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# Multi-level inclusion systems: how tempered radicals influence change in manufacturing organisations

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores how tempered radicals promote inclusive workplaces across organizational levels in manufacturing companies. Tempered radicals work within established structures to deliver socially inspired change, strategically challenging norms while balancing organizational commitment and personal values. Building on Meyerson's foundational work, this research extends tempered radical theory by developing a Multi-Level Tempered Radical Approach Framework that examines how these change agents operate differently across frontline, supervisory, and managerial levels. Within manufacturing settings, 27 participants were interviewed through narrative inquiry methodology. We employed Leximancer text mining and thematic analysis. The findings reveal distinct patterns in how tempered radicals construct identities, navigate work environments, employ operational methods, and engage in interpersonal interactions at each organizational level. The framework developed for this study contributes to tempered radical literature by providing empirical evidence of level-specific strategies within hierarchical manufacturing contexts—an underexplored setting in existing research. The study advances understanding of Meyerson's spectrum while offering insights for enhancing workplace inclusion in traditionally hierarchical industries.

## KEYWORDS

Inclusion; manufacturing; tempered radicals; change

## Introduction

Tempered radicals work quietly with and within an organization to subtly foster a more inclusive workplace (Griffiths, Pio, and McGhee 2023; Meyerson 2008). As powerful agents of socially inspired change (organizational transformations driven by social values), they navigate a delicate balance between organizational commitment and personal values that may diverge from the dominant culture (Meyerson 2001a; Meyerson and Scully 1995). Meyerson's (2001b) foundational framework conceptualizes tempered radicals as individuals who operate along a spectrum of change strategies, from quiet individual resistance to strategic alliance building, always maintaining their dual commitment to both organizational success and personal values.

The urgency of understanding tempered radicals in contemporary workplaces has intensified as organizations grapple with increasing diversity challenges and the need for authentic inclusion practices (Ashforth et al. 2014; Tucker 2023). Studies reveal that traditional diversity management approaches often fail to address systemic exclusion, particularly in hierarchical industrial settings

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where power dynamics can perpetuate inequality (Boekhorst 2015; Shore et al. 2011). The current state of tempered radical research, however, remains predominantly focused on senior management in service-based financial or technology firms, with limited exploration of how these change agents operate across different organizational levels (Griffiths, Pio, and McGhee 2023; Kelan and Wratil 2018).

This study addresses a critical gap by examining: How do tempered radicals promote inclusion across different organizational levels in manufacturing settings? This research extends existing literature by investigating how tempered radical strategies vary across organizational contexts, providing the first empirical evidence of level-specific approaches within manufacturing environments. The manufacturing industry, characterized by close collaboration and traditional hierarchies (Kazushi 2001), provides a unique context for studying inclusion and tempered radicals' roles (Alat and Suar 2020; Alexander et al. 2022). Rather than constraining inclusion efforts, this context's hierarchical clarity and collaborative imperatives create optimal conditions for examining how positioning fundamentally shapes change agency strategies. While these organizations face distinctive inclusion challenges due to rigid structures and emphasis on operational efficiency over social considerations (Obeidat, Mitchell, and Bray 2016; Tucker 2023), these characteristics enable systematic examination of dynamics that might be obscured in less structured settings.

The study develops a Multi-Level Tempered Radical Approach Framework that demonstrates how organizational position fundamentally shapes approaches to promoting inclusion. Key findings reveal distinct patterns in how tempered radicals construct identities, navigate work environments, employ operational methods, and engage in interpersonal interactions at frontline, supervisory, and managerial levels. The research contributes to tempered radical theory by examining frontline and supervisory levels alongside management roles within manufacturing contexts, extending Meyerson's (2008) theoretical spectrum while offering insights for enhancing workplace inclusion in traditionally hierarchical industries.

Selected companies represent diverse manufacturing sectors including food and beverage, machinery and equipment, chemicals, metals, and wood products, spanning both regional and urban locations. Companies were chosen for their hierarchical structures and collaborative work environments that provide optimal conditions for studying cross-level inclusion dynamics. The organizations range from medium-sized regional manufacturers to large multinational operations, offering variation in organizational culture while maintaining the hierarchical characteristics essential for multi-level analysis.

This paper proceeds as follows: the literature review examines existing tempered radical research, establishes the theoretical foundation for multi-level analysis, and explores manufacturing's unique characteristics for inclusion research to identify the research gap; methodology details the narrative inquiry approach and participant selection; findings present the Multi-Level Tempered Radical Approach Framework; discussion interprets results within existing theory; and the conclusion synthesizes contributions and future research directions.

## Literature review

### *Inclusion in the workplace: a critical examination*

The concept of inclusion, while frequently invoked in contemporary organizational discourse, requires critical examination beyond its apparent simplicity as a self-evident organizational element (Shore et al. 2011). Rather than representing a universal construct, inclusion emerges as a contextually dependent phenomenon that varies significantly across organizational cultures, hierarchical levels, and identity intersections (Boekhorst 2015). Shore et al. (2011) conceptualize inclusion through dual mechanisms: satisfaction of both belongingness needs (feeling valued as a group member) and uniqueness needs (feeling valued for distinctive attributes). This duality

reveals inclusion's inherent complexity, as individuals simultaneously seek acceptance and recognition of their differences within organizational contexts. The contextual variability of inclusion becomes particularly evident when examining how organizational culture shapes which differences are celebrated versus tolerated, and how identity intersections influence experiences across hierarchical levels.

As workplaces grow more diverse, organizations face the challenge of building environments where all employees feel valued and can thrive (Boekhorst 2015; Richter et al. 2020; Tucker 2023). Organizations seek to obtain the benefits of a diverse workforce, such as creativity and innovation, while managing the potential for tension, conflict, and miscommunication (Härtel, Härtel, and Trumble 2013; Syed and Kramar 2009). While diversity reflects the mix of people within an organization, inclusion creates an environment where each person feels welcome, uniqueness is valued, and everyone can participate and contribute (Boekhorst 2015; Harrison, Boekhorst, and Yu 2018). However, inclusion manifests differently across organizational cultures. Manufacturing environments present distinct challenges due to hierarchical structures, operational imperatives, and historically homogeneous workforces.

Traditional diversity management strategies seek workforce cohesion and organizational success; they often prioritize mainstream perspectives, failing to "alleviate the ongoing under-representation of ethnic minorities, women and other disadvantaged groups" (Syed and Kramar 2009, 644). To maximize the advantages of workforce diversity while tackling its challenges, organizations must foster an environment where everyone experiences belonging, equitable treatment, and appreciation for their authentic selves (Harrison, Boekhorst, and Yu 2018; Pless and Maak 2004). As workplaces become reliant on social connections and interpersonal dynamics, organizations need to broaden their understanding of inclusion by looking past visible diversity characteristics to embrace a broader spectrum of individual differences, including personal background, lifestyle choices, family circumstances, disability status, educational experiences, and physical characteristics (Härtel, Härtel, and Trumble 2013; Hope Pelled, Ledford, and Albers Mohrman 1999; Rupert et al. 2016). This comprehensive approach acknowledges difference within and across cultural boundaries, encompassing individual differences to create shared advantages through a socially connected diversity framework (Härtel, Härtel, and Trumble 2013; Syed and Kramar 2009).

For individuals whose identities diverge from dominant cultural norms, inclusion represents an ongoing negotiation between authenticity and belonging, often requiring navigation of complex power dynamics (Boekhorst 2015; Pless and Maak 2004; Richter et al. 2020). The challenge of remaining authentic while managing diverse identities has become fundamental to tempered radical conduct. Conventional understandings of authenticity expect individuals to maintain a singular, coherent identity across different contexts (Alvesson and Willmott 2002; Light 2015). However, contemporary research on multiple workplace identities challenges this view. According to Caza, Moss, and Vough (2018, 703) authenticity involves "establishing and sustaining cognitive and social capacity for multiple genuine expressions of self" rather than maintaining one fixed identity.

Workplace social connections play a crucial role in fostering genuine acceptance and belonging, transcending the mere sharing of physical space or adherence to behavioral checklists. These meaningful social interactions and relationships are fundamental to creating a sense of belonging and directly impact employee well-being (Bandura 1991). Nevertheless, research examining the strategies and processes organizations use to develop and establish inclusive cultures remains limited (Rezai et al. 2023). Organizations tending to downplay the value of subtle change (O'Brien 2022). They favor visible programmatic approaches over incremental change, potentially overlooking transformative champions working within existing systems (Liaquat, Jost, and Balcetis 2023). Despite increasing emphasis on diversity, existing studies still need to address how organizations cultivate environments that embrace all individuals (Boekhorst 2015). Recent research further underscores the importance of inclusive leadership in fostering environments where employees

feel empowered to innovate. Tamasevicius et al. (2026) found that inclusive leadership enhances innovation by strengthening psychological empowerment—employees’ sense of autonomy, competence, and impact—which in turn encourages creative and proactive behaviors aligned with inclusion goals.

The complexity of inclusion demands approaches that move beyond surface-level accommodation to embrace the broader spectrum of individual differences. Shore et al. (2011, 1234) suggest that “when belongingness and uniqueness needs are placed in jeopardy ... individuals will engage in efforts to achieve the balance that they seek,” highlighting how inclusion challenges mobilize individual agency within organizational constraints. In culturally diverse teams, working flexibly and being willing to consider others’ perspectives can help team members navigate differences more effectively, leading to stronger inclusion and more innovative outcomes (Granow and Asbrock 2021). Despite this landscape, tempered radicals emerge as capable, yet often invisible, champions of inclusion who understand the role of social connections in organizational change (Griffiths, Pio, and McGhee 2023).

### ***Conceptualizing tempered radicals as inclusion champions***

Tempered radicals, conceptualized by Meyerson and Scully (1995), embody a distinctive duality within organizations: they remain committed to organizational success while maintaining personal values that diverge from dominant cultural norms, empowering them to subtly cultivate inclusion from within as catalysts for organizational change. For example, a production supervisor noticing limited participation from non-English speaking team members might gradually introduce visual aids and encourage peer translation during daily meetings, creating more inclusive communication practices while maintaining operational flow—demonstrating how subtle changes can transform workplace dynamics without disrupting established systems.

Tempered radicals strongly orient toward substantive values such as well-being, social benefit, and equity (Bajaba et al. 2023; Meyerson 2001b). They seek meaningful change to improve the world of work and to amplify positive actions (Broadhurst et al. 2018). Their dual perspective broadens their wisdom and fosters innovation, adding unfamiliar knowledge to the organization through their outside experiences and values (Griffiths, Pio, and McGhee 2023). Tempered radicals are distinguished by their resilience, endurance, and innovative problem-solving capabilities rather than visionary outlook and strategic competence. As Meyerson (2001a) and Scully and Meyerson (1993) explains, organizational transformation often occurs through an accumulation of small, strategic changes rather than dramatic overhauls. This incremental approach mirrors how organizations naturally evolve, adapting gradually to new information and changing circumstances (Weick 1984). While tempered radicals orchestrate changes through everyday actions and decisions, their impact can be overlooked because such gradual transformation appears seamless and natural. However, these seemingly minor adjustments, when accumulated over time, create radical organizational change (Bajaba et al. 2023; Meyerson 2001b; Weick 1984). Meyerson (2008) describes tempered radicals as everyday leaders; they can communicate their ideas in ways various people can understand, and they think flexibly to see change from different angles (Ashforth et al. 2014; Vaul-Grimwood et al. 2023).

As demonstrated in Figure 1, Meyerson’s (2001a) foundational framework presents tempered radicals as operating along a spectrum of change strategies, demonstrating remarkable flexibility in adapting their approaches to organizational contexts and personal circumstances. This spectrum encompasses five primary strategies: (i) resisting quietly through subtle self-expression that maintains authentic identity while avoiding direct confrontation; (ii) transforming threats into opportunities by reframing challenging situations as catalysts for inclusive change; (iii) negotiating change by finding middle ground solutions that advance inclusion while respecting organizational constraints; (iv) leveraging small wins to create incremental progress that builds momentum for



**Figure 1.** Spectrum of Strategies adapted from Meyerson (2008).

broader transformation; and (v) utilizing strategic alliance building to develop coalitions and amplify change efforts through collective action.

Meyerson (2008) describes tempered radicals as informal or formal leaders who move fluidly along this spectrum, adapting their approach as circumstances evolve and their organizational influence grows. This flexibility allows them to tailor change efforts to unique challenges and opportunities, maximizing impact while managing personal and professional risks. The spectrum is not linear or rigid but a fluid continuum where tempered radicals choose starting or end points depending on their judgment and context.

Meyerson (2001a) emphasizes that strategy impact should not be judged solely by speed or visibility. While leaders may choose radical norm changes through shocking and risky actions (Spinoza et al. 2023), tempered radicals gradually influence change in ways that are patient and inconspicuous yet impactful over time (Meyerson and Tompkins 2007). The concept builds on Weick (1984) foundational theory of small-wins, arguing that individuals can more effectively address complex challenges by pursuing achievable, concrete changes rather than attempting comprehensive transformations that often provoke defensive reactions and organizational inertia. In a study of quiet leaders, Badaracco (2001, 121) notes, “their modesty and restraint are in large measure responsible for their extraordinary achievements.” The strategies enable “successfully navigating a middle ground... choosing their battles, creating pockets of learning, and making way for small wins” (Meyerson 2008, 6).

Tempered radicals act as catalysts for meaningful social change through subtle strategies that foster gradual shifts in organizational change, echoing findings from Ma and Jin (2019) that prospector-style strategic orientation—characterized by proactive innovation—correlates with improved performance in manufacturing contexts. A case in point is the frontline machine operator who consistently challenges casual gender-biased language during shift handovers, gradually influencing their peers’ communication habits while maintaining positive team relationships. The influence extends beyond organizational boundaries. In their study of ecopreneurs as tempered radicals, Walton and Kirkwood (2013) demonstrate how these individuals effect change through subtle yet impactful strategies. They describe an organic brewery founder who demonstrated that it is possible to run a successful business and create value while being environmentally sensitive by reusing bottles and sourcing organic ingredients. This approach exemplifies how tempered radicals can transform industry practices by showing viable alternatives rather than directly confronting existing business models.

Tempered radicals embody a unique approach to organizational change, characterized by their ability to navigate tension and their identity as a “state of enduring ambivalence” (Meyerson and Scully 1995, 588). Their commitment to organizations and to causes or ideologies that differ from dominant organizational culture creates a distinctive perspective (Griffiths, Pio, and McGhee 2023). This dual allegiance fosters innovative problem-solving, where they prefer to bridge

different viewpoints rather than seeking to alter them entirely, learning from their ongoing navigation of organizational loyalties and personal change agendas. They have expertise in remaining authentic to their values while conforming just enough to preserve their position and influence within the organization. Vaul-Grimwood et al. (2023) aptly describe tempered radicals as “outsiders within,” which encapsulates their unique position straddling organizational norms and change imperatives.

Tempered radicals’ effectiveness in promoting inclusion stems from their acute sensitivity to individual differences and their capacity to bridge perspectives across organizational divides (Griffiths, Pio, and McGhee 2023). Their personal experience of navigating difference positions them to understand both the challenges facing marginalized individuals and the systemic barriers that perpetuate exclusion (Richter et al. 2020). This dual awareness enables them to serve as cultural interpreters, translating excluded voices into language that resonates with dominant groups while maintaining authenticity of diverse perspectives, and as strategic facilitators maintaining credibility across different organizational groups (Chiambaretto, Massé, and Mirc 2019).

The tempered radical’s approach to change, which emphasizes moderation and long-term impact, is a source of positive deviance that can lead to significant and enduring organizational improvements (Dhital et al. 2023; Quinn and Meyerson 2008). In the manufacturing context, their unique positioning enables them to bridge operational realities with progressive practices which could translate to more innovative production processes (varied perspectives and experiences), improved team dynamics on the shop floor (through enhanced communication and collaboration), and better problem-solving capabilities (through an inclusive environment) (Jakobsen, Jacobsen, and Serritzlew 2019). They act as knowledge brokers, demonstrating capacity to manage tensions between competitive units through shared vision and cross-functional coordination, effectively bridging diverse organizational groups (Ton, Hammerl, and Szabó-Szentgróti 2023; Westerman and Huey 2012). This ability positions them as crucial actors in fostering inclusion and celebrating uniqueness as they strive to create workplaces where all aspects of identity are valued and respected.

The ambivalence that characterizes tempered radicals proves particularly valuable in inclusion work, preventing both uncritical acceptance of existing systems and complete rejection of organizational frameworks, fostering nuanced approaches that work within constraints while pushing boundaries (Liaquat, Jost, and Balcetis 2023; Meyerson and Scully 1995; Richter et al. 2020).

Tempered radicals strategically use voice and silence (Creed 2003; Meyerson 2001a). They carefully balance the need to speak out against exclusionary practices while maintaining their organizational standing. This balance is central to their effectiveness. Rather than allowing frustration to overwhelm them, they redirect emotional responses as catalysts for constructive organizational action, using measured approaches to emotional management that distinguish subtle operational style (Meyerson 2001b). Through selective voice, they can amplify marginalized perspectives and create environments where others feel safe to share their experiences, fostering inclusive dialogue without alienating colleagues (Kelan and Wratil 2018; Kirton, Greene, and Dean 2007). This strategic approach enables them to celebrate differences while building rather than breaking relationships across organizational divides (Vaul-Grimwood et al. 2023).

### ***Context-specific application: the manufacturing industry***

Tempered radicalism theory has demonstrated considerable versatility across diverse organizational and cultural contexts (Meyerson 2001a, 2001b). Research has applied this framework to examine religious-Zionist feminism in Israel and indigenous human resource development in Ghana, illustrating its relevance beyond traditional corporate settings (Osafó and Yawson 2021; Zion-Waldoks 2021). Despite this broad applicability, manufacturing organizations remain largely unexplored through the tempered radical lens (Griffiths, Pio, and McGhee 2023), particularly

regarding how these change agents operate across different organizational levels within hierarchical industrial environments.

Manufacturing involves transforming raw materials into finished products for resale, ranging from simple processes such as sawmilling to complex operations such as making scientific health-care equipment (Esmailian, Behdad, and Wang 2016). The industry is undergoing significant transformations driven by globalization and evolving market demands, with Industry 5.0's human-centric approaches emphasizing the convergence of humans, technology and information (Doyle-Kent and Kopacek 2020; Elmaraghy et al. 2012; Laurie et al., 2020). Digital servitization—defined as the strategic transformation of manufacturing firms from product-centric to service-oriented models through digital technology integration—advances these human-centric goals by fostering collaboration, adaptability, and customer-focused value creation (Zhang, Balaji, and Jiang 2025). Understanding these shifts is important because the sector remains vital for economic development, with success increasingly dependent on how organizations manage their human resources and collaborative relationships (Bai et al. 2023; Jakobsen, Jacobsen, and Serritzlew 2019; MBIE 2018; Nobuya, Cheng, and Smeets 2017).

Manufacturing organizations are fundamentally human-centric environments where people work closely together in interdependent relationships (Alat and Suar 2020; Hackman 2002). They rely on collaborative product assembly processes and team-based production systems. These systems extend from individual job roles to cross-functional teams working on production lines (Ojstersek, Javernik, and Buchmeister 2021). The collaborative relationships extend beyond immediate production tasks to encompass problem-solving teams, quality improvement groups, and cross-departmental project teams addressing manufacturing challenges through collective expertise (Grant and Parker 2009). Rather than being defined by technological advancement alone, these environments are characterized by complex human dynamics and organizational structures where teams must navigate multiple interdependencies: between individuals within work groups, between different production teams across shifts, and between operational staff and management levels (Hackman 1987, 2002; Wageman 2008).

The industry's hierarchical structure, with multiple roles and a definitive chain of command (Bates et al. 1995; Kazushi 2001; Nahm, Vonderembse, and Koufteros 2003). This structure creates distinct organizational levels that each face unique challenges in fostering inclusion. Production lines involve frontline workers coordinating closely with immediate colleagues, supervisory staff bridging operational and management concerns, and managers navigating strategic decisions while maintaining connection to operational realities (Jost, Banaji, and Nosek 2004; Morgeson, DeRue, and Karam 2010). This multi-level structure creates opportunities for tempered radicals to operate differently depending on their position within the organizational hierarchy, as each level offers distinct access to influence, resources, and change strategies.

It is this reliance and connection between individuals that offers a unique setting for tempered radicals to foster inclusion as they connect differences while respecting uniqueness (Meyerson 2001b; Meyerson and Scully 1995). This environment of collaborative teamwork, hierarchical structure, and interpersonal interdependence serves to incubate and highlight individual activities to foster inclusion, making it an ideal context for studying how change agents navigate organizational complexity to promote inclusive practices across different levels of influence (Li, Chiaburu, and Kirkman 2017).

## **Research gap**

Despite the theoretical richness of tempered radical concepts and growing recognition of inclusion's complexity, significant gaps remain in understanding how these dynamics operate across organizational levels and within specific industry contexts. Existing tempered radical research has predominantly focused on senior management positions within service-based industries,

particularly technology and financial services (Kelan and Wratil 2018; Kirton, Greene, and Dean 2007), leaving questions about how tempered radicals operate at frontline and supervisory levels.

More fundamentally, existing research of tempered radicals has predominantly examined uniform strategic approaches without examining how hierarchical positioning systematically shapes inclusion strategies. Meyerson's (2008) framework conceptualized tempered radicals as personally-mediated change agents, yet questions remain about whether they function as isolated actors or as part of integrated organizational change systems. Manufacturing industries represent a particularly underexplored context that offers clear hierarchical structures enabling systematic examination of cross-level dynamics that may be obscured in flatter organizational settings.

This study addresses these gaps by examining how tempered radicals promote inclusion across frontline, supervisory, and managerial levels within manufacturing organizations. The study aims to demonstrate whether tempered radicals operate through complementary and interconnected strategies rather than uniform approaches, investigating existing frameworks to provide empirical evidence of level-specific inclusion strategies within hierarchical industrial contexts.

## Research approach

### *Methodology and participants*

This research adopts a subjective ontological stance wherein reality is constructed through individual perceptions, naturally leading to a social constructionist epistemology that maintains truth is accessed through participants' meaning-making processes (Creswell 2014; Eriksson and Kovalainen 2016; Leavy 2017). Such foundations support an inductive qualitative approach using narrative inquiry to examine individuals' experiences within their social, cultural, and institutional contexts (Clandinin 2006, 2007, Daiute 2013; Kim 2016). Narrative inquiry suits this research as inquirers "come alongside participants" to explore their lived and told stories (Clandinin 34), while the interviews are "conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion" (Rubin and Rubin 2005, 4). The application of narrative inquiry methodology to examine tempered radicals across manufacturing hierarchies represents a methodological approach designed to capture subtle organizational phenomena through collaborative storytelling. The emphasis on contextual understanding is to enable systematic documentation of both participants' narratives and the manufacturing environment complexities that shaped their inclusion efforts, providing methodological guidance for researchers investigating similarly subtle organizational phenomena.

Given the focus on understanding tempered radicals in manufacturing, purposive sampling was employed to identify participants who demonstrated characteristics of tempered radicals—those balancing organizational commitment with efforts to create inclusive change. This intentional targeting was methodologically essential: understanding how tempered radicals influence inclusion across organizational levels required participants who were actively and demonstrably doing so. Manufacturing organizations throughout New Zealand were identified through industry networks and professional associations, with advertisements placed on staff noticeboards and internal intranets. Prospective participants contacted the researcher directly to maintain confidentiality. Screening conversations with the researcher explored three key areas: participants' relationship with their organization, their experience of holding values distinct from the dominant culture, and their methods for influencing organizational change while maintaining effectiveness within their role. These screening areas operationalized Meyerson and Scully (1995) foundational characteristics of tempered radicals: dual commitment to both organizational success and personal values that may diverge from dominant culture, combined with evidence of attempting to influence change from within established structures.

**Table 1.** Interview guide.

| Interview area          | Sample questions                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Background and Context  | Tell me a little about yourself, what is your story?<br>Tell me about your workplace—a general overview?                                                                                                          |
| Personal Experiences    | Is there any way you feel you are different to the dominant culture of the organization?<br>Can you describe a time when your personal values conflicted with what was expected at work?                          |
| Workplace Interactions  | Share with me a story of how you have brought people together in the workplace<br>Tell me about a time when you helped someone feel more included or valued                                                       |
| Organizational Dynamics | Describe a situation where you had to balance being loyal to your organization while staying true to your personal beliefs<br>Can you think of a time when you influenced change without having formal authority? |
| Individual Approaches   | How do you typically approach situations where you want to make things better for others?<br>What strategies do you use to maintain effectiveness while pursuing change?                                          |

**Table 2.** Participant distribution by industry, gender identity, level of organization and age.

| Industry     | Gender identity |          | Level in organization |            |          | Age      |          |          |          |
|--------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------------|------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
|              | Male            | Female   | Front line            | Supervisor | Manager  | 21–30    | 31–40    | 41–50    | 51–60    |
| Food         | 12              | 7        | 8                     | 7          | 4        | 4        | 5        | 5        | 5        |
| Printing     | 3               | 1        | 2                     | 2          |          |          | 2        |          | 2        |
| Equipment    | 3               |          | 3                     |            |          | 2        |          |          | 1        |
| Technology   |                 | 1        | 1                     |            |          |          |          |          | 1        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>18</b>       | <b>9</b> | <b>14</b>             | <b>9</b>   | <b>4</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>7</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>9</b> |

Interviews were conducted through face-to-face meetings where possible, with some conducted online due to the then-current pandemic restrictions. Participants were provided opportunity for informed written consent in accordance with the University's Ethics committee.

The semi-structured interview protocol covered five key areas: workplace experiences, organizational relationships, personal values and conflicts, change processes, and demographic information (see [Table 1](#)). Questions were designed to elicit rich narratives about workplace experiences, value conflicts, and change processes while remaining accessible across different educational backgrounds and organizational levels. The protocol encouraged participants to share their authentic experiences without predetermined assumptions about specific change agent roles or characteristics. The semi-structured format balanced coverage of key research areas with narrative flexibility (Clandini).

Between 2020 and 2022, a total of 27 participants (see [Table 2](#)) were interviewed from within nine organizations and across 12 geographic sites in New Zealand. The interviews were on average around 60 minutes and were digitally recorded and transcribed.

As detailed in [Table 2](#), participants represented diverse organizational contexts across nine manufacturing organizations spanning 12 geographic sites, including food and beverage, printing, equipment, and technology sectors. Participants' roles across frontline ( $n = 14$ ), supervisory ( $n = 9$ ), and managerial ( $n = 4$ ) levels provided insights into how organizational positioning influences individual approaches to fostering inclusion. This individual-level approach aligns with the theoretical foundation of tempered radicals as change agents whose effectiveness stems from their personal navigation of organizational tensions and value-driven change efforts (Meyerson 2008). The manufacturing context demonstrates methodological value through its clear hierarchical structures, offering a template for cross-level analysis in traditionally structured industries.

The study's initial research design aimed to include 20–25 participants, aligning with the sample size recommendations of Symon and Cassell (2012) for qualitative studies of comparable scope, with theoretical saturation approached after approximately 24 interviews. Additional female participants were purposively recruited to address initial gender underrepresentation.

## Data analysis

Qualitative research does not provide a single answer, it is open-ended, organic, and produces detailed data from which claims, within a particular context, are made (Braun and Clarke 2013). To analyze this rich qualitative data, a combined analytical approach was adopted integrating computer-assisted pattern identification with researcher-led thematic interpretation (Sotiriadou, Brouwers, and Le 2014). Leximancer is a machine learning-based CAQDAS text mining application that uses natural language processing to identify frequency and co-occurrence patterns within complex textual data (Chen et al. 2016; Hyndman and Pill 2018; Kim and Kim 2017). It utilizes thematic and relational analysis to form groups of concepts traveling together throughout the text (Engstrom et al. 2022; Smith and Humphreys 2006). In contrast to generative artificial intelligence applications, Leximancer functions primarily as an analytical tool, extracting and visualizing existing patterns within datasets without generating new text (Lemon and Hayes 2020). Generative artificial intelligence (Claude, Anthropic, version claude-sonnet-4-5) was used solely for writing editing purposes, specifically sentence reconstruction and improving conciseness. All substantive content, including data collection, analysis, findings, theory development, literature engagement, and identification of contributions and implications, is the original work of the authors.

The combination integrating computer-assisted pattern identification with researcher-led thematic interpretation addresses potential limitations of purely manual coding while maintaining researcher interpretive control. For a corpus of 27 interview transcripts, Leximancer provided systematic identification of co-occurrence patterns that might be overlooked through manual analysis alone, while avoiding the risk that researcher preconceptions might influence initial pattern recognition. As Chen et al. (2016) and Hyndman and Pill (2018) demonstrate, such analytical tools can provide valuable insights into complex textual data while maintaining the researcher's interpretive role.

Multiple studies have validated Leximancer's robustness for qualitative data analysis. Smith and Humphreys (2006) found almost identical percentages between themes generated through separate manual and Leximancer analysis, while Engstrom et al. (2022) and Lock and Seele (2015) demonstrated its effectiveness across healthcare and business ethics research. While acknowledging that automated tools may have limitations in capturing nuance, researcher-guided interaction addresses these concerns through adjustable stop words and concept merging, ensuring human reflexivity directs the analysis process (Chen et al. 2016; Engstrom et al. 2022). Starting with no preconceptions, Leximancer overcomes potential bias that may influence manual coding alone while serving as a tool to confirm emergent findings (Lemon and Hayes 2020; Mingming and Edwards 2019).

Leximancer presents initial analytical insights through a visual concept map, illustrating co-occurrence patterns within the data. Words constituting concepts are weighted according to their frequency of occurrence in textual units consisting of two complete sentences (Liu, Lai, and Xu 2018), with conceptual clusters formed based on relationship degrees and proximity within the corpus (Hyndman and Pill 2018; Kim and Kim 2017). The analytical approach explicitly combined Leximancer's computer-assisted analysis with manual thematic analysis, using researcher interpretation to refine automated outputs while emphasizing reflexivity and triangulation with field notes and memos. This method allows for identifying broad discursive patterns while preserving participants' unique perspectives across organizational levels.

Initial analysis using Leximancer provided preliminary insights through co-occurrence patterns, illustrated in Figure 2. This visual representation serves as a starting point for understanding the interconnectedness of key concepts within the data. While some terms generated by Leximancer (e.g. "year," "school," "job," "home") may not appear immediately relevant to the research question, they proved to be valuable indicators directing attention to rich contextual data. These seemingly disparate terms often pointed to important aspects of participants' personal

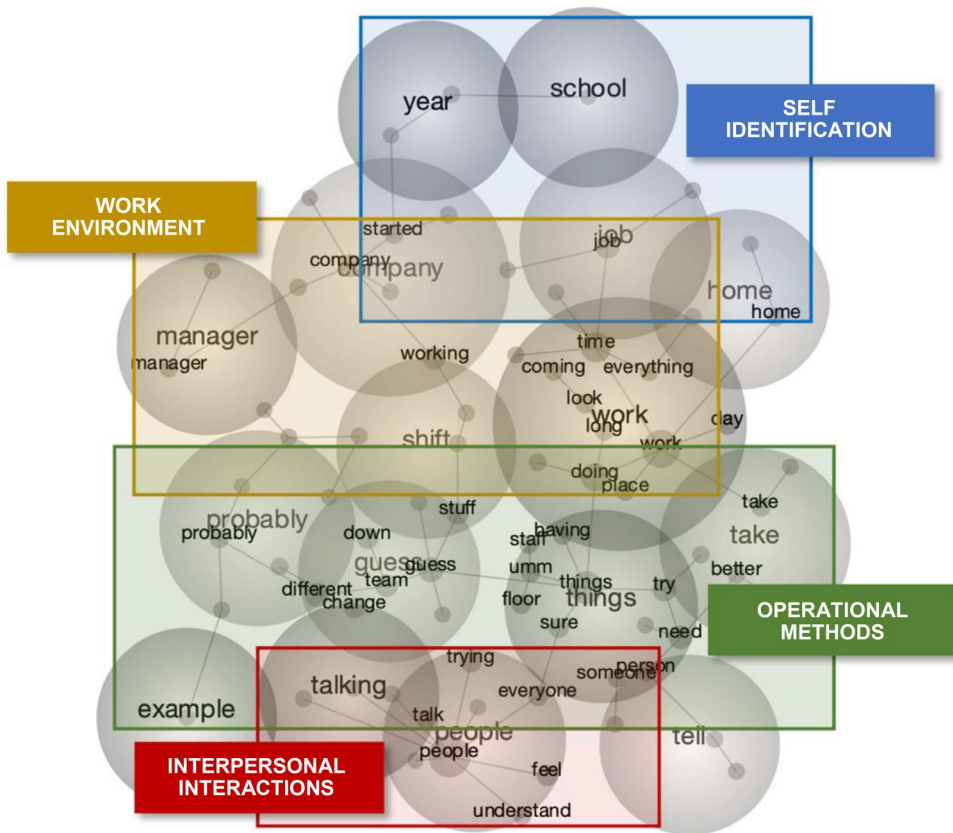


Figure 2. Leximancer concept map and the emerging themes of discourse.

and professional experiences, highlighting the multifaceted nature of tempered radicals' identities and approaches.

In this integrated analytical approach, Leximancer generated initial conceptual patterns from the complete dataset, which the researcher then interrogated and refined through manual thematic analysis. The software functioned as a pattern identification tool rather than a code generator, with all thematic development and interpretation conducted by the researcher. This approach combines systematic pattern detection with interpretive depth, using researcher interpretation to refine automated outputs while emphasizing reflexivity and cross-verification with field notes and memos. While initial coding was conducted by one researcher, analytical reliability was ensured through systematic peer review with coauthors who verified emerging themes and interpretations.

Analytical memos documented coding decisions throughout the process, and triangulation with field notes and Leximancer outputs provided multiple analytical perspectives to mitigate single-coder limitations. The thematic analysis and the Leximancer-generated cues led to the development of four distinct themes of discourse: participants' self-identification, their work environment, their operational methods, and their interpersonal interactions. When superimposed onto Figure 2, these thematic categories provide a comprehensive visual representation of the emergent discursive patterns, offering a more nuanced understanding of how different concepts interrelate within the broader thematic framework.

The emergence of these four discursive themes proved particularly significant when subsequently compared to existing literature, as they closely aligned with the attributes of tempered

radicals as defined by Meyerson (2008), suggesting empirical justification of the theoretical framework through inductive analysis. These themes correspond to critical characteristics: a strong sense of identity (Self-Identification), a meaningful connection to their work environment (Work Environment), distinctive operational approaches (Operational Methods), and a heightened awareness of their colleagues and interpersonal dynamics (Interpersonal Interactions). This alignment to the attributes of tempered radicals not only provides empirical support for the presence of tempered radical attributes among our study participants but also validates the relevance of our sample to the research objectives.

The thematic analysis was continued to develop discourse themes into sub-themes. Thematic analysis aligns with social constructionist epistemology, enabling researchers to organize and describe patterns while delivering rich and thorough analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). Themes and patterns of meaning are identified and analyzed, within the context of the research question, and shaped by the researchers' standpoint, experiences and epistemology (Braun and Clarke 2013; Clandini). The semi-structured interviews yielded a corpus of data relevant to our research question, offering insights into the complex strategies employed by tempered radicals across various organizational levels. This research adopts a thematic approach to examine participant responses by analyzing interview transcripts, researcher-generated memorandums, annotations, and field notes, with pseudonyms used throughout to protect participant confidentiality while maintaining necessary identification for our multi-level analysis. To better understand how tempered radicals foster inclusive workplaces across different organizational strata, we leveraged the well-defined hierarchical structure typical of the manufacturing sector. By flagging the data according to organizational level (frontline, supervisory, and managerial), we conducted a more detailed and comprehensive analysis of the four primary themes of discourse and the sub-themes. This approach allowed us to uncover variations in strategies and perspectives across different levels of the organizational hierarchy. This cross-level analytical framework provides a methodological contribution for examining hierarchical variations in organizational phenomena beyond tempered radical research.

## Findings

The interplay between organizational hierarchy and change agency emerged as a defining feature of our research into tempered radicals in manufacturing environments. Our analysis unveiled patterns of influence that shift and evolve across organizational levels, revealing how hierarchical position shapes both opportunities and constraints for inclusive change. We examined the narratives of 27 participants through Leximancer-assisted analysis and thematic analysis methods. We discovered that tempered radicals share fundamental characteristics of dual commitment to personal values and organizational goals. However, their strategic approaches differ markedly based on their hierarchical position.

The clarity of organizational structures within manufacturing provided a lens through which to observe these variations. What emerged was not simply a hierarchy of influence but a multifaceted ecosystem where tempered radicals at each level—frontline, supervisory, and managerial—leverage different types of organizational and social capital to effect change. Their stories, captured through our narrative inquiry approach, revealed four interconnected primary themes of discourse that operate symbiotically across the organizational spectrum: self-identification, work environment, operational methods, and interpersonal interactions.

Understanding how these themes interconnect provides crucial insights into the complexity of tempered radical strategies. The way individuals identify themselves (self-identification) fundamentally shapes how they perceive and navigate their organizational context (work environment), which in turn influences their choice of tactics (operational methods) and their approach to building relationships (interpersonal interactions). This interconnected nature means that

tempered radicals at different organizational levels develop distinct but complementary approaches to fostering inclusion, each leveraging their unique position within the organizational hierarchy.

### **Self-identification**

A significant finding from our analysis was how participants across different hierarchical levels articulated distinct identity orientations when discussing their approaches to organizational change. These identity constructions serve as the foundation for all subsequent change activities, revealing how organizational position fundamentally shapes self-perception and change capacity.

Frontline participants consistently positioned themselves through expressions of personal autonomy and direct influence, as demonstrated by statements such as “So, you come here be honest to your job. Be honest, if you go home, it’s yours” (Akashi). The Personal Agency orientation that emerged from this level captures how these individuals primarily identify as autonomous actors focused on direct, personal influence rather than formal organizational roles. This identity foundation creates a platform for change that relies heavily on individual credibility and peer-to-peer influence within immediate work groups. While personal agency was the predominant identity orientation among frontline participants, the data revealed that identity construction was not uniformly singular. Haajar’s integration of her maternal identity, “My first role is being a mum,” into her workplace self-conception suggests that some frontline participants drew on multiple identity sources in ways that echo the role integration more typically associated with managerial participants. This indicates that while the level-specific patterns are systematic, individual identity constructions retain complexity that the organizing themes do not fully capture.

In contrast, supervisory staff demonstrated a markedly different identity construction, positioning themselves through organizational frameworks rather than personal autonomy. Liv’s statement, “that’s our policy and our values are more important,” exemplifies the Frameworks orientation that emerged from examining how supervisory staff anchor their change efforts within existing organizational policies and procedures. This represents a refined understanding of institutional mechanics that enables supervisors to operate as bridges between different organizational levels.

Managers expressed their identity primarily through Role Integration, blending their multiple identities within organizational life both professionally and personally. This integration enables a more calculated approach to change that differs significantly from frontline autonomy or supervisory framework-dependence. The extent of identity integration varied among managerial participants, with some demonstrating seamless blending of professional and personal identities while others described ongoing negotiation between different aspects of self.

The responses guided the second-level organizational themes presented in [Table 3](#). Frontline participants described themselves through autonomous personal action within immediate work contexts. Supervisory participants described themselves through institutional structures and policies, using organizational mechanisms to legitimize their actions. Management participants described themselves by integrating professional roles, personal values, and external experiences.

### **Work environment**

The distinct identity orientations observed directly influence how tempered radicals navigate and perceive their work environments, creating different approaches to understanding and leveraging organizational context for inclusive change. [Table 4](#) demonstrates these different approaches to navigating the work environment based on organizational level, reflecting the complex interplay between individual agency and organizational structure that tempered radicals must navigate.

**Table 3.** Examples supporting the global theme: Self identification.A total of 485 data extracts (288 frontline, 115 supervisory and 82 management) from all participants.

| Level       | Participant quote                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Second-level theme |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Front line  | So, you come here be honest to your job. Be honest, if you go home, it's yours. (Priam) [be true to your values]<br>And I'm 36 years old now and try to do something positive for life. P14 Finn I've always been friendly. Yeah. And no matter what happens, I tried to sort of create the family environment. (Solomon)<br>So, I decided that I want to work in the spring repair factory, so I dropped school. And my dad wasn't very happy, my parents [were] not very happy about it. (Kimiora)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Personal Agency    |
| Supervisory | The knowledge that you have from outside, the things sets, sets boundaries, and set a firm, a stable structure for yourself for within the business, because I know some ... of the stuff that you have done at home, or wherever you are outside, can contribute to your work. It can have an effect on your work as well when your mindset, and everything, yeah. (Liv)<br>Whatever I do at home, the work it's a normal life, you know, and if I come to work, and it shouldn't be nothing different. If I teach my kids at home, to be good and do the right thing. (Soren)<br>So that knowledge that you have here, you apply it at home. So yeah, that's our policy and our values are more important, and also goes in line with our family values as well. (Liv)<br>And that is how also I bring it to my, how I look, nurture my children, my girls, you know, in terms of inclusion, reminding them, especially in school, you know, there's nothing worse than having someone that feel lonely. You know, if you see someone, you know, in, not within your group, but outside of the group, you know, and if you can bring that person in is important. (Lillian) | Frameworks         |
| Manager     | I could not think of anyone at our school that was Māori [the indigenous population] that had any aspirations moving into a to Uni, or becoming a manager (Rashid)<br>it's a bit like being mom at home, you know, you guys sort of say no, no talk like that, please. Not in front of your mother. (Mackenzie, Manager)<br>I've got a family and got ... bills to pay and that kind of stuff as well. So, it's just, you need to support them. (Adalyn)<br>At school, I will just sort of listen like I'm back at school, I was a bit reserved and such. So, I wouldn't be the one answering all the questions or be the one here. (Lev)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Role Integration   |

Frontline staff's personal agency orientation manifests in their work environment through Transference patterns, where they manage their role in organizational change by recognizing issues that need addressing while often choosing to transfer responsibility for action upward rather than taking direct action themselves. As Akashi explained, "Because they take care of the people on the floor... if there are issues in the factory," frontline staff frequently spoke about escalation as their primary mechanism for addressing workplace concerns. This approach reflects their immediate relationship-focused worldview and limited formal authority within organizational structures. While transference was the predominant pattern, some frontline participants did not consistently defer responsibility upward. Julieanne, for instance, departed from the typical escalation pattern when facing a significant organizational change initiative: "I went into the Auckland branch and laid out to them what they had to do to make sure they didn't stuff up jobs." This suggests that transference was a dominant rather than absolute strategy, with the degree of direct action varying according to the perceived urgency of the situation and the individual's level of operational expertise.

Supervisory staff's framework orientation enables their unique approach to the work environment through Inclusive Bridging. Supervisors demonstrated greater awareness of organizational diversity and complexity, as Lillian noted: "we are very multicultural like in our QA department we have Russian, we have Indian, we have Filipino, we have Korean, we have Malaysian, we have Chinese." Supervisors consistently position themselves as connectors between different

**Table 4.** Examples supporting the global theme: Work environment. A total of 828 data extracts (460 frontline, 212 supervisory and 156 management) from all participants.

| Level       | Participant quote                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Second-level theme   |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| Front line  | <p>If you feel that you are not happy with about something, you can talk to your supervisor, your manager, they will try to come to a good situation and help you and tell you why they were the policies are such basically it's not ... too bad. (Solomon)</p> <p>So, I send an email to her, but she said she will discuss that with this, higher, higher, higher management team. I think they had discussion, but I'm not very satisfied with that result. (Mikaere)</p> <p>But now for us, there's like anything, any issues raised with the mid management, or they are forwarded if that thing is not solved at that specific thing. It's raised upstairs yeah. (Akashi)</p> <p>I guess it's just understanding that it's not a not a perfect world, it does come down to, you know, we are a business where, you know, into profit maximization, and that, you know, even like, my managers and their managers, their hands are tied in some of these things. (Bing)</p>                                                                                                                                                               | Transference         |
| Supervisory | <p>He said, Oh, I'm going up to the technical manager. I said, Please, do so. You know, if you think that you want to complain about me, by all means, go for it. (Lillian)</p> <p>Oh, we have got we are very multicultural like in the our QA department we have Russian we have Indian we have Filipino we have Korean we have Malaysian we have Chinese we have Japanese are in my team. But, but no kiwi. (Lillian)</p> <p>So, you have got to kind of pull them aside and have a chat and sort out their external issues, make sure they are working fine in the workplace. I have had to do that more and more over the years. it's kind of yeah putting out fires, it's what I do a lot. (Torsten)</p> <p>I think we all have different values from a different cultural perspective. But I've value myself as you know, part of the business, if they had done something good for me, why wouldn't I give back anything that I could. (Liv)</p>                                                                                                                                                                                        | Inclusive Bridging   |
| Manager     | <p>It is interesting over the over the period of time that I've been in this role to see how that's changed a wee bit. And now, when someone is bought into that team who does not fit the white New Zealand or the white English male, how some people get very excited about it. (Mackenzie)</p> <p>So, yeah, it's been an interesting ride so lots of cultural issues in there that I've seen through my time there and elements of discrimination, the elements of ignorance that have and misunderstandings about cultural issues which, I think, they are still impact the business that I think it's been interesting. (Rashid)</p> <p>Both ways, I sort of use business ideas to influence change, outside of the organization and I can rely on experiences outside the organization to influence people inside the organization so, so that's an example of that. (Rashid)</p> <p>Employment relationships, relationship building, resolving disputes, inspiring people. Yeah. And so, the business, someone said to me I wanting to be an operations manager and ... my view is that I'm a bit of wingman and frontman. (Rashid)</p> | Strategic Detachment |

organizational groups and levels, actively working to bridge gaps between teams and departments while viewing the organization as a web of connected groups rather than isolated units.

Management's role integration identity facilitates Strategic Detachment in their work environment approach, choosing to rationalize and facilitate change rather than directly implement it. As Rashid explained, "the demographics of people are different," managers tend to speak about change in ways that rationalize and contextualize rather than direct immediate action.

Table 4 demonstrates these different approaches to navigating the work environment based on organizational level. Frontline participants spoke about recognizing issues and transferring responsibility to those with formal authority to address them. Supervisory participants described

their role as connecting different organizational groups and levels, bridging gaps between teams and departments. Management participants discussed maintaining distance from direct implementation, focusing on rationalizing change and facilitating conditions for others to act.

**Operational methods**

The distinct identity orientations we observed directly translate into different operational methodologies across organizational levels, creating a spectrum of change approaches that encompass processes for evaluating information, solving problems, making decisions, and forming opinions. Table 5 demonstrates these distinct operational methods employed by tempered radicals at different organizational levels, reflecting how identity constructions manifest in practical change activities.

Frontline staff's personal agency orientation manifests operationally through Change Empowerment, where individual self-efficacy significantly influences effectiveness in fostering change. Their belief in their capacity to bring about improvement directly impacts their actions

**Table 5.** Examples supporting the global theme: Operational methods. A total of 1463 extracts (816 frontline, 416 supervisory and 231 management) were collected from all participants.

| Level       | Participant quote                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Second-level theme |
|-------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| Front line  | Transgenders and it's something I do advise employers of when I am in an interview, I mean I starting a new job in a week. Again, when I was in the interview with them, I said, I need to tell you this in case you've got someone who has a problem that I am a transgender. (Julianne)<br>But basically, you have to be you have to be listening ears you need to give people a chance if you don't give people the chance in you to get that morale up. If you keep on pushing them down in this giving them your ideas, especially in manufacturing firms, that doesn't work that way. (Solomon)<br>I guess, maybe because I don't think I can actually impact anything. Maybe that's why I didn't do anything about it. (Stephany)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Change Empowerment |
| Supervisory | And tell him what I think. And hopefully, he can listen. (Stephany)<br>They can see it when this person is doing that sort and then they will become like, they're not working together, or they will start having arguments in there and then, it's my role to sit them down and talk about it and guide them through what needs to be, where they need to go and all that sort of thing. (Soren)<br>I guess accepting of each other's differences, whatever they are in allowing everyone to be their authentic selves? (Vaani)<br>And the experience that I have been, right, and how I get, you know, like, if you go to a party, even though there are lots of people, you can still feel lonely, right? So, it's the same. Same thing in in wherever you go, you know, and be able to be sensitive enough to observe Hey, you know, please, you know, we need to include that person. (Lillian)<br>When they, they tell you, Oh, my pain here pain there, you know, and, alright, just to sometimes all they want is to listen. And sometimes I realized that sometimes people don't want advice, just like my girls, you know, they'll say, Mom, I don't want you to advise me, all I want is to just to listen. (Lillian) | System Stewardship |
| Manager     | And I think that in any workplace, you need to have a certain amount of challenge, like a climb. (Adalyn)<br>And what you can do to make things through visual things, especially that English is not their first language making, things very visual for people, as well. So yeah, um, so I guess that you've been empathetic to other people's challenges. (Adalyn)<br>I really love work. I love coming here and actually being able to do some good impact on people's lives, making other people feel good. (Mackenzie)<br>I would often talk about you know, the story of talking about stereotyping, these stereotypes in the factory worker. I tell everyone that. (Rashid)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Inclusion Advocacy |

and persistence when facing obstacles. This empowerment approach focuses on capability building rather than simply solving immediate problems, creating sustainable organizational capacity enhancement. Akashi's troubleshooting philosophy demonstrates this approach: "Try two or three ways ... doesn't go ... then call the Sparky [electrician]," encouraging others to develop problem-solving skills rather than creating expert intervention dependency.

Supervisory staff's framework orientation translates into System Stewardship, employing systems thinking to navigate the complex interplay between organizational structures, personal values, and change initiatives. Supervisors experience and manage a distinct psychological tension—they recognize the need for change while benefiting from and operating within current systems. Vaani captured this tension: "I guess accepting of each other's differences, whatever they are in allowing everyone to be their authentic selves?" This stewardship approach allows supervisors to balance their roles within existing organizational structures while simultaneously working to transform them. System stewardship was the predominant operational pattern among supervisory participants, however, some individuals drew on more direct approaches before engaging institutional channels. Bing, for instance, tested changes independently before seeking management endorsement: "depending on what it was, I guess I would test it and see if it worked. If I got, you know, the outcome that I wanted from it, and then perhaps go to my managers." This indicates that stewardship, while systematic, was not uniformly anchored in institutional processes from the outset.

Managers' role integration identity enables Inclusion Advocacy, where they deliberately maintain a degree of distance from direct action while focusing on creating conditions for change through strategic rationalization and encouraging innovative thinking. Mackenzie's statement exemplifies this approach: "a lot of my role is trying to get people to actually think outside the square and think innovatively." This advocacy represents a more complex approach than previously theorized in tempered radical literature, demonstrating how managers leverage broader perspectives to introduce new ideas while justifying their approaches through their role in encouraging innovative thinking.

Table 5 demonstrates these different operational methods employed by tempered radicals at different organizational levels. Frontline participants described building capability in others through troubleshooting and skill development. Supervisory participants spoke about understanding how organizational structures, personal values, and change initiatives interconnected. Management participants discussed encouraging innovative thinking and introducing new ideas while maintaining distance from direct implementation.

### ***Interpersonal interactions***

The interconnection between identity, work environment navigation, and operational methods culminates in distinct approaches to interpersonal interactions that reflect each level's unique sphere of influence and change capacity. Table 6 demonstrates these different approaches to interpersonal interactions based on organizational level, encompassing narratives gathered from data associated with interactions with people, including ideas of culture and difference, words identifying people as individuals (person, someone, manager) and as groups (guys, everyone).

Frontline staff operate within what emerged as Interpersonal Focus, characterized by a relatively closed world centered on immediate colleagues. This focus reflects their personal agency orientation and creates change through direct, personal relationships within immediate team dynamics. Aadesh's reflection captures this localized influence: "when I started when I first being a new immigrant to this country, yeah I have some difficulties at the beginning especially see all the new faces, hearing a different accent. That was my major drawback." Frontline workers construct their social world primarily through direct, personal interactions with immediate

**Table 6.** Examples supporting the global theme: interpersonal interactions. A total of 828 extracts (460 frontline, 212 supervisory and 156 management) were collected from all participants.

| Level       | Participant quote                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Second-level theme         |
|-------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Front line  | when I started when I first being a new immigrant to this country, yeah I have some difficulties at the beginning especially see all the new faces, hearing a different accent. That was my major drawback. (Aadesh)<br>just making sure everyone has a voice, I think. (Bing)<br>if I feel something's not right, and that person isn't justice does not right. I will stick up. (Jayjay)<br>But I want to be team worker. So, for me to work as a team worker, I need to make sure my boys, my guys are all on the same page as I am because otherwise, I'll be in danger by myself as well and everyone else around me. (Kimiora)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Interpersonal Focus        |
| Supervisory | So, we we've talked about it in our team settings around how some people may complement each other because they've got different skills. It's used in the wider business. (Vaani)<br>But not for the site. It was for not for everyone, it was only for salaried people. (Soren)<br>And I talked to that person that gave her a hard time I said, Look, she is here as an internal auditor. So, if she asked for information, right, please give it to her. (Lillian)<br>A lot of guys on the floor come up with some really good stuff. And a lot of stuff isn't so good too, you're gonna try to explain why it won't work or, or something. (Declan)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Network Perception         |
| Manager     | Yeah, we, I supposed surface level diversity is what you think about when you first meet people, isn't it, it only after knowing them for a while, but you realize that people's values are different? Do we think about that? Yeah, I suppose the answer is no. (Mackenzie)<br>I think everyone enjoys being successful working. My work system, obviously my role is to build, trying yet, I guess it's about influencing change in a positive way. (Rashid)<br>And I went on what's she's talking about? And then I looked at her, oh she's Māori and I looked around the auditorium and quickly figured out that I was the only other person in the whole entire building that was Māori. (Rashid)<br>So, when we make a change on site, we go through a certain set of criteria to make sure we're doing things safely make sure we're not, we're not adding any financial risk to the business. (Mackenzie) | Organizational Perspective |

colleagues, with change influence operating within a tightly bounded interpersonal space shaped by the close-knit nature of manufacturing work environments.

Supervisory staff demonstrate Network Perception, viewing others in terms of connected groups rather than isolated individuals. Torsten's perspective illustrates this networked thinking: "So, I have always kind of seen them as just my team, they are the team." Supervisors uniquely conceptualize and navigate organizational relationships through an interconnected lens, seeing themselves as crucial connection points between different organizational groups. This perception of networks of social units provides opportunities for supervisors to act as intermediaries who can leverage their connections to amplify or mute certain voices as needed to promote inclusion.

Managers operate through Organizational Perspective, considering interpersonal interactions within the context of the broader organization rather than immediate relationships or team networks. When Mackenzie spoke of hiring decisions, the organizational context was paramount: "And I remember thinking ... I think I want to hire you just because you look different for everyone else." Managers distinctively view and interpret workplace interactions through a broader organizational lens, focusing on how individual and group dynamics impact organizational goals and often considering inclusion from a strategic, company-wide perspective. While organizational perspective was the predominant interpersonal orientation among managerial participants, some instances reflected more direct personal engagement. Rashid's practice of

personally telling inclusion stories to factory floor workers demonstrates this complexity. He noted: “I would often talk about, you know, the story of talking about stereotyping ... in the factory worker. I tell everyone that.” This suggests that managerial interpersonal reach was not uniformly strategic, and at times extended into the direct, personal register more characteristic of frontline interpersonal focus.

Table 6 demonstrates these different approaches to interpersonal interactions based on organizational level. Frontline participants described relationships with immediate colleagues and direct team members. Supervisory participants spoke about connected groups and teams across the organization. Management participants discussed interpersonal dynamics within broader organizational contexts and company-wide perspectives. Frontline participants referenced personal connections, supervisory participants referenced team networks, while management participants referenced organizational impacts. These observed differences informed the development of the three interpersonal interaction orientations.

These findings reveal that tempered radical strategies are not simply different approaches to the same goal, but rather complementary and interconnected approaches that work synergistically across organizational levels. The personal agency of frontline staff creates the foundational credibility and peer influence necessary for change initiatives. Supervisory bridging and stewardship provide the structural connections and institutional knowledge required to navigate organizational complexity. Managerial advocacy and strategic perspective offer the broader context and conditions necessary for sustainable, organization-wide change.

## Discussion

This study reveals that tempered radicals operate differently across organizational levels, with the manufacturing context proving theoretically valuable due to its clear hierarchical structures and collaborative work environments. This enables detailed analysis of cross-level interactions that might be obscured in less structured organizational settings. The findings reveal that tempered radical strategies are not uniform across organizational levels but rather complementary and interconnected approaches that work synergistically across the four themes of self-identification, work environment navigation, operational methods, and interpersonal interactions.

To capture these systematic variations and demonstrate how organizational position shapes strategic application of Meyerson’s spectrum, we developed the Multi-Level Tempered Radical Approach Framework, presented in Table 7. This framework synthesizes our key findings across organizational levels, demonstrating how hierarchical positioning creates distinct yet complementary approaches to inclusion work. The framework operates dynamically rather than as isolated attributes: identity construction shapes how tempered radicals perceive and navigate their work environment, environmental positioning influences available operational methods, and these operational approaches determine interpersonal spheres of influence. These elements function interdependently, with each component enabling and constraining subsequent elements to create level-specific change systems. The framework reveals an interconnected ecosystem where tempered radicals at each level leverage different types of organizational and social capital to effect change, each approach complementing the others within the broader organizational context. Our research demonstrates that hierarchical position introduces variation by creating distinct opportunity structures and constraint patterns at each level, fundamentally altering which strategies become viable and effective.

### *Self-identification: how hierarchical position shapes change agent identity*

Frontline participants’ Personal Agency identity revises Meyerson and Scully (1995) dual commitment concept by revealing how limited formal authority constrains identity construction to

**Table 7.** Multi-level tempered radical approach framework.

| Global theme                                                            | Second-level organizational themes                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                         | Frontline                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Supervisory                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Management                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Self-Identification</b><br>(foundation for environmental navigation) | <b>Personal Agency</b><br>Identify as individuals focused on personal actions and peer relationships allowing frontline staff to see themselves as everyday leaders influencing change through small, incremental actions | <b>Frameworks</b><br>Supervisory staff identify themselves through organizational frameworks and policies, allowing supervisory staff to navigate tension between organizational loyalty and desire for change                                             | <b>Role Integration</b><br>Express identity through various roles within and outside the organization, allowing managers to balance multiple identities and navigate personal-professional commitments                     |
| <b>Work Environment</b> (shapes operational choices)                    | <b>Transference</b><br>Lack direct knowledge of organizational change processes, leading frontline staff to escalate matters, demonstrating quiet resistance through disruptive self-expression                           | <b>Inclusive Bridging</b><br>The framework orientation creates a heightened awareness of those around them, reflecting a unique position as outsiders within. Supervisors consequently take ownership of bridging different groups and fostering inclusion | <b>Strategic Detachment</b><br>This integrated identity allows managers to distance themselves from direct actions, instead focusing on rationalizing the approach to change                                               |
| <b>Operational Methods</b><br>(influences interpersonal engagement)     | <b>Change Empowerment</b><br>The level of self-efficacy influences effectiveness in fostering change, shaping belief in the capacity to bring about change and consequently actions within immediate team relationships.  | <b>System Stewardship</b><br>The bridging position enables the use of systems thinking to navigate the complex interplay between organizational structures, personal values, and change initiatives                                                        | <b>Inclusion Advocacy</b><br>This strategic detachment enables managers justify the approaches by emphasizing the role in encouraging innovative thinking and leverage a broader perspective to introduce new ideas        |
| <b>Interpersonal Interactions</b><br>(creates change capacity)          | <b>Interpersonal focus</b><br>Consequently, frontline staff operate within a relatively closed world centered on immediate colleagues. Focus on personal relationships and immediate team dynamics                        | <b>Network Perception</b><br>The systems approach leads supervisors to view others in terms of connected groups. Supervisors act as bridges between different teams or departments                                                                         | <b>Organizational Perspective</b><br>Consequently, managers consider interpersonal interactions in the context of the broader organization and approach diversity and inclusion from a strategic, company-wide perspective |

personally mediated experiences. The mechanism operates through restricted access to organizational decision-making processes, which prevents frontline staff from anchoring identity in institutional frameworks and instead necessitates reliance on personal credibility and peer influence. This positioning enables frontline tempered radicals to operate as everyday leaders who apply ground-level peer-to-peer influence to secure small wins, aligning with Weick's (1984) explanation of achievable, tangible changes that avoid the paralysis and resistance of attempting sweeping transformations. Meyerson and Scully (1995) explain that organizational transformation often occurs through an accumulation of small, strategic changes rather than dramatic overhauls, however, our findings reveal a new dimension by demonstrating that frontline staff may experience less organizational ambivalence than previously theorized, potentially limiting their ability to leverage tension as a catalyst for change while paradoxically enabling more focused change efforts.

Supervisory staff's framework-based identity revises Meyerson's premise that tempered radical identity stems primarily from personal values. Instead, intermediary positions enable identity anchoring through organizational structures and established protocols. Supervisors' dual access to both operational realities and management frameworks allowed them to legitimate change

initiatives by translating between institutional language and frontline concerns rather than relying solely on personal conviction. By relating their approaches to established rules and frameworks, supervisory tempered radicals demonstrate what Ashforth et al. (2014) describe as their ability to simultaneously embrace complexity and opposing ideas, yet our findings reveal this occurs through institutional legitimacy rather than personal values alone. This framework-based identity operates by leveraging organizational structures and established protocols to legitimate change initiatives, enabling supervisory staff to present potentially radical ideas within familiar institutional language and processes. This framework-based identity represents a previously unrecognized form of “outsiders within” (Meyerson and Scully 1995; Vaul-Grimwood et al. 2023) who navigate tension through organizational mechanisms rather than purely personal navigation, thereby creating systematic approaches to change that leverage institutional legitimacy for inclusion initiatives.

Management participants’ Role Integration identity fundamentally challenges existing tempered radical conceptualizations by revealing identity complexity that exceeds previous theoretical boundaries. Tempered radicals strongly orient toward substantive values such as well-being, social benefit, and equity (Bajaba et al. 2023; Meyerson 2001b), and our findings demonstrate that managers achieve this through identity integration that draws on their experiences, values, and identities formed beyond the organization, bringing unfamiliar knowledge through their outside experiences (Griffiths, Pio, and McGhee 2023). This integration process is supported by research on authenticity which confirms that individuals can have “multiple ‘true selves’ that are all authentic” (Caza, Moss, and Vough 2018, 703), with managers engaging in “aggregating” practices that create “linkages among multiple identities, while still maintaining the distinctions among them” (Caza, Moss, and Vough 2018, 722). This revises Meyerson’s (2008) premise that tempered radicals experience ongoing tension between organizational and personal identities. Instead, managers resolve this tension through identity integration that synthesizes professional roles, personal values, and external experiences into coherent wholes. Unlike frontline and supervisory participants, whose positional constraints required more bounded identity performances, managers could express identity across multiple domains simultaneously. These identity constructions directly shape how tempered radicals perceive and navigate their organizational environments, with personal agency, framework-based, and role integration identities each creating distinct approaches to environmental engagement.

### ***Work environment navigation: Level-specific approaches to organizational context***

Examining how identity orientations translate into environmental navigation reveals distinct approaches to understanding and leveraging organizational context for inclusive change. For frontline participants, operational knowledge combined with limited decision-making power produced awareness of issues but necessitated transferring responsibility upward to those with authority to act. This transference approach reflects their organizational reality—while they may lack formal change management training, their direct operational experience provides valuable insights into workplace dynamics. The awareness of issues and willingness to escalate builds upon what Meyerson describes as reframing threats as opportunities, yet our research extends this by demonstrating that transference of responsibility represents a strategic adaptation to structural constraints rather than limitation. This reliance on transferring responsibility suggests a more limited strategic use of voice than Creed (2003) theorized, yet simultaneously demonstrates how frontline tempered radicals promote inclusion through systematic escalation pathways rather than direct intervention, thereby showing how structural constraints become a strategic advantage when combined with operational credibility and peer influence. This indicates potential for enhanced influence through targeted change-oriented training that imparts knowledge and skills while motivating toward organizational goals (Jakobsen, Jacobsen, and Serritzlew 2019).

Supervisory participants' Inclusive Bridging extends knowledge brokering theory (Ton, Hammerl, and Szabó-Szentgróti 2023; Westerman and Huey 2012) by demonstrating heightened awareness capabilities that emerge from structural intermediary positions. This bridging capacity emerges from their position as intermediaries who regularly interact with both frontline staff and management. This heightened awareness enhances tempered radicals' capacity to operate as outsiders within (Meyerson 2001b), yet our findings reveal this occurs through systematic connection of disconnected groups—extending Chiambaretto, Massé, and Mirc (2019) knowledge brokering concept to include inclusion-specific bridging strategies. Their Inclusive Bridging position suggests supervisors may be more adept at strategically using both voice and silence. This positions them well for positive deviance while maintaining organizational legitimacy (Westerman and Huey 2012). Supervisory Inclusive Bridging functions through supervisors' structural positioning between frontline and management, which provides access to multiple organizational networks and creates capacity to translate change initiatives across hierarchical boundaries using institutional knowledge rather than personal advocacy alone.

Management participants' Strategic Detachment represents a new contribution that challenges traditional conceptualizations of tempered radicals as direct change agents. This detachment reflects their deliberate choice to influence through facilitation rather than direct intervention. Strategic detachment extends Badaracco's (2001) description of quiet leaders who favor less direct action by demonstrating calculated approaches that emphasize encouraging innovative thinking and leveraging broader perspectives. Strategic detachment advances understanding of how managers navigate organizational environments by maintaining analytical distance that enables systematic assessment of change opportunities while creating structural conditions that support inclusion initiatives across different organizational levels. Managers in this study influenced inclusion not through direct intervention but by creating the conditions, including resourcing, framing, and timing, that enabled others to act. This approach aligns with Ashforth et al. (2014) observations that organizational actors who effectively manage ambivalence can facilitate positive change through mindful action and wisdom, with our findings revealing how this environmental positioning creates institutional conditions that enable others to drive change forward (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003). The ways tempered radicals navigate their work environments directly influence the operational methods available to them, as environmental positioning determines the scope and nature of change strategies each level can effectively employ.

### ***Operational methods: systematic variation in change implementation***

These distinct environmental approaches translate into sophisticated operational methodologies that reveal level-specific strategies for fostering organizational change. Frontline participants' Change Empowerment extends Weick's (1984) small-wins theory by demonstrating how individual-level interventions create capability-building rather than problem-solving approaches. This empowerment approach emerges from their direct operational experience and close colleague relationships, providing credibility and influence while supporting Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory regarding reciprocal interplay between personal agency, behavioral outcomes, and environmental influences. The varying levels of self-efficacy among frontline participants extends what Osafo and Yawson (2021) recognize as challenges tempered radicals face in navigating dual commitment. Our findings reveal that positive deviance at this level depends more on individual characteristics than organizational position. This dependence on individual characteristics is further supported by Dhital et al. (2023) research, where healthcare workers demonstrated varying capacities for positive deviance driven by personal traits rather than institutional roles, with successful positive deviants characterized by intrinsic motivation, personal value systems, and individual capacity for innovation. Frontline Change Empowerment revises Meyerson's premise that small wins operate uniformly across organizational contexts. Instead, frontline tempered radicals

achieve incremental change through capability building rather than problem solving. This operates through their limited access to organizational resources, which necessitates reliance on individual self-efficacy and peer influence to develop others' problem-solving capacity rather than implementing solutions directly.

Supervisory participants' System Stewardship represents a previously unexplored contribution to tempered radical literature through application of systems thinking as a critical strategy, fundamentally expanding Meyerson's (2001a) spectrum of strategies. This approach reflects their unique position where they can observe interactions between different organizational levels and understand systemic implications of change initiatives (Liaquat, Jost, and Balcetis 2023). This extends what Jost, Banaji, and Nosek (2004) identify as internal conflict between recognizing need for change while benefiting from current systems by demonstrating how supervisors transform psychological tension into systematic change strategies. Just as within the framing of their self-identification, supervisors demonstrate what Ashforth et al. (2014) describe as the ability to simultaneously embrace complexity and opposing ideas, supporting the concept of enduring ambivalence. This extends theoretical understanding from simple tension management to strategic tension utilization. Our findings reveal that supervisory tempered radicals promote inclusion by leveraging tension as a systematic strategy through understanding how organizational structures, personal values, and change initiatives interact, enabling bridging approaches that connect organizational levels while navigating structural complexities through institutional frameworks.

Management participants' Inclusion Advocacy challenges existing tempered radical theory by demonstrating active championing of inclusion principles through organizational influence rather than direct implementation. Managers demonstrate positive deviance (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2003) by actively advocating for innovative thinking and deliberately introducing unfamiliar knowledge to the organization, drawn from outside experiences and values (Griffiths, Pio, and McGhee 2023). Our findings reveal managers function as inclusion advocates who promote inclusive practices by endorsing, supporting, and championing inclusion efforts initiated by others. This aligns with Badaracco's (2001) description of quiet leaders who favor less direct approaches. Management Inclusion Advocacy revises Meyerson's premise that tempered radicals implement change personally. This advocacy approach enables managers to actively promote inclusion values while empowering others to implement specific inclusion practices, revealing how managerial tempered radicals promote inclusion through strategic championing and institutional legitimacy that creates enabling conditions for systematic change across hierarchical levels. These operational approaches shape the interpersonal dynamics and spheres of influence available to tempered radicals, with empowerment, stewardship, and advocacy methods each creating distinct patterns of relational engagement.

### ***Interpersonal interactions: spheres of influence across organizational levels***

The interconnection between identity, environmental navigation, and operational methods culminates in distinct interpersonal approaches that reflect each level's unique sphere of influence and change capacity. Frontline participants' Interpersonal Focus enriches understanding of manufacturing's collaborative nature by demonstrating how collaborative interdependencies create intensive relationship-building opportunities within constrained organizational scope. Manufacturing organizations are fundamentally human-centric environments where people work closely together in interdependent relationships, relying on each other through collaborative product assembly processes and team-based production systems (Alat and Suar 2020; Hackman 2002), with teams navigating multiple interdependencies between individuals within work groups, between different production teams across shifts, and between operational staff and management levels (Hackman 2002; Wageman 2008). This localized Interpersonal Focus extends the multi-level nature of inclusion efforts described by Härtel, Härtel, and Trumble (2013) by revealing how foundational

interpersonal interactions serve as building blocks for broader organizational inclusion initiatives, while demonstrating that reliance and connection between individuals creates both opportunities for intensive relationship-building and constraints on scalability. Within this manufacturing context, frontline tempered radicals are uniquely positioned to foster inclusion by connecting differences while respecting uniqueness (Meyerson 2001b; Meyerson and Scully 1995). However, the Frontline Interpersonal Focus revises Meyerson's premise that tempered radicals influence broadly across organizational boundaries. Instead, limited organizational access limits frontline influence to immediate colleague networks. This occurs through their intensive daily collaboration with direct team members, which creates strong peer relationships and credibility within immediate work groups but prevents influence beyond this bounded interpersonal sphere.

Supervisory participants' Network Perception fundamentally extends tempered radical theory by demonstrating systematic interconnected thinking that emerges from structural intermediary positions. This network perspective emerges from their position as connectors between different organizational groups, naturally developing awareness of interconnections and relationships. This Network Perception amplifies and extends the bridging capacity of tempered radicals noted by Griffiths, Pio, and McGhee (2023) and Vaul-Grimwood et al. (2023) by revealing how supervisors conceptualize organizational relationships through interconnected lenses rather than individual-focused approaches. In manufacturing characterized by close collaboration and traditional hierarchies (Kazushi 2001), supervisory staff bridge operational and management concerns while navigating strategic decisions and maintaining connection to operational realities (Morgeson, DeRue, and Karam 2010). This bridging role positions supervisors as critical communication nodes who can observe dynamics across different organizational levels. Collaborative relationships extend beyond immediate production tasks to encompass problem-solving teams, quality improvement groups, and cross-departmental project teams that address manufacturing opportunities through collective expertise (Grant and Parker 2009). Operating within these complex network structures, supervisors strategically use voice and silence to advance inclusion—knowing when to amplify certain perspectives and when to create space for others to contribute. Supervisory Network Perception emerges from intermediary positioning that enables perception of organizational networks as interconnected systems. Supervisors' regular interaction with multiple organizational groups develops awareness of structural disconnections and creates capacity to bridge these gaps through strategic relationship building across hierarchical and functional boundaries.

Management participants' Organizational Perspective challenges existing tempered radical conceptualizations by demonstrating strategic, company-wide viewpoints that transcend intimate, relationship-centered approaches traditionally associated with tempered radicals (Meyerson 2008). This broader perspective reflects their strategic responsibilities and access to organizational-level information and resources. While Meyerson and Scully (1995) emphasized direct, personal influence as characteristic of traditional tempered radical approaches, our findings reveal how organizational perspective enables managers to consider inclusion from strategic viewpoints that potentially constrain such intimate influence while creating alternative pathways for change. This shift toward organizational perspective enables managers to maintain strategic oversight responsibilities while creating conditions for change through institutional influence. Management Organizational Perspective revises Meyerson's (2008) premise that tempered radicals influence through direct, personal relationships. Where supervisory participants bridged groups they could directly access, managerial participants shaped inclusion through analytical understanding of organizational patterns and demographic dynamics. Managers' access to senior forums and cross-functional authority enabled influence at the institutional level, creating conditions for coordinated change across the organization rather than within bounded relational networks.

### ***Implications for practice: empowering all tempered radicals***

The Multi-Level Tempered Radical Approach Framework reveals how change agents operate distinctively across frontline, supervisory, and managerial levels, offering organizations practical insights for supporting inclusion champions across traditionally hierarchical industries.

Organizations should prioritize developing self-efficacy at the frontline level, as this fundamentally shapes individuals' perceived capability to initiate change within constrained organizational contexts. Our findings reveal that frontline effectiveness depends more on individual attributes than previously theorized, with the change empowerment approach focusing on capability building rather than simply solving immediate problems. Drawing on Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory, this self-efficacy develops through a reciprocal interplay between personal agency, behavioral outcomes, and environmental influences. Organizations can strengthen frontline capabilities through structured developmental interventions that enhance both technical competencies and psychological ownership over change processes (Jakobsen, Jakobsen, and Serritzlew 2019). Establishing mechanisms for frontline staff to surface concerns within immediate work groups creates psychologically safe environments where staff identify issues but look to higher levels for broader organizational action. Cross-level mentoring programs can further facilitate exchange of level-specific strategies while supporting navigation of organizational tensions that characterize tempered radical identity.

Supervisory tempered radicals can leverage their position as outsiders within organizations to demonstrate their unique capacity for inclusive bridging. They think in terms of whole systems, understanding how organizational structures, personal values, and change initiatives interconnect, and experience unique psychological tension in recognizing the need for change while operating within current systems. Acting as knowledge brokers between otherwise disconnected groups (Chiambaretto, Massé, and Mirc 2019), they navigate between different organizational groups as neutral facilitators who build trust and enable collaboration (Ton, Hammerl, and Szabó-Szentgróti 2023). Organizations can establish cross-functional teams led by supervisors, providing a platform for their systems thinking approach to problem-solving and change implementation. Development programs should also recognize that supervisors strategically use voice and silence to advance inclusion, knowing when to amplify certain perspectives and when to create space for others to contribute.

At the managerial level, organizations can recognize and support the more strategic, indirect approach that these tempered radicals adopt. Rather than expecting direct action, organizations could create spaces for managers to exercise their inclusion advocacy role through formal innovation forums or diversity task forces where managers can channel their broader organizational perspective into concrete initiatives.

Tempered radicals across all levels maintain enduring ambivalence, simultaneous commitment to organizational success and personal values that may diverge from dominant cultural norms. This tension prevents both complacency with exclusionary practices and rejection of organizational frameworks, making them effective at fostering inclusion from within. Organizations can protect this enduring ambivalence by implementing policies that explicitly recognize and reward incremental change efforts. By acknowledging progressive improvements rather than just end-state achievements, organizations can combat what O'Brien (2022, 1278) terms "negative lumping" and legitimize the work of tempered radicals while preventing disengagement from gradual improvement efforts.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined how tempered radicals promote inclusion across organizational levels in manufacturing settings, revealing that hierarchical position fundamentally shapes change agency strategies.

### ***Implications for future theorizing***

This research challenges assumptions that change agents operate independently, suggesting theoretical opportunities to reconceptualize organizational change as coordinated systems rather than isolated efforts. The Multi-Level Tempered Radical Approach Framework's revelation of position-specific opportunity structures and constraints invites inquiry into how different organizational structures enable or constrain change agency beyond manufacturing contexts. Future theoretical development might explore whether the Multi-Level Tempered Radical Approach Framework applies universally or whether different structural contexts produce alternative configurations. The framework also opens questions about temporal dynamics in change agency, inviting scholars to consider how individuals navigate strategic adaptation across career progression and how organizational change systems evolve over time.

### ***Methodological directions for future research***

The integrated methodological approach demonstrates value for examining hierarchical variations in organizational phenomena beyond tempered radical research. Manufacturing's clear structural delineation enabled cross-level examination, suggesting that researchers studying change agency in hierarchical contexts should leverage similarly structured settings to reveal dynamics obscured in flatter organizations. The analytical integration of computer-assisted pattern identification with researcher-led interpretation offers a methodological model for balancing systematic detection with contextual understanding, applicable to studying subtle organizational phenomena across multiple hierarchical levels. This approach provides researchers with frameworks for examining how organizational position shapes various behaviors, attitudes, and outcomes, extending beyond change agency to broader organizational scholarship. The Multi-Level Tempered Radical Approach Framework offers organizations practical guidance while providing researchers with theoretical scaffolding for reconsidering how structural contexts enable diverse yet complementary approaches to fostering inclusive workplaces.

## **Contributions**

This research makes three distinct contributions to management and organization theory.

### ***Theoretical contributions***

This study revises Meyerson's (2008) foundational premise that tempered radical strategies operate uniformly across organizational contexts. Our research demonstrates that hierarchical position creates distinct opportunity structures and constraint patterns at each level, fundamentally altering which strategies become viable and effective.

The Multi-Level Tempered Radical Approach Framework captures these systematic variations across four dimensions: identity construction, environmental navigation, operational methods, and interpersonal dynamics. Across each dimension, distinct yet complementary approaches emerge at frontline, supervisory, and managerial levels, forming an integrated system of change agency rather than isolated level-specific strategies.

### ***Empirical contributions***

This research provides the first empirical evidence of level-specific tempered radical strategies within hierarchical industrial environments. Existing literature predominantly examines senior management in service sectors, leaving gaps in understanding frontline and supervisory change

agents in manufacturing. Our findings reveal that strategies are not uniform applications of Meyerson's spectrum but complementary approaches working synergistically across organizational levels. The manufacturing context demonstrates how hierarchical structures enable examination of cross-level dynamics obscured in less structured settings, revealing systematic complementarity between change agents rather than isolated individual efforts.

### **Methodological contributions**

This research contributes through integration of narrative inquiry with cross-level comparative analysis in hierarchical contexts. The application of narrative inquiry demonstrates how collaborative storytelling captures subtle organizational phenomena, while manufacturing's clear hierarchical structures provide a template for cross-level analysis in traditionally structured industries. The analytical integration of Leximancer pattern identification with researcher-led thematic interpretation demonstrates how systematic detection complements interpretive depth, while the cross-level framework enables examination of hierarchical variations, offering guidance for researchers investigating structured organizational contexts.

### **Research limitations and future research directions**

This study's limitations stem primarily from sample composition and methodological approach. The male-dominated nature of the manufacturing sector resulted in gender imbalance, while the focus on New Zealand contexts may limit generalizability to other cultural and industrial relations environments. The study's management-to-staff ratio resulted in fewer managers in the sample, and the thematic analysis approach, while providing valuable insights, could benefit from more structured methodologies such as Gioia for enhanced theoretical rigor. The purposive sampling approach, while appropriate for identifying participants demonstrating tempered radical characteristics, carries inherent risk of confirmatory selection. By screening for dual commitment and change-oriented behaviors aligned with Meyerson and Scully (1995) framework, the study may have excluded individuals who foster inclusion through approaches not captured by existing tempered radical theory. However, this intentional targeting of individuals already practicing tempered radicalism was methodologically necessary rather than incidental. To examine how tempered radicals influence inclusion across organizational levels, the study required participants who were actively and effectively doing so. In this sense, the alignment between participant characteristics and theoretical criteria reflects purposeful design rather than confirmatory bias.

Future research should address these limitations through several directions. Cross-cultural studies examining how hierarchical dynamics manifest across cultural contexts where power distance and individualism vary, could reveal whether position-based strategies operate universally or interact with cultural factors. Gender-balanced sampling could determine whether the patterns observed generalize across demographic groups or whether gender intersects with hierarchical position to create additional strategic variations. Longitudinal studies tracking implementation and impact of multi-level support strategies could provide insights into real-world effectiveness and reveal how strategies evolve as individuals navigate career progression or organizational structures shift. Comparative studies across industries could distinguish between manufacturing-specific patterns and universal aspects of hierarchical change agency, while examination across different manufacturing subsectors (discrete versus process manufacturing, high-tech versus traditional) could reveal intra-industry variations. Such research directions could refine Meyerson's (2008) tempered radical change spectrum by examining variations across organizational levels, industries, and cultural contexts, ultimately leading to more targeted tools for organizations to support their inclusion champions effectively.

## Author contributions

CRedit: **Chris Griffiths**: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing; **Peter McGhee**: Supervision, Writing – review & editing; **Roy K. Smollan**: Supervision, Writing – review & editing.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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