

Ticking diversity box is not enough to boost inclusivity

Value Varied Perspectives, HR Statistics Can Be Superficial

By Vibhash Naik

In recent years, there has been a shift from the term 'diversity, equity and inclusion' (DEI) to 'inclusion, equity and diversity' (IED). While this may seem like a simple change in phrasing, it reflects a significant shift in how companies and organisations approach 'diversity'.

So, why do we need to move from DEI to IED? The answer lies in the way we approach 'diversity'.

For many companies, 'diversity' is often seen as simply a matter of bringing in more people from different backgrounds. They measure their success with gender ratios, ethnicity statistics and other demographic data, which does give them a superficial appearance of diversity in the organisation. However, inclusion is not about ratios and matrices showing up in green. It is about the culture and individuals' actual experiences and perspectives.

What also happens in the

pursuit of boosting these ratios is that some companies resort to positive discrimination against certain groups.

Positive discrimination, or affirmative action, refers to policies and practices that provide preferential treatment to under-represented groups to redress past discrimination or enhance diversity in a particular field. Some even choose to have quotas for under-represented groups. While the quotas may deliver an uptick in the ratios, it tends to create dissonance among employees and even resentment towards those who are perceived to have received preferential treatment. This approach also fails to address the underlying systemic and cultural issues preventing true equity and inclusion.

This is where the shift to IED becomes crucial. By prioritising inclusion and equity first, we can create an environment that values the experiences and perspectives of all employees,



regardless of their backgrounds.

We also need to keep in mind that diversity is much more than just the gender. It encompasses a range of perspectives, interpersonal styles, abilities and experiences. When we prioritise 'inclusivity' and 'equity', we must ensure that our culture is not only accepting of one form of 'diversity', but rather includes and celebrates all. This means fostering an environment that is welcoming to individuals with different backgrounds, beliefs and identities.

In practice, moving from DEI to IED requires a shift in mindset and approach. 'Diversity' is an outcome. 'Inclusion' and 'equity' is the means to this end.

Additionally, we must ensure that 'equity' is embedded in all aspects of the business, from recruitment and hiring to promotions and leadership development. This indeed requires a commitment to transparency, acco-

untability, and ongoing evaluation of progress toward 'equity' goals (and not just the 'diversity' ratios).

It's also imperative that we place a strong emphasis on identifying and eradicating prevalent biases within the organisation.

The shift from DEI to IE and D holds enormous potential for driving business success. By prioritising 'equity' and fostering a genuinely 'inclusive' workplace, companies can boost employee engagement, retention and productivity. Research confirms that 'diverse' and 'inclusive' organisations are also more agile, innovative and responsive to shifting market demands.

But the benefits go beyond the bottom line. By embracing equity and inclusion, we can cultivate an environment where diversity flourishes organically, without the need for mandatory quotas or preferential treatment.

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