexive framing.
I would be interested to know to what countries the percentages signifying the “rollback” refer to, for example, in studies by Kapor Center and Conference Board.	Thank you for this helpful observation. We have clarified in the Introduction that the percentages and rollback figures (e.g., Kapor Center 2024; Conference Board 2023) refer primarily to U.S. corporate data, while U.K. and European trends remain comparatively stable. We also added the Institute of Directors (2025) reference to illustrate regional variation and contextualize the transnational, non-uniform nature of DEI retrenchment.
I would also suggest that the authors compile the non-academic (non-theoretical) references in a separate list of references. Some references seem to be missing, e.g. Kapor Center, Conference Board.	We thank the reviewer for this practical suggestion. We have now ensured that all previously missing references (e.g., Kapor Center 2024; Conference Board 2023) are fully cited and formatted in the reference list. Following the EDI journal style, we retained a single consolidated reference list while clearly identifying non-academic sources through organizational authorship and URLs. This approach ensures completeness, transparency, and consistency with journal guidelines.
Reviewer 2	
First, the paper reads more like an essay than an article with its many endnotes, loose writing style and mention of many different concepts that carry different meanings. For example: the concepts in the research question are different from the ones in the next sentence that reframes that question into ‘mechanisms through which inclusion is simultaneously invoked and undermined’. For an	We thank the reviewer for this helpful observation. In response, we have substantially refined the conceptual alignment, tightened the writing style, and removed all endnotes by integrating them into the main text to ensure the manuscript reads as a cohesive scholarly article. Specifically: Abstract and Introduction: The research question and conceptual framing are now fully aligned. The abstract explicitly states that the paper focuses on the mechanisms through which inclusion is simultaneously invoked and undermined, establishing continuity with the introduction’s question

academic article, more conceptual precision is needed throughout.	on how political narratives reshape organizational power and legitimize DEI retreat. Theoretical Framing : The opening of Bourdieu's Triadic Framework section has been rewritten to clarify that Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic power, field, and doxa provide the theoretical foundation for analysing DEI withdrawal: conceptualized as the quiet revocation. Repetitive phrasing was removed, and transitions were added to link the triad directly to the three mechanisms elaborated later (symbolic reframing, managerial recolonization, epistemic disqualification). Terminology Consistency: Terms such as rollback, retrenchment, and withdrawal are now used only descriptively or contrastively, while quiet revocation serves as the core analytic concept throughout. Endnotes and Style: All endnotes have been integrated into the main text, and language has been tightened for precision and analytic tone.
Second, the rollback is an empirical and contextualized phenomenon, yet the paper never explicates the context from where it is written. I assume it is the USA (given some references to USA institutions such as the Kapor Institute), but for an international journal, this needs to be explicated, especially given the political situation in the USA against DEI. This is also what raises questions about the claims that the revocation is quiet or subtle, as it certainly does not look subtle or quiet from where I am located, and there is overt and explicit power behind it.	We thank the reviewer for this insightful comment highlighting the need for clearer contextualization of the quiet revocation phenomenon. In response, we have revised the Abstract and Introduction to make the geographic and comparative framing explicit. The paper now clarifies that: The empirical illustrations draw primarily from the United States, where anti-DEI legislation, corporate retrenchment, and discursive reframing are most visible, while situating these developments within a transnational context that includes the UK, Europe, South Africa, India, Brazil, and Hungary. This revision establishes that the paper is not U.S.-centric but uses the U.S. as an analytical reference point to theorize broader institutional dynamics of DEI withdrawal. We have added the following clarifying sentence in the Introduction: "The percentages and rollback figures cited (e.g., Kapor Center 2024; Conference Board 2023) refer primarily to U.S. corporate data, whereas U.K. and European patterns remain more stable (Institute of Directors 2025). This variation highlights that the anti-DEI backlash is not uniform globally." This addition explicitly signals both where the paper's illustrative data come from and how the phenomenon varies internationally. To address the reviewer's concern about the term quiet, we now emphasize that quiet revocation does not imply absence of overt resistance. Instead, it captures how rollback mechanisms operate symbolically and institutionally, even amid visible political hostility, through bureaucratic normalization, strategic realignment, and legitimacy discourses that mask ideological withdrawal as rational governance. This distinction is now articulated at the end of the Introduction and reiterated in the theoretical section. Through these revisions, the manuscript now explicitly situates its context and clarifies the conceptual scope of quiet revocation as both an empirical and transnational phenomenon that encompasses, but is not limited to, the U.S. political environment.
Third, it is a conceptual paper, but there is a mismatch with the empirical nature of the research question as presented at p. 3. In the introduction, there is also mention of abductive theorizing, which requires empirical data. There are no data provided, only empirical statements based on journalist sources,	We thank the reviewer for this important observation. We acknowledge that abductive theorizing is often associated with empirical data collection; however, in this paper, the term refers not to an empirical method but to a logic of conceptual reasoning (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Locke, Golden-Biddle & Feldman, 2008; Shepherd & Suddaby, 2017). Accordingly, we have clarified this in the Abstract, but more

that are treated in the same way as academic peer-reviewed ones. I would rather see a differentiation in those sources, and a clearer explanation of research methods used when empirical claims are brought in the paper.	elaborately in the closing of the Theoretical section leading into the conceptual sections. We have also touched on this lightly in the conclusion. In all, we now clarify that abductive theorizing is used here to denote <i>analytical inference from existing literature, prior empirical findings, and observable political developments to generate new theoretical connections</i>. We have also ensured that journalistic and policy sources are treated only as contextual illustrations, distinct from peer-reviewed evidence. These revisions make our theoretical reasoning explicit and methodologically more precise.
Fourth, I think the most promising part of the article is about the three notions taken from Bourdieu's rich work. I do not think that the presentation as Bourdieu's triadic framework does justice to the many other concepts that are part of Bourdieu's work that you do not mention. Please make clear here why you invoke these notions, and explain to what issue you are applying it, as that issue is shifting in the text, both as the phenomenon and in time.	We appreciate this valuable comment highlighting the need for clearer justification of our use of Bourdieu's concepts and their link to the paper's central issue. In the revised manuscript, the section formerly titled "<i>Bourdieu's Triadic Framework</i>" has been retitled "Bourdieu's Analytical Lenses: Symbolic Power, Field, and Doxa." We now clarify explicitly that these three concepts are not intended to present Bourdieu's work as a complete framework but are deliberately selected because, taken together, they best capture the symbolic, structural, and epistemic mechanisms through which inclusion is simultaneously invoked and undermined in the current anti-DEI environment. A new bridging paragraph now explains that <i>symbolic power</i> illuminates how meanings and legitimacy are recoded, <i>field</i> highlights the arenas in which authority and capital are negotiated, and <i>doxa</i> exposes the taken-for-granted assumptions that naturalize inequality. The revision also specifies that while Bourdieu's broader repertoire includes <i>habitus</i>, <i>capital</i>, and <i>illusio</i>, these are not foregrounded because they are less directly aligned with the paper's analytical focus on DEI withdrawal as a process of symbolic recoding, field-level repositioning, and doxic naturalisation. Finally, we inserted an explicit sentence linking the triad to the paper's research question: The three concepts are mobilized to analyze the core focus of this paper: How shifting political narratives around DEI reshape organizational power structures and legitimize the retreat from equality-oriented practices. We now ensure that conceptual precision, theoretical consistency, and a stable analytical focus are maintained throughout the paper.
Fifth, there is an issue of framing here. The current reframing of DEI as is alarming but indeed a frame, and one that could also be presented differently. P. 5 presents some figures to illustrate the challenge, yet the frame here could also stress the 69% of HR executives not reporting DEI cutbacks. Furthermore, the presentation in the next few pages of managerial recolonization of inclusion draws on known critiques of the business case frame of DEI developed within critical diversity studies, that were developed in the period before the current backlash. The claim of political neutrality and depoliticization of DEI in that previous period is taken over from the literature, but arguably, that was never void of politics to begin with, and a Bourdieusian analysis should pick up on that.	We thank the reviewer for this insightful comment on the need for greater framing balance and reflexivity. The revised manuscript (pp. 4–5) now explicitly acknowledges that 69 % of HR executives reported no DEI cutbacks (Conference Board, 2023), highlighting variation across contexts and addressing the concern over one-sided representation. The section "Symbolic Reframing of DEI as Organisational Liability" (pp. 15–17) has been expanded to clarify that the earlier business-case framing was itself politically charged, a form of symbolic power that recast justice as performance, rather than a neutral managerial logic. We now emphasize that both the prior and current DEI framings are politically constituted symbolic constructions operating within the organizational field, consistent with a Bourdieusian reading of symbolic power, field, and doxa. These revisions strengthen conceptual precision and demonstrate how each framing reproduces domination through distinct legitimacy claims (justice-as-performance vs. risk-as-neutrality), directly addressing the reviewer's concern.
Sixth, the contributions of the paper need to be in line with its aim and research question. In the style of writing you often create oppositions (f.e. 'DEI retrenchment is not merely administrative or reactive but symbolically legitimated, structurally distributed	We appreciate this constructive comment and have revised the Theoretical Contributions section extensively to ensure clarity, alignment, and precision. The section now explicitly links the paper's contributions to its central research question, how inclusion is

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and epistemically naturalized’p.11, or not simply due to shifting priorities or budget constraints, p. 12), but they read like a strawman argument. Please be more precise in the contributions, especially in relation with the critical diversity studies literature, that has made these power analyses before. What does your study add to what we already know?	simultaneously invoked and undermined, thereby ensuring conceptual coherence across the manuscript. To address the reviewer’s concern about oppositional phrasing, we have reframed such contrasts to emphasize analytical depth rather than rhetorical opposition. The revised section explains how organizational rollback operates simultaneously across symbolic, structural, and epistemic dimensions, avoiding any impression of strawman contrasts between prior work and the current argument. We have also strengthened the paper’s positioning within the critical diversity studies literature by explicitly acknowledging prior analyses of depoliticization, non-performativity, and power (e.g., Ahmed, Noon, Zanoni, Holvino) and clarifying what the present study adds. The revised text specifies that the concept of quiet revocation extends these frameworks by theorizing how DEI rollback is re-legitimized under political backlash, institutionalized through organizational governance, and normalized within transnational field dynamics. Finally, the section now delineates the paper’s four main theoretical advances, extending symbolic power from rhetoric to governance, linking field-level and political pressures, re-centering doxa as a mechanism of ideological control, and integrating these into a Bourdieusian triadic framework that explains the co-production of inclusion and exclusion. The revised contributions section now offers a more precise, cumulative, and field-anchored account of how this paper advances critical diversity scholarship, in direct response to the reviewer’s feedback.
Seventh, the section on practical implications seems disconnected from the previous texts as the assignments for organizations and practitioners seem to ignore the political shifts. These interventions do not differ from the ones advocated in the transformative change literature on DEI that see DEI as a political change project.	We thank the reviewer for this constructive observation. We have substantially revised the Practical Implications section to ensure a stronger integration with the theoretical framework and the paper’s central argument on quiet revocation. Specifically, we have: Anchored the implications in the paper’s political and institutional context, explicitly framing them as responses to the anti-DEI political climate, institutional retrenchment, and legitimacy crises that define the present moment. Linked each implication to the three interlocking mechanisms theorized earlier, symbolic reframing, managerial recolonization, and epistemic disqualification, so that the recommendations directly operationalize the symbolic, structural, and epistemic dynamics discussed in the main analysis. Clarified how these implications differ from conventional transformative-change literature by emphasizing institutional resistance, field-level power, and epistemic pluralism. The revised section highlights how DEI practitioners can sustain equality work under conditions of political hostility, rather than in politically neutral settings typically assumed by prior frameworks. Revised the closing synthesis paragraph to reconnect practice to theory, demonstrating how symbolic, structural, and epistemic analyses of quiet revocation inform organizational action and extend existing DEI change models.

	Thus, we now directly address the reviewer's concern about disconnection and repetition. The section now presents a politically grounded, theoretically coherent, and novel set of interventions that distinguish this paper's contribution from the established transformative-change literature.	