

The Inclusion Model in CINIA: Disability as a Labor Competency in Mexico – A Case Study on the Protection vs. Autonomy Dilemma

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Abstract. This case examines CINIA, a Mexican social enterprise that reframes disability as a competitive labor competency. Employing over 1,100 individuals with intellectual, sensory, or motor disabilities, CINIA operates under the Social Model of Disability, emphasizing dignity and autonomy. However, its structured environment—key to initial success—now reveals critical tensions: professional stagnation, limited career mobility, and a "benefits trap" that discourages formal employment. CEO Fernando Diez faces a strategic dilemma: whether to consolidate the protective model, replicate it regionally, or pursue a hybrid path balancing growth and security. The decision will determine whether CINIA remains a lifelong sanctuary or becomes a catalyst for broader systemic inclusion. The case is designed to apply core OB theories to analyze dilemmas in motivation, job design, burnout, and career development in a sheltered employment setting. It is especially suitable for OB/HR advanced courses focusing on diversity, motivation, job design, and organizational culture.

Keywords: social enterprise, disability inclusion, protective-autonomy paradox, benefits trap, labor competency, Mexico, Social Model of Disability, strategic dilemma.

1. The CEO's Dilemma: Preserving Structure or Cultivating Autonomy?

Puebla, Mexico. February 2026. Fernando Diez, CEO of CINIA, let the latest reports fall onto his desk. One folder contained congratulatory letters and formal petitions from three other Mexican states, urging him to replicate their "model of inclusion." The other held internal data that told a more nuanced story: productivity metrics were strong, but surveys and manager feedback revealed early signs of waning engagement among tenured employees. Some veterans, having mastered their precise, structured routines, were quietly asking, "What's next?"

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The organization stood at a crossroads defined by its own success. CINIA's pioneering model was built on a foundation of clear structure, predictability, and protective support—a sanctuary that had successfully restored dignity and competence to over 1,100 individuals. This very structure, however, now seemed to be constraining the next level of professional growth for its most experienced staff. The central challenge was no longer just about how many people CINIA could employ, but about how deeply it could fulfill their evolving psychological needs for growth without betraying its founding promise of security.

Diez faced a defining choice for CINIA's future, a dilemma that struck at the heart of organizational behavior: Should CINIA proactively evolve its model toward greater job autonomy and professional mobility to combat stagnation and foster self-determination, even if this transforms its core identity and risks destabilizing its cohesive culture?... Or, should it reaffirm and strengthen its unique, structured ecosystem, consciously prioritizing long-term psychological safety and stability for its employees over the pursuit of professional advancement, accepting that some degree of stagnation may be the cost of a secure, lifelong community?

This was not merely a strategic pivot; it was a profound decision about the psychological contract with their employees. Choosing the path of structured autonomy would require navigating complex theories of motivation and cultural change. Choosing the path of protective structure would demand a defense of stability as a legitimate and ethical organizational outcome. For Diez, the data on his desk framed a critical test of leadership: how to evolve a sanctuary without destroying what made it safe, and how to cultivate growth without extinguishing the flame of security.

2. The Foundations of CINIA: Context for a Strategic Choice

To make an informed recommendation between preserving CINIA's protective structure or cultivating greater autonomy, it is essential to understand the organization's core DNA. The following sections detail the origins, philosophy, and operational model of CINIA. This background is not merely historical context; it provides the critical raw material—the values, design choices, and strategic alliances—that will determine whether and how the organization can successfully navigate the dilemma its CEO now faces.

Origin Story: From Personal Vision to Operational Reality

The social enterprise project CINIA was born in Puebla, Mexico, in February 2005. Its origin was not based on a quota law or a government mandate, but on the deep conviction of its founders that "work is the only way to transform people's lives" (Kurezyn Díaz et al., 2017).