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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion International Conference

Stream Proposal

Who Counts? Cultural Capital, AI, and Inclusion in Global Work Environments

Stream Focus:

This stream explores how institutions define and reward ‘value,’ and how these definitions shape inclusion and exclusion across generations. Drawing on cultural capital as an analytic lens (Bourdieu, 2002), the stream invites research on how AI reshapes what counts as competence, expertise, and legitimacy, and how these shifts affect equity in workplaces and lifelong learning contexts (Drydakis, 2025; OECD, 2024). How do educational systems and workplaces reproduce or challenge age-based hierarchies?

By analyzing AI literacy as an emerging form of institutionalized capital, this stream asks who benefits from new markers of value, whose experiences become marginalized, and whether these digital values reinforce existing privileges or open pathways toward decolonizing expertise. This stream offers a critical space for scholars to develop actionable insights for creating more inclusive, intergenerational workplaces and equitable educational curricula in an AI-driven era. We welcome empirical, conceptual, and practice-based contributions that interrogate intergenerational dynamics, stereotypes, and institutional practices shaping inclusion in global work contexts.

Themes:

I. Defining Value: How Global Organizations and Educational Systems Shape Who Counts

This theme focuses on how institutions and global leaders define, legitimize, and reward ‘value,’ and how these processes shape patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Educational systems play a foundational role in producing and legitimizing particular forms of knowledge, competence, and credibility, which are later recognized and rewarded in the labor market through hiring, promotion, and professional status. These value processes are not neutral. They systematically advantage certain groups while marginalizing others across age, gender, nationality, and educational background. As AI adoption accelerates, institutional definitions of value are shifting, particularly around what counts as competence, adaptability, and legitimacy. Decisions about curricula, credentials, and assessment, especially concerning AI literacy and related skills, therefore become critical sites where inclusion and exclusion are determined long before individuals enter the workplace (Gottschalk & Weise, 2023; Lamont, 2012).

Guiding Questions:

- How do educational institutions define valuable knowledge, skills, and behaviours?
- How do universities and business schools decide which AI competencies to teach, and how does it impact inclusion?
- How do schools, universities, and training systems legitimize forms of competence later rewarded in the workplace?
- How do value practices in educational institutions include or exclude across age, gender, nationality, and socioeconomic background?

II. The AI Pivot: Redefining Cultural Capital and Competence

Using cultural capital as an analytical lens, this theme examines how norms of competence, credibility, and legitimacy are shaped by institutional power relations in both education and the workplace (Bourdieu, 2002). Cultural capital helps explain why some individuals align easily with institutional value models, through recognized credentials, pedagogical styles, or forms of digital fluency, while others are marginalized. Educational systems play a central role in defining what counts as intelligence and competence, with organizations subsequently rewarding these pre-legitimized markers. As AI reshapes work and learning, AI literacy and experience are emerging as new forms of cultural capital, raising questions about whether digital competence becomes an elite resource accessible primarily through privileged pathways (Robinson et al., 2020). This theme explores whether new AI-driven markers of value disrupt existing hierarchies or instead reproduce long-standing inequalities linked to class, age, gender, and race (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Nurani, 2025).

Guiding Questions:

- How is AI literacy emerging as a new form of cultural capital, and for whom? Who benefits from early or privileged exposure to AI-mediated learning?
- As AI reshapes work and learning, what are the new markers of value? Will the new digital markers reinforce or challenge existing privileges?
- How does cultural capital help explain why some individuals fit institutional value models while others do not?
- How do dominant groups (defined by age, race, or gender) shape norms of competence, credibility, and professionalism within corporate and academic settings?
- How do academic elitism and specific credentials act as gatekeepers that privilege some groups while excluding others?

III. Age, Stereotypes, and Intergenerational (In)equality

This theme examines age as a key dimension through which value, competence, and legitimacy are constructed in AI-mediated contexts. Persistent stereotypes portray younger individuals as technologically adept and innovative, while positioning older workers and learners as less adaptable or resistant to change (Ng & Feldman, 2012; Vaportzis et al., 2017). Such stereotypes shape experiences of inclusion and exclusion in both workplaces and educational settings, influencing access to opportunities, credibility, task allocation, and belonging (Ayalon et al., 2021). Importantly, beliefs about age and intergenerational competence vary across cultural, national, and regional contexts, complicating universal narratives about adaptability. As AI adoption accelerates, there is a risk that age-based assumptions become further entrenched, unless institutions actively design practices that support intergenerational learning, reskilling, and collaboration (Ropes, 2013).

Guiding Questions:

- How do age-based stereotypes (e.g., "digital native" vs. "tech-resistant") shape perceptions of technological competence, credibility, and access to opportunities?
- How do intergenerational dynamics and beliefs about age and expertise vary across cultural, national, and regional contexts?
- How do challenges differ across age/life stages (early career, mid-career, late career)?
- What are the unique challenges faced by older workers in increasingly AI-based workplaces?
- How do systems of learning and recognition shape who is able to develop the cultural capital needed to adapt to AI-driven change, and who is excluded from these opportunities?

IV. AI, Inclusion, and Emerging Hierarchies

This theme explores how the growing integration of AI into workplaces and educational institutions is reshaping hierarchies of expertise and inclusion. AI fluency is becoming a key proxy for competence, which risks marginalising workers and students who do not align with emerging digital value systems. At the same time, AI adoption may open possibilities for recognising forms of expertise that were previously undervalued. This theme explores how institutions reproduce or challenge AI-related inequities and the extent to which AI creates new forms of exclusion or reinforces existing patterns of privilege. It calls for critical analyses of the policies and leadership practices needed to forge equitable pathways in an AI-mediated world.

Guiding Questions:

- Which policies and leadership practices mitigate marginalization and foster equitable pathways for competency development in AI-integrated contexts, and which exacerbate inequities?
- How can diverse forms of expertise beyond dominant models of AI fluency be recognized and rewarded?
- Does AI create entirely new forms of exclusion, or does it simply reinforce existing patterns of privilege?
- Does AI adoption create new inequities for existing marginalised groups?

Suggested Topics for Submissions

We invite submissions including, but not limited to:

- Case Studies & Empirical Research:
 - Intergenerational dynamics in AI-integrated workplaces or classrooms
 - Equity in lifelong learning and upskilling initiatives
 - Education-to-work transitions

- Critical Examinations:
 - Stereotypes, bias, and cultural capital across age, gender, race, and professional background
 - The "decoupling" of degrees from competence
 - Decolonizing business and educational curricula

- Policy, Leadership & Practice:
 - Analyses for fostering digital inclusion
 - Practices for intergenerational collaboration and mentorship
 - Inclusive leadership models
 - Global/cross-cultural perspectives on competence and value

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