

## WORKPLACE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION: COMPLIANCE TO EXIGENCY

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**Abstract:** Globalization led tremendous movement of people around the world, resulting into vociferous discussion at the international forums on issues of immigration, assimilation, adjustment and the politics behind and associated with them. Diversity and inclusion has become a sensitive issue today. Workplace in forms are microcosm of a nation, reflecting numerous types of people on the basis of ethnicity, caste, religion, gender, race, sexual orientation, all directed towards a common goal and working under one association. However, we can't say our workplaces truly reflect the salient composition of our country or society we are living in? Successful organizations will be those who are able to imbibe and promote workforce diversity through workforce inclusion. The present paper investigates the significance of inclusion on workforce diversity leading to organizational excellence in the light of previous researches done. The study reveals that various dimensions of diversity are linked with organizational performance in different way. Furthermore, it offers a conceptual framework that reflect the integration of inclusion and diversity for organizational excellence on the basis of available literature that will facilitate the industry practitioners and scholars to devise such diversity initiatives and inclusive practices which will lead to organizational excellence.

**Keywords:** Workforce diversity, inclusion, organizational excellence, conceptual framework.

### INTRODUCTION

Being a part of this Globalized era it is almost inevitable for organizations to resist mobility of workforce. Thus, attracting and retaining the best available human resource talent is the need of the hour (Sharma and Agrawal, 2012). Managers often use to raise a question regarding the significance of managing diversity and as such the impact it has over the organizational performance (Jackson and Joshi, 2004). Every organization desires to excel in their respective field which requires them to be agile in terms of people management in terms of acquainting and making them skilled in, dealing with diversified workforce and believe in the sanctity of inclusion. An organization with diversified workforce if fostered with an inclusive culture tends to make the organization more novel, swift, and in sync with customer's needs and wants. It is observed that annually organizations invest billions of dollars approximately eight billion on managing diversified workforce (Hansen, 2003). From the last few decades, organizations have shifted their focus of efforts from diversity to inclusion. As per the survey carried by the Society for Human Resource Management and Fortune magazine during 2001, approximately 75% of the organizations were involved in one and another form of diversity initiatives and practices.

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In India the concept of workplace diversity has typically started with gender diversity because of the inequality factor that considers that top-notch posts are meant for males. As such, addressing robust gender inclusivity programme, organizations shifted their attention to age diversity and cultural diversity and also inclusion of the differently-abled personnel. Thus, it is imperative to comprehend how composition of workforce impact team performance. It is still divisive to determine whether workplace diversity and inclusion practices will lead to negative or positive effect on organizational outcome. It has been found that for organizations to thrive and survive in this globalized era they have to manage the diversified workforce with inclusive practices (Dessler, 2000). Others found there is no direct link between workforce diversity organizational outcomes, but it is mediated by organizational strategy, commitment from top management, well-organized communication with unbiased treatment and building multifaceted team. It was argued by Jain and Verma (1996) that organizations that give importance to diversity management issues will definitely taste success in this dynamic labor market. Friedman and Amoo (2002) also observed that the knowledge base of organizations can be accelerated by assimilating people with diversified exposure, training and cultural orientation. The basic aim of present paper is to appraise the existing literature on workplace diversity and its impact on organizational excellence. Age, Gender and ethnicity are taken as the dimensions of diversity.

The rationale behind the present paper is to understand workplace diversity and its various dimensions and its transition to inclusion as discussed in the literatures. This is a review based paper in which previously published papers were explored to study the specific purpose. Finally, to propose the areas of further exploration that could be made in the field of workplace diversity and inclusion that would lead to organizational excellence.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

During last many years' organizations are trying to understand and visualize the significance of managing diversified workforce for better team management that lead to organizational efficiency (Jackson and Joshi, 2004). It was empirically tested (Jackson, Joshi, and Erhardt, 2003; Webber and Donahue, 2001) that one cannot automatically reap the benefit of workforce diversity; one has to toil a lot to accrue this benefit in the form of high-end innovation and creativity in the field of strategic decision making for organizational excellence. On the other hand some research shows that diversity at workplace leads to interpersonal-conflict, decline in group cohesiveness leading to high employee turnover (Jackson and Joshi, 2004). Way back in 1993 Cox also stated the same thing that diversity affects the organizational process in many ways ranging from its communication system, sense of creativity and its problem solving approach that is strongly related to organizational performance.

A very interesting research was conducted by Richard in 2000 which empirically tested the impact of ethnic and cultural diversity on firm's performance. The findings were quite fascinating, it was observed that positive and negative impact of these two dimensions were context specific i.e. in the presence of a particular context it has a positive impact on firm's performance while in the absence of context, a negative relationship between cultural diversity and firm outcomes may emerge. In addition to this, the results also throw light on the organizational contexts that may obstruct firm performance. In nut shell, for some organizations diversity may lead to competitive advantage while for others it may be detrimental for its performance outcome. In late 1990s the impact of diversified workforce was not clear at the bottom line as these were not been systematically measured and documented for easy retrieval and use (Robinson and Dechant, 1997). Given the vagueness in the findings that whether or not diversity management practices leads to improved performance there is a need for an exhaustive review to link the different dimensions of diversity research with organizational outcome.

Jayne and Diboye (2004) study focused on diversity and explored that merely having a quantified diversified workforce will not serve the purpose neither it will improve the talent pool nor automatically build a well committed and motivated workforce that will result into increased group and firm performance but systematic inclusion of diversified workforce will give expected results.

### **Unveiling the Concept of Workplace Diversity**

Diversity is broadly classified as both visible and invisible set of dimensions ranging from age, gender, religion, caste, category, and ethnicity as well as physical and mental ability.

A study by Dahm (2003) stated that workplace diversity sparkle a mixed ray of emotions and feelings i.e. at times it create discomfort because of the difference among the individuals and at times brings synergy among people leading to adding value to firm's performance because of the assimilation of these dissimilarity in the form of their unique trait.

Results of past researches have reinforced that diversity within teams and groups leads to both positive and negative effects on the organizational outcome. As such domestic as well as global organizations have realized that to serve their diversified customers they have to design and create such products and services that may attract them to go for repeated purchase decision (Okoro and Washington, 2012). Thus, it is imperative to understand the significance of workforce diversity in attaining organizational objectives. Since last so many year studies have reflected that workplace diversity has its impact on organizational outcome both positive and negative.

### *Positive Side of Workplace Diversity*

Workplace diversity encompasses differences people bring with them in their workplace with respect to age, gender, cultural or ethnic orientation, educational background, experience, etc. Perception towards a particular thing varies from person to person. Diversity of thought is required when we look for creative problem solving approach. In-fact it has been observed in many researches that quality mix of diversified mind at the top management level leads to improved organizational performance. Among all dimensions of diversity, gender diversity is the one, whose presence may lead to increase in firm's performance and image while absence of it may create problems (Kravitz, 2003). It was critically argued that equal representation of females at the top will result into access to those resources that only female employees can bring to the table, ultimately leading to increased firm's performance (Frink, et. al, 2003).

Another type of diversity is, informational diversity which is defined as variation in knowledge bases and outlook that participants bring to the group (Jehn, Northcraft and Neale, 1999). Now a day, organizations are realizing the significance of informational diversity because of advent of project teams or work groups. As such cross functional teams' leads to more innovative, creative and out of the box ideas for critical problems (Harrison, et. al, 1998: Horwitz, 2005). According to Homan, Knippenberg, Kleef, and Dreu, (2007), performance can get a boost if there is diversity in information and perspectives among members of work group, but the point is that the members should believe in the sanctity of diversity of traits both visible and invisible. Diverse group can perform better if they embrace a pro-diversity belief rather than pro-similarity beliefs (Homan et. al, 2007). It has been supported by many researches that heterogeneous teams assimilating minority members were more innovative and creative in generating ideas and unusual alternatives than homogenous teams (Nemeth, 1986). Diversity of educational background and years of association with the company also influence the quality of discussion and debate, that impact the decision making process in a positive way (Simons, Pelled, and Smith, 1999).

Benefits of workplace diversity are not only related with intangible form of organizational outcomes but also with tangible forms like revenue growth, profitability etc. Results show that there exists a positive relationship between type of representation at the top and annual revenues. (Roberson and Jeong, 2007; Weignand 2007). In a study conducted by McKay et. al (2008), it was assessed that whether diversity climate leads to improved or increased sales performance of employees and it has been confirmed by large body of theoretical literature that integrating diverse groups of workforce with various others diverse stakeholders results in improved decision-making pattern, context focused approach towards problems, innovation and creativity which further leads to a competitive advantage

to organizations. However this do not directly relate with benefits to stakeholders (Weigand, 2007).

### **Negative Side of Workplace Diversity**

As diversified workforce brings different set of traits, personality and attitude in the organization which results into positive outcomes that too when such differences are taken as unique traits by other group members, otherwise such differences will lead to negative effects on individual as well as group outcomes, especially racial and gender diversity (Richard and Johnson, 2001). For instance, individuals who differ from majority of their group members tend to have less organizational commitment, more intention to leave, increased tendency for absenteeism, not only this it will results into increased cost of group coordination in terms of communication time and understanding. Although, such effects diminishes with time (Watson, Kumar, and Michaelsen, 1993). But it's always better to have proactive approach by checking the readiness of organizations towards diversity and inclusion issues. This can be done by conducting diversity audits within the organization so as to examine the pulse of diversity supportive environment in terms of recruitment and selection policies, retention strategies.

Organization that are proactive in approach tends to wave-off the impact of biased recruitment promises, feeling of being befooled among minority recruits and some or other form of stereotyping and backlash (Mckay and Avery, 2005). Organizations use to follow either of the two forms of Team composition paradigm. Those who favor similarity-attraction paradigm tends to select group members on the basis of similarity of attributes, for say, age, gender, cultural background, caste, religion are some of the observable dimensions of diversity. Studies reflect that these demographics characteristics of members are generally negatively associated with overall team performance because of reluctance of other members to accept each other's differences as unique traits (Milliken and Martins, 1996; O'Reilly, Caldwell, and Barnett, 1989; Smith et. al., 1994; Wiersema and Bantel, 1992). On the other side those who follow dissimilarity-attraction paradigm tends to have mixed bag of feelings. According to Horwitz, 2005, more the diversified group lower will be the team cohesion because of inbuilt tension and relational conflict. Although it's always not the same sometimes if theses difference were catered properly by way of informational diversity, may lead to synergized group results in the form of more creative and innovative ways of solving problems (Homan, et. al, 2007).

As per the study carried by Pelled, Eisenhardt, and Xin, (1999) it was observed that positive and negative impact of diversity varies according to the various dimensions of diversity, that is diversity on the basis of functional background usually do not have much impact on team performance but gender, age, tenure and race germinate emotional conflict among group members leading to decline in team performance.

### **Unveiling the Concept of Workplace Inclusion**

Inclusion is defined by different researchers in different ways, which lead to disparity in its definition. According to Pelled, Ledford, and Mohrman (1999). Inclusion refers to the degree to which an employee feels included and accepted by others in the group as an insider. On the other hand, Roberson (2006) defined it as full participation and involvement of employees in the management by removing the barriers in growth. Miller (1998) defined it as perception of employees that they are allowed to participate and contribute towards organization goal.

Holvino, Ferdman, and Merrill-Sands (2004) define workplace diversity as an inclusive organization in which the diversity of knowledge and outlook that members bring to the organization that shape the organization's structure and system.

As scholars have started realizing that without the feeling of inclusion the benefit of diversified workforce can't be reaped. But the problem is that there is lack of proper theoretical ground for inclusion and limited empirical research in this growing field. In this line the work of Mor Barak (2000) is remarkable as she conceptualized it and developed a theoretical model of inclusion that define inclusion as feeling of employees as a significant part of the organization that lead to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, employee well being and task accomplishment.

### **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The goal of review of literatures related with diversity and firm performance was to develop a framework that can help link diversity and organizational outcomes in terms of Job satisfaction, OCB, Organizational Commitment and Turnover intention by way of fostering workplace inclusion. The framework presents that for effective management of diversity, inclusion of diverse workforce has to be created by practicing inclusive leadership and practices and fostering inclusive climate within the organization. This conceptual framework is derived from the literature review will provide base to research scholars for further study and will facilitate practitioners to design and implement diversity inclusive practices (See Figure. 1)

### **Integrating Workplace Diversity and Organizational Performance**

Workforce Diversity for organizational success has become an inevitable issue for contemporary business houses. In today's globalized era shortage of talent has become matter of concern, thus diversity at workplace is imperative. Since 1990's both research scholars and practitioners were optimistic about the impact of gender diversity on organizational performance (Cox and Blake, 1991). But, empirical investigation in this line has observed an inconsistent result that its impact can be positive or negative. According to resource-based theory of firm discussed by

Barney (1991) there exist a positive relationship between diversity and performance. But according to Social Identity Theory there exist a negative relationship between workforce diversity and organizational outcomes (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Gender discrimination is often justified by the many individuals on the ground that females are meant for serving the economy in terms of care giver and domestic work (Kossek, Lobel, and Brown, 2005). As such there exist a significant difference in the status of man and women, over which organization should work upon to bring equality among them (Leonard and Levine, 2003).

**Proposition 1:** Gender diversity has a significant impact on Organizational performance.

Workforce demographics are undergoing a paradigm shift resulting in steady increase in the quantity of mature workers in the coming years. According to the *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics* there will be an increment of 36.5% of employees in 2016 in comparison with 2006 within the age group of 55-64. Age diversity refers to the ability of organization to assimilate all different categories of ages within a business environment. Traditionally organizations use to follow the age-distribution system in terms of hiring young people's at the entry level and then growing them to the top by retaining them in the organization. But now because of globalization employee mobility is quite high thus age diversity also becomes inevitable to resist. Review of literature reflects the research on age diversity is much less developed in comparison to gender and ethnic diversity, suggesting the need for developing new paradigms and approaches for studying impact of age diversity on organization. Further, the degree of impact of Age diversity on performance depends upon the type of work carried out by the organization. Thus, companies in which routine works are performed increasing age heterogeneity leads to decline in organizational productivity. Generally, age heterogeneity in itself has a negative effect on individual's overall performance (Atwater, and Feinberg, 2004; DeArmond et. al., 2006; Gonzalez and DeNisi, 2009; Ostroff, Atwater and Feinberg, 2004; Shore et. al.2009).

**Proposition 2:** Age diversity is a negatively related with Organizational performance.

Ethnic diversity is a form of appreciating the differences of individuals. These differences can be in terms of religion, language, culture and race (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005). Multicultural organization is in trend today. Every organization is trying to cultivate greater participation of this multicultural workforce so as to synergize the efforts and extract maximum employee satisfaction and organizational performance. Research in the area of Ethnic diversity has gained momentum in 1990's and is still a researchable area (Milliken and Martins, 1996; Johnson and Joshi, 2004). Studies reveal that a moderate level of ethnic diversity has no effect on group performance or form outcomes in terms of revenue, profitability and market

share. However, with increase in the ethnic diversity of workforce composition performance improves in positive terms (Hoogendoorn, Mirjam van Praag, 2012). It has been observed that ethnic diversity leads to improved team performance because of synergized and complementary effect of diverse pool of knowledge, skills and experience translating into more creative and innovative approach towards work (Alesina and La Ferrara, 2005; Lee. N, 2011; Ozgen, Nijkamp and Po ot, 2011; Richard, 2000; Timmermans et. al., 2011). But, high degree of ethnic diversity leads to germination of conflict and clashes due to social categorization and difficulty in communication and coordination (Lazear, 1999; Morgan and Vardy, 2009).

Thus, on the basis of review of literature we propose that moderate level of Ethnic diversity at workplace has positive impact on organizational performance in terms of productivity, creativity, innovation, revenue and market share.

**Proposition 3:** Ethnic diversity at workplace is positively related with organizational performance.

### ***Integrating Inclusion and Employee Outcomes***

In a study conducted by Ehrhart (2004) it was found that fair treatment of diverse workforce by top management is vital for inclusion to take place. Employee's perception of being accepted in the group is effected by the behavior a leader displays while interacting with the followers (Douglas, Ferris, Buckley, and Gundlach, 2003). A leader whose behavior is in consistent with group values and is focused towards appreciation of diverse membership tends to develop organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior of employees and least intension to leave (Nembhard and Edmonson, 2006; Nishii and Mayer, 2009). When leaders offer equal access to rewards and opportunities to their subordinates, employees develop the sense of inclusion which substantially minimizes the status difference leading to high degree of employee commitment (Douglas et. al. 2003).

**Proposition 4:** Inclusive leadership is positively related with Job Satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior but negatively related with Turnover intentions.

*Inclusive organizational practices* refer to those organizational policies, practices and procedures that maintain and foster the feeling of inclusion among the diversified workforce. Practices such as access to information, communication facilitation, employee participation in decision making, freedom from stereotyping, systematic conflict resolution mechanism are positively related with organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, ultimately resulting in satisfaction towards job and least intension to leave (Bilimoria et. al., 2008; Janssens and Zanoni, 2007; Mor Barak, 2005; Nishii, 2010; Roberson, 2006).



**Proposition 5:** Inclusive organizational practices is positively related with Job Satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior but negatively related with Turnover intentions.

An organizations climate reflects the culture it carries which is one of the important elements in building corporate image in the eyes of all stakeholders. Perception of employees that whether their organization values their contribution regardless of the visible or invisible dimensions of diversity is known as diversity climate (Gonzalez and DeNisi, 2009; Kossek and Zonia, 1993; Leslie and Gelfand, 2008; McKay, Avery, and Morris, 2009; Mor Barak et. al., 1998; Thomas and Ely, 1996). Climate of Diversity also embrace those justice-related events that balance power and autonomy across work groups and develops the feeling of inclusion or exclusion of diversified workforce (Kossek and Zonia, 1993; Mor Barak et. al., 1998).

Findings of Sheppard, Lewicki, and Minton (1992) and Simons and Roberson, (2003) revealed that that work group perception towards diversity climate in the form of equity in treatment, sharing of information and participation in the management (Nishii, 2010) leads to positive organizational outcomes ranging from more organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior and least turnover intentions. It was also observed that inclusion and exclusion is significantly dependent on job satisfaction (Acquavita et. al. 2009; Mor Barak et. al., 2006; Mor Barak and Levin, 2002).

**Proposition 6:** Inclusive Climate is positively related with Job Satisfaction, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behavior but negatively related with Turnover intentions.

## **FUTURE DIRECTION**

From the culmination of various researches conducted in the field of diversity it has been observed that there exist inconsistency in results and there are certain loop holes in the past diversity literatures which can be removed by further conceptualizing the group diversity and workplace inclusion. Previous diversity studies have mostly ignored the impact of multiple demographic characteristics of individuals for say age, gender and race on group performance, which is in-fact very vital for assessing the impact of group composition on working system and organizational outcomes (Jehn and Bezrukova 2004). Previously in most of the researches one single theoretical lens were used to study the impact of team diversity on performance which should be replaced with more process-based, conditional paradigms of team diversity. Moreover, many researchers have studied the concept of concept of team diversity from one-dimensional static perspective which cannot accurately measure the dynamics of team process, nature of interaction, dependency and interdependency of team process, complex and varying nature of interaction among members and

units. The actual effect of team diversity on organizational as well as individual performance can be measured through longitudinal studies (Harrison et. al., 1998; Horwitz, 2005; Jehn and Bezrukova, 2004; Webber and Donahue, 2001). Impact of diversity and degree of inclusiveness among individuals varies with the size and type of organization. In an organization that foster an inclusive climate, members belong to either majority or minority group tends to feel that their differences are accepted as their unique traits and feel dignified which ultimately results into decreased instances of resistance and conflicts. Thus, it is important that further research should encompass inclusion at workplace by taking into account the opinions of both the majority and minority members to so that a holistic picture of an inclusive climate within an organization can be presented (Davidson and Proudford, 2008).

Traditional approach towards diversity and inclusion issues was confined to just qualitative terms i.e. through recruitment and hiring of diverse employees. However, later on it was observed that mere numerical representation will not serve the purpose, thus more research is required towards investigating the inclusion component in the organization by assessing the organizational climate, policies and practices in terms of equal employment opportunity, top management philosophy and values (Avery, McKay, Wilson, and Tonidandel, 2007; Gelfand, Nishii, Raver, and Schneider, 2005; Ragins and Cornwell, 2001; Scheid, 2005; Shore et. al., 2009; Wasserman et. al., 2008). Further, significance of inclusive leadership cannot be undervalued as leaders are the one who are executioners of these policies. Previously less attention have been given towards practices that foster inclusion and major emphasis were given on the practices that promote discrimination at workplace. Future research can focus on empirically testing the relationship between inclusive climate, leadership and practices and organizational outcomes. (Dipboye and Colella, 2005; Man and Lam, 2003).

## **CONCLUSION**

Modern organizations are rethinking and revamping the diversity and inclusive programs to build a competent and engaged diverse workforce because nowadays it is not just compliance but a regulatory requirement for sustainable growth. Diverse workforce empowers each other by bringing innovation and increased level of performance. Research findings have reflected that presence of diverse workforce will not reap the benefit, inclusiveness among employees is required. The conceptual framework presented in this paper will provide base for future research exploring the impact of diversity and inclusion on organizational outcomes. As we know with the advent of globalization diversity and inclusivity are here to stay. Thus, bring clarity in the area of understanding and promoting workplace inclusion is required (Ely and Thomas, 2001). Further previous researches majorly focused on the relationship between diversity and organizational outcomes but future research

should focus on empirically testing the relationship between workforce inclusion and organizational excellence.

In contemporary organizational theory, the term diversity is often portrayed as a “double-edged weapon”, that is if diversified workforce are managed and coordinated well will give positive organizational outcomes, on the other hand if they are discriminated on the basis of their specific traits will lead to conflict and declining performance. Thus, organizations must audit their human resource practices and policies so as to assess their readiness towards being an inclusive workplace, that will further lead to organizational excellence.

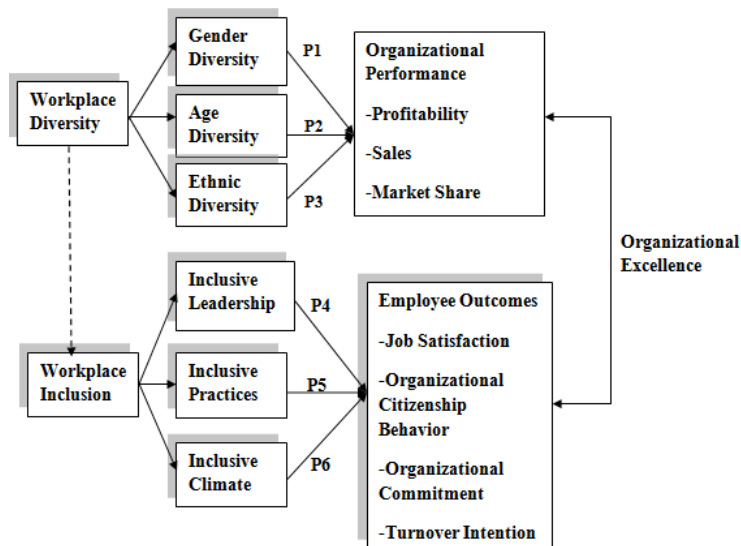


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

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