

Building inclusive workplaces: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives

Dr Shivani Sah

Assistant Professor,
Christ Academy Institute Of Law, Bengaluru, India

Abstract : The modern workplace is evolving to embrace inclusivity and diversity as integral components of organisational success. Research has shown that diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace boosts creativity and innovation. It also leads to better decision-making and better productivity. The paper explores the various strategies in managing diversity, equity and inclusion at the workplace. This is a qualitative study. The paper uses a semi-structured interview approach with 15 human resource professionals and managers from diverse organisations. The data is analyzed using Atlas.ti software. The findings of the study bring to the fore the major strategies and issues related to diversity, inclusion and equity. Strong leadership accountability, mapping DEI metrics to performance goals, and awareness and training programs are among the strategies that can lead to a more diverse and inclusive workplace.

IndexTerms - Barriers to implementation of Diversity ,Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Inclusive workplace,

I.INTRODUCTION

The contemporary organizational landscape recognizes the importance of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as critical for fostering innovation and sustainable growth. Organizations adopting DEI practices report enhanced employee satisfaction, creativity, innovation and overall employee performance. DEI initiatives focus not only on building a diverse workforce but also on ensuring fair treatment and inclusive practices that empower all employees to contribute meaningfully.

Based on insights from HR professionals and Managers, we discuss current practices, challenges, and strategies for implementing DEI, using data from a semi-structured interview schedule.

DEI research has evolved over the past 45 years, with increasing attention to both theoretical frameworks and practical interventions(Park, Park, and Kwon 2025). Scholars argued that increasing the number of diverse employees would improve organisational effectiveness by fostering innovative and creative ideas. DEI allows a variety of perspectives, which can lead to more creative solutions and improved decision-making processes(Olusanya 2023).Companies that prioritise DEI are better able to attract and retain top talent. A diverse and inclusive workplace is appealing to potential employees and can reduce turnover rates, as well as companies with inclusive practices often outperform their less inclusive counterparts (Bhushan and Kumar, 2024; Lai et al.). Integrating DEI principles into workforce training programs can enhance collaboration and innovation(Adegbite 2024).

Despite the growing emphasis on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in organizations, several critical research gaps persist that undermine the effectiveness of DEI initiatives. One primary concern is the misalignment between DEI programs and the specific needs of organizations. Many initiatives are reactive responses to external trends rather than being grounded in internal assessments. This leads to generic, short-term interventions that often fail to address underlying issues and can result in employee disengagement.

Research Objectives

1. To examine diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives in organizations
2. To identify barriers for implementing DEI
3. To identify strategies for overcoming barriers to DEI

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study. Data was collected from Human resource professionals and Managers across sectors using a semi structured interview schedule. It included sections on organizational policies with respect to DEI, , Snowball sampling technique was used. The respondents were from across sectors like banking, Energy, Financial service, technology. The respondents were in the middle and senior management cadre. Data is analysed using Atlas ti software. The data from the respondents was anonymized to preserve the identity of the respondents and annotation P was used to represent the respondents

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data was collected from 15 managers from senior and mid management level cadre. A brief profile of the characteristics of respondents is given in table 4.1. The respondents were working in the field of technology, retail, Ecommerce, Banking and Corporate Social Responsibility

Table 4.1

Respondent	Sector	Designation
P1	Technology	Hr Manager
P2	Technology	HR Business leader Head Units
P3	Retail	People Partner
P4	Technology	Senior Manager HR
P5	Financial service (Banking)	Assistant Vice President
P6	Ecommerce	Chief human Resource Officer
P7	Travel and mobility sector, Technology	Chief People officer
P8	Engineering sector Electrification and automation technology	Global product marketing, India, Middle East and Africa region
P9	Banking (Public Sector)	Bank Manager
P10	Banking	Bank Manager
P11	Technology	Program Director
P12	Technology	HR Manager
P13	CSR/Skill and development	Project Lead
P14	Technology	Manager
P15	Banking public sector	Manager

3.1. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policy.

Majority of the respondents reported having a dedicated diversity, equity and inclusion policy in place. The policy defined in detail the pillars of diversity, equity and inclusion in the organization and steps taken to ensure the same in the organization.

Some respondents reported a roll back on DEI commitment due to political and policy changes. In such cases organizations DEI initiatives have been diluted and new initiatives put on hold.

As is evident from the comment of P5

“Yes, used to have a dedicated team post more focus on gender perspective post 24-25 roll back on DEI”

3.2 Equal Opportunities in Recruitment and Hiring

Surveyed respondents reported that they followed merit-based and transparent recruitment processes where in merit was the only criteria for recruitment and there is no discrimination based on gender, race, age, physical disability, sexual orientation. Technical competence is the basis for selection this leads to creation of equal opportunities for all.

As supported by following statement *“shall ensure that no applicant or employee is discriminated on the grounds of his/her disability in regard to any position for which the applicant or employee meets the inherent requirements of the position.”* (P2)

..... This ensures all candidates are evaluated based on skills and qualifications, not personal characteristics” (P4)

Practices like not collecting personal information of candidates, having gender inclusive guidelines, behavioral event based interviewing workshop, using unbiased job descriptions, using structured interview, ensuring diversity in interview panels, focusing on inclusive hiring practices enable the organization to minimize bias in recruitment process

“Gender-Neutral Job Descriptions: We craft JDs that are free from gendered language and bias, ensuring they appeal to a diverse talent pool.

In order to encourage diversity in the organization. Organizations create awareness regarding diversity among managers and ensure that diversity efforts are not only limited to gender but diversity also in terms of people with disability, multigeneration and sexual orientation. Organizations are conducting multiple drives for specific diversity hiring for example in case of public sector banks special drives are conducted to recruit from marginalized communities, women, economically poor section of society as well as rural areas. To encourage more women in workforce organizations, have recruitment drives focused on them, there are initiative and drives to enable women to come back to the workforce after a career break. Recruitment is done from diverse talent pools and multiple forums. Campus recruitments and recruiting veterans to ensure generational diversity. As is echoed in the statement

“We follow a transparent and merit-based hiring process. Specific recruitment drives are conducted for women and economically weaker sections to improve diversity” (P10)

Due to recent changes in the political scenario and policy change some organisations have stopped focusing on diversity in their recruitment, as reflected in following statements

(P3) “not focusing on gender, sexual orientation. ensuring equality in the process Earlier emphasis on returning mother or people who have taken a break”

(P5) “Earlier hiring PWD, specific program for women, veterans but now its no longer a focus. Hiring from individual perspective as DEI is no longer a policy”.

3.3 DEI Training: Training is considered a key initiative of promoting diversity, inclusivity and equity in workplace. Programs are designed to create awareness, build inclusive behaviors, and foster a culture of belongingness. Analysis of the data revealed majority of the respondents are offering regular training programs for promoting diversity, equity and inclusivity in the organization. Only two respondents reported that there were no formal training programs available for the same. These programs are delivered by certified trainers to ensure effective delivery. In many organizations these are mandatory programs as reflected in statement of P7

“Every year a mandatory training session for the employees is conducted, followed by assessment in which they have to score more beyond 80%”

Unconscious bias training, training on eradicating racism and bias, know your pronouns training are some of the trainings provided in organizations. Learning programs on principles of Diversity, equity and inclusivity were some of the trainings which were found to be prevalent among all respondents. Unconscious bias training helps employees recognise and mitigate unconscious biases in the workplace. Mandatory compliance training equips employees with essential knowledge on workplace inclusivity, policies, and best practices Apart from this study also found in certain organizations there was a focus on providing training online. Training is delivered through various formats and platforms. These include e-learning modules, content with voice-over, through learning management systems. Some organizations also conduct training on sensitivity and cultural competence.

To ensure equity special skill programs are offered to women, people with disabilities and pride community. The target audience for training varies certain training programs focus on leaders to foster inclusive leadership and challenge biases.

These are reflected in statement of P6 *“Our diversity and inclusion training programs are designed to create awareness, build inclusive behaviours, and foster a culture of belonging across P6. These initiatives include:*

Gender Sensitization Workshops & The Art of Allyship Inclusivity Sessions: *These are designed for people managers to help them foster inclusive leadership, challenge biases, and support diverse teams.*

Learning Program on Principles of DE&I – Compliance Training: *A mandatory training that equips employees with essential knowledge on workplace inclusivity, policies, and best practices.*

Illuminate – Exclusive Workshop for Women at P6: *A safe and empowering space where women can openly share experiences exchange ideas, and connect meaningfully. The workshop also includes a segment on women's self-defense.”*

3.4 Inclusivity

The respondents reported that the majority of them had an inclusive culture characterised by a feeling that employees' perspectives and contributions are important and valued. Such cultures are driven by values of no discrimination and harassment. Employees are

encouraged to voice their opinions and participate. There is mutual respect and acceptance. Open communication, access to equal opportunities, and embracing diversity all lead to an inclusive culture.

The sentiment is reflected in the statement of P4, "Our organisation has an inclusive culture where diverse perspectives are valued, and all employees are respected. We promote open communication, offer equal opportunities, promotions, appraisals and ensure a supportive environment for personal and professional growth. Continuous DEI initiatives and feedback mechanisms help maintain an atmosphere of belonging and collaboration."

"Warm, inclusive where everyone feels respected and valued", focusing on empowering women, supporting returnees, and embracing diverse backgrounds. (P13)

Specific focus area includes gender equity focusing on initiatives to empower women, disability inclusion by providing accessible workplace inclusive training and LGBTQ+ inclusion by advocating diversity. Organization are working for inclusion by having focused programs for women- training them for leadership, skill building programs, enabling return to workplace. Skill training for people with disabilities, special programs and celebrations for pride community.

In some organizations training handbooks and materials are made accessible for employees with disabilities or communication impairments, including alternative formats and visual illustrations.

The policy of P2 states

"At P2, we strive to provide a work environment free of discrimination and harassment. We are an equal opportunity employer and employment decisions are based on merit and business needs.P2 has an equal opportunity policy for persons with disabilities, ensuring a diverse and inclusive workplace. The policy includes accessible workplaces, reasonable accommodations, learning and awareness, employee resource groups, extra leave, and grievance handling. P2 provides ramps, accessible common areas, mobility support, and assistive devices. The company also has a special loan policy for employees with disabilities and offers training opportunities on LEX. is an Employee Resource Group for employees with disability and their allies. "

Conducting awareness and training sessions, diverse hiring practices, encouraging mentorship and support programs, employee resource groups, and cultural and community initiatives are the ways in which organisations are building an inclusive culture.

3.5 Organizational response to discrimination and bias

The majority of the respondents reported that they have formal processes to report and address incidents of bias and discrimination. This mechanism could be grievance redressal cells, internal complaint committees. In some organisations, anonymous hotlines and emails are provided to launch complaints, and some organisations have an employee relations case system. Organisations have specific policies related to anti-discrimination and sexual harassment. The measures for noncompliance could include disciplinary measures like formal warnings, corrective interventions, escalating the issue to higher management, impact on individual rating, and hampering individual promotion approval, as DEI is documented in performance appraisals. The majority of respondents specifically state the consequences of non-compliance. As is reflected in the following statements

"We also ensure that leaders have diversity goals in their OKRS which further get percolated to their team members. It impacts their rating, directly impacting their hike and bonus payout" (P7)

"We have a very strong team of Neutral HR, who works along the legal cell of the company to respond to any incident of discrimination raised. Neutral HR investigates the case and can take the necessary actions, up to and including terminating the guilty employee. We also have a 3 warning letter issuance policy"(P11)

3.6 Barriers to DEI

A minuscule minority asserted the absence of barriers for implementing DEI programs. Scarcity of resources, lack of strategic leadership accountability for DEI. Pushback to women's leadership, Mental attitude, Stereotypical behavior, lack of buy-in to the concept of DEI among members of the organisation, and cultural resistance were some of the major barriers to DEI. Unconscious Bias comes across as a significant barrier mentioned by multiple sources, as this could have an influence on recruitment, promotions, and team dynamics, potentially preventing truly equitable outcomes. Lack of awareness can also act as a barrier because the employee lacks an understanding of the issue of inclusivity beyond just gender, but also covering the scope of disability, race, and LGBTQIA+ concerns. This, in turn, can limit the effectiveness of the implementation of such measures. In certain fields, like mechanical engineering, a lack of talent pipeline also emerged as a barrier

3.7 Strategies for Overcoming Barriers

Organisations have implemented various strategies for overcoming barriers. An analysis of the respondents' statements brought to the fore the following points:

1. **Training and awareness programs:** A key strategy is to organise continuous awareness programs to create awareness regarding the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion. Apart from this, specific training sessions on DEI, covering topics like Unconscious bias, inclusivity, sexual harassment, gender equality, discrimination based on race, and religion, can be organised. Sensitisation workshops and Gender Sensitisation workshops can be conducted to train managers to foster inclusive leadership, challenge biases, and support diverse teams. Mandatory training on the principles of DE&I and workplace inclusivity is in place.
2. **Strong Leadership Commitment and Accountability** are crucial for reducing barriers. This involves the involvement of leadership, starting right from hiring and onboarding, and leaders exhibiting inclusive behaviour.
3. **Accountability for promoting DEI:** This can be ensured by tying performance metrics to DEI goals and integrating it into Objectives and key result areas. Noncompliance to DEI principles can hamper promotion approval. Measuring key DEI metrics on a regular basis and publishing reports can lead to transparency and accountability.
4. **Policy and Process Implementation:** Implementing diversity-focused recruitment initiatives like inclusive job descriptions, structured interview processes, focusing on skills and potential, policies for pay parity and no discrimination. Culture Building- Focusing on building an inclusive culture where diverse views are valued, and everyone feels heard and supported. This can be achieved through open communication channels, sharing DEI experiences and celebrating language and cultural inclusivity.
5. **Establishing Support Systems:** Initiatives like mentorship programs, Employee resource groups also help in breaking down the barriers. Establishment of an employee resource group for various groups like women, people with disabilities, veterans, and young professionals can enable mentorship and learning. Implementing accessible workspaces and digital solutions for accessibility will further help in building inclusivity in the organization.
6. **Rewards and recognition:** Some organisations reported recognising and rewarding DEI commitment by providing public acknowledgement, promotion opportunities, and performance bonuses. Many organisations have instituted quarterly and annual awards for DEI commitment. In some organisations, certificates and nominations for leadership opportunities are also provided.

IV.CONCLUSION

The findings underscore the importance of a structured and strategic approach to DEI. Strong leadership accountability, mapping of DEI metrics to performance goals, awareness and training programs will enable integrating DEI efforts as an essential part of the organisation. DEI practices contribute not only to organisational success but also have a ripple effect on society, contributing to societal progress. By fostering an inclusive, equitable, and diverse culture, organisations not only enhance their internal dynamics but also contribute significantly to global sustainability goals. The recommendations outlined in this paper provide a roadmap for organisations aiming to champion DEI.

REFERENCES

1. Adegbite, Adeola O. 2024. "Diversity, Equity, And Inclusion In Workforce Training: From Concept To Implementation." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 29 (12): 30–37. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2912093037>.
2. Ahmad, Afra S., Eden King, Alex Lindsey, Isaac Sabat, Cassandra Phetmisy, and Amanda Anderson. 2021. "Interpersonal Outcomes of Religious Identity Management at Work." *Journal of Management Studies* 58 (8): 2207–39. <https://doi.org/10.1111/JOMS.12758>.
3. Bell, Suzanne T., Anton J. Villado, Marc A. Lukasik, Larisa Belau, and Andrea L. Briggs. 2011. "Getting Specific about Demographic Diversity Variable and Team Performance Relationships: A Meta-Analysis." *Journal of Management* 37 (3): 709–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206310365001>;JOURNAL:JOURNAL:JOMA;WGROU:STRING:PUBLICATION.
4. Bhardwaj, Arjun, Sushanta Kumar Mishra, Israr Qureshi, Kunal Kamal Kumar, Alison M. Konrad, Marc David L. Seidel, and Babita Bhatt. 2021. "Bridging Caste Divides: Middle-Status Ambivalence, Elite Closure, and Lower-Status Social Withdrawal." *Journal of Management Studies* 58 (8): 2111–36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/JOMS.12763>;REQUESTEDJOURNAL:JOURNAL:14676486;CSUBTYPE:STRING:SPECIAL;PAGE:STRING:ARTICLE/CHAPTER.
5. Bhushan, Aishwarya, and Ranjith Kumar.S. 2024. "Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Best Practices for Fostering an Inclusive Workplace Culture in the Digital Age." *Economic Sciences* 20 (2): 130–40. <https://doi.org/10.69889/a2defb90>.
6. Blau, Peter M. 1964. "Justice in Social Exchange." *Sociological Inquiry* 34 (2): 193–206. <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1475-682X.1964.TB00583.X>;REQUESTEDJOURNAL:JOURNAL:1475682X;PAGE:STRING:ARTICLE/CHAPTER.
7. DiTomaso, Nancy. 2021. "Why Difference Makes a Difference: Diversity, Inequality, and Institutionalization." *Journal of Management Studies* 58 (8): 2024–51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/JOMS.12690>;JOURNAL:JOURNAL:14676486;WGROU:STRING:PUBLICATION.

8. Harrison, David A., and Katherine J. Klein. 2007. "What's the Difference? Diversity Constructs as Separation, Variety, or Disparity in Organizations." *Academy of Management Review* 32 (4): 1199–1228. <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.2007.26586096;PAGEGROUP:STRING:PUBLICATION>.
9. Holmes, Oscar, Kaifeng Jiang, Derek R. Avery, Patrick F. McKay, In Sue Oh, and C. Justice Tillman. 2021. "A Meta-Analysis Integrating 25 Years of Diversity Climate Research." *Journal of Management* 47 (6): 1357–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206320934547/SUPPL_FILE/REFERENCES_FOR_ONLINE_SUPPLEMENTAL_FILE.DOCX.
10. Knippenberg, Daan Van, Carsten K.W. De Dreu, and Astrid C. Homan. 2004. "Work Group Diversity and Group Performance: An Integrative Model and Research Agenda." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 89 (6): 1008–22. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.89.6.1008>.
11. Lai, Patrick Ho Lam, Deborah Hogan, T Mcnamara, Marcie Pitt-Catsoupes, Kathleen Christensen, and Samuel L Bradley. 2024. "A New Lens into Workplace Equity: The Equity of Employment Systems." <https://doi.org/10.1108/edi-01-2024-0028>.
12. LaVan, Helen, and Yvette P. Lopez. 2023. "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Examining Prejudice at Work: A Levels of Analysis Perspective." *Management Decision* 61 (4): 896–923. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-06-2021-0771/FULL/PDF>.
13. Leslie, Lisa M., Yeonka Kim, Joyce E. Bono, and Gregory R. Beaver. 2020. "On Melting Pots and Salad Bowls: A Meta-Analysis of the Effects of Identity-Blind and Identity-Conscious Diversity Ideologies." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 105 (5): 453–71. <https://doi.org/10.1037/APL0000446>.
14. Olusanya, Emmanuel O E. 2023. "Workplace Diversity, Equity, Inclusion." *Journal of Business Diversity*. <https://doi.org/10.33423/jbd.v23i4.6615>.
15. Park, Cho Hyun, Sunyoung Park, and Bora Kwon. 2025. "Forty-Five Years of Research on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Management." *Management Decision* 63 (13): 66–95. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-11-2023-2181>.
16. Randolph, Angela, Amanda Hinojosa, and Brandon Randolph-Seng. 2023. "Guest Editorial: Prejudice at Work: What We Understand and What We Still Need to Learn." *Management Decision* 61 (4): 889–95. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MD-04-2023-210/FULL/PDF>.
17. Roberson, Quinetta M. 2019. "Diversity in the Workplace: A Review, Synthesis, and Future Research Agenda." *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 6:69–88. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-012218-015243>.
18. Roberson, Quinetta, Ann Marie Ryan, and Belle Rose Ragins. 2017. "The Evolution and Future of Diversity at Work." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 102 (3): 483–99. <https://doi.org/10.1037/APL0000161>.
19. Stahl, Günter K., and Martha L. Maznevski. 2021. "Unraveling the Effects of Cultural Diversity in Teams: A Retrospective of Research on Multicultural Work Groups and an Agenda for Future Research." *Journal of International Business Studies* 52 (1): 4. <https://doi.org/10.1057/S41267-020-00389-9>.
20. Thatcher, Sherry M.B., and Pankaj C. Patel. 2012. "Group Faultlines." *Journal of Management* 38 (4): 969–1009. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206311426187>.
21. Triana, María del Carmen, Kwanghyun Kim, Seo Young Byun, Dora María Delgado, and Winfred Arthur. 2021. "The Relationship Between Team Deep-Level Diversity and Team Performance: A Meta-Analysis of the Main Effect, Moderators, and Mediating Mechanisms." *Journal of Management Studies* 58 (8): 2137–79. <https://doi.org/10.1111/JOMS.12670;WGROU:STRING:PUBLICATION>.

Copyright & License:



© Authors retain the copyright of this article. This work is published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), permitting unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.