

Responsible Leadership and Sustainable Management  
*Series Editors: Nayan Mitra · René Schmidpeter*

Kakoli Sen  
Sujata Shahi *Editors*

# Creating a Culture of Diversity and Inclusiveness in India Inc.

Practitioners Speak

 Springer

# **Responsible Leadership and Sustainable Management**

## **Series Editors**

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Kolkata, West Bengal, India

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Kakoli Sen · Sujata Shahi  
Editors

# Creating a Culture of Diversity and Inclusiveness in India Inc.

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*Editors*

Kakoli Sen  
IILM Institute for Higher Education  
New Delhi, India

Sujata Shahi  
IILM University  
Gurugram, Haryana, India

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*This book is dedicated to all the diverse groups of people in the Indian Society and elsewhere, all the people who struggle daily to find acceptance, to be recognized as individuals, as humans.*

## Foreword by Dr. Bhaskar Chatterjee

It gives me immense pleasure to learn that Dr. Kakoli Sen, Director, IILM Institute for Higher Education, and Dr. Sujata Shahi, Vice-Chancellor, IILM University, are bringing out this book on a very pertinent topic, i.e., *Creating a Culture of Diversity and Inclusiveness in India Inc.* A society like ours, which is multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual, covers a very wide spectrum of people placed in an incredibly diversified range of circumstances. Added to this are the factors of social and economic stratification, which further amplify disparities and divergences. Thus, India is indeed a melange of people with different backgrounds, upbringing and education. They are placed in milieus that offer an incredible range of geographical, cultural, ethnic and linguistic variety.

In recent years, if we leave out the COVID pandemic period, India's economy has grown faster than that of any other major country, barring China. A very substantial part of that growth has been fuelled by India Inc. Our corporates have emerged from the shadows of the socialist era, and acquitted themselves with great credit, thereby earning the appellation of "engines of growth." Because they have blazed a trail of success and profitability, our country has moved forward on the developmental path by leaps and bounds.

It remains now for our corporate entities to demonstrate their strong and uncompromising commitment to *responsible management* and to all the accountability that it entails. It is the belief and the conviction of both the editors, whom I have known well for several years, that a vital and essential part of the overarching concept of responsible management is diversity and inclusion. Of this, doubtless, there are some shining examples but by and large, embracing this vitally important concept has not been among the priorities of corporate India. This is partly because the idea itself has not been highlighted enough. Simultaneously, the concept has not been adequately fleshed out nor have its contours been clearly delineated.

This is the gap that this book attempts to bridge. Over 15 chapters, it meticulously addresses virtually every aspect of the diversity and inclusion paradigm—from defining the concept itself to its promotion, the modalities of implementation, to making out the business case for it, to identifying the typology, to bringing clarity on the issues of digital divide, to looking at technology as a solution provider and

to finally studying the impact that the COVID pandemic has had. Furthermore, it has taken a close look at some good practices and examples—both national and international.

For anyone wishing to take a deep dive into the increasingly important issue of “diversity and inclusion” as a vital pillar in the structure of responsible management, and even for those who wish to ascertain the broad thematic of it, I strongly recommend this book and I warmly congratulate both editors as well as Springer Nature, the publishers.



New Delhi, India

Bhaskar Chatterjee  
Former Secretary  
Government of India  
Former Director General  
Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs



## Foreword Dr. S. Y. Quraishi

Having worked in a diverse environment and knowing the gravity of the need for inclusion for all, I am happy to present this book on *Creating a Culture of Diversity and Inclusiveness in India Inc.* by Dr. Kakoli Sen, Director, IILM Institute for Higher Education, and Dr. Sujata Shahi, Vice-Chancellor, IILM University, who have made an earnest effort to delve deep into this malaise that exists in our society and needs consistent efforts to create a sensitivity around it. Coming from a culture like India, which is respected across the globe for its rich cultural heritage and its ability to coexist with numerous subcultures within itself, it is a perfect topic to be taken and is in sync with their background. It is this unique feature of diversity with inclusion that this book talks about.

Here, diversity means the various ways in which we differ from each other; it could be biological, cultural, socioeconomic, religion, caste and regional differences that cannot be changed or modified in any way. After all, human beings have an inherent quality or potential within themselves that makes them unique and that uniqueness needs to be celebrated. Inclusion means bringing together our differences to create a whole. This could be in the form of physical inclusion, mental, social, emotional or even with oneself through introspection. We need to be cognizant of the fact that inclusion is possible only through collaboration. This means accepting and creating an environment which involves respect and connect, irrespective of physical, cultural, socioeconomic differences and others.

Drawing upon these various facets of diversity and inclusion in the world, this book is dedicated to explaining the concepts of diversity and inclusion and why it makes sense to practice in the Indian Corporate and how it will bring development and prosperity for all. It covers the need of leadership involvement for successful D&I implementation as well as evaluation and measurement techniques. In this collection of chapters, the authors spare the academic jargons to give the readers a

light yet thought-provoking book, which to my opinion is extremely important not just because it is the most natural state of being, but it is what is the need of the hour. I congratulate the editors, the authors, the publisher and all who have been associated with it and wish them well.



New Delhi, India

S. Y. Quraishi  
Former Chief Election Commissioner  
Former Secretary  
Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports

## Editors' Note

Every time we have seen a transgender approaching people on the traffic signals for money, we have looked at him/her with a lens. Behind all the makeup and the façade of entitlement, lies a desperate attempt to belong to a community, the female one in this case. People laugh or scoff at them; some give them money not so much to help them but maybe to pity them or to avoid their wrath. We have heard stories of them throwing a fit at auspicious occasions if not paid well, but have we thought how do they survive without any education, any employment or active source of money? How many of such people can we remember having studied with at school/college? None perhaps! When we see disabled people begging, a lot of us are wary if they are faking it. If there are such people walking in front of us on the road, in the market, in the mall, we become impatient as they are slowing down others. A lot of us are perhaps also impatient when a disabled (specially abled) person serves us at a restaurant as we are not expecting them there and have a doubt about their abilities. When an old person or a single woman or a gay person walks into a restaurant or a bar all by themselves, or a person from a lower socioeconomic strata walks into a five-star hotel, inquisitive almost disapproving eyes turn towards him/her. Ditto for someone from a non-English school background trying to speak English, and there are multiple such situations where we do not tolerate let alone appreciate anyone who is different from us. We have made a place for everyone in the society; some privileged ones get everything, a lot others remain unrecognized and uncared for, with little access to resources like the privileged ones. Why are we as a society so typecast? Why is it difficult to accept anyone who may not fall into the mould of a “normal” person? Cut to the corporate world, the scene is not very different.

How many of us have worked with heterogeneous groups, groups that have had good representation across genders, religions, different socioeconomic backgrounds, people with disabilities, different age groups, different ethnicities, etc.? Very few if at all! How is it that these people are not visible in our mainstream workforce as much as they could? Why is there no diversity in our workplaces? What about organizations that are hiring for diversity, how are they ensuring that everyone has a sense of inclusion, what else can be done, how could more and more organizations become aware of the concept of diversity and inclusion; these and many other similar

questions are the genesis of this book. We started thinking about bringing out this book sometime in 2019 and started reading more and more about it. We looked at organizations that are recognizing diversity and inclusion and making it part of their vision. We reached out to people who are working in this area either in an organization or as part of a think tank. When we discussed with them about this book and what we would like to address through this, a number of people came forward and put across their viewpoints. It is with their support and efforts, we have been able to bring out this book which is the very first in this endeavor, and we strongly believe that for change to come, a beginning has to be made, first within and then beyond.

This is a pioneering book which brings D&I stories, practices and perspectives to promote a culture of accepting diversity and practicing inclusion in the Indian workplaces. It is a fresh approach that does not just highlight the need or criticize the lack of diversity and inclusion but actually offers a solution on how to go about it and also gives real examples from the corporate world. This book can serve as a handbook about how to implement D&I practices beginning with a framework of D&I policies and a working plan as well as put audit systems in place. It offers ways to develop an inclusive culture and also a D&I measurement model. Go on, read it!

New Delhi, India  
Gurugram, India

Kakoli Sen  
Sujata Shahi

# Acknowledgements

The journey to bring out this book has been very interesting and enlightening. There are some incredible people who have contributed in multiple ways to help us put this together. First and foremost, we thank Springer Nature for this opportunity. We are delighted to have the honor of bringing out the first book in their series “Responsible Leadership and Sustainable Management.” We are grateful to Mrs. Nupoor Singh for all her extremely prompt and invaluable support throughout the process. Dr. Nayan Mitra deserves a special thanks for her brilliant and timely inputs. Heartfelt gratitude to Ms. Ananya Sengupta, former Director, Transactions Advisory with PwC, and a dear friend from Kenya for her astute and sharp eye for detail, and diligent research scholars Shahana Qutab, Shriya Vashisht and Kirti Maheshwari for their support toward the chapters. Our gratitude towards IILM Management for providing all the support and encouragement. Our heartfelt thanks to our respective husbands, Alok Kumar Sen and Anil Kumar Shahi, for their unflinching love and support, our children for their love, and our parents for their blessings and for being the guiding force. This intellectually rich journey is incomplete without any of you.

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# Editors and Contributors

## About the Editors

**Kakoli Sen** is Professor and Director at IILM Undergraduate Business School, New Delhi and Pro Vice Chancellor at IILM University. She is Ph.D. in Management with 10 years of experience in the corporate and 15 years in academics and has done International consultancy assignments. Dr. Sen has held academic leadership positions and worked on developing international academic collaborations. Her research interests are women leadership, entrepreneurship, and diversity & inclusion. She has published research papers and cases in ABDC journals, Richard Ivey and Harvard Business Publishing. She teaches and trains in the areas of Business Management, Organizational Behavior and People Management. She was conferred upon the World Education Congress award of 100 most dedicated professors in the year 2019.

**Sujata Shahi** serves as Vice Chancellor of the IILM University, Gurugram. She has a diverse experience of 37 years in the field of education working in academic and administrative capacities. Dr. Shahi, a Ph.D. in Psychology, is Professor of OB and HR, with extensive research work in the areas of organization development, innovation at workplace and personal value systems. She has been adorned with many awards and accolades including the Chancellor Award for Postgraduate Diploma in Journalism. She is also the Recipient of the Achievers of Academic Excellence in Leadership Award. She has contributed to various journals, publications and international conferences with her research work. Dr. Shahi serves as Member of the key professional bodies like NHRD, FICCI, CII, etc.

## Contributors

**Bidisha Banerji** Associate Professor, IILM Institute of Higher Education, New Delhi, India



**Jhilmil Das** Sr. Manager (HR), GRSE Ltd (CPSE, Ministry of Defence, Govt. of India), Kolkata, India

**Sujitsh Das** Co-Founder & Managing Director, badgefree.com, Talent Market Exchange, Bengaluru, India

**Rishi Kapal** Stanford LEAD Alumni, Organization Development Specialist, Teenzclap Futureworks, Pune, India

**Vandana Madhusudan** Head Human Resources and CSR, ACME solar, Gurgaon, India

**Nayan Mitra** Founder-Director, Sustainable Advancements (OPC) Private Limited, Kolkata, India

**Saurabh Roy** State Head - Industrial Relations (WB, SK and A&N Islands), Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd, Kolkata, India

**Sidhartha Satpathy** Storyteller & Chief Enabler, iSidhartha (OPC) Pvt Ltd., Chennai, India

**Kakoli Sen** Pro Vice Chancellor, IILM University, Gurgaon, India

**Pallavi Shah** Executive Manager, Learning & Development, Deloitte US India, Hyderabad, India

**Sujata Shahi** Vice Chancellor, IILM University, Gurgaon, India

**Amardeep Singh** Global People Analytics Manager, Arcadis Consulting India Pvt. Ltd., Bangalore, India

**Shruti Swaroop** Founder-Embrace Consulting, Gurgaon, India

**Amit Verma Ifeanyichukwu Egwu Eze** Academic Director, HTMI Switzerland Dubai, Dubai, UAE;

Diversity & Inclusion Specialist, Brain and Spine Foundation, South Africa; Associate Professor, Department of Engineering and Architecture, Amity University, Dubai, UAE

**Ranjani Vijayaraghavan** Vice President, Technology, Deloitte US India, Hyderabad, India

# Creating a Culture of Diversity and Inclusion in India Inc.: An Introduction



**Kakoli Sen**

**Abstract** India is a vast country and well known for its diversity. However beyond the diversity of food, culture, clothing, language, religion etc., there is a diversity of different sub groups within the whole such as men, women, youth, senior citizens, urban, rural, rich, poor, literate and illiterate, transgenders, People with Disabilities and many others. A lot of these groups are not part of the mainstream society, have little aid to uplift them and offer a respectful life and equity in society. Education is unaffordable for them and makes little sense when how to survive is a daily priority. Economic independence is the benchmark of development of any individual and overall for the country and the society. When several such groups are left out of the mainstream society and suffer in silence or have to depend on others' charity, we as a society are to blame. It is either our ignorance or insensitivity which allows such voiceless helpless communities to suffer for years. While the broad diversity is well celebrated across the world, it is the Inclusion we should be working on. This chapter covers some of these issues and also summarizes the chapters and their themes.

**Keyword** Diversity · Inclusion · Minorities · Organizational Culture · Digital divide · Inclusion measurement · Mindfulness

The National Statistics Office report on disability released last year states that almost 2.2% of Indian population has some kind of physical or mental disability. The number of women in India as per a 2019 World Bank report is 48%. About 5.3% of India's populace are senior citizens. 15% Indians are Muslims followed by Christian, Sikh, Jain and other religious communities who comprise smaller but significant percentage. Ian Jack in a Guardian article (2018) writes that almost 50% of the Indian population is less than 24 years old, a huge number which has had significant exposure to information and technology from an early age and are also known as "Digital Natives". In terms of caste system still prevalent in India after 75 plus years of independence, while dalits make up close to 25% of the population, a miniscule number

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K. Sen (✉)  
Pro Vice Chancellor, IILM University, Gurgaon, India  
e-mail: [kakoli.sen@iilm.edu](mailto:kakoli.sen@iilm.edu)

is represented at leadership levels in the top 100 companies in the *Fortune India 500*. All these groups of people (and there are more, India being such a diverse country) are routinely getting left out of the mainstream India Inc., be it in terms of jobs, promotions, new ideas, new projects, new products, new markets, Organizational vision, Policy decisions, workplace inclusion, etc., without a thought. If we add up all the numbers, that is a big number to leave out. In pure business terms alone, are we assuming that these people as employees have little to offer and as customers no specific requirements and expectations? In social terms, are we not being unjustified by ignoring such a huge number of people and creating a divided society?

According to UNESCO data, as more and more women become well educated and economically independent, they will become a major driving force for future businesses. In the UK, a significantly higher percentage of Chinese and Indian students attain the British A levels compared to white and other ethnic students. The Indian youth population is characteristic of being comfortable with technology, is politically aware, is sensitive to the society and ambitious too. There are several such changes happening at the secondary and tertiary levels that will become primary markets and critical if ignored. We also know that diversity and inclusion, especially gender diversity has been talked about and somewhat practiced for many years now in India but the results are far behind what they should be in terms of education, jobs, equal pay and opportunity and overall social equality, etc. It is time that we take a new look and understand what diversity and inclusion mean and how they can be achieved better in the corporate world to start with. The workplaces of tomorrow will be different in many ways. Young people, women, technology will be playing a bigger role, much bigger role than they are playing now. They will be sizeable in number, more confident, more vocal and more demanding. Artificial intelligence will be omnipresent, and many jobs will simply disappear to give way to new others. Policymakers and those calling the shots today may become more and more redundant. Time relevant skills and competencies will take the centre stage as new skills and new age practices will help businesses remain sustainable. The workplaces will have to have people from different generations who will have different expectations from work and life as well as others. Attracting, managing and retaining this diverse workforce will be critical to the competitive edge of any business. Diversity will become more pronounced, and inclusion will be imperative than a choice. Organizations will have to start valuing each individual no matter where they come from, how they look, how they speak, what will eventually matter is what they bring to the table. Sarah Kaiser, Employee Experience, Diversity and Inclusion Lead for Fujitsu, says that digital technologies today are at the heart of everything we do, and that it has changed the way people work, live and innovate. She also says that diversity and inclusion are the key drivers of employee engagement and productivity in this globalized world of today.

Diversity is a given, people differ from one another in multiple ways, Inclusion and the need for it is what we need to understand better. Some firms look at diversity as a social responsibility, in which they address existing social inequalities by hiring people from such groups. Some other firms look more deeply into inclusion to bring in different perspectives and create innovative solutions. Such organizations feel that

it is important to have a workforce that reflects their potential customer base at all levels of hierarchy and that helps them in developing a range of products and services. A McKinsey report found that companies who practice racial and ethnic diversity were 35% more likely to generate above average returns and those who implement gender diversity were 15% more likely to have better financial returns. Organizations which aim at sustainability in the long term must embrace and think of practices that involve one and all. Each employee has some value to add. Irrespective of the employees' economic or cultural background, personality, age, gender, disability, everyone wants to add value and deserves to be valued not just to make people feel good but also it makes business sense for the organization. When your customers are from a diverse group, how can your employees also not be from those diverse groups as they represent their own groups, their product and service expectations. It has to be that simple! And in a country like ours, these numbers are really big, so do we want to avoid a huge chunk or several such chunks of people and over crowd the rest?

Diversity and inclusion have to start at the top, become part of the organizational vision and mission, led by the top management team and adopted by the rest as their organizational culture. D&I is not to be restricted to hiring of diverse people only but to all the organizational policies and practices and the organizational culture within as well as the brand image. It could be about what do we stand for, what is our employer perception, what do we market, who do we market to and how. It could be about how we design our offices, it could be about how we hire and develop our people and plan our resources. It is about the legacy we build. Diversity and Inclusiveness is a thought process change, one that is open, creative and embraces all for its good. It is about removing our conscious and unconscious biases, bringing in cultural change and a social revolution. For that, we have to understand what do we mean by diversity at workplace, what kinds of diverse groups exist in the same world we co-habit.

This book intends to cover major areas of diversity and inclusiveness and bring stories and viewpoints as well as tips from the corporate, NGOs and think tanks to sensitize students/practitioners/corporates and all other stakeholders about the need and implementation of the same to build the workplaces of tomorrow and hence an inclusive society. While the conceptual perspectives will be presented based on the available literature, this is an attempt to bring out a focused approach in connecting "Theory to Practice". Chapters shall be offering a background on the chosen area and present the content as well as quote real-time practices with data and anecdotal evidences as well as present the challenges and how they were managed. There is a range of issues that have been addressed in this book such as explaining what is diversity and inclusion to how does it make business sense to practice D&I, what organizations are doing or not doing to encourage D&I, corporate examples of the ones who are practicing D&I to adoption of new-age business models through app infra modernization, data analytics and automation of D&I.

Economic independence is the benchmark of development of any individual. So, when the corporate opens its doors, people find the strength and confidence that automatically brings in the sociocultural change and upward mobility. This in turn

brings in more mainstream visibility and garners overall acceptance. In the absence of a clear-cut space, career path and role models, diverse groups will fail to identify a path for themselves.

A brief summary of each chapter follows; Ranjani Shah writes on *The Business Case for Diversity & Inclusion (Why D&I?) and explains the 5 W and 1H*. The chapter presents the various factors of diversity and inclusion factors and how they affect the business outcomes for any organization such as profitability and market performance, tapping the untapped talent pool, improved hiring and retention ratios, positive employer branding and how it is critical to build a strong organizational culture through involved leadership, programmatic leadership versus all round empowerment, innovation. Any organization is comprised of individuals who may have come from different backgrounds and have different viewpoints about interacting with others dissimilar to them, but if they could overcome their own barriers and become more sensitive to others' needs, it would be easy to develop an inclusive mindset that will lead to overall inclusive behaviour in organizations as well. Using personal anecdotes, Ranjani writes about how small changes in our behaviour could bring in incremental changes.

Nayan Mitra and Khushboo Mehta write about diversity and inclusion as a key business strategy. This chapter explains the main points of diversity and inclusion and how the world follows it as well as in the Indian context. It also brings up case studies of international organizations such as Facebook, Sodexo, Unilever and national companies on how they have adopted inclusion as a strategy and evolved over the years and made their workforce more and more diverse and how it has served them well. These organizations, irrespective of size, have made conscious attempts to include people from across genders, race, age, special abilities, etc. In India which in addition to the ones mentioned above has a range of diversity issues such as education, religion, caste, socially disadvantaged, language, regional background, ethnicity, economic well-being and lifestyle, companies like WIPRO, VODAFONE, CAPGEMINI, Vindhya Infomedia, MEESHO are making earnest efforts to bring them into the mainstream. The authors suggest that D&I has to be owned and led by the top management team (TMT) by developing policies on D&I which needs to be monitored by a dedicated diversity and inclusion manager to evaluate the real difference.

Bidisha Bannerjee, in her chapter *Impact of Geography and Technology on Diversity and Inclusion Practices*, writes about how diversity is context specific, region specific and country specific and any efforts in this direction have to be looked at in its context. In her chapter, she brings up the case study of a global IT/ITES firm and how it has managed geographical diversity and inclusion and the role of technology in the practices as well as challenges in India. GLOBSYS was started by an Indian American and operated by a group that was predominantly Indian saw early successes and did not really feel the need for D&I. However, global presence mandated a global workforce, and it has since then followed a nuanced approach in moving towards D&I whether it is about inclusion at the board level or at the specific regional level differences and how technology has emerged to be a big enabler.

Sujitsh Das writes about the divide between the technologically endowed and the deprived and through his chapter *Flattening the Diversified Sphere through Digital Inclusivity* suggests that the 8C framework agenda, i. e. connectivity provision, content creation, capacity augmentation, core technologies creation and exploitation, cost reduction, competence building, community participation and commitment to the deprived and disadvantaged, will help in attaining digital inclusivity. He shares how to make digitally inclusive society through the help of several live case examples such as MyGate app that empowers the unorganized domestic helps, security guards and other manual labour not just by providing them employment opportunities but also dignity of labour to SunMoskha's Smart AQUAnet™, a cloud base system which empowers farmers to decide how much water they need for their farming and pay accordingly. The author shares that while over the last decade there has been substantial growth of digitalization, it has also slowly but steadily created a digital divide. However, he recommends a strong need to flatten that divide and has also presented a number of interventions which are now being developed towards this.

Amit Verma, Vinod Kumar Shukla and Eze Ifeanyichukwu in their chapter *Diversity and Inclusion through Technological Trends* write about how technology can bridge the divide among the different groups in society who are mostly excluded or marginalized. Some of these groups include neurodivergent people, people living with disabilities, refugees and various others. The number of people with neurological disease and autistic people runs into billions, and the needs of such a large group of people cannot be left unattended. The chapter suggests ways how digital innovations can achieve the social inclusion of people with disabilities. The authors have classified the problems of autistic under social, formality and job demand problems and discuss several digital innovations such as Cumulus Headphones, Cpi blog, Habitica, Autismity, Brain in Hand app, Dexteria, Dragon Dictation app and several others that help them overcome motor issues, learning disabilities, speaking or writing issues as well as social skill limitations. The authors have also highlighted some specific digital innovations that can help women overcome their career barriers and help them in self-empowerment. The chapter also covers digital innovations designed specifically for people with disabilities (PwD), refugees and sufferers of racism and suggests that further advances in digital technologies like artificial intelligence, machine learning and bioinformatics present further hope for achieving digital inclusivity. At the same time, it makes a point that these innovations do not factor the educational background of its users, as they blindly presume that all users must be literate and technology-oriented.

Saurabh Roy writes about *Developing Effective Diversity and Inclusion Culture within Organizations*. He specifically attempts to answer questions about how to build a successful diversity and inclusion strategy, how such strategies can create a lasting impact and how to implement and make it sustainable. Saurabh explains the words diversity and inclusion and using the Icerberg model and McKinsey 7S framework emphasizes the importance of culture for creating and promoting D&I. He also offers a D&I framework stating that the data has to be collected, analysed and action plans drawn up while making substantive changes to the vision and mission statements, governance format as well as evaluate, audit and monitor for progress as

per timelines. His chapter provides a framework where the first step is to establish the foundation, create internal and external framework and then bridge the two. He mentions about advertising and marketing campaigns challenging stereotyping which big brands like Tanishq and more recently Dove have already started.

Amardeep Singh in his chapter on *Measuring Diversity and Inclusion* emphasizes the need for the appropriate metrics and measuring them both qualitatively and quantitatively. He advocates a D&I committee that should members from diverse groups and the committee meet on a regular basis and also have meetings with the larger project team which should include the HR business partners, professionals and the analytics team. Inclusion should also trickle down from the top. People coming from diverse backgrounds often feel that the system is working against them than with them. This is why the top leadership needs to be more inclusive in words and action. The easiest way to achieve this is by having a more diverse leadership team and working towards expanding the leadership's mindset. The right metrics which need to be tracked should be set up after a thorough brainstorming with the right set of people. The metrics should be compared with a benchmark. The metrics should be reported transparently. In addition to the gender diversity, he brings up the case of LGBTQ as well as Person of Color.

Shruti Swaroop's chapter focuses on *Measuring Inclusion* in various aspects of an employee lifecycle within an organization. She has worked on D&I practices and their measurement and emphasizes the role of the founders of any organization to lead by embracing the concept. She suggests that the EMBRACE model can be used for creating an inclusive culture through developing the organizational climate. Founders with their own set of values create policies and processes which ultimately become the culture of any organization. Inclusion, Shruti writes, is a behavioural concept and speaks about acceptance of people's uniqueness and creating a sense of belonging within the team and within the entire organization. Measuring inclusion can help organizations in finding the gaps which can be worked upon to create the right culture which will improve performance and productivity. This chapter focuses on the importance of measuring inclusion and what all aspects within the organization should be measured. This will create the D&I picture of the organization and help create an inclusive culture. She discusses how inclusion is to be observed at an individual level by asking questions about one's own behaviour such as hiring preferences, socializing preferences and team member experiences. She further suggests questions to assess inclusion at team level and organizational level and recommends inclusion to be part of the organizational values. The chapter discusses optimal distinctiveness theory in the context of inclusion and lays emphasis on constant assessment of the inclusion practices.

Sujata Shahi writes about the *Importance of Diversity and Inclusion in the education sector* both at primary, secondary and higher education levels. She writes that there are multiple benefits of inclusion at the knowledge institutions as they can become the very starting points of exclusion if not rightly thought through and managed in thought and action by the schools and colleges. She further states that India has the tradition of teacher being "Guru" and a role model for his/her students, and hence, teachers must practice inclusion in their communication and behaviour with students.

The chapter highlights multiple benefits that will accrue from developing an inclusive environment in educational institutions, be it for gender, caste, PwD among others.

Vandana Madhusudan writes about *Scaling up Organizations with Diversity and Inclusion* mentioning that if organizations really want to put D&I on their agenda which they must, they need to make some serious efforts in that direction. She also brings up data from two actual recruiter portals and shares how there are enough freshers, women, PwD, especially able candidates who are waiting to be hired but for some reasons are getting overlooked. The chapter emphasizes the need to put out the organizational vision and mission on online and offline platforms, celebrate each effort as well as success in the D&I arena. The author shares that social media is a very useful source to market as well as hire diverse and specific talents. She gives an example of how large organizations with capital resources are also building their diversity brand and attracting diverse talent with educational and community partnerships. She quotes Intel Capital, Intel Corporation's global investment organization, that has recently announced the Intel Capital Diversity Fund, which will invest in Technology startups run by women and under-represented minorities. She also quotes how Monsanto, an American Agrochemical and Agricultural Biotechnology corporation, founded in 1901, more recently taken over by Bayer has partnered with the company's philanthropic arm, the Monsanto Fund—to help encourage Black, Latino and women students to pursue Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects.

Jhilmil Das in her chapter, *Diversity in adversity: fostering the DNA of inclusiveness in the current crisis*, writes about the ill effects of COVID-19 on the already marginalized sections of the society. She quotes that women, LGBTQ community, PwD communities have been more adversely affected by this crisis than other groups. While the pandemic forced all organizations to chart out business continuity plans and survival strategies to come out of this difficult phase, the D&I agenda almost got relegated to sidelines. However, in dynamic situations like these, employees and organizations need to be even more resilient, innovative and responsive to change. Cross-functional diverse teams will be able to drive the innovation and sustained growth. The author writes about the need to inculcate positive reinforcements through inclusive leadership to promote D&I practices in order to create a holistic and inclusive culture at workplace as most organizations have not yet realized how diversity can benefit the business. The chapter cites examples from leading organizations such as Tata Steel, J&J, Microsoft, Accentre, Urban Company India and OYO who have made their D&I agenda. She also shares several company case studies such as Tata Steel, TCS, Marico, ABB India, PNB Metlife and Alstom on how they have adopted their D&I practices.

Rishi Kapal in his chapter, *Covid-19 impact of Diversity and Inclusion*, also writes about how the pandemic may have affected the various diverse groups adversely. He further fears that some managers may in the face of current adversity start looking at D&I initiatives as cost centres; however, the business case of D&I is well established. He also quotes the Qualcomm study in association with Cherie Blaire Foundation for Women (CBFW) and others to support Malaysian women entrepreneurs. The chapter also shares about the task force constituted by FICCI on D&I at the end of



2019 and that the mandate of the task force to have inclusive policies to include all communities towards the national growth. Rishi also discusses how organizations can appraise performances during and after the pandemic and how the hiring process should also be reviewed. He also mentions that once the pandemic effects reduce and employees start returning to work more and more in office, they may also need psychological and emotional support in order to readjust to the new work norms.

In the chapter *Humanness—the Inclusive Way*, Sidhartha Satpathy writes about the mental consciousness and how humans process information. He traces the origin of human behaviour and how the human race started forming groups to survive and these groups and clans became all tight knit, all powerful and binding. The Industrial Revolution, however, challenged the closed set-up and people migrated for better opportunities. However, people also moved about with their differences such as values, thoughts, ideologies and behaviour patterns which clashed with the new and modern environment and brought in complexities, dynamics and exclusion. He explains the various categories of exclusion with anecdotal evidences and how detrimental it is to those individuals but also raises an awareness of the daily biases we all indulge in such as demographic orientation, body orientation, physical deformities, labour mobility, socio-economic orientation, college degree pedigree, religious bias, colourism and technology competence.

Pallavi Shah brings up *Mindfulness as the catalyst for DEI and* writes about the need and art of being mindful and to be in the present to identify our own biases and complexities. This is essential to build a diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce where differences are recognized and valued and to increase the productivity of our organizations and satisfaction of our people. This, she writes, will also enable people to bring their best selves to work and society. To do so, she advises that we have to rise above the digital and emotional clutter that we are in. The chapter also offers tips on how to create a mindful and nurturing organization by offering psychological safety, developing emotional intelligence and also how do we start as the individual level by creating mini moments throughout the day.

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# The Business Context of Diversity and Inclusion (5W, 1H)



Ranjani Vijayaraghavan

**Abstract** Across organizations, educational institutions, governments, and establishments, we have reached a stage where all of us are familiar with the terms “diversity” and “inclusion.” We see it in our vision and mission statements, and in our strategies and priorities. We undergo training to understand their meaning and attempt to adopt practices to align with the big picture. However, have we ever analyzed these terms thoroughly to appreciate why they are important to each one of us? While we try to apply what we know in own areas of work, do we realize these apply to everyone and everywhere, in both professional and personal lives? Many of us as corporate leaders discuss and emphasize on best practices around diversity and inclusion; how many of us have emphasized this across various levels of managers and leaders, where the rubber really meets the road? This chapter focuses how D&I form fundamental values for human coexistence and our collective success. It emphasizes why organizations need to change the narrative around diversity and inclusion as something which makes strong business sense, across various layers of the organization. There is focus on the various challenges faced during ground-level implementation and how intentional interventions can help build and mature organization culture end to end.

**Keywords** Business-sense · Profitability · Innovation · Leadership · Empowerment · Business-case · Hiring · Retention · Culture · Challenge · Opportunity

I am often faced with these questions from colleagues, team members, and associates—“As a woman leader in the Technology industry, have you ever felt ‘gender’ has affected the way you are perceived or treated? How did you deal with life events and challenges during your career journey? Are there people who made a big difference to your professional journey? What are some practical and effective ways for us to encourage and sensitize people around the topic of gender diversity?”.

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R. Vijayaraghavan (✉)  
Vice President, Technology, Deloitte US India, Hyderabad, India  
e-mail: [ranjani1978@gmail.com](mailto:ranjani1978@gmail.com)

While I enjoy moments of self-reflection while answering these questions, I am also compelled to reflect on how far we have advanced collectively as corporates, leaders, and society in the diversity and inclusion journey. And what more can we do together?

In my 23 years of experience with corporate India and as a woman technologist, focus on diversity and inclusion has progressed multifold and considerably changed our workplace dynamics. During my school and college education years, gender ratios in classrooms were skewed. In the late 1990s, when I got my campus placement in the manufacturing sector, my parents were skeptical about sending me to a different city to stay there on my own and work. Owing to the IT sector booming then, I made my entry into the corporate world in 1998. There were fewer women in the workplace than today, and there were varying opinions about what women could do at work—mainly because there were not many role models. The entire industry was exploring the potential of the other gender collectively. I worked across roles and companies with support from open-minded mentors and leaders who believed in my skills, explored and provided career growth opportunities, and supported me through my life events. Intentional investment in my career growth encouraged me to perform at my best while balancing my family priorities. I feel empowered when I look back at my journey from being an entry-level helpdesk engineer to a technology leader today; I am proud to see the progress we have made together in our society, families, and workplaces.

There is a lot which has changed in the last 2 decades. More and more women in education and entry levels have strengthened the pipeline and improved gender ratios considerably. Change in societal support systems for women and mothers has helped them continue their careers and return to the workforce easily post-life events. Policies and processes have evolved to support maternity needs and career breaks positively, improving retention and engagement of women professionals. Sponsors, mentors, and leaders within organizations are directly responsible for the progressive shift to the gender-inclusive culture and continued focus. Intentional efforts for diverse leadership teams are building strong leadership pipelines. Many women leaders in senior positions and their success motivate all women to take charge and advance their careers.

Beyond gender, the focus on persons with disabilities and the LGBTQIA+ community also has taken center stage in the last decade. Laws and regulations in the legal sphere supporting rights for women, persons with disabilities (PWD), and LGBTQIA+ communities have paved way for many of these changes.

Across organizations, educational institutions, governments, and establishments, we are now familiar with the terms “diversity” and “inclusion.” We see it in our vision and mission statements, and in our strategies and priorities. While senior leaders and executives see the value of D&I and emphasize the significance, the practical challenges in implementation are mainly because practices around D&I are still seen as a senior leadership mandate and directive in most organizations. Seldom do team leaders or members across the organization truly understand the details or the basis for the business case for it. To bring in transformation and expedite progress, it is important that everyone understands and sees D&I as a business proposition and how it contributes to growth and success.

Humans are driven by purpose. When we understand why something is important, we are intrinsically motivated to contribute and participate in the change. In this chapter, I have tried to simplify and share with you my understanding of the business case for D&I. I have expanded the subject using the 5W, 1H analysis method to present a holistic interpretation.

**What** is ‘your’ interpretation of the terms diversity and inclusion?

## **Diversity—The Word “Diversity” Means Variety or Assortment**

Our understanding of the world is based mainly on our life experiences. The towns and cities we live in, our school and family environment, financial status, upbringing, religious beliefs, interactions with friends, work experiences, the constant, conscious and unconscious observation of the world around us, shape our personality, thoughts and actions. All these make each one of us unique and dissimilar from each other.

It is a misnomer that diversity is only about gender. It includes today’s multi-generational workforce, the LGBTQIA+ spectrum, people with disabilities, veterans from armed force backgrounds joining corporates, people from varied socioeconomic backgrounds, and much more. It is also about cross-border cultural diversity in a global economy when we work with professionals from across countries and geographies.

When we set out to build a diverse team, we form a team with members from various genders, backgrounds, geographies, cultures, and ages; as a result, we build a team which has members with different skillsets, strengths, opinions, and ideas. The diversity of the group brings varied perspectives and context to the team. As a professional, in all our experiences, we want to belong or lead such a group as such an amalgamation assures collective and superior results for the team. Now that we have a diverse set of people on the team, do we start seeing efficiencies and top performance automatically? It is not that simple. This leads us to what the word “inclusion” brings into the mix.

## **Inclusion—Inclusion Means to Feel or Be a Part of Something**

Many of us want to feel part of one team, group, or association. The answer lies in leveraging a diverse team’s differences, strengths, and skillsets and making it click. To make this work, every person on the team needs to respect, trust, and work together. It is crucial that we have an environment where people can be open, ask questions, put forward ideas for discussion, and share work and deliverables. The culture we build within the team, every small action, gesture, and communication by

every leader and member alike will determine the outcome and efficiency of the work they do together. When we have an open environment where we accept everyone for who they are, they can feel like they are a part of the team. Inclusive behavior is about how we understand, empathize, and support professionals' diverse needs with the right spirit. Let us look at some scenarios and examples to understand this better.

When we have employees in the group, and some of them have younger children and need to be available at home at certain fixed times, is the entire team flexible to adjust schedules to support the professional? Are leaders mindful when extending opportunities for growth or travel to all employees alike? Are there biases related to life events when assigning work or rating performance? This bias could very well be toward male employees who may be occupied with family or elder care who need some flexibility.

Another common question we hear is—What does sexual orientation or gender identification have to do with inclusion? We can answer this question easily when we apply it to ourselves and who we are. As individuals, can we give our best at work if we are not free to express and be who we really are? People generally find it very stressful to “watch” what they say and “be” who they are. For example, as a woman professional, if I am unable to identify myself as a “woman” at the workplace, I would be force-fitted to act and behave like the other gender. How comfortable would I feel? Would I be happy and productive in a workplace where there is bias toward my gender or my preferences are ridiculed? Societal acceptance and bias have been the greatest barriers for the LGBTQIA+ community and their progress. These biases affect the way we interact with our team members. This makes the community uncomfortable to express themselves and bring their best to work. Are we encouraging an environment within the team where everyone is comfortable with their identity and know that they are respected for their skills and performance, not judged for their life choices and preferences? In the PWD context, as working professionals, if we are not aware of the appropriate behavior, questions, or support I can provide to a PWD co-worker, can we work as a team effectively? Are we mindful to not judge their abilities and capabilities based on their disabilities?

With multiple generations working together, are we biased when assigning work to specific age groups and roles? Are assumptions related to age and experience playing up when we intend to collaborate and seek ideas? When we have veterans from armed force backgrounds leading teams, are we assuming the stereotype that they would be dictatorial? Are we ignoring the strengths brought in by the professional and only looking at them with the assumptions we have formed about specific cohorts?

Many organizations are now sensitizing their workforce to aspects of LGBTQIA+ and PWD allyship, to help strengthen inclusive culture and behavior. There is emphasis on sense of belonging and all-inclusive behaviors. Each one of us can give our best at our place of work if we are able to express ourselves freely and feel confident, respected, and valued for who we are. Most of what we just examined here are softer aspects of building relationships and teamwork. Not always quantifiable, but extremely important to achieve the metrics we set out to. Diversity and inclusion are generally viewed as just important words seen in vision and mission statements, strategies, and priorities. We seldom realize that they translate and form a basis for

our behavior and every interaction; they determine success for us and our teams largely.

We briefly analyzed the terms diversity and inclusion and what they mean to us; now let us look at how diversity and inclusion impact various factors and business outcomes for any organization.

## **The Business Case for Diversity and Inclusion (Why D&I?)**

In our country, we know that the primary groups underrepresented in the workforce are from the women, PWD, and the LGBTQIA+ community. We also have armed force veterans actively looking to join the corporate workforce. Most business objectives, especially in countries like India, talk about diversity metrics and set targets to include diverse groups of professionals. It is natural for any of us (gender/background agnostic) to wonder, what difference does it make if I get more women, veterans, PWD, or LGBTQIA+ representation to my team?

It is hard to rebut the argument—it is easier to find skillset and competency in the widely available talent pool and challenging to find the same from the underrepresented groups.

### ***Profitability and Market Performance***

We cannot contest the fact that organizations which are diverse have better profitability and market performance. As leaders, one would agree that a key driver for financial performance is to develop strong bonds with a broad group of clients, coupled with aligned organization strategies year after year. A diverse network of leaders and employees within any organization would mean information regarding a broader clientele and a strong strategy I.

According to a McKinsey\* report on D&I published in 2020, from data sets encompassing 15 countries and 1000 large firms, research shows that companies with better ethnic and cultural diversity are **37%** more likely to have financial returns above their industry medians. Companies with gender diverse executive teams are **25%** more likely to have above-average profitability than others. Also, the greater the representation, the higher the likelihood of outperformance. Companies with more than 30% women executives were more likely to outperform less diverse organizations by **47%**.

There is a widening gap between top diverse companies and the ones yet to embrace diversity. The report and many more studies establish how this gap has widened in the last 5 years and how D&I is inevitable for business success. Clear business benefits from healthy D&I practices have led organizations globally to make it their board room priority and agenda. While it is important to set the tone at leadership level and to communicate to the entire organization strongly, implementation

and action at all levels are key to success. Any priority is successful when followed in letter and spirit across the enterprise.

### ***Untapped Talent Pool***

A quick search on the Internet shows that out of the approximate 7.8 billion world population (year 2020), women form 50.8% and people with disabilities form 15%. In today's world, where we have high competition in the market to hire and retain high performing talent, the underrepresented talent pools are a huge area of opportunity.

There is a pool of women in our society, who have taken a break from their career due to life events and want to come back to work. A good training and upskill plan which helps induct them back into the workforce will help us tap into this pool easily. The PWD community may also need learning and upskill support. Many PWD and LGBTQIA+ community groups and allied organizations in India are striving to tap this talent pool by raising awareness, running sensitization campaigns, and targeted job fairs. Veterans from armed forces actively looking for corporate jobs come with diverse leadership experience. They have the necessary foundation and skills ready to join the workforce. Induction and initial support to settling into corporates would work as a win-win for both sides. Proactive and positive partnerships with these communities and supporting allied groups provide avenues for diverse hiring from the untapped available resource pools.

### ***Hiring and Retention***

The advantage with hiring from the underrepresented sectors in India is twofold. Their interest and motivation levels are typically high. As leaders who have interacted with folks from underrepresented communities, we realize that they just need a foot in the door; they would give their best to excel given the opportunity to learn and thrive. Their success often serves as a motivation to others in the community and encourages more people from their background to follow suit.

According to a McKinsey\* report on D&I published in 2020, the focus on gender diversity and hiring programs has enabled improvements in diversity ratios by 10% in the last decade. Gender diversity in leadership positions has brought in a diverse approach to the thought leadership within organizations impacting productivity positively. In the cultural construct of India, organizations are increasingly realizing the untapped potential in the PWD and LGBTQIA+ sectors. Many organizations are also exploring the neurodiversity space which hold potential for varied skillsets and help make a true societal difference.

According to a recent Korn Ferry Survey\* on key talent trends in India, 63% of executives say their diversity programs help with employee retention. Once hired, the loyalty and engagement levels have proven to be higher than the industry average

reducing employee retention costs. Retention is high for diverse groups as they respect the flexibility, career growth opportunity, and efforts provided by the organization for their support. This brings down re-hiring and training costs for the organization effectively.

### **Diverse Hiring—Challenge Versus Opportunity**

Despite hiring targets and the push to source from diverse talent pools, we often find that hiring teams and leaders struggle to match the open job positions with available profiles from diverse communities. For example, as a technology leader, if one were to look for a product expert profile, it is always challenging to find a perfect candidate from the generic talent pool. It becomes an added complexity if one were to look for this perfect candidate from an underrepresented pool; logically speaking, the underrepresented pool is a pie of the whole.

With the right intent and slight change in perspective, leaders and organizations can turn this challenge into an opportunity. Many large corporations globally have set an example by leading the way by creating opportunities and bridging the gap in this endeavor.

Instead of looking for matching skillsets directly to open positions, many companies use the strategy to match available skills and tweak positions within their businesses to accommodate talent resource. Once hired, they then bring appropriate training, upskill, and support for the employee to settle in, improve working conditions, and attract similar talent into the company.

Due to the socioeconomic conditions in our country, individuals from underprivileged backgrounds and rural areas may not have the same learning and upskill opportunities as available to people living in big cities. If organizations could find a way to influence talent upskill in these sectors positively, these would serve as strong untapped resource pools for hire.

### ***Positive Reputation and Brand***

For any organization, being fair and providing equal opportunities to everyone at the workplace is the right thing to do. There are legal and compliance requirements that mandate non-discriminatory practices at the workplace. With a commitment to D&I from senior leadership, strategy, and vision aligned to these practices, targets, and metrics to define outcome, it establishes a positive reputation and brand for organizations.

Marketplace reputation goes a long way to attract customers, suppliers, and employees alike. It strengthens brands globally across countries and helps attract businesses. All of us aspire to join an organization that is known for its all-inclusive employee-friendly reputation. As a woman professional, I would want to explore opportunities to see more women employee and leadership representation. Allyship



and support to LGBTQIA+ community by any organization are essential to attract talent from this sector. D&I-friendly policies, support commitments, and actions are vital to building credibility for any organization.

### ***Leadership Efficiency***

Intentional, structural leadership inclusion plays a big part in the success of the organization's D&I strategy. Firstly, a diverse senior leadership team with members from various ethnic backgrounds, gender, and minority communities can serve as role models to encourage career development, equal opportunity, and growth aspects for everyone.

Senior leadership is directly accountable for the formulation and execution of any organization's strategy and vision. A diverse leadership team will ensure focus on inclusive organizational culture and help remove any existing biases in human resource systems and models. Senior leadership behavior sets an example for others to follow suit. If a leader practices D&I in letter and spirit, the team observes and follows the leader by example. When senior leaders undermine D&I as just another tick in the box initiative, it is taken lightly by the groups and subordinates. Hence, leadership commitment, leading by example, and action encourage team commitment and action.

### **Programmatic Leadership Versus All-round Empowerment**

D&I leadership is commonly led by either human resource teams or specific D&I-focused teams and leaders in many organizations. This is a structured approach to begin the journey toward D&I, where the central team works to formulate metrics and targets, build awareness through required training programs, and raise awareness on D&I for the entire enterprise. How do we then make sure every team understands and achieves metrics, attends training programs, and follows inclusive behavior?

Efficiency in D&I leadership improves when we have business leaders across the organization leading the on-ground implementation and adoption initiatives of D&I practices. Many women leaders and male allies who support gender diversity and inclusion would encourage other women to join the workforce and enhance their careers to leadership positions. A leader from the PWD community or a veteran group ally would likely help influence policy decisions to support workplace and technology changes needed to support their cohorts. A representative or an ally of the LGBTQIA+ group can influence policy formulation and support required for the community inside and outside the organization. Shared accountability and commitment from leadership help drive culture change and empowerment. This helps integrate D&I into all aspects of organizational behavior, systems, and structure.

## ***Innovation***

An environment that promotes avenues to share new ideas, without inhibition and welcomes feedback fuels Innovation. According to research (from BCG\*, Harvard Law School Forum on Corporate Governance\*), in organizations with highly diverse leadership, almost half the revenue (45%) came from products and services launched in the last three years. According to a recent Korn Ferry Survey\* on key talent trends in India, 76% of executives say that diversity and inclusion initiatives lead to greater innovation.

How does D&I fuel innovation? A diverse team helps with the understanding of broad client markets, even if one person on the team can relate to a new market segment. People with different backgrounds and experiences approach the same problem differently and propose varied solutions, increasing the odds that one of those would be successful. When a diverse team comes together, it creates a natural environment for people to speak up and contribute. There is improved endorsement of ideas and open culture when we can identify ourselves with other members in the group.

### **D&I in a Virtual Workplace—Significance and Advantages**

With the world operating virtually in the blink of an eye, owing to the pandemic in the year 2020, there is now increased significance of being empathetic, inclusive, and understanding to teams and fellow workers. As we adapted to working remotely from home full time, respect and consideration for our personal space and time, our well-being, and consideration for fellow team members and their circumstances play a key role in collective success. Apart from strengthening inclusive culture, it has also proven advantageous for D&I practices.

In India's gender diversity space, due to societal norms and constructs, women face challenges of co-location to different cities/towns post-marriage. The requirement to operate from specific office locations led to them leaving the workforce. Post-life events related to childbirth or elder care, women are often needed to spend more time at home. This resulted in women opting out of work or taking a break from their careers. Virtual and remote work has opened possibilities now to work from anywhere. Location constraints are no more a problem. Working from home has enabled flexible work hours and less commute. This has resulted in more support for women to continue their careers without a break.

PWD professionals can work from home and not depend entirely on workplaces equipped with all the facilities they would need to operate seamlessly. We know that virtual and remote ways of working have proved to be cost-effective and there would be hybrid ways of working in the future. This has setup positive ground to improve D&I practices, and organizations are actively taking advantage of the same. It has opened avenues to hire from smaller towns and cities, enabling us to make a

difference in rural and semi-urban areas. Socioeconomic diversity and inclusion of talent have become a large possibility with hybrid workplaces.

*The above factors underline why D&I serve as a vital business growth enabler, coupled with aspects of ethical, legal, and socioeconomic requirements and compliance.*

**WHERE and WHEN** does D&I apply?

No matter where we are and with whom we interact, accepting differences, valuing opinion, trust, and respect are universal principles that determine the quality of our personal lives and relationships. These apply in our workplace, informal gatherings, at home, friends, family, neighbors, and acquaintances. These form the basis of our behavior and personality in all surroundings and situations. While we have our persona based on our experiences and the way we have seen the world, if we open our minds to accept viewpoints, value, and trust people, we open avenues for great relationships.

I want to share one of my life experiences here to emphasize the above. I worked with a group of people in my apartment society to organize some fun activities for kids at an orphanage on a weekend. We made sure we gathered information on age groups of the kids and planned games and gifts accordingly. The event was very successful, and the kids had a great time.

We gave away gifts to all the kids at the end of the event as planned. To promote group culture and fun, we had bought board games and books as gifts. When we were about to leave, a small girl came running to us and mentioned that one of her friends wanted to talk to us about the event. I asked the girl to bring her friend along to which she insisted we accompany her to another room. We were already getting a lot of good feedback from the admin staff, and we could see the happiness on the faces of the kids. I was curious what the child had to say to us, so I ran along.

I walked up to the boy who seemed about 10 years old. As I walked closer, I realized why the girl had insisted me to accompany her there. He was visually challenged and had a cane rested alongside his chair. I immediately sat down and held his hand. He first thanked us for the event and then asked me if I knew any bookstore where he could find something to read or play with in Braille. He was learning Braille, and such books and games would help him. I was taken aback for a moment when I heard this from him. We had planned everything for the event with no information about any of the children with disabilities. We never thought we should plan something different for them. We learnt a great lesson on **inclusion and empathy** that day. Thereafter, we made sure we worked with the orphanage in advance to plan activities and gifts which would be meaningful and fun for “all” groups of kids.

*Often, we assume that diversity and inclusion apply only to workplaces; we have all the knowledge and training in the area. This incident underlined the importance of being intentionally inclusive and applying the tenets of D&I in every situation and action.*

**WHO** needs to lead or practice D&I?

Considering the above example, who do you think should have been mindful and intentional about the children with disability in the organizing committee?

If we create the psychological safety where there is no hesitation for anyone to suggest or share an idea, the thought from any of these folks would have helped us plan better. In this case, this was a voluntary team working for a social responsibility event, with no hierarchy or authority. Still, no one thought of this scenario. Probably, if we had a member in our group who had experience working with people with disabilities in some way, they may have suggested it.

When we spoke to the orphanage about it, they mentioned that most events happen in this manner, and no one stopped to consider about the small set of kids with disabilities who were left out. Hence, they did not think of suggesting this to us as well. Now that we insisted, they said they would be happy to partner on this and help. The child was proactive enough to share his thoughts, and we were open to his feedback. This helped us move forward in the right direction.

The takeaway here is that no one intended to exclude that group of children. And now that we knew what we needed to change; we would make amends. Hence, irrespective of levels, roles, age, or authority must be intentional, be open to feedback, be courageous to share our opinion, and be passionate about action.

Suppose we extrapolate the situation above to a business context, it speaks to the fact that a diverse team with varied backgrounds and experiences would help us understand client markets better, design products and services to suit a varied client base, and how we can become pioneers to meet unique client and market demands.

*In an organizational context, it is very easy to attribute D&I accountability, commitment, and behavior to specific groups, leaders, or management levels, whereas it is each of us who play a role in building the culture of D&I across the organization.*

*The other important aspect is not to assume intentionality of behavior. We all know that each of us is biased based on our backgrounds and experiences and may play up in interactions. If they do, the key is to have positive conversations and accept feedback. By doing so, teams acknowledge each other, rather than getting caught up in blaming each other or externalizing problems. This will lead to a happy work environment.*

*When we promote an open culture to speak up and share, we fuel the organization progress.*

## **How Do We Practice Inclusive Behavior Effectively?**

Well, D&I indeed makes business sense. Now we understand it is essential for success and we must practice it everywhere. As a professional working for any organization or establishment, how can I be inclusive and practice D&I tenets effectively? There is a hack to inclusive behavior that I would like to share with all of you.

Emotional intelligence is regarded as a highly necessary leadership trait and in interpersonal relationships. Humility and respect are closely linked to emotional

intelligence. They form the core of inclusive behavior. In every interaction, personal and professional, we must ask ourselves if we are humble and respectful.

Are we humble enough to listen to other's perspective without bias or judgment?

Are we seeking views from everyone around the table?

Are we respectful to others opinions?

Are we respectful and understanding to people and their situations during times of stress?

Are we conscious of our bias related to backgrounds, identities, and gender?

Are we letting these affect the deliverable and business outcome?

When we walk into a building, how we treat the door attendant, or the front desk professional reflects how inclusive we are in our interactions with others. While in a meeting, if we observe someone talking over another person when they are trying to express their view, are we mindful enough to call that out and give the person a chance again?

There is a misconception that we know it all once we have some corporate work experience or we read and learn about D&I. It is incredible to see how we are challenged about this time and time again with new experiences and learnings when we open our minds. The key is to realize that all of us are biased somehow and there is constant opportunity to learn and get better. Humility to learn and practice helps us become more inclusive professionals.

*If all of us understand the business benefits and outcomes of D&I and realize how our consistent daily behaviors are critical to the success of D&I, we can become change agents and ambassadors in moving the needle forward in this space. As a woman leader today, I have benefited from acts of inclusion throughout my journey. As individuals and leaders of tomorrow, it is our responsibility to pay it forward and make a difference.*

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**Ranjani Vijayaraghavan** is a technology leader at the Deloitte US India offices at Hyderabad. She has 23+ years of multi-functional experience in the technology and information security domain. Prior to joining Deloitte, she has worked with multinational companies such as Infosys, Goldman Sachs, and DXC Technology and is a certified cyber security expert.

Apart from her role as a technology business leader, she has been an active champion in the DE&I space throughout her career. She has led multiple internal and external initiatives for diversity and inclusion. She is an active contributor within organizations like NASSCOM, NHRD, and AnitaB to promote women in technology and women safety-related projects.

# Diversity and Inclusion—A Key Business Strategy



Nayan Mitra and Khushboo Mehta

Diversity and Inclusion is a top-to-bottom business strategy—not just an HR program.  
—Josh Bersin, Bersin by Deloitte

**Abstract** The concept of diversity and inclusion is no longer merely a lip service of the human resource function, but a deeper strategic decision underlined in the policy of the organization, owned and led by the top management team. It is a win–win for both the organization within as well as externally to its various stakeholders. This paper aims at understanding the various concepts of diversity and inclusion the world over as well as specifically in the Indian context and focuses on documenting few case studies—both international and Indian. Each case study depicts how the companies have progressed over the years in including more and more diverse workforce and benefitting out of it.

**Keywords** Diversity and inclusion · Responsible leadership · Strategy · Policy · Implementation · Sustainability

## Introduction

The term diversity and inclusion has gained momentum in recent times as the world became a global village, migration for a better life became an accepted norm and the rapid penetration of the Internet in the remotest corner of the world became a necessity. This created increasing pressure on the organizations to think out of the box, speak the language that the customers want to hear, respect and embrace differences, and thereby cater to a large target audience across the globe. In other words, organizations faced increasing pressure to compete in a global market with diverse customers (DeSimone & Werner, 2011). This gave rise to the need to just and

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N. Mitra (✉)

Founder-Director, Sustainable Advancements (OPC) Private Limited, Kolkata, India

K. Mehta

New Delhi, India

equitable employment which paved the way for responsible employers to consciously accommodate and encourage diversity and inclusion in their workforce.

However, the concept of diversity and inclusion (D&I) went a step ahead than just a human resource function; it translated to a strategic function. Green (2009) observed that valuing diversity and having a diverse workforce is not just morally correct but makes great economic sense, as it could be a key component of effective people management to improve workplace productivity.

### ***What is Diversity and Inclusion?***

Interestingly, while they are almost always mentioned together, they have very different connotations. Diversity has been described by Hays-Thomas and Bendick (2013) as “the mixture of attributes within a workforce that in significant ways affect how people think, feel, and behave at work, and their acceptance, work performance, satisfaction, or progress in the organization”. Inclusion, on the other hand, refers to “the degree to which an employee is accepted and treated as an insider by others in a work system” (Pelled et al., 1999). A latest article in Gallup’s *Workplace* magazine defines the difference between **Diversity and Inclusion**: “Inclusion has to be understood as very different from Diversity because simply having a wide roster of demographic characteristics won’t make a difference to an organization’s bottom line unless the people who fall into any one demographic feel welcomed. Inclusion refers to a cultural and environmental feeling of belonging” (Washington & Patrick, 2018). Examples of diversity would include but not restrict to appreciating those differences in terms of demographics and beyond.

Inclusion, on the other hand, results in a cultural and environmental sense of belongingness as inclusive cultures foster values and innovation by accepting individuals for who they are and what they believe in. Inclusiveness ensures that every voice is duly heard and acknowledged which would remove all barriers, discrimination and intolerance at a workplace. In fact, Inclusion plays an important role “at the heart of the global sustainable development agenda, i.e. to leave no one behind” (United Nations, 2019). According to Gallup’s research, some of the requirements that need to be considered as an inclusive culture are that employees are treated with respect and that they are valued for their strengths (Washington & Patrick, 2018).

A study from Deloitte observed that organizations with inclusive cultures have a clear advantage over those that do not. For example, organizations with inclusive cultures are (Bourke & Dillon, 2018):

- Two times more likely to exceed financial targets
- Three times more likely to be high-performing
- Six times more likely to be innovative and agile
- Eight times more likely to achieve business outcomes.



However, the practice of D&I in workplace is not automated. It is a carefully crafted strategic decision backed by a strong implementation plan. Pedulla (2020) mentions some of the key elements to be considered for D&I as follows:

- (a) Collect, count, and compare change over time and in comparison, to other organizations;
- (b) Deploy alternative complaint systems like the Employee Assistance Plans (EAPs), Ombud's offices, and transformative dispute resolution systems;
- (c) Test for biased technology with an eye to screening out discrimination and then checking for it on the back end;
- (d) Beware of the small-N problem by increasing the representation of particular groups;
- (e) Involve managers from the start in the design process to increase buy-in and smooth implementation, making interventions more sustainable and long-lasting.

As is with all strategic decisions, the onus lies on thoughtful and engaged leadership in order to make the D&I strategy work and leave a significant impact on company culture and the workplace. Majorly six traits have been identified to become an inclusive leader—"Commitment, Courage, Cognizance of bias, Curiosity, Cultural intelligence and Collaboration" (Bourke & Dillon, 2018). This would mean celebrating differences, showing respect for all employees and looking out for opportunities to share leadership with people from underrepresented groups. In order to foster D&I, organizations need to enhance recruitment and retention strategy of key talent and catalyze innovation. That is why, D&I initiatives need to be incorporated in leadership development and workforce engagement processes. "Empirical research has shown that when leaders solicit and appreciate employee input, it helps create work climates that are high in psychological safety" (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006).

### *Examples of Diversity and Inclusion Policies Worldwide*

Let us look at some of the companies that have recently consciously upgraded their D&I policies. However, with these examples, we neither endorse nor criticize policies, merely state them as examples where certain companies have reported their D&I policies and/or reports publicly:

- (a) **Facebook:** As per the latest annual diversity report (2020) by Facebook, it has been indicated that, over a period of time, there has been an improvement in the representation of women in the company that includes but not limits to Black and Hispanic women. However, its long-term objective of having at least 50% workforce from underrepresented groups is yet to be achieved by 2024. In fact, by the year 2020, the percentage has risen to 45.3 per cent compared to 43 percent in 2019 (The Verge, 2020).

- (b) **Sodexo:** Diversity of different nationalities, gender, age is an integral part of Sodexo Benefits and Rewards Services. About 45% of Sodexo's managers and 53% of all employees are women at senior development level. In Mexico, Sodexo Benefits and Rewards Services is focused on empowering marginalized communities by creating opportunities for them. This is done with the help of Inroads, a local non-governmental organization (NGO). Young talent from low-income families works at Sodexo four hours a day under the guidance of a mentor and attains rigorous training for community service programmes. Another initiative, INLASO, focuses on disabled/differently abled people, while in Mexico, there is no specific quota scheme to incentivize companies to appoint this target group. But now, an awareness campaign has been initiated within Sodexo and a local recruitment agency, Manpower, hires such people. Similarly, in Tunisia (North Africa), Sodexo offers financial and practical aid for Foundation against Exclusion (FACE) in order to assist the human resource departments of various corporations in incorporating gender equality by conducting various recruitment events.
- (c) **Unilever:** Alan Jope, Chief Executive Officer, CEO, says "Diversity and Inclusion is one of the three things that we want Unilever to be famous for". This statement translates to Unilever ensuring that its operations are fair, attractive, and retain the best talent and assisting them to unfold their full potential. In order to ensure this, the list of eight changes that they have been included in their strategy are as follows:
- a. Leading change from the top: Unilever incorporates a Global Diversity Board that includes senior leaders to be accountable for creating diversity and inclusion strategy, giving direction and acting as a catalyst for action. Enhancing gender representation is already written into their yearly business and development targets.
  - b. Improving numbers and culture at the same time: A more holistic approach is recognized by using data on current and historical challenges to set stretching targets for every market and function within Unilever. The Unilever Leadership Executive checks progress against these targets every month.
  - c. Un-stereotyping business and brands: This means to un-stereotype the workplace to shatter conventional norms as 60% of women, and 49% of men believed that existing stereotypes held them back at work.
  - d. Addressing unconscious bias: A metric "Gender Appointment Ratio" looks at the record of senior leaders over a five-year period measuring how many men they had hired compared with the number of women hired.
  - e. Offering better support for new parents: Initiatives such as Global Paternity Leave Standard and Global Maternal Wellbeing standard enable new fathers to take three weeks paid and 16 weeks paid maternity leave, respectively.

- f. Flexible working hours: All employees are entitled to ask for flexible working, granting them more control over how, when and where they work.
  - g. Addressing tricky hot-spots: In order to build proactive talent pipelines, development of existing female leaders and working with recruitment specialists in supply chain is taken into account.
  - h. A shift in senior positions: Female representation in Vice President has improved from 17% in December 2015 to 30% in December 2018.
- (d) **Bumble:** Whitney Wolfe Herd founded Bumble in Austin, Texas, United States of America (USA), the dating app where women make the first move. Bumble has 85% of the employees and 80% of the executive team as women. It has generated USD37 million in revenue from the App Store and Google Play in the first quarter of 2019. The company also offers flexibility at work, generous parental leave policies and fully funded health care.
- (e) **Genentech:** The USA-headquartered biotechnology company, Genentech, commits to inclusive culture as 54% of its employees are women and 41% of its executives are women. The company has a six-point plan for gender balance that includes merit- and performance-based systems to ensure equity, career and work flexibility to retain employees, as well as visible senior leadership support.
- (f) **23 and ME:** The Consumer DNA testing company founded by Anne Wojcicki in Sunnyvale, California, USA, has a true gender balance with 51% women share. About 42% of the leaders, at director-level and above, are women. Also, this women-tech company provides 16 weeks paid maternity and paternity leave.
- (g) **Pinterest:** Pinterest, headquartered in San Francisco, USA, has 47% of employees as women, including 30% of its engineers. It focuses on hiring more women engineers.

### *Diversity and Inclusion Practices in India*

In developing countries, such as India, the idea of diversity has become more relevant owing to rocketed globalization, demographic shift in societies, and transition in labour markets (Kundu, 2003; Kundu et al., 2015). However, India has a markedly different societal context for diversity from Western countries and is one of the most diverse nations in the world (Sowell, 2002). The country must address a range of diversity issues, including age, education, religion, caste, socially disadvantaged (e.g. scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other deprived classes), gender, language, regional background, ethnicity, economic well-being, and lifestyle (e.g. vegetarian vs non-vegetarian) (Som, 2007; Ratnam & Chandra, 1996). This is indeed a challenge. Moreover, when organizations define the term diversity and inclusion, it generally includes inclusion of women and people with disabilities. While sexual minorities

are mostly overlooked as they neither avail any benefits from inclusive policies nor become the part of the diversity pool.

Till recently, there has been a rising trend of visible investments introduced by Indian companies to contact lesbian, gay, bisexual, transexual, queer, and ally (LGBTQ+ buyers. As per the report by Forbes taken from Now Consulting, a marketing consultancy expert in this area, nowadays, companies are getting an advantage to be perceived as LGBT friendly, as the discretionary income of this growing 30 million strong adult community with yearly earnings amounted to 1.5 trillion Indian rupees (Chari & Vohra, 2015). But recent report by Philip & Soumyaja (2019) demonstrates the fact that transgendered people are often ignored at work in India and face social exclusion, marginalization and stigma. Throughout their working lives, they also face hurdles pertaining to their career choices starting from the recruitment and selection process till the time they continue to work.

Some of the selected examples of Indian corporations and multinational companies operating in India embracing D&I have been documented as under.

### ***Wipro—A Global Information Technology, Consulting, and Outsourcing Company***

The global information technology (IT) company with over 1.5 hundred thousand employees, Wipro strongly advocates for diversity and inclusion in the workforce. In order to promote D&I, senior teams at leadership positions have taken an initiative to publish blogs and mentor young women employees in the organization. The diversity and inclusion (D&I) programme, at Wipro formally launched in 2008, focuses on four aspects—gender, disability, nationality, and disadvantaged communities. Firstly, to ensure gender diversity, men are also equally included in gender-related initiatives. For example, mentors in the “WOW Mentorship programme for high potential women employees” are senior male employees. **Moreover, life stages of women are also considered like initial years are focused on learning, while the middle stage is more on flexibility and organizational support and last stage is to make an impact on the organization.** The percentage of women employees in the senior management level has risen to 22 per cent from 2014.

For disabled/differently abled community, “Winclusive”, a vibrant community has been created to further discuss the employee’s accessibility. For example, Wipro’s social media platform, Yammer, is able to connect people and share updates in the disability sector. Also, Wipro has joined hands with several NGOs and conducts job fairs in assisting disabled communities to find job opportunities and provides tools and training to work in the IT industry. For disadvantaged communities, Wipro’s rural BPO centre was launched in Manjakkudiin, Tamil Nadu, in 2011 as a tie up with Swami Dayananda Education Trust. This centre has been able to generate employment for 150 employees in the first three years. To counteract societal biases and cultural biases, increased awareness and gender sensitization workshops and sessions

are conducted on the inclusion of persons with disabilities (PwD). Moreover, Wipro also collaborated with universities in rural areas to harness talent from rural communities and tie up with NGOs to provide skill training to underprivileged people. To promote sensitivity towards different cultures, it has tools such as Global smart and Onsite Readiness Program focusing on cultural sensitivity.

## Vodafone

One of the world's largest telecommunications companies, Vodafone Group Plc., even as a stand-alone company before merging with India, strived to work for the welfare, health, and wellness of its employees and partners involved. Vodafone joined hands with the social sector to address India's most pressing challenges such as increasing women participation in the workforce, hiring disabled people to name a few. To promote D&I at Vodafone, a module on inclusive leadership and unconscious bias was firstly introduced to bring a change in the mindset. Women for non-conventional roles were hired under the Project Shakti Program. Project "Samridhi" was introduced to promote women empowerment in Haryana by developing entrepreneurial skills. Through initiatives such as Project Drishti, Vodafone India tied up with the National Association of Blind (NAB) to employ blind people for their call centres in Mumbai. **Also, to enhance gender diversity, Vodafone focused on maternity leave workplace safety for women among many other policies.**

## Capgemini

Having a global presence in over 40 countries, Capgemini has embedded D&I as a strategic intervention to promote innovative, inclusive, and creative solutions. Their vision is to hire the best of talent from varied backgrounds, build collaboration for diversity, equity, and inclusion. In order to advance gender equality, it focuses on four pillars, viz. recruit, develop, retain, and promote. This includes inclusive employment policies and benefits and employee network groups to create equal opportunities in the workplace.

WinspirE for advancing gender balance and OUTfront for LGBTQ+ inclusion are some of the initiatives which are strong foundations of diversity and inclusion, as embraced by Capgemini. This programme helps in providing equal growth opportunities and better working conditions for all women employees to achieve their career aspirations. Also, to promote diversity in its truest sense, multiculturalism is adopted to benefit from a diverse mix of cultures and ethnicities and gives equal importance to the happiness and well-being of employees in the workplace. Another initiative CAPtivate assists women employees to address their professional gap and offers guidance to bring back talent pool back into the workforce. As part of their

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme, gender balance initiatives for people with disability and LGBTQ+ community among others are also included.

At Capgemini India office, women employees account for 35% of the workforce. It supports women leadership programmes that inspire women to take higher risks, experiment, and build communities of support and challenge. Capgemini India has been awarded the Economic Dividends for Gender Equality (EDGE) Certification in recognition of their commitment towards gender inclusivity.

It is not just the larger companies with huge portfolios that are directing their energies towards promoting D&I; newer and smaller organizations are also setting their paths right by early identification and commitment to D&I cause as under.

## **Vindhya Infomedia**

Vindhya Infomedia founded in 2006, headquartered in Bangalore, boasts of a state-of-the-art Global Delivery Centre across four locations in Bangalore and Hyderabad. Its Centre of Excellence has thirteen years of leadership in the market providing high-quality business process outsourcing (BPO) solutions for complex to multinational, transnational companies in microfinance, telecom, banking, insurance, retail, and government sectors. Vindhya has over 1400 staff of which 50% are women and 50% with physical disability. One day as Pavithra sat near a window looking outside, she saw a physically disabled boy trying to cross the road and that was the trigger. Vindhya that was jointly started by Pavithra and her husband Ashok has consciously brought in a culture of change. They have employed women and people with physical disability and helped them to be financially independent and voice their opinions.

Gradually, she convinced their clients that the employing PwD comes with an added advantage of higher efficiency, quality work, and higher productivity. During the pandemic, Vindhya facilitated the Government Helpline desk for migrant workers. They were also entrusted by the government to manage the command centres which helped in arranging for testing for Covid, arranging ambulances, reaching them to the nearest hospital, ensuring medical care for home quarantined patients, support in retesting them till they get negative and return to their homes. Vindhya with its team of physically disabled team came out strongly to support the government and its people. FY 2020–21 will see Vindhya employing more than 5000 people with additional centres across the country. Pavithra has been felicitated by various organizations in the last few years like “2009 TATA—Stree Shakti for enabling women Entrepreneurs”.

## **Meesho**

Bengaluru-based Meesho—which literally means “Meri Shop” (my shop)—provides potential entrepreneurs with a virtual shop. The social commerce platform has created

an alternate distribution channel by helping housewives, young mothers, aspiring entrepreneurs, students, and teachers to launch, build, and promote their online businesses who were earlier held back by lack of capital. Meesho, the Facebook-backed social commerce enabler, says it has empowered more than 2,000,000 Indians to become entrepreneurs with zero capital over the years. Of these, 70% are women entrepreneurs. According to Vidit Aatreya, Founder and CEO of Meesho—“These are the first-generation women entrepreneurs leading the social commerce revolution in India”, As a result, these women become financially independent and have their own professional identity. This is also proving to empower women at large. For example, one of the West Bengal natives, Susmita Bardhan, has managed to pay 80% of the down payment for her dream home. She is paying the remaining instalments with her monthly profits. This social-selling platform wants to grow its community of women entrepreneurs and social commerce leaders beyond metros and tier I cities and to be inspired by entrepreneurial minds.

## Conclusion

The conversations around diversity and inclusion have begun the world over and have also percolated in India both among the MNCs as well as companies of Indian origin. However, it is not strong enough. It has to be a policy decision, owned and led by the top management team (TMT) and monitored by a dedicated diversity and inclusion manager to monitor, evaluate and enforce corporate standards pertaining to diversity, tolerance, and inclusion. D&I policies are strategic decisions that make a company richer in its resources, versatility, creativity, and out of the box thinking. Moreover, it brings about a culture of mutual respect that transcends to the external audience as well, thereby positively impacting its’ financial in form of bigger markets and non-financial performance in terms of enhanced image and reputation. Most importantly, diversity and inclusion caters to the sustainable development goals or the global goals which aim at “leaving no one behind”.

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# Diversity and Importance of Diversity and Inclusion in the Education System



Sujata Shahi

By education I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man-body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education or even the beginning.  
—Mahatma Gandhi

**Abstract** Diversity and inclusion is one of the most crucial parts of our education system. It adds value and purpose to teaching. Dictating the emphasis paid on equality and liberation, the message that gets conveyed is love, respect and equity that by all means will be practiced and preached. Out of many known benefits, one of the major advantages is the confidence that gets spurred up in the eyes of our nation builders when they know that they are accepted and not discriminated. The article talks about the importance and relevance of diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, it also speaks on how to effectively practice and incorporate some of the widely known and acceptable strategies that'd ensure that it is not just the concept that is told but it could be practiced too. The main emphasis placed in the entire article is to convey the message to everyone within the education system to now gear up and change some of the traditional ideas and teaching methods. While doing so, and learning the newest ways, as mentioned, would give a new direction and meaning to what already existed but was not stressed on so much.

**Keywords** Diversity · Inclusion · Education system · New teaching method

Diversity and inclusion are essential parts of education sector and are also one of the way we add purpose and value to our life by ensuring that unanimity is retained. Our Indian values wholeheartedly talk about respect: respect we hold for ourselves, respect we hold for each other, respect we have for diversity and respect we have for the future. Diverse population of India with the largest democracy in the world makes discussion of diversity in the education sector a prime objective. It seems quite relevant to change the education system to complement the country's economic

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S. Shahi (✉)  
Vice Chancellor, IILM University, Gurgaon, India  
e-mail: [sujata.shahi@iilm.edu](mailto:sujata.shahi@iilm.edu)

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scheme. And the first step effort is evident in our new education policy that focuses on diversity and inclusiveness in education system.

As per the data extracted from The Hindu, “India has one of the youngest populations in an ageing world. By 2022, the median age in India will be just 28, compared to 45 in Western Europe, 49 in Japan and 37 in China and the US”. India being the country with maximum number of individuals travelling for education be it within the interstate or intercountry, the higher education institutes are now expected, more than ever to cater to societal diversities and be inclusive in every ways. And the intention is purely to make the nation more symbolic, recognised known for its diversities. Intriguing question arises about the gender diversity especially in few of the stream of education like STEM. Have we ever thought about the aspects that exclude women in STEM subjects? Is gender a barrier? Our society benefits from including a good proportion of differently abled population. Are our HEIs inclusive towards them?

We all are the witness about diversity in number of languages spoken in India and scripts being used in India. But have we thought about how our HEIs ensure to incorporate this richness and amalgamation of language diversity into its systems and processes so smoothly? These questions later manifest us to ponder the notion on “diversity and inclusion” in higher education. Hence, our country India which is a nation known for its diverse population should appropriately respond and reflect by being inclusive, thus depicting the rich culture and social diversity.

## **What is Inclusion and Diversity in Education System?**

One general viewpoint that one might think that inclusion and diversity in education system are only limited to culture and race. But now, it includes facets of gender issues, sexual orientation, physical and mental disability. Simply by the virtue of the question stated above, inclusion and diversity in education system by all mean including “all” in the education body despite of any societal classification whatsoever. And to further understand, respect and acknowledge that humanity is above all and the right to education is inherited by all. And to also make the stance clear that no discrimination will or should be entertained within the sacred educational institutes and premises.

## **Why is It Important?**

Education, inclusion and diversity are three words invariably used in the field of education, proposing it as a thoughtful notion that wholly promotes equality. The idea of inclusion and diversity instils amongst students and education body system a sense of “oneness”. Each year, thousands of students move to different schools and universities without thinking of the culture, race, caste, religion, etc., they belong to,

with just the idea of practising their right to education. Hence, it is the duty of the education system to ensure that their rights are preserved and is justifiably endured.

Schools and universities nowadays promote inclusion and diversity with the goal ascertaining the education is for all, and it should be imparted to all with no discrimination whatsoever. This not only helps the fellow students understand the concept of unanimity, but it further allows and lets them to understand that they all belong to the same community despite of society's created system such as religion, caste and race. The objective behind promoting inclusion and diversity is just to ensure that the future adults are civically interconnected and engaged, so that they recognise that despite of the society labelled classification they all function together in the same world. Teaching equality is believed to imbibe in young kids the concept of fairness, justice and equality allowing them to understand that everybody matters, everybody's opinion matters and in no way the person should be separated and distinguished from the society. It is believed that the idea of promoting fairness, equality and justice amongst students through diversity and inclusion complements well with the education system and creates more education and employment opportunities for students who learn well from the beginning in the concept of "oneness" and "togetherness". Several benefits of inclusion and diversity in the education system have been duly recognised as follows:

- Helps students understand that despite of them staying in societal stratified distinctions based on caste, colour, creed, religion, etc., they are still living under one world.
- Sense of belongingness, cohesiveness and team work is more readily generated and accepted if the institute promotes inclusion.
- Acceptance of norms, codes and ethics of different culture and society is understood right from the beginning, hence the students learn to adjust and adapt in all situations amongst people of diverse groups and cultures.
- Emotional, social and psychological well-being of students is enhanced and retained since they learn to function under one roof.
- Helps students to think more rationally, critically, logically and the inferences later derived are of critical and valued judgements.
- Leads to enhanced self-esteem and self-concept.
- Greater EQ is maintained and retained as students learn to indulge themselves in varied settings.

## **How is It Being Practised?**

Education inclusive of diversity and inclusion brings out the sense of self-worth in all students. With the education bodies (universities and schools) placing special emphasis on inclusion and diversity, teaching methods adopted at schools and universities are now transformed and are highly supportive of inclusion and diversity. Some specified

- **Promoting inclusion and diversity through “Gurus”**—The first and foremost thing to remember is that all children and young adults imitate and learn. Here the empirical model is for them to learn from their gurus, i.e. teachers and lecturers. The environment strictly supporting inclusion and diversity is further replicated and respected by all students. The objective is to create safe learning environment for all and to promote “oneness” amongst all.
- **Mode of communication should be “Singular”**—Spoken and written communication adopted by teachers at the education bodies should be best fitted to cater to students of different cultures and intellectual levels.
- **Using various teaching aids**—Using various teaching aids such as smart boards and audio-visuals facilitates education and further helps students in understanding a concept with more clarity and simplicity so that no student is left unattended. Further the flexibility of transformed curriculum also enables students from society and communities to not face difficulty. Diverse learning environments and teaching methods enable students to think logically and critically, thus reducing any bias.
- **Making teaching impartial**—Teaching material does not conceal, hide, leave out, exclude or omit any relevant information pertaining to any specific culture or group rather should be openly discussed without holding any prejudice and biases regarding any. Presenting any such opinion in the classroom setting can cause children to look at certain group differently which further in their life gives rise to discrimination and obstructs cohesiveness amongst people. Hence, any material taught is presented in a manner that supports objectivity rather than subjectivity.
- **Equal opportunities for all**—All students are given equal and fair opportunities and are not neglected on the basis of any preconceived notions. Equal and fair opportunities invoke a feeling of fair competitiveness and cooperation amongst all.
- **Heterogeneous groups and classes**—Heterogeneous groups and teams are formed so that all children get an equal opportunity to work with each other, understand each other’s opinions, think critically and logically and thus derive a mutual decision. Further forming heterogeneous groups and classes allow students to understand that there is no inequality or favouritism amongst people, and everyone gets an equal opportunity under one roof.
- **No to favouritism/equal treatment for all**—All students are given equal treatment. Favouritism is discouraged, and appreciation to all students is given regularly so that students are taught to value and applaud qualities and work that is beyond person’s societal demarcation.
- **Extra classes and tutorials**—Extra classes and tutorials are regularly organised especially for students who struggle in coping up with the regular class due to any reason such as language barrier and slow processing time.
- **Modifying the syllabus**—An effective way of promoting inclusion and diversity is to modify syllabus for the ones who might find it difficult to cope with regular students. The idea still lies the same that is to include all despite any barriers posed. The curriculum should thus be in sync with the diverse contexts making

all students aware of different backgrounds and diverse cultures within our society rather than one homogeneous group.

- ***Organising extra-curricular activities***—Education bodies now place great emphasis on extra-curricular activities, thus placing more emphasis on activities such as sports, debate and dance, so as to enhance talent of students who are otherwise not very academically driven. One of the other benefits of introducing extracurricular activities is to promote teamwork, leadership, decision-making, problem-solving amongst students beyond academics. Further it helps students to identify their interests and pursue them. Nowadays, universities and schools are also accepting students who perform exceptionally well in other areas such as sports and music, ensuring that education is not limited to attaining just the highest marks.
- ***Facilities at school/universities***—Modifiable/convenient facility at schools and universities can help students to explore the building and not feel left out within the campus facility. Restricted movements in certain section of the building can develop a sense inferiority amongst children and give a message of “different” to other kids.

## Reaped Benefits

Present education bodies recognise the many benefits of inclusion and diversity out of which the few highlighted ones are as follows:

- Promotes citizenship behaviour amongst students towards the nation and each other, thus enhancing the sense of acceptance for all
- Helps the children enter adulthood with an open mind rather than with tainted preconceived notions, biases, prejudice and discrimination
- Facilitates teamwork, group cohesion, leadership amongst children, and they learn this while working with diverse group
- Children further learn more about different cultures, which thus promotes creativity and a better outlook
- Through modifying teaching methods, a more responsive learning environment is created
- Children at later stages display better workplace efficiency and satisfaction
- Children learn better with other children, especially when they work in teams they tend to learn to involve in cooperate learning that is they learn that the better outcome can only be yielded when they complement each other.

## Conclusion

As desired by most educational institutes, diversity and inclusion are not as easy as it may seem. It requires a continuous two-way effort from both the students and

teachers so to ensure that it works effectively especially dealing with children of different cultures, races, backgrounds, etc. Hence, it is very important especially for teachers who are considered as “Gurus” to have a thorough understanding of the groups of children with different backgrounds of their institute.

It is the duty of teachers to quickly acquaint themselves with the culture, status, background, any implicit and explicit biases, racial awareness, etc., of the new incoming students before welcoming them, as this plays a very critical role in creating a learning environment which is free from any bias or errors and does not unintentionally also promote anything.

Hence, acknowledging children’s cultural, racial and ethnic diversity, their gender issues, sexual orientation, disabilities effectively and then modifying the teaching methods are an effective approach towards promoting inclusion and diversity effectively in educational setting. And all education institute must ensure that it is neglected and is sincerely taken care of.

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# Impact of Geography and Technology on Diversity and Inclusion Practices



**Bidisha Banerji**

**Abstract** This chapter brings into focus the need for a nuanced approach to the concept of diversity and inclusion in organizations. Diversity is context specific, region specific and country specific—a fact if ignored can lead to a scenario of unmet targets and dissatisfied workforce. Technology has the potential to play the role of a big enabler and has the power to widen the ambit of potential employees—in terms of both incorporating new groups and integrating new regions. The impact of geographical diversity and role of technology on D&I are illustrated by a case study of a global IT/ITES firm and looking at its worldwide global practices and challenges in India. The case study analysis reveals that leadership plays a significant role in mitigating barriers to promoting D&I in organizations and setting the agenda for the future workforce.

**Keywords** Geographic diversity · Technology · Leadership · IT/ITES · Board

## Introduction

Organizations today have to thrive in uncertain times with unpredictable challenges. In the globally competitive and dynamic business environment, diversity and inclusion (D&I) have become central towards the success of the organization. The term diversity itself has undergone multiple interpretations and reinterpretations overtime, and now it has come to mean inclusion as well. As the world becomes more globalized and interconnected, it is important for organizations to get a clear in-depth understanding of not just what these terms mean but also how to put them to practices and find ways to make them relevant for all stakeholders.

The term diversity refers to all the ways we differ from each other and what makes us unique. Ashton (2010) explained diversity by classifying it into two dimensions—primary and secondary. The primary dimension focusses on gender, sexual orientation, age, etc., which exhibits the main differences between different people,

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B. Banerji (✉)

Associate Professor, IILM Institute of Higher Education, New Delhi, India  
e-mail: [banerjib@gmail.com](mailto:banerjib@gmail.com)

whereas secondary dimension focusses on aspects which are not noticeable in the first encounter like geographic location, income, education, etc.

Overtime, along with diversity, inclusion has been added and although companies are increasingly becoming aware about diversity and inclusion worldwide, they still face difficulty in drawing the lines between the two. Inclusion means combining and harnessing diverse resources and forces together to utilize them to the best potential. It aims to put the concept of diversity into practice in the organization by creating an environment that supports different ideas, perspectives and backgrounds and helps business to achieve overall goals. It also helps employees to connect and engage better as it promotes a sense of respect, trust and associations in the organization.

These aspects of inclusion are only known after some interactions have taken place between the individuals. Yet, it is now well accepted that diversity without inclusion is not enough. In 2018, Deloitte research studies suggested a similar formula: Diversity + Inclusion = Better business outcomes. It simply signifies that the concept of diversity without inclusion is worth more when the two come together.

The dynamic labour markets around the world have led to greater workforce diversity. The demographic profile of the workers has become more diverse with gender, age, race, ethnicity, nationality and other dimensions. Farndale et al. (2015) have pointed out that this has posed new challenges for human resource professionals and business heads of organizations. In the traditional system, organizations while addressing the issues of equality and inclusion were mainly concerned with employment rules and regulations, disparity in compensation, managing expatriates and cross-cultural diversity. However, the scenario is changing with rapid globalization. All these have made geographical dimension an important area of study in any discussion on diversity and inclusion from both national and global perspectives.

Due to rapid technological progress and the impact of COVID-19, the role of technology in influencing and supporting D&I across organizations has become extremely relevant. The advancement of technology has made it easier for the organizations to implement and practise D&I. It is indeed worth exploring the role technology has played in the advancement of D&I and if it can hinder it also in any possible way.

This chapter will cover two dimensions of the diversity and inclusion discussions. The first is in the definition of the term diversity and inclusion and its many variations. The second is the impact of technology on diversity and inclusion. These two will be first explored through the existing academic literature. This will be followed by a case of a firm where the challenges of geographical diversity are highlighted and the role technology has played in it. The chapter will end with observations on the role of stakeholders in promoting mandate of D&I in their organizations.



## **Geographic Variations of D&I and Its Implications on Corporations**

With globalization, the issue of diversity and inclusion is no longer restricted to one nation. It has become a wider and more interdependent concept. There are various rules and regulations related to dynamics of diversity and inclusion which differs from country to country, depending on factors such as nature and extent of post-colonial legacy besides cultural and historical reasons. The social, historical, economic and political constructs of regions play a monumental role in shaping its societal attitudes which in turn influences D&I of organizations in those geographies.

Studies from different geographies reveal the divergence in interpretation and implementation of D&I policies. A study by Klarsfeld et al. (2014) mentions that employers in UK, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Canada need to collect data and monitor the progress of racial minority employees in the workforce to enhance equality. However, France and many other European Union countries do not allow collection of such 'ethnic' data in the name of equality. This can make it difficult to monitor the progress of the nation especially vis-a-vis other nation in the aspects of diversity and equity at workplace.

Pinheiro et al. (2015) stated the differences in the evolution of different aspects or dimensions of diversity based on different countries. For instance, gender was given precedence over origin in Nordic countries. However, in countries like India and Malaysia, ethnic or origin was given precedence over gender. Moreover, in countries like USA and UK, both gender and ethnic origin appear simultaneously in employment law.

The degree and types of legislation also differ country-wise. There are some countries which focus on anti-discrimination policies and ensure that everyone is treated equally at workplace, whereas others are focussed on affirmative or positive actions for specific groups like ethnic minorities. It is mostly observed that countries that have mandatory reporting are more likely to focus on affirmative actions than on anti-discrimination except in Australia.

In the USA, regulations related to equal employment policy and mandated affirmative actions have been there since a long period of time around the mid-1960s, even before the more voluntary concept of diversity management which emerged from the 1990s. However, in Western continental Europe, the concept of diversity management and equity started to grow since the mid-2000s.

There are various institutional pressures which play an important role in shaping employer practices leading to some convergence in diversity management practices such as pulls towards standardizing human resource management in large multinational companies. For instance, countries like Italy and Japan which are relatively homogenous in terms of race and origin have some inclusive practices at workplace as a result of globalization. The same practice is also evident in emerging economies like Russia and Nigeria. In countries like New Zealand, Australia and EU nations, trade and labour unions also played a major role in the promotion of

minority worker rights. Different social regulations related to diversity management also impact decisions of the organization in managing diversity.

Caven and Astor (2013) investigated the gender equality initiatives taken by architecture professionals in France, Spain and UK based on EU directives. It was found that despite 50% of women who entered the architecture industry in these three countries, they still represent less than 30% of registered architects (22% in the UK, 25% in France and 29% in Spain) due to environmental factors. Some similarities and differences were also found among female architects in the three countries. The similarities were related to why the respondents had chosen a career in architecture across the three countries, although only Spanish respondents reported that it was unpleasant to visit construction sites. The study concluded that the common background in all the three countries is that these initiatives almost exclusively focus on women alone and that the lack of a 'critical mass' of female architects makes such initiatives less effective.

Thus, the geographic variations in D&I preferences reveal that no two regions can be treated alike. This also poses challenges to human resources department in organizations. This challenge is exacerbated in multinational companies where the organization operates across geographies under a common umbrella. Incorporating the different interpretations of what constitutes diversity in each region has the potential to become a sore point among the many regional units.

## **The Role of Technology in Overcoming Traditional D&I Impediments**

In the current global competitive business environment, diversity and inclusion have become non-negotiable and not merely a compliance issue. Managing D&I at workplace is a complex task, however, but can be assisted by analytics and technology. To implement D&I in organizations, steps need to be undertaken properly as well as periodic assessment. Effective leadership and communication are very important to successfully implement D&I combined with technology. It is essential to create awareness and educate and engage all the stakeholders regularly towards D&I initiatives, and this can be done easily with the help of technology. Utilizing technology with D&I is also one of the best practices to keep unconscious bias away in recruitment, training, performance and compensation management practices. For example, recent studies by Wharton (2020) on elevating diversity and inclusion at the workplace suggested that to ensure fairness and equity in performance management, an organization can adapt merit-based framework with objective features which can be codified and evaluated systematically with the help of technology.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has huge potential in creating a more diverse and inclusive work environment given its ability to reduce biases and also adds an independent perspective into decision-making of the organization. AI-powered recruiting solutions can also be trained to perform objective assessments of skills and competencies.

The idea here is to bring about a transparency in the early stages of recruitment process and improving the quality of hiring. Many global companies have adopted these kinds of technology like for PepsiCo, where AI Robot Vera conducts interviews.

There are different ways in which technology can be used at workforce to eliminate both conscious and unconscious biases. According to research by RedThread-Mercer (2020), around 43% of D&I technologies focus on talent acquisition including sourcing and selection of candidates. This helps in accessing wider talent pool with diversity recruiting. There are various software applications that create job postings to attract diverse candidates. It is important to invest in various kinds of software that conducts sentiment analysis to appeal to a wider pool of candidates. The recruitment process pays little regard to the job descriptions itself. Nonetheless, they are an important determinant of an organization's overall human capital strategy and AI-powered analytics solutions can help companies to identify bias in job descriptions.

AI can also be used to reduce unconscious bias in all the important steps of employee life cycle starting from recruitment to retention to termination. It can provide clear, core leadership and technical knowledge requirements and proficiency descriptions that may be utilized across functions, systems and geographies to guarantee a consistent and objective benchmark for evaluating employees and job candidates. There is lot of recruitment software in the market offering options to analyse and screen the resumes and profiles of potential candidates to find out if they are fit for the job and the organization while reducing unconscious bias by ignoring demographic factors like age, gender, sexual orientation, geographic, etc.

Zhang et al. (2019) in their article highlighted how AI can help in reducing bias to augment diversity and inclusion. Since machines are subject to the algorithm and data build by the people making them, they do not have any inherent biasedness unlike humans. AI can play major roles in promoting D&I at workplace in dominantly two sections—one is of access of the aptly qualified candidates to job opportunities and providing assistance to all those involved in hiring in making fair and better employment decisions.

Workforce analytics is one of the new revolutions in the business industry. It can also be used to address the diversity issue at the workplace. It is an essential tool for building organizational culture that promotes D&I at workplace. It can collect data through multiple sources and provide insights on important practices like recruitment, performance management and compensation, etc. It can reveal pay gaps across the diverse workforce and can be used to treat employees fairly. Data-driven approaches like these attach real numbers to the diversity issue and help business heads and leaders to solve these issues on priority and also gain effective insights on implementation of D&I policies.

Fischman (2008) studied the impact of cultural diversity and ICT on how effectively teams perform. He found that cultural diversity had a negative influence on communication but positive influence on decision-making. Cultural diversity also had an influence on selection of communication media. ICT minimized the negative impact on intercultural communication.

Technology also helps in giving diverse aspects to recruitment marketing. Glass-door (2014) has found out that 67% of employees consider diversity an important

factor when considering companies and job offers. According to various research studies conducted in the past, diversity attracts diversity, so companies can try using this as an advantage by showing images and videos on their website that demonstrate diversity of the company and even the goals it is planning to achieve in short and long run.

Lewis et al. (2013) have highlighted in their book the technological connections between diversity leadership and the evolution of communication to cater to the needs of dynamic and multicultural business environment. The book also pointed out that the efforts in promoting diversity and inclusion at workplace are responsibility of the company as a whole rather than only the human resources team.

Technology in D&I can be used to focus on employee retention and engagement. There are different analytical tools available focussing on better employee experience. Virtual inclusion platforms are an increasingly popular option to support a diverse and inclusive workplace. This kind of technology works by granting employees the ability to share their experiences and allow their voices to be heard without any fear. Technology with D&I can also bring an ease in employee feedback process to analyse the data for any patterns.

Thus, technology has a more or less beneficial impact on D&I. This is something that human resources professionals should actively and consciously make use of when promoting their organizations' D&I mandate.

## **D&I at GLOBSYS—A Case Study**

Established in the late 1990s and headquartered on the East Coast, GLOBSYS (name changed) is a Nasdaq listed company having more than 20,000 plus professionals globally. GLOBSYS's revenue was nearing the \$1 billion mark in 2019 with a compound annual growth rate of above 15% for 2018–20. GLOBSYS provides advice and deals in a multitude of areas ranging from banking and financial services, insurance, analytics and technology. GLOBSYS is an information technology (IT)/information technology-enabled services (ITES)<sup>1</sup> firm with the presence across most continents.

ITES is a form of outsource services which involves IT in different fields like insurance, finance and banking and telecommunication. These soft skills are mainly used

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<sup>1</sup> IT/ITES or firms are usually engaged with the following processes:

- Business process outsourcing (BPO).
- Knowledge process outsourcing (KPO).
- Back office operations.
- Legal process outsourcing (LPO).
- Logistics management.
- Game process outsourcing (GPO).
- Call centres.

It also includes the services like e-CRM, medical transcription and coding, data processing, data mining, electronic publishing, etc.

in knowledge process outsourcing (KPO) sector, business process outsourcing (BPO) sector, legal process outsourcing (LPO) sector, back office job and call centres.<sup>2</sup>

The contribution of ITES sector to the growth and development of the India for profit and non-profit activities has been extraordinary. ITES industry in India has remarkably contributed to GDP, foreign exchange earnings and employment generation. NASSCOM reported in February 2020 that IT and ITES industries in India grow annually at the rate of about 25% and create nearly 2 million jobs. IT services sector garnered the highest revenue of USD 97 billion (growth of 6.7%), followed by E-commerce which stood at USD 54 billion (growth 25.6%). The sector generated exports of over USD 147 billion in revenues in FY2020, growing at 8.1% from the previous year.

In fact, according to a report by PWC (2010), Indian ITES industries are its flagship economy builder and every single rupee spent by ITES sector accounts for two rupees in Indian economy. The ITES sector is rapidly changing the overall Indian business standards. In fact, every job created in ITES sector accounts for creation of four employments in rest of the economy. With exports accounting for the predominant share in overall IT revenues, the performance of this sector is correlated with the state of global economy. The Economic Survey 2020–21 has pointed out that foreign direct investment flows into India's services sector grew at a robust 34% year to year during April–September 2020 to USD 23.6 billion. The survey also mentioned that this accounted for four-fifths of the total gross FDI inflows into India during this period, primarily driven by 'computer software and hardware' subsector. Interestingly, growth rates of global GDP and India's net software earnings have been observed moving in sync with each other.

A study by Rao and Balasubrahmanya (2017) shows that the Indian IT/ITES industry has largely been India centric—in terms of both delivery centres and human capital. Within India, the activity is currently concentrated around Bangalore, Chennai, NCR-New Delhi, Hyderabad, Pune, Mumbai and Kolkata. Besides central government intervention, state governments are trying to attract IT/ITES companies to set up development units in their states by offering them favourable business environment.

The ITES BPO industry has been renamed as 'Business Process Management' (BPM). The ITES BPO sector now not only covers transformation in the bottom line of the customer organization but also handles stop-line improvements. The key movers for outsourcing have moved beyond cost-saving to include other determinants such as sustained performance improvements, flexible access to the global talent pool

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<sup>2</sup> Some of the services offered by ITES:

- Medical transcription.
- IT help desk services.
- Document processing.
- Application development.
- Data entry and processing.
- Telecommunication services.
- Data warehousing.
- Enterprise resource planning.

and scalable organization, thus prompting organizations to re-evaluate and restructure their outsourcing strategies.

GLOBSYS was started by an Indian American, and run and managed by predominantly Indians with major offices being based out of India. The culture and workforce thus reflected the attitudes of its people and their working styles and affinities. The tremendous growth and success which the company and the people running had enjoyed since its early days had sort of eclipsed the divergence of attitudes of its employees with their external environment. While GLOBSYS would hire locally in most overseas projects, the big margins came when most of the people were based offshore, which was in India. With this as their primary revenue model, the question of integration of a diverse workforce was unnecessary.

Economic growth in India, which used to average around 4.4% a year during the 1970s and 1980s, jumped to 5.5% in the 1990s and further to 7.1% in the past one decade. The average pace of per capita growth was 5.5% a year in the last decade. More importantly, India's rate of growth has become more secure partly due to the steadiness of growth within each sector—agriculture, industry and services—and partly due to the shift of the economy towards the services sector, where growth has been more stable.<sup>3</sup> This growth has been fairly well spread across sectors with services showing the most increase, followed by industry, and less so in agriculture. This is reflected in GLOBSYS's journey which has benefitted most with the offshoring/outsourcing model of service provision.

With economic growth, education among Indian women has increased. Fertility rates have gone down, and access to water, electricity and cooking gas has expanded. Krishnan (2020) shows that women's labour force participation rate (LFPR) rose to 42.7% in 2004–05 and was 23.3% in 2017–18.<sup>4</sup> GLOBSYS too has witnessed an increase in its women workforce. This rise in the number of women in its workforce has raised issues of gender diversity and inclusion in the organization. The push towards diversity and inclusion at GLOBSYS effectively came around 2015–16 when its board members began to insist on a much more diverse workforce. A global presence mandated a global workforce, and just globalized was not enough.

Officially, GLOBSYS's initiative on diversity and inclusion initiative has tried to tackle various bottlenecks to facilitate D&I. It has a core group of senior leadership who provides guidance and oversight on the various initiatives. One of the ways it has done this is to create special focus groups of certain communities. One such focus group is for women in order to provide support and opportunities to their career advancement. It has also tried to ensure recruitment of candidates of diverse nationalities as well as of gender. A continuous programme of training and learning has been set up to create awareness and impart information.

In reality, the challenges of D&I have been different from what the formal structures at GLOBSYS had perceived. Contrary to previous notions, these challenges

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/04/india-s-remarkably-robust-and-resilient-growth-story>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.strategy-business.com/blog/As-India-advances-womens-workforce-participation-plummets?gko=762f7>.

are more deeply entrenched and perhaps most important, intractable, not just due to cultural reasons but also because of the external environment in which they are embedded. While the challenge of bringing in more diversity in the workforce may be solved by recruitment, the challenge of inclusion seems obdurate to resolve at GLOBSYS without bringing in fundamental shifts in mindsets and a concerted effort in acknowledging and understanding people who are dissimilar to those who are already there and at the helm of affairs.

- **Geographical Diversity**

There are many challenges when firms aim to make themselves more diverse. The GLOBSYS experience demonstrates that the interpretation of diversity varies across geographies and that the meaning of the term itself can vary tremendously across regions and sectors. For example, in India, gender is of topmost importance in implementing the diversity mandate, while in USA, it is primarily race followed by gender and finally sexual orientation of the employees. In Philippines, it is lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues. The analytics and business processing outsourcing (BPO) work in India which has largely spawned in the South Indian cities of Bengaluru and Hyderabad have been dominated by South Indian Brahmins. Although overtime, their workforce has become more diverse, the leadership is largely from the above-mentioned background. The metric to measure the D&I for these various groups and subgroups of people is not an easy task especially when public information on the recruitment for these groups is not easily available nor accessible across geographies.

While gender, race, sexual orientation among others are useful constructs for analysing diversity trends, it also helps to look at the core constituent of the firm in order to understand the context. GLOBSYS is a fairly homogenous company comprising primarily males of Indian origins. Against this backdrop, diversity at GLOBSYS is about balancing diverse groups of people based on primarily two criterion—gender and the ratio of non-Indians to Indians. The ratio of Indians to non-Indians is essentially about ethnicity and should be distinguished with the race issue. Hence, a broader meaning of diversity needs to be adopted here. The President and Chief Operating Officer at GLOBSYS, Mr. Anand (name changed), believes, *‘Diversity is defined in the context of your larger population’*.

Mr. Anand narrated an incident that took place during a North American client visit to the Gurugram Office of GLOBSYS. To prepare for the client visit, who was the Head of Human Resources for his firm, GLOBSYS had done a meticulous job. They had tried putting their best foot forward by including a lot of women during the meetings and discussions in order to showcase their gender diverse workforce. GLOBSYS was hoping to present a picture of a modern and diverse workforce at their Indian office. However, their efforts went in vain when the client in the end asked, *‘Why are there no African Americans?’*

This particular incident among many others demonstrates an important lesson—*diversity is totally shaped by the local environment*. The definition of what to include in diversity is always geography specific which has implications on how to structure implementation of the diversity mandate in firms.

- **Diversity across the Board**

Besides geography, diversity has to be viewed in the context of the target level for which the mandate is being implemented. Hence, benchmarking against peer group is necessary. This is especially true as one moves higher up the corporate hierarchy where the divergence between representations of various groups starts getting more skewed. At GLOBSYS too, there is divergence although there are attempts being made to strike a balance. However, contrary to conventional notions, it is not always the top level where the imbalance exists. For nightshifts at GLOBSYS, only 38% of the workforce is female. This of course is a geographic problem—concerns of safety and security issues for women returning home after their night duties in India. Mr. Sachdeva (name changed), Senior Vice President at GLOBSYS, has mentioned that now GLOBSYS is building small pods of around 10–15 workstations at convenient locations which will accord greater flexibility and perhaps more safety to its female workforce. These pods involve far lower capital expenditure, yet they enable women to travel to their workplaces round the clock since the commute time will decrease and access to local/home transportation might get easier.

Once the overall gender diversity in an organization starts improving, the question becomes what is the diversity at the really senior levels? Mr. Sachdeva has pointed out how GLOBSYS has evolved from merely looking at the overall population of its workforce to now segmenting them by certain types of jobs and levels. The Board at GLOBSYS has pointed out that greater representation needs to come especially at vice president and above levels where gender diversity is at a meagre figure of 15–20%.

- **Gender Diversity at GLOBSYS**

Mr. Anand considers gender as a proxy for a certain type of thinking. A thinking is characterized by innovation and empathy and is thus beneficial to any organization as it leads to a richer set of alternatives for making decisions. This kind of difference in thinking is important as firms start operating in different environments, and hence, they need people with different perspectives and varied experiences. Gender diversity has to permeate to the top or rather start from the top since women leaders are usually the ground breakers for other lower down the ladder. It is a widely held belief that women bosses may understand the need of other women in the workforce better since for many issues like those related to menstruation, pregnancy and childcare these women leaders may have gone through similar circumstances.

Overtime, especially due to a conscious drive in the last 3 years, gender diversity at GLOBSYS has become more balanced with the gender pay gap in their India office having almost become non-existent. The gender diversity ratio for GLOBSYS in 2004–05 was roughly around 20–25% for women to men. Recently, it has risen to 42% for women which is a jump of 70–80%. However, the pool from which certain businesses like analytics hire, which is largely from the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and Indian Institute of Management (IIM), is quite small for women. As also pointed out earlier, working at night is a big deterrent in India for women as compared to a country like Philippines where public transport and



restaurants operate through the night. In South Africa on the other hand, there is a reverse challenge. There are incentives for hiring people of colour, while a ceiling exists for hiring white people. In a way it is reverse apartheid!

Overall, the culture of the country is a significant variable. Mr. Sachdeva believes that the best D&I case for GLOBSYS has been in Philippines because of the high number of women in their workforce. He attributes this to the history of the country. Philippines was ruled by the Spanish for 200 years and then by the Americans 50 years before they got their independence. At that time, women were hired predominantly to do housework and daily chores, while men were primarily employed in the services sector, defence and agriculture. Very soon, the Americans realized that the amount of commitment and passion that the women folk actually demonstrated was significantly higher than that of men. This continued over years, and so in Philippines today, the number of male homemakers is higher than of female homemakers, which means that more Filipino women step out of the house to earn a livelihood. Thus, at GLOBSYS in Philippines, more women manage businesses, clients and services among other functions.

- **Evolving Organizational Culture**

Mr. Sachdeva also points to the fine line that separates hiring people of colour, gender, region, etc., to meet the D&I mandate and discrimination those who are best suited for the profile in question. GLOBSYS has chosen to focus on the tasks and responsibilities for the role advertised while bringing in candidates from diverse backgrounds. Going hand in hand with this is an enhanced cognizance of the external environment by sponsoring a lot of awareness programmes around the types of jobs, roles and responsibilities that exist so that there is wider outreach for the recruitment pool. The mandate is to hire a person of a diverse background for which there are well-defined procedures. Within the organization, workshops and training sessions are conducted to enhance sensitivities of everyone to the overall D&I issues.

Another way this issue was addressed was by creating a diversity and inclusion committee which is a formal committee that reports to the CEO. The committee has representations from different functions and different business units within GLOBSYS, across cross-cutting dimensions of diversity in thought, gender and race. The committee has been given the charter and is expected to play a vital role especially during recruiting. They also help in designing training programmes keeping in mind the emphasis on diversity and inclusion.

- **Technology as an Enabler**

Technology has enabled the creation of a hybrid model of work from home (WFH) and occasionally physical office to maintain an uninterrupted connection of the employees with the corporate culture. The hybrid model has enabled flexibility which women who had to take care of young children or were in nightshifts had always found missing. This has also opened the possibility of having older people especially empty nesters and thus can expand the potential employee profile. The concept of WFH especially during the COVID-19 pandemic has made less of a difference to USA where this phenomenon was already prevalent. For the software

businesses, human resources and sales work at GLOBSYS, this work was even earlier being partly conducted through home offices over the USA.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also made a dent in the disparity related to D&I. While earlier job profiles demanded 45 h a week, a full-time work commitment required the employees to come to work regularly. The flexibility that some of the potential hires at GLOBSYS requested, maybe for a 15–20 h per week schedule, was not appreciated. India was subjected to very stringent rules and regulations as well as compliances by the Department of Labour and the Department of Telecommunication to be followed in terms of working from home. The National Association of Software and Service Companies or NASSCOM, which is an Indian non-governmental trade association and advocacy group focussed mainly on information technology and business process outsourcing industry, has been making the case to the government for offering a certain level of flexibility in terms of working hours and work from home. Mr. Sachdeva pointed out that GLOBSYS has been rallying around NASSCOM which in turn presents its case to the state and the central governments that the old notion of a brick-and-mortar office is obsolete. The Indian government in November 2020 announced simplified guidelines for business process outsourcing and IT-enabled services (ITES) players to reduce the compliance burden for the industry and facilitate ‘work from home’ and ‘work from anywhere’. The new rules for ‘other service providers’ (OSPs)<sup>5</sup> would create a friendly regime for ‘work from home’ and ‘work from anywhere’ while removing several reporting and other obligations for such companies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has ushered in a new wave of flexibility, where work can happen from anywhere, so employees can potentially choose their timing of work and can work part time. The real issue with work from home is really inclusiveness—how do organizations integrate people of diverse backgrounds in a virtual mode especially when integration has been challenging even in the non-virtual mode! Moreover, acceptance of a diverse candidate is crucial as Mr. Sachdeva suggests. The right job for the candidate needs to be located within the organization, and sincere attempts need to be made to not make them unsuccessful. There is a recognition that future jobs would require a high degree of emotional quotient and thus commitment becomes a key attribute in a candidate.

Mr. Sachdeva gave an example of how technology has come to play a pivotal role in increasing D&I at GLOBSYS. The processing work that GLOBSYS does in USA for a banking client or insurance client can be easily taught to a 12th-grade individual. This work does not require graduate or postgraduate qualifications. So, companies have started creating these bespoke programmes in order to on-board people without worrying about education. So, somewhere, the new leap of faith that people are willing to make is—‘let’s give everybody a relaxation on the education

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<sup>5</sup> OSPs are entities providing application services, IT-enabled services or any kind of outsourcing services using telecom resources. BPOs, knowledge process outsourcings (KPOs), ITES, call centres all refer to these kinds of services.

<https://www.livemint.com/companies/news/govt-eases-guidelines-to-make-work-from-home-permanent-11604594622132.html>.

part, per se. And let's start to build on their technical skills and build and expand their skills through awareness and coaching and training. So that they can do the job that they are expected to do'. However, these jobs are probably at the bottom and the middle layer of the pyramid. Moreover, the nature of such jobs is more processing oriented, which require less subjectivity and perhaps more objectivity.

## Conclusion

Diversity mandate is easy to solve using the recruiting tool. Inclusion of diverse people in the workplace is really the colossal challenge. It becomes trickier when the diverse people are few and far in between. It creates a lot of tension and anxiety for those people whose numbers are lesser in the organization but also those who are used to being the dominant group. In a largely Indian origin and male-driven organization, inclusion would be a far bigger issue to resolve. Moreover, when the new diverse candidate is of a somewhat lesser-known ethnic group and has an unfamiliar accent or appearance, the ease of acceptance among the rest goes down significantly. For a global company like GLOBSYS, this would be a herculean task especially as it seeks to expand its markets globally. It needs to rethink the composition of its workforce by trying to get the best talent and one that is most suited to its needs, rather than trying to attempt a matching of colour, race and gender in order to reach a certain D&I goalpost.

The GLOBSYS case brings to focus four important dimensions of D&I. First is that diversity has big geographical undertones. Hence, human resources and recruitment services need to rethink their strategies at a fundamental level—redefine diversity in the context of the surrounding environment and then formulate policies to meet the mandate. This would of course require rethinking and reworking for each region/geography their own unique diversity mandate. Above all, this would ask for a much keener observation and understanding of context in which offices and employees work.

Besides the geography, the external environment of the corporation can be a big deterrent or driver. For a company like GLOBSYS, operating in Bengaluru (considered traditionally more progressive and women-friendly) would entail a different set of challenges than operating in Noida (Uttar Pradesh) or Gurugram (Haryana) which are historically perceived to be more conservative. Depending on where the primary operations are located even within a specific geography can lead to an ease in implementing D&I mandate or make it more challenging. Hence, a more nuanced understanding of not just the geography but also of the external context is required.

The second dimension is that leadership has a significant role to play in promoting any change agenda especially in diversity. In today's world where the focus is primarily on the billionaire CEOs, one tends to overlook the composition and contribution of the board members and the top management in pushing for change. The proponents of change are at the senior most levels whose worldview plays a pivotal role in recognizing, disseminating, training and implementing policies that reflect a

more inclusive view of the corporation and its circumstances. Thus, the attitudes and experiences of board members and senior leadership team play a significant role in any kind of critical transformation.

Here, the composition of the Board, senior management and leaders would be quite noteworthy. A more diverse and open-minded top management would also be a driver of change in the D&I mandate for the company and vice versa as well. That is why it is sometimes maybe more important to promote diversity in its all-possible meanings at the top levels since there is a higher chance of percolation to the levels beneath it. Those at the top have greater visibility and agency to be the poster girls/boys of diversity and inclusion and as well as advocates and success of change.

The third dimension is that of gender diversity which remains till date the foremost agenda in the hands of those seeking to increase diversity in organizations. However, true gender diversity needs to be accompanied by a real change in perception and acceptance of differences among the genders. Government rules and regulations tend to lean in favour of women whenever a complaint is filed against a man in sexual harassment cases. However, no such recourse exists with the men. True diversity would mean that in any organization, both genders should have the same rights and access to redressal mechanisms. Too often, the dice is loaded against one group or the other which ends up creating disharmony and feelings of rejection.

The fourth dimension is using technology in ameliorating the pitfalls of a monolithic organization which is attempting to include the D&I mandate. While technology in itself is never the solution, it can be applied in ways that can overcome the constraints of human biases and external environment. However, familiarity and ease with technology then become a prerequisite—something that everyone may not possess. Along with knowledge of technology is access to network/Internet/Wi-Fi—a deal-breaker which the pandemic has very clearly established.

To sum it, diversity and inclusion remain till date an evolving goal, with definitions and perceptions getting refined as organizations and generations bring in their experiences and context. Hence, a careful examination of D&I at each stage periodically would be a good idea and taking stock of what all elements need to be included to make it meaningful and truly impactful. As the world becomes more globalized, geographical interpretations and role of technology will be key determinants in making the diversity and inclusion policies more relevant to organizations and its employees.

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# COVID-19 Impact on Diversity and Inclusion



Rishi Kapal

**Abstract** The researches from global corridors reveal that despite the companies putting out messages and brave faces, the diversity and inclusion initiatives need more, especially with COVID having changed the face of work and associated priorities. It is important for enterprises to ask themselves the right questions to foster diversity and inclusion during and post the pandemic. While it may be less said, the impact of challenges like emotional and mental well-being in the diverse employees, has a far-reaching impact in developing nations. While extended work hours seem to be the common normal across the working population, its impact on women seems to be far-reaching with concerns of safety of people at the workplace and welfare of family at the other end. A lot of new perspectives about D&I are evolving during the pandemic with a potential to have adverse domino effects. The single-parent females, sole breadwinners taking care of their parents and job cuts might be putting in a lot of psychological stress on the diverse and inclusive population at work. Leaders have to look at the world from a new order and provide more than adequate assistance to the employees in need.

**Keywords** Diversity · Inclusion · Emotional-wellness · Productivity · Equality · Pandemic · Psychological · Disabilities · Emotions

## Introduction

The ongoing pandemic is providing new dimensions to diversity and inclusion, topics that have always been critical for businesses and communities. The shift in everyone's experience and perceptions during COVID-19 is providing an opportunity for leaders to look at new ways of embracing diversity, inclusion and equality at the workplace. The pandemic has put increased focus on new-age D&I practices. Michele Meyer-Shipp, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer for KPMG, has been quoted by Forbes

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R. Kapal (✉)

Stanford LEAD Alumni, Organization Development Specialist, Teenzclap Futureworks, Pune, India

e-mail: [rishi@meetrishi.com](mailto:rishi@meetrishi.com)

as saying, “Leaders are asking, What should I be thinking about in terms of Diversity and Inclusion?”.

Laura Hay, Global Head of Insurance at KPMG, wrote in a KPMG blog that at a broader level, working women have been impacted more by COVID-19 as compared to their male counterparts. There are certain questions being raised in the global landscape with regard to D&I which are about:

- Is the D&I agenda being pushed back in the wake of ensuring productivity of remote workers?
- Are women feeling the heat about work-life balance much more since they are now juggling between being productive and trying to take care of family needs during the workday?
- Many working women might be living alone as PGs, away from the hometown; how is remote working in the pandemic affecting their emotional and mental state of mind? Are they feeling social and professional isolation? Do the employers even realize this phenomenon?

Corporate leaders are concerned that D&I practices might fall through the cracks if everyone is constantly occupied by worries of financial losses to business during the pandemic and how to recover from them. Hence, experts closely monitoring the D&I aspects in the pandemic era suggest continued measures [including some mentioned in a white paper published by Deloitte (2020)] such as:

- **Show and Tell:** Ensure there are pulse surveys and regular contact with all employees, anywhere in the world to validate whether the organizational policies of D&I are still intact. For example, is every employee getting equitable access to technology and resources required to perform his/her job effectively on a remote basis, regardless of gender, role, seniority, etc.?
- **Psychological Safety and Sense of Belonging:** As indicated earlier, it is being hypothesized that during the pandemic, most women might be bearing disproportionate responsibility for childcare, children’s educational arrangements, family management and trying to balance work productivity at the same time. In order to ensure that the personal responsibilities do not stress the employee when performing work-related tasks, the role of empathy and offering extra support by maybe pushing back deadlines can give stronger sense of belonging. It will be a common aspect where women at home may have to interrupt their video calls to tend to a personal matter. This needs patience on part of the other attendees, but providing such support will create enhanced loyalty. The need to show appreciation for co-workers and for employers to recognize continuous contributions by workers at all levels was never so important as it is now.
- **Speaking Up:** The issues being faced by women working remotely are not the regular workplace matters of underperformance or lack of resources. The working conditions themselves have changed. Hence, employers must create conditions for employees to be able to speak up confidently either in public or through confidential channels about what help they need to maintain productivity. This may need changes at the corporate policy level; for example, women with infants

may not want to take calls during certain hours when at home, which was not the case had they been out of home at the workplace. Employers should also encourage employees to speak up about non-inclusive behaviors they have experienced, whether intentional or not.

For those women who are caregivers to children and elderly parents as well being the only bread earner for the family, multiple issues may lead to a domino effect in terms of mental health. On top of that the news of job cuts around the world may create significant additional stress, unless employers ensure that there are adequate emotional assistance programs available to the employees in need.

However, there is also a silver lining in that the diversity of the workforce is being tapped by some corporates in very positive, innovative and inclusive ways. Many bright minds in the workplace might have a partial or full disability which could cause physical limitations and hence a barrier to their productivity at the office. With the work from home practice, such barriers could potentially become nonexistent or irrelevant.

*Consider Ana (name changed) who had serious challenges in being a part of meetings in office due to partial deafness and difficulty in reading the screen in the conference room. Now in the comfort of her workstation at home, she is able to turn on the volume and/or brightness to the level that suits her audiovisual senses. As a result, she is able to perform much better and faster. Had the pandemic not struck, the chances of Ana's employers envisaging that working from home would enhance her productivity would have been small. Such small yet impactful elements of D&I can help companies reimagine the future even after the pandemic has slowed down.*

During the pandemic, businesses also discovered the broader skill-sets that the employees had. Many women doubled up as counselors to expecting mothers working remotely in order to ensure that no one suffered a lack of psychological comfort when working from home. Suddenly, the initial chaos caused by everyone working from home became a chance for people to offer new ways of contributing to the organization and going above and beyond their call of duty when women and people with disabilities (PWD) needed time to adjust to the new "abnormal." A few corporates even created a "pooled earned leave" concept where employees can donate their unutilized leave to women and PWD who might have exhausted their earned leave. This way the ones in need do not have to work on leave without pay if they exceed the number of earned leaves they were entitled to. Overall, it is a win-win for all the stakeholders in the system. There are many examples of such eye-openers that companies have experienced during COVID-19. Leaders should therefore not be looking to getting back to "business as usual" after the pandemic but rather embracing many of these new practices as an integral part of their business in the future.



## Key D&I Considerations Arising Out of the Pandemic.

If furthers the emotional triggers that one should watch for, maybe the women and PWD might show these signs more than the others are a subject matter of interpretation: behaviors of venting their frustrations on family members. There is a strong chance that lockdowns could lead to an increase in relationship issues, in some cases resulting in situations where minor matters may trigger domestic violence. There is also strong evidence to suggest that social disengagement is leading to isolation, both physically and emotionally, from friends and colleagues. In turn, this might result in low productivity and job satisfaction.

Evidence suggests that D&I safety norms like staggered shifts and absence of interactions with other colleagues over the coffee machine can take a heavier emotional toll on women employees. Building individual resilience in the D&I parlors will become critical, and this can be done by introducing training related to stress management and resilience development, for example, by encouraging that every person subscribes to the playlists of [ahhaa.com](http://ahhaa.com). At a team level, certain employee might need higher peer support and a caring team culture. At a manager level, their key role will be to ensure there is psychological aid available and D&I champions are designated on a rotational basis so that there is a 360 degree participation of the employees in preserving the inclusive culture.

A Gartner article (2020) says “Workplace equity isn’t only the right thing to do; it’s a strategic and financial advantage.” Lauren Romansky the Managing VP of Gartner is quoted as saying, “Underrepresented groups—racial/ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and women—have been disproportionately affected by the health and economic impacts of COVID-19. And yet, in a recent Gartner survey, only 2% of HR leaders identified DEI, by itself, their No. 1 priority in light of the pandemic.” Further analysis of diversity and inclusion in the report embraces elements not just relevant to the industry in USA but in India as well. This is a useful tool, given the wide ethnic and cultural variances in our country. Lauren’s statement raises serious concerns about the fact that many organizational leaders may consider D&I initiatives as cost centers. That being the thought, during the pandemic every management team is trying to roll back expenses and it will be unfortunate if the axe of budget cuts fall on D&I divisions or the staff responsible for that department find themselves being given the pink slip. Along with the decisions of implementing hiring freezes and layoffs to sustain during the economic uncertainty caused by the pandemic, many believe that the short-term future of D&I initiatives in organizations might be uncertain.

Considering the case in USA, it seems that the people of color might be experiencing higher COVID-19 infection and mortality rates as compared to their counterparts, and economically, women and people of color are experiencing the greatest chances of job losses. While USA might have a structure in place to capture and analyze the data on the ethnicity and gender alignment to the job losses, for India can we deduce that women layoffs been more than men? It is a question which does not have a certain answer as of now. However, it is true that women in India have more

representation in the hospitality, travel, recreation, manufacturing and retail sectors: all of which have been the most impacted by the pandemic. And hence, it would not be unreasonable to infer that women have probably been impacted more than men by job losses.

In order to ensure that managers and leaders stay focused on their D&I initiatives during the pandemic and after, it is important to keep reminding them about the leverage that D&I initiatives brought to their business. Many companies elevated their brand perception based on integrated marketing campaigns about how they promote diversity and inclusion. If they now roll back their stance during the pandemic, it could cost them dearly due to loss of customer empathy and consideration.

Take, for example, a case study that was released two years ago by Qualcomm (2020) on how they facilitated a program titled “Mentoring Women in Business” which was in collaboration with the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women (CBFW), Tune Talk Mobile Prepaid and the Foundation for Women’s Education and Vocational Training. The program was designed to support women entrepreneurs in Malaysia to connect them with mentors and business professionals all around the world. The objective was to enhance Malaysian women entrepreneurs’ skills in the domain of business and technology, so that they can grow and sustain businesses successfully. The case study refers to the Gender Gap report by the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report that cites a very strong correlation between a country’s economic prosperity and competitive and gender equality. Qualcomm has built a reputation of taking pride in walking the talk when supporting D&I and sustainability initiatives. If it now has a different take on D&I due to the pandemic, all the goodwill and leverage earned by the company, over decades, would be significantly eroded. Can it afford to risk that?

Interestingly in India, FICCI had constituted a Task Force on D&I at the end of 2019, when the pandemic had first begun to emerge. In a press release on December 19, 2019 (“FICCI constitutes Task Force on diversity and inclusion (D&I),” FICCI announced that the mandate of the Task Force was to “work towards enabling D&I focused work policies across India Inc. to ensure Indian corporates have inclusive organizational policies in their companies with enough gender diversity, inclusion of people with disabilities as well as representation from the LGBTQI+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex) community.” One of the Co-Chairs of the Task Force Ms Radhika Piramal, Executive Director and Vice Chairperson, VIP Industries, was quoted as saying, “This taskforce aims to increase inclusion of women, people with disabilities and members of the LGBTQ community into corporate workplaces so that all can participate in India’s economic growth.” Another Co-Chair, Mr Keshav Suri, Executive Director, Bharat Hotels Ltd, and Founder, Keshav Suri Foundation, said, “It is important to ensure that the workplaces have an acceptable environment where people respect and recognize each other’s meritocracy over their sexual orientation, disability or gender. For focused planning and action, this task force will have three subgroups on Gender Parity, Empowering Persons with Disability and LGBTQ under the overarching ambit of D&I.”

With the Chambers of Commerce in India giving due cognizance to D&I at the time it was needed the most, all that is needed is that leaders must ensure that their

previous messaging of supporting D&I initiatives remains intact during a time of need and beyond. To maintain the importance of D&I initiatives in everyone's mind, the leaders must not forget to keep emphasizing the company culture and branding during their ongoing addresses and town halls with the employees. If the managers do not hear the messaging from the leaders, it will fail to build the resilience during the crisis. External stakeholders as well as employees are very likely to remember how different companies dealt with and sustained D&I initiatives during the pandemic: whether they were increased, maintained, remained unaddressed or sacrificed. Companies that practiced their D&I values despite the pandemic will be viewed favorably, while the ones who dropped the ball in the short term might face lower levels of brand salience, customer engagement and employee retention (over and above layoffs). Sustaining D&I while dealing with the business fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic is quite possible. There are organizations that have been able to put together a checklist on the slight shifts in processes to maintain D&I initiatives and some which need to improve. Here are some processes that can be updated to leave a lasting effect on D&I initiatives:

## **Appraisals and Performance Evaluation**

Most if not all organizations have faced at least one appraisal cycle during the pandemic. Some organizations have conducted it, while some others may have let it pass. It is known that every organization has a specific appraisal process that is aligned to the performance and work culture. And the culture of most organizations today is very different as compared to what it was before the pandemic hit and the new post-pandemic normal would again likely be different. This calls for a new balance to be created when doing comparative evaluations (pre-, during and post-pandemic) for appraisals. The bottom line is that in no way should the appraisals be biased so as to put gender and diversity-impacted professionals at a disadvantage.

For a start, any company that is wondering whether to appraise the D&I champions during the pandemic or not and if so how should see the progress made by the champions and compare them to D&I developments in other like-for-like organizations for the pandemic period. In that way, the metrics of evaluation will be unbiased and will account for how the ecosystem, at large, has responded to the D&I initiatives during the pandemic. The measurement parameters for performance evaluation during the pandemic can include:

- What has been the impact of the pandemic on the D&I initiatives included in the mission and vision of the company?
- How did the D&I champions respond to upholding the mandates during the pandemic, as compared to other companies with similar initiatives having been announced in public?

- Have the other industry players/competitors expanded the diversity within their organizations during the pandemic or has it been compromised? How does that compare to how your HR has been able to maintain the diversity balance?
- Has the nature and size of your organization's talent pool changed during the pandemic as compared to competitors? If the change is drastic, then is there a plan to regain the balance as the impact of the pandemic reduces?
- How does your D&I turnover data compare with the data from the open market?

Including the above elements in the appraisal process will ensure that the performance evaluation reflects the impact of the pandemic on the D&I constituents of the organization.

## **Rethinking Hiring Approaches**

Pandemic has not completely subdued hiring of people. The manpower requirement continues; however, when everyone is confined to their houses, it is not possible to align money and location to the availability of talent. To ensure that the hiring process continues to focus on letting the world know that you are an equal opportunity employer, here are a few things that organizations can do:

- Ensure that the organization's diversity and/or disability-friendly opportunities are being advertised in the right mediums and locations. There are various social media groups for diverse professionals like returning mothers and defense veterans looking for corporate jobs. Organizations must ensure that the advertisements are reaching the right audience.
- Rather than competing for resources, organizations can collaborate and reach out to other organizations to see if one had to let go of someone whom the other can hire and truly live up to their D&I balance promises. A female QA testing employee in a city might want a transfer closer to home which a company cannot provide and might have to let go of the employee. However, if they know that some other company in the location preferred by the employee is hiring, a mere internal referral can ensure that the woman is able to maintain career continuity.

PWD are facing unemployment and/or underemployment during COVID-19. They have already been facing workplace discrimination in one way or another, and the new normal of isolation and containment might make things even more difficult. It is important for leaders and employees to ensure they are extra compassionate with the PWD employees and colleagues and maybe check on their welfare more often than others.

## Referral Program to Enhance D&I Benefits

Progressive organizations that want to sustain their diversity in talent sourcing can always encourage their existing employees to refer connections and candidates who meet the D&I norms to the organization. Such referrals can also be a part incentive scheme should a referred candidate get hired by the company. With such continuous messaging to uphold D&I, every employee will have the company's noble mission at the top of their mind. For all the support a company would get from its employees, the leaders must ensure they show enough and genuine gratitude. It will ensure that the team cohesion remains intact. Along with the times when people are getting pulled into "solitary" confinements, gratitude lets them know that they do not need to feel like a replaceable part of a machine. Leaders need to express how thankful they are for the teams' support particularly when their attention can be diverted to more concerning and pressing personal matters.

Last but not least, organizations need to be careful that D&I initiatives not derailed by office politics or existential threats felt by specific employee groups. This is not the time for politics in "policies" to poison the workplace. There are combative managers as well as peacekeepers in every organization. The formers are usually trying to decide what is in their best interests irrespective of how those decisions can hurt the D&I initiatives and work-life balance. However, if there is a wave of anger and disappointment in the diverse employees currently, the last thing one needs is office politics adding fuel to the fire. Leaders will need to keep a close watch on the aggressive and combative managers because a combative and confrontational attitude can do more harm to D&I initiatives particularly now since the employees at the receiving end will have fewer avenues to voice their frustration while working remotely.

Leaders will have their work cut out for them to maintain harmony while not sacrificing D&I initiatives. They will need to think of creative ways to foster unity and offer channels where employees' energy can be directed. It may not always be office work, but perhaps some sort of joint community engagement, for example, volunteering opportunities with the community outreach programs that keeps the sense of diversity and inclusion initiatives alive. It then becomes a way to provide initiatives for collective impact and hopefully divert employee attention away from office politics.

One element that managers must appreciate is that if they do not provide open and transparent ways for staff to express their anger, uncertainty and other emotions then the latter are more likely to vent their frustration on peers and subordinates in the company. That can be a big problem since these emotionally fired up people will not keep in view the damage it can do to the D&I initiatives. To avoid this, leaders can voluntarily create perspective-sharing fora directed toward relevant D&I topics. They should also ensure to communicate that any opinions expressed during these fora will not reflect on the person's appraisals or performance. The more the people are open about their likes and dislikes, the easier will it be to understand and address their sentiments.

All in all, the workforce should not be made to undergo unnecessary fears and anxieties due to the topic of D&I being politicized. Every employee who is struggling to survive and thrive during the pandemic should be aware that they are at liberty to make the choices that are appropriate for their own circumstances during the pandemic. The difficult part of holding D&I initiatives is when most people are walking into a room labeled fear and we need to bring them to the rooftop named hope. The passageway might not be easy, but definitely worth walking through.

## **What Will the Post-pandemic Return to Work Look like?**

During the pandemic, businesses have been devising processes and procedures to get safely back to work. How does one reimagine the world of work with much more evolved and mature levels of diversity, inclusion and equality? One fact to remember is that everyone is on their own journey to navigate the pandemic. That said, the procedures by organizations to handle the pandemic will suit many but not all. Hence, a higher element of personalization and adaptability will be required for diversity and inclusion practices at workplaces.

When the employees return to their workplaces, quite a few of them might come with hypersensitivity, because of the home concerns that they will probably carry to the workplace. Companies will need to be prepared to adapt their approaches and policies to be more inclusive and to deal with differences in expected behaviors of returning employees particularly female and special need employees as compared to what was normal in the pre-pandemic era. For returning “recent” mothers, psychological safety at the workplace will be very critical. The anxiety of having a newborn at home while they are working in the office under the shadow of the pandemic may lead them to voice unpopular opinions. The character of the leaders and divisional heads of the companies will play a big role in developing trust and acceptance.

Diversity and inclusion can be practiced at its best when employees in need can be allowed to take time off during the day to support a family member, for example, taking the parents to a doctor or helping the child with homework. These are no longer considered to be special needs but necessities. D&I policies also need to encompass the fact that employees will be looking to rely on their co-workers to back them up and share the burden, reciprocally. For working women and people with disabilities, work from home during the pandemic has blurred the lines between WFH and being on leave. This might be viewed with suspicion by corporate HR who might feel that women employees or people with disabilities are doing their personal work during the work time, while being shown as logged onto the system. In order to ensure that such thoughts do not become widespread, corporate committees that are being created for work management during COVID-19 should have equal representation from women and people with disabilities. Diversity and inclusion can only be real when employees understand each other rather than having D&I policies forced upon them.

D&I practices during the COVID-19 have also brought forward the importance of emotional and mental well-being. The number of women seeking employee assistance programs seems to have gone up, and every major corporate has ensured that they offer weekly webinars addressing emotional wellness, for example, tying up with [ahhaa.com](http://ahhaa.com) which is founded by a former monk. The corporates have truly realized that for maintaining the D&I balance when employees return to work, ensuring mental health is very critical. In a report launched in August 2020 by the India Alliance (2020) comprising Ranstad India, Gi India, Adecco India and Manpower India, they make it a point to discuss the importance of mental well-being during the pandemic. As per the report: “Mental wellness is the state of emotional and psychological well-being in which an individual is able to use his or her cognitive, behavioral, social and emotional capabilities, to function in family, society and organization adequately and meet the expected demands of everyday life.” It is likely that initiatives for ensuring mental health and well-being are here to stay as a part of D&I practices under the new normal.

As per report quoted above, when returning to work, there will be two categories of employees. The first would continue to work from home, while the second would resume working from office premises. While the report does not make any specific recommendation based on gender or D&I, it seems likely that the corporate sector would prefer women and PWD to be in the first category even if these employees would prefer to come back to their desks. Consider this however: GNITS, a college for women in Hyderabad, has put in strong D&I practices—their Vice Chairman Ms. Srividya Reddy has maintained equal standards of guidance, support and treatment to returning staff and faculty which is not based on gender. Both women and male faculty and staff are performing their duties on campus and feel as equal rather than one privileged over the other. Such role models can show the way ahead on balancing the return-to-work D&I initiatives.

In the corporate sector, post-COVID-19 return to work D&I initiatives would largely depend on the industry and the nature of work being pursued. For example, IT/ITES might see a disproportionately large category of women and PWD being asked to work from home, whereas the manufacturing sector cannot function without the physical presence of employees. Many of the floor managers and line workers in the infrastructure and manufacturing sectors are women, and they will need to return on premises. Within the organizations, each department might need different D&I initiatives rather than one umbrella policy.

## **A Final Word**

Across sectors, many companies are recognizing that work-life balance may not have the same definition as earlier. However, they have managed to understand and appreciate that with the remote working being a reality, the talent they need to acquire or relocate can create a much more geographically diverse workforce. This can in turn eliminate bias in job descriptions about preferring people from a certain gender

of geography. With the world under lockdowns off and on, organizations have rapidly evolved their business models and invested heavily in technology to support remote working and connectivity with employees and clients. The hope is when the social distancing measures are lifted, the companies will still leverage the infrastructure they created to support more flexible working and will believe that the people who choose to continue working remotely are delivering as much as the ones who may be able to return to their physical desks.

One must not ignore the fact that D&I is under stress during these times and this can lead to anger and distrust from various groups within the workforce. However, the leaders must ensure that any difficult D&I-related conversations are allowed, and that they are made to happen in a nonjudgmental manner. This can eventually lead to constructive ways of enhancing psychological security and restore trust. We are all human and into the alley together.

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# Diversity in Adversity: Fostering the DNA of Inclusiveness in the Current Crisis



Jhilmil Das

**Abstract** The COVID-19 pandemic has posed an unprecedented crisis globally, which forced organizations to chart out business continuity plans and survival strategies to come out of this turbulent phase. With the pandemic changing the way of work, the organizations are left with little choice than to shift their focus on adopting differential approach in the realm of managing human assets and talent development, which has emerged as essential strand or foundation of success for any business entity. In order to survive and thrive in this changed environment, it is essential for organizational leaders to redefine the concept of diversity and inclusion (D&I) and its workplace implementation. As India Inc. moves from shock to adaptation in the crisis backdrop, it becomes imminent for Indian business leaders to relook at their D&I strategies in order to break the stereotypes and embrace the real sense of inclusiveness and equity at workplace. The study deals with case-based evidences of D&I practices from Indian workplaces backed by inclusive business leadership, which essentially leads to workplace collaboration and empowerment. The paper is an effort towards inculcating positive reinforcements through inclusive leadership to promote D&I practices with a view to create holistic and inclusive culture in the organization.

**Keywords** D&I · Inclusiveness · Workplace · Collaboration · Pandemic

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in creating one of the most daunting challenges in the recent times across the globe, with little choice left to businesses than to make way for adaptation and adjustment. The crisis unmatched in terms of its scale and impact took a huge toll on human lives and created huge financial losses for the global economy as well as loss of employment. In India, the GDP contracted by 23.9% in Q1F21, the first time in 40 years, and unemployment rates rose as high

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J. Das (✉)

Sr. Manager (HR), GRSE Ltd (CPSE, Ministry of Defence, Govt. of India), Kolkata, India

as 26% (The Hindu, 2020). The youth population of the nation has been reported to lose over 6.1 million jobs in this year as a result of the pandemic (ADB, 2020). There is a huge supply shock across world economies, including India, and the shutdown of manufacturing, automobile and other industries rendered an exodus of over 660,000 migrants to their hometowns due to the lack of jobs (Hindustan Times, 2020). This unprecedented crisis led us to reflect, introspect and learn to look at the latent possibilities to emerge out of the difficult times. Caught amidst this rigmarole is the effort to absorb the existential realities of the new normal.

With the change in way of work caused by the pandemic, it has become imperative for employers to focus on maintaining equity by addressing employees' needs, perspectives and potential. Those organizations having strong focus on diversity and inclusion felt it easier to steer ahead through the pandemic's choppy waters in order to address the need for challenging need for talent. The pandemic has forced organizations to adopt differential approach towards promoting employee representation and belongingness amidst global hiring freeze and lay-off decisions. Therefore, it has become vital for leaders to redefine the entire concept of D&I and its workplace application in order to thrive in this new reality caused by the pandemic.

## **Changing Workplace Dynamics in New Reality**

The pandemic-led crisis has been known to affect the health, well-being and lives of human communities in different ways. An unfortunate consequence of COVID in the business environment being unemployment, job losses and retrenchment also reflects prevalence of gender discrimination. As per data, the rate of job loss for women in India is 17.6% more than that of men, in the COVID-19-induced situation (CMIE, 2020). The sudden jolt caused by the pandemic has forced everyone to adapt quickly to situations like state of complete lockdown, practice physical distancing, deal with school closures, handle kids at home, take care of the elderly and ensure business continuity through virtual or digital platforms, which led to formation of new attitudes and sentiments, which eventually resulted in emergence of various diversity & inclusive (D&I) issues, that might have potential and long-lasting impact on an organization. With the adjustments in the changed work setting, a radical shift has been created in the mindsets of people towards embracing the new normal, expecting more flexible work arrangements in place, elements of transparency and agility in the system and having equitable access to technology and resources, which can surely create substantial change in the way businesses are going to operate post-COVID-19.

Despite significant gains in job opportunities and legal protections of women, the prevailing stereotypes about gender roles, skills and capabilities of women and their domestic responsibilities have restricted women for long at their workplace from achieving success. According to United Nations report, the pandemic is likely to have a disproportionate negative impact on working women due to larger presence of such population in unorganized and informal sectors, less secure jobs, acute lay-offs and salary cuts in job roles having high female participation, relatively high

number of cases of domestic violence and abuse as well as increase in the number of women providing greater care of demands at home, which may result in potential forced departure of women to leave their jobs in future (UN Women, 2020). As per study, women employees are 1.5 times more likely than men to cite acute challenges with mental health and increased household responsibilities as fallout of the crisis (McKinsey, 2020). The report further reveals the struggle of the LGBTQ+ employees across geographies in the pandemic setting with isolation and fear of losing ground at work.

The pandemic has also led to unfortunate upsurge in cases of racism across the world, with several communities facing harmful experiences (Gover et al., 2020). The manifestation of such prejudices might cause detrimental impact on the mental well-being of people, forced exits from workplaces, as well as major economic disruption and cultural disparity in the future. While there has been a temporary slowdown in hiring activities of companies, the gear is shifting to adapt to the new normal of remote hiring. Bias filters still work in progress as recruitment activities move online. When it comes to engagement in the work-from-home scenario, being blind to operational challenges of that of employees with care-giving responsibilities is a bias manifestation. From a growth standpoint, the learning and development activities of organizations are also prone to bias, attributed due to limited access and opportunity for all employees.

While the pandemic-induced crisis and subsequent functioning out of virtual silos has triggered greater attention, what is still observed is the manifestation of certain workplace biases like halo bias, affinity bias or status quo bias or likewise biases that can hinder inclusive spirit. Conditioning and personal interactions often play critical role in formulation of biases and gradually merge into the unconscious of a human brain.

## **Diversity and Inclusion: Key Drivers of Collaboration**

According to the 2018 Diversity Best Practices Inclusion Index, diversity and inclusion (D&I) are considered as the key strategy of the twenty-first century organizations, which not only helps to acknowledge and understand differences among people, but also leverages the influence of such differences for business profitability of organization (Folick, 2019; IBM, 2020). Diversity broadly indicates the co-existence of employees from various sociocultural backgrounds, whereas inclusion leads to collaborative environment of involvement, respect and connection through implementation of the concept and practice of diversity, thus creating business value (Jordan, 2011). Studies reveal that an increase of 1% in workforce diversity can actually lead to 3–9% increase in business revenues for organizations (Bahl, 2018).

Diversity is often associated with the heterogeneity in the way things are nurtured, cultivated and appreciated for achieving organizational effectiveness in this competitive world, and thus, diverse and inclusive teams are found to take better and more effective decisions (Larson, 2017). Workforce diversity management has, therefore,

evolved as an important area of concerns across organizations, including governments as well as non-government entities.

## **Criticality of D&I Agenda in Current Times**

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in intense nature of unprecedented challenges including people-related ones, despite best efforts of the organizations to implement successful business continuity plans. The practice of including marginalized population is especially critical during a pandemic, and thus, it is essential to consider intentional inclusion of voices across teams particularly in the current situation of fear, uncertainty and rapidly changing scenario. Though the D&I at workplace concepts have been prevalent for more than decades now, however, the implementation still remains questionable, even in the biggest of corporates. Generally perceived as “nice to have” for corporates in the best of times, such topics like D&I often get pushed to the sidelines and taken off the senior team agenda, particularly in the time of crisis as leaders struggle to manage other priorities in this time of fundamental uncertainty. With increased blurring of work and home boundaries, it is important that companies invest on initiatives that drive belongingness in employees resulting in greater engagement and higher productivity at work. In today’s world of accelerating change, it is imperative for employees as well as organizations to stay resilient, innovative and responsive to change, which is inevitable without practicing diversity in the workplace.

Diversity and inclusion, being the fundamental differentiator for any business, provides the key for driving innovation and fuelling the growth of customers and the ecosystem. With companies focusing on creating cross-functional diverse teams as strategy besides leveraging the diversity of the workforce, it is apparent for organization to benefit out of such innovativeness and synergizing its outcomes. With fast-paced technologies being infused into the organizational spectrum, it becomes crucial for organizations to opt for representation in creating products and services of inclusive nature. Diverse voices in organizations help to create holistic solutions for business and society, encourage creative thinking among employees and achieve success with satisfied customers. However, organizations are unable to make full usage of these resources despite realizing the undeniable value of workplace diversity. According to Intel-Zinnov, women comprises 48% of India’s population; however, a huge gender disparity still continues to exist in Indian workplaces, with 31% and 26% representation in technical and non-technical and technical roles, respectively (Business Today, 2020). This reflects a critical need for organizations to nurture in a careful and sustained manner and a conscious cultural shift to reap the full benefits of the D&I practices. In order to actualize the same, business leaders need to look beyond the basic and challenge underlying assumptions around D&I, focusing on suitable implementation of D&I initiatives to deliver positive change for organizations.

## Revisiting the Existing D&I Strategy

In times of crisis, having a diverse leadership team helps to promote innovative thinking and better understanding of the diverse range of issues facing employees and customers and providing solutions to problems. The culture that promotes leadership to put diversity and inclusion into action is critically the first element to act upon. First, the leaders need to shift from the traditional manner of diverse and inclusive work culture. Given the fact that transition in workplace generations has led to newer expectations and challenges by the new set of communities, there is a need to adopt new approaches to problem-solving and create a culture that is equal and inclusive, which prompted organizations to adopt initiatives like virtual happy hours, morning coffee meetings and digital town halls or extended office hours for those who simply want to talk. However, with the increasingly complex business environment, interconnected and diverse technologies, organizations need to think about D&I efforts not just based on gender, race and ethnicity, but delve deeper into cultural constructs, like religious and political beliefs, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic backgrounds and people with disabilities (PwD). Involvement and participation of people from various backgrounds, perspectives, and abilities having equal access to opportunity and confidence to participate in key organizational decisions can lead to true value creation.

It is witnessed that employees tend to quit jobs when they feel that their authentic self and uniqueness is not appreciated or valued. It is thus vital to create an environment where the employees can feel a sense of connectedness to the company and its people. Diverse employees often struggle to find work because employers do not wish to engage with the reasonable adjustments diverse people are entitled to (Randle & Hardy, 2016). Employers are thus likely to see disabled workers as a “less safe” choice than non-disabled workers (Pareek et al., 2020). Such evidence suggests that organizations might get wary in the future to avoid contracting employees for whom additional safety measures need to be put in place due to the pandemic. Further, employers’ lack of knowledge about disability made them less likely to even consider contracting a disabled person, even if no reasonable adjustments were required (Eikhof et al., 2019). Such practices might particularly negatively impact the diverse groups, for whom infection and mortality rates have been reported to be significantly higher (Pareek et al., 2020; Tidball et al., 2020).

## D&I Landscape in the Indian Context

India is a heterogeneous country having an incredible natural diversity in terms of gender, language, ethnicity, thoughts, beliefs and creeds (Cooke & Saini, 2012). The term “diversity” in India refers to the wider complexity of regional, linguistic, religious, cultural, socio-economic status and educational diversity as compared to diversity in the western countries, which includes other groups, such as lesbian, gay,

bisexual and transgendered persons (Haq, 2020). The diversity aspects of India are rooted in the sociocultural factors and emerging demographic trends, whereas religion is one of the key facets of diversity, alongside caste, race, gender, disability and age. Women comprising nearly 50% of India's population constitutes an important segment of the workforce, and their participation in the workforce is gradually increasing in the market. In terms of linguistic diversity, it has a variety of languages and dialects. At the national level, the age group 15–59 contributes 67.9% population in urban areas. The contemporary Indian organizations possess interesting mix of Baby Boomers (most holding top positions and leadership roles or joining post retirement), Gen X (mostly working as senior professionals in managerial positions) and Gen Y (the youngest workforce at all entry levels), working side by side. India has 2.68 crore “disabled” persons constituting of 2.21% of the total population (Rudolph et al., 2020).

The central and state government organizations have taken the lead as primary employers of disabled people. The Government of India has reserved 3% reservation of the total jobs for persons with disabilities in 1977 meant for lower ranking jobs (C & D categories), extended to higher ranking (A & B) categories as per Persons with Disability (PwD) Act of 1995. The beneficiaries of this scheme are the visual impaired, the hearing impaired and the orthopedically impaired on 1% reservation for each category in the central government services, public sector banks and government undertakings. In the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, the list has been expanded from 7 to 21 conditions and now also includes cerebral palsy, dwarfism, muscular dystrophy, acid attack victims, hard of hearing, speech and language disability, specific learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders and chronic neurological disorders.

India being a large country comprising 28 states and eight union territories, the phenomenon of regionalism is engrained in the heart and mind of Indians. Though LGBT has always been observed as stigma in Indian society, however, post-decriminalization of homosexuality and efforts of NGOs and media, the acceptance of this group has increased. The Supreme Court of India, in April 2014, recognized the transgender as “third gender” allowing them employment by consideration as OBCs, ruled in favour of their rights and freedoms and also decriminalized adult consensual same-sex relationships in Section 377 judgement review in September 2018 (Patel, 2019). The nation's approach to managing diversity enshrines “reservation” quotas as part of public policy to protect its historically discriminated groups: the scheduled castes (SCs), the scheduled tribes (STs) and the other backward classes (OBCs) (Haq, 2012). The equality policies in India are focused primarily on affirmative action or reservation for these three designated groups. Further, there is no formal inclusion of women in reservations under higher education or public sector jobs. Moreover, although equal under the law, in reality, women are treated as second-class citizens facing multiple intersectional discriminations and limited individual rights within India's highly patriarchal and conservative societal norms (Haq, 2020).

The status of gender diversity in Indian organizations is, however, at its nascent stage, which emphasizes upon equality in hiring, remuneration and representation in leadership roles (Das, 2018). The gender diversity and inclusion in Indian workplaces

reveal alarming statistics as even top-listed companies have only 20% female representation out of total workforce (Bothra, 2019). As per the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2018, India ranks 142 among 149 nations which slipped from 87 in 2016 and 108 in 2017. Since 2014, women accounts for only three out of every 100 CEOs and MDs of companies listed in NSE and only 67 out of 1814 chief executives of NSE-listed companies (The Economic Times, 2020a, 2020b). Despite the initiative taken towards adoption of various initiatives and affirmative actions to boost gender diversity and inclusiveness in workplaces, India could not achieve the status of women representation in top- and middle-level roles (Verma & Basu, 2019). Further, 33% Indian employees have been recorded to have faced age-based bias at their workplace, followed by 17% of biasness due to physical appearance and 15% others who faced bias on basis of culture/religion (Business and Sustainable Development Commission, 2018).

Although the Indian public sector has remained at the forefront of valuing diversity, however, studies conducted on large Indian telecom public sector organization indicate prevalence of gender and categorical discrimination at workplace like disability, minorities and social disadvantage (Kundu et al., 2018). Though the initiatives have been commenced since long to enhance gender diversity in Indian organizations, however, out of 48.5% female of the entire organized workforce, only 28% constitutes women (Das, 2018). Recent trends reveal increased involvement of private organizations in IT, manufacturing, hotels, food and beverage outlets towards hiring disabled persons for the cause of social responsibility, bringing in diversity at workplace, and become an equal opportunity employer or with a view to tap the larger talent pool.

## Is D&I Agenda in India Inc. Ready for the Current Crisis?

The COVID crisis is seen as a great reset for organizations across the world, and the corporate landscape of India has been witnessing tectonic shifts in terms of mindset and ideologies with the pandemic acting as a catalyst for these compelling changes. The paradigm shift created by new ideologies like *we all are in it together*; *the new normal* and *black lives matter* has taken the world by storm which left an underlying impact on the issue of diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, with the crisis posed by the outbreak of the global pandemic, differently abled people really find it difficult to secure job opportunities. In the midst of phenomenon like salary cuts and loss of employment, 64% specially abled people faced financial crises, and 60% has no source of income. This calls for additional focus from organizations to bring back the focus to relook at D&I strategies (Janardhana et al., 2015).

The D&I agenda has managed to get a second wind amidst this chaos. It is bound to gain more momentum as corporate India moves from shock to adaptation and, eventually, emerge from the effects of this pandemic. The crisis has forced organizations to identify ways on how homes can be converted into workplaces and remote

working actualized for a wider talent pool on a prolonged basis. Further, the situation has aggravated adoption of policies and programs that allowed accommodating work timings to ensure people's work-life balance, especially in the Indian context, where policies like work from home and flexi working were counted among perks instead of normal *modus operandi* for an organization. The COVID crisis has finally taught Indian managers to let go off the earlier conception and believe that high-performance culture and teams can be built remotely too. It is not merely the ship, but the skills of its captain and his sailors that will help it sail through the turbulent storm. In post-COVID era, the right competencies and skills will matter more than ever, irrespective of who brings them to the table, further championing D&I would prove to be one of the differential for organizations. Leaders need to seize the moment to evolve and understand that the concept of D&I goes beyond gender, geography and the LGBTQ+ community, rather it is about breaking the stereotype and removing the obstacles of the associated stigma.

India Inc. being a late entrant in the D&I bandwagon, corporates are yet to realize the true potential of diversity and how it can be leveraged for the benefit of the business. Organizations still struggle to understand the real meaning of inclusiveness and how to navigate through its complexities. The failure to embrace diversity puts risk on losing critical talent, which in the long term might impact the company's profitability. Many organizations in India have embraced the D&I agenda merely as tokenism to gain mileage at forums or to promote employer branding. A close look at the team composition or employee demographics would reveal failure of leadership to ensure walk the talk, more so where there is dearth of team leaders or people managers, who have received any formal training to promote and manage diversity. Boardrooms are still a distant dream for diverse candidates, and a lot of them struggle to even get their due recognition for performance or voice out their opinions in team meetings.

There is a certain need to infuse thought leadership which reckons that the subject of D&I is not merely an ideology to be preached at seminars but an actionable strategy on the ground. In fact, many Indian organizations need not look outside to improve their D&I score, provided they recognize their existing pool of diverse employees, who are worrisome to come out due to fear of stigma and discrimination. Creating an open and accepting work environment would definitely be a welcome step towards embracing diversity and inclusivity at the workplace. While the world has progressed significantly towards technological advancements and modernization, yet there exists a long way to bridge the gap in order to make workplaces diverse and inclusive. It thus becomes imperative to provide equal opportunities to meritorious and deserving candidates, irrespective of their gender, physical, cognitive and socio-emotional abilities. Though there have been increased privileges today in terms of receiving education and employment opportunities, however, reduction in women employment rates still raises question on the drivers of implementation for empowerment of their careers.



## **Leading D&I: Evidences from Forward-Looking Indian Workplaces**

A diverse workplace elevates the bottom line of the company, builds better work culture and creates better business sense. The forward-looking companies are able to identify natural differences among its people, understand requirements of each group and curate a culture to bring out the best in people. The workplaces are increasingly witnessing more and more millennials, fed on newer and broader values of diversity and inclusion (D&I) philosophies. While diversity is rightly considered as a key differentiator in organizations, the inclusive practices make real difference at the workplace. In the parlance of diversity and inclusion, three areas have emerged as the areas of attention owing to targeted policies: LGBTQ+ people, women and persons with disabilities.

### ***Focus on Women Equality***

Studies reveal that women constitutes only 27% of its total workforce, out of which 17% are in senior management positions and only 3% have grown to the level of CEOs (The Economic Times, 2017). The steel behemoth, Steel Authority of India Ltd. (SAIL) recently got its first woman Chairman to steer the company to its next trajectory. In 2013, Nishi Vasudeva became the first woman to head a Maharatna PSU when she became the CMD of Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (HPCL). The online payments company, PayPal recently initiated the “Recharge” program, aimed towards skill building of women technologists through its “back to work initiative” in order to enable them pursue their career returns after long breaks. A “First Day of Period” leave for female employees by Culture Machine, a Mumbai-based company, has been a move towards breaking the jinx of long-standing subject of taboo. The “ReConnect” program started by Vodafone is targeted towards women wishing to return from long breaks, particularly for those facing issues in developing professional connections or skill refreshment.

Likewise, IT companies like Capgemini have started off with initiatives like “FareWelcome” which not only provides assistance to women to stay connected with the organization and colleagues during maternity leave but also provides ease in getting “back to work” after such breaks (Capgemini, 2020). “CAPtivate” is one more such inclusive initiative of the company, which addresses the experience gap to career women and provides necessary guidance to rejoin workplace. The company also devised the “Power Ahead” initiative by providing opportunity to selected senior women executives to interact with top industry leaders and inculcate valuable leadership lessons. The company offers various opportunities to women employees to constantly upskill in order to sustain in this ever-changing world of technology.

## ***Inclusion of PwDs***

According to studies, specially abled people constitute only about 0.5% of Indian working population in top-level corporates (Business Standard, 2020a, 2020b). With over a billion people worldwide with disabilities and 40–50 million population in India, PWDs represent a substantial pool with employable talents and skills; however, things seem to be changing, and India Inc. has taken the lead. The “Spoken Web” of IBM Research India, a voice-enabled technology, complements the Internet and helps people with impairments to access information and perform business transactions. The company’s “Human Ability and Accessibility Center” in India initiative uses technology to make the workplace more manageable for people with sensory and physical disabilities.

The PSU power giant, National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) as well as Titan India, part of Tata group, are few examples to include persons with disabilities in the work and employment arena. Titan Industries pioneered the use of sign language at the workplace way back in the 1980s with a view to accommodate people having speech and hearing disabilities. Industries like hospitality have dedicated policies for enlisting employees with disabilities (PWDs), which greatly pushed up the confidence levels of employees and created the need for “positive discrimination” to reinforce equality. Moreover, where physical infrastructure is considered an inhibitor to accommodate PWDs, many companies have devised and embraced the concept of “universal design,” based on designing products and infrastructure for usage irrespective of age or ability.

## **Promote LGBT+ Rights**

The diversity and inclusion philosophy at Johnson and Johnson (J&J) India is deep rooted in its value system and is a reality of life (J&J, 2020). The company initiated global internal programs like “Open & Out” under its Employee Resource Group (ERG), which aims towards promoting equal access to opportunities for all its employees. The multinational major wishes to join the global bandwagon through its underlying commitment to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) community by extending family benefits like mediclaim and other policies to the same gender partners. Built on a fair and embracing ecosystem, the focus on such gender-inclusive benefits reflects the company’s culture of inclusion and better employee experience. The safe and welcoming work environment of the company also creates a sense of pride and equitable treatment among all individuals.

Godrej has long been promoting inclusive culture for its employees as well as clients (Godrej, 2020). Godrej Culture Lab, the group’s initiative, led a powerful role in changing mindsets about LGBT+ people. Similarly, the software giant Microsoft’s “GLEAM” constitutes the people resource group of the company, where members connect via events like the “Ignite” talks, network with LGBT+ groups, raise

funds, interact with community leaders on gender and sexuality and host sports and cultural activities. The formation of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and same-sex partner benefits instilled confidence and became a game changer in the LGBT + journey. The gender reconstruction surgery covered under Microsoft's corporate medical insurance played a critical role in bringing LGBT+ groups within the mainstream workplace culture of the company.

### ***Inclusion Initiatives: Corporate Imperatives***

Tata Steel, one of India's largest business conglomerates, with its continuous focus on diversity and inclusion practices unveiled its new working model, permitting employees to work from home for 365 days a year, where even officers who are required to be based out of a particular location can now work from home for unlimited days in a year. The company also introduced a new HR policy, which facilitates its LGBTQ+ employees to declare their partners and thereafter avail employee benefits as admissible. Likewise, Urban Company India has also announced "Mental Health Leave Policy" for its employees, allowing them to avail unlimited sick leaves in case they are suffering from any form of mental or physical illness, particularly if the patient has contracted COVID-19. Various public sector companies including Mazagon Dock, Bharat Electronics and GRSE have decided to offer one-month special leave to employees who have contracted COVID-19 and allowed quarantine leave in case family members have contracted the virus. Free transportation has been extended across all categories of employees including outsourced vendors in order to promote safe and caring workplace culture. In a bid to foster growth, happiness and holistic development of employees, OYO has announced five-day work week starting August 2020 for all employees across teams with rosters for field roles that require working on Saturdays, so as to ensure five-day working week and no scheduling of work calls and meetings, or sending emails or slack messages on weekends and holidays, ensuring complete weekend curfew, unless emergency. The steel major SAIL has also introduced shorter work hours for employees like three days a week, every alternate day, four hours every working day or half of the working days in a month with a variable pay structure in order to promote well-being of its employees. Aditya Birla Group, one of the largest business conglomerates having operations in 12 countries, ensured that its leadership is representative of the local workforce that hires local talent regardless of ethnicity, sexuality or social background, ensuring that the skills are transferred equally throughout its operations. Accenture India started conducting online hobby classes and employee engagement activities in order to engage with employees' children during the lockdown period. Big-4 consulting firm Ernst & Young (E&Y) has transitioned the employee life-cycle experience to virtual mode. Schindler, a manufacturing veteran, followed the concept of three 5s, wherein every day, every employee is encouraged to reach out to five co-workers, five customers and five family members. 3M has activated Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) in order

to seamlessly operate on virtual platforms to sustain the organization's long-standing culture.

In addition to the above, there are several instances of inclusive practices from forward-looking Indian corporate houses across manufacturing and non-manufacturing as elucidated below.

## **Manufacturing Sector**

### ***Alstom India***

Alstom India with its focus on diverse and inclusive workforce encourages women to resume work after sabbatical. The company has also launched "RENEW", the "Return2Work" program aimed at attracting diversity talent back to the workplace, wherein women employees having three or more years' experience who took a career break of over 12 months are eligible to apply (Alstom India, 2020). Through this initiative, they are put on a fixed term contract employment for 6 months initially and based on their performance offered suitably to join either part time or full time. The women employees of Alstom India comprising 18% of the workforce are also involved in shop-floor heavy-duty jobs at their manufacturing units in Sri City, Madhepura, Coimbatore and Kolkata, handling jobs that are typically associated with male-centric roles. Skill development support and higher education program is provided to women diploma engineers with financial support, which witnessed efficient delivery from women entering newer fields of work. The women occupancy in the board which was 17.9% in 2018 showed a promising increase in 2019, with 20% seats globally occupied by women. Constant attempts have been made by the company to provide women with positions at workplace that are worthy of their skill sets.

### ***ABB India***

Gender diversity and inclusion goals are a key part of people strategy at ABB India (ABB, 2020). The company strongly believes in the philosophy that workplace equity is a precursor to workplace equality. ABB recognizes that a diverse and talented workforce provides the requisite quality and skills to create competitive advantage as well as innovation and business success, if allowed to flourish in an atmosphere of inclusiveness. The purpose of the Diversity & Inclusion Committee at ABB India is not only to enhance diversity for the organization, but also meant to leverage the same for gender-diverse workforce to achieve superior business results. The key performance indicators (KPIs) are aligned with the Group People Strategy and crucial capability building initiatives like Women Leadership Development Program (RISE)

to ensure that the company encourages and fosters next line of leadership. As per company records, 29% of senior management roles in the company were held by women in the year 2019.

ABB believes in driving an equitable workplace for creating better leaders and to remain innovative and agile. The company trains business leaders and employees on “Interrupting Unconscious Bias” through training programs which helps them to ponder over biases, if any and to engage and work in an inclusive work culture ensuring a safe working environment. The company also launched the Telecommute (work from home) policy, a path breaking step in a typical manufacturing company like ABB. Though meant to measure productivity, however, ABB embraced virtual tools and systems so as to increase connectivity in a smooth manner. The “Re-Board” Program initiated by the company aims to rehire former female employees. Day-care facility is also maintained at all its locations in order to build an inclusive organization for both men and women employees. It has also given opportunity for the company towards personalization with an aim to humanize its workplaces; for example, regular communication by the Diversity & Inclusion Committee on different aspects and showcasing of personal stories of female leaders throughout the year has ensured the company to know the contributing person beyond the role.

## **Banking and Financial Sector**

### ***PNB MetLife***

The insurance industry in India happens to be still among the various sectors which strives to achieve a gender-balanced workforce. As per Annual report 2017–18 of the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI), women constitute around 27.81% of the total life insurance agency force. The insurance major, PNB MetLife, has been able to achieve success in fulfilling 35% gender diversity, which is above the industry standards and aspires to achieve 50% gender diversity target in future (PNB MetLife, 2020).

The insurer works with people across hierarchies and regions of the country to put in place inclusive practices and ensures that the team follows unbiased processes, be it in terms of hiring or planning for career progression. Considering that insurance industry has no entry barrier as far as having any technical background is concerned, therefore, someone driven to learn something new can definitely pursue a career in insurance. While the company focusses on encouraging more female employees to take leadership positions and focus on strengthening gender diversity, it has also created equal opportunities to provide meritocracy in all aspects from hiring to succession planning. The company believes in building an inclusive workplace based on the three key pillars: (i) *Valuing uniqueness*: Openness to new and diverse ideas, respecting others’ opinions and ensuring the uniqueness that everyone brings to the table is valued; (ii) *Building belongingness*: Create an environment to

make employees feel belonged, acclimatize with the company's culture and lingos without feeling uncomfortable; (iii) *Critical eliminating barriers*: Using objective measures to respond while seeking multiple viewpoints, being conscious of unconscious biases and aware of not being too critical and proactively trying to create an environment for people to share their opinions without hesitation and freedom to speak out loud.

## **IT Sector**

### ***Tata Consultancy Services (TCS)***

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), the forerunner software firm with its vision of promoting an inclusive workplace culture, has launched Diversity And Women's Network (DAWN) in 2009 to encourage and enable women employees to advance and realize their potential (TCS, 2018). This network focuses on initiatives for retaining women, advancing women-encompassing policies and enabling an environment to help them manage major milestones in life with the motto "what gets measured, gets done", which helped the company to achieve balanced gender ratio. With changing demographics and generations at workplace, the company initiated the concept of Leadership & Diversity (Lead), which encompasses all facets of diversity like gender, generation, culture, PwD, LGBTQ+ as well as diversity of the mind beyond gender conversation, focusing on diverse skills and inclusion at work. TCS also became the first employer to have one lakh women employees on its payroll and over 160,000 women employees in its workforce as on 31 Mar 2020, making it one of the largest employers of female talent in India.

"Respect for Individual" being one of the TCS values, it continues its effort towards tapping the needs of diverse segment of its employees by forming diversity councils in each geography, which continues to create equitable opportunities for the LGBTQ+ community. Regular engagement with employees and clients was addressed in order to successfully address the gap by extending medical coverage to LGBTQ+ employees and their partners.

## **FMCG Sector**

### ***Marico India***

The FMCG major, Marico, with its vision to promote inclusive workplace initiatives has created a strong communication forum with people from diverse and non-diverse groups, which led to promotion of open conversations and identifying challenges among employees. It also helped to create an enabling environment around

systems, policies and infrastructure. The company also initiated communication strategy in order to create sensitivity through drama-based, theatre-based programs. With “Equality”, “Belongingness” and “Openness” as the core pillars, the company made focused efforts to create an inclusive culture where all members feel respected and valued while working “together” towards “Creating the Marico of tomorrow” (Marico, 2020).

With the three pillars of focus, the company-initiated program on differently abled talent and partnered with non-profit organization, Adamy Foundation in Bangladesh, targeted towards the youth to find sustainable and meaningful employment and improve livelihood through skills training and capability development. Merchandise training was also imparted for a month to the beneficiaries having speech and hearing challenges, using sign languages.

Marico emphasizes on measuring input output metrics through annual engagement survey and Chatbot conversations to keep track on its cultural dimensions. The second metric as an input helps the company to identify as to how many new candidates the company met, not reflective of the population within the organization. The company made a target to achieve 50% of its conversations with new candidates. In terms of output metrics, the company aimed at the diversity targets for gender, thought and ability, tracking the same over a period of three to five years. The other outcome metrics include employee retention and internal growth and promotion of people within the organization.

## **The Future Workplace: Diverse and Inclusive**

With the increasing complexity in business environment with diverse and varied perspectives being put in with people across geographies, it is imperative for organizations to think about D&I efforts not just based on gender, race and ethnicity, but also delve deeper into the cultural constructs such as religious and political beliefs, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic backgrounds and people with disabilities. In order to achieve true value creation, it has become necessary for organizations that people from different backgrounds, perspectives and abilities have equal access to opportunity and feel confident to participate in organizational processes without any glitch and concern. Although every company has different approach towards its diversity and inclusion planning, however, the pandemic has allowed those who spearheaded and promoted these efforts to project their leadership credentials and highlighted the indisputable need for diverse talent in real time during the period of crisis. With a diverse team, unique perspectives are brought to the table, which in turn boosts productivity, helps to determine unnoticed problems and offers more efficient solutions, leading to overall business growth and success.

Organizations that rely on recognizing, valuing, managing and celebrating diversity are generally capable of attracting, hiring and retaining best employees (Pitts, 2009; Wambui et al., 2013). Those organizations subsequently lead to considerable impact on employee engagement, job satisfaction and organizational commitment

at individual-level performance, effective communication, decision-making, brainstorming and corporate behaviour at group-level performance and profits, competitive advantage, problem-solving, creativity and innovation at firm-level performance (Kundu & Mor, 2016). The application of technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) in the sphere of D&I presents a compelling scenario. Although these technologies can modify and recreate the way we live, work and feel, the real positive impact can only be achieved when targeted solutions are created, redefined and put to application by a diverse pool of innovators and developers from different backgrounds. In order to achieve inclusiveness in technological products, the building blocks for these innovations need to be injected with diverse perspectives so as to avoid creation of conscious or unconscious bias in the process.

In the absence of inclusion, diversity adds little value to the larger business picture. For an organization to foster an inclusive environment is itself a long-term commitment which requires continuous cultural transformation, including deep-dive into work structures, job designs and a keen understanding of all factors reflective of the communications made by the organization and its leaders. This necessitates sustained behavioural changes at the leadership level, which in turn would serve as a role model for the organizations at large and teams in particular. Inclusive workplaces are meant to attract and retain the brightest of minds from a wide and diverse pool of talent for the organization. The initiatives like sensitization and awareness drives across organizations and training programs on unconscious bias and establishing behavioural standards can actually go a long way in setting the scene for inclusive practices and standards.

With a view to bring out the true success of D&I initiatives, leaders need to champion the cause and conjoint their experiences and knowledge before building a case to drive the D&I agenda. They should also possess the ability to influence, provoke and/or facilitate with a view to engage varied perspectives and mindsets and perhaps more importantly question their own conventional thinking to bring out the efficacy in the implementation of D&I initiatives. The leaders and talent managers need to work collaboratively in initiating and sustaining efforts towards creation of empowering environment and diverse workforce which promotes values, respect and acceptance for unique perspectives. It is thus necessary to cultivate an inclusive leadership with a view to maintain and nurture these initiatives into transforming the work environment towards a more inclusive and equitable one.

## **The Change in Wave: Inclusive Leadership as the Key**

*“The pandemic is not agnostic to issues of power, privilege or equity and it’s not coming on an even plane. This is a clear example of the very issues that diversity and inclusion initiatives are designed to address”,* says Williams, Facebook’s Diversity and Inclusion Head (Forbes, 2020).

The status of gender diversity in Indian organizations in the present times has shown reflection as organizations have started recognizing the benefits of gender



diversity and inclusion in the long run. The future imperative for Indian organizations would surely aim to go beyond the “wait-and-watch” phase of D&I and rather focus on the accountability, enhancement, reaping the benefits and analysing the impact of the D&I processes as a whole. A diverse work environment built on the foundation of flexibility and versatility is a strong proponent of success, both at individual level as well as organizational level. According to study, it is predicted that around year 2025, the millennials would constitute 75% of the global workforce including positions of leadership and that D&I would emerge as one of the primary coveted workplace parameters among others for the demographic section (Forbes, 2017). It goes beyond saying that the culture of collaboration and empowerment can only thrive when there is inclusiveness promoted by inclusive leadership. Inclusive leaders strive to ensure that the employees who contribute towards their organizations are acknowledged irrespective of hierarchical positioning (Hassan & Jiang, 2019), which pushes inclusive leaders to focus on practices that further promote employee diversity in decision-making. According to research, organizational teams led by inclusive leaders tend to be 20% more likely to make high-quality decisions, whereas 29% of the leaders are more likely to get engaged with their team collaboratively (HBR, 2020). Inclusive leaders not only make team members feel comfortable, but also encourage them to express their opinions candidly without any fear of being pushed aside due to power distance or any difference in status. Inclusive leadership helps to promote inclusiveness through openness and transparency at workplace, thus promoting employees to thrive and perform successfully (Choi et al., 2015). Those leaders are especially adept in creating connections even in uncharted avenues in unexpected manner and possess the ability to embrace adversities to turn them into opportunity for transforming internal and external stakeholders for positive results.

## Conclusion

While organizations have been increasingly subjected to market turbulence and crisis, the business leaders have a vital role in not only addressing the business concerns but also its key human assets. Successful crises management strategies are testimony to the pivotal role played by inclusive and authentic leaders, who help employees create sync with the larger vision of the organization. Those leaders also create greater drive and ownership among employees through their focus on demonstrably inclusive behaviours. This results in positive impact on the trust level of employees towards the organization and increased level of engagement. D&I leaders, who lead the organizations from the forefront with the larger goal of transforming their teams towards better future and improvised culture, inculcate a deeper sense of collaboration and bonhomie within the sphere of the organization as well as externally with their clients and communities. In order to emerge successful amidst the ongoing crisis, the business needs to look at the problems differently so as to create business opportunities, which is possible with a suitable leader at the top. The process of creating a more diverse, inclusive and equitable work environment should not be a

one-time intervention. The organizations should strive to maintain continued focus in order to achieve a holistic and inclusive culture through regular and continuous workplace assessments, properly devised reporting mechanisms, healthy diversity and inclusion practices and awareness building with a view to address power and gender imbalances, diverse mindsets and implicit biases across the organizations.

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# Flattening the Diversified Sphere through Digital Inclusivity



Sujitesh Das

**Abstract** Over a period of time, there has been a call for inclusion amongst various criteria, so that humankind can progress, together. Humans across the globe today lie on a digital spectrum from being steeped in the digital world to digitally starved. Given the accelerated proliferation of digital, more so with the abnormal times that we as a race are witnessing in all spheres of life, a new dimension of diversity and inclusion is emerging - a thought that I wish to seed in, which in no time, could vegetate into a revolutionary breed for an evolved planet. While there has been a lot of progress in terms of technology, there remain grave differences not just in the access, but also education and usage of digital assets. The author in this chapter attempts to highlight this aspect, beginning with the clarification of what it means and following it with three case studies from India, whereby the benefits for digital inclusion have been highlighted. Finally, the chapter is concluded with a call for engagement from multiple stakeholders to ensure a '100%' digital inclusivity.

**Keywords** Digital diversity · Digital disparity · Digital divide · Digital exclusion · Digital inclusion · Digital equity · Digital engagement · Digital empowerment · Digital dividend · Digital connectivity · Digital revolution · Digital access

## Introduction

'Change is the only constant' - howsoever clichéd it may be, has been accelerating in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. At the heart of these changes are the innovations made possible by Information and Communication Technology (ICT)—smart gadgets, computing devices, Internet broadband, high-speed connectivity—that are not only transforming the ways in which markets but also the people within them work. The digital revolution is the front driver of fiscal growth today; its effect and impact are faced not just by commercial entities, but also being used by the society as a whole, particularly to encourage inclusion; important as it is for

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S. Das (✉)

Co-Founder & Managing Director, badgefree.com - Talent Market Exchange, Bengaluru, India

businesses, it must be promoted in tandem with social and democratic objectives, especially in tackling exclusion. Though the fruits of ICT—such as the Internet blue chips, online shopping and nanosecond email—have failed to cure century-old malaises like poverty and unemployment, digital has the power of addressing several problems in the fields of education, health, rural development by being a major facilitator for information transparency, good governance, empowerment, participative management and grass-roots democracy.

While every economy continues to digitalize at an astounding pace making lives easier, millions of households across the globe cannot access this due to physical gaps in local broadband networks, lack of digital skills, unaffordable subscription plans and personal device limitations. Today, the participation and involvement in the decision-making for social or community activities are primarily a function of not many people accessing ICT, but also being proficient in using the same, and hence the acute opportunity loss of several people getting disconnected in the modern economy. Digital prosperity has different benchmarks with populations having unlimited, good enough or inadequate access to ICT. Digital disparity refers to the wide discrepancy or the gulf existing between demographics and regions that have easy or ready and regular or effective access to digital and modern ICT and those that have restricted access.

## **Worldwide Webbing of the Digital Diversity Spectrum**

Digital diversity encompasses physical access to technology resources, but more broadly, the knowledge or content, skills, abilities which allow for its use. The wide variance in the physical access to ICT contents varies across multiple factors like social, geographic and economic factors like age (young/old), gender and physical disability. Similarly, there are different dimensions to digital diversity such as economic status of individuals (rich/poor), economic prosperity of nations (developed/emerging), ethnicity, race (majority/minority), geographic location (rural/urban) and technological prowess (quantitative/qualitative). As a result of this, the adversely affected population, the most severe percussions being social, cultural, economic and learning exclusions, are greatly impacted.

It is quite interesting to note that the time taken by radio to reach 50 million people across the world was 40 years, television was 16 years, personal computers was 12 years, whereas the Internet was only 5 years. The Internet has acted both as an integrator (transcending national boundaries and influencing cross-border flow of education, health and trade services) as well as a divider (due to its disparities in access). It continues to become more and more popular as a communication medium and at present buzzing with economic activity by having turned into a marketplace; it gives value to the customer, enhances profit for the producer and eliminates middlemen. However, for the Internet to be a true mass medium, it will have to achieve harmony amongst all consumer segments.

## Resonating-Cum-Residual Impact of Digital Diversity

The reality of a dispersed access marketplace and the disproportionate pace of digital infrastructural development is a big challenge for economically backward groups. While over a period a time, there may have been a growth on the adoption of smart phones by such groups, continuous expenses on ever-rising data plans and enhanced ability to optimally perform the various functionalities act as a hindrance to leverage the opportunities and experiences offered.

Additionally, ‘digital diversity’ is a whole series of interlocking divides that can be categorized as follows: global, national, regional and societal. Globally also, there is a digital divide between the more industrially developed and the less developed or developing nations. Within a nation or state, there is a city or urban and rural digital divide; within urban, there is educated and uneducated digital divide; amongst educated there is socio-economic group digital divide, that is the rich or economically well off and the poor or deprived classes. There are several interlocking factors that contribute to creating the digital diversity spectrum and amplifying existing universal divides, which is even true in economically advanced countries:

- Age: The younger generation is much more exposed to ICT and hence more willing to use it more often as compared to the older generation, who are resistant to change and avoid its use or use it less frequently.
- Gender: ICT tends to be considered as a technical subject, being meant for the male, thereby having a voluntary or involuntary resistance from female population to join the bandwagon (Pinfold & Mokhele, 2005).
- Racial segregation: The racial legacy or policy of a country towards ICT also contributes to the disparity.
- Physical disability: Many a times, the ICT is not designed keeping in mind the physically disabled, like the visually impaired, or the unit cost of anything that is specialized or customized is generally unaffordable.
- Attitudinal: This is derived from cultural and behavioural attitudes towards ICT—for example, that it is for the elite class, and not meant for the masses. This mindset could be of cultural origin, wherein oral and personal communication or strong family and kinship networks are valued more than ICT as a priority means of exchange.
- Relevant content: The content in ICT lacks customization; hence, a whole lot of people across age, gender, culture and ethnicity is unable to appreciate its utility (Pinfold & Mokhele, 2005).
- Lack of digital skills and support: Low proficiency levels of computing and technology skills, and at times, literacy skills, prohibits people in many disadvantaged groups from making use of ICT.
- Physical access: The cost of ICT infrastructure and necessary equipment (hardware/software), with consistent connection appears to be a deterrent for some people to access and use it on a regular basis.

The worldwide-widening spectrum of digital diversity threatens the digitally starved, whether individuals, groups or entire countries. Once the issue of access to devices and network is ensured, it is important to teach the new users how to put the technology to work for them. For those who do not have digital skills, the fear of new or unknown technologies is a major roadblock. Thus, digital literacy is an important element, and hence, knowledge remains to be the key to both the questions and answers. The variance that defines the knowledge about the digital landscape, thus, is as important as the difference in access to the technology itself.

For a long time, there has been a myopic view about the meaning of digital literacy—with people tending to confuse it with computer literacy. While computer literacy means the possession of hardware and software skills and the practical ability to design/build/run computing devices, together with its associated components, and the Internet, digital literacy includes having an understanding and adaptable mindset and behaviour to use the social media and network in an economic, cultural and political context.

## **The Arising Theory of All-Round Digital Inclusivity**

Universal access to digital is more important than ever in today's times. The significance of digital highlights the priority of filling the gaps that separate the segments of society as well as nations with or without the opportunities and advantages of ICT.

According to the Bureau of Internet Accessibility, digital inclusion is like a blueprint for addressing and guiding the readiness of communities to fully embrace the digital age—with full participation from the population ensuring enrichment of individuals and societies. The concept of digital inclusivity is to have a method of addressing issues related to digital illiteracy, in the process enabling and enhancing the skills of people and units to retrieve and utilize ICT. There needs to be a hands-on kind of approach driven at a policy level, wherein it includes not only access to Internet, but also the availability of hardware, software, digital content, services and training for skills required for the effective use of ICT. As the Internet gets deeply entrenched in the lives of individuals and the society, it is imperative to ensure digital literacy for all. With the advancement of technology, more inclusion is also called for. It would require targeted strategies and investments to do away with the historic, formal and fundamental barriers of gaining access to and operating technology.

The terms digital inclusion and digital equity are sometimes used interchangeably, but they can be articulated with a slight difference. As per the Benton Institute for Broadband and Society, digital equity is a condition in which all individuals and communities have the ICT capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy. It is necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning and access to essential services (<http://mediawiremobile.com/news/what-is-digital-inclusion-and-why-is-it-important/>). On the other hand, digital inclusion refers to things which needs to be undertaken to ensure the digital economy reaches all households like, ease of access to connectivity and devices, training



technical support, relevant online content and application to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration.

## **The Here-and-Now Necessity for Digital Inclusion**

As has been highlighted by Otelco, inequalities in the access and usage of digital assets bring down the physical and financial interactions and thereby the value of life of those deprived of it. The Digital Divide Council calls for an urgent issue to address at all levels (individual, society and country) for the overall betterment of mankind. The only saving grace is in converting the digital divide into a digital dividend to mitigate the prevailing economic and social inequalities.

Any endeavour to reduce digital divide should take care of all the three aspects—knowledge/content, skills and abilities—to use ICT. Innovative usage of digital technology creates a significant impact in a community and supports economic inclusion by breaking down barriers to information, broadening access and lowering the level of skills needed to participate in the economy. According to Steele (2018), continuous seamless interactions in the digital mode amongst citizens would lead to the discovery of business ideas, discussions on public issues and coming up with solutions which would benefit the humankind. Promoters of the concept of digital inclusion include those who are involved in enhancing both the education and commercial aspects of the same. Because of the digital divide, if certain societal pockets remain disregarded or restricted in terms of equitable participation for prolonged periods of time, then it will hamper each and every civic aspect from education to health, leading to a downward economic trajectory.

The rate at which the digital revolution has exploded calls for collective collaboration amongst various stakeholders like businesses, institutions and governments to facilitate digital inclusion. This is the only option ahead for the enablement, engagement and enhancement of humankind where cooperation and competition coexist globally.

According to the Bureau of Internet Accessibility, the United Nations has acknowledged the Internet to be a basic human right that needs accessibility and expression in that medium, to all citizens across the globe. World over, the view is that large-scale, national-level planning is also needed to bridge the digital divide and to reap digital dividend. The utility of the high technology is meaningless without building the capability to utilize them. Focusing to develop this capability from the primary and secondary school would inculcate strong foundations in the domain and go a long way in continuous upskilling. This gets supplemented with professional vocation and training as well as the informal and unstructured learning that happens in homes and communities.

Education and learning are now the lifeblood of our twenty-first-century knowledge societies, and digital has become integral to them. The upcoming generation of students will experience better learning as they can better access and use various learning tools available on the Internet. The gap between the rich and the poor is

likely to be narrowed. The poor, especially, will learn better ways of empowering themselves. Overall, there are a plethora of benefits that come with digital inclusivity. The digital divide can never be contained in isolation, but the effort must be multidimensional and multi-pronged. Creation of ICT infrastructure and content as core methodologies with a thrust to technology growth in a planned manner will certainly lessen the gap. There are two approaches to enable a wider population to benefit from technology and information revolutions: one is to enhance level of literacy that is basic, functional technology and computer education amongst masses, and another is to design appropriate ICT tools around the capabilities of users that employ audio/visual input/output, without need to be literate, low-cost telephony, data—VOIP and wireless communication.

### **Attaining Digital Inclusion Takes a Global Village**

According to Rao (2005), thrust of programmes with a ‘C-8’ (connectivity provision, content creation, capacity augmentation, core technologies creation and exploitation, cost reduction, competence building, community participation and commitment), particularly to those in the deprived and disadvantaged sections of society, would help in achieving digital inclusion. As per Otelco (2017), the combined efforts of government agencies, private and non-profit organizations in addressing the needs—an affordable digital connectivity, an affordable digital device and an affordable digital education—are vital for inclusion. Few of the areas that need to be given priority for converting into digital dividends are distance education, telemedicine, job matching, local development and market reach. For a nation like India, a plethora of initiatives that need to be deployed to stitch the multidimensional digital tear must consist of digital upskilling, technology savvy operations and use of automated data and information exchange across several spoken, read and written languages. India as a nation has been putting in place an enabling environment for the digital revolution, by addressing bottlenecks of infrastructure like electricity, IT penetration, tele-density and Internet, as well as enabling policies to transform the country as a knowledge society.

In the last few decades, there have been several projects and initiatives that have made a successful impact in the journey of digital inclusion such as the Railway Computerized Reservation System for passengers, the Akashganga Dairy Milk Collection System, the Akshaya e-Literacy Imparting Centres, the Bhoomi Scheme of Land Records Digitization, the Gyandoot Community-owned Intranets for Rural Tribal Citizens, the Information Village Research, the TARAhaat range of services to unserved rural markets, the Warana wired villages Movement, to cite a few.

*In the next few pages, I cite a few real-time case studies from on ground in India, as highlights of humble attempts made for digital inclusivity across different tiers.*

## Developing Indigenous Solutions to Empower the Remotest

It is a no brainer that it would be easier for the masses to understand and appreciate concepts which they can connect with. Once most of the population can appreciate the advantages, they would be able to enjoy, it would lead to greater acceptance and usage. It can be illustrated by the example of how digital awareness would help agricultural workers by opening avenues and boosting their status by rationalizing their daily work. The impact would be through the agri-chain from learning optimal methods of tending crops to locating better markets for the production to uncovering ways of taking computed risks via insurance. Transformations on the field such as these become workable in digitally included societies (Steele, 2018).

### *Here is a heart-touching real story from rural India to illustrate the above*

Maudiguda is a small village located in Rayagada District of Odisha. The prime occupation of the villagers is farming. For several years, the farmers of the village used to grow only cotton and tobacco once a year, during monsoons, as the village faced acute water problems. While the capital costs for agriculture were met, the farmers did not find selling the harvest profitable enough. They also observed severe deterioration of fertile soil and non-reliable access to water for irrigation. They were interested in shifting their agricultural pattern from cotton and tobacco to growing vegetables. Since Rayagada was close to the village, they believed that they had a great opportunity both in terms of demand and market linkage for vegetables. However, these small and marginalized farmers did not have the means to either afford an irrigation system or think of any alternative. They were uncertain if their dreams of year-round farming would ever be realized.

The team from SunMoksha brought hope to them by first introducing an innovative method to supply equitable irrigation water to them from a shared irrigation system. Then they introduced a mechanism to collect enough funds to operate and maintain the system year-round. SunMoksha's Smart AQUAnet™ promoted the usage of a shared water source for irrigation, wherein the farmers placed their requests for the quantity of water they needed to the local operator or entrepreneur—'Aquapreneur'. Water utilized by every farmer was measured and recorded, so that they were equitably billed for the water used by them. SunMoksha team trained the Aquapreneurs in the usage of smart components so that they could operate the technology governing the entire water solution system on their own.

Smart AQUAnet™ is a cloud-based solution which is remotely monitored and controlled. The operator has the comfort of a back-end support and guidance of the technical team through digital means from SunMoksha's Command Centre. Also, the operators receive their revenues from the money paid by the farmers for their water consumption. Each farmer gets billed only as per the quantity of water supplied. Due to the scheduling capability in the system, the farmers knew exactly when the water will be delivered to their plot of land. SunMoksha conducted a detailed survey to understand the site's geography, soil condition, climate condition, rainfall, ground water level, etc. Sound testing was carried out at strategic locations to understand

water and soil profile below the ground. It was found that the earth under the Rayagada area was very rocky. Despite the proximity to a river, Maudiguda had acute water problems. Based on the survey conducted, SunMoksha designed and sized the Smart AQUAnet™ solution with 3 kWp solar PV system with 3 HP submersible DC pump. This pump was to be shared amongst 45 farmers holding 27 acres of land in terms of large, medium and small plots.

The pumping system was ‘tuned’ to optimize the flow of water to match the nature’s recharging process through rock fissures from where the water was being pumped out from. That led to a steady flow of water, well within the ‘recharge’ limit of the bore well. The IoT-controlled system was operated only on requests and would pump water only when needed, thus ensuring the conservation of the underground water ecosystem. Since the commissioning of Smart AQUAnet™, the farmers were able to access water all the year around yet ensuring sustainability of the underground water supply. There was no longer a need to have multiple water pumps for plots of land and usage of diesel gensets to power the motors when electricity supply was cut-off. Smart AQUAnet™ could set water supply limits based on soil conditions and crop types. This greatly benefited the ecosystem, through water conservation, maintaining ground water level, enabling multi-cropping, financial sustainability and centralized operations and maintenance.

Within a year, the AQUAnet™ system demonstrated its capability of water conservation and improved agricultural efficiency through digital means. Throughout the year, the farmers were able to grow a variety of vegetables, such as eggplant, okra, chilli, tomatoes, cucumber and more, depending on the season and the market demand. This led to an increase in the income of the farmers by up to tenfold. While previously, each acre used to generate Rs. 15,000 to Rs. 20,000, post-implementation of Smart AQUAnet™, income from each acre increased manifold to Rs. 1.8–2.1 lakh annually. Smart AQUAnet™ successfully achieved the goals to improve agricultural output, reduce input costs and address climate change mitigation in Maudiguda. The farmers adapted to crops and produce that could be grown within the limited irrigation water available and maintain the water levels sustainably.

## **Promoting Disruptive Innovations to Narrow the Cleave**

Nations are addressing the digital diversity and disparity through a combination of private, non-profit and government funding sources. There is a growing need of providing a central data bank for communities that are doing the hard work of providing common people the ammunition and assets needed to engage in the digital economy and share their thoughts and knowledge (Otelco, 2017).

*Below is another inspiring live case study from urban India that is reshaping experiences.*

In 2016, Bengaluru-based MyGate pioneered the use of technology in housing societies with a complex, yet elegant, solution. Already, it counts over 15,000 communities, as customers and over 2.5 million app users, who use it to find house help, manage deliveries to their home, pay their society maintenance bills, connect with neighbours and many other uses. A story like that of many other apps—and yet MyGate is different. What is ostensibly a solution only for the residents of these communities is a delicate system that benefits, enables and even empowers every other participant in the community, those at the other end of the digital diversity spectrum, such as the security guard or the daily help. In doing so, the four-year-old company is already well-positioned to redefine the workings of the rural-to-urban economy.

An estimated nine million Indians work as security guards and 50 million as domestic help. These informal workforces have not seen many of the benefits that digitization has brought along. There are undoubtedly efforts to change this, but MyGate is running perhaps the most successful one on a large scale. During these four years, MyGate has already trained over 300,000 security guards to use the MyGate guard app, thereby giving them a digital education, making them more efficient, competent and significantly reducing their manual effort. More importantly, though, the app is also improving the perceived status of the profession, giving it the respect it deserves, by empowering guards with information they can use to properly secure a premise.

Traditionally, the security guard is seen as being inefficient and even incapable of distinguishing between visitors and intruders or trespassers. MyGate not only ensures that they can do this—but that they do it quickly. For example, security guards, on average, take over three minutes to verify persons requesting entry to a gated community; with MyGate, this is reduced to under 30 s, as most visitors are pre-approved by residents on the app. Such interventions at the gate make the security service more valuable to the resident while making the work of the guard less stressful. All these improvements are thanks to the technology and the growing digital literacy of the nation's populace.

This form of digitization brings new rungs to a profession that has never been taken seriously. Formalization of tasks, tracking of effort and the ability to showcase value to the end customer will make the guard profession a better long-term career option, rather than a means for rural folk to find their beginnings in the big city for a few years. Similarly for the 1.5 million domestic workers that are today registered on the MyGate app, finding work in the community is simple and quick now. All they must do is to register and put in their skills and availability. Employers using the app can easily browse through the profiles of all the maids, nannies and cooks that work there and check reviews and ratings submitted by their neighbours as well as the timings at which they are available. The digitization of some aspects of these professions can also have a larger impact on society. For example, the vast majority of India's unorganized workforce are lone migrants to urban areas who

return home once a year for harvest. They live in the city by themselves, reliant on a small network of people for work. Often, when they are back in the city, they find themselves displaced and must rely on the grapevine for new work. With MyGate, though, they have a digital profile that is similar to a skills resume. This effectively makes unorganized workers completely mobile, capable of returning to the big city each year without any fear of being unable to prove their experience. In fact, it also makes them less reliant on their existing networks. They are completely free to seek employment anywhere they please, as there are societies using MyGate all over the country. But it does not just end here. The possibilities are endless. Despite being part of an unorganized sector, this simple record will eventually allow them to access more of the economy, particularly in terms of financial products and be included in the mainstream economy.

In the coming decades, we are likely to see a growth in urban areas across the country. There are over 45 million Indians living in gated communities across the country, and the number is growing by a double-digit percentage every year. This reliance of this population on technology is only going to grow, but it is important to increase digital literacy across the board. Platforms such as MyGate will be instrumental in closing the gap that exists in this regard and can redefine the functioning of the rural-to-urban economy through digital.

## **Establishing Durable Partnerships to Cross-Pollinate Stakeholders**

As per the research by Otelco (2017), cost, fear, sustainability and availability have been the biggest deterrents for a complete inclusion of technology. Various stakeholders are engaged in this cause. While historical statues may act as barriers, institutions should be incentivized to carry forth their efforts.

*Following is a promising case narrative from emerging India, magically weaved in the power of sharing.*

The shared mobility or logistics sector in India is amongst the most informal and unorganized sectors in the country. By some estimates by TeamLease, the logistics sector employed about 83 lakh people in the country in 2018–2019, and it has been one of the few sectors that have been adding jobs every quarter, despite the pandemic. The shared economy and growing influence of e-commerce leading to greater hyper-local delivery have further bolstered the sector as one of the first and earliest options for the highly migrant labour population in the country. Before the triumvirate of Aadhar, smartphones and payment apps came in to India circa 2017–18, this sector was prone to large inefficiencies and an inherent lack of trust mechanisms, which limited the labour from finding continuous employment opportunities. There are three significant ways by which this digital divide has got bridged over the past

3 years, with several actors contributing towards the increasing organization of the logistics and transportation sectors.

Firstly, with the advent of the cheaper smartphones, a plethora of two-sided marketplaces serving the gig-economy led to increasing access to data and information about the migrant labour that could be used to build the equivalent of ‘trust tokens’ for the labour and merchant economy. This was particularly visible in the logistics sector where the advent of app-based services such as Porter, LetsTransport and TruckSumo created the bridges needed for the digital economy to make inroads into the mobility and logistics sectors. Secondly, the Aadhar network, however flaky it was initially, helped establish a better verifiability, when combined with one of the cheapest mobile data networks in the world. It has significantly reduced the cost and risks of employing informal labour. The chances of a person to land a gig-economy job are at least 5–6 times higher when they have an Aadhar number tied up with a phone number that can be used for OTP verification, compared to when they do not. Lastly, an increasing number of players started to provide access to personal finance through these digital platforms, which the workers hitherto did not have access to. This, combined with the one of the most frictionless payment platforms in the world (the UPI), enhanced the value of the digital platforms to the players in the platform.

The next generation of the digital platforms benefited from the optimization improvements that were possible once the information, payments and risk profile infrastructure were in place. This led to the creation of sharing economy platforms such as Vogo, Bounce, Dunzo, Swiggy and the likes. It also led to the acceleration of the adoption of new technology and business models in transport and logistics, such as Rivigo, Blackbuck for intercity reverse logistics and Lithium Urban Technologies, Yulu and BluSmart for EV-based transportation. The next wave of the developments that bridged the digital divide was through optimization plays. In the case of Vogo, for instance, it helped create a shared bike platform that could make available an individualized and affordable means of transportation, to anyone who had a valid Aadhar, driver’s licence and a smartphone. As mobility is a key indicator of both social and economic mobility, for the entry-level executive, and the gig-economy worker, owning a vehicle was no longer an entry barrier to a better lifestyle, as was the case before. They could pay it out of their incremental earnings, and hence not dip deeper into debt or count on favours through informal networks for funding their ability to earn. For the platforms such as Vogo, providing such services, it was imperative to have the ability to track, monitor and indeed, control the asset to some extent, to create the ‘trust’ tokens needed to make such services available to someone who was previously not known to anyone in the platform and instead have it run algorithmically. Similarly, in the on-demand concierge platform, Dunzo, the fundamental money-value-of-time arbitrage was combined with optimization plays to allow for merchants, individual customers and gig-economy workers to service pent-up demand for single-task and small-delivery needs in the hyper-local environment. In the past, it would have been done with (expensive and commercially inefficient) office peon networks, which is now thrown open to many people provided each customer, merchant and driver was willing to sign up to create ‘trust’ tokens on the platform. In Lithium, the company pioneered the employee transportation

services using electric vehicles, even though the driver could not afford to buy the expensive electric car. However, by using the digital technologies and building on the triumvirate previously mentioned, Lithium was able to not only provide drivers the ability to skill up on the vehicle technology but also helped customers switch to a more efficient and less polluting mode of transport, without pushing for large subsidies or high adoption costs. This has also increased the productivity of either the vehicle or the driver or both, thereby enabling a self-reinforcing positive cycle of equity and inclusion for those willing to engage and play as per the rules of the digital economy. To summarize, one of the most unorganized and fragmented segments in the country—transportation and logistics—has seen the most significant disruption from the digital revolution after the finance industry and clearly has increased the equity and inclusion in the sector, through increasing formalization, and optimization making the entire sector a more organized and therefore increasingly credit-worthy part of the economy.

The Indian Government has been propelling the digital age and associated convergence by announcing enabling policies towards development and progress with a goal of ‘Digital for All’. However, implementation of some of these programmes has been beset with various operational, procedural, regulatory issues and supporting legal framework that is inhibiting the reach and benefit of the digital ICT to masses in the country. But I sincerely believe that the democratized and combined power of self and social will ignite and accelerate digital inclusivity to the desirable extent.

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# Scaling-Up Organizations with Diversity and Inclusion



Vandana Madhusudan

**Abstract** The chapter is a study on diversity and inclusion in talent acquisition practices. It is a practical and hands-on recruitment perspectives for scaling-up Indian organizations willing to become sustainable. This study focusses on the availability of diversity pool, sources of reach out and systematic recruitment deployment strategies for strengthening diversity in Indian Organizations. This chapter emphasizes on practical recruitment strategies that can be adapted to create diversity vision, mission, and process to attain scalability along with focus on diversity. It deciphers the available diverse pool of talent, vocation wise, region wise and busts critical myths on talent availability. Taking cues from job portals and analyzing the recruitment trends, the chapter clearly demonstrates a methodological path for raising diversity across levels—fresher, middle management, and top leadership hiring. The tenure demonstrated for the availability of talent is in absolute real terms and 2020 focused. Special care has been taken to present data of common industries where women hiring is critically less.

**Keywords** Scale-up · Diversity hiring · Inclusion selection · Leadership hiring · Employee engagement with diversity

## Scaling-Up Organizations with Diversity and Inclusion

Indian corporate employees have seen an age when telecom jobs were called “jobs of line man.” We have lived the age in which “Boss” would be the male figure, with no feminine choice to that noun. We have lived the age, when being on the table, thumping opinions, still reserved to “bold ladies” at work, who never gave significant importance to families. We have lived the age where most coveted management institutes in the country had consistently had less than 10% girl students passing the campuses and facing the wide job world. We have lived an age when hiring North

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V. Madhusudan (✉)

Head Human Resources and CSR, ACME solar, Gurgaon, India

e-mail: [vandana.madhusudan@acme.in](mailto:vandana.madhusudan@acme.in)

east resource is full of “risk” as they may leave you any time. We have lived an age when relatives ruled in small enterprises and hiring was strictly caste based!

We are now living the age when an entire railway station (Matunga) is managed by women. DMRC appointed seven transgenders for operating a busy metro station, which they manage very efficiently, truly the “Proud Station of India” (Butani, 2020). We are truly living in an age when startups are hiring women leaders in their third trimester of pregnancy. We are living the age with the new normal pushing boundaries of geographies and hiring trends leading the way to give opportunities in tier 3 and tier 4 cities. We are living in the age when Chairman Jack Ma, of Ali Baba (one of the largest e-commerce companies) attributes its success to just women. There are millions of users and millions of merchants on Alibaba. The online site was evaluated \$248 billion in 2017. Jack Ma is blatantly open about his success strategy on online shopping arena. According to Worldwide ERC (2019), 33% of Alibaba Group’s founders and more were women, and even now, the percentage of women in top leadership slot remains the same. Ma gives the deep secret of business success as women and their eye to detailing. According to Jack Ma, women have the power to see beyond the obvious. They correspond to business decisions very fast.

We are living in an age when big companies like L’Oreal have also become famous for strong and robust diversity and inclusion initiatives. L’Oreal leads in women hiring, and about 70% of employees are women, and upper management is more than 50% with women leaders. All these can happen when a company centers diversity and inclusion at its core (Emplify).

A study from the International Journal of Economics & Management Sciences shows details on Indian companies. In India, corporates have been looking forward for raising diverse work force.

It is a fact that worldwide business communities are looking for attracting Indian diverse teams. There is a voluntary shift in making efforts toward gathering more momentum in non-conversional hiring. This study reveals that women hiring in private sector is about 16% in IT and communications.

Thus, agreeably, in few years, we have traveled a lot, but is it enough? But is it OK to have a handful of companies centering themselves to diversity and inclusion in twenty-first century? Hiring is a manifestation of vision of the organization, especially the top most leadership team. Let us look at some of the practical initiatives at recruitment levels on how companies can initiate more of diversity hiring, thereby looking at augmenting the funnel of diverse candidates for companies. Large corporates have traveled a long path in creating diversity hiring a priority. Unless and until, the acceptance on the long-term benefits of diversity is established in the minds of leaders, it is a rarity that an organization can achieve diversity goals.

To give an example in 2008, in Idea Cellular—one of the top three telecom players, a group of Aditya Birla group, it was seen that women employees were less than 22% in the organization, and the leadership and middle management was less than 6%. An entire strategy was planned to ensure that this ratio is altered with a significant impetus on not only hiring but retention. Of the major strategies put, it was made sure that to ensure diversity hiring, each level of the organization needed to be mapped. Some of the winning examples adapted for gender-based hiring was:

Mapping all the roles and creating exclusive roles that can be reserved 100% for women employees.

Stages of recruitment for diversity candidates.

To give a practical look on hiring, let us take up three stages of recruitment.

- Hiring at diversity and women candidates at entry level
- Hiring diversity candidates in middle management—mammoth task in hand
- Hiring leadership with diversity.

Talent Availability:

There are diversity candidates **AMPLEY AVAILABLE!** Easily Accessible!

## **Pipeline Issue: Hiring of Diversity and Women Candidates at Fresher Level**

HR of corporate houses, especially industry like telecom, infrastructure, and large-scale companies, have always come back to business sharing that women candidates are not available in exclusive domains like STEM, engineering, CA, etc.

The biggest boon to hiring has come with very clear support of job portals like Naukri.com and IIMJOBS, wherein they have indicated very clear demarcations so that in case any company wishes to reserve looking at diversity candidates and women candidates, they can have exclusive look into the same. Technology will be able to sift the entire data and give recruiters exactly what they look for. For example, if we look at Naukri Resdex page, which helps us scout resumes, we can clearly select diverse candidates and exclusively choose people with disability (Fig. 1).

This is a very important tool, which corporates can use to straight away reach out to differently able candidates of a particular region and particular academic background. Same goes for women candidate hiring; in case we wish to look at traditionally non existing women roles like in engineering and CA, now we can exclusively hunt for women candidates as presented in the portal. Just to share a brief—in Naukri—we can get more than 624,901 women freshers who have an engineering degree. This breaks a lot of myth that engineering candidates are not available. If we pick up a stream-wise analysis, we find that in all streams including civil, electrical, electronic, aerodynamics, there are thousands of female freshers available to be hired (Fig. 2).

If the organization prefers to reserve some of the fresher role for women candidates, over the period of 5–8 years, the organizations can clearly see a gradual percentage increase in the women employees. This is the most foundation and basic step to inculcate the diverse work force. Beginning to have front lines as women candidates allows, clear pathway for gradual and sustainable increase in the number of women candidates.

Looking from Naukri, for the basic roles, we have the following details industry wise of women availability (Table 1).

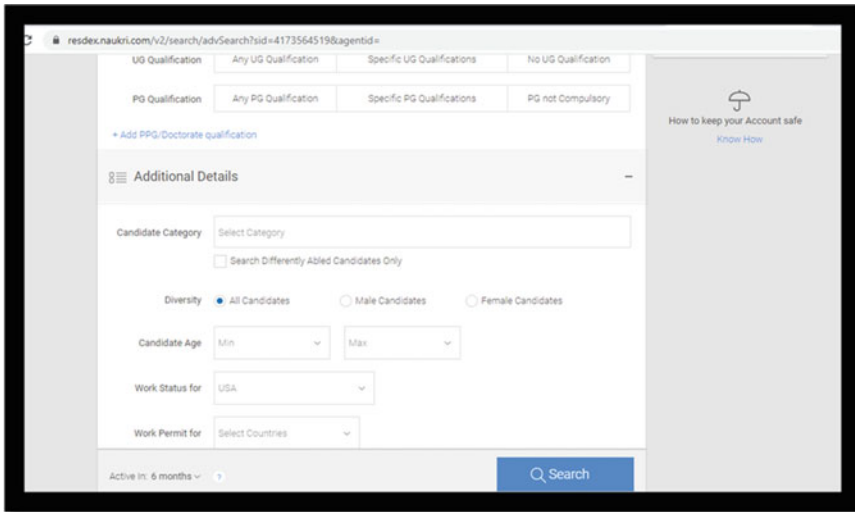


Fig. 1 Print screenshot of Naukri portal, with clear indication of candidate category, enabling distinct choices of diversity, differently able resources (Naukri.com, 2020)

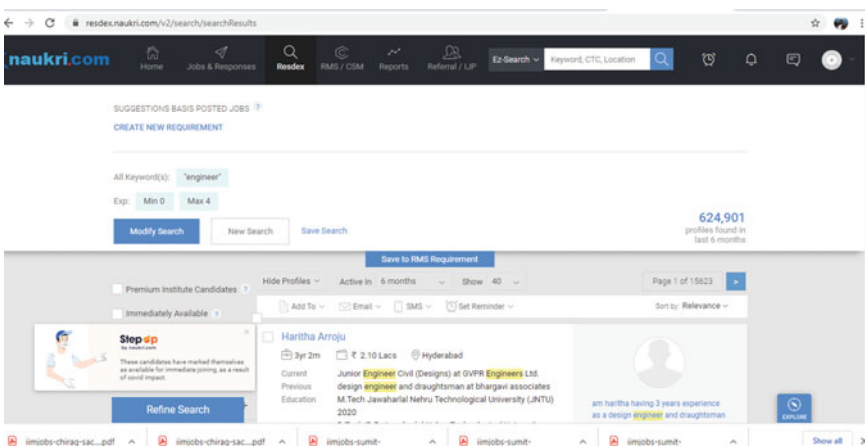


Fig. 2 Screenshot of Naukri portal, sharing the availability of “Women Engineer” with 0–4 years of experience

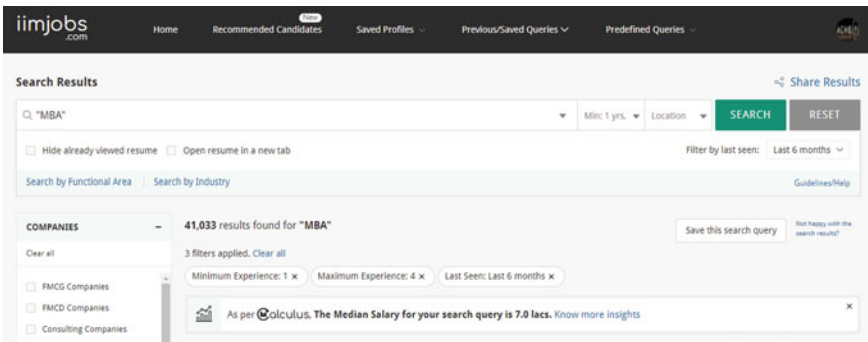
If we look for women candidates from premium colleges through IIM jobs, here are the details.

41,033 women candidates are available with premium MBA, with 0–4 years of experience, ready to join in less than 3 months of notice period (Fig. 3).

Other hiring details and availability presence of women and disability candidates (Figs. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11).

**Table 1** Availability of women candidates, function wise

Stream/Function chosen	Number of women candidates available
Engineer	624,901
CA	62,178
CS	36,003
Sales	309,165
MBA	219,362
MBBS	9220
Teacher	119,365
Pilot	7942
Technician	1,111,008
Telecom	1,965,029
Infrastructure	1,955,628
Real estate	170,333
Legal	49,451
HR	293,010
Supply chain	24,052
Procurement	24,711
Admin	274,279
Call center	30,468
Total number of women	9,333,350



**Fig. 3** CA fresher hiring from IIM jobs—9097 candidates

## Hiring at the Middle Managerial Levels

The biggest gap in the funnel of recruitment pipelines comes when we have to look for women employees in middle management levels. As per the report at Entrepreneur, it's observed that McKinsey as an organization has figured that companies with higher

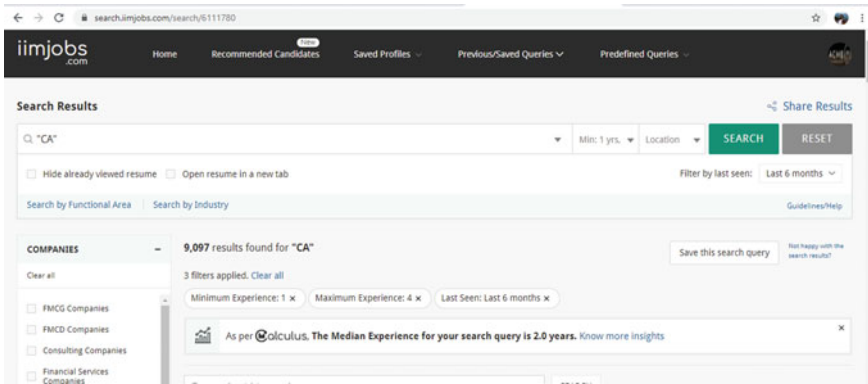


Fig. 4 Fresher with disability: available resources—9566

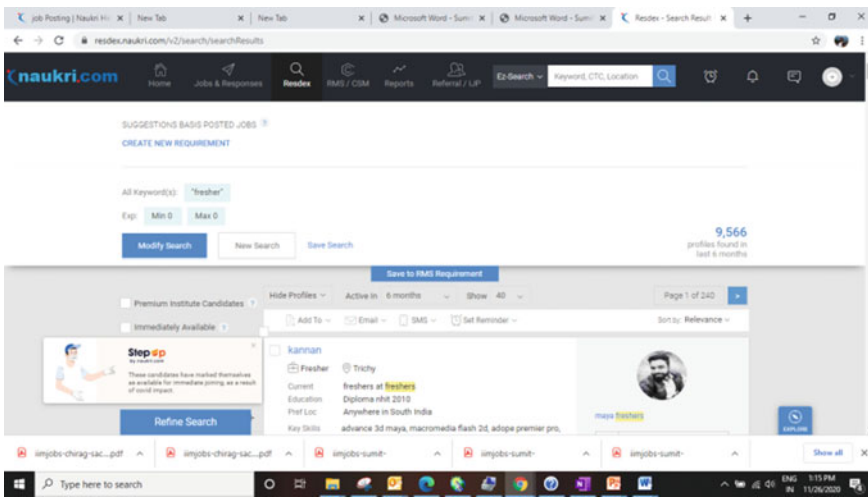


Fig. 5 Fresher women candidates—2,455,476

percentile of gender hiring and leadership give sound financial returns over their industry counterparts.

Moreover, catalyst remarks that companies give more than 16% higher return on sales with women directors onboard. According to Schnieders (2017), for Entrepreneur “Females” mid-career drop off can also result in a loss of company imagination and invention. Researchers from Carnegie Mellon found that if women make up more than 50% of a team, the shared intelligence greater than the average, which leads to greater imagination, association, and decision-making.

For thousands of women, the mid-career is a very long-term decision-making platform. Sally Blount, dean of Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management, calls this the “Mid-Career Marathon.” Here is the stage when women are

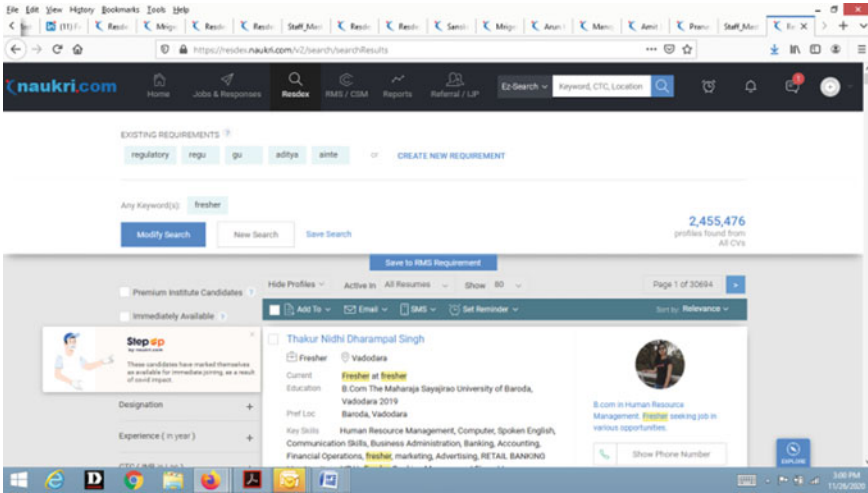


Fig. 6 Women with 5–10 years of experience—2,092,435

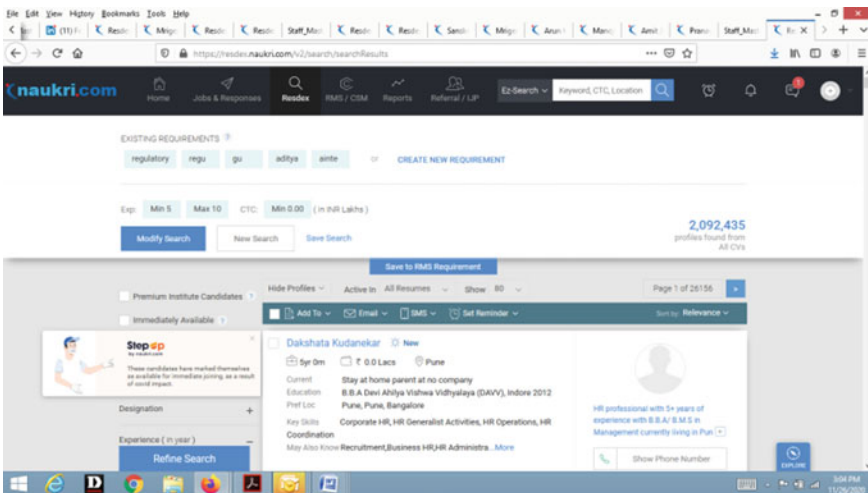


Fig. 7 Women with 10–20 years of experience—749,981 women employees

focusing on their personal life goals—marriage, kids, raising up and education responsibilities of self and family, taking care of aged in the family, etc. Though the same is applicable to men too, but women by construct of society and family stand taller in picking up responsibilities aligned to family goals. There are situations beyond control where working women’s strength is put to test. The choiceless experiences, thus, push working women force to choose over family protection and personal presence of time with family to protecting career interests. Post-Covid,

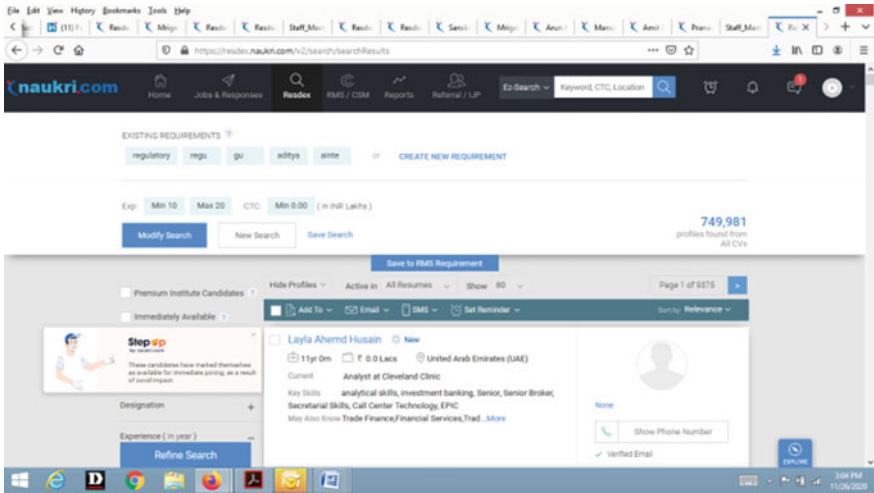


Fig. 8 Women with 20–30 years of experience—90,548

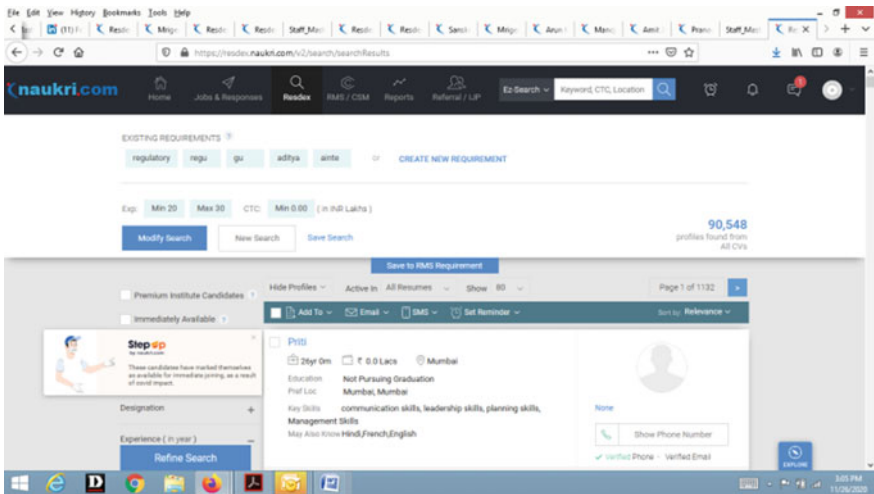


Fig. 9 Women with CTC bracket: 0–10 lakh—4,366,084

work from home scenario and understanding that women can bring in the difference, really has impacted the business in right light. Now the understanding of conventionally men-oriented industries like infrastructure, real estate, energy are opening up avenues for work from home which was absolutely unimaginable before Covid times. We can thus look forward for more diverse roles.



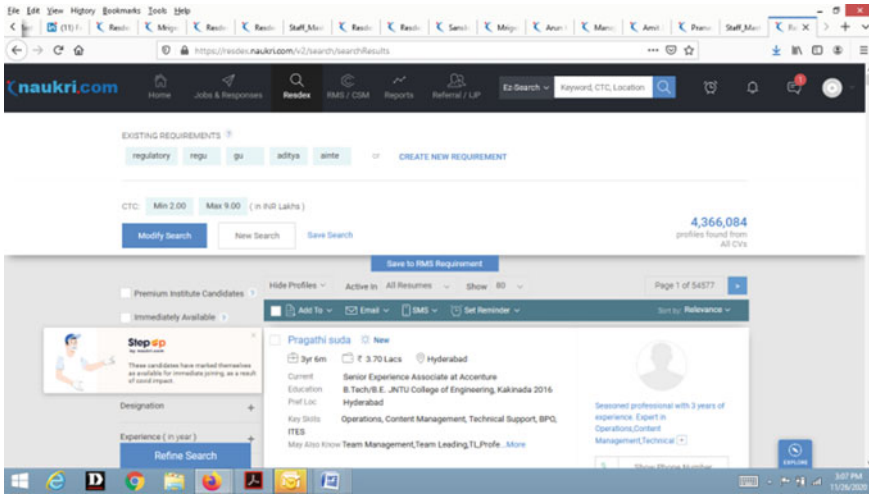


Fig. 10 Women with current CTC 10–40 lakh immediately available to join workforce—64,155

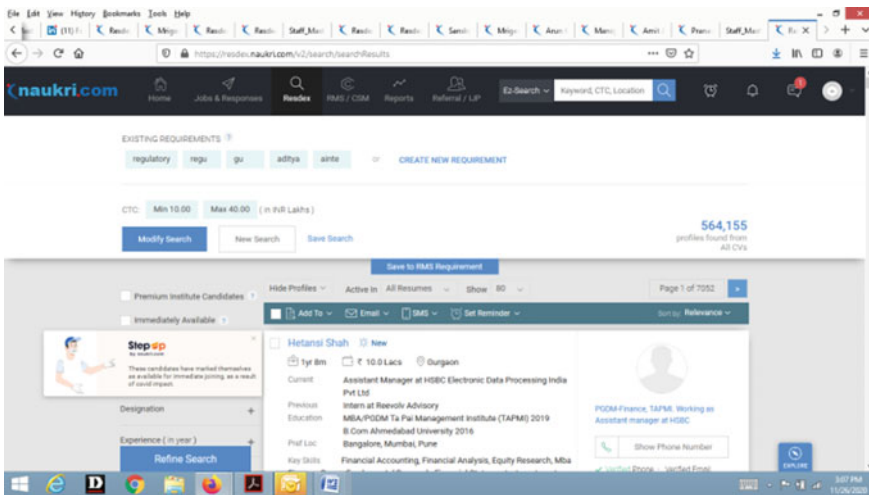


Fig. 11 Working women with CTC 40 lakh and above—4263

## Women Managers Leave Job Twice as Fast as Their Male Counterpart

As per the recent reports, from Naukri job portal, the statistics of salary and experience are as follows:

- Number of women candidates available with salary range (Table 2).
- Number of women candidates with experience (Tables 3 and 4).

**Table 2** Employee cost and available number of women candidates

Cost (lakh)	Nos.
0–10	4,366,084
10–40	64,155
>40	4268

**Table 3** Women employees available with bracket of years of experience

Years	Nos.
0–4	245,546
4–10	2,092,435
10–20	749,981
20–30	90,548

**Table 4** Percentage of turnover gender wise

	Female (%)	Male (%)
Manager	24.4	13.3
Senior and Executive Managers	26.9	7.3

Middle management accessibility can be resolved from good hiring source exclusively driving diversity and inclusive platforms like IIM jobs. Here we can access from over half a million premium, diverse talent with diversity filters built in Search Resume Database. We can shortlist premium, diverse talent from job applications, target diversity candidates by sharing exclusive perks and benefits at the time of posting a job on the recruiter dashboard.

It is a source of employer branding with features like an exclusive diversity Website to share your organizations' D&I vision. An employers brand's logo under the "featured employers" for diversity, employee testimonials on all diversity jobs (linked to ones D&I Microsite), Diversity Banner Ad on search page, under "Employers looking for more women professionals like you" (linked to the D&I Microsite). Power your Returnship Program can be run for bringing back talent after maternity. These are fantastic features that technology has enabled. The need is only to tie up the hiring needs, putting in place the vision and right focus and systems to give diversity its due need in the organization.

For middle management hiring, it seems magical and great to see that in IIMJOB portal, we have customizations like

- Only women candidates
- Returning from break
- Working mother
- Single parent
- Veterans

## Differently Able

Besides the Army, Navy, defense short service commission candidates. This immediately situates in the mind of recruiters on the large pool of selections. Incidentally, the training results with comeback women is much higher and genuine. We get to see that women employees take lesser amount to align, give better result in most of the training assessments, and can be integrated in the mainstream without fuss and delay (Figs. 12 and 13).

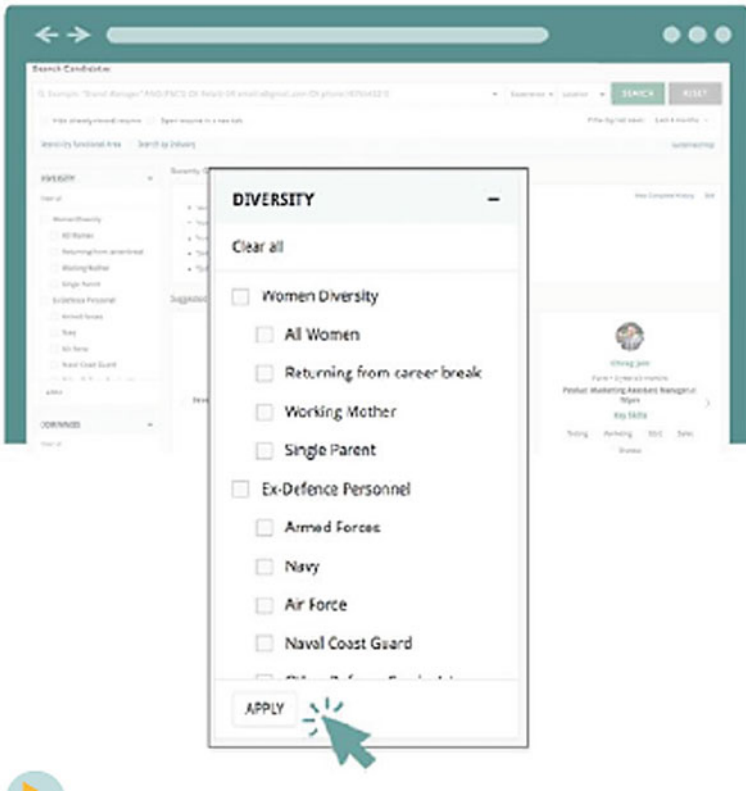


Fig. 12 IIM jobs focus on diversity supply ease and channels for selecting diversity candidates

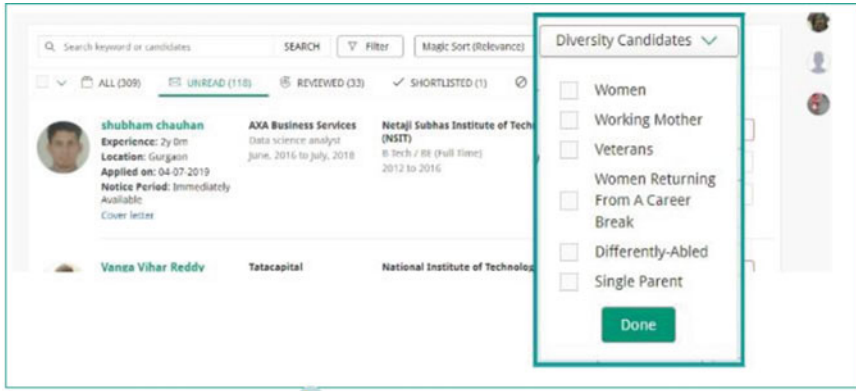


Fig. 13 Diversity candidates—category

### Practical Steps for Increasing Middle Management Diversity Candidates

What are the new and practical initiatives Indian mid-sized and large companies are doing for getting the return of middle management resources? To name a few, lactation room, new parents policy, flexi working, children assistance, women mentorship program, sports for women, men as advocates of gender diversity, retuning mothers program, adoption and surrogacy leave, pregnancy care program, women internal network, special parking for expecting mother, capability building program, work from home, voluntary parenting care, marriage and child birth gifts, marriage leave, onsite crèche facility, employer assistance program, sabbatical and anti-sexual harassment policy.

### Hiring Leadership Diversity Candidates: Challenges

According to Mckinsey, with increasing completion, diversity and inclusive hiring strategies are more likely to succeed. Since 1989, Axelrod’s has investigated on women hiring details. She has imagined as a consultant at McKinsey on how and what steps can help women leaders be retained for long. In the late 1990s, Axelrod was a leader of McKinsey’s War for Talent project, which contested the leading US companies faced in finding talented executives. She was then taken on leadership positions at the global marketing communications group WPP and then to eBay.

In the last ten years, the issues of talent acquisition has intensified. IT and knowledge leaders are very critical to the success of organizations. Statistically, the baby boomers are actually getting retired in developing economies. In developed ones,

there is a skill gap in education and corporate expectations. New young force, globally, is wanting a different approach for employment. The war for talent has intensified. Globally, every company is looking at new ways of leveraging the strength of talent. For example, eBay understands that women make most consumer purchasing decision. Hence, the market for women is larger and bigger than men; hence, the women need to be the target of online-payment systems. Women understand women better. So, having top talent women leaders in major roles where judgment needs to matter for customer acquisitions, women predict their approach of shopping and decision-making (McPherson & Mendonca, 2008).

Now, there are very clear indicators available on how diversity impacts the bottom line. It is true that female workers are essential part of any workforce diversity effort. Beyond attraction of women leaders, the major challenge is grow women leaders within the ecosystem. Women are also looking at mentors and partners to network with, voice issues, and hear and learn from experiences.

According to a recent McKinsey study, more than 70% of organizations are unable to find the right leadership mix. Our times are evolving—as they say—Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (VUCA).

Leadership competencies are getting redefined quarter after quarter. There is a greater expectation in leadership team with behaviors which are much more humane and people-centered. This grouping with a new set of demand for different type of leadership has pushed for more complex leadership. At one level, we look forward for the complete life cycle management, and at the other, keen look at diverse talent and development of the leadership funnel has become a mandate. According to Rajeev Chary, the average tenure of a leader in any leadership role is meaningfully reducing—partly due to new chances in growing markets and/or leaders finding themselves at the other end of administration band where the bond with the organization has further broadened.

## 4 Major Challenges in Hiring for Leadership Roles

**Unavailability of Timely Internal Talent**—Typically, internal talent does not grow with new skill sets in fast requirements. Though many organizations are focusing on right talent frameworks to manage talent, however, rarely we are willing to take internal employees for the next level of leadership roles. Many a times, politics, internal polarities are reason why internal talent does not get access to leadership roles.

## **Honoring the Discretion Needs of the Position is also Become Critical**

**Acquiring the Right Culture Fit**—One can witness many new HR systems that help the assessment and culture fitment; however, the decision is largely dependent on the final interview with the candidates. It is at most the best calculated risk taken in terms of culture alignment, and mostly, it does not work out. There is much more evolution needed to examine the right culture fit. As per the study by Ben Slater—23% organizations misjudge and reject the right talent.

**Creating Timely Candidate Sourcing from the Market**—Most of the organizations are attempting to safeguard their valued employees. But the time taken and cost of hiring is also very high considering the returns expected. The lead time between market leader accepting the offer and joining is also high—sometimes more than 3 months and sometimes also lead to a potential drop out situation.

## **Best Practices for Diversity Hiring**

As per global organizations, there are some fundamental steps that can help enhance the diversity hiring. Following are some of the suggestions suggest by Rakuna (2018).

### ***Affirm One's Diversity Positioning***

It is important for organizations of repute and stature to share their diversity commitments in the open. Higher number of women employees in particular business unit, function and vertical should be showcased as good practices. The media coverage, social communications about it raises the standards of the organization in the employee mind spaces. Right from the employee brochure to employment commitments can be shared in the Website. Thus, diversity can stake center stage in establishing the long-term vision of the brand.

### ***Diversity Vision and Mission***

Diversity vision and mission can take center stage of brand architecture of sustainable organizations. The printed brochure, books, year planners etc., can have diversity vision and statement/diversity commitment, diversity images and sustainability impact images, demographics stats, information on ESG policy and detailing on work

with communities on diversity. Diversity contract, diversity pictures, Womenfolk-centered landmark achievement, demographics statistics should be highlighted. New projects initiated could be done with diversity, inclusion and sustainability in mind. The company's social media should carry pictures from diversity celebration meets and celebrations, images which showcase organization's D&I efforts, worth mentioning diversity award/public recognition of organization's D&I efforts, any new initiative being launched by diverse employees, new product launch or story being shared by women or PwD employees, emphasizing the long-term retention benefits of diverse candidates, etc. Offline events should bring together a diverse group of employees from all levels to engage a miscellaneous pool of individuals. The Employee Referral Program should be talked about to encourage other diverse individuals to apply. To capitalize on one's employees' network, organizations should strengthen employee referral recruiting databases at organization, counting a thoughtful memorandum about the business need for a different set of staff and the importance the company places on diverse referrals. Communicate your organization's goals and where you are in the process of building a more diverse and inclusive workforce with your employees.

Use Social Media to Source and Market to Diverse Talents: Social media not only helps you to build your employer brand but also allows you to identify and target very specific candidates. According to a survey by ADP, LinkedIn is the most effective diversity recruitment and sourcing tool. There are millions of groups on LinkedIn for almost every profession. Your recruiters can join, develop long-term relationships with active group members, and post relevant openings or company updates. For instance, Kaiser Permanente has its recruiters join diverse groups on LinkedIn, like female professionals, Latinos, and African Americans. LinkedIn also provides specific tips for diversity sourcing. Besides LinkedIn, Facebook is an effective channel to target once ideal diverse candidates. Facebook allows you to target specific demographics and create targeted advertising campaigns on Facebook to reach diverse student groups. Another way of utilizing Facebook is to create your company's "Diversity Careers" Facebook Page and promote it through a targeted advertising campaign.

Involve in Philanthropic Actions that Chains D&I Efforts. Large organizations with capital resources, build their diversity brand and attract diverse talent with educational and community partnerships. Intel Capital, Intel Corporation's worldwide investment group, recently announced the Intel Capital Diversity Fund, which will devote in knowledge startups run by ladies and understated subgroups. Monsanto united with the company's charitable arm, the Monsanto Fund—to benefit Black, Latino and women scholars to pursue Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics themes. These energies were an active method to upsurge diversity in their talent pool and strengthen their branding in diverse communities.

Organizations must also use the right metrics to monitor their diversity recruiting efforts. How would one judge whether the diversity and inclusive goals are pertinent and the direction taken is adequate. It is absolutely imperative that organizations check at regular interval on the matrix they are following for tracking progress to set a diverse team. Some of the key metrics for your organizations could be percentage of

diverse candidates at each recruiting point, percentage of diverse aspirants applying, percentage of employees from different region applying for the post, percentage of minorities at different levels and application percentage for each role, employee satisfaction score wrt D&I, retention rate among minority employee groups, long-term preservation, especially with respect to ethnicity, gender, regional presence, etc.

There are a number of recruitment effectiveness measurement matrices. Some of the best initiatives are recommended measures by Dr. John Sullivan. Dr. Sullivan is a global HR thought-leader from the Silicon Valley. He indicates ratio of diverse candidates interviewed by acquisition manager, proportion of new inductions to fresher's, percentage of job offers extended to diverse candidates, proportionate turnover rate of diversity hires within a year, typical manager satisfaction score after a diversity hire, average on-the-job performance rating of diversity hires after one year, percentage of exit basis gender, diversity, etc.

Big data is revolutionizing the way we operate. We are now in a stage that software can deliver exactly what we seek in diversity parlances. We can put in use lot of software to bring the campus hiring process as aligned to our requirements. The processes can be made quick, aligned and focused to give the results you want rather quickly than traditional ways of hiring.

## Concluding Remarks

Distinguishing the worth of diversity primary in an corporate's lifecycle is an vital part of creating an ecological and finally positive cultural foundation. It is a powerful supply and one that really helps a professional as it enters a rapid growth phase. Diverse minds can create solutions to the kinds of difficult problems a business encounters. Individuals from different backgrounds, upbringings, and geographies will look at the same issue through the lens of their own past and cosmetics. Those differences create a surfaced answer and typically one that reverberates with far more patrons. However, institutional and structural changes are much needed to improve gender diversity in male-dominated organizations and are critical for eliminating any differences in structural opportunity that contribute to gender inequities (Barnes & Tiffany, 2018).

According to Kaufman (2017), CEO Fevrr in [www.entrepreneur.com](http://www.entrepreneur.com), "Maintaining culture while preserving diversity for a quickly growing business isn't without its challenges. It takes time, and there are certainly short-term setbacks in the name of growing the right way." The most important lesson for all recruiters of 2021 and beyond is—Yes, there are ample women and diverse candidates available and accessible for any organization globally. A competent set of untapped resource is waiting to be unleashed. It is important to set our vision and create indomitable will to ensure diversity plays a central role in organization expansion. Undoubtedly diverse teams give better stakeholder returns and vision for a long-lasting organization cannot be put without having seeds of diversity!



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# Developing Effective Diversity and Inclusion Culture Within an Organization



**Saurabh Roy**

**Abstract** Diversity refers to the existence of human differences on the grounds of race, age, national origin, citizenship, geographic location, religion, ethnicity, cultural diversity, mannerisms, gender, sexual appearance, physical ability, mental ability, interests, education, appearance, family status, relationship status, socio-economics status and experiences. While, Inclusion, on the other hand, in its true form is supposed to remove all barriers, discrimination and intolerance within an organization, thus creating an environment of respect and trust, resulting in increase of participation and contribution of all employees. Diversity and Inclusion are the key to growth-oriented success of future of organizations. D&I are valuable in generating innovation from within, increasing profits, ensuring a sustainable positive legacy of progress, while constantly identifying and addressing systemic barriers embedded within policies, practices, programmes and services that inadvertently create Exclusion. This chapter provides key steps in developing an effective and efficient D&I culture within an organization, so as to develop and nurture its employees in terms of creativity and innovation, organizational reputation, productivity, decision-making, problem-solving and organizational performance. This chapter offers organizations and individuals information on identifying tools and methods for building their D&I strategy. It provides the means to integrate D&I values and practices into existing corporate processes and enables a progressive and result-oriented organizational culture to develop as a key competitive advantage. The D&I framework provided will provide a foundation to all the organizational processes to involve Diversity and Inclusion in a systematic and integrated manner and become part of the workplace culture, attracting a diverse range of talented people. Finally, it is about equipping organizations and D&I professionals with the necessary guidelines, tools and support necessary, as the world becomes well connected and continuous exchange of workforce relocating across various countries based on the need of their expertise and

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S. Roy (✉)

State Head - Industrial Relations (WB, SK and A&N Islands), Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd,  
Kolkata, India

e-mail: [Saurabh.Roy@ril.com](mailto:Saurabh.Roy@ril.com)

profession, D&I would become more stronger across future companies, creating an competitive edge in an increasingly competitive global labour market.

**Keywords** Diversity and Inclusion · Workplace culture · D&I guiding principles · Governance structure · D&I implementation and audit

## **Developing Effective Diversity and Inclusion Culture Within an Organization**

The concept and practice of Diversity and Inclusion have existed across the globe ever since man decided to migrate from one place to another place during the Stone Ages some 8000 years ago (Gowdy & Krall, 2013). When people belonging to different races mixed with one another either through fighting for dominance or for other survival instincts, diversified people belonging to different races, ethnicity, religion, etc., mixed and societies and cultures got created from them. At the same time due to the impact of these differences, many people were also excluded either as punishment or due to historical or cultural reasons from the main society (Foucault, 1996). Diversity, Inclusion and Exclusion have been occurring across our societies globally on few of the mentioned parameters such as race, age, national origin, citizenship, geographic location, religion, ethnicity, cultural Diversity, mannerisms, gender, sexual appearance, physical ability, mental ability, interests, education, appearance, family status, relationship status, socio-economics status and experiences.

As organizations are creating their global footprint across various countries and continents, with an increased market share, it is also becoming essential for them to have a diverse workforce. Organizations are able to be more effective, by communicating across various consumer groups from different cultures, races and religious backgrounds, through a diverse workforce and serve their customers better, resulting in increased volumes of businesses and profits with access to a more diverse market. Diverse workforce consists of individuals belonging to unique backgrounds, cultures, race, ethnicity and differing characteristics, aspirations and expectations (Cennamo & Gardner, 2008). These diverse workforces from different backgrounds feel respected at their workplace, when their different needs are appreciated by the organizations where they are working. Management needs to understand the need of these diverse groups of people so as to avoid employee tensions and conflicts (Hill et al., 2003). While maintaining workplace synchronization is crucial for organizations to enable them to be productive, managers in organizations around the world are focused on workplace equality by trying to avoid “us” verses “them” allusions and comments (Yang & Guy, 2006). As the Diversity & Inclusion strategic benefits get known, it is being implemented across a plethora of companies worldwide. The question is as follows: How to build a successful Diversity and Inclusion strategy? What is the extent of success of Diversity and Inclusion strategies, in creating an impact? How effective is the implementation and the methods used? What goes beyond Diversity

and Inclusion? These are some of the questions that I have tried to answer with my practical experience and knowledge.

**Getting to know the basics:** The first step in building Diversity and Inclusion strategy is to understand the difference between the “D” and the “I”. The conventional understanding of these terms has evolved over time.

**Diversity:** Diversity is defined as a range of different things or being composed of divergent elements. From an organizational point of view, formerly, Diversity included solely respect for and appreciation of the differences in the intrinsic traits such as age, ethnicity/race, gender, nationality, disability, religious background, sexual orientation, socio-economic status as well as education, skills, personality and knowledge domains (Loden & Rosener, 1991). Nowadays, the wider perspectives reckon anything that makes us different from each other such as cultural aspects, generational gaps, military experience, multilingualism, business knowledge and other learned or developed traits. Workplace Diversity and Inclusion are accepting and valuing all the differences that exist between the various sets of people within the organization.

In recent decades, workforce Diversity has become a powerful tool to encourage new ways of employee achievements along with organizational growth, as organizations have widened their footprints across various geographies and countries. Top Fortune 500 companies such as Apple, Amazon, Ikea, Exxon Mobil, Boeing, Coca Cola, IBM, Medtronics, P&G and many other multinational companies have been benefitting in terms of higher productivity, financial performance and sustained growth gained from their diverse workforce with different skills, gender, race, ethnicity and age groups (April & Shockley, 2007; Davidson & Ferdman, 2002; Kossek et al., 2004).

**Inclusion:** From an organizational point of view, Inclusion in the workplace increases when its employees collaborate and support each other thus creating an environment of respect and trust, resulting in increase of participation and contribution of all employees. Inclusiveness focuses beyond the concept of few to the group (April & Blass, 2010). Inclusion in its true form is supposed to remove all barriers, discrimination and intolerance within an organization. If inclusiveness is applied properly within the workplace, everyone would feel included and supported. For organizations to be able to do so, many changes are required in the entire organizational structure, policies, procedures and styles of doing business, resulting in total cultural change within teams, departments and the entire organization (Miller, 1998).

Diversity and Inclusion are two sides of the same coin. As the diverse populations become more global, the companies will need to review the changing demographics as they implement strategies to stay competitive and find workers. As a strategic business partner, Diversity and Inclusion are valuable in generating innovation from within, increasing profits, ensuring a sustaining positive legacy of progress. Programmes with abundant activities designed with the goal to foster creativity and build a positive workplace culture are being part of policies and processes going

beyond the moral obligation of doing the right thing. To be able to incorporate Diversity and Inclusion into the organization, it is essential to understand the components of workplace culture.

**Workplace culture:** Workplace is a place where work is done, while culture within a workplace is a way of thinking and behaving. Therefore, workplace culture can also be said as an environment that an organization creates for its employees. It plays a powerful role in understanding the work fulfilment, associations and growth. It can also be termed as a mixture of various factors such as leadership skills, organizational values and beliefs, work traditions being followed within the organization, formal and informal communication channels, behaviours and attitudes contributing to the emotional and relational environment of the workplace (Kinjerski & Skrypnek, 2006). Though these factors are unwritten and unspoken, they usually contribute to creating formal and informal connections between colleagues.

It is often confusing to understand what factors influence culture positively or negatively due to the fact that an organization's culture is not always tangible and specific. However, to understand workplace culture, one should ask the questions—What does the organization stand for? What does it achieve? What is crucial to the organization?

Culture is a combination system of the shared values, norms, practices, behaviours and attitudes which shapes the stakeholder's decision-making, actions and feelings. It covers relationships within and with customers, leadership, values across all the levels and to every employee. Culture determines whether the organization achieves its set goals, whether the employees feel supported in crisis situation and whether the employees feel appreciated while contributing and staying in the company. Values shape behaviours, and behaviours shape outcomes. If an organization is able to create positive corporate culture, then it would also positively have its implications on its employees: ideally, employees would be more happy, productive, satisfied, leading to improved performances along with being more motivated (Dolan & Garcia, 2002). Moreover, if employees are having positive vibes about their workplace, they would less likely think of leaving, resulting in lowering attrition rates and support the organization's long-term operational planning processes. I will share two major models of workplace culture.

### *The Cultural Ice Berg Model*

Edward T. Hall, the famous anthropologist and cross-cultural researcher, had envisaged corporate culture in the shape of an iceberg in 1976. He explained that usually corporate culture is a form of essential assumptions used to resolve internal and external issues faced by the organization. The form includes both the seen and the unseen characteristics of the organization, resulting in people not belonging to the organization not always being able to understand the organization being studied fully (Hall, 1977) (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1** The cultural iceberg model. *Source* The National Center on Cultural Competence

The usual visible elements as per the iceberg model of corporate culture are as follows: vision and mission, policies, strategy and external presentation; while the invisible elements of corporate culture include the following: unwritten rules, status, relationships, values and norms, attitudes and feelings and people’s fundamental needs (e.g. for safety).

Like in the case of the iceberg, only the tip is visible, similarly within organizations too the visible portions stand for the obvious aspects of an organization’s culture. Similar to the iceberg beneath the visible organizational culture are the hidden informal connections of the organizational culture, which comprises the larger and therefore more important part. The visible elements are seen in terms of behaviour and with more involvement, the underlying thoughts, perceptions and beliefs can be uncovered. Thus, for implementing any cultural change, the invisible aspects need to

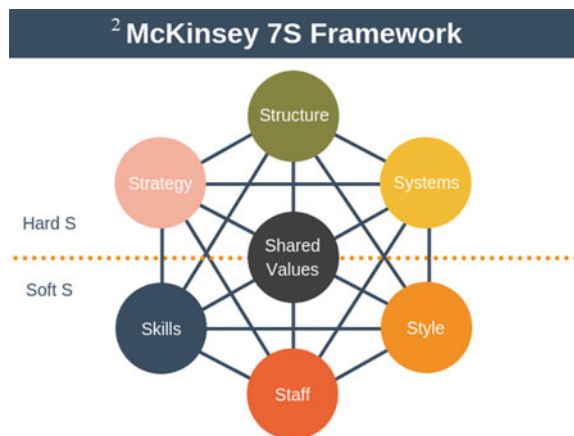
be addressed and known, and for doing the same, organizations need to understand the different needs of its employees and how the efforts that it is making would be impacting those needs of the concerned employees, and finally how much are its own employees cooperating in letting the organization know regarding its needs and fulfilment of the same.

### ***McKinsey 7S Framework***

Tom Peters and Robert Waterman while working as McKinsey consultants in 1970s developed the 7S framework; therefore, it is often referred to as the McKinsey 7S Framework. According to them, the company was a complete system and had seven elements segregated as hard and soft, which lead to the success of the organization. Although different, the hard and soft elements are interdependent and impact each other and the outcomes of the company. The hard elements were defined as those which could be clearly measured and mapped, which were strategy, structure and system, while soft were the ones which were less tangible but had deeper effect on the culture, being the basis of the daily transactions. The soft elements were the shared values, skills and work styles which varied from person to person (Peters & Waterman, 1982) (Fig. 2).

As per this model, a balance in all these elements will determine the success of the company, while an emphasis on only the hard elements will create havoc, for example, a new functional team being created without considering its connection with other elements will destabilize instead of improving the system. A workplace culture is often expressed in the form of the organizational environmental condition that includes work hours, dress codes, salaries, health facilities, childcare, communication and collaborations. If the employees are happy and have a positive view of the company, it is likely that they will stay committed to it. A friendly workplace conveys

**Fig. 2** McKinsey 7S framework. *Source* Intology Limited, Middlesbrough, UK

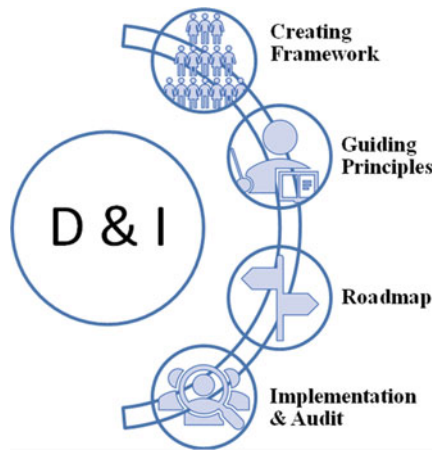


a positive environment reflected in the attitude of the people and success of the organization.

Good management culture is seen in tiny or even invisible gestures or initiatives that can be felt by the customers and the employees. Customers feel having been listened to and received good advice. Employees feel valued. This impacts the social branding of the organization. It is the culture that determines the growth of the company as the satisfied employees and happy clients recommend the organization and create the image of the company. Once you have understood Diversity, Inclusion and workplace culture in its true essence, you are ready to start developing the workplace Diversity and Inclusion strategy.

### *Developing the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy*

The first step in developing a successful Diversity and Inclusion strategy is to collect proper data and analyse it as part of the organizational assessment process, based on the analysis the D&I strategy needs to be aligned with the organization’s business goals and values. For an organization’s D&I strategy to be successful, it is crucial to be focused on creating an inclusive work culture that is both exclusive to the organization and workable. For organizations starting a Diversity initiative, the development of the Diversity and Inclusion strategy will have essentially the following—creating the framework, guiding principles, roadmap and implementation and audit.



**A. Creating the Diversity and Inclusion Framework Has Four Main Areas.**



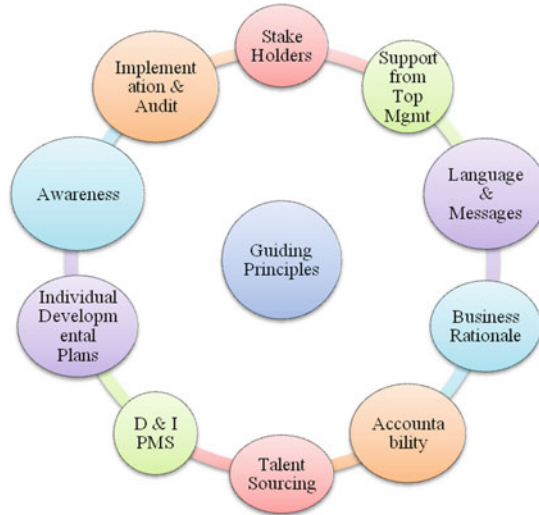


- i. **Brief Overview**—This includes the need and importance with respect to fulfilment of the vision and mission of the organization, its units or teams and the process of the strategy in short.
- ii. **Self-assessment**—The data collection tools can be used to measure the gaps and reflect on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats and needs for Diversity and Inclusion issues. The lessons learnt from the past efforts and the strategic planning process will help to understand the expectations of the present and give a vision for the future.
- iii. **Goals, Plans and Parameters**—A tangible set of goal, strategy to meet that expectation along with the parameters of measurement or indicators which will help to understand the progress over a certain period of time, say 2–5 years must be prepared.
- iv. **Implementing the Strategic Plan**—A complete detailed working plan for the whole organization has to be drawn. It must include the responsibilities with timelines for implementation of the initiatives across the section or whole organization. The stages for implementation of the strategic plan are as follows:
  - a. Route map—prepared by the planning team with support of cross teams and top management. Planning, organizing and launching the processes to achieve the goals.
  - b. Data collection and analysis—proper SWOT analysis for need is to be done.
  - c. Create vision and goal statements, plan strategy and the measurable parameters—the tangible results need to be drawn out keeping in mind the vision for 2–5 years and a process of continuous evaluation for adapting to the changes and need of the workforce and the goals of the organization.
  - d. Approval and support of senior management—the planning and required support must be shared with the top management to take their suggestions, support and get approval for implementation.
  - e. Implementation—the vision must be communicated with all the stakeholders and continuous communication about the implementation, successes and its progress must be shared.
  - f. Continuous evaluation and implementation—the benchmarks and deliverables must be continuously evaluated and reviewed for any changes and support required for the implementation.

The innumerable profits of incorporating a Diversity and Inclusion plan into the corporate culture help most to tap into the talents of the workforce. It gives foundation to all the organization process to involve Diversity and Inclusion in a systematic and integrated manner and become a part of workplace culture. Organizational researchers explain that managing Diversity inclusiveness is more of empowering or enabling employees (Thomas, 1992).

#### B. **Guiding Principles while Establishing D&I Strategy and Policy**

According to various studies and implementation of D&I as a strategy to get business outcomes, several guiding principles have been discovered by various organizations implementing D&I successfully. These guidelines are listed below, in ten different steps.



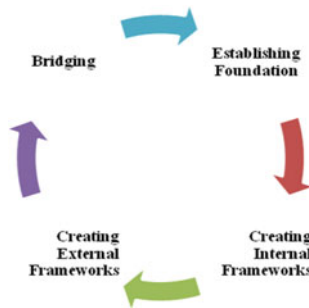
1. Establish D&I governance structure that involves all stakeholders and starts at the top and cascades through all levels.
2. Establish visible support from the top management.
3. Create and circulate within the organization D&I language and messages are frequent and consistent.
4. Create a clear business rationale with intended actions and outcomes, based on D&I strategy.
5. Create accountability and measurement by formalizing and integrating D&I strategy into decision-making processes.
6. Create talent sourcing processes and policies that are D&I sensitive.
7. Create D&I management in such a way that it gets ingrained in the performance cycle through to retention of key talent.
8. Create individual development plans that are inclusive and supportive to the Diversity climate and monitor achievements.
9. Create awareness and development enabled through training, learning and growth opportunities.
10. Implement D&I strategy and policies through internal programmes and external partnerships.

Besides the above-mentioned guiding principles, organizations also need to align their CSR activities to their D&I efforts, engage all stakeholders while setting their priorities, take actions that demonstrate authenticity, communicate transparently with their all stakeholders and be accountable to achieving

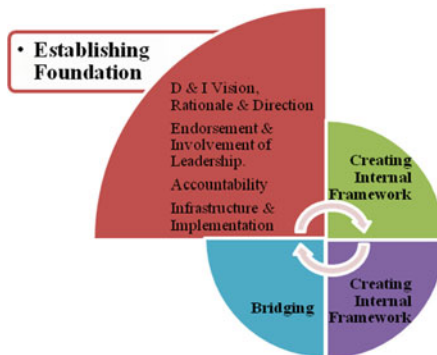
outcomes. I believe organizations that apply these guiding principles when developing their D&I strategies will provide stakeholders evidence that they are in it for the long haul.

**C. Developing the Roadmap**

Having a well-planned and established roadmap would definitely create the organizational D&I journey more effective and efficient and over a period of time would also assist in gauging the progress of the journey. The ingredients necessary for building the D&I roadmap are shown in the image and comprise (I) establishing the foundation; (II) creating internal frameworks; (III) creating external frameworks and (IV) bridging/aligning all of them together to get results for a D&I robust organization.



- (I) **Establishing Foundation:** Successful D&I strategy requires a deep-rooted foundation with clear vision that provides strong rationale, direction, sets expectations and establishes accountability for results, with a justified business case. Unfortunately, many a times, this step is either skipped or developed with ambiguous and unmeasurable criteria.



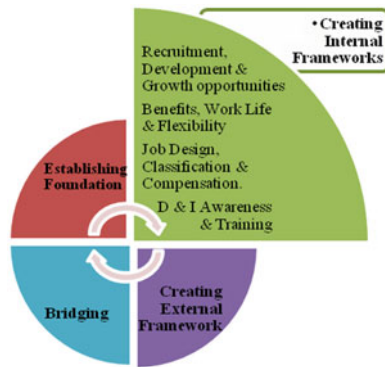
Further, for proper implementation of the strategy across the organization, it requires endorsement and complete involvement of the leadership to establish the accountability of the strategy. It would also lead

to proper allocation of infrastructure and lead to defined implementation of the strategy. If the foundation is not clear than regardless of how wonderful the D&I strategy could be, people have a hard time accepting and adjusting to it.

Contrary to popular practice, the most effective method of laying a strong D&I foundation begins before the strategy is actually defined. We are ultimately creating a more balanced work environment with varied people in it, so the existing people should be engaged in the development process and input should be taken from one and all as to how they imagine the future workplace.

Engaging with people early on allows a much stronger D&I foundation, as it reveals much of the organizational DNA, during the evaluation and preparation phase and also assists in making informed decisions, preventing missteps and revisions later.

- (II) **Creating Internal Framework:** Once the foundation has been laid down, internal frameworks related to various other policies should be worked out, wherein D&I should be appropriately placed within all the existing strategies and policies to address future issues properly.



Successful implementation of D&I would require it to be integrated with recruitment having Diversity at the heart of it. It means that conscious efforts to attract diverse background applicants should be done by the recruitment and selection panels, to attain and maintain diverse workforce across levels and functions. Special efforts should be made so that high potential employees from under-represented groups can advance in their career through self-assessment, coaching, mentoring and sponsorship opportunities. Employees should be provided exposure to variety of cultures as part of their growth strategy. Organizations should ensure parity in turnover rates of diverse groups to majority groups.

Organizations also need to integrate their diverse group of employees with equal benefits, work–life balance and flexibility in making D&I strategy successful. Flexible work options, wherever possible, should

be implemented as a sustainable strategy, by actively promoting it as a value to increased productivity, as it entails employee's a positive balance between work and life, rather than viewing them as growth restraining. Organizations should also consider subsidized eldercare, childcare, emergency care, fitness and wellness programmes, paternity leave, paid leave to take care of spouses and elderly, etc., as part of increased benefits, to cater to the diverse needs of its employees.

Organizations can practise accepting and recognizing Diversity in language and accent, religious practises, dressing styles, differently abled persons, etc., to encourage diverse employee groups' emotional well-being. These practices by organizations would lead to successful recruitment and retention of diverse workforce including women, disabled, differently abled, LGBTQ+ communities, etc. Organizations should also continuously audit and assess the benefits and services for easy adaptability to changing conditions and technology.

Another very important factor of internal frameworks is to evaluate job descriptions, job design, classification and compensation for socio-economic bias and adverse implications. Job descriptions should be concise and should exclude non-job-related factors such as gender, age, religion, disability and sexual orientation. At the same time, it should also be accommodating to individual needs along with organizational needs. While designing jobs, organizations should consider increased flexibility and variety in jobs by accommodating employees need for part-time work, remote work, even non-core working hours and taking leave for various reasons. Employees should be encouraged to be performance-oriented along with flexibility, and remunerations should be based purely on performance rather than personal biases. Organizations should also continuously conduct compensation audits to ensure that their compensation programmes are not based on biases of gender, age, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity or other potential equality issues, and in case found to be so, should be immediately resolved by dealing with it appropriately. Organizations should enhance their classification of compensation systems to remove any conscious or unconscious biases and assumptions.

Imparting continuous Diversity training across all levels of the organizations including the top management to make employee more sensitive towards their fellow colleagues and their needs leads to organizational excellence. Professionals exclusively working on promoting D&I within the organizations also considered as experts along with various functional leaders should be involved in development, delivery and reinforcement of the D&I trainings. Organizations should encourage discussions on D&I issues specific to disability, gender identity, caste, culture, community, religion, ageism, racism, prejudice, discrimination, biases, etc., by integrating them into the organizational learning programmes

and should be addressed with sensitivity and compassion. Organizations can use different training methods from the traditional classroom based to eLearning, social learning, case studies, etc., to promote D&I acceptance by its employees. Employees who are likely to move to other parts of the country or the globe due to internal transfers should also be provided cultural competency trainings along with their families to enable them to adopt faster. D&I trainings should be ongoing multi-year programme that enables employees to revisit the learnings.

(III) **Creating External Framework:** Increasingly, D&I strategies implemented by organizations are having a major impact through its external relationships and are defining success of the organization with its customers from varied backgrounds. Organizations are also creating a positive brand through D&I efforts by advocating their D&I progress by engaging with the external communities to who they serve, local communities and society at large, through its varied CSR activities and philanthropic efforts leading to enrichment of organizations’ goodwill, brand and reputations.



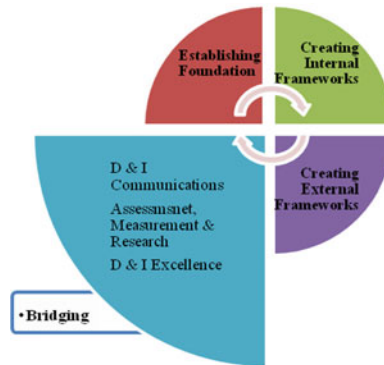
As part of positive external D&I frameworks and initiatives, organizations need to liaison with the governments and communities where they are serving their products and services. Many organizations as part of their D&I efforts are permitting their employees to participate in various community projects, and they are also additionally compensated for the same. Community-level involvement by the organizations in promoting their D&I initiatives is also part of long-term planning and treated as more than philanthropy, as they create positive impact within the communities they serve as well as create long-term workforce.

Important aspect of creating a positive external D&I framework would include integrating products and services to cater to diverse groups by developing teams that are diverse and involved in the product or service development. This enables the product and service development teams to be considerate regarding the diverse customer base, and the products

and services also get easily adapted. Organizations are also researching changes in demographics, values and consumer behaviour so that they can be served better, to their diverse customers. As part of the external framework of D&I, organizations also need to focus their D&I initiatives on their marketing, sales, distribution and customer service strategies that would cater to their diverse groups of customers. This can be done through having an inclusive marketing and advertising campaigns, while challenging stereotyping. Organizations also are developing all their marketing and customer-oriented processes to be fully accessible by all their customers, irrespective of their diversity.

Organizations are also focusing as part of their external D&I frameworks on developing diverse supplier base, to enable them to cater to all customers, to fully align to the broad objectives of the organizations D&I strategy. As part of the diverse supplier development process, organizations also need to provide trainings to their suppliers to overcome any biases and develop the diverse supplier base as more competitive.

- (IV) ***Aligning/Bridging D&I Foundation to Internal and External Frameworks:*** Aligning Diversity and Inclusion strategy with various internal and external frameworks of the organization is critical as it would decide the long-term fate of the implementation of the strategy.



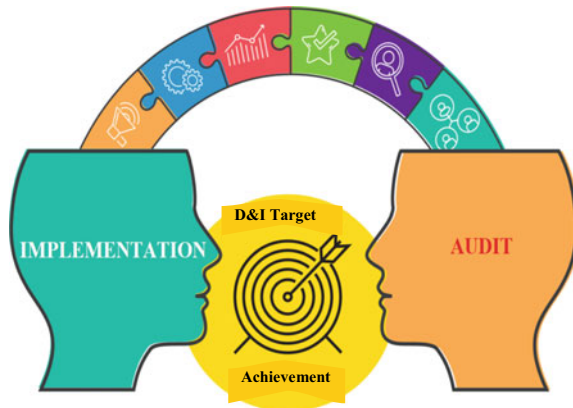
This can be done only by ensuring organization's D&I reporting process, assessments and measurements lead to proper decision-making related to D&I initiatives. The measurements would include all aspects of D&I and gather attitudes and opinions through feedbacks, opinions and focus group surveys of the employees including the stakeholders towards D&I initiatives.

Creating an effective communication related to the organization's D&I strategy and policies that are fully accessible in different formats and languages to all of the internal and external stakeholders of the organization would play a major role in aligning the long-term D&I strategy of the organization, as it would lead people to understand regarding the

organizations initiatives as part of its D&I initiatives. Organization also needs to create frequent and systematic communications with consistency of language to all its stakeholders regarding the various initiatives it has been taking up under its D&I strategy, this would help the organization to brand itself internally as well as externally. Progress reports on the strategies should also be shared with all in regular manner to create more effective impact.

**D. Diversity and Inclusion Implementation and Audit**

Once the D&I framework is created, guiding principles set and road map developed, implementation of D&I strategy and policies should start. For doing so, it would be advisable to bring together a group of people who champion Diversity and a D&I Board/Council/Committee should be set. The role of this group would be to work closely with the top management to keep the D&I strategy on track. The major role that the group can play could be related to creating and sharing D&I-related communications, conducting awareness activities, monitoring the implementation of D&I as part of other strategies and policies, conduct D&I surveys to understand people’s perceptions related to D&I implementation within the organization, evaluate effectiveness of the D&I strategies and report on the same on regular basis. Ensure that the reports are accessible by all. The role of the group would be to work in sync with other stakeholders of the organization, implementing various other policies.



One of the major tasks of the D&I committee would be to conduct regular D&I audits to discover, investigate, learn and understand the existing D&I strategy and continuously improve upon the same. While conducting the audit, the group should always consider measuring the D&I strategy and evaluating if it is robust enough and aligned to the long-term organizational objectives. They should focus on finding the gaps between reality and expectations from the strategy by the diverse workforce. Based on the audit, the D&I committee



should communicate the results to all to increase effectiveness of the D&I strategy.

Finally, with the world becomes well connected and continuous exchange of work-force relocating across various countries based on the need of their expertise and profession, D&I would become more stronger across future companies, as diverse groups of people are getting more support to move to mainstream and as organizations world over are realizing the societal and economical value of D&I. Those organizations that work to foster Diversity and Inclusion as an integral part of their business model, brand and culture would make substantial financial gains, through maximizing their diverse employee potential and work to serve the unique needs of their diverse customers, at the same time build on their strengths in developing inclusive work cultures and approaches.

### Notes

1. As organizations recognize that conditions, needs and perspectives vary greatly worldwide, and it may vary in their own establishment location to location, various considerations are to be made while framing their D&I initiatives, including country-specific traditions, cultures, country-specific compliance and other legal requirements, their own sector of work, their location-specific organizational size, various local influences on Diversity dimensions, to name a few.
2. Organizations lacking experience in D&I and having much complexities either due to their size, multiple product range or multi-location establishments should engage external D&I agencies to have a more fruitful implementation of D&I strategies.
3. While conducting opinion surveys on D&I, organizations need to understand that the opinions they receive as feedback are perceptions based on that particular time and may change in future. Some employees or groups may give much broader opinions while others may be more critical based on their perceptions and could be influenced by their own exposure-specific factors or the informal relationships or hierarchies.
4. While publishing D&I audit outcomes, committees should use quantitative data along with qualitative data and, wherever possible, provide objective and factual information, to more accurately determine the actual current level of D&I.
5. If the committees decide to rate their own organizations on the effectiveness of their D&I interventions, they should do it very carefully to avoid any misrepresentation as departments and functions may likely have different levels of D&I within them.
6. It would be imperative to pursue future in-depth research on D&I for creating possibilities and understanding the ever-changing dynamics of human Diversity within both formal organizations and society at large. This could also highlight the simultaneous need for establishing specialized research to build healthy theoretical frameworks that can contribute to creating new insights into human diversity.

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# Diversity and Inclusion Through Technological Trends



Ifeanyichukwu Egwu Eze, Vinod Kumar Shukla, and Amit Verma

**Abstract** Diversity and Inclusion have been in the spotlight because of their avowed potential to hand humanity the coveted, and sought-after peace, progress, and prosperity. The body of knowledge in this field has been heaping the blame for the untoward expressions of diversity in society on the diversity sphere (i.e. our inherent nature, e.g. race, gender, colour, and neurodiversity, and our acquired nature-like language, culture, religion) as the culprits. Therefore, experts have been exploring better ways to manage our diversities and harvest the treasures therein. Until recently, the most potent weapon for fighting the biases that arise from our diversities has been the deployment of diversity training, which is believed to help trainees overcome their biases against otherness, thereby leading to inclusion in society. However, this chapter seeks to emphasize how digital resources are flattening the diversity sphere by creating inclusive environments, opportunities, capabilities, and productive interactions among people that fight bias. It further argues that digital technologies enable a system akin to water drilling technologies that cut through the soil profile, connecting people and the treasure (water) hidden far beneath the water table, which keeps flowing once the faucets are turned on. This process of bridging the gap between people and the treasures they desire using digital technologies is referred to as flattening and the continuous access to the treasure they desire through the use of these digital resources as digital inclusivity. The chapter also shows in practical terms how the diversity sphere is being flattened and the digital resources help to achieve inclusivity in the following spheres: neurodiversity, gender inequality, racism, and others. And, it suggests that further advances in digital technologies like artificial

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A. Verma (✉)

Academic Director, HTMI Switzerland, Dubai, Dubai, UAE

e-mail: [amit.verma@htmidubai.com](mailto:amit.verma@htmidubai.com)

V. K. Shukla

Associate Professor, Department of Engineering and Architecture, Amity University, Dubai, UAE

e-mail: [vshukla@amityuniversity.ae](mailto:vshukla@amityuniversity.ae)

I. E. Eze

Diversity & Inclusion Specialist, Brain and Spine Foundation, Africa, Abuja, Nigeria

e-mail: [ezei.royalspringabj@gmail.com](mailto:ezei.royalspringabj@gmail.com)

intelligence, machine learning, and bioinformatics present further hope for achieving digital inclusivity.

**Keywords** Flattening digital exclusion · Diversity sphere · Diversity and inclusion

## Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has underscored, once again, the potential of digital innovations to foster inclusion. It has brought with it the work from home concept (WFH) or remote working (RW). This implies the provision of an enabling environment for people in different locations, time zones, and different physical and mental conditions to work together uninhibited. We shall be considering how digital innovations close the diversities in distance, mental and physical conditions to enable diverse groups of people work and function inclusively.

To provide a road map for this discussion, we shall be considering some vital issues raised by Manzoor and Vimarlund (2018), who reviewed over 340 (three hundred and forty) publications from (2000–2016) on how digital innovations achieve social inclusion of people with disabilities. They found, among other things, that most of these publications did not show how digital technologies facilitate the social inclusion of people with disabilities; that many unclear terms like “assistive technologies”, “access technologies”, and many more were used in discussing these technologies; that most of the discussions were based on only one aspect of disability without specifying how the said technology will foster the inclusion of disabled people in the workplace and society, etc. We shall, therefore, frame our discussion to show how digital inclusivity is providing answers to these issues and others to ensure we place our discussion on a firm footing.

We start with defining some basic terms to ensure clarity of thought as under:

**Technology** is the use of technical skills and achievements or the application of scientific knowledge in solving problems.

**Digital** means anything that shows information as a set of digits or functions on a binary system. Therefore, any technology that presents information as a set of digits or runs on a binary system is a digital technology or innovation. For instance, the Cumulus headphones. However, innovations like prosthetic legs, artificial eyes, and wheel chair are non-digital technologies. The use of terms like assistive technology, virtual technology, ICT, is synonymous with digital innovation. Artificial intelligence (AI) that gives information, service, or assistance that will help those who are excluded in one way or the other to overcome, reduce, or eliminate their barriers to full inclusion in society is an **inclusive technology** or innovation. This process of information sharing or provision of services or assistance that will enable those who are excluded in one way or the other to overcome, reduce, or eliminate their barriers to full inclusion is what we refer to as **flattening** in this chapter. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines **inclusivity** as:

the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those having physical or mental disabilities or belonging to other minority groups.

Having defined the basic terms, we shall now turn to some of the different groups in society who are mostly excluded or marginalized. Some of these groups include neurodivergent people, people living with disabilities, refugees, and others to see how digital inclusivity is flattening these diversities.

## Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity is one aspect of human diversity that has profound scientific evidence and explanation. It simply refers to differences in the ways our brains perceive, process, and interpret information. Two perspectives on neurodiversity exist. Those who try to explain neurodiversity as a pathologically triggered condition that has to be treated and cured, and others who see it as a natural variation that gives neurodivergent people the potential to bring unique contributions and perspectives to the workplace, and in solving problems generally. According to the National Symposium on Neurodiversity (2011) held at Syracuse University, neurodiversity is:

...a concept where neurological differences are to be recognized and respected as any other human variation. These differences can include those labeled with Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyscalculia, Autistic Spectrum, Tourette syndrome, and others.

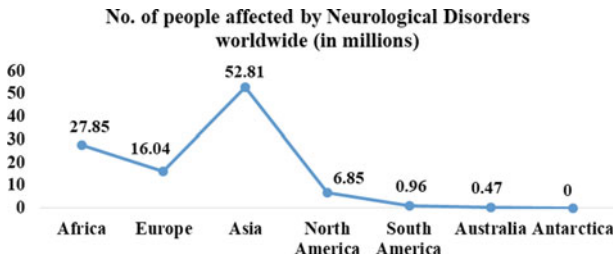
The above definition tends to see neurodiversity from a neurotypical perspective, where it is seen as a deviation from the norm. But another definition from CIPD views it as a norm and goes further to excavate the hidden treasures therein.

The CIPD defines neurodiversity as:

the natural range of differences in human brain function. Amongst employers, it's become the term used to describe alternative thinking styles including dyslexia, autism, ADHD, and dyspraxia as they relate to diversity and inclusion in the workplace. These can have unique strengths, ranging from data-driven thinking to sustained focus over long periods, the ability to spot patterns and trends, and the capacity to process information at extraordinary speeds.

Neurodiversity is a natural phenomenon. It respects no cultural, racial, religious, or ethnic boundaries. Class and family background have no cure for it. Educational attainment and medical sophistication have no cure or plausible explanation for it. It is, therefore, obvious that neurodiversity is a natural phenomenon to be harnessed. The graph below shows that neurodiversity is a global reality (Fig. 1).

This chapter does not only seek to explore the reality and relevance of neurodiversity but also emphasizes the strengths that neurodivergent people bring to the workplace and the digital resources flattening the diversities between neurodivergent people and neurotypicals in the workplace and vice versa. For a long time now, the know-how for tapping the richness in neurodivergent people was lacking. But



**Fig. 1** Population affected by neurological disorders around the world. *Source* Kour and Arora (2019). Computer vision-based diagnosis of Parkinson's disease via Gait: a survey

now digital innovations are providing this know-how and the platforms for tapping this goldmine. We must note that there are digital resources that are generic in their application and usability and those that are specific.

It is important for diversity professionals to know the variety of digital resources that aid inclusion in the workplace and outside the workplace and how they work, so they can make critical decisions with ease, as it regards the best mix of digital resources that will make the inclusion of excluded people smoother. This is also important in talent acquisition because it helps managers understand the range of skills and strengths that different neurodivergent individuals and other excluded people could bring to their workplace and how best to work with them. We shall be considering some digital innovations that are bridging the gap between the rest of society and this hitherto excluded group, especially in the workplace.

This is intent on emphasizing their usefulness in designing inclusion and flattening diversities. Take, for instance, the Ayoa assistive digital app that can be used by most neurodivergent people to flatten or eliminate their challenges when working with neurotypicals. Ayoa is an all-in-one, collaborative whiteboard software approved by the British Dyslexia Association, which provides all employees with a neuro-inclusive WFH solution. It consists of flexible mind mapping, task management, and instant messaging functionality to recreate the office digitally—acting as teams' central hub whilst WFH. With more companies opting to sustain the WFH culture, the software has been developed to accommodate both neurotypical and neurodivergent people working from home, without diminishing its capabilities to work as a team hub in the brick-and-mortar office. It has a customizable workspace and a flexible nature which makes it possible to integrate different working styles. With special features for the neurodivergent such as mind-mapping features, dyslexia-friendly fonts, visually customizable project and task management, it has received the approval of the UK Government's Disabled Student Allowance Scheme and the British Dyslexia Association as assistive software in 2019. Overall, the software makes up for the deficit in neurodivergent people when measured by neurotypical. Ayoa is not only a platform for seamless and result-oriented collaboration but also a neuro-inclusive one, ensuring everyone is able to work together to the best of their abilities.

Another digital innovation that caters to the inclusion of neurodiverse people is the neurodiversity hub. The hub is a web-based service that flattens the diversity sphere by building a community of neurodiverse people who are well-trained and prepared to succeed in places where neurodivergent has been known to have challenges, like schools, workplaces, and social environments. The hub helps employers and institutions of learning with strategies for achieving inclusion of the neurodiverse people. In this chapter, we will limit our discussion on neurodiversity to autism and dyslexia.

### *Ayoa Success Story*

Success stories from users of digital tools are important resources for gauging the effectiveness of digital tools.

David Matkin, a dyslexic and a dyslexic tutor, has shared his first-hand experience using Ayoa mind-mapping app. According to him, the usual difficulties he normally encounters with planning are now history with the use of Ayoa's mind-mapping feature which enables him to plan his daily, weekly, and monthly tasks, including his downtime. The tool makes it easier for him to link or export his work to other documents. The tool has equally helped him with the organization of his ideas, which used to be very difficult for him. With mind maps, he can now put down his first ideas and subsequent ones and structure them coherently. This tool has made planning, organization, and documentation easy for him.

### **Autism**

Autism is an aspect of neurodiversity that demands considerable attention from diversity and inclusion practitioners. It is believed that autistics have so many distinctive qualities that could make them great assets to organizations, if well-harnessed. According to Autism Society: Autism is a neurological condition that affects a person's communication, social life, and regulatory activities (Osteen 2010). On the other hand, the NHS argues that autism is not an illness, though autistics may experience challenges in certain aspects of life just as other people do. It defines autistics as people who may:

- Find it hard to communicate and interact with other people
- Find it hard to understand how other people think or feel
- Find things like bright or loud noises overwhelming, stressful, or uncomfortable
- Get anxious or upset about unfamiliar situations and social events
- Take longer to understand information
- Do or think the same things over and over.

A good knowledge of the challenges an autistic deals with will help others in developing a good working relationship with them. Many autistics, over time, have

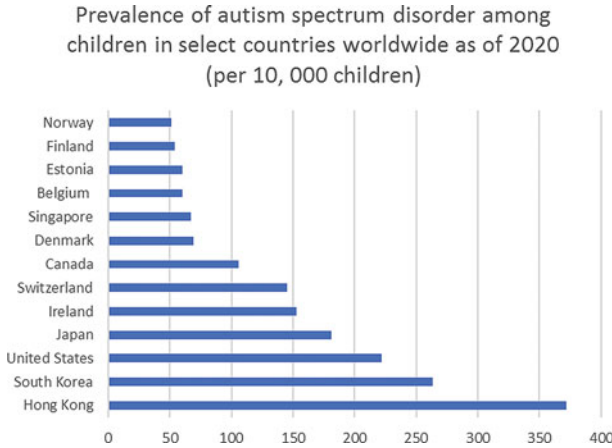
shown to have greater abilities that dwarf their challenges and the resilience to achieve uncommon feats. More so, they have shown to have attractive qualities that endear them to others as exceptional. Because this group of people is largely excluded from the workplace, emphasizing the values they bring to the workplace is critical for their inclusion. Below are some of the autistic strengths:

- Ability to master and process information quickly.
- Visual and graphic learning capabilities.
- Ability to reason logically.
- Capacity to excel in academics, especially in such areas that require technical and logical reasoning abilities.
- Capacity for extraordinarily good memory.
- Detailed and goal oriented.
- Highly dependable and honest.
- Highly reliable in observing routines and schedules.
- A good sense of focus and direction.
- High level of punctuality.
- Sticks to rules meticulously.
- Sustained focus on achieving goals.
- Penchant for orderliness and perfection.
- Creative problem-solving abilities.
- Strikingly innovative.

Having considered what autism is and the potential endowments autistics have, we need to look at the global prevalence of autism to show that it is not a phenomenon that should be glossed over. Available statistics reveal the severity of autism and why it is receiving global attention, as shown in the tables below. However, it is important to note, according to Warriar et al. (2020), that “none of the existing studies of autism and gender identity have compared the rates of other related neurodevelopmental and psychiatric conditions in transgender and gender-diverse individuals versus cisgender individuals, making it difficult to estimate if the observed effects are specific to autism”. As a result, we have limited our autism classification by children of school age (Fig. 2).

Autism is a global phenomenon that needs critical attention. Going further, an insight into the employment and experience of autistics in the workplace is critical. The work done by Lorenz et al. (2016) sought to find out how autistics succeeded in getting employed and the barriers, both expected and occurred barriers, that keep them away from getting employed or staying in their jobs and identifying solutions to overcome these barriers. They conducted an online survey in which 66 autistics participated, and 17 of them had autism-specific employment. They found three major categories of barriers to autistics employment: **social, formality, and job demand problems**. Having identified three problematic areas for autistics, let us consider how digital innovations are tackling these problems and flattening the sphere of neurodiversity. We shall, therefore, consider how digital inclusivity is flattening the three major barriers to autistic employment and among other excluded groups as shown below. It is important to note that many digital innovations are available





**Fig. 2** Prevalence of autism spectrum disorder among children in select countries. *Source* World population review

in the market. So, the choice of the products that will be discussed here is purely discretionary and does not reflect the superiority of the products over others.

**For Social Problems:** Because autistics have social interaction problems, these apps were designed to assist them to overcome challenges in social situations, especially by helping them navigate through crowds without stress such as:

**The Cumulus Headphones:** These headphones are designed to help autistic adults to deal with crowds. The phone has functions that help users to avoid discomforting noises and switch to empowering music. It has special features like a galvanic skin sensor, the sound cancellation mode, and the directional microphone and music modes. This app helps in providing all the indicators that help autistics monitor and manage their emotional states in social situations.

**Look At Me App:** The look at me app is a Samsung electronics product designed to assist autistics to cope with social challenges. This app is a tutorial app that helps autistics learn different emotions and how to convey them in different social situations. It uses face-recognition technology to teach autistics the meanings and implications of different facial expressions in social interactions. It teaches children how to initiate and sustain communication with others as a way of improving their social lives. It also uses the camera functions of smartphones to teach children how to make eye contact during social interactions. It is designed as a game and teaching app, making it suitable for parents, family, and friends to use in teaching autistic children sustainable social behaviour.

**CPI blog:** The CPI blog has a list of sixty-five apps that are dedicated to helping people on the autism spectrum. One of the apps is dedicated to helping with social activities is the Autism Tracker. This app helps autistics identify behavioural patterns, the frequency and reasoning behind behaviours, and cause and effect.

### *For Formality Problems*

**Brain in Hand app** is an app that helps professionals offer customized telephone services and assistance to autistics to help them navigate their daily routines in the workplace in a manner that does not disturb their emotional state. It does this by using a light system akin to the traffic light, with different colours of light indicating different emotional states. Professionals like employers, lecturers, and caregivers use it to support autistics navigate their formal environments with much ease.

**Autismity:** This is a simulator for autistics in **virtual reality (VR)**. It is designed for those who provide formal services to autistics like health service organizations, companies, educational institutions, care providers, and autistic persons themselves to understand the needs of autistics and how to help them be more productive.

**Habitica** is an online task management and role-playing digital innovation that gamifies acceptable social behaviour and productivity to help those who struggle with role-plays and task management to develop themselves in a fun way. It uses a reward system to encourage good behaviour and productive lifestyles but punishes unacceptable ones. The sole objective is to help users achieve a productive and healthy lifestyle.

### *For Job Demands*

**Routinely:** Routinely is a digital tool that helps users track their daily routines to help them improve performance. It provides the functionality for setting goals and reminds users to achieve set goals.

**Work Autonomy:** Work autonomy is a tool that helps users who, ordinarily, could not work alone or without supervision do just that. It empowers them to overcome communication challenges normally experienced with co-workers and supervisors, completing work schedules and analysing tasks independently, and giving all vital information about earnings, task completion outcomes, and productivity levels. The tool is made up of three major components, namely: messages, production, and schedules. It uses all the facilities for digital communication like text messaging, videos, voice notes, and photographs to enhance user's communication.

**Dexterity:** This app, just as the name sounds, is used to enhance or achieve dexterity, especially for those who have fine motor issues. The tool uses a multi-screen interface to help build dexterity. It comes with some features that help users track performance, share progress with others, and create emails. It has a lot of exercises that help users develop control in their hands and write better.

## Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a challenge with learning which manifests in difficulties with pronouncing words, spelling, writing, dictation, and visual difficulties. Let us look at the digital innovations flattening the diversity sphere of dyslexia.

### *For Inclusive Education*

**See. Touch. Learn App:** This app helps dyslexics master the pronunciation of new words, identification of objects, and use of numbers. It comes with many practical lessons that can help users learn new lessons and assess their progress.

**Dragon Dictation App:** This app helps dyslexics learn how to answer everyday questions and record their responses to improve learning. It makes it easier for dyslexics to speak their ideas, and the app will convert them to text.

**Ghotit Real Writer and Reader:** This is a digital innovation that tackles all the problems faced by dyslexics like writing, reading, punctuation, and spelling. It has many amazing features that address the typical challenges dyslexics face.

### *For Inclusive Workplace*

**Dragon Naturally Speaking:** This is a digital innovation that enables dyslexics to learn faster and achieve efficiency at work. It makes writing easier for those with writing difficulties. It uses a robust speech recognition system to produce well-written documents, emails, essays, memos, etc. It allows users to train it to recognize their voice and for vocabulary building. It makes work completion and learning faster.

**Grammarly:** This app helps users produce well-written documents by eliminating grammatical errors. It helps those who produce content at a professional level, do their job with a lot of ease.

**Notes i.o:** This is a programme customized for dyslexics that makes it easier and faster for them to take notes online and share with co-workers, colleagues, and friends.

**The Intel Reader:** This is an electronic reading device that converts any printed document to an e-book and reads it. It takes away the burden of writing and reading from dyslexics.

**MindMeister:** This digital tool makes writing and note-taking easy for dyslexics. It makes idea generation, brainstorming, and planning easy for its users through the use of its mind-map features.

**Livescribe Smart Pen:** This smart pen bridges the gap between handwriting and electronic typing. It has cameras that capture your writing and converts them to audio almost immediately.

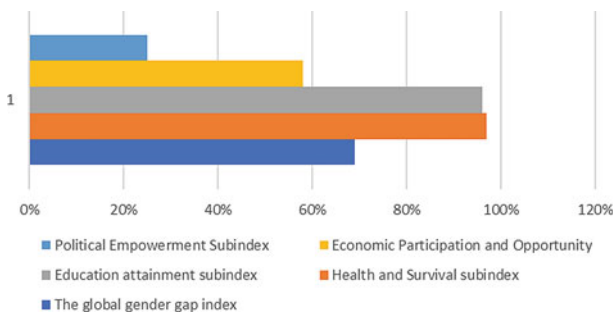
## Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is one of the oldest forms of exclusion in human history, occasioned and sustained by different world views, cultural practices, religious beliefs, assumptions, etc. Women have suffered untold limitations, denials of fundamental human rights, suppression, injustice, maltreatment, and many more schemes designed to keep them beneath the male folk perpetually.

As fundamental and obligatory as voting in elections is, women were not allowed to vote until the twentieth century, after years of sustained struggle. Education of the girl child which has shown to be of immense benefit to humanity still lags behind in some parts of the world, due to a number of factors, including ignorance, illiteracy, etc. The table below shows the percentage of poor girls who have never been to school and those who have scarcely received some education. Figure 3 shows the global gender gap index and the extent to which the gap has been closed to date.

Despite the efforts made in advancing the inclusion of women in society, it appears much still needs to be done. The graph above suggests that many more interventions are needed in the areas of political empowerment and economic participation and opportunity for women. It is critical to note that this situation still prevails because some companies and organizations still do not allow women to reach the top leadership positions, despite the fact that women when given an opportunity have demonstrated outstanding leadership in global organizations.

From the foregoing, we have seen that the major areas where women still lag behind are in the areas of access to education, access to economic opportunities or gender pay gap, and socio-cultural acceptance. It has been noted that most of these problems are caused by poverty, ignorance, cultural and religious practices, and women’s traditionally perceived stereotyped roles as caregivers, home managers,



**Fig. 3** Global gender gap index, 2020. *Source* World economic forum, gender gap index, 2020

and so on. Digital innovations hold great promises in flattening these gaps and thus ensuring the inclusion of women in society and the workplace. Today, several digital innovations have been developed and others are still being developed to close the gender gap against women. Some of these innovations are platforms that grant women the opportunities of juggling their roles as caregivers and employees at the same time.

## *Digital Innovations for Gender Inclusivity*

### **For Flattening Diversities in Education**

**Telecentre:** Telecentre is a global platform for the provision of educational and economic empowerment through information communication technology. But it has a specially designed programme for women. This programme is named TC WOMEN, which seeks to empower women with the acquisition of ICT knowledge as a means of economic empowerment and inclusion of women in the ICT sector.

**Girlswhocode:** This is another digital platform that is out to change the gender landscape in technology. It is educating women on coding, hoping to raise the best women coders to prove that women can excel in programming. It is on a mission to prove that programming is not only a male-only career.

**Gender 4 STEM:** This digital platform seeks to change the poor statistics of women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education and careers for the better. It is training women in STEM education to have more women representation in STEM careers.

### *For Inclusive Workplace*

**PowertoFly** is a digital platform that seeks to link women with Fortune 500 companies and other organizations that prioritize gender inclusion and gender equality in the workplace. The platform also seeks to promote diversity recruiting. It has some special tools for talent searching, visibility services, targeted job advertisements, and tools for reaching outstanding talents who are generally difficult to reach. Companies also leverage the platform to find credible and verified women employees for high-profile roles in their organizations.

**Sheworks!** is a digital platform that seeks to promote the inclusion of women in the workplace and society. It congregates diverse pools of talented women from around the globe and links them with companies where they are a good match. It provides opportunities to these women to work on their own terms and the tools to monitor

hiring and team management, as well as the provision of access to free courses for personal development.

**Catalyst** is a digital platform that promotes women's empowerment and fights bias against women in the workplace.

**UN Women:** UN Women is the UN organization at the forefront of fighting for gender equity and equality, both in the workplace and society as a whole. It works to protect and promote women's rights and put a stop to all discrimination against women globally. They have created different programmes, both digital and non-digital, for raising awareness and empowering women to take their rightful place in society. They are the champions of gender advocacy, and they partner with different organizations globally to achieve their goals.

### *Powertofly Success Story*

**ChleoEdeal, Software Developer at Manifold:** Powertofly has been at the forefront of closing the gender gap by linking women to opportunities in the tech industry which is known to be dominated by men. One of the many beneficiaries of this platform is ChleoEdeal, who got her remote job as a software developer through this platform. According to her, most of the worries and concerns she had about finding a befitting Tech job as a woman that would fit her schedules were all taken care of by Powertofly.

### *The Disabled*

Disability does not equal inability. In fact, so many people living with disabilities are more capable than people without any disability in so many ways. It has been noted that all of us live with at least one form of disability at different points in our lives. Disabilities could be congenital, accidents, from life-changing experiences, and natural disasters, etc.

What is a disability? Disability means, with respect to an individual—(A), a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual; (B) a record of such an impairment; or (C) being regarded as having such an impairment (Francis & Silver, 2016).

According to the World Health Organization, disability has three dimensions:

1. **Impairment** in a person's body structure or function or mental functioning; examples of impairments include loss of a limb, loss of vision, or memory loss.
2. **Activity Limitation**, such as difficulty seeing, hearing, walking, or problem-solving.

3. **Participation Restrictions** in normal daily activities, such as working, engaging in social and recreational activities, and obtaining healthcare and preventive services.

Because disabilities are limiting life experiences and exclusionary in nature, people with disabilities are unable to access opportunities, enjoy certain services, use some technologies, physical spaces, and learning opportunities. For these reasons and many more, accessibility issues are of great concern to people living with disabilities and diversity managers. The committee on the rights of persons living with disabilities statement buttresses this issue of accessibility as shown below:

Accessibility is a precondition for persons with disabilities to live independently and participate fully and equally in society. Without access to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communication, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, persons with disabilities would not have equal opportunities for participation in their respective societies.—Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities General Comment No. 2 (2014)

Access to information communication innovations has shown to have more productive effects in flattening the diversities that are a result of disabilities between people living with disabilities and those who do not. Digital innovations help in flattening these diversities by combining advances in information communication technologies and assistive digital innovations designed to make it possible for those living with disabilities to do what people who do not have disabilities could do. Information communication technologies, in this case, include e-learning platforms, e-libraries, eBooks, and Websites dedicated to special activities, while assistive technologies include innovations that have a digital base like voice assistants, digital earpieces for the deaf, and many more.

Apart from the exclusions from impairments, physical limitations, and participation restrictions, another form of exclusion that affects the disabled is psychological exclusion or Ableism. It is the attitude of making a person or people living with disabilities to feel rejected, looked down upon, and underrated. Statistics of different forms of exclusion against the disabled abound. Statistics on the inclusion of disabled people in terms of human rights protection, right to education, and work is still below par with tendencies for exclusion. Table 1 shows the data on the employment status of the non-institutional population by disability status and age for 2018 and 2019 in the USA and compared the data with persons with no disabilities to showcase a contrast.

Let us now look at some **Digital Innovations Flattening Disabilities**.

**Table 1** Employment status of the non-institution population by disability status and age, 2018 and 2019 averages

Characteristics	2018			2019		
	Total, 16 years and over	16–64 years	65 years and over	Total, 16 years and over	16–64 y ear	65 years and over
<i>Persons with a disability</i>						
Civilian non-institutional population	30,136	15,325	14,810	30,392	15,231	15,161
Civilian labour force	6266	5111	1156	6321	5117	1204
Participation rate	20.8	33.3	7.8	20.8	33.6	7.9
Employed	5.767	4666	1101	5858	47,706	1152
Employment population ratio	19.1	30.4	7.4	19.3	30.9	7.6
Unemployed	499	445	54	463	411	52
Unemployment rate	8.0	8.7	4.7	7.3	8.0	4.4
Not in labour force	23,870	10,215	13,655	24,070	10,113	13,957
<i>Persons with no disability</i>						
Civilian non-institutional population	227,655	191,182	36,477	228,783	191,039	37,744
Civilian labour force	155,809	146,932	8877	152,218	147,758	9460
Participation rate	68.4	76.9	24.3	68.7	77.3	25.1
Employed	149,994	141,390	8604	151,680	142,85	9195
Employment population ratio	65.9	74.0	23.6	66.3	74.6	24.4
Unemployed	5815	5542	273	5537	5273	265
Unemployment rate	3.7	3.8	3.1	3.5	3.6	2.8
Not in labour force	71,846	44,250	27,595	71,666	43,282	28,284

Source Bureau of Labour Statistics (2020)

### ***For Social Inclusion***

**The Transcense App:** This app flattens and removes the chasm between the deaf, the hard-of-hearing, and the hearing during conversations. The captioning functionality is so efficient that it makes communication natural and inclusive for the aforementioned groups.



**The Microsoft Soundscape Headset:** This app with its 3D soundscape guides blind people safely to their locations with ease. It assists them in finding their way around. Its beacon technology details information concerning location, safety that makes navigation less challenging for the blind and gives them an experience that equals natural sight.

### *For Educational Inclusion*

**ICT4D PWD:** This is a community of disabled people and those interested in advancing the cause of the disabled people through digital inclusion. They seek to achieve this by equipping the disabled community through the provision of ICT knowledge and connecting them with opportunities that demand their skills for economic empowerment.

### *For Social Inclusion*

**Gaming Controllers and Games:** Xbox's latest gaming controllers are specially designed with the disabled in mind. It has a flexible control system that is enabled by plugging different jacks to it. Everything about the Xbox is designed to make the disabled have an unrestrained gaming experience. Jouce3 is another gaming controller made for the disabled that has been referred to as the all-purpose controller. It requires only minimal movement from a person's body. Any part of the body that is functional can be used to operate it, and it can be kept anywhere, including beds, wheelchairs, and others. Other accessible gaming devices designed for the maximum pleasure and inclusion of those living with disabilities include: Blue Tip Gaming Axis 4 Pro, Sub Pac M2X, Quad Stick FPS Game Controller, Single Hand Joy-Con Adapter, Guitar Hero Foot Pedals, NES Hands-Free Controller, Rock Band Wheelchair Mod, etc.

People with disabilities are also not being left out in games. About 75% of all the designers of Wraith games are people with disabilities themselves. And they have created the game Collapsus with the disabled in mind. So, many other games for people with disabilities abound.

### *Live Captions*

Captioning services are receiving serious attention as a means of achieving inclusion for people with disabilities. Google just revealed it would begin live-captioning for all its products to accommodate those with disabilities. PowerPoint has also introduced live captions to accommodate those with hearing difficulties during presentations.

Governments, like that of Seattle, have started making live-captioning mandatory in public places like bars, stadiums, restaurants, and others.

### ***Voice Assistants***

Alexa and Siri: These are artificial intelligence products that use voice recognition to function. Once product is trained to recognize the users voice, they can answer calls and run errands. They also assist users perform some chores and many other things, thereby making life easier.

### **Racism**

The death of George Floyd is, arguably, the new face of racism in the world today. George Floyd, an unarmed black American, was shown in a video that went viral shouting, “I can’t breathe. I can’t breathe”, while a white policeman was kneeling on his neck until he became lifeless. This event troubled public sensibilities and gave rise to public protests in defence of black peoples’ rights across the globe, led by the BlackLivesMatter movement, which started in 2013 after a judge unfairly released George Zimmerman who shot and killed Treyvon Martin, a black man in 2012. Racism constitutes all the discriminations based on physical attributes.

In attempting to explain the different manifestations of racism in society, so many scholars have attempted to explain it using different terms. It is critical to acquaint everyone with these terms to facilitate a better discussion and understanding of this subject. Common among these synonymous terms are institutional racism, structural racism, systemic racism, and racial scaffolding. Institutional racism is a system of policies, decisions, practices, and behaviour put in place to disadvantage people of colour. Systemic racism, in a nutshell, was a legalized system of discrimination against people of colour that made it difficult for people of colour to attend the same schools as whites, did not allow them to access the same health care as whites, and did not allow them to do the same jobs as whites, and many more.

Many scholars have used the term aversive racism to describe the present-day kind of racism. Aversive racism, according to Robbie et al. (2018), is a form of present-day bias in which individuals sympathize with victims of past injustice, support the principle of racial equality, and regard themselves as non-prejudiced, but at the same time possess negative feelings and beliefs about people of colour. It is this new form of racism that anti-racial movements are out to fight.

To understand the anti-racial movement, it is important to understand the terminologies it employs to describe racism and racism-related ideologies. The following are some of the terms:

**Ally:** Ally is a person who advocates and promotes the inclusion of marginalized people, persons, or groups for the benefit of all people.

**Allyship:** Allyship is the process of building relationships based on trust and dedication with marginalized individuals or groups.

**Microaggressions:** These are behaviours against or towards marginalized people that leave their victims feeling humiliated or insulted.

**Gaslighting:** Gaslighting is a psychological manipulation meant to cause targeted individuals or groups to doubt their realities or factual experiences.

**White Supremacy:** White supremacy is the belief in the superiority of white ideas, beliefs, actions, and worldviews over those of people of colour.

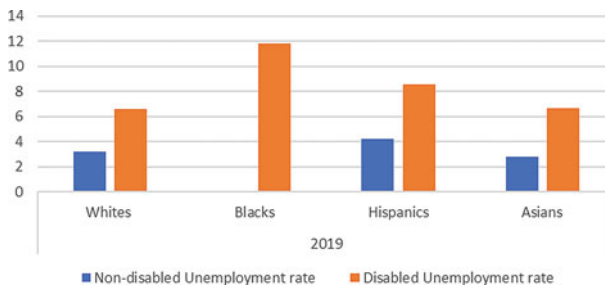
**White Fragility:** White fragility is the tendency to respond angrily or defensively towards any behaviour, regardless of how negligible it may be, to people of colour considered a threat to white privilege.

**White Privilege:** This is the set of advantages, benefits, and privileges reserved or enjoyed by white people solely because they are white.

**Intersectionality:** Intersectionality simply refers to the interconnectedness of social categorizations like class, gender, and race, regarded as producing a system of discriminations as it applies to a given individual or group.

Figure 4 highlights the latest statistics of unemployment among people with disabilities in America to show that racism also affects those living with disabilities. It is evident that the Black community experiences the highest rate of racism among disabled people followed by Hispanics.

Having considered what racism is and the terms being used in battling it in contemporary society, it is pertinent to consider one of the most powerful events in the twenty-first century about racial inclusion going forward: the marriage of Prince Harry and Meghan Merkel in May 2018. Prince Harry epitomizes the highest class of white royalty and blue bloodedness. Meghan Merkel, on the other hand, represented an average person of colour with a humble background. Some journalists



**Fig. 4** Unemployment among disabled People in America by race, 2020. *Source* Bureau of Labour Statistics (2020)

doubted whether the royal family would accept Meghan or not. But it did. On 31 March 31, the couple officially stepped back from their roles as Duke and Duchess of Sussex and dropped the many benefits and privileges attached to royalty so as to have a happy life together. In the same vein, to achieve inclusion or belonging, privileges, entitlements, positions, claims, etc., might have to be dropped.

### *Digital Innovations Flattening Racial Diversity*

**Dyversify:** This is a digital platform dedicated to providing information on the experiences of underrepresented minorities in the workplace and ensuring their inclusion in society.

**BITC Race in the Workplace Campaign:** This platform is concerned with promoting racial tolerance in the UK. It promotes resources for increasing interracial relations.

**Uber Eats:** This is a new feature in the Uber app designed to support and showcase restaurants owned by black people around the USA and Canada with no delivery cost. This is aimed at encouraging businesses owned by people of colour to also thrive.

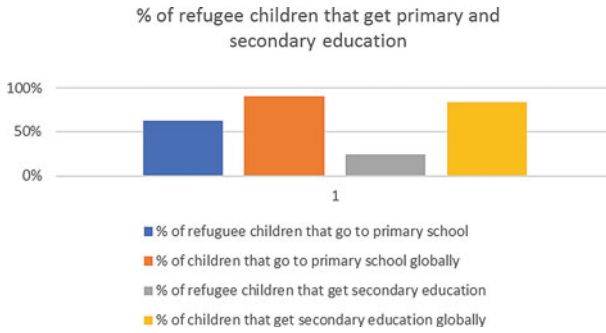
**Netflix:** This giant video streaming service is not left out in the fight against racism. It has started projecting the black story and experience in the USA, displaying curated contents of black experience and contributions in the USA to show patriotism, and the need for mutual relations.

**Yelp Racist Alert:** Yelp has developed “an anti-racist alert” feature that will allow customers to report a racist activity they encountered in a business. Once reported, the business is flagged, so that customers will avoid the business until the issue is cleared. This is done to encourage business owners to make their businesses racism-free.

### **Refugees**

Another critical demography that suffers exclusion from the rest of society is refugees. These are people who were forced out of their natural habitation by natural disasters, conflicts, economic challenges, political, and socio-religious problems. These groups of people are totally cut off from their livelihoods, social environments, amenities, and societal comforts.

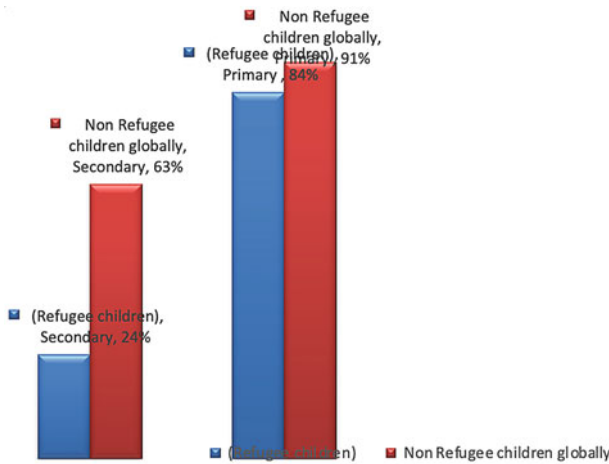
Governments around the world have put policies in place to address the problems of refugees. Recently, the United Nations High Commission for refugees (UNHCR) has been fighting to achieve digital accessibility for Refugees. It is believed that digital accessibility will contribute to the flattening of the gap between refugees



**Fig. 5** Refugee children that get primary and secondary education. *Source* The UN Refugee Agency

and the rest of society. It provides refugees access to education, opportunities, and health services. The percentage of refugee children that get primary, secondary and higher education around the world is lesser compared to the non-refugee children (Figs. 5 and 6).

The graph compares the number of refugee children who get higher education against the number of non-refugee children who get such education around the world.



**Fig. 6** Refugee children that get Higher education. *Source* The UN Refugee Agency

## *Digital Innovations for Refugee Inclusion*

### **For Inclusive Education**

**RefugeeEd.Hub:** This is an online platform for refugees globally. This platform seeks to improve the standard of education among refugees by partnering with global stakeholders in the provision of refugee education to ensure refugee education is up to global standards.

**edSeed:** This is a digital platform dedicated to sharing refugee stories with the goal of attracting donors and stakeholders towards building a higher education network for refugees.

**Edraak:** Edraak is an online educational platform or massive open online course platform for the Arab world. Both refugees and non-refugees in the region can access it. It features the best courses designed by Arab professors in partnership with the best universities in the world to meet the region's needs. As such, after acquiring requisite education tailored to addressing the needs of the region, refugees can get fully integrated into society.

### **For Social Inclusion**

**Refugees Are:** This is a digital platform that monitors global news around refugees to ensure negative sentiments are not stirred up against them. And to ensure their challenges and needs are brought to the attention of the public for redress. It ensures that backlashes or xenophobic attacks on refugees are addressed or prevented.

**Doctor-x:** This is a digital app that uses a multi-language feature for storing the medical history of refugees. And a personal account for every refugee that doctors can update any time the refugee receives medical attention. It is a global digital health database for refugees and can be used when the refugee goes to another country.

**Paper Airplanes:** This service is available in the USA, Turkey, Jordan, and Egypt. It uses video conferencing to teach professional skills to people affected by crises in the Middle East and East Africa and orients them on how to be integrated into society. Some of the courses available on this platform are Turkish, English, journalism, and coding.

### **For Workplace Inclusion**

**Rafiqi:** This digital technology helps refugees by matching them to exciting job opportunities that match their profile to help them get meaningful employment. It also offers information on available training for refugees.

**Power-Coders:** This platform trains refugees on computer programming, after which it employs them as programming interns. After this programme, the refugees are better equipped to find meaningful jobs and then get reintegrated into society.

**Place (place.network):** This platform provides innovation laboratories for migrants and refugees, especially in Europe. These laboratories provide refugees with problems solving skills, design thinking abilities, and more. After this programme, they become equipped to solve problems in society through gainful employment.

## Conclusion

From the foregoing, we have attempted an exploration of how digital innovations are flattening the diversity sphere through digital inclusivity. We have seen that some critical demographics in society that were hitherto excluded because of misconceptions and misinterpretations of their natural experiences, like neurodiversity and others, are now being reintegrated into society through digital inclusivity, in the form of, digital technologies, assistive and access technologies, web-based services, and artificial intelligence. These digital innovations appear to have a tripartite approach to inclusivity: provision of knowledge to excluded demographics, social integration capabilities, and workplace empowerment.

However, it is necessary to note that these innovations do not factor in the educational background of its users, as they blindly presume that all users must be literate. It is also critical to state that most of the progress is achieved through digital inclusivity is barely seen in developing countries, with most of them yet to institutionalize diversity and inclusion practice. Going forward, digital innovations present some hope in artificial intelligence. With the advancement in artificial intelligence such as voice assistance, multilingual technologies, bioinformatics, and augmented reality, digital innovations should be developed to have the capability of teaching people with disabilities and illiterates how to use them.

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# Measuring Diversity and Inclusion



Amardeep Singh

**Abstract** Nowadays, organizations across the world are adding Diversity and Inclusion as an important indicator of the organization's report card simply because it has been proved using quantitative methods that a more diverse and inclusive organization tends to have better revenue. However, most organizations indicating a healthy Diversity are simply reporting core employee breakup from a Diversity perspective and almost all organizations are still trying to figure out how to best capture Inclusion. This emanates from the fact that capturing Diversity as a breakup of headcount is easier, and while Diversity numbers might be healthy or well above the target, it is not a good indicator of Inclusion. Diversity does not lead to inclusion. Thought leaders involved in the measuring or capturing inclusion have mentioned rather limited ways to measure inclusion and one of the best ways to capture Inclusion, or the feeling of belongingness in any organization, is to create an inclusion survey. Of course, just like the engagement survey, which aims at capturing the "true" engagement of an organization, has inherent issues, the inclusion survey can also have issues and the end result may not be a good indicator of the "true" inclusion of the organization. Finally, every approach may have its pros and cons, and while there may not exist a single way for this, it does become imperative to have a proper team around D&I, which should include the right set of diverse employees, to track the D&I effort by providing proper guidance and consultation.

**Keywords** Diversity · Inclusion · D&I · Metrics · Inclusion committee · Engagement

## Understanding Diversity

One of the most comprehensive definitions of diversity has been penned by Berkeley in their Greater Good Magazine. In the definition, Berkeley in this definition has included every aspect that needs to be considered and not gender differences alone,

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A. Singh (✉)

Global People Analytics Manager, Arcadis Consulting India Pvt. Ltd., Bangalore, India

which predominantly across the world refers to under the D&I umbrella (UC Berkeley, 2020).

### ***The Gender Breakdown***

It is interesting to note that the general trend of understanding of Diversity in any organization which leads to the data being sliced up to reports focuses on gender aspect.

### **Racial Background Consideration**

Ever since the Emancipation Proclamation was issued by Abraham Lincoln in 1863, which led to freeing up of the slaves during the Civil War, North America, particularly USA, has taken cognizance of including racial background in the definition of Diversity also.

### **The LGBTQ Community**

Netherlands, a country which had always been in the top ten of countries with high human freedom index, incidentally also was the first country in the world to have legalized same-sex marriage (CATO, 2019). On the other hand, USA, famous for its civil right liberties and equally famous for the lack of it also, and also ranking high on the human freedom index legalized same-sex marriage in 2014, with the historic Obergefell versus Hodges case, in which the Supreme Court of the United States, ruled that the fundamental right to marry should be guaranteed to same-sex couples also.

Even though the LGBTQ community, largely around the world, has been looked at with a different perspective over the years and since 2000 after Netherlands legalized same-sex marriage and subsequent rulings by other countries, the LGBTQ community has been getting its fair share of empathy. The community is now coming out into the open and administrations, be it political or organizational, around the world are also supporting and advocating the rights of the community. The USA even has an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, (EEOC or specifically mentioned as EEO), which looks into matters concerning racial discrimination or discrimination around any other aspect, be it gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, etc., in employment across the country.

Specific challenges faced by the LGBTQ.

The LGBTQ community at the workplace faces a different set of challenges which translate into bigger obstacles or challenges when the organization is trying to look

into capturing Inclusion and not Diversity. The problem becomes more complicated when the organization is looking at someone who is a woman, LGBTQ and a Person of Color (PoC).

- One of the biggest challenges faced is by the LGBTQ community in coming out actually means more than just letting people know that the employee identifies as LGBTQ. To understand and learn about the experiences of the LGBTQ community, McKinsey compiled broad set of qualitative and quantitative data on more than 2000 employees (McKinsey, 2020).
- Also, LGBTQ women were far less likely to be out than men. Only 58% of the women as compared to 72% of the men confirmed that they were out.
- Interestingly, people who are out at work often need to do that repeatedly, again and again. About 20% of the respondents in the survey McKinsey actually had to come out multiple times in a week, while 10% confirmed that they had to come out on a daily basis.
- The survey also pointed out that many LGBTQ employees feel that they have to really outperform non LGBTQ employees to gain recognition in the workplace. If the employee happens to be a woman, LGBTQ and PoC, all in one, the kind of discrimination the person is bound to face is immense.
- Company policies as well as immigration laws also make things difficult for the LGBTQ community. Imagine a gay couple having a child through a surrogate and the man applies for maternity leave as he is going to be the primary care giver. Most organizations have not considered these kinds of situations in their policies.
- Almost half of Asian nation member of UN and nearly 60% of African nation members of UN criminalize same-sex sexual acts, and in some cases, the penalty is life imprisonment or death, while in certain countries, being transgender is illegal. Imagine if a LGBTQ employee is asked to travel to a not so “safe country” as multinational organizations do require their leaders to travel frequently to other countries for business.

## The Disability Population

There is not only a big challenge that needs to be overcome, but an enormous opportunity to include these very talented individuals. It lifts us up. It makes us better. It's one of the key values I want to instill in a company like Unilever—Paul Polman, former CEO, Unilever.

Sherbin and Kennedy (2016) in a research for Center for Talent Innovation (now renamed as Coqual), titled *Disabilities and Inclusion*, found that even while 30% of the workforce in the USA has some sort of disability, only 3.2% self-identified as having a disability (Kennedy & Taylor, 2017). They further point out that:

- Only 13% employees have visible disability which translated means that people who meet them can quickly tell if they have a disability,
- 26% of the employee's disability is sometimes visible,

- And, interestingly 62% of employees have *invisible disability* which means that unless told, people cannot know that the employee has disability.

The case for Diversity and why it matters.

So why does Diversity take much importance, especially in the corporate world. Let us delve a little in the case for Diversity and what does it mean for a diverse organization.

1. **Diversity has a direct impact on the revenue of the organization**

One of the most compelling gender impact studies has been conducted by the renowned university Economists, Sara Ellison (MIT) and Wallace Mullin (George Washington University). They concluded in their paper titled, *Diversity, Social Goods Provision, and Performance in the Firm*, which was published in the *Journal of Economics and Management Strategy*, that diverse offices may function more efficiently than offices with less diversity, thus improving the overall bottom line of the organization (Ellison & Mullin, 2014). The economists used eight years of data on revenue and survey information, from 1995 to 2000, which included some all-male and some all-female offices data (which are actually very hard to find), apart from the mixed gender offices data. The authors found that shifting from an all-male or all-female office to one which has a mixed gender, could increase revenue by roughly 41%.

And as per McKinsey's own reports, companies with proportion of racial and ethnic diversity are actually 35% more likely to have improved financial in the industry. And companies with a high proportion of gender diversity are 15% more likely to have improved financial returns in the industry (McKinsey, 2015).

2. **Diversity initiatives help proper representation in underrepresented fields**

McKinsey, in their 2015 study, showed that by having greater gender diversity in the global labor market, would actually double the women's contribution to the global GDP growth. It estimated that it could lead to an addition of USD 2.1 trillion to the Western Europe's GDP in 2025, if all the countries were able to match improvement rates of the fastest-improving country in the region. The USD 2.1 trillion could actually be translated from higher participation rates of women and a greater representation in high productivity sectors. McKinsey Global Institute further has been able to link gender inequality in the society and gender inequality in the workplace, and the institute points out that "*no country can achieve gender equality in the workplace without closing the gap in the society*" (McKinsey, 2015). Despite such a compelling case, the progress toward greater gender diversity is actually very slow, much below expectations.

3. **Diversity leads to higher levels of employee engagement**

Laura Sherbin and Ripa Rashid, in their Harvard Business Review (2017) article titled "*Diversity doesn't stick without Inclusion*," also point out a diverse and an inclusive culture can also lead to higher levels of engagement in the organization. Their research finds out that—"*employees with inclusive managers are 1.3 times more likely to feel that their innovative potential is unlocked*" (Shelbin & Rashid, 2017).

In the same study, it was found out that employees without a feeling of belongingness are more likely leave their jobs in less than a year while on the bench women employees could have been better retained had there been better flexible options.

4. **Diversity provides a better Public Relations image**

Uber’s mishandling of its recent damaging reports of gender discrimination, leading to the resignation of the company’s top talent, including their former President Jeff Jones, is an example of how lack of diversity can lead to a bigger problem for the company. As Heather R. Huhman, in her article titled, “*Why you need to focus on Diversity before its too late*” (Huhman, 2017), points out, a complete lack of focus on diversity or without an appropriate strategy on diversity may end up with legal complications in the long run and Uber is a classic example of this.

In a survey conducted by Indeed.com in December 2016, covering 1002 employees in the tech sector, it was found that 77% of the employees felt that it is understandably important to have a diverse company, while 25% felt that there is a lack of appropriate action in this direction (Indeed Survey, December 2016). These numbers speak for themselves (Indeed.com, 2016).

5. **Diversity helps provide a proper reflection of the population demographics**

Apart from keeping pace with the changes in the society, mirroring the current population demographics in the employee base also helps reaching out to the more diverse customer base, as pointed out by Raj Mukherjee, SVP, Product at Indeed.com, most innovative products created in today’s world to solve some of the customer’s problems or needs cannot be built without considering diverse perspectives (Indeed.com, 2016).

## Measuring Diversity

For any organization to be top on of its long-term goals and objectives, it needs to make sure that the organization tracks those goals holistically within the organization by using its in-house capability or by bringing in capability from outside through a third-party vendor. “What gets measured, gets managed,” now a management adage which is very much relevant for organizations to manage its critical metrics, especially after Peter Drucker mentioned in his 1954 book titled “The Practice of Management,” is quite apt even for Diversity and Inclusion. Unless the metric is measured and monitored, it cannot be tracked and improved which implies whether the organization achieved or missed its goals and/or objectives and by how much. Regular monitoring of such critical goals helps take corrective action in case the goals are in the red or leverage learning if the goal is green. However, before the reporting landscape on Diversity and Inclusion is set up, it is imperative that the right metrics need to be finalized after a careful and thoughtful discussion with the core project team which can include the HR professionals as well as diversity consultants, not to mention the leads from the reporting and analytics team.

Felicity Menzies, CEO and Principal Consultant at Include-Empower.com, mentions that “*organizations should consider the legal and ethical requirements regarding the storing of sensitive information* (Menzies, 2019). In certain countries, it is against the law to collect sensitive information without prior consent of the individual and while most organizations do have access to and store rather personal and sensitive information and it is the organization’s responsibility to ensure that the data is not used to discriminate anybody, employee, client, or even a vendor.

Menzies, in her article on the Website, states four purposes, which metrics around Diversity and Inclusion should serve in any organization:

1. Metrics for diagnosis—These help identify blind-spot bias. These types of metrics cut across the whole lifecycle of an employee within an organization from hire to exit.
  - a. Recruitment—Creating and tracking a metric around recruitment helps identifying barriers to entry for various groups. In order to ensure that the aligned objective is met, a suitable metric needs to be put in place; however, a more in depth analysis may be needed to understand why certain groups apply as compared to other groups.
  - b. Selection—A useful metric during the selection phase in an organization can help in understanding the bias during assessment and selection.
  - c. Promotion—Similarly as in selection phase, a bias can be identified for promotions also. However, one needs to be careful while deriving insights from this metric as there might be certain employees who may choose to sit out of promotions. There are studies that have shown that women are less likely to apply for promotions than men.
  - d. Development—Even in the employee development phase, there can be a certain bias which can be identified by monitoring lateral moves, who is on key roles, training and other learning and development participation.
  - e. Pay and benefits—One of the key aspects in pay and benefits is the lack of equal pay between gender. Empirical studies have shown that even today, women are paid 21 cents less than men. Organizations should ensure to have a trust worthy analysis to be conducted on the gender pay disparity, if the organization plans to close that gap.
  - f. Employee engagement—Menzies (2019) points out that a significant difference in engagement scores across different identity groups can be indicative of biased mindsets. She goes on to suggest a specific supplemental survey to look into Diversity and Inclusion concerns. An inclusion index can be created which can be calculated from an “inclusion survey” created around employees being valued around their differences in background, feasibility of employees being able to voice their concern without fear of retaliation and whether employees have confidence in the grievance system and procedures.
2. Metrics for tracking purposes—Organizations will be unable to assess improvement in any specific area in the organization in the absence of any metric to track

and monitor. Once a metric is created, it needs to be tracked regularly, making it much easier for the organization to understand how to change its course to ensure improvement or to remain on the right path in alignment with the attainment of the long-term objectives.

3. **Measuring the ROI**—Since Diversity and Inclusion have a direct impact on the financial performance of an organization, it makes sense to measure and track the return on investment on those initiatives. It is imperative, however, to link the Diversity and Inclusion to the performance measures of the organization.
4. **Grievances and lawsuits**—Tracking metrics on diversity also helps create readily available reports for any future lawsuits or grievances that may occur. It also helps identify groups which are most likely to be prejudiced against, within the organization.

Nadja Yusif, Managing Director and Partner, BCG London, in her discussion on metrics on Diversity and Inclusion, points out that building of the right metrics and tracking those metrics is not an HR issue, it is a board-level issue and it is critical not only to have the right data but also to have the right ways of monitoring progress (Boston Consulting Group, 2018).

Menzies (2019) in her article also lists out a pathway for creating and Diversity and Inclusion metrics in one's organization:

1. **Identify and define which metrics to be monitored**  
Organizations need to create their diversity goals based on their business goals and can extend those to racial background, ethnic background, nationality, education levels, professional expertise, tenure, age, disability and health status, sexual orientation, etc., and not just limit it to gender. She further points that diversity metrics should be relevant to local context and business leaders. It will be completely a waste of time and resources if the wrong problems are addressed, and hence, wrong metrics are tracked. Gender inequality is a global problem; however, gender diversity issue should be looked at what maturity level it exists in a particular region or area. There might be different issues related to India, the Middle East, or China. It is imperative to gauge what is the major local issue which should be central in forming the diversity strategy for the organization within a specific region.
2. **Understand the data landscape and review the data policies in place**  
Organizations should review their current data policies in place thoroughly to ensure there are no loopholes which can lead to a legal issue. Organizations nowadays have access to and store a lot of personal and sensitive individual data. How the data is stored, shared, and reported is the organization's responsibility which needs to be clearly laid out in the data policy. In that context, most organizations have even set up their own data privacy teams with the correct hierarchical structure in place which is responsible for taking critical decisions on how the sensitive data is being stored, used and reported. Interestingly, with the advent of Artificial Intelligence and Robotics Process Automation (RPA) coming of age, these functions are taking more importance as they not only to review and update such policies but sometimes take critical decisions on such

matters with situations coming up for review in front of a committee which they one cannot even think of.

3. Select the right metrics

A carefully chosen set of metrics, serving three broad purposes, diagnosis of risk areas, track progress of initiatives, and calculate the ROI, should be set in place.

4. Establish the baseline measures

Measuring progress is extremely helpful if the progress is benchmarked against a baseline. One of the best ways to have this over a benchmark is to compare the results with the industry standards which helps the organization understand if the organization is better or worse than the industry. Historic trends within the organization can also help, however, in limited manner.

5. Set goals and targets

When setting goals, due considerations should be given to the barriers that can pose serious risk to the attainment of such goals and how those can be addressed. Here, change management needs to play a very important role as the current status quo might turn out to be extremely fluid. The new concepts can be viewed not in the right light within the organization, and such efforts may not bear fruit immediately or even in near future as employees directly impacted may offer some resistance to such initiatives, directly or indirectly.

6. A concrete RACI model should be followed

RACI or responsible, accountable, consultant and informed matrix is the responsibility assignment matrix which can also be used while setting up the Diversity and Inclusion metrics within the organization. However, the ultimate accountability of the Diversity and Inclusion initiative should rest with the CEO of the organization.

7. Track and monitor progress

Proper milestones should be set which should be monitored, and any deviations from the progress should be addressed. However, small deviations should be acceptable, and those permissible deviations should be documented in the project upfront before the start of the project. Also, all milestones time frame should also be documented in the project charter itself to ensure there is transparency which can dispel any confusion that may arise at a later stage.

8. Report the results

The results based on Diversity and Inclusion should be reported regularly and with transparency. This not only helps in building confidence internally in the organization, it also helps maintain accountability within the organization. Also, the reports on Diversity and Inclusion should be published as per the agreed frequency with the project team or at least once a year.

9. Review the metrics on a regular basis

The metrics may need to be reviewed basis the change that the organization may face or occur or as and when the metrics mature within the organization.



## Understanding Inclusion

Diversity without Inclusion is not worth it. Just being Diverse is not enough, as Sherbin and Rashid (2017) point out that Diversity and Inclusion should go hand in hand. An organization with good diversity in staff does not necessarily mean that it is also inclusive (Sherbin & Rashid, 2017). Most organizations, actually, tend to only look at diversity numbers as those are easier to calculate and even easier to report, while inclusion metrics are missing. Obviously, the reason is that measuring inclusion within an organization is not really easy, and in fact, most organizations do not even have a framework in place to measure inclusion at the workplace.

Also, measuring inclusion and measuring engagement are actually more or less similar in nature with the same set of issues associated with them. Most of the engagement surveys may paint a rosy picture; however, the real situation could be far from the truth. And, questions are raised when attrition strikes in the organization, when and where it least expected, which then leads to finger pointing and fact finding, but then it is always too late as the top talent is already hired and moved on. Measuring inclusion is similar. A survey, in most cases, kind of might be misleading as Sherbin and Rashid point out in their article. Coqual which helps organizations to uncover bias and overcome obstacles for the unrepresented populations in the workplace clearly points out the above issue with an on-site project in South America. In one of the projects with a Chilean-based firm, they found in a rather insightful one-to-one interview, with one of the most valued, respected, well-paid indigenous Peruvian employee, who was also included in the leadership decision making process, that despite the firm being high on diversity in terms of numbers, he will never make it as a partner in the organization due to his color and background. This is actually what the true picture is, which is missing on the reports tabled on most company's annual reports.

Coqual has done some of its own research in the USA, and as per Coqual's findings, 58% of Black professionals in America have experienced some sort of racial prejudice at the workplace, and while 19% of the Black employees feel that someone from their race or ethnicity will never achieve a top position in their organization, while only 3% of the Whites felt that someone from their race or ethnicity can never achieve a top position in their organization. This, again is in stark contrast to the rosy numbers around diversity or ambitious goals on diversity numbers, points out to the problem around inclusion.

Kathy Gurchiek, in her article titled "*6 Steps for Building an Inclusive Workplace*," says that Diversity is only half of the Diversity and Inclusion picture, "*Creating a culture where people are respected and appreciated requires another level of effort that may not be getting the investment it needs*" (Gurchiek, 2018).

Johnny Taylor, President & CEO SHRM, points out that that "*we often forget the "I" in the D&I conversation. The challenge is in having a culture where all employees feel included. It's a major investment to bring talent into your organization, so why bring them in if they're not happy when they get here? You've got to get the inclusion part right.*"

Engle (2020), in her article—The “i” in D&I: 4 Ways to Make Inclusion the Focus of Your Diversity Efforts, mentions that a true leader responsibility is to take the right decisions, carefully weighing the perspectives around inclusion.

Dianne Campbell, Vice President Global Diversity and Inclusion, American Express, says, “*It’s the experience that your leader is creating that is going to make or break your D&I initiatives.*” She adds that however, “*as HR practitioners, we take for granted when we say to leaders that they need to be inclusive that they know what we mean.*” Dianne points a very important point in her statement as most HR professionals assume that the leaders understand the language of the HR professionals, while in most cases it is not. And, it is highly likely that leaders are so obsessed with achieving the long-term objectives of the organization that such initiatives as Diversity and Inclusion end up taking a back seat.

Jennifer Brown, President and CEO of Jennifer Brown Consulting and author of the book, “*Inclusion: Diversity, the New Workplace & the Will to Change,*” says, “*You need people who are going to make the time to roll up their sleeves and do the work.*”

It becomes extremely important, in view of above, that the leaders in any organization are sensitized and educated in the workplace, right from the basics. This is where having a Diversity and Inclusion committee or a council in the organization helps, which should be working very closely with the HR leaders, HR professionals, and even the analytics and reporting team.

## Measuring Inclusion in a Workplace

Fostering a common understanding of Inclusion within the workplace is only half of getting the job done. Measuring Inclusion at the workplace is not an easy task. A good starting point on getting a good idea of inclusion within the workplace is by creating a survey with the right set of questions on inclusion. Obviously, this needs to be initiated with discussion with the right set of employees within the organization—the Diversity & Inclusion Committee, the HR consultants, HRBPs, and of course the analytics consultants.

Verna Myers, VP of Diversity and Inclusion Netflix, points out clearly how difficult measuring Inclusion is and how relatively easy measuring Diversity is.

Gaudio (2019) in his article on Forbes titled “*Inclusion is Invisible: How to Measure it,*” says that inclusion is actually qualitative in nature and very subjective in nature. Paulo, further points out that while most of the definitions of inclusion being apt, they do not provide any guidelines or a direction on how to have a holistic methodology to measure inclusion at the workplace. Paulo, in his article, gives an example from the healthcare industry to cite how his team has been using a questionnaire in different organizations to list incident of “exclusion” and ask people in the organization to list whether and how often they have experienced these types of exclusion.

Fitzpatrick and Sharma (2017) of Cornell University, in their article titled, “*Can Inclusion be Measured in a Quantitative Way, Just Qualitative, or a Combination?*”, mention two approaches, qualitative and quantitative for measuring Inclusion in a workplace.

They have listed the qualitative measures as:

- Attitude—Witnessing and measuring change in attitude of employees in the organization.
- Community involvement—Inclusive organizations have representation and involvement from different aspects of the community. This is reflected in community presence through community participation.
- Engagement and satisfaction—Employee engagement surveys prove to be a critical resource for measuring inclusion, with three different core functions such as diagnostic tool and climate of inclusiveness through facilitating transparent communication.
- By gathering exit interview data, inclusion is measured through the transparency of answers reflecting employees’ comfort to disclose feelings.

And quantitative measures as:

- Diversity of leadership board.
- Having a more transparent culture and tracking the employee grievances over a period of time. This should show a decreasing trend.
- Reduced social distance emanating from better development and fewer grievances is also an indicator of inclusion.

## Challenges

One of most important challenges or rather obstacle is when organization is focused more on meeting the Diversity goals without making a concerted effort to be more inclusive. This often leads to creating diverse sub-groups within the workplace. This may lead to more isolation from the macro-groups rather than bringing them together for more collaborative work within the organization. Diversity often leads to differences in opinions and approaches because of the differences in background. In the larger diverse group discussions, often the focus on organizational objective gets missed which needs to be considered by the group facilitator. There should be constructive discussion instead of destructive arguments, with a clear understanding of what the objective is (Kadokia, 2019). However, it is the diverse nature of such groups which also brings about the true innovation in the workplace, which should not be missed.

Inclusion should also trickle down from the top. People coming from diverse backgrounds often feel the system is working against them than with them. This is why the top leadership needs to be more inclusive in words and action. The easiest way to achieve this is by having a more diverse leadership team and working toward expanding the leadership’s mindset. It needs to be visible enough from the top to be

absorbed by the middle and lower ranks. More often than not, Diversity and Inclusion committee members encourage employees with diverse backgrounds to “fit” into the existing work cultures rather than working on making the culture more inclusive. This is primarily due to the obstacles faced by the members who are themselves from a diverse background. McCluney and Murray (2020) point out that those committee members need to assess exclusion in the workplace which can help understand the causes of low inclusion.

Even though empirical studies have established the fact that diverse organizations are bound to have more impact on the financials of the organization, it may also lead to a commoditization of diverse background employees, as highlighted by McCluney, since most organizations focus on revenue and profitability as their long-term organizational objectives. Diversity and Inclusion initiatives need to focus on the impact it has on the diverse background employees rather than using market share as a measure of success.

## Conclusion

Any organization wanting to push its Diversity and Inclusion initiatives to the next level and to ensure a positive impact on its bottom line needs to follow few steps:

- It must have a Diversity and Inclusion committee within the organization comprising of leaders who are committed to D&I. The committee should be a good mix of employees with diverse backgrounds.
- The committee should meet on a regular basis and also have meetings with the larger project team which should include the HR business partners, professionals and the analytics team.
- The right metrics which need to be tracked should be set up after a thorough brainstorming with the right set of people.
- The metrics should be compared with a benchmark.
- The metrics should be reported transparently.
- Since measuring Inclusion is always a big challenge than diversity, it is imperative that a proper approach should be followed to measure inclusion within the organization (Berkeley, 2020).

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# Measuring Inclusion



Shruti Swaroop

**Abstract** This chapter focuses on the importance of measuring Inclusion in various aspects of an employee life cycle within an organisation. Building on the existing work done on Inclusion and Inclusion measurement and focusing on the role played by the Founders of any organisation, the EMBRACE model focuses on the aspects of any organisation which create an inclusive culture. This culture is built on how various processes, policies and implicit behaviour within any organisation are fuelled by the Founders and their values. Inclusion is a behavioural concept and speaks about acceptance of people's uniqueness and creating a sense of belonging within the team. Inclusion is driven by how individuals within an organisation look at Diversity and in turn influence group behaviour. Thus, Inclusion is behaviour driven by groups. How groups work together to create an environment of psychological safety is another aspect of Inclusion. Measuring Inclusion can support organisations in finding the voids which can be worked upon to create the right culture which fuels performance and productivity. This chapter focuses on "why" we need to measure Inclusion and "how" various aspects within the organisation can be measured to ascertain what the group is thinking about Diversity and thus focus on areas which can create an inclusive culture.

**Keywords** Inclusion measurement • Uniqueness and psychological safety • EMBRACE • Organisational culture • Performance and productivity

## Introduction

Through the first two decades of my life, I possibly never thought about the differences between people. Maybe that is because my parents taught me to see the world in a particular way.

I grew up in a family of sisters, supported by parents who never spoke about the differences between people based on their caste, culture, religion, gender or

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S. Swaroop (✉)  
Founder-Embrace Consulting, Gurgaon, India

colour. The armed forces embody an environment where Diversity is everywhere and Inclusion is a way of life. I had taken Diversity for granted until I moved out of this sheltered life and, after completing higher studies, joined the corporate world. My friendships have always been gender, religion and socio-economic status neutral; hence, a world where friends or relationships are made based on someone's gender is a difficult concept for me to digest. My exposure to the world of biases, micro-inequities, stereotypes and prejudices started as I realised that people differentiated between educational backgrounds, or brands on their resumes, and that religion and socio-economic differences affected how interpersonal relationships unfolded at work.

As I struggled to make sense of this differentiation, I moved to the UK. There was far more conversation about diversity and Inclusion in the UK than in India: organisations were striving hard to include people from different race, geographies, ethnicity and disabilities. The effort to make the corporate and social worlds inclusive got me thinking about the role policies, processes and more importantly people plays in small ways to make a difference.

I remember trying to come back to work in India after my maternity break, and often, the first questions asked by the interviewer would be about my motherhood. How was I expecting to manage my kids and work? Who would ensure the kids grow up well while I am at work? I realised that the answers I gave made an impact on the decision-making process. I was encountering bias. I also knew that no one would have asked me these questions in the UK. The law there bars any questions of this kind, but in India, employers get away with this and much more. When I started consulting and coaching business leaders, I also realised that employee engagement initiatives were decided based on the whims of the business leaders rather than tried and tested processes. A senior partner of a law firm would never hire ambitious men, as he felt they would run away with his clients. What was his criteria for deciding who was ambitious? Anyone who had obtained his law degree from a Tier 1 law college. He lost out on a lot of good talent because of his perception and prejudices.

While we have all grown up and known the world as a mix of people with different backgrounds and different beliefs, how our beliefs affect our judgement and our decision-making process is something we may not understand. And while Diversity awareness programmes can help with this I have realised that such programmes by themselves do not create the change we expect to see in people. I also realised that while laws can change *who* we hire or retain; *how* we hire and retain talent at the workplace is about mindset and behaviours. In other words, the way we behave based on our inherent mindset, upbringing, and our values is not something which can be changed by laws alone. Further, the "how" of attracting and retaining talent does not get covered through Diversity training.

It was then that I understood. Inclusion, which is unfortunately often used interchangeably with Diversity, even though they are distinctly different, is the need of the hour. Diversity could ensure different people come together, but only Inclusion would make them talk to each other and accept each other as they are. This meant Inclusion at a cognitive level before anything else. Diversity is the truth of human existence and evolution; however, we must also acknowledge, so is Exclusion. Even as we seek

Inclusion, our natural reaction to people around us is Exclusion. The human mind generally looks at the differences that we have with others rather than focus on the similarities. Our biases, stereotypes and prejudices prevent us from finding common ground with those whom we view as being different. Our environment, upbringing and need for survival make human kind and more accepting of people who think and look like us.

It is heartening, however, to see people starting to realise the difference between Diversity and Inclusion and to hear the corporate world talk about Inclusion and fostering an inclusive work environment. The Deloitte six signature traits (Bourke, 2016) of inclusive leadership are a step towards understanding Inclusion and how behaviours can be modified by leaders to create an inclusive environment. Deloitte has identified these six signature traits as commitment, courage, cognizance, curiosity, cultural intelligence and collaboration. Many corporations quickly adopted these traits as essential for successful leadership.

Significant efforts like getting more women in the workforce, creating legal compliance measures to ensure equal rights for specially abled people, have been made towards promoting diversity within organisations. For those organisations that do understand the benefits of having a diverse workforce, a Diversity scorecard like the one created by Hubbard (2012) to measure diversity initiatives is a great tool for assessing where they stand. I have, however, always wanted to know how implementation of these Inclusion initiatives will actually change people and whether it will really create an impact on the culture of any organisation. Measuring such a behavioural change is essentially measuring Inclusion.

To measure Inclusion, one needs to ascertain if the steps taken by any organisation to create an inclusive environment are really generating results, and if yes what these results are, i.e. are they affecting the entire environment, are we really able to change the fabric of the environment and create a sense of Inclusion or are we also creating some side effects on the way?

In this chapter, we will be discussing *inter alia*.

- Diversity and Inclusion and the way I see it
- Inclusion measurement, the why and how of it
- The challenges to measuring Inclusion.

## **Diversity and Inclusion—As I See It**

Our values are formed very early on in our lives, and we live most of our lives based on these values. They define our beliefs, behaviour and the stereotypes we have in our head (Gollwitzer, 2011). If our immediate family is biased against people from a particular community or colour, we tend to carry it with us through our entire life often without realising how in some cases we may be showing undue favouritism while giving people opportunities or conversely rejecting people without giving them a fair chance based on these biases.



Biases are the opinions we form about people based on both our beliefs and our experiences, and we all have them. After all, our brain needs a way to process the millions of pieces of information we get every day. The brain needs to divide people and situations based on some preconceived notions. Heuristic is the word used to describe this phenomenon. A heuristic is a mental shortcut that allows people to solve problems and make judgments quickly and efficiently. This shortens our decision-making time and allows people to function without constantly stopping to think about their next course of action. Heuristics could be formed due to our experiences or the way our brain has been programmed based on our upbringing. In some cases, they may prevent us from recognising the diversity around us and even from acknowledging that we may be biased. Nevertheless, they play an important role in helping us make decisions.

Diversity is all around us. The dictionary meaning of the word is “different from one another” and all of us are different from one another in various ways—in our socio-economic background, choices, attitudes, behaviours, education, colour, ethnicity, race to name a few. Organisations are a mix of people, and they could be different from one another because of any or all of the reasons mentioned above. To bring these people together within an organised set-up and make them work efficiently, one needs Inclusion.

Inclusion, as we know it is about acceptance of people. The Oxford dictionary defines Inclusion as the “action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure”. It is also pertinent to point out here that Inclusion (in the D&I context) is more than just an antonym of Exclusion. While Exclusion may be about not including people and keeping them out of our close circle, simply not excluding people or letting them into our circle does not automatically mean Inclusion. True Inclusion is embracing people for what they are, in their entirety. We differ from others in our opinions, choices and personalities which can make us like or dislike someone. At the work place though, liking or disliking people needs to be pushed to the background, and people need to be accepted for what they bring to the table. Competence should be paramount while making “people decisions” in the corporate world. In an organised set-up, making different types of people come together to work productively requires managing workforce through inclusive leadership.

The VUCAworld we are living in today demands diversity of markets, consumers, ideas and talents from organisations for them to be ahead of their competitors and increases efficiency and productivity. For growth-based organisations, simultaneous shifts in style of working, business ideas and talent management are the new context, and they need to ensure that their workforce is ready to deal with what may come their way in this rapidly changing environment. The Deloitte report (2013) has defined inclusive leadership as being essential to increase productivity in this world. As illustrated below, data/evidence from the Korn Ferry Institute (2019, p. 3), which synthesised the work on the performance of diverse versus homogenous teams by Katherine W. Phillips (October 2014, cited by Korn Ferry Institute, 2019), and Bruce Tuckman’s framework (1965, cited by Korn Ferry Institute, 2019) for the maturity over time of team performance, shows that diverse teams are ultimately more productive and perform significantly better after an initial period of conflict (Fig. 1), where

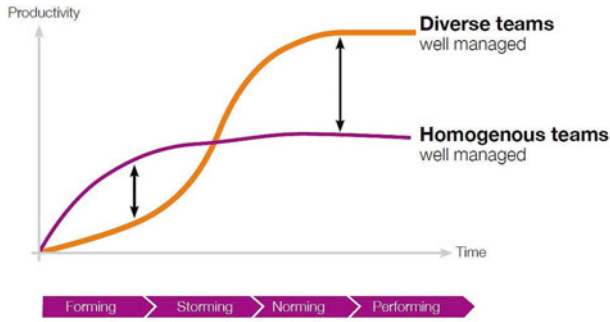


Fig. 1 .



Fig. 2 .

performance is defined as a combination of both results and behaviours that were responsible for achieving those results (Fig. 2).

One of the most widely accepted, contemporary approaches to Inclusion, introduced by Shore et al. (2011), defines it as “the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness”. Another definition of Inclusion by Deloitte (2013, p. 4) says that it is viewed both as a process and a condition, i.e. Inclusion is thought to incorporate both an active process of change (to include) and an emotional outcome (I feel included).

Brewer (2007) in her works has challenged two common assumptions about in-group biases: that in-group positivity necessitates out-group derogation and that in-group bias is motivated by self-enhancement. A review of relevant theory and research on inter-group relations provides evidence for three alternative principles: (a) in-group attachment and positivity are primary and independent of out-groups, (b) security motives (belonging and distinctiveness) underlie universal in-group favouritism and (c) attitudes towards out-groups vary as a function of inter-group relationships and associated threats to belonging and distinctiveness. Building on the research by Shore et al. (2011) in this field, one can look at ways of implementing and measuring Inclusion within organisations.

Introducing Inclusion within organisations is one way of trying to make organisation employee friendly and keeping the workforce engaged. According to the Society for Human Resources Management, there are enough studies (Leonard, 2012) to prove that engaged employees are more productive and work harder. Daniel Pink’s

Autonomy, Mastery and Purpose framework mentioned in his book *Drive*(2011) outlines that people are motivated if they have:

1. Autonomy: the urge to run their own lives
2. Mastery: the desire to get better at something that matters
3. Purpose: the yearning to do what we do in service to something larger than ourselves.

All these also connect with Brewer's definition of Inclusion.

Achieving a true culture of Inclusion in an organisation will mean that accountability for creating and maintaining an inclusive environment lies with everyone—not just the leadership but all the way down to the junior-most person within the organisation. But, how will we measure if we have that culture? How will we know if everyone within an organisation is engaged and motivated and feels included? Also, how does one ascertain if any organisation is doing enough to make people feel included and if the employees are doing enough to make their peers feel included?

These are some of the aspects that we discuss next.

## **Creating (and Measuring) an Inclusive Work Environment**

A Deloitte study on Global Human Capital Trends (2017) reveals that the number of executives who cited Inclusion as a top priority rose by 32% since 2014. This tells us that the corporate world understands the importance of Inclusion and how the presence of under-represented groups can add to an organisation's overall performance and effectiveness. Most HR leaders have the pulse of their organisation, and they know whether the organisation's culture is inclusive or not. However, measuring this is not easy as we are talking about how an employee "feels" at work which is an intangible element. One way of measuring inclusive behaviours may be to ask employees directly for examples. Descriptive surveys that question if people feel included, heard and respected in their work environment, by their peers, subordinates and leaders, can form a part of these measurement methods.

Some HR leaders I have interacted with have come up with the following concerns with respect to these questions:

1. We have just made changes to our leave policy, and the employees are dissatisfied currently. Any survey measuring Inclusion will be adversely affected due to this.
2. Our workforce does not understand the concept of biases and how it affects Inclusion.
3. We do not believe our employees have the maturity to be objective in a survey about feelings.
4. Is Inclusion measurement qualitative or quantitative? We understand Inclusion is about accepting "uniqueness and giving people a sense of belonging" as per Brewer's definition. But is it possible to measure belonging and how do we know that each person is accepted for his uniqueness within organisation?

5. The survey questions may also present employees with situations of Exclusion and ask them to identify if they have experienced certain behaviours at their workplace. The major concern with this approach is that the questions could be leading and individuals could come up with a positive answer with even the slightest hint.

Example:

- a. Do you find a lot of in-groups in your organisation based on education, age or ethnicity?
- b. Do you feel excluded from conversations which do not originate from your in-group?

While questions like these could be used to ascertain how inclusive any organisation is, some people could answer “Yes” to the questions mentioned above more because of their perception of Inclusion or Exclusion rather than real experience.

6. Another problem with these questions could be that they could lead the respondent to look for issues where none exists. Organisations could be risking a lot by such tools of measurement as this could create a dissonance in the mind of the employees.

Given that Inclusion measurement has a qualitative aspect, and that the questions to measure how people are feeling may be subjective, employees could suffer from a “recency effect” and may not be in the right frame of mind to answer survey questions objectively. This means that if surveys are being used to measure Inclusion, the questions may need to be drafted with the utmost care to ensure they are not leading and are able to elicit a holistic view of the corporate culture. The other way to create an inclusive environment and measure the impact of Inclusion awareness initiatives could be to follow up the initiatives by a 360-degree feedback at an individual level, functional feedback at the team level and an organisation-wide engagement survey, to find out if these Inclusion awareness initiatives and interventions have led to any real change in behaviours.

## **Inclusion at the Individual Level**

At an individual level, Inclusion is about personal behaviours and choices. It is about understanding how “I” behave and how I perceive and am perceived by others. I often question my workshop attendees about the behaviours they have experienced and the behaviours that they believe may be perceived by others. The latter usually are difficult to judge, but a discussion between various groups, on their individual experiences of biases that they have felt, can help people recognise and realise what they may be subjecting others to. Thus, Inclusion measurement for individuals is often based on critical self-assessment. The questions below will help individuals

understand if they have any biases which prevent them from reaching out to others and from embracing people for who they are.

1. Is there a trend in the people I hire?
2. Is there a trend in the people I favour or share my personal space with?
3. Is there a pattern in the people I am friends with, I favour, refer or recommend?
4. Do I make positive or negative assumptions about people without knowing much about them?
5. Do I feel alienated by my peers, subordinates or supervisors because of reasons outside my control like my nationality or colour?
6. Do I feel that my suggestions are heard and respected by my team?
7. Do I hear and respect every opinion shared by every team member?

Further, at the individual level, inclusive leadership can be measured through a series of similar questions, which can help leaders explore how inclusive they are and ascertain if they are creating and developing diverse thinking teams, which in turn will lead to innovation, ideation and increase in productivity.

Even if the role does not require leadership qualities, these questions can help create an understanding of what they may need to make others comfortable in their presence.

I once had a participant in a learning intervention programme, who while admitting his gender bias said, “I always thought I am not gender biased but some of these questions on patterns have made me realise how despite being surrounded by women, I do not trust them enough to discuss my professional life with them. I just realised, the reason I don’t share my professional life with them is because I don’t trust women to understand professional issues.”. Such realisations through self-assessment create awareness, which if acknowledged and worked on, may make a change to the organisation and, in the long run, to society.

## **Inclusion at the Team Level**

Inclusive practices within organisations lead to increase in trust amongst the workforce and particularly within teams, which subsequently leads to increased collaboration and productivity. The book, *Outward Mindset* by the Arbinger Institute, helps us understand how we can change from an inward-looking focus to one which puts other people at the centre of our thoughts and actions. This would create the open mindset that is necessary to foster team collaboration (Arbinger Institute, *Outward Mindset*).

At the team level, some questions that can be asked to create a sense of awareness may include

1. Is the team only listening to certain people when taking decisions?
2. Do the team meetings give enough opportunity for everyone to speak up and express their perspective?

### 3. Do you think everyone in your team feels valued and heard?

These questions will help teams realise the power of a diverse team and team members, which they may be either cultivating or ignoring. Taken simultaneously with individual self-assessment, these questions would help them look beyond themselves and treat others fairly and respectfully. My experience has been that sometimes such questions lead us to internalise how we may be fuelling mistrust amongst our team by not giving everyone the opportunity to be heard. When people are not heard and if they feel disrespected within their teams, they do not share opinions, which can prevent many innovative ideas to be brought to the table. One of my coaches told me that his ideas were often shut down by his peers and superiors, and hence, he has stopped sharing them. On speaking with his team members, it was found that they are biased against him due to his superior educational background. They felt his education meant he was more intelligent and smarter as compared to his team members, and they felt insecure listening to his ideas. Since the individual did not know this, he did not feel psychologically safe within the team and withdrew from all discussions.

## **Inclusion at the Organisation Level**

At the organisation level, one needs to measure a lot more, and this information will help with brand building, as well as with attracting and retaining talent. Inclusion measurement, in this case, is usually about the entire ecosystem from business processes to talent management systems. The true value of Inclusion measurement would be felt if we can evaluate Inclusion initiatives through the entire employee and business life cycle including clients and vendors. Since behaviours and culture vary across teams within an organisation, measuring Inclusion on a team-by-team basis and assuming that this will give the full organisation-wide picture which may be misleading. This method will provide information about the various teams themselves, but not for the dynamics between teams. Hence, team-wise Inclusion measurement may not be the correct method to measure Inclusion at the organisation level.

Simma Lieberman, an Inclusion expert who is the author of “110 Ways to Champion Diversity and Build Inclusion” and who recently launched a podcast, *Every Day Conversations on Race for Every Day People*, says, “Diversity management and Inclusion are integrated into every system and process, so people are comfortable taking risks, sharing ideas, and they feel invested in their own success and the success of the organization at every level.” (Talentculture, 2018).

## Challenges of Inclusion Assessment

The negative side of Inclusion assessment questions may include the following:

1. Organisations may have a trend in the people they hire because certain job descriptions could be similar (e.g. in a specialised accounting firm, the majority of hires might have a similar educational background and profile) or a particular team may want a specific kind of behavioural competency for their team. These requirements may be genuine, but it is very easy to confuse these patterns created as lack of Inclusion.
2. Inclusion surveys like these could make the organisation very wary of giving true scores during performance assessment to employees as they may be overly concerned that a bias is at play if the employee in question is from an under-represented group.
3. Formation of in-groups is a common occurrence in organisations and not all of them necessarily lead to lack of inclusiveness. Surveys like these could lead to people becoming wary of expressing their genuine likes or dislikes at the work place
4. Individual self-assessment may lead to people over assessing themselves to be more inclusive than they actually are.

Let us try to understand what should be measured at the organisational level to assess its inclusiveness. Figure 3 shows an Inclusion measurement model termed EMBRACE<sup>®</sup> created by the author. The model has an outer and an inner layer which are discussed in more detail below.

Fig. 3 .



### *The Inner Layer of the EMBRACE Inclusion Measurement Model*

## **Values**

The organisation's values drive the basic culture of the place. They make up the fabric which defines the work environment and are the fundamental guides and prompt to action. They help the organisation decide its future and give employees a sense of direction. People make organisations, and values of any organisation are decided based on the Founder's values. These can then be trickled down to various levels within the workforce by ensuring there is a value and culture fit at the recruitment level and through various employee engagement interventions.

If an organisation and its core workforce want to be inclusive, this should not just be a part of the organisation's values but even more importantly, should be seen and felt by its employees by virtue of the actions of its leadership. For ease of understanding, let us say that there is no explicit value that promotes Inclusion in an organisation X. However, the organisation wishes to promote participation from everyone, and to do this, the leaders ensure respect for individuals and within teams, appreciating people for who they are, create a participatory culture and ensure overall integration of every employee within the workforce. If measured, such an organisation should have a good score of Inclusion as the drive to encourage participation is coming from the top. Since values drive the basic intent within every function of the organisation, having Inclusion as a value will help ensure that the organisation breathes it from top to bottom.

## **Accountability**

Living the values that drive Inclusion will also need accountability at every level within the organisation. Incorporating new behaviours or changes within an organisation's culture takes time and sustained effort. To ensure that Inclusion initiatives are consistent and sustainable, setting meaningful and measurable outcomes that can be tracked and assigning accountability for these outcomes are the best approaches available for any organisation. It is important to note that this accountability for driving change and ensuring that Inclusion efforts do not lead to a naught needs to lie not just with the senior leadership but across all the functions and levels. Metrics to measure accountability need to be built in within the corporate structure and framework. One way of doing this would be to include aspects of Inclusion within the performance metrics of all employees as people are more likely to follow behavioural competencies that are a part of their key result areas. These measurements, whether done annually or biannually, will be a good indicator of any individual's role and personal contribution towards developing and fostering Inclusion across the organisation.



Leaders may want to hold themselves accountable towards being inclusive if they want the Diversity and Inclusion needle to actually move and thereby enabling the organisation to attract and retain good talent. Metrics need to be developed for each role and for each individual to track progress towards goals, and senior leaders must be held responsible for sponsorship and progress of these initiatives. Prioritising sponsorship of such strategic initiatives should also be a part of the leadership deliverables.

## **Communication**

In this fast-growing corporate world where emphasis on Diversity has led to an increased number of diverse people in any set-up one can think of, communicating well is even more important than before. How often do we actually listen to people or dismiss their opinion or perspective because we are biased? Often, our judgements and the visuals we attach to these judgements prevent us from listening to people at face value. Organisations need to do significant work to assimilate the diverse workforce and ensure that in-groups do not lead to disruptions in productivity and efficiency. The key to a more engaged workforce is right communication. Internally, this communication needs to ensure that we are non-judgemental and non-dismissive towards people on the basis of their colour, background, education, sexual orientation or any other choice they have made. It is known that humans are more likely to agree with people with similar choices and try to find common patterns with others when working with diverse groups. However, ensuring inclusive communication, where people are not called out for being different, is the key to a harmonious work environment. An example of non-inclusive communication would be telling someone, “You may not get the concept as you are not an engineer.”

Externally, it is important for organisations to communicate their inclusivity quotient to their investors, clients, customers, vendors and the talent pool to maximise their ability to attract talent, investors, funding and create a solid brand for themselves. Increasingly, being seen as a diverse and inclusive organisation is a great step towards brand building. Of course, organisations cannot fake any of this, and this needs to come from the values of the organisation. If the organisation breathes Inclusion in their values, some of these are automatic choices. Internal communication is also a factor of individual values, choices and experiences; wrong signals from the top may lead people to be judgemental or biased towards others thus creating an environment which is not inclusive while the right communication can have the opposite effect. The idea is to foster communication channels that explicitly emphasise Inclusion and build inclusivity in all forms of communication. And to drive this, we need to go back to “accountability”.

## Processes and Practices

Another factor to bring about an inclusive work environment is to make people processes and policies inclusive. People processes like job descriptions and recruitment, on-boarding, procurement, learning and development programmes, performance appraisals, evaluation, exits—all processes should accommodate inclusive practices. Organisational policies related to the above processes, work–life balance, flexible working hours, leave, travel, amongst other things need to look beyond majority of employees and must cater to the minority workforce as well. It will also help to have merit-based rather than demography-based practices and policies. Recruitment processes and policies need to be inclusive and should embrace candidates for who they are, rather than trying to force-fit them into the existing culture. Doing this may help us find future employees who are more engaged and in turn bring their complete self to work.

Flexibility in work environment is about demonstrating that the organisation truly cares for what the employee needs, wants and desires besides his work life. Policies that promote flexible work culture and not just as a tick in the box can be counted as building blocks towards an inclusive work environment. Moving from maternity and paternity leave policies towards parental leave to accommodate for LGBTQIA is a big step towards being inclusive. Mentoring and coaching efforts should be built into learning programmes and should focus on Inclusion awareness and developing these as a competency. For the best implementation of these efforts, it is important to create and leverage employee resource groups (ERGs) within organisations. ERGs should connect with the employees, do a reality check on the ground and understand the real experience of the workforce. This helps ascertain the true impact of inclusive policies. It is important to ensure that systematic feedback is obtained through these groups to assess how the initiatives are being implemented and whether the efforts are sustainable in the long run.

Derven (2014) Global leadership development expert and change strategist says, “Taking ERGs to the next level by leveraging them more fully (such as expanding globally where relevant, or using them as a source for customer insights or employee development), is an emerging focus.”. Processes and policies should be created to ensure a fully equitable culture that provides complete integration of all employees.

### *The Outer Layer of the EMBRACE Inclusion Measurement Model*

If an organisation has values that include respect for all, an equitable environment that is being driven by accountability across levels ensures proper communication and has policies and practices that ensure equal rights for all, and then it is understood that they will be able to create the sense of **uniqueness, belongingness** and **psychological safety** for its workforce, which in turn will lead to a truly inclusive culture.

To understand the outer layer better, we need to look at Brewer’s (1991) optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT) which looks at the definition of employee Inclusion in the work group as a condition that satisfies both the belonging and uniqueness needs of human beings. Onto this, if we build the concept of psychological safety

researched by both Edmondson (1999) and Project Aristotle (Google), it is easy to understand why all three are imperative for an inclusive environment.

The optimal distinctiveness theory starts with some basic assumptions about the human nature such as being social animals and unable to survive outside cooperative, interdependent groups. Living in a society not only provides people with the benefits of shared resources, division of labour, sharing of knowledge and intellect and mutual protection, but also pulls people to share what they consider to be “only theirs” but needs to be shared to contribute to the overall good of the group. Thus, social living requires trust (that if I cooperate, others will do their share and reciprocate), feelings of obligation (to do one’s own share and reciprocate others’ cooperation) and psychological safety. If individuals depend on only their in-group interactions as necessary for personal survival, the question becomes how do individuals determine who is likely to reciprocate trust, support and cooperation? (Leonardelli et al., 2010, p. 65).

Thus, we see that to be able to survive, which is a basic human need, we need to find a social circle we can rely on, we need to look outside our in-groups, i.e. people who are cognitively similar to us and from a similar background and find people who maybe diverse in their origins, thought process and background from us. This creates a social circle and makes survival and growth easy. This also helps human beings test who is likely to reciprocate trust, support us and cooperate with us. The optimal distinctiveness theory posits that human beings are characterised by two opposing needs that govern the relationship between membership in social groups and self-concept. The first is a need for assimilation and Inclusion, a desire for belonging that motivates immersion in social groups. The second is a need for differentiation from others that operates in opposition to the need for immersion. As groups become more and more inclusive, the need for Inclusion is satisfied, but the need for uniqueness is created (Shore et al., 2011).

I strongly believe that too much Inclusion within groups leads to Exclusion of under-represented groups. As the culture of inclusiveness decreases, the need to be known for “who I am” comes down but the need to be a part of the group is activated and vice versa. Thus, the need for uniqueness and belonging is inversely related. However, these competing drives also satisfy each other, assuring that interests at one level are not consistently sacrificed to satisfy the interests at the other level. According to the optimal distinctiveness theory, the two opposing motives produce an emergent characteristic—the capacity for social identification with distinctive groups that satisfy both needs simultaneously.

Research on psychological safety mentions that people are more effective at work and better at learning where they believe they have the ability to take risks and will not be shamed for making mistakes. Organisations can provide a great sense of psychological safety to its employees by emphasising that employees will not be penalised for bringing their whole selves to work (which suggests that employees are encouraged to embrace their vulnerabilities and learn from them rather than hide them). With increasing insecurity at the work place combined with the volatile markets, an environment where employees feel that they can openly seek feedback, share ideas without fear and feel safe to be unique is paramount if organisations

want to retain talent in the long run. It is believed that the sense of psychological safety affects the well-being and health of people. Thus, the absence of the same can create health issues. If employees leave due to health reasons, the opportunity cost of getting a replacement is far more than the cost of working to create a culture of psychological safety. This, by itself, should be a significant reason for working towards ensuring psychological safety within the workplace. If the idea is to develop an inclusive culture, organisations must be willing to truly embrace people for who they are. Since lack of Inclusion almost always carries negative psychological and behavioural outcomes for individuals, groups and the organisation in the long run, being inclusive becomes the natural path to increasing productivity for corporates.

### *Case Study*

I was approached by an Indian conglomerate to help them create gender, diversity and Inclusion awareness within the organisation. While the Human Resources team and the leadership wanted to create real impact and had already put significant efforts and finances into the agenda, the leadership felt that there was not much actual change in the work culture. Indeed, the “grapevine” feedback was that the workforce felt discriminated against at all levels. On analysing organisational data (hiring, attrition, promotion and trainings numbers) for the past five years, we found that while the company had hired people across gender, location, ethnicity and pedigree to name a few categories of Diversity and had succeeded in creating a more diverse workforce, these people did not feel included when they came to work.

So while the intent to have great scores on Diversity and Inclusion existed, in reality the situation was not the best. We spoke with people one-on-one about what they saw and how they felt about the organisation’s various initiatives. We went through the entire employee life cycle from recruitment to exits to understand how people felt about the organisation’s various D&I initiatives, policies, processes, communication systems, accountability to create a diverse and inclusive environment and the authority that various leaders had and felt.

### *What We Found*

## **Recruitment**

We found that quite a few roles were explicitly kept for the majority workforce. Highly educated, able-bodied men were given most key roles within the company. Women, specially abled or mentally challenged people, people from Tier 2–3 cities and those with an educational background that was not Tier 1 were not given preference for meatier roles. So, while people were hired from diverse backgrounds, roles of prominence were not given to all these candidates. In many cases, post recruitment, people were very quickly moved across roles of less prominence. Recruitment data was telling us about the Diversity initiatives on the ground, but when we spoke to the recruiters, they seemed more focused on closing the numbers quickly and getting people who were from the majority employment workforce available in the market.

Under-represented groups like women, specially abled people were seen as liability by the recruiters who would add to the cost of the company and will be difficult to manage in the long run.

## **Leadership Programmes**

Most women were not included in the leadership programmes because their supervisors felt, “Investing in women may be a waste as they are likely to fall off the career path due to marriage or children.” Fresh graduates were not included because of the impression that they may not have the maturity to understand leadership as concept. Employees from Tier 1 institutes did not self-nominate as they assessed themselves better than their peers and did not want to be seen as needing additional training to become efficient leaders.

## **Opportunities at Work**

It was also found that women were denied opportunities to travel or be part of special projects due to the perception that they may not want to travel or that they may not be able to handle travel requirements. It was also felt that travel may not be safe for them. Women were not given roles that traditionally have been managed by men, like working at factories, roles that required late night timings and roles that required dealings with aggressive customers. Specially abled employees were hired but were not provided with the right infrastructure to succeed.

## **Promotions**

People also thought that they were overlooked for promotions and their increments were not significant as compared to people who were members of the in-groups formed by the decision-making authorities. Women felt that promotions were difficult to come by due to the perception that they would switch geographies with their family or that they had greater commitment to family over work at all times.

## **Exits**

Exit interviews spoke about favouritism or lack of Inclusion based on gender and educational background. When ex-employees were interviewed, we also found that they felt alienated the moment they resigned. Most employees once they resigned

were not treated as part of the organisation. Any information regarding business was not shared with them. Other employees speaking with people serving their notice period were frowned upon as well. This led ex-employees to discourage future employees to apply for positions within this organisation.

### ***Corrective Actions Proposed and Their Outcomes***

The survey and data analysis results threw up quite a few more observations such as how people were treated by peers, employee engagement gaps and gaps in leadership skills to name a few. As a result of this measurement, we suggested extensive programmes to the organisation, some of which were behavioural and Inclusion coaching, mentoring, Inclusion and its benefits, understanding and disrupting biases, leadership programmes, communication through town halls on company vision and long-term initiatives, instilling a collaborative work culture between the C level leaders and the junior-most employees, business alignment of all employees to the organisation's goals. We also spent significant time with the under-represented groups within the workforce on helping them work their way through self-limiting beliefs, confidence issues and self-esteem concerns. Since implementing these efforts, we saw the Inclusion scores go up significantly within 15 months,

*What other changes can be suggested to improve the Inclusion score within the organisation?*

### ***So How Do We Measure Inclusion?***

For measuring anything, we need to start with a baseline. This baseline may be an index if validated across a reasonable number of organisations or otherwise may be the exact point, where any organisation is, at any point in time. Organisation A can organise a survey to measure their Inclusion levels and use that as a baseline to see whether and how its efforts are reaping results. This baseline then becomes a benchmark against which they can track their progress. Relevant questions at the individual, team and organisation levels will need to be asked, as mentioned above, to ensure that an Inclusion baseline is created based on the answers received. Survey questions based on the many aspects of the EMBRACE® framework need to be asked to understand if people feel that the company's values, policies, processes and communication systems indeed make them feel included. While creating this baseline, the organisation must also measure how it is performing with respect to attracting, retaining, attrition and capability building of the under-represented profiles.

Once this baseline is created, efforts are put in to make a change within the organisation, correlation between the skills and knowledge imparted and the business impact of these should be measured at regular intervals to ascertain if Inclusion levels are really changing and how has it impacted the business. Inclusion measurement can be both qualitative and quantitative. Some quantitative ways of measuring Inclusion may be

1. Ratings of any learning programmes on Diversity and Inclusion
2. Rankings at the employer of choice surveys
3. Attrition percentage

4. Increase in productivity and performance of employees through revenue
5. Increase in quantitative representation of the under-represented groups at the board
6. Bogardus social distance scale (Wark & Galliher, 2007)
7. Decrease in number of discrimination grievances/complaints.

Inclusion can also be measured qualitatively, and the measurement tool or questionnaire for qualitative measurement should have a list of “incidents of Exclusion” or “incidents of experience” from which people can then choose to indicate whether and how often they have experienced these. This may be one way to assess if the organisation is following inclusive practices. Survey questions could also include for example whether the organisation has inclusive values, whether accountability is shared across all levels, whether the communication within the organisation makes people feel included or excluded and whether the policies and practices followed by the organisation are really inclusive.

Each of these areas will need to have examples of Inclusion in the form of clear statements so that people understand what demonstrating these attributes would feel like. While these statements will be subjective, having five–six detailed statements under each area will help provide evidence of the real situation and ascertain if the organisation is really inclusive. Having multiple data points for each of these attributes are important to obtain robust results. The idea should be to measure to what extent talent, performance and competence are the priority while making decisions rather than differences like background, education, gender or ethnicity—these are the essential ingredients for an inclusive environment.

Some examples of statements that can be used to evaluate the level of uniqueness, belonging and psychological safety felt by employees within the organisation are given below. Employees would usually be asked to evaluate each statement based on either a rating scale (say 1–5) or specifically select whether they agree, strongly agree, disagree, strongly disagree or are neutral.

1. I have not felt pressured to change things about myself in order to fit in within the organisation.
2. My contributions and achievements at organisation were recognised.
3. I feel safe and accepted as myself within the organisation.

Since uniqueness, belonging and psychological safety are all cognitive, it is important that these questions are framed to ask employees about how they feel (I have felt, I feel recognised or appreciated or safe) rather than about their opinion. Sense of belonging can also be measured through the general belongingness scale set out by Malone et al. (2012). Measuring the culture of the organisation across these aspects will help create a baseline and make stage wise assessment of an inclusive culture easier. For an organisation to be really inclusive, and ensure the stages of change are followed, one must ensure the new behaviour is ingrained into every aspect of the organisation. Like every change, creating an inclusive work environment needs significant efforts and is a step-by-step process which goes through multiple changes to achieve a truly inclusive work culture. Deloitte has come up with six personas of

strategic change as applied to Diversity and Inclusion (Bourke, 2017) These are as follows: opposed, unaware, undecided: anxious, undecided: fatigued, supportive and committed.

The EMBRACE® framework has five stages of an inclusive work environment which are defined as follows:

1. Unaware: The organisation is unaware of Diversity and Inclusion as concepts.
2. Aware: The organisation is aware of the concepts, however is not interested in creating an inclusive environment.
3. Voluntary Inclusion: The organisation is aware of inclusive practices, however most of these are only for compliance.
4. Practised Inclusion: The organisation wants to be inclusive and is actively looking at implementing inclusive practices across various parts of the system.
5. Truly Inclusive Culture: The organisation has achieved Inclusion at all levels and maintains it through updating their practices and policies. Measurement of Inclusion annually is a regime which is strictly followed to ensure nothing falls through the cracks.

Statements about each attribute of the Inclusion measurement model, like values, accountability, communication, policies, processes, uniqueness, belongingness and psychological safety, will have to be clearly framed. The statements in each attribute will be assigned to the stages of inclusive culture. Each stage will have multiple incidents assigned against it. If people choose more statements which are classified with the unaware stage within the attribute, and if the aggregate score comes under the unaware, the attribute is termed as unaware from a stage perspective. This demonstrates the level of Inclusion. Statements like “There is a roadmap for Diversity and Inclusion implementation within the organisation” will help us understand how clearly the roadmap has been defined within the system. Each statement is assigned a stage within the model, and the number of times a statement is chosen will enable us to come to the conclusion on where the organisation sits within the stages of the model.

Statements like I feel safe to express my thoughts can be used to ascertain aspects of psychological safety. Some choices made by employees will help us understand whether people even understand the need to be psychologically safe. The stage of the organisation is dependent on the synthesis of the answers received across all respondents. The questionnaire should also seek information about gender, ethnicity, age, tenure, sexual orientation, education, amongst other things of the respondents. This information will help understand the demography of the respondents better. It will help the organisation ascertain how a certain section of the workforce is feeling. Action can then be taken accordingly through learning programmes or targeted changes to existing policies and processes.

It is also important to know that once these strategic interventions are initiated, the organisation must ensure that it is fully committed and followed it through. An organisation, that promises one thing and delivers another, risks losing the trust and confidence of its workforce as well as its customers. There have been various instances in my experience, where the human resources team wants to create an



inclusive workforce, but during the implementation stage, business leaders and other senior staff are unwilling to admit to their biases and arm twist HR to stop the initiatives. I often suggest meetings, discussions and buy-in with all business leaders to ensure a smooth ride before embarking on any journey of culture change.

## **Challenges and Constraints to Inclusion and Inclusion Measurement**

1. Majority groups within the workforce may not even be able to recognise instances of Exclusion as they would be the most included within any organisation. Example: Men may not be able to understand the why women behave, dress or speak differently in the workplace to assimilate better. Since, men are regarded as majority representation of the workforce, they may not be able to understand the areas and concerns women may go through. People may not understand the challenges specially abled people feel, to be able to empathise with them. Organisations like Google and Microsoft spend extra time in sensitising their workforce towards people who are blind or people who have been through post-traumatic stress syndrome or even something as simple as diabetes. This sensitisation if not done will make various Inclusion interventions or even measuring Inclusion difficult.
2. Organisations may become too sensitive towards their Inclusion efforts and would strive harder to be seen as an inclusive workforce. This may sometimes bring down their tolerance level for an individual's uniqueness and ability to create a sense of belongingness within their workforce. This ultimately defeats the purpose of the exercise and prevents organisations to be truly inclusive.
3. True Inclusion is about behaviour. Aligning actual behaviours with the concept of Inclusion will require time. Organisations will need to be ready for the change management process needed to move through the stages of Inclusion.
4. To ensure consistency in the measurement process, the survey questions, the benchmarking standards and areas to be assessed will need to remain same across levels and organisations.
5. Inclusion measurement is evidence-based, hence sometimes measurements could be inconsistent if the examples of evidences are not exhaustive.
6. For organisations and its leaders to be willing make this exhaustive effort towards Inclusion, it needs to be tied to business outcomes and organisation's goals. Inability of the sponsors of such initiatives to do so could lead to this entire project failing.

## Inclusion Measurement at the Global Level

Globally, the focus on Inclusion measurement has increased significantly in the last few years, and some companies have gone ahead and begun the process using tools like Culture Amp's Inclusion Survey. A PwC report from 2019 states how companies are tying Inclusion effectiveness to overall compensation. At Ingersoll Rand, employees have a D&I scorecard which is used as part of an overall performance score, influencing decisions relating to promotion, salary increase or bonuses. The same report also speaks about how Merck & Company, Inc. is working on its agenda of making a priority of advancing women within the organisation and how it measures its progress. "We found we needed to support and build out company-wide policies, processes and practices to meet our goals—for example in how we do recruitment and on-boarding". Awaken is another organisation which is actively working in the area of measuring Inclusion quantitatively to help job seekers identify work cultures.

## Conclusion

Inclusion is the key to a more engaged workforce, and measuring Inclusion will allow organisations to understand not only their true culture but exactly where to focus to attract and retain talent. This focus will also help in increasing productivity and efficiency. The idea of measuring Inclusion is to ensure that talent is being prioritised and not the differences between people. Holding people accountable and driving accountability for Inclusion by making it a part of their key result areas, ensuring that internal and external communication is inclusive in nature and that Inclusion initiatives cover all aspects of the employee life cycle will help make employees feel included by appreciating their uniqueness, while at the same time giving them a sense of belonging and providing them with psychological safety.

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# Mindfulness—A Catalyst for DEI



Pallavi Shah

**Abstract** *How do we build a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workforce where differences are recognized and valued? How do we increase the productivity of our organizations and satisfaction of our people? How do we enable people to bring their best selves to work and society?* The answer can be found in mindfulness—to be present and know what is happening in our body and mind, without judging, criticizing, or getting carried away. It means taking a breath and focusing on the here and now. Mindfulness leads to self-awareness and self-acceptance. When people feel accepted, they bring their authentic selves, diverse skills, and unique ideas to the workplace. This is the core of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Unconscious biases and prejudices, huge roadblocks in DEI, can be overcome through mindfulness, creating space for recognition and action to reduce stereotypes, objectification, in-groups–out-groups, tradition, and dogma. It can lead to psychological safety, non-judgment, perspective taking, and emotional intelligence. Yet being mindful all the time seems overwhelming, and often, we give up before we even start earnestly. So, let us look at starting with small doses of mindfulness sprinkled throughout our day. Mindful mini moments are doable and proven to yield amazing results. Mindfulness is cost-effective and universal and is now the subject of study worldwide, with far-reaching benefits and a strategic advantage. We are the cusp of transformation, and mindfulness can be the catalyst! To see results, mindfulness needs to permeate all areas of corporations, from strategic planning, recruitment and procurement, engagement and retention, growth and development, and corporate social responsibility. It starts with us. We can take a step back and ask difficult questions. Are we appreciating people for what they are? Are we recruiting qualified talent or just people who look and think like us? Our organizations must be places where we can ask questions without fear or judgment. Then, we can truly see the power of DEI. Differences need not threaten us. We can grow, transform each other, and perform together, not by losing our individuality, but by recognizing and embracing others. Let this chapter on mindfulness serve as a reminder that our individual differences are meant to be collectively celebrated in ways that embrace the rich dimensions of DEI contained within each of us.

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P. Shah (✉)

Executive Manager, Learning & Development, Deloitte US India, Hyderabad, India

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It is a busy Monday morning in August. While it is like that on most Mondays, this one is particularly chaotic. Sheila is recovering from a fun weekend with her friends. While she juggles home and a career, she is someone with emotional baggage like you and me.

9:00 am: Sheila picks up the breakfast plates and packs lunches for the family, thinking *Why does it always have to be me packing the lunches?* She rushes out of the house to catch her office shuttle on time.

9:15 am: She enters the shuttle hoping to find a quiet seat where she can close her eyes for the 45-min bus ride, to catch up on her sleep. Murphy's law prevails, the bus is full, and the only open seat is next to a ponytailed, casually dressed man. She tries her best to maneuver her lunchbox and laptop bag and purse to squeeze into the empty seat. The man reminds her of someone, and the memories are not happy. Before Sheila can settle into the seat, the bus makes a sharp turn, and Sheila's lunchbox ends up in the man's lap. The man raises his eyebrows, and Sheila exasperatedly says, "*It's not my fault.*" The man smiles and says "*Here, let me place this overhead.*" Sheila is embarrassed at her involuntary reaction and manages a sheepish smile, and by the time she reaches office, her initial bias has given way into a great networking conversation with the man.

10:15 am: Sheila leads a team of six professionals, and the newest member is a 25-year-old gen Z animation expert—Jay, who takes the company's dress code of casual dressing to the next level! Sheila walks into her work bay and cringes when she sees him! His appearance takes so much focus away from her that Sheila completely misses the brilliant animation Jay has created for their next campaign, well before the deadline.

11:00 am: Sheila's day is about to get interesting, especially during the pre-lunch brain storming session with Nilesh, a 67-year-old veteran. Who can ever progress with these archaic regimental suggestions? He reminds her of the folks in her apartment who only complain about things but do nothing. She wonders if we should relook at retirement age. Sheila brushes the thought away and goes to the cafeteria.

12:30 pm: Her plan for a quiet and quick lunch is ruined by her colleague Sam's wheelchair and the special service he receives in the cafeteria, to her, and it seems a bit unfair!

1:15 pm: The post-lunch meeting is with Tina—a talented 40-year-old transgender team member, who used to go by the name Tom a few years ago. No matter how hard she tries, Sheila finds herself judging and skirting meetings with Tina. The voice in her head makes it hard for Sheila to really listen to Tina's brilliant proposal.

4:00 pm: The last meeting of the day is with Rama, a new woman director, and Sheila wonders what it will take to become a director herself. All said and done, very few women really break the glass ceiling, right?

11:30 pm: As Sheila takes the last few work calls from home and hits the bed at the end of the long day, she wonders why she feels drained at the end of a less than

productive day. A typical day, overloaded with work, mental clutter and judgments that kept Sheila from being at her best.

Like Sheila, we all live in a world where we juggle different roles we need to play. We encounter and interact with all kinds of people and at times fall into the trap of stereotypes and bias. Can we even imagine how very different and varied the lives and experiences of others can be—the 25-year-old animation wizard who is brilliant at his craft, the 67-year-old veteran, the colleague with special needs, the transgender colleague who only hopes you understand what it might be like to be in her shoes? How do our past experiences, opinions, and judgments about people and circumstances impact our personal and professional life?

How do the different roles and situations we play affect our ability to focus on a task, more importantly on a person? Is it difficult to engage with others when our never-ending to-do list is looming large over our minds? And what about our value system and beliefs that play on us as we constantly weigh the “right” vs. the “wrong”? Do we notice ourselves becoming cynical and disengaged? How many of us are fighting chronic fatigue, sleep deprivation, and simply unable to enjoy simple things that used to be our source of pleasure once? Do we find ourselves distracted, often frustrated, and anxious for no apparent reason?

People like people like themselves. You like people, who are like you. And naturally, there are uncomfortable moments when we see viewpoints different from our own; at times, we involuntarily react, or we do not recognize our biases in action, and we close ourselves to alternative approaches. Different perspectives and situations build stress—loss of control, the interruption of power, fear of failure. It is commonly recognized that diverse teams produce more significant returns. But this is not the case if teammates from an array of different backgrounds are not sustained by conditions within an organization that help them thrive. A quick way to thwart innovation, trust, and invaluable critical feedback in decision-making is a workplace in which employees feel it is too great of a professional or personal risk to fully express their ideas and concerns or make decisions with limited regard to such input.

We try to address the challenges we face by working on our self-esteem (externally—referenced), instead of developing self-acceptance (internally referenced). However, external factors of self-esteem such as recognition, rewards, and acceptance are often beyond our control and may lead to frustration. This may result in some or all of these: excessive stress and fatigue, physical health issues, mental health issues, anger, irritability, anxiety, isolation from friends and family, withdrawing from colleagues and friends, job dissatisfaction and reduced engagement, reduced productivity and creativity, and drain on company resources. This is happening at the individual level. Now let us take a step back and see the compounded effect of such turmoil at the organizational level. Organizations are comprised of many people, who bring in a lot of baggage, and struggle to recognize repetitive behavior patterns that have become dysfunctional. This turmoil directly impacts the bottom-line and other key performance metrics. In addition, turmoil can have a negative impact on organizations in the form of employee retention as well as reduced productivity.

So how do we enable people to bring their best selves to work and society? How do we increase the productivity of our organizations and the satisfaction of our people?

How do we build a diverse and inclusive workforce where differences are recognized, welcomed, and valued?

## The Answer Could Be Mindfulness

**Mindfulness is the foundation on which we can build a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workforce.** Most of us think that advanced and complicated solutions are needed for complex problems. This does not have to be the case at all. Do not be fooled by the simplicity of mindfulness. It is in the simplicity of this practice that its value lies in. To start with, let us establish a common understanding of mindfulness. Mindfulness is to be present and know what is happening around you and within you at any given moment, without judging or getting carried away by it.

What does mindfulness mean at an individual level and organization level?

Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom—**Viktor E. Frankl**.

Mindfulness is training our brain to recognize this space between stimulus and response—to become aware of our thinking patterns and reactions. Mindfulness involves training our attention, labeling, and pausing before reacting. Mindfulness creates self-awareness of our biases and creates space to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. In the workplace, we interact with and work with colleagues that we might have known for a long time. We all have histories and baggage that we carry with us into the workplace. Our relationships with our colleagues are defined by a timeline and cemented by memories. Some times when we interact with a colleague we have known for a while, some unpleasant memories from the past crop up, and then it becomes hard to tune into the moment. When someone talks about a situation which we can relate to, we may slip into memories of our own situation and stop paying attention. **How do we stay in the present with a person we have a history with and with whom we want to have a professional future?**

**How can we pay attention by letting go of the personal association and focus not on our situation, but theirs?** Mindfulness is focusing on the current interaction, without past baggage or future expectations. It involves understanding what the person needs from us, what we need from them, how we can make that clear, and how we can make it a reasonably simple transaction. It is living in the moment, being fully cognizant of ourselves (both mentally and physically), our environment, and the present. It means paying attention to what is going on in our body and mind, including where we hold tension and what is getting in the way of our ability to focus on the work and the person in front of us. It is all in the moment.

Mindfulness has become the subject of study worldwide, and results indicate that benefits of mindfulness include: reduced anxiety, reduced body aches, reduced emotional reactivity, reduced feelings of loneliness, reduced rumination, reduced stress, improved cognitive flexibility, improved emotional intelligence, improved

focus, improved productivity, improved relationship satisfaction, improved working memory.

### *How Has Mindfulness Evolved Over the Generations?*

For generations before the Internet, there were pockets of time in the day with free or down time, thus allowing for natural opportunities to be mindful. Today, any pocket of time is already absorbed for most people. The present generation and the next generation living in the digital age face constant noise and distractions. Hence, making time for mindfulness has become more critical now than ever before. On the one hand, we are faced with information overload, both digitally and emotionally. Today, we have more information about other people than we have ever had before. We can virtually experience how people live on the other side of the globe and in remote corners of this world. We have more information about the circumstances of others. Yet, some of us may have become more entitled and self-centered, engrossed in what is happening within, and having less time and mental bandwidth to care for the people around us. When we start becoming too absorbed with our own thoughts, it does not allow us to look outside ourselves, explore other realities, and realize that there is no need to fixate on ourselves and the current situation. Perhaps it is time to be mindful about the needs of others.

There is also a demographic factor at play here. We live with 7 billion others in this world. Gone are the days when many of us had the luxury of a quiet walk near our house and “pausing to smell the roses” without bumping into neighbors or passersby who may wonder what is wrong, why is this person lingering around, what could they be up to? A casual smile to a stranger may be looked at with suspicion and create alarm instead of warmth.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated physical and mental stressors have aggravated the situation around the world. Being in confined spaces for long periods of time has become a harsh reality, and everyday outlets such as going to work, going shopping, and taking a walk have now become a calculated luxury.

For the above reasons and others, the need for mindfulness as a practice has strongly resurfaced across the globe. People are realizing that **the only way OUT is IN!** David Black of the Mindfulness Research Guide has been gathering information on the number of scientific and medical papers per year on mindfulness, and the resulting graph is pretty telling. Something that was not on the research map at all a few decades ago is a prime area of interest now. Many young scientists are now taking up this field, and young neuroscientists and behavioral scientists are building their careers in a new field called contemplative neuroscience (Leuke & Gibson, 2014).

We may be in a moment of real transition. We can look at this as an opportunity for us to grow as people. Yet, we are in the early stages of mindful evolution and need to evolve more to embrace the information that is available to us and move the mindfulness conversation in a more realistic and applicable direction to everyone.



One of the greatest challenges for us is the digital revolution and the alternate reality it has created. Many of us are spending more and more time online than offline. We need to navigate this reality mindfully, or it will consume us. Technology itself is a source of endless possibilities but also endless distraction. We are now very good at writing code—but how good are we at knowing ourselves, loving ourselves, and making a better world together with our fellow beings (Kabat-Zinn & Hanh, 2009)? Time will continue to be of the essence, and it may take a few generations for mindfulness to be embraced for what it simply is and to permeate most of the workplaces. This may be merely an evolutionary stepping stone. Through practice, some of us might get to a higher plane of awareness.

The year is 2021. The world and the workplace 20 years ago and 20 years into the future will be significantly different. We may be on the cusp of transformation, reimagining the workforce of the future and the future of the workforce, and mindfulness can be the catalyst for this transformation!

### ***Why is Mindfulness Vital for DEI Organizational Development?***

It is natural to wonder about the connection between mindfulness and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). In a corporate setting, does mindfulness have a place? People are uncomfortable with mindfulness as a topic; the vision that crops up is one of people in business attire sitting cross-legged on the floor with closed eyes...time to address some myths?

Unconscious biases and prejudices that reside under the surface of our conscious thoughts stop us from moving forward in DEI. Studies at Harvard have indicated that many of us have biases that silently influence all our decisions, from whom to hire to whom to have lunch with, to whom to promote to the next level? Our behavior is better predicted by our unconscious beliefs rather than what we say we believe (Tulsyan, 2019).

The answer to bias is far deeper than forcing reform or compliance. A culture of mindfulness can go a long way to help overcome bias. A necessary first step would be to watch what we do and say and realize how our thoughts, words, and actions impact others. We can also remind others to stay mindful. As we evolve as people, we bring our words and deeds in line with our good intentions.

Things that we need to be mindful of are stereotypes (they do not describe individuals), “Us” versus “Them” thinking (winners versus losers), objectification (commenting on physical features—a big nose, dark skin tone, etc.), lack of compassion (not being aware of how our habits may harm people), tradition and dogma (tendency stick to old habits), victim mind-set (feeling that bias and related problems are happening to us). Mindfulness as the foundation of DEI is much more than just a better way of living and working, and it could become a significant strategic advantage. It may be a better way to operate as an individual, a better way to build

a team, and a better way to build a business. If we build our businesses with mindfulness at the core, we may enable the change in our work culture from the inside out.

Mindfulness practice could be vital to DEI organizational development because,

- It may enable individuals to look at situations objectively, surfacing unconscious biases, or unexamined assumptions and beliefs.
- It may bring awareness and spark change through curiosity and critical thinking at the individual, institutional, and systemic levels.
- It may equip individuals and teams with strategies to navigate difficult conversations.
- It may create space for diverse perspectives and re-evaluates organizational practices.
- It may pave the way for inclusion of the most disproportionately impacted among us.

Simply put, there may be nothing as cost-effective and universal as mindfulness. Organizations across the world need to embrace mindfulness as a simple (but not easy) tool for positive culture change. **When people feel accepted, they bring their authentic selves, diverse skills, and unique ideas to the workplace. This is the core of an inclusive environment.**

### *How Can Mindfulness Permeate an Organization?*

What do we do when we see or experience something different? We often feel tense and alert, and immediately react. Instead, if we allow ourselves space to take a breath and observe our reaction, we could change our response. We can choose to take a second look. What is it that we are reacting to? Does it really threaten us? In this moment, we move from judging to including. Mindfulness may help us ride the waves of our daily ups and downs. Mindfulness is awareness of what is happening and how we are feeling. When we cultivate this nonjudgmental awareness and allow ourselves to go through the experience, we may learn our triggers and vulnerabilities. From this self-awareness and acceptance, we may then look at others without bias or assumptions. We will then be able to accept others without trying to change them. The key is being open to and appreciating, rather than rejecting differences. Once we have established a strong foundation of self-acceptance, we are better able to accept others. Our reflexive reactions could be replaced by curiosity and interest. Instead of focusing our energies on removing our biases and stereotypes, we could also focus on responding to differences with curiosity and openness. This can enable creation of a workplace where people feel welcome and psychologically safe, instead of worrying about being judged.

A recent research project conducted by Google (Project Aristotle) found that that psychological safety may result in a sense of belonging, better ideas, and better teamwork (Rozovsky, 2015).

- **Strategic Planning:** Help build a mindful strategy with an equity framework and sustainable institutional change tools to increase belonging and productivity.
- **Recruitment and Procurement:** Help transform a lack of diversity in recruitment or procurement outcomes into a robust representation of talented people across the demographic spectrum.
- **Engagement and Retention:** Help employees thrive, feel purpose at work, and resolve workplace barriers to engagement, retention, and promotion of diverse talent.
- **DEI Training:** Enable teams to develop key competencies for organizational equity, build trust and connection within the workplace, and empower people to deliver their best work.
- **Growth and Development:** Foster an environment of personal and collective growth and development.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility:** Coexist as a responsible and mindful organization giving back to society.

### *What Are the Key Tenets of a Mindful Organization?*

Organizations that seek to develop a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace will intentionally design an environment that values psychological safety, non-judgment, perspective, and emotional intelligence.

**Psychological Safety:** Psychological safety is one key to creating an inclusive workplace that welcomes diverse contributions from individuals and teams. Mindfulness could help enable psychological safety in teams. It could help create space to pay attention to others, objectively understand their needs, and create a nonjudgmental space that encourages individuals to express their thoughts freely. Organizations can promote psychological safety by intentionally designing mindful and inclusive practices within teams, for instance: establishing protocols for communication protocol in a way that each team member gets the time, space, and attention to express their ideas without fear of being ridiculed or sidelined.

**Non-judgment:** Judgment—something we do without noticing—often may be the root cause of interpersonal challenges. The first step would be to move toward non-judgment and pay attention. That is when we may be able to recognize our preconceived notions and opinions. We may realize that we have been busy tagging things as “good” or “bad.” While judgment is a basic facet of human nature and we cannot completely get rid of it, we can certainly become aware that we are often too quick to judge. This awareness may help us rethink. As Kabat-Zinn and Hanh (2009) who developed mindfulness-based stress reduction explains: “Because our judgments are often black and white (we like this, we don’t like that, this is good, this is bad) we become imprisoned by our point of view.” What if we could move from judgment to discernment? Discernment is the ability to observe things as they unfold and be

aware of our relationship to it. **Discernment can be a gateway, opening up diverse points of view and the crossroad for understanding and empathy.**

**Perspective:** Diverse and equitable teams in organizations offer distinct and alternative perspectives that may result in huge benefits, from better service to problem-solving, negotiation, relationship-building, and innovation. An environment of trust allows these diverse perspectives to emerge and thrive. Diversity and mindfulness practice could encourage team members to share their points of view without fear of reprisal. However, the presence of diverse teams and good intentions alone are not enough to create an environment of perspective taking. Focused mindfulness practices, such as collective reflection, and analysis of discussion question could help. Assigning a “devil’s advocate” or two is an additional practice to help challenge a commonly held perspective and think more broadly.

**Emotional Intelligence:** Emotional intelligence is defined as the ability to identify and understand emotions in ourselves and in others, and the ability to apply this awareness for regulation of our behavior and relationships (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). Emotional intelligence could be central to an organization’s success, as it is recognized as “the single biggest predictor of performance in the workplace and the strongest driver of leadership and personal excellence” (Bradberry, 2014). As thriving, diverse teams are largely dependent upon cohesive relationships, emotional intelligence is a foundational quality in the development of personnel to create healthy relationships and sustain a diverse and equitable organization. Daniel Goleman identifies empathy as an underlying key competency driving its successful application. The practice of mindfulness is shown to generate empathy and emotional intelligence, better understand oneself and others, welcome differences, and strengthen relationships. From a mindfulness perspective, the key habit that can help us cultivate more emotional intelligence is pausing, which lets the momentum of our emotions to be interrupted, so we have a moment to notice how they are showing up in our body and mind.

### ***Where Do We Start as Individuals?***

A positive work environment directly results from people operating with confidence (not arrogance) and self-regard. *How can we foster positive self-regard?* **Be mindful.** More specifically, find **PEACE**. Pause–Empathize–Ask–Contextualize–Expand, **Pause:** Take a mindful breath, notice how your body and mind feels, notice the emotion, and do not jump to a conclusion. **Empathize:** Empathize with yourself and others. Put yourself in the other person’s shoes. **Ask:** Probe into your assumptions, and ask yourself: Who does this person remind you of? Is that memory happy or painful? What behaviors/actions have led you to make a particular impression? Can you separate fact from opinion? **Contextualize:** At times, we tend to attribute a person’s behavior to innate character flaws or personality traits rather than the current context. Ravi shows up to meetings late because he is not dependable or

punctual, instead of—Ravi is late because of the major accident at the intersection. Can we look at the current context and view Ravi’s actions from that lens? **Expand:** Allowing ourselves to expand our circle can help widen our horizons and reduce bias. Opportunities to interact with diverse individuals and learn about their unique backgrounds, experiences, and skills help break stereotypes and allow us to look at people as individuals rather than as a member of a broader social category.

### *How Do We Create Mindful Mini Moments?*

We understand mindfulness in theory experiencing and enjoying the “here and now,” rather than pining for (or worrying about) another time or place. Deep down, we are aware that ruminating on the past or anxiously worrying about the future can leave us spinning our wheels in the present. Yet as we walk into a meeting, our mind may start “past-looping”—bring back memories of difficult conversations with this person, and we could get sucked into that loop. We may start imagining it will happen again and get into “future-tripping.” Our body language and expressions would change, our emotional state may change, and we walk into the room already stressed, ready to defend ourselves with a line of explanations in case we are asked about A or B or C. We may be so engrossed in this story that our mind is spinning and that we could fail to notice the present reality—the colleague’s friendly smile as she gets up to open the door for us, the coffee she has ordered for us, or how she looks a little tired today. What could have shaped up as a productive conversation if only we were “present” becomes a check in the box and a reinforcement of our previous bias.

Mindfulness as a way of life can seem overwhelming and difficult to action, and hence, many of us give up often before we start. Between work responsibilities and family obligations, blocking off a significant part of our day to embrace the present may be unrealistic, and perhaps even the thought of another commitment is anxiety-provoking. It is time to change the lens on our mindfulness practice. How about we start with small doses of mindfulness sprinkled throughout our day? Mindful mini moments could be compelling and effective and could yield viable results. Sounds too good to be true? Let us go back to research:

- A UC Berkeley study of 12 chronic pain patients found that learning “micro-dosing” mindfulness techniques led to a decrease in pain symptoms. Eleven of the participants reported less depression and anxiety, a feeling of connection to others, and a greater sense of happiness, generosity, and gratitude.
- Research by Adam Lueke and Bryan Gibson of Central Michigan University has shown that people who listened to a 10-min recording encouraging them to focus on their body and thoughts without judgment showed less implicit bias based on race and age on a subsequent implicit association task (Lueke & Gibson, 2014).
- An fMRI study showed that after a short mindfulness intervention, participants showed reduced activation in brain regions associated with emotional processing (the amygdala and the parahippocampal gyrus) (Lutz et al., 2014). In other words,

the participants who practiced short mindfulness interventions were able to better regulate their emotions in response to negative stimuli.

- Micro-dosing mindfulness in collaboration with UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center is currently evaluating the effectiveness of small doses of mindfulness in two large intervention studies with hundreds of primary patients, hospital staff, and healthcare providers on the frontlines treating COVID-19.
- Harvard Business Review reports that through small mindful activities, brain activity is redirected from the limbic system to the prefrontal cortex—basically from the reactionary part of the brain to the rational part of the brain. This change causes us to “change the way we react to everything” and enables us to rely more on our executive functioning rather than impulses (Levin, 2017).

Mindfulness is not just something you practice during a 10-min morning meditation session. It can be incorporated throughout your everyday life by simply paying a little more attention to your daily activities as you are performing them. It is about accessing awe in the ordinary moments of our lives. Mindfulness starts to get interesting when we start to integrate it into everyday life. Remember, mindfulness means to be present, in the moment. And if you can do it sitting on a chair, then why not while out shopping, drinking a cup of tea, eating your food, holding the baby, working at the computer, or having a chat with a friend? All of these are opportunities to apply mindfulness, to be aware.

**Simply put:** A little bit goes a long way, when it comes to including even the smallest doses of mindfulness into your day-to-day activities. Ready to experience a mindful mini moment? Simply take a deep breath and then slowly exhale. Take roughly twice as long to exhale as you took to inhale. As you breathe, pay attention to something in your current environment that you appreciate or value. It could be the feeling of grass under your bare feet, the sound of trees rustling in the wind, or the softness of a pet's fur. When our exhale is longer than our inhale, it causes our vagus nerve to signal the brain to turn down our sympathetic nervous system. This lowers our body's fight-or-flight response. A review of a wide range of studies by Roderik Gerritsen and Guido Band of Leiden University in the Netherlands (2018) found that deep inhalations followed by longer exhalations reduced subjects' stress levels. They theorized that this type of breathing pattern explains why practices such as yoga and meditation calm our minds.

Taking what we know about meditation, mindfulness, and deep breathing, how can we incorporate them into our daily habits? We befriend ourselves as we are. How about we just drop in on ourselves every now and then, visit, and hang out in awareness? Here are some suggestions to bring in mindful mini moments throughout your day:

- Brush your teeth: What does your toothpaste taste like and feel in your mouth? What sound does the brush make as it moves along your teeth? What is the texture of the toothbrush in your hands?
- Wash your hands: What does it feel like to have soap in between your fingers as you lather it up? How does your soap smell? What size of lather bubbles have

been created? Does the water make a gushing or a trickling sound as it goes down the drain?

- **Relish your coffee:** Take a moment to smell and inhale the aroma of your coffee, and then take a slow sip. How does the warm cup feel in your hand? How deep in your mouth does the taste of the coffee spread to? How does your energy level change as you drink the coffee?
- **Make a meal:** Linger on the texture and color of the fruits and vegetables, as you wash them. How does it sound as the knife chops? How does the smell of frying garlic spread in your kitchen? How does the warmth of the stove feel? No worries if you are not a cook. You can enjoy this experience while you are heating food in the microwave or opening a take-out or delivery container.
- **Serve in style:** As you serve, be aware of the weight, consistency, and aroma of each dish. Notice the temperature of the serving spoon and how it feels in your hand as you stir. As you serve yourself/others, think of the satisfaction and nutrition it will provide and feel blessed for a full plate of food.
- **Enjoy your shower:** We usually hop in and out of the shower without really savoring how good and relaxing a hot or cold shower feels. What if you could be aware of how the water feels on your body? Think about how the soap smells and how the bubbly lather feels in your hand. Be aware of the sound the water makes as it hits the shower floor, and truly enjoy the massage and the texture of your towel while drying off.
- **Be present when others speak:** When people speak to you, give them your undivided attention. Set down your phone, or better yet, leave it in another room. Look them in the eye. Instead of formulating your response as they speak, listen to every word carefully.
- **Indulge mindfully:** Truly enjoy the piece of chocolate instead of gulping it down. As you open the wrapper, think of the sound it makes. Before you put the chocolate in your mouth, think of happy memories related to that type of chocolate.
- **Take a walk:** When you walk, focus on the points where your feet touch the ground. See how your weight automatically shifts from one foot to the other. Become aware of the smell of flowers, and how the different scents feel. Feel the breeze in your hair and the light as it hits your eyes.
- **Move your body:** Whether you are working out on your yoga mat or the gym, whether you are playing ball, jogging, or swimming, give it your 100% attention. Notice which muscle groups you use, notice what sweating or tiredness feels like, and notice how deep breathing helps.
- **Wait in line:** Waiting in line is a painful yet unavoidable part of our day. Instead of letting impatience and frustration consume you, how about some deep breaths? If outside, focus on the landscape around. Waiting in a store? Notice the different colors of the items near the checkout line, and count your breath.
- **Listen to music:** Any time is a good time for music! So switch on your favorite piece of music and let it engulf you. It is but natural that before you know it, your mind will start wandering—whenever you catch yourself distracted, come back to the sounds of the music. Observe both the sounds and the quiet pauses between the sounds.

- **Acknowledge and apologize:** Many insensitive comments often come from our unconscious biases, and for that reason, people often do not realize what they have said was offensive until after the fact or until someone addresses it. Regardless of how an insensitive comment resurfaces, be mindful of how it may have made someone feel. If people are hurt, tell that person you are sorry and acknowledge the microaggression. You would be amazed at how far a heartfelt apology can go.

### ***How Can We Build Mindful DEI Leaders?***

Leaders face greater pressure and uncertainty and feel compelled to do more with less, multitask, and transact instead of connect. These overloaded leaders show up as fragile, less effective, and less able to learn and adapt. By contrast, great leaders are mature and have a stable sense of self that is not vulnerable to short-term setbacks. They learn from failure and are eager for constructive feedback. The foundation for this is positive self-regard.

Mindfulness can help leaders navigate through stress and ambiguity. When we pay attention to bodily symptoms and emotions, and take active measures to handle these, we naturally feel better and find the mental space to look outside ourselves, at others, and how they may be feeling. This is where empathy stems from—understanding someone else’s experience. When we show empathy, others feel accepted, understood, and empowered to bring their authentic selves to work. This is the bedrock of an inclusive environment. Many CEOs are also seeing mindfulness as a pathway to leadership excellence. Several organizations are embracing mindfulness hands-on and reaping the benefits.

### ***Way Forward***

While everyone is and should be entitled to their own beliefs, opinions, attitudes, and preconceived notions can cause serious rifts in the workplace. As an organization grows, confrontation, disagreements, and miscommunication can occur, *and that is okay*. It is how we handle these issues that are so critical to a diverse, inclusive, and mindful corporate culture. For an organization to be successful, employees and leaders alike need to feel comfortable in their environment and be able to express themselves freely. It is high time that organization leaders and staff tap into mindfulness as a universal and cost-effective way to create a workplace that employees want and customers appreciate.

It starts with us, and it starts with you. We can create mindful organizations by working with ourselves. Then, we can take a step back and ask difficult questions: questions that can make us uncomfortable but that is where self-acceptance will come in. As we work to develop acceptance in ourselves, we will also create environments that support it. Our organizations must be places where we can ask questions



without fear or judgment. Then, we can truly see the power of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Difference need not threaten us. We can grow, transform each other, and perform together. This is what inclusion really means: not losing our individuality, but enhancing it by recognizing and embracing others.

Fast forward: Mindfulness has enabled and empowered Sheila to move forward and enjoy her journey. She is now able to gain from the experiences of the veteran, leverage the talents of the gen z animator, understand where Tina comes from, and most important, be kind to them and herself. As before, events and people, and emotions they cause, often threaten to overwhelm her in the midst of a busy day, but now she tries to respond by first acknowledging the emotion and then saying: “Yes, I know you’re there, and it is okay.” She touches the emotion, observes her body, notices whether it is her throat that has tightened or the shoulders, and simply breathes deeply to relax and move on. Mindfulness has enabled her to deal with the moment, drop the unnecessary baggage, and move on. She knows it is a journey with two steps forward and one step back, yet a journey she is happy to take on, one mindful breath at a time.

If Sheila can do it, so can we. With mindfulness as the canvas, we could paint our workplaces in the colors of the SPECTRUM that invite us to belong, to stay together, and to nurture a workforce where everybody is connected at the core. Let this chapter on mindfulness serve as a reminder that our individual differences are meant to be collectively celebrated in ways that embrace the rich dimensions of diversity, equity, and inclusion contained within each of us. Colors are beautiful, words weave magic, and histories are rewritten when our passion is kind, accepting, and open.

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**Pallavi Shah** is an Executive Manager at Deloitte (Learning and Development). She works at the intersection of the future of work, the workplace of the future, and effective learning–development strategies for the new age professionals, in the current times of disruptive change. She currently leads Manager Development (Professional and Leadership Skills) for Deloitte US–India Offices. She brings in 13+ years of experience in providing learning solutions across industries and geographies. She collaborates with business to develop and deliver issue to impact learning solutions and manages large-scale marquee program deliveries. She strives to be a catalyst of transformation for individuals by understanding behavioral nuances, learning styles, and training methods that inspire. She has developed and managed training and organizational effectiveness initiatives that promote the development of a skilled, high-performing, motivated workforce. She is a certified yoga and mindfulness instructor, registered with World Yoga Alliance and has been conducting yoga and mindfulness sessions for corporations and individuals across all ages, in the USA as well as India. She is passionate about sharing the gift of mindfulness with the world.

# Humanness—The Inclusive Way



Sidhartha Satpathy

*Diversity is being invited to the party, Inclusivity is being asked to dance*

—Verna Myres, the author of “Moving Diversity forward”

**Abstract** This chapter is all about looking at the various aspects of inclusivity. While diversity has become a common term as there is a functional matrix that could be attached to that the corporate board members easily relate to, what we are missing is the human element of inclusivity. This softer element is actually what gives the organization hard results to drive towards future. I have made an attempt to fundamentally understand where and how did we get initiated into moving ourselves away from the very concept of including people into our larger organizational goals. While running towards the purpose of the organization, we seem to have become bereft of including the humans who are enablers of this objective. Here, I am putting across how through the evolution of industrial journey, we have created silos within and differentiated people based on demographic orientations, bodily orientations and minority orientations. These orientations are explained through live examples that happen at workplaces. The attempt is to tickle our thinking to help us create even more stronger thinking inclusive organizations.

**Keywords** Inclusivity · Humanness · Demographic orientations · Bodily orientations · Minority orientations · Inclusive thinking

We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value, no matter what their colour—Maya Angelou.

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S. Satpathy (✉)

Storyteller & Chief Enabler, iSidhartha (OPC) Pvt Ltd., Chennai, India

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## **Introduction**

### ***Inner Evolution***

As humans, we are not only emotional but have consciousness and are different from non-living things. We as humans over the period of our evolutions are known for this fundamental thing and that is called “emotional beings”. Whether it is in the personal spaces or that of in the professional life space, we all have this quality of being emotional. This enables us to not just interact or connect with other human beings not just age but also from an intellectual point of view. While the emotions are deep seated within, the consciousness is that of what we experience of what happens around us. If one were to look at the neurological surcharges and how they trigger, it is the posterior cortex of the brain that triggers off our consciousness. This consciousness triggers the way we experience things all around us and that triggers the emotions that get attached to it. When there is a threat that is anticipated, it makes us not only quickly analyse the situation but also respond to them. They have helped the human community survive, innovate and work together to create groups in the past 315,000 years (Tuttle, 2021).

While consciousness and emotions have together helped us internally to build our feelings of likes and dislikes, our feeling of pride, control, building legacy, power and many more, it also gave birth to the concept of values and belief systems that enabled us to judge what is right or wrong from individual perspective. These values and beliefs have strengthened over the years to ascertain our responses to the environment and the outcomes of our reactions. It also gave rise to groups that started to react and respond to the environments in a similar fashion, and it brought people together to conform to common threats.

### ***The Conformists***

As humans, the deep-seated need for conformity within; led to build the newer belief systems which have been passed from one generation to another generation. Our chances of survival in the newer world started to grow. It became easier for people to build newer ways of thinking that was to become different from the other groups in the other parts of the world. The climatic, geographical spaces, the food habits, ways of living all started to grow and build over a period of time that was uniform. It became a “Fit-In” mechanism. It was a great way of bringing new common practices. A group of people also started to think of a way of cultivating potatoes which they have seen been grown in the wild. They cleared up a piece of land and planted potatoes. When a newer set of people joined them, they liked what was happening and joined in. Over a period of time, the group thought about the water process or protecting their fields from the wild. And finally, these practices became common and a change to that needed a lot of effort. The patterns and practices became similar, and people

started to look up to the original group who started it. One led to the other, and there was a set process and method. People conformed to how they cultivated potatoes around. This was not just with food; it also became relevant in various other fields too. Civilizations started to grow. While one civilization created a method, there was another who did a similar action in a different method. It was merely an adaptation to the environments around them and the need for survival. Cultures started to build and evolve around them.

The comforts of conformity made us stick to the thought processes and augment them as it became easier to manage people around. Acceptance of norms and thoughts started to become a part of the culture of conformity leading to rise of individual powers which meant either collaborative methods or controls. While some of the tribes continue the animal kingdom method of the strongest being the leader of the pack while some brought in the lineage framework, thus giving rise to a segment where family traditions grew more important than that of the community. Though the community leveraged from these traditions, it created the isolation of learnability. In India, the caste system got more prevalent giving rise to five different casts. Unfortunately, this 2000+ year old system has been in vogue even today though the constitution decries this. The roots of conformity to this kind of system have been impactful to the human kind.

### *Winds of Change*

The evolution of Industrial era brought in societal changes. The capitalistic ways of working and thought processes became the order of the day in most of the economies around the world. In 1760s, Great Britain saw the inception of the First Industrial Revolution (Britannica). This revolution was nothing but the beginning of the exploration of the human intelligence and working structures. What started as harnessing machines gathered storm to spread throughout the world in the subsequent years. Every decade that went by saw the imprints expanding, and today, we are in the Fourth Industrial Revolution and happen to be at the cusp of a big change. As the economy moved from an agrarian to industrial to services and now to the information technology-based economy, the world has been shrinking in terms of communication and travel, people's movement to newer regions and exploring work across boundaries and borders. This has also led to, the demand for more and more manpower with the desired skillset made organizations to ask people from distant places too and at many a times from outside the borders.

### *Differentiated Workforce*

These movements pushed us humans to change the very nature of humans who were happy surviving in their very own backyard. The need of money which became the

very form of energy exchange started to redefine the thought process of work and workforce. These all meant no more of guarded territories that could protect people within their own communities. People had to build frameworks for themselves, and protection became their own job role rather than of a community like older times. To top it up, the current environment influenced our thoughts and that of our emotional reactions. We started to see differences in thoughts, ideologies, behaviour patterns of one with others, differentiation amongst people because of colour, cast, creed and biggest of all monetary gains. These differences got accentuated when they got muddled well with the older ways of working and thinking as a society and as family structures. In totality, while it was humanly handy to bring in more systems, procedures and structured thinking patterns, it also gave rise to the very thought of subjugation and the power dynamics. As the environmental dynamics kept playing from the external point of view, the emotions got mixed up with the values and belief systems of the individual giving rise to a complex concussion of feelings internally. These feelings make some of us highly sensitive to the environment while some less sensitive.

### ***The Differentiation***

The very fundamental of an organization is that though it is for making profits, it is made up of people. People like you and I perform the various tasks necessary for accomplishing the desired results. With the very fluidity of people, the growth of the Industrial Revolution and opening up of the market, the environment within an organization has become even more complex giving rise to power dynamics, favouritism leading to cut-throat competition, insecurities, framed images about each other's background, economy, culture and so forth rather than looking at the potential. In a nutshell what we are missing is of treating each other as human beings. Outcome of this non-treatment and the handing over of differentiated culture has led to over-sensitive employees, water cooler discussions, non-transparency, polarization and mistrust amongst people. The larger and hierarchical the organizations are, one could see more of these behaviour patterns that are emerging due to non-inclusivity of people. This non-inclusivity has led to productive losses; ideas that could have potentially given rise to more value to the organization is getting brushed aside, demotivation at times leading to mental agony and depression. Eventually loss of a member from the tribe.

### ***What is Inclusivity?***

According to the English Oxford Dictionary, inclusivity means "*the practice or policy of providing equal access to opportunities and resources for people who*

*might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those having physical or mental disabilities or belonging to other minority groups.”*

Inclusion is a Right, not privilege of a select few ... Judge Geary Obertt.

As we see the journey of humans through the various eras and civilizations, there is no doubt that the differences are many. These differences have led us to think differently from one other and while also becoming the seed for non-inclusivity or inclusivity.

While the organizations do struggle with the very thought of diversity and inclusivity (D&I), there has been lot more focus on diversity as that is visible, and the matrix could be tracked well. While inclusivity takes us a couple of notches below as this is a direct replication of our values, behaviours and cultural influences as humans.

*Harish sat, there in the boardroom with disgust and anger. The last two hours in the meeting, he felt humiliated. It was a tough one to swallow. He knew his leadership was well there, listening and debating on the issue that he had lovingly worked on. His efforts seemed to have seen no daylight.*

*When Harish joined the organization a couple of years ago, he was filled with dreams. His MBA degree from one of the well-known colleges in his city earned him the job, at least that is what he thought it was. But, having come in from a lesser known place and college compared to the big institutes was making him feel left out.*

*It was not the salary that bothered him, what bothered him is the fact that his ideas were not being heard rather being brushed aside by saying, “You are young and new, learn the ropes.” But similar ideas when shared by another fellow mate from a premier college were given due importance stating that this institute guys are better off.*

Is there something about Harish that does not fit in well with the organization? At the surface level, one would tend to say, YES!! He needs to change his thinking. Go little deeper, and you realize that as an organization, we have already created a differentiated thinking, and this culture goes about making an impact on the next generation of leaders. And if Harish were to survive this period, he could by all means get imbibed into the same culture.

## ***Non-inclusive Categories***

We keep differentiating people in many ways which leading to non-inclusivity. They could get broadly categorized under the following nine headings:

### **Demographic Orientation**

This is one of the oldest “non-inclusivity” clauses. The fight to bring in equality and non-discriminatory has been going on for ages. This non-inclusivity is based on

## (a) Gender (Male/Female/Transgender)

*Swetha was wondering as to why Roshan got to do the project with the sales team in Assam, when her qualification and work credentials were all well set. She had slogged it out for the last 18 months for this field posting. She knew that it has to be in the oil rigs with so much of physical work. It did not take her long to realize that her manager who was a lady herself thought that it will be tough one for her out in the field with other men. She did make her argument, but it was not considered.*

There are many like Swetha who feel left out in the journey to build a differentiated career. The restrictive thought process need not be only from any particular gender. This is not just a career loss; it is also a loss of differentiated thinking in the workplace. According to the McKinsey 2020 report (McKinsey & Company, 2020), it says that the gender diversity is still a challenge. The only good part is that there is a positive movement of female population over the past five years. While the numbers seem to be moving up in the west, countries like India have a long way to catch up.

According to the McKinsey report of 2015 (cited in McKinsey & Company, 2020), it states that women contribute towards 37% of the world GDP while being part of 50% of the global working age population. And when this report was analysed over the subsequent years, it is stated that, “in a best-in-region scenario in which all countries match the performance of the country in their region that has made the most progress towards gender equality, \$12 trillion a year could be added to GDP in 2025”. And in a best in case scenario where there is equivalency in work the GDP could move to a whopping \$28 trillion or an addition of 26% in the GDP by 2025. This by any means is a humongous movement as economy and society.

As these being statistical numbers, which are great to note, the gender diversity over the past five years has gone one marginally. Interestingly, in a span of 18 years from 2000 to 2018, women have contributed to 2/3rd of the additional workforce, but they have been added to the jobs that are at the lower end of the spectrum which has lesser salaries and huge job insecurities. And with the economic fallouts that happen, like the economic slumps or pandemic, these jobs are the first to go leading to huge disparities and insecurities. The above is from the job positioning point of view, and the bigger battles happen inside the organization, when jobs and viewpoints get sidelined just like Swetha struggling to understand her missing the opportunity that she was battling for.

The leaky pipeline of women going on maternity breaks (The Quint 2018, April 28) does make a subsequent impact on the role growths. We will discuss this aspect in the later points. But, the stereotypical thinking and approach creates a wider gap that supporting and enabling the system to accept thoughts and viewpoints rather than looking at genders. There is a conscious effort that has been put in which are showing signs of improvement, but at large, the wholistic approach and a thinking change is a must. While female/male discrimination is one, there is a population that has been struggling to find their space altogether, that is the transgender community (Venugopalan & Verma, 2020).



Interestingly, while we as a current society are struggling with giving this community a recognition, the medieval India was very active in engaging with transcommunity for many jobs and was open about their presence in an active society. In April 2014, the supreme court of India recognized transgender as the third gender and legalized its usage. It was a big step for India as a nation to not only recognize this community but also to try and build in sensitivity in its approach in workplaces. This was recognized as part of the human rights that every living being is entitled to. This was a big move as a society to legally use it. The second big step was the presidential nod that this community got for the Act being passed through Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. It was “The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act”.

Unfortunately, the transcommunity has to fight for its presence. Thankfully it has made good ground with regard to its battle for space in public, while the fight for space in corporate world has just begun. While companies like Amazon, Thought works, Accenture and KPMG have started the process of bringing in some skill enhancement and support systems, India Inc. has a long way to go. The kind of jobs that gets meted out to them is more menial in nature. This is also because the literacy rate is significantly lower compared to the others. The social stigma is another big pull down factor. One could certainly argue that the literacy rates are low and the question to ask would be, are we even open as an individual and as an organization to think about this segment of human race?

### **Age and Years of Experience**

*“Raghav, you do not know much about the situation.”*

*Sir, please listen to me once, I plead you before you take a decision. Raghav stated that with a lot of fear and confidence at the same time.*

*His boss, finally let him speak. At the end of the conversation, his boss asked “How come you know all this, you are quite young and new to this project?”*

*Raghav looked down and said, “Sir, I have been working with the frontline ground staff for the past six months and I have gathered this information. I think being on the ground helps.” He cheekily added.*

*Raghav was lucky that he got the space to share his view point. There are many who are not able to bring in their view point because of discouragement by seniors or even fellow members who tend to laugh at the one who is raising a point of view.*

People like Raghav are lucky to have got manager who heard him and gave him the opportunity. There are many who do not even get the time and patient listening just because they are young or at times too old to be part of a young team. The perception of age and experience or the lack of it makes an employee miss the opportunity to add value to organization or their jobs. It is quite a tricky affair to talk about this particular segment. In countries like India where the percentage of younger generation getting into the work stream is quite higher. This could create a whole lot of differentiated experience and expectations of leading young and a dynamic generation. While the older generation keeps pushing with their experience as an upper hand of understanding the situation better, it is also becoming a handicap for

them itself when they are asking the younger generation to do exactly what is said rather than inviting them to contribute in newer and differentiated way of working.

The emotional trauma that the younger generation goes through is huge because of this discrimination. They tend to join in organizations with lots of ideas and thoughts and their understanding of how the corporates run. While all this happens, when their voices are not aired, they tend to withdraw leading to passive engagement. According to a Harvard study (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2020), only 13% of the population in an organization are engaged. If one were to believe this statistic, it is quite a scary space for an organization to be in. With the growing younger population that is joining the workforce, we would tend also lose this workforce, and there is never a stable engaged workforce.

If the mid management or the senior management happens to rubbish the current generation of workforce as being rushed, not following process or protocols and being eager to grow, then the judgemental thinking would lead to more resistance between the two sections, thus giving rise to even more passively engaged or disengaged population. The current generation is looking for a listening ear, with rational thinking, and if there is merit, then they seek to take charge of the situation or action. Lack of it would lead to lack of newer thoughts or ideas, and conformity would become the order of the day. The organization tends to have more of doers and less of thinkers leading to more deadweight in the system.

## **Labour Mobility Orientation**

*When Abhimanyu landed at Bangalore for the first time, he was quite excited. He had big plans. He was the first one from his huge family who had stepped out of his village near Bhopal to do his engineering. As a child, he was quite experimental and had done projects on new age programming. He was looking forward for this experience.*

*He entered the college, he met up ladies who seemed much advanced, guys who were adept with the parties, living-in relationships and many more. It took him almost a year to adjust to the new ways the society had evolved. Every time, he learnt something new, and another newer dimension was in front of him. And his learning continued.*

*As if this was not enough, that when he entered corporate world, he was struggling with the new learnings and then came the shock of him having to report under a South Indian leader who would not give him better projects and any kind of behaviour change made him to be reprimanded. His increments were lesser compared to others. He was getting marginalized. To his chagrin, he only later got to know that he was being marginalized because he was from North and not because he lacked any knowledge or technical know-how.*

Connectivity has become more and more easy, both in terms of telephonic and mobility across regions. With the growth in telephonic connectivity increasing, we have seen access of data and knowledge has become universal. Which means that my location of stay or learning is independent of where I work. With pandemic that has

changed the very nature of our work from physical spaces to that of virtual spaces, the way of working has changed. To top it up and to tap into global talent, organizations which are working towards managing the talent demand supply gap. Anywhere work culture is catching in. What this means is that we are no more constrained to work from a physical space as long as our work interest is in line with the industries that support anywhere work culture. Also, those organizations, like manufacturing that demand physical presence, movement of people to newer regions, are no more a problem. While all this adds flavour to having a cosmopolitan work force, it has also led to bringing in differentiated cultures within. Different cultures mean different belief systems and differentiated ways of looking at scenarios. It also leads one to start learning newer belief systems which demands not only from him/her to be open minded and also from the people around.

Today the need for organizations is to be more accommodating and patient with diverse sets of employees. It is not new to see an African working along with a Tamilian, Scottish, Bihari and Bengali team. These are to work not only with their differences but also intellectual capabilities. If the vernacularity of a person becomes an impediment, then either it could lead to confusion as well as misalignment of goals. Just imagine if the Spanish speaking pilot is not able to converse well with the ATC in Jaipur Airport for landing, it could lead to more disaster. In spite of all the understanding, still there are teams in organizations that would continue to have discussions and calls in their vernacular languages without even acknowledging the others who may not comprehend the discussion. The lack of sensitivity to people and surrounding becomes the stopper of progress as a team and leading to attrition.

### **Socio-economic Orientation**

*Madan was always a quite person and chose to be stuck to his desk. His daily routine was to come log in, stand-up meetings, a quick tea break and back to desk, a hurried lunch for 15 min all alone, back to desk, a tea break at 4 pm at his desk, closing meeting at 5.30 pm and then log out at 7 pm.*

*He hardly had friends or rather there were hardly anyone who would be friends with him. Being a good worker, his manager never had complaints. His team members would not connect with him as he would not smoke, drink, party or just gossip with any. It was work and back. Nobody connected to understand about his family background apart from what was on his resume. His dressing sense was not appealing too. He was a lost soul in that massive organization.*

With mobility being the thing, people have crossed boundaries, and even today, there are first-generation movers who have left their village spaces to go and work for large multinationals. These people are struggling with their own past and the struggles that they have been through along with the promises back home. While the new place could be overwhelming, it could be a daunting place to adjust to. People like Madan have normally struggled through their life spaces to make their cut into the organization, and their sole motto is to hold onto the jobs that they have got. It is

the value of giving everything to the space that takes precedence over any other lure that life would offer in a big city.

Whether we like it or not community formation is normal in every situation, and the wanting to connect with each other is quite strong. Having said so, we tend to gravitate to people who are from similar backgrounds or exhibit to a desirable pattern. In the process of selection and acceptance, we tend to miss or exclude those on the margins. When left alone and not considered, Madan could tend to become aloof and lead his life into depression and other health issues. Our insensitivity at workplace becomes a detachment for people to accomplish more from life and enjoy life to the fullest.

### **Educational—College Pedigree**

*“This particular need a person who is fairer man, how can you propose him for the role. The positioning is very important. Let there be no arguments or any further discussions about this outside these closed doors.” Niraj had to hear an earful from his boss with regard to the client interfacing role. He realized that he had to let go of his most capable person for someone else who could be lesser qualified.*

Harish’s example in the earlier section is an apt example of people like him who face this humiliation. You are from Tier 2, Tier 3, and Undergrad becomes like a time stamp for life. The tier differentiation that was initiated as part of compensation differentiation today stands to become a differentiating factor amongst people from different colleges. This differentiation remains for a long time both in terms of compensation as well as thought process. While these talks state a lot about the insecurity, it also leads towards the missed value adds that might have bolstered the process. It brings in the feeling of superiority and inferiority complex, inclusion and exclusion.

### **Religious Bias Orientation**

*It was a wonderful interview and Badri was very confident of him getting selected. Post the interview he remembered, being escorted out. The senior manager had put a hand around him and was asking him personal questions like the kind of dish liked, was he religious or not and so forth. Least did he realize that he was being checked out if he was from a particular community of a religion. Badri never heard from them. He made multiple calls but all he was said that the position got closed internally. A couple of months later, he heard that one of his batchmates got placed there and that is when he heard the reality.*

Fanaticism is built by individuals and others who would love to follow and conform to those norms. It is about building and nurturing the clan that was lost out. And this is not the organization that represents it as organizations are far bigger in dimension than what we as individuals do, but if not tapped in time, it does lead to fanatic ways of working. In turn, it creates conformed organizations that may not bring in

innovation, newer ways of thinking or challenging older methods for better efficiency and progress. If by any means we have people like Badri joining in, it will tend towards more struggle and dissatisfaction. The insensitivity towards a diversified religious belief brings in polarization in the culture of the organization and lack of cohesion.

### **Bodily Orientations**

The human body has seen evolutionary times, and we have become the best mutated version of who were as a generation of the past. These mutations are not just genetically deep but also has seen changes in our behaviours and thought processes. We have either become a better or lesser version based on how the larger society has looked at us. When the societal norms felt that there was a usage, the strengths were accentuated, while on the other hand, it was seen as a detrimental force and was decried. An organization stands no different from any society. It is just that it becomes a focused unit with the thoughts and differences the way the society sees it. One of the strongest behaviour patterns is towards the sexual orientation and health aspect of an individual. It could be the lack of proper understanding and acceptance that leads to non-inclusive behaviours. Bodily orientations could be looked at from the below three categories of non-inclusivity.

### **Colourism**

*“This particular need a person who is fairer man, how can you propose him for the role. The positioning is very important. Let there be no arguments or any further discussions about this outside these closed doors.” Niraj had to hear an earful from his boss with regard to the client interfacing role. He realized he had to let go of his most capable person for someone else who could be lesser qualified.*

A very strong belief system that the colour of the skin would be apt for a particular role or function. This deep-seeded thought of a particular colour being of a lesser race is what we have traded it from the colonial era and continue to live with it. Taking advantage of the whole concept of Colourism, one particular industry in the current era is making a living out of this insecurity of people. And that is the skin lightning industry which is predicted to be at \$8.9 billion by 2024. Organization roles are getting more stereotyped to the skin tones as an exact replica of what and how our society treats people around. If you are fairer, marriage is in better shape than being that of darker skin or that of the opportunities in education and lastly if not the least at work spaces.

The impact of skin colour has been huge on our minds, right from the kind of work allocation to that of wage gaps. At times, job roles in advertising, front ending roles, client interfacing, media and many others have become stereotypical to the fairness of the skin. Though the above could make someone think of limiting it to an industry, it is not so. The list of roles are unending, and streaks of such examples are

quite prominent in every industry and sector. Not just from a role or work perspective but also at a psychological level when one being dark skinned could end up being the butt of jokes which at times people consider as normal slur. The movement like of “Black lives Matter” which took the world by storm in 2020 is just the tip of iceberg, and there is much more that goes around which has impact not just on real opportunities but also on deep psyche of people. There is an task for us to become more and more sensitive and inclusive towards people.

## **Sexual Orientation—LGBTQI**

*Rahul whispered into Asif, “Buddy yesterday at the park, I happened to see Mohit kissing another man. It was not an normal peck man, it was the gay kind of kiss.” Even before Asif could react Rahul continued, “He being the Team leader, I am worried if he would want us to indulge in favours. I cannot imagine!!” Asif calmly replied, “Mohit has been our boss for the last one year and have you ever seen him approaching us in that context or any feelings. Then why label him if you happen to see him. He may be gay and that is his choice.” Rahul could not believe what Asif said, and he stepped out of the place giving a disgusting look at him.*

It may take a Rahul to think more deeper and understand a perspective of what sexual orientations could mean or have an impact on one’s working style. Even though there has been legalization of sexual preferences across the world, the individual thought processes has to be looked at. It starts to make an impact at deeper emotional and behavioural levels. The thinking patterns of leaders, individual team members does not restrict them from impacting people who have a different way of living but leaves them with a life long scar when their lives are a center of attention at times and circumstances. When an individual choice becomes public and starts to interfere in decision-making, collaborative workings, succession planning, opportunity for challenging roles then it starts to have a bigger impact in the growth story of an organization. One may tend to lose out on people who could really be the deal makers, creative thought leaders, coders, industrial gurus and what nots.

The interesting part is that there has been an increased acceptance of LGBTQI community with governments opening up their public policies and the kind of active engagement that has happened in various communities across the globe. The PRIDE community has been active to propagate the differences in sexual orientations. These and many other like minded communities have been active in making the various generations understand the differences in societal groups and also in a few large organizations. Companies like Intuit, Visa, Uber, Google, Ford, IBM, TCS and many others are actively aiding to the culture change that is happening at workplaces. There are intranet communities that encourage people to come forward to share their preferences and talk about their thoughts and feeling in this aspect. The pride communities not only talk about educating people but also help in changing policies to be friendly to various sections including theirs. For example, TCS in 2019 changed its health cover policy to cover same-sex relationships. The journey of being considerate

and responsive has just begun, and it needs a lot more of acceptance at a behavioural and psychological state.

## Physical Disability and Health Differentiation

*Sujatha was getting frustrated as Mayank kept dragging himself. She was sure that if she were to wait for Mayank, then she would reach the client meeting late. Her reaching late to the venue was not a botheration any more. Mayank had been waiting, but now, she had to rush to the meeting, and it was all squared up on Mayank. Mayank had “Leg length discrepancy” and that slowed down his pace considerably. When he saw Sujatha getting frustrated, he finally responded saying, “You carry on to the board room, I will catch up with you there. Do not worry, we need to be on time. You better not be late for me”. He took the blame on himself just to see her move away.*

According to the 2018 disability report of WHO, the world has close to 15% of the workforce, which is close to a billion people. These disabilities are in one form or other. While countries like India have showcased numbers of 4–5% as per the census reports of 2011. This is also because of the discomfort of census gatherers to collect information on disability and also the understanding of the definition what could get covered under this category. WHO says that it is not just the physical form of disabilities but also the diseases that lead to various other disabilities. When this is corroborated along with the literacy and opportunities of growth, the engageable population is abysmal. The sad news is that the number of disabilities is just going to keep growing because of ageing, nature of diseases that are spreading and unmet medical demands.

And with this kind of a complexity and scenario, one could only expect that the workplace is going to need even more sensitive people around. Certain organizations like the tech giants of TCS, Cognizant, Cap Gemini are putting in efforts to gather information of not just physical but also health issues of their employees, a significant population goes unnoticed. While audits like that of OSHA or Healthcare audits do stress on the aspect of identifying health and mitigation measures what it leaves behind is the wide spread acceptance of its importance and the due people sensitivity. When one of the BPO organizations wanted to get started with including “Hearing Disabled” people into their system, the discussion was about why they cannot be part of the system and what will happen if they are part of the system. This spoke not about the organization’s interest or the “Hearing Disabled” person’s capability but the lack of the managers thinking and their non-belief. Their insensitivity made them lose out a highly dedicated workforce which the others saw an opportunity to be inclusive.

## Expectant/Maternity Leave Return

*Rashmi was delighted that she was in her eight month of her pregnancy and was due any point of time. Her organization had supported her in all ways, and she was looking forward for this maternity break. She had been a super performer and has been in the top-ten performer list. While this happiness was certainly there, she worried if on her return she will be given the same kind of challenges. How will she cope up with the new tag that her team members would put her through?*

In 2018, there was a report that was created by Genpact Centre for Women's Leadership along with Ashoka University stated that 73% of women leave their jobs post-delivery. Even amongst those who return, 48% quit after 4 months of being on the job. The work space becomes difficult for them to accept and manage the challenge of being a working woman. The challenge is one that of being a new mother, second the work environment enabling and helping them and to top it up stigma that the colleague may tag as saying that the pressure could not be managed. The obvious question that one can legitimately ask is, "Should the employee focus on the task at hand or should she be battling the frivolous biases that arises because she has just now become a parent"? None of them do tend to ask for sympathy rather a practical approach and an equal playing field.

## Minority Orientations

While the above orientations have a very clear biases that are obvious and quite visible in the daily operational basis, there are many others that go unnoticed and most of the time under the carpet activities. At times, they do stand out as a sore thumb to be addressed.

### (a) Technology Competence

*Madhav happened to have been loyal to the organization for the last 15 years and active with his machines. He has grown up the ranks through utmost dedication and efforts. While there were no efforts that were left unturned, the newer technology and changes that were brought in were straining him a lot.*

*The other day he had three engineering trainees who came and took one full day orientation program, but it was still too complex for him. It had been almost three weeks now, and he was struggling. His usually supportive boss had called him and questioned him on the failures of the products. He had no answers to tell him, while he was sure that the new machines were non-functional for him and he had requested if the older machines could be in.*

In manufacturing or software industry, technology is one thing that has taken the world by storm. Without it, one cannot manage to bring in efficiency or reach out to newer ways of working. In 2016, one of the magazines (Berman & Dorrier, 2016) declared "Technology Feels Like It's Accelerating—Because It Actually Is." While



the technology chips have been becoming increasingly faster and less costly, Moore's law is becoming even more relevant.

The pace of change has brought in people to keep upskilling and evolving themselves at a regular pace and at times multiply their efforts to learn, thus demanding more effort from people. It is but natural that people's ability to learn is relative and all do not have the same knack. Some pick up faster, while some are laggards. Which brings in the human behaviour of one group being looked up as lesser competitive or as laggards. At times, during team meetings, this leads to conflict of non-capability vs non-listeners especially if both of them perceive being right in their thinking and approach. This would also lead to demotivation of individual and power struggles in the process of growing up. If the scope of understanding each other's behaviours and learning is not given due respect and understanding, then it leads to the deepening of the divide.

## Choice Orientations

*Shreya and Sunitha were thick of pals, and since their joining into this newer investment Banking organization, they have grown thicker. They dread as the days move towards Thursday, and the whole of their department is divided between Arsenal, Manchester United, Manchester City and the others. The discussions are one of heated arguments for the weekend games. They both could never understand the game nor the working of the clubs. They felt they were left out. During the Soccer season, the heat was even more and would rule over their official meetings too leaving them wondering what to do other than sitting silent.*

We all have our love and affiliations towards various clubs and teams. These affiliations take us back to the clan cultures that we had in our past. Feel connected and be part of pride that boasts and lives by it.

**I am Chennai team lover, I belong to Delhi gang, Mumbai is in my blood, ManU is my identity, Williams in the F1 king.** This is quite common to hear across, and some organizations do make their business out of this passion and love. But, when they start to become the centre stage of any team, it would disrupt the culture of acceptance and accommodativeness of myriad differences in thoughts and liking. A similar type is also seen with people who do psychometric assessments. You may have heard this common statement, **"I am an introvert and hence do not speak much"**. These tags become the handicap either by the individual or by other who tag them of these labels. They are very common and are huge limiters in a progressive organization.

The biggest issue is when behavioural traits get associated with personalities as to how someone would behave because they love some team and thus leading to stereotyping of actions and reactions. People love to create these team-based or club-based cliques or corporate membership-based or profiling types to feel comfortable. It is like an identity that makes them at home with newer sets of people. They at times become openers in any discussion and help break barriers, and when they are

over emphasized by people without a conscious effort to understand them, then they lead to blocks and non-sensitivity amongst other team members. It is a mental trap to fall in for with ease.

### ***Inclusive Thinking***

As the Norwegians say: “There is no bad weather, just the wrong choice of clothing.”

We humans are fundamentally emotional beings who love the conformist attitude to protect and safeguard self. This leads us to behave in a pattern that creates groups. We may have moved away from our fixed civilizations, but the very nature of a group and our clan mentality is far from receding. With the pace at which we are growing, we will have to chance our ways of thinking. If we are to talk about wholistic growth, carrying people together, ideas matter and that need us to be sensitive towards each other.

Verna Myres, the author of “Moving Diversity forward”, beautifully states “Diversity is being invited to the party, Inclusivity is being asked to dance”. It is the very essence of being human. It is not merely that we have brought together people with different races, gender, thoughts, age, culture, competence, interests and ambitions in an organization, the most important is to get them working together in an inclusive wholistic approach. And that is feasible only when we are sensitive towards the human element within us called humanness.

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