

Role of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Workplace

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ABSTRACT

The three closely linked values--diversity, equity, and inclusion, adopted by organization integrates people of different abilities, races, ethnicities, religion, gender and sexual orientation. The objective is to treat all employees with respect, listen to their ideas, value their contributions and provide equal opportunities to all for growth and advancement. The term diversity, when used in discourse relates itself to inclusion which as a philosophy, cannot be discussed meaningfully unless it is mentioned in the context of equity. If the workplace is inclusive it means that it understands, recognizes, accepts and respects diversity and embodies it so that each individual member of the society can achieve their full potential cultivating a sense of belongingness at large. Companies are better able to respond to challenges, win top talent and meet the needs of different customer keeping DEI initiatives in mind. Over the past few years, leaders have taken strides to strengthen these values into their cultural practices and policies creating a respectful work environment to set the tone. It is diversity that brings in the advocacy for equity and justice for every individual in a group irrespective of their abilities, social status, religion, class, caste and so on and so forth.

KEYWORD--values, philosophy, belongingness, challenges, equity, justice.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Organization now-a-days are driven by the value of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) which has become an integral part of their culture. It is something of a buzzword in today's world. However, an organization should not look at diversity as a trend but should understand its depth and value that a truly diverse and inclusive organization brings in form of improving happiness, productivity and competitiveness in the industry. Diversity relates itself to a variety of perspectives represented in a team, be it racial and social issues, all being the facets of a larger conversation. While inclusion provides every individual an equal opportunity to access education, resources, opportunities, or any other treatment based on the qualities that make them unique, in an environment where everyone feels safe, respected and empowered to succeed. It's all about freedom of expression of one's true self with a culture in which a mix of people come to work together, feel comfortable, confident to be themselves and work in a way that suits them to deliver business needs. This ensures that everyone feels valued and importantly adds value to business to maintain equity in terms of fairness in providing equal opportunities to all based on individual needs and group goals.

1.1 TYPES OF DIVERSITY

Different types of diversity exist in an organization. It can be--

- *Internal diversity*--Any trait or characteristic for e.g. sex, race, ethnicity, gender, nationality or physical ability that a person is born with is internal diversity.
- *External diversity*--Any attribute, experience or circumstance that helps shape a person's identity but is not something that they were born with for e.g. marital status, religion, appearance, etc.
- *Organizational diversity*--Employees in organization perform different jobs or functions, have difference in work experience or seniority is what constitutes organizational diversity.
- *Worldview diversity*--Worldview diversity encompasses an innovative and inclusive work environment that is forward focused and influences the way we interpret and view the world.

1.3 WHAT IS DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT WORKPLACE

Though diversity and inclusion are different terms but are actually inseparable and go hand in hand. At diverse and inclusive workplace, employees feel equally feel involved, empowered and trusted in all fields of life. The "all fields" part is important, since if the employees don't feel that their ideas, presence or contribution are

truly valued or taken seriously by their organization, they will eventually leave. Inclusion at workplace is also the most important keys to retention. When employees trust that they and their colleagues will be treated fairly they are more likely to look forward to work with a feeling of pride and would wish contribute more to their workplace. Organization that believes in cultivating an inclusive culture will not only help attract a diverse set of talent but also help retain its workforce.

1.4 BENEFITS OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT WORKPLACE

Organizations accommodating people from diverse background perform better and ensure--

- *Increased creativity and innovation*--A diverse workforce brings creativity with fresh ideas and unique approaches to face challenges with innovative solutions.
- *Broader range of skills and knowledge*--Employees possess a wide array of skills, knowledge and expertise enhancing their ability to adapt, learn and excel.
- *Improved decision making*--Enriched decision-making is possible due to comprehensive analysis of problem with multiple viewpoints.
- *Enhanced problem solving*--Diverse teams can effectively tackle complex problems using critical thinking with more robust and effective solution.
- *Expands market reach*--A diverse workforce can better understand and cater to customer needs offering a variety of products and services.
- *Increased employee engagement and retention*--Employees feel respected and valued for their unique contribution which boosts their morale, satisfaction and engagement, ultimately increasing retention rate and reducing employee turnover.
- *Improved financial performance*--Companies that are leaders in DEI initiatives display improved financial performance by generating higher revenue.
- *Increased team performance*--When employees feel far more open and engaged, with agile thinking it has a positive impact on team innovation and performance.

1.5 WAYS TO PROMOTE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Changing the culture of workplace is challenging and organization generally shy away from it because they do not understand how to begin and are not sure whether they're doing it right. If the previous initiatives to implement diversity have failed, it may decide that such initiatives don't work. Here are some of the ways to make workplace to be a more diverse and inclusive one--

- Change hiring practices and hire talent from all backgrounds.
 - Provide space to employees, make sure that people feel included and represented at work to maintain group feeling.
 - Organization should focus on inclusive leadership and make a decision that embodies the values of the organization.
 - Be transparent in your efforts, ask for help, conduct regular meetings, take feedback but never try to build diversity on your own as one person can't see or fix everything by themselves.
 - One needs to be vulnerable by asking people to contribute their ideas to the discussion, not only to identify the most popular ones but also to generate the best idea.
 - Undertake continuous research on the potential benefits from a diverse workplace where employees would feel happy, wish to stay longer and produce more when they feel respected and valued.
 - Learn to innovate and bring social changes in long term through these initiatives.
- Generally people understand diversity on a surface level that is visible. But many don't understand that it is a secret weapon for innovative and creative environment. So organization should cultivate deep-level diversity to survive the intense competition by--
- Hiring a diverse talent.
 - Sharing leadership experiences in the form of storytelling.
 - Embracing positive diversity by taking a stand on social issues like racism, discrimination, sexism, prejudice and harassment.
 - Support the person as a whole since people bring their whole selves to work as no one is just "one thing".
 - Attach employees to mentors to facilitate larger conversation geared towards changing organizational behaviour.
 - Creates fertile ground for idea generation, problem-solving and innovation to ensure productivity improvement.

1.6 WHY IS WORKPLACE EQUITY SO IMPORTANT

Besides focussing on diversity and inclusion, equity at workplace is equally important and hinges on equality, openness and belongingness. Till date there is struggle to create business that is completely free from bias and discrimination. Though equity and equality sound similar but the implementation of the terms has different outcomes. Equality refers to when every person or group is given the same resources or opportunities. But people generally come from different background with unequal access to opportunities or resources. Besides this all employees never begin from the same starting point. So creating a balance between equity and equality is really difficult. There is no one-step solution to create workplace equity since it is a time-consuming activity that requires real commitment. The bottom line in organization is workplace equity which means investing in employees and widening the pool of workforce to provide diverse leadership in the future. Here are some suggestions on how to get started on equity initiatives--

- Maintaining transparency in organization by sharing wage data with employees.
- Drive awareness around equity at workplace by supporting diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives.
- Accommodate employees from diverse backgrounds equally.
- Avoid racial and gender-based wage inequality at priority.
- Share targets and company's progress with employees.
- Prioritize equitable representation among the workforce.
- Ensure that the team meets every month to review the company's equity targets through the feedback received.
- Promote inclusive leadership at the workplace.

1.7 HR DEPARTMENT ROLE IN IMPLEMENTING DEI STRATEGY

For employers and people management professionals alike, the biggest challenge is to understand where to start as the process is no quick fix. A lot of people may immediately jump to figure out how to make their company more diverse, but you can't underestimate the importance of inclusion and equity. Without these two pieces, true diversity cannot be achieved. One needs to understand the role played by the three elements to create an appropriate working environment. It is not an easy task as no single HR professional will be able to address the issue of DEI for a company because you don't have all the perspectives. HR professionals play a key role in developing and implementing DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) initiatives. This includes--

- *Shaping organizational culture*--These professionals work with leaders to define company values and goals around diversity and inclusion. They can also help create policies and procedures to support these goals.
- *Developing DEI strategy and framework*--This involves understanding the organization's current state, identifying areas for improvement, setting measurable goals and developing a strategic plan for improvement.
- *Managing DEI initiatives*--HR professionals are responsible for recruitment and hiring, designing employee policies, communicating goals to help set the tone for company culture.
- *Producing DEI reports*--It is also the responsibility of these professionals for generating DEI reports, which form the basis of improvement in weak areas.
- *Generating technology based solutions*--HR professionals can also promote the use of technology to improve and refine its DEI initiatives. Technology-based solutions can be used as an important tool in building a more diverse, equitable, inclusive and transparent organization.
- *Acting as a bridge to fill the gap between upper level and lower level management*--The HR department creates a bridge between the levels of organizational hierarchy, communicating expectations from top to bottom at workplace.
- *Initiate training and development activities*--It is the responsibility of HR professionals to undertake training and development activities to implement DEI initiatives at workplace.
- *Help generate and update metrics for performance evaluation*--Metrics are often required for measurement of performance. HR professionals come to rescue if the metrics become outdated or are not applicable on diverse employees modifying the metrics to fit the requirement of workplace.

1.8 EVERYONE MATTERS IN A "FOR ALL" DEI WORKPLACE

The "*for all*" approach is critical for success as it believes in creating a consistently high-trust diverse and inclusive workplace with equity for everyone, no matter who they are or what they do for the organization. The leaders following "*for all*" approach help overcome challenges to create a workspace where employees feel they belong to, that their unique talent matters and their individual needs will be taken care of. Leaders tap into collective intelligence using the technology and try to maximize the potential of every member. Organization

needs human judgment, empathy, passion and creativity from all their employees to realize the full potential of the era's new technology, increase agility and inventiveness to address the challenges of an increasingly demanding marketplace. When companies experience this very human act of acknowledgment of inclusion, dignity and compassion that is when they become "for all" workplace. And those that remain "for some" workplace risk losing money, with reduced earnings and falling behind their competitors. Only companies that compete using "for all" strategy cultivate tremendous value and thrive in the long term.

II. CONCLUSION

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is a conceptual framework that is integral to a company's success and promotes the fair treatment and full participation of people from various background. It encompasses the symbiotic relationship, philosophy and culture of acknowledging, embracing, supporting and accepting all individuals to achieve the objectives of the organization. Diversity assumes the value and respect in a social group by establishing positive inclination to inclusivity while fostering a feeling of oneness and a sense of belongingness. Along with diversity, inclusive workplace provides a place where diversity among learners is appreciated and considered to be a resource rather than a problem; where employees from diverse background are valued for what they are and are made to feel safe enough to express whatever they know, without fear or discrimination; and where the training-learning methods are culturally responsive to meet the different learning needs and interest of employees from diverse background. It makes employees feel needed in their role, team and the organization and when the organization knows how to truly embrace value and make use of diversity it can respond to challenges in a better way. The more diverse voices you have in the organization, the better are the outcomes, purely from a business standpoint. Employees bring a unique framework to the job that enables them to approach problems differently and propose unique solutions. When leaders know how to draw out diverse perspectives, build on them and be inclusive of them they get better ideas, can easily identify blind spots and develop new approach for problem solving.

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