LINKING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TO EMPLOYEE OUTCOMES: EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

KANUPRIYA SHEKHAR[1] and Dr. SANJAY SRIVASTAVA[2]

[1]Research Scholar, SLM MRIIRS. Email: shekharkanupriya@gmail.com
[2]Supervisor, Professor, SLM MRIIRS. Email: dss@mrei.ac.in

Abstract

With the developments in technology, globalization, and demographics, it has become strategically and ethically important for organizations to create truly inclusive workplaces. This research analyzes the effect of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) programs on employee engagement in the Information Technology (IT) industry in India with emphasis placed upon how inclusion translates to fair and sustainable business results. Based on a sample survey of 247 IT professionals, the study utilized a non-experimental correlational framework capturing workplace engagement at an intellectual, social and emotional level through standardized instruments. Results show there is a strong positive correlation ($r = .668$, $p < .01$) between perceived inclusion and employee engagement which affirms the organizational benefits arising from psychological safety, equity, and sense of community. Moreover, the study sustains that cultures with inclusivity provide not just individual resilience but also group creativity alongside moral responsiveness which challenges traditional corporate governance thinking today. The research justifies inclusion on ethical grounds framed as business case arguments accentuating debates within accountancy and corporate social responsibility circles about why corporations have to embrace inclusiveness--to advance human dignity into work.

Keywords: Diversity and Inclusion (D&I); Employee Engagement; Workplace Inclusion; Workplace Inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Today's business environment has been greatly dynamized over the past several years due to factors such as advanced technology, globalization, and key demographic changes. Since organisations are continuously working towards sustaining their competitive advantage and adaptability in today's global environment, the issue of D&I has risen to prominence. The workforce is also getting fused; people with different cultural backgrounds, different generations, and people from different diversity statuses are now contributing their diverse views and talents in organizations.

The coronavirus has severely affected the vulnerable populations within societies, thus exposing the inequities and inequalities within the organizations that called for more organizational equity and diversity (Bhaskar et al., 2020). Periods of remote work have also created new dynamics and the potential for both the reinforcement and potential disruption of exclusion templates of a workplace in virtual settings (Cutler et al., 2021). Therefore, as a central consideration in any organization, knowledge of how D&I provides benefits in terms of employee engagement has emerged as a key imperative. Although, there is substantial literature on Diversity and Inclusion that point out various positive outcomes, more research is required to understand how and why those initiatives affect and influence Employees' outcomes; what are the conditions or what might moderate or mediate those effects, and what are the implementation obstacles that diversity and inclusion face.

It is important to understand that the ways in which D&I creates engagement are diverse. It is possible to increase brothers and sisters, teamwork, and psychological safety by practicing openness, cultural intelligence, equal opportunities for all by listening and valuing diversity, thus making everyone feel they are welcomed, they are part of the team, and their ideas are heard and encouraged (Luu et al., 2019). For employees, there could be a feeling that ideas or

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1

aspects of themselves are valued by the organization, thereby making them likely to accept and be accepted by the organization, other employees, or the broader society (Bernstein et al., 2015). In addition, inclusion and diverse employment have been pointed out to enhance the achievement of higher innovation, ideation, and problem solving (Saha & Sharma, 2020). Diversity entails the presence of multiple employees from diverse demographics and brings out fresher views and solutions to problems as compared to a homogeneous group (Maddux et al., 2021). Nevertheless, it is worth realizing that these advantages often become possible without even a dedicated diverse staff; however, an inclusive organizational culture must stimulate and appreciate diversity (Johnson & Lambert, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Diversity and inclusion programs

As businesses try to meet the challenges and make the workplace fairer and more welcoming for all employees, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs have become more and more important. The objective of DEI programs is to stop discrimination, bias, and differences of opinion, as well as to make sure that all employees feel welcome and respected, no matter where they come from.

These efforts can include things like hiring practices, policy changes, and training and education programs. DEI programs are important for making the world a better place where people are more accepting and respectful of differences. These programs are meant to encourage and support all kinds of diversity, including race, gender, sexual orientation, and ability. They also work to eliminate any kinds of bias and discrimination in the workplace so that everyone has a fair chance. One important part of DEI initiatives is encouraging employees to make diversity a core value of the company. This can make the talent pool more creative and productive, as well as help the company better understand and connect with the different communities it serves. A diverse workforce can also help make the company culture more welcoming and positive. Diversity programs also try to get rid of and deal with systemic discrimination and bias. This could mean making rules and procedures to deal with bias and discrimination at work, as well as teaching employees how to spot and deal with these problems. DEI programs also often focus on making the workplace more welcoming for groups that aren't well-represented, such as women, people of color (especially black employees), and LGBTQ+ people. This could mean giving these groups resources and network support, as well as making sure that their voices are heard and their points of view are taken into account when decisions are made.

Employee engagement

One of the first problems with the literature is that there isn't a single definition of employee engagement that everyone agrees on. The cognitive part of employee engagement is about what employees think about the company, its leaders, and the conditions at work. The emotional part is about how employees feel about each of these three elements and whether they have good or bad feelings about the company and its leaders. The physical part of employee engagement is about the physical energy that people put into doing their jobs. Kahn (1990) says that engagement means being both mentally and physically present when doing an organizational role.

Saks (2006) says that organizational commitment is different from engagement because it describes how someone feels about and is attached to their organization. Engagement, on the

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2

other hand, is not just an attitude; it's also how focused and involved someone is in their work. Also, OCB includes voluntary and informal actions that can benefit coworkers and the company, but engagement is more about how well someone does their job than about doing things outside of work.

Chandani et al. (2016) gave another definition of employee engagement: an engaged employee is one who gets things done, doesn't change jobs often, and is always the company's ambassador. Hay Group defines an engaged employee as someone who gets results by getting them excited about their work and channeling that energy into the success of the organization. An employer can only get this result if they make an implicit agreement with their employees that they will act in ways that are in line with the goals of the organization. An employee could also be found to be at three different levels of engagement. He could be involved, not involved, or not involved at all. Employees who are engaged are those who work hard to help the company reach its goals. Someone who is not engaged is someone who is involved but not with enthusiasm and energy in working toward the organization's common goal. People who are "disengaged" at work are unhappy and show it by acting out. There are three different types of engagement: intellectual engagement, which is the desire to do better at work; affective engagement, which is feeling good after doing a job; and social engagement, which is talking to other people about how to make work better.

Impact of diversity and inclusion programs on employee engagement

Jerónimo et al. (2022) looked at how diversity practices affect employee engagement in the specific setting of a telecommunications company. The results are based on 238 responses and

show that there is a positive link between how people see diversity practices and how engaged they are, but this link is mediated by how people see inclusion. Inclusive leadership, on the other hand, does not change this relationship, but it does make employees feel more included. According to the literature, having a diverse workforce can lead to better problem-solving, more innovation and creativity, and higher productivity, quality, and engagement among members (Chung et al., 2016). On the other hand, diversity can also have bad effects on the outcomes of an organization. For example, it can lead to more conflict, less social integration, slower decision-making, a smaller talent pool, and fines and lawsuits that hurt profits and the public image (Shore et al., 2011; Mor Barak, 2014). There are times when the company's messages and policies about diversity and inclusion don't match up with what employees actually do every day (Bourke et al., 2017). There are a number of reasons why this separation happened (Mor Barak, 2014). For example, employees may have had ingrained biases, and managers may have been too lenient with discriminatory behavior (Saraiva & Irigaray, 2009). Companies may have adopted diversity practices just to follow the law (Shore et al., 2018), or they may not have had the right leadership skills (the ability to respond to the unexpected, predict behaviors and reactions, and come up with possible solutions). Gotsis and Grimani (2016) say that this difference could make workplaces hostile and discriminatory, where companies practice social exclusion. Because of this, some writers (like Ferdman, 2017, and Mor Barak, 2014) say that everyone in the company needs to know how important it is to make the workplace welcoming, because it is linked to both employee performance and engagement.

If a diversity program clearly states its goals and is strategically framed and understood by everyone in the organization, it works (Madera et al., 2017). These things together affect how employees feel about being included in a diversity program (Mor Barak et al., 2016). When

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employees feel like they are part of a group or an organization and have access to information, resources, networks, and security that lets them have a say in decisions, they feel included. When people have a good opinion of general D&I practices, they are more likely to work better and create an environment of trust (Roberson, 2006). This positive view also has a direct impact on performance (Bae et al., 2017), organizational commitment (Shore et al., 2018; Chen & Tang, 2018), job satisfaction and well-being (Bakker et al., 2012), as well as lowering stress and turnover (Hwang&Hopkins,2015).

Employees feel accepted and valued at work when they think they are included (Chen & Tang, 2018). In addition to having rules and policies in place to support D&I issues, employees need to feel like they are included, valued, and treated fairly. One of the things that can lead to perceived organizational inclusion and its effects is the presence of an inclusive climate, consistent practices, and leaders who are open to everyone (Shore et al., 2018). An inclusive organization is one that tries to include all of its employees and, if necessary, change whole business processes to make sure that their points of view are taken into account when setting the organization's main goals (Ferdman, 2017).

H1: There is a significant correlation between the D&I programs (workplace inclusion) by employees with their engagement.

Research Methodology Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) programs on critical workforce outcomes, employee engagement within the Indian IT industry. As organizations

increasingly recognize the strategic value of inclusive practices, it becomes essential to understand whether and how such initiatives translate into measurable benefits for employees and the broader organizational environment.

Research Design

In this study, a non-experimental, correlational research design was adopted to assess the impact of diversity and inclusion (D&I) programs on employee engagement within the IT sector. This design was chosen to explore naturally occurring relationships among variables without manipulating the organizational setting. Primary data were gathered through structured, standardized instruments, ensuring reliability and comparability of responses across a larger population.

The quantitative tools used in this study include four validated scales:

1. **Diversity & Inclusion Perception Scale** – Designed to capture employee perceptions of inclusivity, fairness, representation, and accessibility to growth opportunities within their organization.

2. **ISA Engagement Scale** (Soane et al., 2012) – A 9-item instrument that measures engagement across three interrelated facets:

   a) **Intellectual Engagement** (e.g., "I focus hard on my work")

   b) **Social Engagement** (e.g., "I share the same work values as my colleagues")

   c) **Affective Engagement** (e.g., "I feel positive about my work"). This scale is grounded in Kahn's (1990) theory of psychological presence and has been validated for strong internal consistency and construct validity.

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4

Each scale used a 5-point Likert format, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," allowing for nuanced responses. The ISA Engagement Scale is well-suited for understanding the cognitive, emotional, and relational aspects of employee engagement in a holistic way.

Objectives of the study

The study aims to investigate the multifaceted impact of diversity and inclusion (D&I) programs on employee engagement in the Indian IT Industry.

1. To understand the concept of Diversity and Inclusion Programs and employee engagement in relevance to the Indian IT Industry.

2. To investigate the impact of diversity and inclusion programs on employee engagement.

Population

The population for this study consists of employees currently working in the IT industry in the Delhi-NCR region. This group was selected for its relevance, accessibility, and diversity, which makes it an appropriate population for studying the influence of organizational D&I practices. Stratified random sampling was used to divide the population into distinct, non-overlapping strata based on key characteristics such as departmental role (e.g., software development, human resources, project management), gender, and years of experience. Within each stratum, convenience sampling was employed to select individual respondents based on their accessibility and willingness to participate.

Sample Size

A total sample of approximately 250 employees was targeted. This estimate was based on the rule of thumb for factor-based surveys (Bentler & Chou, 1987), which suggests at least 5–10 responses per item. This sample size was considered adequate for statistical validity while being practically achievable.

Data Collection Procedure

Given the professional nature of the target group, employees working in IT organizations in the Delhi-NCR region, the survey was administered through an online form, which was found to be the most efficient and accessible medium. The survey link was shared through a combination of email invitations and internal communication networks within select IT companies. These organizations were approached with prior consent, and their participation was entirely voluntary. The study emphasized transparency at every step.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics (N = 247)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	119	48.2
	Female	127	51.4
	Missing	1	0.4
Age	21-29	72	29.1
	30-39	75	30.4
	40-49	54	21.9
	50-59	28	11.3
	60+	18	7.3
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual	243	98.4
	Homosexual/Bisexual	4	1.6
Religion	Hinduism	213	86.2
	Sikhism	8	3.2

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5

	Islam	7	2.8
	Jainism	6	2.4
	Christianity	3	1.2
	Humanity	4	1.6
	None	2	0.8
	Atheist	1	0.4
	Buddhism	1	0.4
	NOTA	1	0.4
	Spiritual	1	0.4
Hierarchy Level	Entry Level	36	14.6
Characteristic	Category	n	%
	Junior Management	35	14.2
	Middle Management	72	29.1
	Senior Management	54	21.9
	Leadership & Executive	50	20.2
Differently Abled Status	Yes	6	2.4
	No	241	97.6
Tenure	Less than 5 years	155	62.8
	6-15 years	53	21.5
	16-25 years	18	7.3
	More than 25 years	21	8.5
Category	General	234	94.7
	OBC	9	3.6
	SC	2	0.8
	ST	2	0.8

The sample comprised 247 employees from the Indian IT industry, with a nearly equal gender distribution of 119 males (48.2%) and 127 females (51.4%), while one participant (0.4%) did not specify their gender. Participants represented diverse age groups, with 29.1% aged 21–29 years, 30.4% aged 30–39 years, 21.9% aged 40–49 years, 11.3% aged 50–59 years, and 7.3% aged 60 years or older. In terms of sexual orientation, 98.4% identified as heterosexual, while 1.6% identified as homosexual or bisexual. The majority of participants adhered to Hinduism (86.2%), followed by Sikhism (3.2%), Islam (2.8%), Jainism (2.4%), and Christianity (1.2%), with smaller representations from Buddhism, atheism, spiritual affiliations, and those selecting "None" or "Humanity." Hierarchical distribution indicated that 14.6% were at the entry level, 14.2% in junior management, 29.1% in middle management, 21.9% in senior management, and 20.2% in leadership or executive positions. The majority (62.8%) had less than five years of tenure, while 21.5% had 6– 15 years, 7.3% had 16–25 years, and 8.5% had more than 25 years of experience. Participants were geographically distributed across various Indian states, with the highest representation from Haryana (39.3%) and Delhi (22.7%), followed by Karnataka (8.1%), Maharashtra (6.5%), and Uttar Pradesh (6.5%), among others. Regarding social category, 94.7% belonged to the general category, 3.6% to the Other Backward Classes (OBC), and 0.8% each to the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST).

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The results were obtained from analysing the data collected to examine the impact of diversity and inclusion (D&I) programs on employee engagement in the IT industry within the Delhi/NCR region. The findings are structured according to the study's hypotheses and research objectives, providing empirical insights into how workplace inclusion influences key organizational outcomes.

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6

Reliability and Validity of Scales: Ascertaining reliability coefficients and factorial validity of Workplace Inclusion scale and ISA Engagement Scale: EFA is a technique that analyses the minimum number of continuous latent variables or factors that can describe the correlations correctly among a set of observed variables (Muthén, & Muthén, 2015).

EFA and Reliability Coefficients of Workplace Inclusion Scale:

To examine the underlying factor structure of the Workplace Inclusion Scale (Lennox et.al., 2022), an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) as the extraction method. Before conducting factor extraction, the suitability of the dataset for factor analysis was assessed through Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The KMO measure was 0.909, indicating that the sample was adequate for factor analysis (Kaiser, 1974). Additionally, Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant, $\chi^2(28) = 1174.67$, $p < .001$, confirming that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor extraction (Bartlett, 1950).

The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was performed, and the eigenvalues greater than 1.0 criterion (Kaiser's criterion) and scree plot examination were used to determine the number of factors to retain. The results indicated that one factor had an eigenvalue greater than 1, explaining 62.81% of the total variance, suggesting a strong unidimensional structure of the Workplace Inclusion Scale. The communalities of all items were assessed, and the results showed that all items had adequate extraction values (ranging from .488 to.716), indicating that a significant proportion of variance in each item was explained by the extracted factor.

The factor loadings of all eight items ranged from .698 to .846, demonstrating strong item contributions to the factor. These results confirm that the Workplace Inclusion Scale measures a single underlying construct of workplace inclusion, justifying the retention of one factor. The findings from the EFA confirm the unidimensionality of the Workplace Inclusion Scale, demonstrating its construct validity. The communalities and factor loadings are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Communalities and Factor loadings (EFA) of Workplace Inclusion Scale (n = 247)

Code	Communalities (h^2)	Factor 1 (Workplace Inclusion)
Item1	.488	.698
Item 2	.649	.805
Item 3	.699	.836
Item 4	.550	.741
Item 5	.639	.800
Item 6	.594	.771
Item 7	.716	.846
Item 8	.690	.831

To assess the internal consistency of the Workplace Inclusion Scale, both Cronbach's alpha and the split-half reliability coefficient were calculated. The results indicated a high level of reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficient exceeding 0.90, demonstrating excellent internal consistency (Struwig & Stead, 2013). Similarly, the split-half reliability coefficient was also found to be above 0.90, further confirming the scale's reliability. These findings suggest that the Workplace Inclusion Scale exhibits strong internal consistency, making it a psychometrically sound measure for assessing workplace inclusion perceptions.

EFA and Reliability Coefficients of ISA Engagement Scale:

To examine the underlying factor structure of the ISA Engagement Scale by Soane et al. (2012), an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) as the extraction method. Before conducting factor extraction, the suitability of the dataset for factor analysis was assessed through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The KMO measure was 0.852, indicating that the sample was adequate for factor analysis (Kaiser, 1970). Additionally, Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant, $\chi^2(36) = 1486.89$, $p < .001$, confirming that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor extraction (Bartlett, 1950).

The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was performed, and the eigenvalues greater than 1.0 criterion (Kaiser's criterion) and scree plot examination were used to determine the number of factors to retain. The results indicated that three factors had eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining 53.78%, 17.18%, and 11.50% of the total variance, respectively, accounting for a cumulative variance of 82.46%. These results suggest that the ISA Engagement Scale is best represented by a three-factor structure corresponding to Intellectual Engagement, Social Engagement, and Affective Engagement.

The communalities of all items were assessed, and the results showed that all items had adequate extraction values (ranging from .768 to .871), indicating that a significant proportion of variance in each item was explained by the extracted factors. The factor loadings of all nine items ranged from .839 to .888, demonstrating strong item contributions to their respective factors.

These results confirm that the ISA Engagement Scale measures three distinct yet related dimensions of workplace engagement, justifying the retention of three factors. The findings from the EFA establish the construct validity of the scale, supporting its use in further analyses such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The communalities and factor loadings are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Communalities and Factor loadings (EFA) of ISA Engagement Scale (n = 247)

Items	Communalities (h²)	Factor 1 (Intellectual Engagement)	Factor 2 (Social Engagement)	Factor 3 (Affective Engagement)
Item 1	.871	.888		
Item 2	.830	.840		
Item 3	.840	.858		
Item 4	.768			.840
Item 5	.827			.884
Item 6	.810			.867
Item 7	.795		.844	
Item 8	.860		.858	
Item 9	.821		.839	

To assess the internal consistency and reliability of the ISA Engagement Scale, Cronbach's alpha (α) and split-half reliability coefficients were computed. The overall Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.882, indicating excellent internal consistency (Cronbach, 1951). The split-half reliability coefficient was found to be 0.838, suggesting a high level of reliability when the scale was divided into two equal halves. Further reliability analysis was conducted for

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8

each subscale of the ISA Engagement Scale, including Intellectual Engagement, Social Engagement, and Affective Engagement. The Cronbach's alpha for the Intellectual Engagement subscale was 0.871, reflecting strong internal consistency among items measuring the cognitive aspects of work engagement. The Social Engagement subscale demonstrated good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.859, indicating the reliability of items assessing interpersonal aspects of engagement. The Affective Engagement subscale showed a high level of consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.878, confirming its reliability in measuring the emotional connection to work.

Descriptive Analysis of Variables: Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and skewness, were computed for all study variables: Workplace Inclusion and Employee Engagement. Given the varying number of items across the scales, a weighted average was also calculated to allow meaningful comparisons. Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables and their sub-dimensions.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables (n = 247)

Variables	M	SD	Weighted Average	Skewness	Kurtosis
Workplace Inclusion (8 items)	32.35	6.23	4.04	-0.79	0.28
Employee Engagement (9 items)	29.86	4.33	3.32	-0.78	1.10
- Intellectual Engagement (3 items)	13.72	1.76	4.57	-1.70	4.88
- Social Engagement (3 items)	11.93	2.65	3.98	-0.52	-0.54
- Affective Engagement (3 items)	12.79	2.45	4.26	-1.09	1.07

The WoThe workplace Inclusion scale had an overall mean of 32.35 (SD = 6.23) and a weighted average of 4.04, indicating that employees generally perceived their workplace as inclusive. Employee Engagement showed a mean of 29.86 (SD = 4.33) and a weighted average of 3.32, suggesting moderate engagement levels. Among its sub-dimensions, Intellectual Engagement had the highest weighted average (WA = 4.57), indicating strong cognitive involvement in work. Affective Engagement followed (WA = 4.26), reflecting significant emotional investment, while Social Engagement (WA = 3.98) was comparatively lower, suggesting that employees were less engaged in workplace social interactions.

Correlational analysis (H1) - Measuring strength and direction of relationship among workplace inclusion, employee engagement: The Pearson's Correlation Coefficient is a practical approach to test for the strength of a relationship between variables (Sekaran, 1992).

The scale ranges on a continuum from -1.00 to +1.00. The closer to either end of this continuum that a correlation score features, the stronger or weaker the relationship between the two variables researched. The Pearson's Correlation Coefficient narrates the potential for a linear relationship as opposed to either no relationship or a curvilinear relationship. Furthermore, this technique does not indicate cause-and-effect relationships. Effect sizes are also used to decide on the practical significance of findings. According to Cohen (1988), the following cut-off points in terms of the correlation coefficient are recognized as practically significant (independent of direction of the relationship): r = 0.10: small effect; r = 0.30: medium effect; r = 0.50: large effect. r-values larger than 0.30 (medium effect) will be considered as practically significant for the purpose of this study. The correlational analyses were conducted for hypothesis 1 of the study-

H1: There is a significant correlation between the D & I program (workplace inclusion) and employee engagement.

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9

Table 5: Pearson Correlations Between Workplace Inclusion and Employee Engagement (n = 247)

Variables	1	2
1. Workplace Inclusion	1	.668**
2. Employee Engagement		1

*Note. **Correlation is significant at the .01 level (two-tailed)*

Hypothesis 1 (H1) proposed that perceived workplace inclusion would be significantly correlated with employee engagement. The correlation analysis revealed several significant relationships supporting this hypothesis. Workplace inclusion was positively correlated with employee engagement ($r = .668$, $p < .01$). This suggests that employees who feel included in the workplace tend to be more engaged.
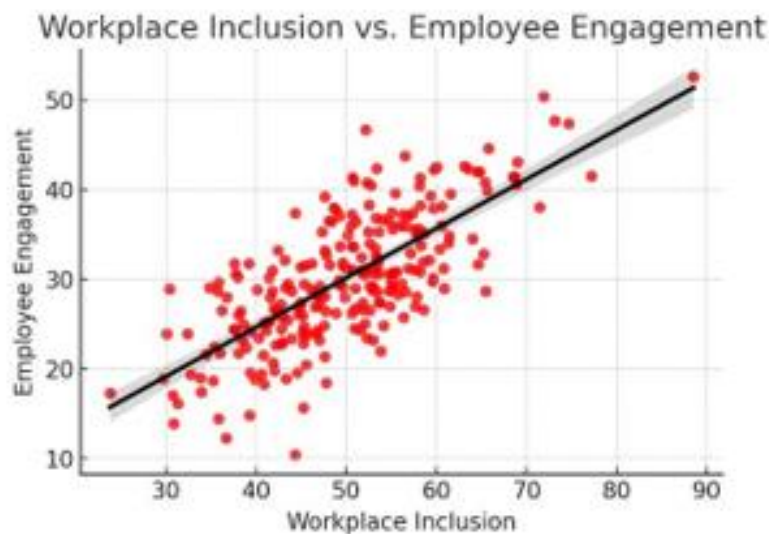
Figure 1: Scatter Plots Depicting Correlation of Workplace Inclusion with Employee Engagement

Overall, the findings provide empirical support for the role of D&I programs in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors. The significant relationships between D&I programs and key work-related outcomes highlight the importance of fostering an inclusive organizational culture to drive engagement.

DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine the multifaceted impact of diversity and inclusion (D&I) programs on employee engagement in the Indian IT Industry. The need for this research arises from the growing emphasis on diversity and inclusion as critical elements of organizational strategy in an increasingly globalized and competitive business environment. This research is crucial as it contributes to the body of knowledge by offering insights into how D&I programs can be strategically leveraged to improve employee satisfaction, particularly in the context of the highly competitive and demanding IT sector in India. By addressing these critical aspects, the study aims to provide actionable recommendations for organizations to optimize their D&I strategies for enhanced employee well-being and organizational success.

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10

Descriptive findings of variables from the study indicate that employees generally perceive their workplaces as inclusive, with high ratings on workplace inclusion. This aligns with the broader trend of Indian IT firms actively promoting diversity and inclusion through structured policies and cultural initiatives. Employee engagement was found to be highest in the intellectual domain, suggesting that IT professionals are highly immersed in the cognitive aspects of their roles. This aligns with the knowledge-intensive nature of the industry, where problem-solving, analytical reasoning, and continuous skill development are central to job roles. Indian IT firms invest heavily in employee training and upskilling, which may explain why intellectual engagement remains robust. In contrast, social engagement was relatively lower, hinting at the nature of work structures in IT organizations, where employees often operate in siloed environments, engaging more with projects than with colleagues. The post-pandemic hybrid work model has further reduced interpersonal workplace interactions, making it more challenging for employees to develop strong social ties within the organization (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Harter, Schmidt, & Killham, 2003). This lower social engagement may have implications for team dynamics, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing, all of which are critical in an industry that thrives on innovation and collective problem-solving.

The findings of this study suggest that Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) programs have a profound impact on employee engagement, especially within the Indian IT sector. These programs not only foster an inclusive organizational culture but also significantly enhance employees' emotional commitment to their work. In a competitive and fast-paced environment like the IT sector, where employees often face demanding workloads and tight deadlines, employee engagement is crucial. The study highlights that organizations with strong D&I initiatives can create a work environment that promotes fairness, respect, and recognition for diverse perspectives, which, in turn, leads to higher levels of engagement (Nishii & Rich, 2013). Employees who feel included in their workplace are more likely to experience a sense of belonging, which motivates them to invest more in their work, resulting in improved productivity and innovation (Shore, Cleveland, & Sanchez, 2018). In the Indian IT sector, where the pace of technological advancements is rapid, and where creativity is a critical component of competitive success, D&I programs have the potential to significantly enhance performance outcomes. Inclusive environments promote diversity in teams, which has been shown to lead to a broader range of ideas and solutions. When individuals from diverse backgrounds are brought together, they bring unique perspectives, which can result in more creative problem-solving and innovation. This is particularly relevant in the IT sector, where organizations rely heavily on the ability of their employees to think outside the box and come up with innovative solutions to complex problems.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the influence of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) programs on employee engagement in the Indian IT sector. In an increasingly interconnected world, where organizations face rapid change and heightened employee expectations, fostering inclusive workplaces has emerged as a strategic imperative. The research addressed key gaps in existing literature by exploring not only the overall impact of D&I but also identifying which dimensions of inclusion are most influential and under what organizational conditions these effects are most pronounced.

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11

Through the voices of employees and the lens of validated scales, the study confirmed what many inclusive leaders believe: when people feel included, they thrive. The results revealed strong and consistent links between inclusive practices and higher levels of engagement, particularly affective and social engagement. Employees who felt respected, valued, and heard were not only more emotionally invested but also more likely to remain committed to their organizations and perform better in their roles.

The findings revealed that D&I practices particularly those that foster psychological safety, perceived fairness, and a sense of belonging have significant positive relationships with all three outcome variables. Affective and social facets of employee engagement were especially responsive to inclusive workplace practices, emphasizing the emotional and relational foundations of inclusion.

Importantly, the results highlighted that inclusion is not a standalone HR initiative but a systemic organizational commitment. The role of leadership, cultural tone, and equitable access to opportunities emerged as vital enablers of D&I success. These insights affirm that inclusion must be integrated into the core of organizational strategies and behaviors to create sustainable impact.

Recommendations

The findings from this study offer compelling evidence that Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) initiatives significantly affect employee engagement. Notably, affective and social engagement emerged as the strongest correlates of perceived inclusion. Building on these results, the following recommendations are proposed to help organizations institutionalize and sustain effective D&I strategies:

1. Make Inclusion a Cultural Priority, Not Just an HR Initiative

The study found that employees who perceived their workplace culture as inclusive, marked by fairness, respect, and a sense of belonging, demonstrated significantly higher engagement and lower turnover intentions. Therefore, organizations must embed inclusion in their mission, values, and daily operations, not treat it as a checkbox activity. This includes equitable hiring practices, inclusive decision-making processes, and visible commitment from leadership at all levels. High scores on the inclusion perception scale were consistently associated with affective engagement and willingness to stay in the organization, reinforcing the need for cultural alignment.

2. Institutionalize Feedback Loops and Inclusion Measurement

Quantitative findings emphasized the value of employee voice and inclusion perception in driving engagement. However, inclusion is dynamic; without regular measurement and feedback, organizations may lose touch with employee experiences. Conduct regular inclusion audits using validated tools, link the results to engagement metrics, and ensure leadership accountability for implementing changes based on the findings. The Respondents in the study also felt their opinions were valued or heard in organizational processes, had significantly higher scores across employee engagement.

3. Tailor Support for Marginalized and Underrepresented Groups

The study highlighted that perceived fairness and access to opportunities varied among respondents based on their identity and role in the organization. Inclusion cannot be one-size-fits-all. Design interventions such as targeted mentoring, career sponsorship programs, and

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Theme 2 – Transforming Shape of World Economics: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Management, Economics and Entrepreneurship

12

supportive peer networks for employees from marginalized identities (e.g., women in tech roles, LGBTQ+ employees, persons with disabilities, first-generation professionals). Respondents from minority or non-mainstream groups expressed lower engagement and inclusion scores when access to growth or visibility was perceived as unequal, as mentioned in the study outcome.

4. Collaborate with Academia and Researchers to Build Evidence-Based Practices

Given the evolving nature of D&I, organizations benefit from staying informed through academic partnerships and third-party evaluations. Engage with researchers to develop sector-specific benchmarks, explore the ROI of inclusion, and pilot experimental interventions tailored to different organizational contexts. The nuanced patterns observed, such as stronger affective engagement among employees with high inclusion perception but weaker associations for intellectual engagement, suggest the need for continued, contextual inquiry.

These recommendations aim to help organizations move from intention to impact, ensuring that their diversity initiatives are not only well-meaning but also deeply embedded, data-informed, and results-driven. They are grounded in the study's key outcomes, providing a blueprint for building inclusive environments where engaged, loyal, and high-performing employees can thrive.

Limitations of the Study

- **Sampling Bias**: Use of convenience sampling within strata may have introduced selection bias, limiting representativeness.

- **Limited Scope**: Focus on IT professionals in Delhi-NCR restricts generalizability to other regions and sectors.

- **Cross-Sectional Design**: The study captures a single time point, missing changes over time.

- **Self-Reported Data**: Responses may be influenced by personal bias or social desirability despite confidentiality.

- **Contextual Constraints**: Findings are shaped by the specific organizational and cultural setting of the IT sector.

Scope for Future Research

While this study provides meaningful insights into the role of diversity and inclusion in shaping employee engagement, it also opens several avenues for further exploration. One important direction would be to broaden the scope beyond the IT sector in Delhi-NCR and extend it to other industries such as manufacturing, education, healthcare, and hospitality, as well as to other geographic regions within and beyond India. This would allow researchers to explore how D&I practices are interpreted and experienced differently across sectors and cultures.

Additionally, future research could adopt a longitudinal approach to track how employee perceptions of inclusion evolve over time and how the long-term effects of D&I programs manifest in organizational outcomes. Since inclusion is a dynamic and evolving process, such a design would offer valuable insights into the sustainability and developmental trajectory of inclusive practices.

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Theme 2 – Transforming Shape of World Economics: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Management, Economics and Entrepreneurship

13

Another emerging area that deserves attention is the experience of inclusion in digital and hybrid workplaces. As remote work becomes a norm rather than an exception, it is important to understand how concepts like belonging, psychological safety, and accessibility are being reshaped in virtual environments. Exploring dimensions of digital equity and inclusion in geographically dispersed teams could help organizations design more holistic D&I strategies.

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14

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Theme 2 – Transforming Shape of World Economics: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Management, Economics and Entrepreneurship

15