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DIVERSITY, EQUALITY, AND INCLUSION (DE&I) IN DYNAMIC WORKPLACE – A NON-NEGOTIABLE STRATEGY FOR ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH

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1. Abstract

Organizations are encompassed of individuals of diverse backgrounds and attributes, such as interests, principles, personalities, philosophies, traditions, customs, nationalities, and languages, who work together to achieve a collective goals or objectives. The degree to which goals and priorities are proficient is strongminded by the people in an organization. The conceivable way people in an organization sincerely think, experience, communicate, function, and respond allows them to achieve their vision objectives. Organizations must hunt a workforce capable of working in a competitive environment by outspreading their labor force to include individuals with a variety of human physiognomies to attract and maintain the best available and most skilled workforce for the efficient achievement of organizational goals and objectives.

The workforce of a diverse organization is primarily representative of the populations of the geographies in which they operate and of their customer base. Diversity describes the range of human differences and variations, whether they are inherent (by birth) or acquired (by experience). In today's labor markets, these variances can be the basis for diverse forms of exclusion and result in different forms of discrimination.

Keywords: *Workforce, Diversity, Inclusion, Equality, Talent Sourcing, Reward & Recognition, Career Advancement, Remunerations.*

2. Introduction

Organizational policies and practices that create inclusion make all employees feel welcome, valued and respected. They are provided equitable and fair access to career advancement prospects, good working environments and market sustainable remunerations. Employees of inclusive organizations experience a deep sense of belonging as well as being empowered and growing. Managing workforce diversity entails more than merely respecting people's differences; it also entails appreciating the importance of differences, knowing, embracing, hostile prejudice, and fostering inclusiveness to improve an organization's effectiveness. Incorporating an individual's perceptions and viewpoints into an organization leads to positive results by making that person feel at ease and as if he or she is an integral part of the organization. Having a sense of belonging at work means that the work environment provides high psychological safety and employees can bring their full identities to work without fear of judgement. Employees feel comfortable expressing their opinions and ideas freely, and are appreciated for their unique contributions and recognized for their

accomplishments. Inclusive organizations take wider responsibility not just for the impact they have on their employees' lives but also on the broader communities in which they operate, working towards social justice and equity for all.

3. Diversity Perspectives in India

Initially, the business case for diversity was built on the assumption that women and minorities would outnumber the traditional "white" male worker, and since this was a predictable future, businesses were left with no choice but to learn to manage a diverse workforce productively. Organizations in the United States are legally bound to support diversity, owing in part to the US Civil Rights Act of 1964, affirmative action and equal employment opportunity. Since the initial focus in the 1980s on women and people of color, the meaning of diversity has expanded to include other forms of demographics such as religious practices and sexual orientation. Diversity and inclusion in the current context encompass other invisible forms of differences among people that include factors such as educational background, functional specialties, working styles, thinking styles and even personality traits. Some argue that when diversity efforts focus more on visual identities such as race, gender, age or disability, without addressing hidden identities emergent from differences in values, beliefs, attitudes, cultures or needs, it may actually hinder development of inclusive cultures by exaggerating differences rather than commonalities.

Different diversity perspectives have been proposed. According to the typologies proposed, they can vary from a negative view of diversity marked by resistance (diversity as a threat) to more positive approaches such as –

- ***Discrimination and fairness perspective*** (*differences problematized*): Involves focus on justice and the fair treatment of all members, as a moral imperative.
- ***Access and legitimacy perspective*** (*where differences are thought to create opportunities such as access to new markets or consumers*): Based on the recognition that the organization's markets and constituencies are culturally diverse and therefore matching the organization's own workforce is a way of gaining access and legitimacy to those markets.
- ***Learning and integration perspective*** (*seen as offering opportunities and providing sustained benefits in the long run*): Premised on the belief that the skills, experiences and insights of diverse employees is a potentially valuable resource for learning and change, and is valued in the workgroup for attainment of its goals.

While there are very noticeable reasons for promoting diversity, equality and inclusion, and often a business case has to be made to make the argument more convincing, it is also, simply put, the right thing to do. As observed, there are multiple reasons for investing in diversity, not the least of which is because it is ethically and morally the right thing to do.

4. Background of Inclusion in India

Research and reports on inclusion in the Indian working context are few with the dominant focus being that of inclusion in education. The Constitution of India prohibits discrimination on the grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth. Equality of opportunity in matters of public employment is also laid out as a directive principle. Through the directive principles of state policy, the Constitution, as a protective measure to correct age old social, economic, political and economic deprivations, lays down that the State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the scheduled castes and tribes. This serves as a protective measure in terms of reservations in educational institutions for the socially and economically marginalized segments, much akin to the affirmative action route in the United States. While educational institutions and public sector organizations are required to recruit considering adequate representation of backward castes and tribes, in reality, discrimination and differential treatment still exist, as the Thorat Committee report on caste discrimination suggests. Even with reports such as these and with safeguards built into the Constitution, discrimination and segregation continues in India, with educational

institutions and organizations yet to fully implement the reforms suggested, and few speak of the need for a privilege check.

Some of the major categories of excluded groups in India include women, Dalits, Adivasis, Muslims and persons with disabilities. It also includes other disadvantaged groups such as transgenders and bonded laborers. According to the National Sample Survey Organization report for 2012, the labor force participation rate for women stands at a dismal 23.3%, while for Muslims it is 33.8%, OBCs 40%, Dalits 41.2%, Adivasis 46%, and other social groups stand at 37.5%. With a large informal sector, bonded laborers, who are unorganized, poorly paid and with little job security, are thought to comprise 10% of the labor market. Bonded workers are generally blocked from changing employers in search of better work conditions, toil for exploitatively long hours against low and often irregular wages, and have very few labor protections offered as part of their employment. Although India outlawed bonded labor in 1976, through various forms of subversions, it continues to exist even today. Around 400 million workers are employed in the informal sector in India currently. In other words, out of every 100 workers, 86 work outside the legal protection, social contract and security the rest of the workforce takes for granted. Thus, the meaning of inclusion takes on a wholly different perspective for those in the informal economy of which bonded labor forms a part.

A recent move by India's supreme court in April 2014, accorded legal recognition for the first time to transgender people as a "third" gender, by classifying them as "Other Backward Classes", thereby allowing for their reservations in education and public employment. It is one more step towards creating a more inclusive climate.



Figure 1 : ORGANIZATIONAL METRICS/BENCHMARKS FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

5. Objectives of the study

1. To Review the workforce diversity, equality and inclusion (DE&I) through supporting theories.
2. To develop the workforce DE&I practice management model in the organization
3. To develop strategic action point model on employee performance.
4. Gaps analysis of diversity, equality and inclusion (DE&I) practice in India.

6. Review the workforce diversity, equality and inclusion (DE&I) through supporting theories

- *Social Categorization Theory*

The social-categorization theory proposes that persons from various social groups (e.g Nation, Employer, or School). People classify themselves into identification groups based on prominent traits, act in conjunction with their categories, and choose situations that sustain group identification, according to this theory. As a result, when compared to comparable persons, dissimilar individuals are less likely to collaborate.

As a function of positive prejudices for in-group individuals and unfavorable biases toward out-group individuals, social categorization may obstruct the elaboration of task-relevant information.

- ***Social Identity Theory***

Individuals with their social identity by favoring their social category or intergroup over outgroups to which they do not belong, according to social identity theory. In an organization, people tend to be more comfortable working with their identity group, where the efficiency of the organization will increase. Employees in the organization feel that people with different intergroup will generate a difference in perception and believe then conflicts will arise. Being a part of a group can create a sense of belonging among its members. Trust and acceptance improve when group members believe they are similar to those around them. Feelings of inclusion grow in conjunction with feelings of acceptance. Recognizing commonalities among group members, on the other hand, is merely one factor that leads to feelings of belonging. Another aspect of inclusion is being recognized and appreciated for one's contributions to the group.

- ***Strategic Choice Theory***

Top executives, according to strategic-choice theorists, make decisions that impact organizational outcomes and performance. The low to moderate levels of racial diversity among organizational executives might strangle strategic decision-making by reducing communication and increasing conflict, negatively impacting business performance. The notion was advanced that demographic diversity is connected with cognitive talents that increase a team's knowledge resources and problem-solving capabilities. As a result, diversity broadens the variety of cognitive perspectives required to discover strategic opportunities and examine multiple strategic options or alternatives within top management teams. The concepts and ideas of integrating workforce diversity at all levels of a business for optimal performance could thus be supported by strategic choice theory.

- ***Optimal Distinctiveness Theory***

According to the Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT), suitable inclusion should allow all employees, especially those from minority groups, to have a sense of belonging and exclusivity. According to the optimal distinctiveness theory, individuals aim for a balance between perceptions of resemblance among group members and salutation of their exceptional qualities. As a result, achieving a balance between belonging to a group and being valued for one's distinct distinctive features promotes inclusion. Individuals' emotions of inclusion grow as they realize, they are valuable members of the organization, and their unique capabilities and personalities are recognized and valued. Organizational commitment, trust, well-being, creativity, and innovation enrich when people feel involved in their work environment. Employees who feel included in their organization report increased job satisfaction and a lower incidence of quitting jobs.

7. Develop the workforce DE&I practice management model in the organization

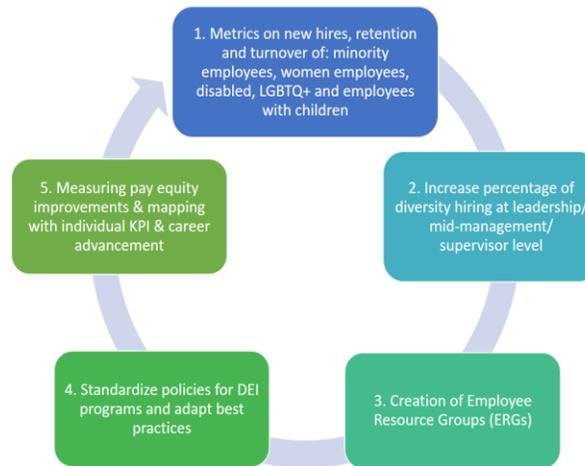


Figure 2 : Workforce DE&I Practice Management Model in The Organization

Hiring a diverse workforce will undeniably increase productivity, but it may also prove to be an adversity if not properly managed, because not only management but also employees are experiencing issues such as language problems (which are acceptable and are not due to employee thoughts), attitude clashes, and differences in perceptions, all of which are directly related to human behavior, which ultimately leads to disaster. In this model, we have understood the various dimensions of workforce DE&I which imply the employees in the organizations. Further, the benefits of workforce DE&I have been identified to know the various benefits which an organization can be availed if workforce diversity, equality and inclusion practices are succeeded efficiently. Workforce diversity and inclusion practices have largely been experienced in many organizations for organizational sustainability and to achieve competitiveness.

8. Strategies action for diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I)

Strong C-suite and organizational cutting age technological capabilities to lead through uncertainty and disruption are fundamental to the success of today's business trends. More inclusive strategies to build these capabilities can fuel greater productivity, innovation and resilience across the organization. Optimizing & implementing such strategies with greater use of new technological tools, more human-centric approaches to workforce management, focus on employee experience, persistence, belongingness and leverage diversity, equity and inclusion as core organizational strengths. The "new normal" workplace emerging from the COVID-19 crisis is likely to adapt these trends.

- ***The Role of Technology***

Technology is no longer very simple with regard to diversity, equity and inclusion. Leading companies are increasingly recognizing this and proactively leveraging technology for DE&I, while companies uncritically implementing new technologies risk a range of inadvertent consequences. This toolkit is designed to highlight the opportunities and outline the challenges specific to greater use of technology in the service of DE&I efforts. Among the tools covered are technologies that broadly utilize new analytic and data science capabilities alongside artificial intelligence (AI), and within that broad umbrella, machine learning and natural language processing. The toolkit additionally covers methods of analyzing employee interaction, such as organizational network analysis and tools for immersive learning, such as augmented and virtual. The use of cloud-based communication and visualization platforms is also fundamental to most tools reviewed.

- **Challenges impersonated by new technology**

New technologies have shown that they can contain prejudices that excavate rather than offset exclusion. Some technologies can be taken to market before fully tested and prove to be ineffective or even damaging. In addition, the technology sector continues to lack diversity, which contributes to blind spots in new product design.

- **Opportunities provided by new technology**

Technological solutions have the potential to establish best practices at scale and empower new practices that were implausible beforehand. For example, technologies are able to review job applications for high volume roles in greater detail than a typically resourced people and culture department. These technologies have been deployed to support company policies and practices, provide timely analytics, identify and reduce bias, introduce greater transparency and visibility, and support employee training. The “DE&I technology” market is growing rapidly, with an overall estimated market size in 2025 of approximately \$20 billion.

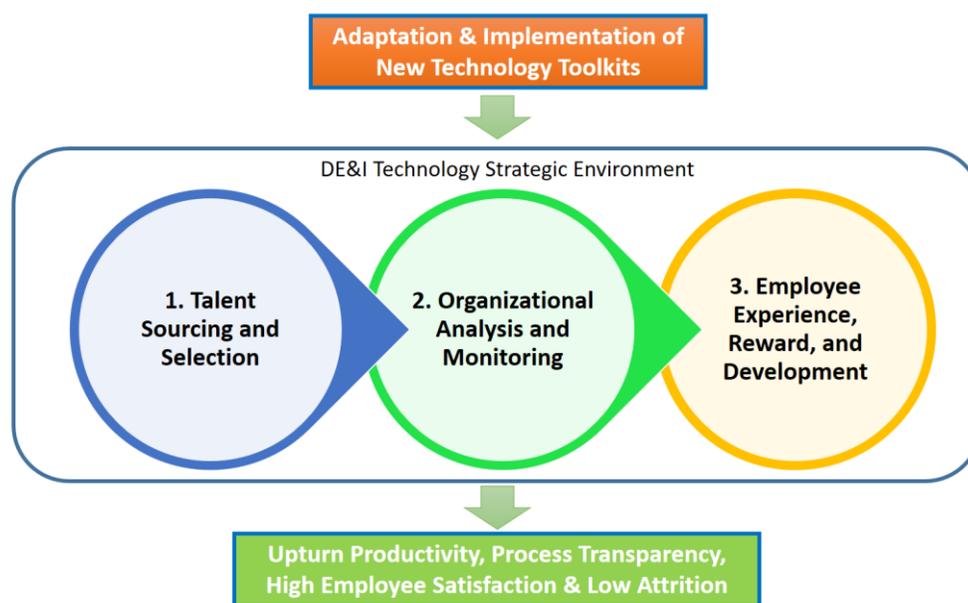


Figure 3 : Strategic Action Model of “DE&I Technology” in The Organization

Talent Sourcing and Selection

- Address unfairness in job announcement: The language used in job descriptions might mislead the application process and the pool of applicants not properly mapped with expectations.
- Attract diverse candidates pool: Existing approaches to posting roles might fail to reach diverse talent pools, then re-strategies the recruitment process supporting DEI.
- Identify best fit candidates based on merit and skills: The interview process should reduce the range of biases/ unfairness/ pre-judgmental into the hiring process to include best talent-pool.

Organizational Analysis and Monitoring

- Benchmark diversity, equity and inclusion across the organization: Decision-makers might lack visibility of the diversity, equity and inclusion and archive nonstandard Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of their organization, such as pay and progression equity.
- Map skill behaviors to create a best fit Learning and development environment which lead to space-age approach of future predicted business needs and analyses who needs training and why.
- Understand employee experience and engagement levels: Managers might lack visibility of employee experience, especially in large organizations, leading to low understanding of inclusion shortfalls, such

as benefits that indulge one group over another.

Employee Experience, Reward, and Development

- Train and incentivize managers and employees to enhance inclusion and belonging in their daily interactions.
- Dynamics within organizations might reduce the voice of employees from diverse backgrounds and affect their sense of belonging in the workplace.
- Conduct objective performance evaluations: Managers might subconsciously apply inconsistent or biased criteria in performance assessment, evaluation and calibration, leading to negative consequences on pay and progression equity.
- Support career path planning alongside learning and development: Learning and Development teams might struggle to offer personalized and targeted career path guidance at scale to all employees.

9. Gaps analysis of diversity, equality and inclusion (DE&I) practice in India

It is precarious for global establishments operating in different topographies to understand how to exploit on the commercial benefits of diversity, equality and inclusion. This highlights the fact that anti-discrimination principles such as diversity and inclusion will continue to blossom shortly. Employee networks are considered a favorable venue for providing care on shared concerns, as well as career growth and entrepreneur initiatives. The premeditated assignment of these has aided in the development of a more inclusive culture. Policies enable diversity and inclusion at work by providing a platform for encouraging equitable opportunities in employment and working practices. Not all organizations will benefit from the same set of DE&I strategies. As a result, it's critical to plan and customize diversity and inclusion strategies to specific conditions and need based. by studying various literature reviews some of the gaps identified are:

- Surface-level diversity (such as ethnicity, age, and gender) has been comprehensively researched, whereas deep-level diversity (such as values, attitudes, perception, and beliefs) has received little attention and the future research can be taken on the impact of deep-level diversity. Likewise, only a few recent studies have attempted to investigate previously untapped aspects of diversity, such as the LGBT+ community. As a result, future researchers will be able to assess the impacts of variables that have never been studied before, such as disability, sexual orientation, LGBT+, languages, and religion.
- The several unexplored outcomes have not been studied. Some outcomes, such as organizational performance, group performance, and top management team performance, have been frequently explored, but those important outcomes like employee turnover, absenteeism, organizational commitment, social cohesion, and communication haven't explored much. It has studied the nonexistence of relationship between workforce diversity with interconnection. As a consequence, this research suggests that future research should look into the association between variety and unexplored outcomes.
- Further research can be conducted on how diversity and inclusion practices can be affected to organizational performance. Very little research has gone into determining the link between diversity management practices and organizational performance. The study can be taken down to know whether there is a positive or negative impact on the organization by implementing DEI management practices.
- There is a gap in the integration of different theories. Many theories such as self-categorization theory, social-identity, similarity-attraction, upper echelon, and decision-making theory have positively and negatively impacted diversity, equality and inclusion. The resource-based theory has favorable racial diversity benefits. social identity and social-categorization theory have been negatively impacting on diversity.

10. Conclusion

Diversity, equity and inclusion professionals will need to apply sound judgement and evidence-based evaluation and testing to realize the potential and minimize the risks of new workplace technologies. While new workplace technologies might present fresh sources of prejudice, evidence to date has suggested that fixes for those biases are available and have strong capacity to scale. To realize the potential of new workplace technologies, organizations seeking to implement an integrated Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) approach should ask technology providers to share details about:

- Clarity about the input data used and how it addresses any privacy concerns.
- Clear correlation to success analysts against key KPIs assigned.
- Evidence base for the validity of psychometric methods used in the appraisal.
- Due diligence on whether the product has prejudiced outcomes by race, ethnicity, gender or other dimensions.
- Reporting on the diversity of the teams that have produced the tool and on the adequacy of their prejudice extenuation training.

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