Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Strategies and Initiatives in the Workplace by IT companies like TCS & Infosys

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Abstract:

Organizations these days are prioritizing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) efforts as this diverse workgroup can prove to be a boon to their business. A diverse workforce calls for the need for having effective DE&I strategies and policies. This is exactly the point where the need arises for the organizations to come up with effective and innovative ideas and strategies to treat the workforce fairly and include them in the organization's culture.

This research aims to study the concepts of diversity, equity and inclusion respectively and why they are important factors at workplace. It also focuses on developing and managing diversity, equity and inclusion strategies and throws light upon the initiatives undertaken by companies thriving in IT sector like Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys Ltd. to promote diversity, equity and inclusion in their organization.

Keywords: **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, workforce, workplace**

I. Introduction:

Corporate world in today's time is very dynamic. It is globally connected by technological aids. Having said that, one can easily comment on how diverse the corporate world is. People of different cultural backgrounds, genders, ages, religions, sexual orientations, economic and social status work together to improve their future and also contribute in organization's growth and prosperity. This shows the diversity of the employees that prevail within the organization. Thus, it becomes a very crucial task and a very important responsibility of the organization to respectfully be inclusive of all the diverse individuals and to make sure that they are treated fairly and equally at the workplace.

The organizations all over the world highly focus on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) nowadays. DE&I refers to the strategies, policies and programs that promote the participation and

representation of different groups of individuals, thus respecting their individuality. DE&I is an integral aspect to create and maintain a harmonious, healthy and successful environment at the workplace, based on the principle that everyone can prosper on a personal and professional front.

As the workforce of an organization plays a very important role in its growth and success, DE&I ensures to effectively and harmoniously bind this diverse workforce and motivate them to prosper. Individuals from different backgrounds having varied life experiences helps in providing new insights and perspectives that in return helps to enhance the processes. When employees feel seen, heard and respected for their unique qualities, it creates a sense of security and loyalty in them towards the organization.

Effective DE&I strategies and their successful application in business help the organization's image and brand to shine in good light. People look forward to work with corporations that believe that every human regardless of the diversity, should be treated respectfully and to be given the opportunities to grow and evolve at work. These strategies help immensely to control and manage the rate and cost of attrition. Constructive DE&I strategies plays important role in strengthening the trust that customer put in the organization.

II. Review of Literature:

Ankita Saxena (2014) has described workforce diversity as attributes and characteristics that are similar and different between two individuals in terms of physical abilities and disabilities, gender, sexuality, race, cultural background. The difference is even in the perspective and mindset of two individuals. The main aim of this research study was to analyze diversity at workplace and its effect on the productivity of the workforce. The researcher says that hiring diverse workforce is need of the hour and is easy compared to managing it. Poor management of diverse workforce will cause problems for HR professionals and they should formulate policies to tackle and resolve any conflicts that arise due to workforce diversity. The policies that include employee engagement, mentoring and training programs help sensitize employees with the issue of diversity and it can be implemented to manage diversity.

Neharika Vohra and Nisha Nair (2015) has emphasized importance of diversity and inclusion. They say that the employees should be appreciated and included by the organization. Workplace inclusion needs to go beyond diversity based recruitment and more emphasis needs to be put on acknowledging the biases both intentional and unintentional that may obstruct in embracing and homogenizing the diverse workforce. Through the results, it was found that the dynamics of

diversity and inclusion are still not clear in the Indian corporate scenario. Thus, there is a huge scope and gap that the Indian organizations need to achieve and fill in to promote diversity and inclusion at workplace in an effective and healthy manner.

S.C. Kundu and Archana Mor (2017) has focused on the objective to study viewpoint of the employees on diversity and its effects on performance of the organization. From the responses received from 402 Indian IT professionals, the results showcase that irrespective of their gender and category, the employees understand the influence of diversity on organization and requirement of diversity strategies, thereby believing in the need for effective diversity management. The employees also acknowledge organization's assistance for diverse workforce through fair employment schemes. The results also encourage the organization to effectively communicate various goals and policies concerned with diversity to the employees in well-organized manner. Organizations need to inculcate and promote an inclusive, acceptance mindset and raise awareness among the employees regarding various diversity issues by emphasizing on providing training focused on sensitizing and understanding of these issues.

Krithi Ks and Ramesh Pai (2021) in their research has described the benefits of diverse workforce for the organizations as it helps in broadening their mastery and perspective. They further explain categorization of workforce diversity in to three categories – primary, secondary and tertiary. A positive and effective workforce diversity management enables to run the business smoothly and also impacts employee performance positively. They conclude by saying they employers should always prioritize and evaluate their diversity and inclusion policies to maintain healthy and positive decorum at workplace that would eventually lead to prosperity of both the employees and the organization. These policies are widely used by various organizations to achieve competitiveness and promote organization's sustainability.

Jeff Waldmen in his blog post conveys that an organization that is diverse and inclusive empowers, allows and encourages its employees to perform to their maximum potential which in turn increases and enhances the employee engagement within that organization. He says that employee engagement can be representation of how emotionally committed an employee is to his or her company and its mission and goals, and a company that practices effective diversity and inclusion methods definitely witnesses high level of emotional commitment from its employees.

III. Objectives of the study:

1. To study steps involved in developing & managing diversity, equity and inclusion strategies.

2. To study the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion and the challenges faced.

3. To study diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives taken by TCS.

4. To study diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives taken by Infosys.

IV. Developing and Managing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) strategies and the Steps involved:

Employers leverage diversity, equity and inclusion efforts to meet regulatory requirement as well as to improve the base line by having a more varied, fair, unbiased and all-inclusive human resource. There are four basic stages in developing DE&I policies. They are as follows:

1. Data collection and analysis to evaluate the need for change

2. Creating strategy that is aligned with the organization's goals

3. Implementation of the strategy

4. Evaluation and auditing the strategy on a regular basis

These primary phases are further broken down into nine action steps that organization can undertake to formulate and develop DE&I strategies. The nine steps are as follows:-

1. **Compilation of data:** Collecting and compiling the data of the workforce from the existing HRIS system and through surveys, gives a clear picture to the employer of how diverse is the workforce compared to the market and understand the internal policies for equity and recognizing the areas of worry or new trends. Employers can conduct personality tests or surveys including open ended questions that would help to collect data of employees' life experiences and other information that employees would want to share. The organization may outsource the means for data collection or utilize other ways to gather information as the employees may not be comfortable sharing some personal details like sexual orientation, religion, etc.

2. **Identifying areas of problems and/or needs:** Employers should start with top-level evaluation of socio-economic factors like age, gender, racial representation, etc. and then move on into in-depth research of location, division, job title, and more. Extra data gathered from the workforce can offer assistance in recognizing other zones of concerns. Employees' perception and outlook may or may not be similar to the outcome of the survey conducted. In the event that they are similar, at that point the employer contains a clearer way to what alter is required; in case not, the organization may wish to conduct focus group to gain better understanding of the issue.

3.   **Identifying and eliminating practices or policies affecting DE&I:** Employers must find out if there are any hurdles hindering the hiring process and opportunities or in including people from diverse statistics groups. Organizations must then consider whether there is a need to revamp or amend any of these practices or policies.

4.   **Recognizing and determining business goals:** The next step is identifying how diversified, unbiased and all-inclusive workforce can assist in accomplishing business goals that are in alignment with organization's strategy. The organization must set particular objectives related to DE&I based on the organization's strategic goals.

5.   **Ensuring support of management to the DE&I initiatives:** Senior level management must get on board and support DE&I initiatives that align with the organization's goals and objectives. Another assignment is to recognize how management will be held responsible for supporting and locks in within DE&I activities. Organization can build team of employees from different levels with obvious leadership skills. The team is entrusted with actualizing the objectives characterized within the past step and advancing DE&I within the work environment.

6.   **Executing the strategies:** The employer must come up with a plan of action to execute these strategies by setting practical objectives and commencing with the factors that have prominent business benefits or that are easily attainable to boost the implementation of strategies.

7.   **Communicating the strategies:** Employers must recognize distinctive shareowners of their organizations and plan messages for each shareowner to notify, guide, attract and empower as fitting. People perceive information differently and thus it is crucial for each individual to get continuous stream of messages of communication around the strategies. The communication arrangement should include official presentation and all accessible media platforms as well as social media. Emails and intranet too can be effectively used for communication. The organization must utilize success testimonials to associate DE&I strategies to its own strategic goals and objectives.

8.   **Evaluate and publicize results:** It is crucial to evaluate the outcomes after implementing DE&I initiatives. Results such as improved representation of identified category of individuals or

enhanced employee survey results should be recorded. Other outcomes such as better employee retention and public acknowledgement such as awards can moreover show an organization is performing in its DE&I activities. The outcomes of these activities should be conveyed at all levels to illustrate the return on venture and added value to the organization.

9.   **Audit and modify:** The needs and the circumstances of the employees constantly keep changing thus there is a need to review and re-evaluate the DE&I strategies accordingly. The organization must formulate and develop policies and techniques to review DE&I strategies and objectives from time to time basis. Organization must take feedback from the employees on the efforts taken in consideration of DE&I strategies that are implemented.

This process of DE&I strategy formulation should be conducted periodically so that the organization stays up-to-date with the diverse workforce of their organization and implement new measures if necessary.

V. Importance of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion:

Organizations actively implementing DE&I strategies and policies put a message across that they accept and welcome people for the unique individual that they are. This creates a sense of belongingness and security among the employees.

Organizations that have effective DE&I initiatives in place attract a large pool of talented and skilled individuals. People want to work with organizations that not only value their hard work but also their individuality. Nobody likes to be told to change themselves or are not treated respectfully and fairly if they want to hold the job. This is unethical and a violation of human rights. Practicing DE&I helps in uplifting and empowering the identifying groups. They are given a fair chance to showcase their talent and skills and progress further in their lives both at professional and personal level.

According to a Glassdoor survey, 32% of job seekers said that they would not apply for a job at a place where the rate of diversity is very low. Diversity at workplace is also a deciding factor for the members of LGBTQ+ community. Around 41% of the job seekers who are from LGBTQ+ community said that diversity is one of the important factors for them while applying for a job.

The employee retention rate at such organizations is high as well as people value to work for a company that values and appreciates them. Effective implementation of DE&I initiatives boost

employee morale and motivation level. The employees are committed to give their best to the tasks assigned. Employees feel safe to put forward their opinions and ideas thereby helping the organization to gain different perspectives and work deliberately in the same. The employee turnover rate and cost is reduced drastically in organizations that practice DE&I. The cost of hiring process and training cost that the company would have to bear if the attrition rate was high is now under control as retention rate is high.

Organizations that practice DE&I come across a company that is absolutely against discrimination. This helps in creating a positive brand image in the market that would be an edge over the competitors. Such a company attracts loyal customers and shareholders as well.

VI. Challenges faced while practicing Diversity, Equity & Inclusion at workplace

As there are several benefits of DE&I initiatives, there are certain challenges as well that a company faces while implementing these initiatives.

Resistance to change is the biggest challenge faced when implementing DE&I initiatives. Employees may object to the new strategies as they are now used to the old pattern and routines. But this challenge can be overcome by the management being persistent and providing necessary means for the employees to cope up and be comfortable with the change. Communication issues are one of the challenges that companies face while practicing DE&I. People coming from diverse culture, background, age, gender, etc. work together. Therefore misunderstandings are bound to happen because of which conflicts arise.

The challenge of stereotyping and prejudices still prevail thereby hindering the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion. Such behaviour may go unnoticed and if not brought into notice at the earliest would lead to a toxic work environment. Tackling such behaviour is necessary so that it does not impact on the business. Diverse workforce is surely a boon to the organization but can also prove to be a curse in some cases. With too many ideas and opinions from different individuals, it could be very difficult to narrow down to a few opinions and finally choose the right opinion that is the best for that given moment and problem. This obstacle can slow down the progress rate of a project. Lack of internal groups that are focused on particular themes can also hinder implementation of DE&I strategies.

VII a. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiatives by TCS

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) values its multi-dimensional and diverse workforce that builds an unbiased workplace environment for everyone. Their DE&I structure is a unit of their LeaD

program which stands for Leadership and Diversity. Their DE&I strategies are the core of their business. Their LeaD programme has evolved over the years and has advanced to segment based approach, identifying numerous aspects of diversity and inclusion such as LGBTQ+ inclusion, gender inclusion, inclusion of individual with disabilities and racial inclusion.

The motto of TCS is inclusion without exception and is propelled by five characteristics – Representation, Enablement, Engagement, Development and Ecosystem. They promote diversified identity groups for inclusion of different gender, person with disability, person for LGBTQ+ community, people from different race and ethnicity.

With gender inclusion, TCS aims to create a healthy and fair workplace environment for all genders, while supporting their abilities and capacity to excel. With LGBTQ+ inclusion, TCS focuses on developing a psychologically safe space where the employees from this community fell safe at work, Inclusion of people with disability prioritizes in abolishing the stigma and prejudices around disability by providing accessible opportunities and knowledge. TCS aims to focus on enhancing the communication and collaboration by breaking the cultural barriers by including individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds in their workforce. TCS with their inclusion strategies for diverse racial and ethnic groups gives across a message that all are provided with equivalent opportunities to knowledge, development, representation, and career advancement irrespective of their race, ethnic community, religion, caste and nationality.

At TCS, various voluntary groups are present where the employees get a chance to voice their views and concerns. These groups are called Employee Resource Groups (ERG) that work with key objectives of creating a safe and secure space for the employees to be their true version at workplace, providing a platform to the communities to contribute to the company's DE&I strategies and initiatives through inter and multi-functional teams, creating and developing learning and development initiatives to facilitate with comprehensive and accessible resources to all.

'Network of Outstanding Women (NOW)', an ERG at TCS, was started in March 2020 to provide the women employees with a support system, to associate, learn and develop by helping and assisting each other in both personal and professional ways.

Another initiative taken by TCS is 'QOLORS', an ERG for the employees from the LGBTQ+ community. QOLORS was started in 2017 with an intention to provide a forum where employees from LGBTQ+ community and those not from the community to come together, share their beliefs

and views, understand and suggest more ways to practice inclusion of LGBTQ+ at workplace. This community enables to create safe and secure environment for the LGBTQ+ folks at workplace.

ENABLE, ERG for people with disability helps in providing a network for people to voice their concerns, share their experience and connect with others. This focus group was launched in December 2017 with the purpose to provide safe and healthy work environment with people with disability.

UNO parenting is a focus group that emphasizes the challenges and victories that comes with single parenting. With the objectives of eliminating stereotypes about single parenting and to create awareness and provide means and resources for mental and emotional support, this forum was founded in May 2021 which helps single parents and allies to educate, motivate and empower themselves as well as others.

BRIDGE a focus group started in August 2021 helps in bridging the gaps between people of different age groups. This ERG works with the aim of embracing individuals from all age groups and their life experience and views that will help in developing prosperous relations and learn from one another.

Apart from the Employee Resource Groups, the management team of TCS have taken various other initiatives in their organization to inculcate and develop a workplace culture that is diverse, equitable and inclusive. The management constantly works on raising awareness and creating an all-inclusive workplace where employees feel valued and respected. Their objective is to change the perception and mind-set of individuals and support them in overcoming their limiting and contradicting beliefs and views with respect to inclusion.

Some of the DE&I initiatives taken by TCS are discussed below.

1. Working with Pride is a campaign where pride month is celebrated. Employees working at various locations of the organizations are connected and engaged via awareness seminars and sessions on sensitizing the topic.
2. iExcel – an initiative taken to coach women at middle and senior level having high potential to take up leadership roles.
3. Web based training programs are provided to the employees to raise awareness among the employees around DE&I.
4. nWin program gives employees an opportunity to look for direction, advice and counselling from the leaders at senior level.

5. Be – Inspired is an initiative taken to motivate and captivate the young pioneers to be familiar with TCS history of inclusion from the get go. This initiative is meant to inspire and empower the associates to aim for leadership roles by exhibiting role models in the company.

6. Di-a-log is a newsletter started in June 2019 that acknowledge and praise workforce diversity and inclusion in TCS.

VII b. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Initiatives by Infosys

With the motto of 'Respecting Each Other', Infosys strive to provide its employees a harassment and discrimination free workplace culture and environment. As an equitable employer, all the hiring decisions are made based on the merit and requirement of the business. Infosys act in accordance with all the laws barring harassment or discrimination against any candidate or existing employee.

The workforce of Infosys comprises of 39% of women employees. Infosys offer leadership training programs to women. #IamTheFuture is one such program. This year long training program which is partnership with Stanford GSB offers opportunity for all round development to the women in leadership positions working at all their global locations. #RestartwithInfosys provides opportunity to women who have taken a break from corporate world to start working again and move forward in their career. Orbit Next is a program specially curated for women in the field of technology. This program offers development trainings, technological trainings and helps in connecting and learn from other victorious experts across all the offices of Infosys.

Infosys takes care of its women employees who are expecting a child /children. Infosys maternity guide offers women guidelines to navigate through this crucial phase of life. Through their Infy app, Infosys encourages their women employees to stay connected, up-to-date and motivated during maternity period. Mom's Net is an initiative implemented for women returning from maternity leave with well-maintained workstations and safe spaces for lactation. Day care facilities are also provided for parents who are looking for child care facilities in close vicinities of their home.

IPRIDE is the ERG at Infosys for the employees from LGBTQ+ community and for people who support them. The three main objectives of IPRIDE are:

1. Making the workplace and its environment inclusive and secure for the employees

2. Raising awareness and advocating on different sexual orientation and gender identities

3. Nurturing an all-inclusive workplace by implementing non – discriminatory schemes

#AllyforChange program is curated to sensitize other employees thereby helping in building a strong base of allies and inclusive workforce. Healthcare Insurance Plan is offered to the employees working in India to cover their partners (same sex, civil or domestic).

Infybility – an ERG at Infosys aims to deliver secure and accessible work environment to the people with disability. It focuses on particular requirements concerning with recruitment and selection, engagement, learning and development and retention of employees with disability by nurturing inclusivity where knowledge base and skillset of the employees is acknowledged and valued. Infybility also takes active participation in formulating DE&I policies within the organization.

Infosys encourages its employees to take up cross cultural skills development training program that offers a chance to recognize their cultural preference and style of approach which focuses on important cultural gaps that may lead to possible communication and cooperation errors and allowing the participants to traverse options to eliminate these errors while maintaining cultural appropriateness. Culture Café promotes interaction within the employees by encouraging them to share the stories of their culture and experience. Culture chat encourages employees to interact with other employees at different location and gain better understanding of different culture and business space.

VIII. Conclusion:

We live in a diverse world thus it is inevitable to work with people coming from diverse groups and lifestyles. Organizations understand the importance of having a diverse workforce and are coming up with different ideas and strategies to provide fair opportunities and include this diverse workforce into their organizational culture. As the organizations are becoming global, it becomes more important for the organizations to curate strategies and actively practice diversity, equity and inclusion.

It has been seen that organizations practicing DE&I are able to attract a good pool of diverse and talented candidates that value the organization for its efforts with respect to diversity and inclusion. It also provides the company an edge over its competitors. Employees appreciate being valued and respected for being their authentic self. Thus they appreciate working for organizations promoting

DE&I. It boosts employee engagement and employee retention in the organization. Working with diverse set of individuals ensures creative and innovative ideas to grow the business.

While there are many benefits of DE&I, it also has its own challenges such as conflicts arising due to misunderstanding in communication, employees resisting change as they are used to the routine and culture within the organizations, conflicts of ideas, toxic work environment due to prevailing prejudices and stereotypes are some of the few that need to be tackled and handled effectively to implement DE&I strategies efficiently.

IT companies like TCS and Infosys are taking great initiatives to make their diverse workforce more equitable and all-inclusive. They have effective inclusion strategies that cater to the need and requirements of the identified groups. Training programs, webinars and sessions are conducted to create awareness on these topics. Means for effective and smooth communication and interaction are provided to the employees.

It can be concluded by saying that diversity is important and if treated in right equitable and inclusive manner is a blessing for the organization.

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