

AN INCLUSIVE LENS TO DRIVE PERFORMANCE IN WORK GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

For workplaces to be productive it is essential that employees feel encouraged enough to express themselves, this is possible only when the organization is inclusive. A lot of research is focused in the area of diversity in groups but only recently the focus has been shifting to inclusion. The concept of inclusion may be perceived differently by different employees and despite having policies in place, it can become difficult to accomplish them in practice. The present article tries to understand the behaviours that enhance inclusive climate and lead to performance of the organization. This paper will offer insights to the stakeholders to target key areas which can foster better relations among team members. India already has a rich and diverse culture. The present study tries to understand how this can be used to develop a culture of inclusion that can better business outcomes. It adds to the already existing body of knowledge by giving a perspective as to how inclusion is understood by the organization and employee in Indian firms and unravel the barriers that may be leading to these differences.

Keywords: *Inclusive Practices, Workplace Inclusion, Inclusion Management.*

Introduction

Management of diversity came to the core where there were changes in demographic scenario and it became necessary because of the legislative backdrop. Initially companies were only focussing on diversity to comply with the legal norms. Gradually, there has been an evolution and there came the realization that diversity can serve as a competitive advantage when inclusion is in place (Vohra et al., 2015). So, it became a strategic requirement to enhance inclusion however what specifically could be done to achieve that is still not clear. The responsibility for creating an inclusive climate primarily lies with chief diversity officers along with other key stakeholders. The present study is an effort to explore what all strategies diversity officers adopt for being more inclusive and challenges faced by them during the process.

Inclusion management on the other hand is related to those strategies which organizations adopt in order to maximize the participation of employees into the overall management of the company. It is important in organizations in the Indian context to tackle diversity and maximize harmony.

Review of Literature

The concept of diversity and inclusion are related and many a times used interchangeably. Efforts have been made by researchers to differentiate between these two and to analyze the impacts of each of them independent of one another (Hope Pelled et al., 1999).

It was contended that both diversity and inclusion are characteristically different yet related concepts in diversity management. While diversity is focused on the demographics, inclusion is more about crafting an organization which is free of barriers. Another approach to distinguish between two was that while diversity is about demographic differences, comprising of both visible (like gender, age, caste,

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race etc.) and invisible differences (like education, cultural background etc.) in a particular organization or group of people, inclusion is about how employees feel their uniqueness is appreciated and full participation in organizational happenings is encouraged (Hope Pelled et al., 1999).

Organizations which are inclusive are characterized by various structures and systems based on pluralistic values and morals and have an accommodating culture (Nishii, 2013; Padavic et al., 2020). Such workplaces constantly try to evolve their norms and values to accommodate all employees and create a feeling of empowerment among diverse minority work groups.

When all employees are involved in decision making irrespective of their diverse characteristics then a sense of togetherness is developed which leads to fulfilment of the two fundamental needs of belongingness and uniqueness (Shore et al., 2011). Inclusion is based on the nature of membership, degree of influence, access that employees feel while working in the organization (Barak, 1999).

Workplace behaviours and Practices to Align with Inclusion

Initially the concept of workplace inclusion was started by organizations to be able to attract as well as retain talent from different minority groups. With the passage of time it has been realized that diversity is a strategic asset which if managed in an efficient manner can lead to a competitive advantage and overall better outcomes for the organization (Zanoni & Janssens, 2007). Inclusion is one of the most important aspects of culture of any organization that can leverage diversity. A study conducted on CEOs of Fortune 500 companies by Harvard Business Review came into agreement on the key elements that define a culture which is inclusive. As per these executives, inclusion is where employees can bring their authentic selves to the organization and take part in its success. In addition to this, the company shows respect for unique traits of their employees and utilises them to its advantage. This is possible to accomplish by employing different practices starting with tackling of biases (Nishii, 2013). When employees have a voice in the matters of decision making related to their work then inclusion takes place. If employees participate in such processes, they become more engaged. As per research there exists a relation between inclusion felt by employees and predictors of workplace performance and commitment.

Need for the Study

Although there has been researches that have given a set of frameworks for managing inclusion or elaborating the concept of inclusion, empirical studies are still limited in number. Further, different countries have a variety of groups with a different social identity or having different set of values so this study tries to better highlight the Indian perspective of inclusion.

Earlier studies that have been done in the western contexts have highlighted that it is possible that people from different gender or ethnic identities would have a different perception of Inclusion and exhibit or value the same in different degrees (Kulkarni et al., 2020). In order to get a deeper understanding of inclusive practices in Indian scenario a qualitative approach was adopted to find how HR experts and diversity officers perceive inclusive behaviours differently from employees.

Objectives of the Study

- To identify strategies and practices employed by global companies to promote inclusivity among diverse group of employees.
- To understand challenges faced by global organizations in implementing practices of inclusion.
- To provide recommendations prescribed by global diversity officers to better implement inclusive practices.

Research Methodology

To understand and better explore how Indian managers understand inclusion and what initiatives Indian companies adopt for managing diverse employees a qualitative approach was adopted in this study.

Research Design

The target population for this study is human resource and diversity professionals in global organizations. These people were the primary point of contact when it comes to diversity and inclusion issues and coordinated different initiatives aimed at achieving the same.

Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was employed where human resource managers and chief diversity officers from various industries participated.

The basic unit of analysis here were global HRs and Chief diversity officers. The major aim was to identify such behaviours and practices which are related with enhancing inclusion among diverse employee groups.

A total of 14 executives met the desired criteria:

- Which held or presently hold the positions of diversity officers or HRs responsible for managing diversity.
- Are part of global organizations

All these participants which were selected had major experiences in the area of DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) and therefore had the required ability to express and articulate what behaviours or practices introduced in the organizations were actually effective in facilitating inclusion.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected in two phases,

First a thorough review of literature was done. Thereafter, a semi-structured interview of selected experts was conducted as it is through semi-structured interviews that there is possibility to probe deeper by asking for the opinions and experiences of these experts with respect to finding out the best behaviours or strategies adopted to promote an inclusive culture in the workplace.

Interview Process

The process of interview was started by 1st contacting those executives who fulfilled the criteria as described above. Participants in the study were contacted either through phone or by e-mail. Then a one-to-one interview was scheduled at participants location as per their convenience. However, if due to some reasons in-person interviews were not possible, then a telephonic interview was conducted. The duration of interviews was about 25-40 minutes. All the responses were recorded and transcribed.

Table 1: Demographic profile of experts and titles held

S.No.	Industry	No. of Participants	Titles held by Participants	No. of Participants
1	Consumer services	6	Chief diversity officers	4
2	Financial services	3	Vice President, Diversity	4
3	Technology	5	Senior HR (DEI)	6

Source: Author (self-compiled)

Results and Discussions

The results of this study showed some overlap with the existing study done by Shore et al (2011). For instance, the descriptions given which were feeling accepted as part of an organization or given equal chances to excel, these exhibit consistency with the trait of 'assimilation' while traits such as promoting new and innovative ideas, understanding unique talents and strengths of employees fall in the category of 'differentiation'.

When common categories for what inclusion means to them were explored, they were about 'appreciating differences and trying to establish consensus', 'making best use of one's skills to the advantage of the group'. Also, few managers took charismatic role of a leader as a pre-requisite for inclusion as one of them commented, for inclusion to have leader should be charismatic. Another theme which emerged was that 'there should be more tolerance for others point of views'. These descriptions are different from the model of Shore et al. and are important to know what are the significant aspects when it comes to understanding Inclusion in the Indian context.

This study in the Indian scenario extends the already vast research done on inclusion in the western countries. An attempt is made to understand the concept of inclusion and how it is utilised in Indian companies. As per the interview results of diversity officers it can be ascertained that the understanding of inclusion in Indian context is relatively broader as compared to the western context. Apart from western view, ideas of tolerating mistakes and leadership were highlighted in the present study. So, it makes a unique contribution to existing research by moving it onto a global scale. One possible explanation of focus on inclusion may be that in Indian context there is more emphasis on maintaining harmony at the organizational and inter personal levels. To be able to achieve this harmony there is a need for consideration from side of both employer and employee and reciprocation of efforts. This is based on the findings obtained from the study. It has been contended that there is reciprocity when the employers offer support and exhibit trust towards employees, this in turn shapes the overall

perception of inclusion among employees. Charismatic leadership in this study was shown to be a desirable trait possibly because it can provide the employees with the feeling of security and safety in the company which enhances inclusion.

Significance of the Study

The present study is important because it gives an insight into what are the possible advantages of inclusion and what would be the costs if there is exclusion.

It has been recognized world wide by top leaders that inclusion is important for an organization therefore there has been a shift in discussion moving from diversity to inclusion. A lot of research has been done in the areas addressing diversity in the workforce, however it is only recent that the debate has shifted to inclusion (Shore et al., 2011). This study becomes significant as it lends a strong basis which will help firms in understanding what is the concept of inclusion and what is the strategic framework in terms of best practices that could be developed so that organizations become more inclusive. It would help in providing solutions which are customized as per the requirements of diverse employees and aligned with the culture of the company.

Recommendations and Future Scope

- Further in -depth studies which explore different inclusive organizational behaviours and practices need to be conducted. More detailed initiatives that are related to various steps in their journey could be offered.
- There is significant body of research that highlights the impact of different leadership styles on organizational outcomes, however less focus has been laid on diversity, equity and inclusion. Therefore, a dedicated study related to styles of inclusion leaders and challenges faced by them in executing their roles can be carried out. It would be useful to understand whether some of the styles were better able to achieve the objective of workplace inclusion.
- As there is a difference between different kinds of organizations based on the industry they belong to, further studies could explore whether these differences have any contribution in creating an inclusive workplace.
- Future research can study competencies exhibited by global diversity and inclusion officers and this would provide a profile for further executives in this profile. This would also help in inclusion focused recruitments and retention of desirable talent.
- There is a need for a study which reviews transformation of culture with respect to inclusion in comparison to other different types of organizational transformation to be able to ascertain the common issues and differences.
- In addition to providing for explicit behaviours, actions and responses there should be an analysis about how successful the inclusive practices have been after their launch in a phase wise manner. This would help in uncovering the hurdles that lead to exclusion.

Limitations

There were certain limitations with respect to the current study

- All the participants were from limited Indian companies and size of sample was small so the findings and results of the study should be further validated.
- As the interview has used a cross-sectional study design to examine inclusive practices in future a longitudinal study with more quantitative data may be utilised to analyse the outcome of managing inclusion.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

The following interview questions were part of the study.

- How would you define inclusion?
- What practices have you adopted for inclusion?
- Which are your best practices when it comes to promoting inclusion?
- What were the major challenges which you faced while implementing these practices?
- How did you deal with those challenges?
- How would you define key features of an organization which is inclusive?
- Any future suggestions and your opinion on organizational inclusion.

