Contentious but Not Optional: Linking Inclusive Workplace to Organizational Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

With the advent of globalization, organizations have started experiencing the presence of diverse workforce, which compelled the researchers to explore this challenging facet of human resource management. Undeniably organizations that wish to thrive and compete with others will require to have managers and employees, who are not only skilled and aware of diversity, but also believe in inclusion. A diversified workforce if nurtured with an inclusive culture will make an organization more agile, creative and accustomed to needs and preferences of customers. Present paper reinforce that feeling of inclusion among diverse workforce boosts better decision- making, increased imagination, novelty, on the one hand while feeling of exclusion result in undesirable outcomes in the form of conflict and in extreme situation employee turnover. The study appraises the association between inclusive workplace and organizational outcomes in the form of organizational commitment and citizenship behavior, job satisfaction and intension to leave. Furthermore, a conceptual framework is developed and suitable propositions are stated.

Keywords: *Workforce Diversity, Inclusive Workplace, Organizational Outcomes*

INTRODUCTION

Globalization is changing the demographics of our nation ranging from economic structure to business approach of organizations that necessitate

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synergized interaction among employees from diverse backgrounds (Cox and Blake, 1991; Milliken and Martins, 1996). In India the concept of workplace diversity has typically started with gender diversity because of the inequality factor that assumes higher rank positions are meant for males only (NASSCOM, 2010). Thus, contemporary organizations need to work on systems approach of management which calls them to be an open system that is continuously interacting and adopting the change posed by the business environment. It is the onus of chiefs and mangers to acknowledge and appreciate the changing nature of workplace, which are throwing challenge before them in terms of managing the multi-cultural organization. Changing demographics of workplace in terms of female participation, revamping of organizational structure and equal employment opportunity legislation requires organization to re-evaluate their management practices and come-up with innovative people management techniques.

Diversity refers to acknowledging, appreciating and respecting the differences people bring in the organization in terms of gender, age, religion, ethnicity, categories, disabilities, etc. (Esty et al. 1995). Does diversity really have an impact on organization's success? Most of the today's organization will answer "yes" because of the legal and governmental requirements. Favorable amendments in the policies and practices will accelerate organization as well as people performance. Many research findings claim that diversified workforce are essentially good for organizations provided it is mediated by organizational strategy, commitment from top management, well-organized communication with unbiased treatment and building multifaceted team (Dessler, 2000; Rice, 1994; Sheridan, 1992). In order to remain competitive, organizations need to be more diversified (NASSCOM, 2010). Therefore capitalizing on workforce diversity is one of the significant dimensions for management.

In the contemporary business scenario when flexibility and innovativeness are key to survival and sustainability, managing diversity at workplace becomes imperative (Devoe 1999). In this context Jain & Verma (1996) argued that organizations catering to diversity management issues will definitely taste success in this competitive market by assimilating diversified workforce through diversity oriented training programs and more practical exposure (Friedman & Amoo, 2002). Annually organizations invest billions of dollars approximately eight billion on managing diversified workforce (Hansen, 2008). Yet, prejudice and discrimination possess challenges before the managers in the form

of lawsuits and tainted business image. These law suits regarding biased attitudes and harassment may take up management's considerable amount of time. Therefore, organizations are ought to take diversity management more than merely acknowledging the difference people bring in, rather identifying the worth of being unique, defying discrimination and fostering inclusiveness.

Organizations have shifted their focus of efforts from diversity to inclusion. Inclusion, although closely related, is a different concept from diversity. Inclusion refers to an individual's feeling of being treated fairly and respectfully by others, at the same time having equal access to opportunities and resources so that they can fully contribute to the organization's success (SHRM, 2010b). It facilitates varied opportunities to different individuals to marshal their unique qualities for the accomplishment of organizational objectives. This happens at two levels, one at individual level another at organizational level. At individual level the way minority group members are treated matters a lot. Thus, the rule of thumb can be dealing others the way you wish to be dealt, but it doesn't mean imposing our value systems and life-style on others. To develop the sense of inclusion, it is important to understand and attend their needs, eventually others will also reciprocate in the same way (Sharma & Agrawal, 2012).

Diversity and inclusion management initiatives fail because of defensive attitude of organizations, so as to avoid the repercussion of expensive law suits by putting major focus on increasing diversity without developing the mindset of inclusion among diversified employees. Diversity is usually addressed as a matter of compliance, which is easy to track but to identify the factors comprising inclusive workplace is difficult to pen-down as a goal for HR leader. Therefore, it becomes imperative to establish explicit understanding about how inclusion is different from diversity, since most of the well-intentioned organizations use to recognize the importance of diversity by ignoring inclusion, resulting into undesirable outcomes that usually underestimate the consolidated efforts of diversity and inclusion.

Organizations have many expectations from diversity. One of the expectations is having a diversified pool of talent that will lead to increased adaptability, variety of viewpoints, more effective execution of organizational strategies, which can be guaranteed only through standardized scientific techniques of recruitment and selection like assessment centers, work samples, personality inventories, etc. (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Another expectation is diversified workforce leads

to harmony in workplace; however contradictory results were found, individuals working with people different from them are more likely to express reduced satisfaction and commitment towards the organization because of the feeling of being discriminated (Riordan, 2000). A report by SHRM (2010) found that approximately 75% of the organizations are involved in one and another form of diversity initiatives and practices. However, it is also not necessary that organizations having diversified workforce will lead to positive outcomes (Barak, 2005). Inclusion requires people to modify their innate beliefs and actions which is tough to realize but extremely powerful when it happens. Therefore, organizations those are able to address inclusion as a strategic issue will reap multifarious benefits. In this context the initial step to be taken is shift in philosophy of management from exclusive diversity to diversity and inclusion.

In the study conducted by Forbes (2014), diversity alone is dangerous for individual and organization in terms of slower decision making, increased conflict, misappropriation of opportunities and expensive cases of discrimination. However, when diversity is integrated with inclusive workplace, it delivers higher performance, greater creativity, higher customer delight and less absenteeism (Cox, 2001). These findings have compelled many researchers to consider diversity as a "double-edged sword" (Milliken & Martins, 1996). In order, to understand this twofold relationship between inclusive workplace and organizational outcomes a conceptual framework is developed and suitable Propositions are made to offer managerial and research implications of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditionally, organization use to address diversity and inclusion by recruiting and hiring diverse employees (Jackson, 1992; Shore et al., 2009). But now inclusion is considered as a separate field of study of recent origin and many researchers have talked about it as the work environment prevailing in the organization that provide stimuli to individuals to interpret information at work (Mowday, R. T., & Sutton, R. I., 1993; Weick, K. E., 1979; Bilimoria, D., Joy, S., & Liang, X., 2008). It has been seen that during the last two decades organizations are trying to understand and visualize the significance of managing diversified workforce for better team management that lead to organizational efficiency (Jackson & Joshi, 2004). For most of the multinational organizations employing diversified employees has become a necessity as a result of various environmental factors, which is usually beyond their control. To survive and have a

sustainable business development, it is must for the organizations to adopt these changes. Diversified workplace is an inclusive organization comprising of members with diversified knowledge and outlook that shape its structure and system (Holvino, Ferdman, and Merrill-Sands, 2004). In other words, it is a complex mix of diversified individuals with different group identities within the same social system (Nkomo and Cox, 1996).

Two sets of arguments regarding impact of diversity on the organization. One set of argument is based on social categorization, social identity and the similarity-attraction paradigm that assumes diversity will prompt in-group and out-group differences and negative social processes, thus compromising on group performance (Tajfel, 1986; Turner et. al, 1987: Byrne, 1971). Social identity theory states that people from different background are less likely to cooperate with the people who are not like them because of difference in their social category and social identity. Which means diversity at workplace leads to interpersonal-conflict, decline in group cohesiveness leading to high employee turnover (Jackson & Joshi, 2004).

The second set of argument is based on information-sharing and decision making theories, which states that diversity will lead to extensive realm of skills, insights and perspectives that may enhance the problem solving orientation of groups which further enhance the group and organization performance as a whole (Cox, 1993; Cox & Blake, 1991). In fact, heterogeneous groups are more creative, high-quality decision makers and can outperform in comparison with homogenous groups (Wanous & Youtz, 1986).

Both these arguments emphasize on the point that one cannot automatically reap the benefit of workforce diversity; 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 (Jayne and Diboye; 2004).

Inclusion Literature: A Transition from Diversity to Inclusion

Prior research in the field of diversity predominately focused on discrimination, tokenism, biasness and affirmative action (Shore et al., 2009). But, as the field of diversity evolved, scholars have started identifying the organizational mechanism by which group performance

can be enhanced (Gonzalez & DeNisi, 2009). One such research domain which is evolving in the area of workplace diversity is that of fostering an inclusive work organization where every individuals feel included irrespective of their differences (Bilimoria, Joy, & Liang, 2008; Roberson, 2007). However, there is lack of proper theoretical ground for inclusion and limited empirical research has been undertaken in this growing field. In this context, the work of Mor Barak (2000) is remarkable as she conceptualized inclusion and developed a theoretical model of inclusion that define inclusion as employee's feeling of being a significant part of the organization that lead to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, employee well-being and task accomplishment.

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 extent to which an employee feel accepted and included by others in the group as an insider. On the other hand, Roberson (2007) defined it as full involvement and contribution of employees in the management by removing the barriers impeding their growth. Miller (1998) defined it as perception of employees that they are allowed to participate and contribute towards organization goal.

Wasserman, Gallegos, and Ferdman (2008) stated through their studies, that mere representation of diverse workforce will not lead to the specific results until and unless the employees feel accepted by the group by means of getting equal opportunity to be heard, raise their voice, being appreciated and included in the main stream of work along with other group members.

The concept of inclusion is in the incipient stage in the organization literature (Roberson, 2007). and has attracted much attention in recent years. Yet, inclusion is a new concept which lacks unanimity on the characteristic feature that impedes its utility both, theoretically and practically. Therefore, we developed a conceptual framework that shows the nature of relationship between inclusive workplace and organizational outcomes and proposed suitable propositions with managerial and research implications of the study.

INTEGRATING INCLUSION AND ORGANIZATIONAL OUTCOMES

At the inception level diversity management practices focus more on eliminating the biased behavior of majorities towards minorities through

formalization of HRM practices like- affirmative action plans, networking and mentoring programs, etc. However, these efforts works at a superficial level only, unless and until the employees feel themselves as part of the large group the objective of unity in diversity can't be achieved. Arslan et al. (2013) have examined various organizational factors like-organizational practices and policies and justice perception that influence workplace diversity.

The subsequent sections consist of discussion on Proposition development with respect to inclusive workplace in terms of leadership, climate and organizational practices and policies with organizational outcomes.

Inclusive Leadership and Organizational Outcomes

Traditionally workplace diversity and inclusion issues were managed by means of recruitment and hiring strategies (Shore et al., 2009). However, recently it has been observed that creating an inclusive workplace necessitate the support of top management in the form of equal opportunity to all. (Avery et al, 2007; Gelfand, et al, 2005; Wasserman et al., 2008). Feeling of being accepted in the group is affected by the behavior a leader displays while interacting with the followers (Douglas et al. 2003). If a leader appreciates their people's contribution and encourage them to give their inputs they convey inclusion (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006). When fair procedures are used to distribute rewards and there is equal access to opportunities employees' take pride in group membership (Lind & Tyler, 1988) which develops the sense of inclusion that substantially minimizes the status difference leading to high degree of employee commitment (Douglas, Ferris, Buckley, & Gundlach, 2003). In contrast unfair treatment communicates the members that they are not respected resulting into psychological withdrawal and low group or organizational identification (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004).

Thus, a leader whose behavior is in consistent with group values tends to develop organizational commitment and citizenship behavior among employees leading to least intention to leave which further increases their satisfaction towards job (Nishii and Mayer, 2009).

*Proposition 1 **(P1):** Inclusive leadership is positively related with (a) job satisfaction, (b) organizational commitment, (c) organizational citizenship behavior.*

*Proposition 2 **(P2)**: Inclusive leadership is negatively related with turnover intentions.*

Inclusive Practices and Organizational Outcomes

Inclusive organizational practices refer to the practices, procedures and policies followed by organizations that foster inclusion of members in the group. Traditionally, researchers have examined the effect of prejudicial treatment of different categories of people at workplace rather than examining the practices that foster inclusion among group members (Dipboye & Colella, 2005) such as exemption from stereotyping, conflict resolution mechanism, equal access to information, involvement in decision making and communication facilitation (Bilimoria et al., 2008; Roberson, 2007; Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998; Nishii, 2010; Janssens & Zanoni, 2007). Every individual wishes to be identified on the basis of their competencies rather than being stereotyped. Further their belongingness and cohesiveness towards the group will increase as they face difficult task with greater autonomy (Man & Lam, 2003) coupled with equal access to work related information and participation in decision making. Thus it's a two way process, more the people identified as unique asset to the organization more they will exhibit citizenship behavior and high will be their level of commitment towards the organization (Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003). In the presence of supportive co-workers and supervisors people exhibit creativity leading to increased satisfaction towards the organization and least intension to leave (Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004).

*Proposition 3 **(P3)**: Inclusive practices are positively related with (a) job satisfaction, (b) organizational commitment, (c) organizational citizenship behavior.*

*Proposition 4 **(P4)**: Inclusive organizational practices are negatively related with turnover intentions.*

Inclusive Climate and Organizational Outcomes

Inclusive climate refers to the perception of employees towards the organization that whether the later values the contribution of their employees (Gonzalez & DeNisi, 2009; McKay, Avery, & Morris, 2009; Leslie & Gelfand, 2008; Thomas & Ely, 1996). Climate of inclusion reflects the inclusion or exclusion of workforce from different background (age, gender, culture, religion, ethnicity, etc.), justice-related events that balance power and autonomy across work groups (Mor Barak et al., 1998; Kossek & Zonia, 1993).

Aggregate justice perception is one of the recent areas of research that suggest fair treatment of diverse employees is an essential element for inclusive climate (Sheppard, Lewicki, & Minton, 1992). It has been observed that people are very cognizant about the authority system prevailing in the organization, how information is generated, processed and retrieved. This phenomenon is known as "climate for opportunity" model which explains the diversity management framework (Hayes, et al, 2002). An individual's perception towards organization's philosophy about fairness in terms of allocation of opportunities is termed as climate of opportunity. Findings of Sheppard, Lewicki, & Minton (1992) and Simons and Rowland, (2011) revealed 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 5 (P5): Inclusive climate is positively related with (a) job satisfaction, (b) organizational commitment, (c) organizational citizenship behavior.

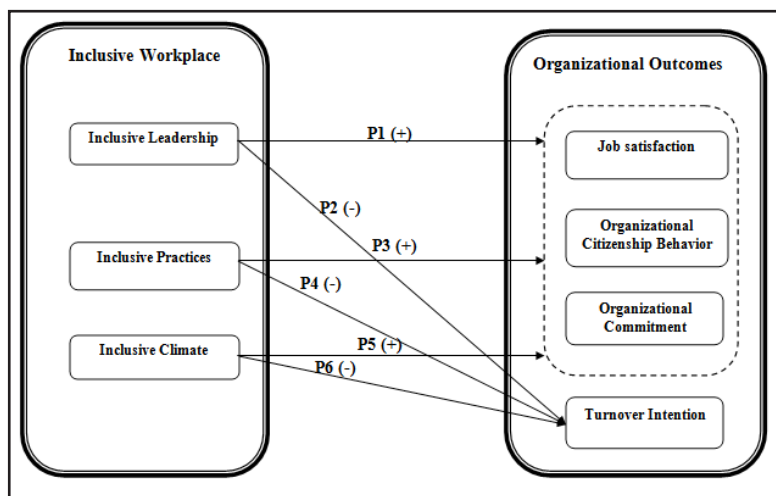*Proposition 6 (P6): Inclusive climate is negatively related with turnover intentions.*

Fig. 1: Conceptual Framework

The framework exhibited above presents the link between inclusive workplace and organizational outcomes in terms of job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, organizational commitment and turnover intention. Further, we believe that antecedents of inclusive workplace would foster greater equity and access to varied opportunities for diversified workforce provided their unique inputs were accepted and they were consistently encouraged to participate in group activities.

IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

HR practices tend to manage diversified workforce by means of affirmative action on one hand and family-friendly policies on the other hand with the aim of germinating organizational commitment and citizenship behavior among diverse workforce (Osterman, 1995). Many studies have established link between organization justice perception with job satisfaction, organizational commitment, withdrawal, and organizational citizenship behavior as organizational outcomes (Colquitt et. al, 2001). The justice perception embraces perception towards practices and policies, climate and culture prevailing in the organization and the ideology of leaders towards assimilation of diversified workforce by the main group. Further, it has been clearly observed that rationally designed and implemented Workplace Inclusion strategies will positively affect the organizational outcomes.

It is imperative to be understood by the managers that mere number crunching practices (e.g, objective hiring and promotional practices, diversity awareness training and discrimination and harassment awareness programs, etc) are not enough to address the challenge of Workplace diversity, but a careful and timely audit of diversity and inclusive climate is also mandatory. In-fact Diversity management practices is conceptualized on the principal of equality through legislation and affirmative action, while, workplace inclusion strategies conceptualize diversity differently (Suzanne, 2011).

Most of the studies focused on practices that promote discrimination at workplace, very less attention have been given towards practices that foster inclusion among group members. On the whole, these scholars draw attention towards the exploring the behaviors and process involved in the area of inclusive leadership (Wasserman et al., 2008), inclusive practices and specific components of inclusive climate, like- justice related event as they specifically relate to employee's perception towards inclusion

(Dipboye & Colella, 2005; Man & Lam, 2003). Further, it has also been observed that minority members feel the discrimination against them but majority members feel "reverse discrimination" against them, which can create conflict among them and may challenge their level of satisfaction towards belongingness and uniqueness needs (Morrison, 1992). Thus, it is imperative that future research on diversity and inclusion shall examine the perception if both majority and minority members so as to have complete picture of inclusive climate prevailing in the organization.

Another issue is that most of work in the field of workplace diversity and inclusion has been done in Western set up, which challenges its generalizability in other cultural set-up, empirical investigation is required to affirm the propositions. Thus, it is expected that the proposed conceptual framework may facilitate the managers to devise well-organized inclusion practices and policies to manage the conflict and its intricacies and maximize the synergy of uniquely different workforce in the organization.

CONCLUSION

Past researches in the field of workplace diversity have observed a paradigm shift from workforce diversity to inclusion. But still less progress has been made in understanding and promoting workplace inclusion (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Researchers have suggested that mere representation of diversified workforce in term of numbers on the board will not serve the purpose; there is an urgent need for inclusiveness among workforce.

Thus, we deem that our conceptual framework of inclusive workplace and organizational outcomes will provide a base for further research in the area of workplace inclusion which is targeted towards synergizing the uniqueness of diverse individuals. We have also observed in our review that there is lack of clarity in the conceptualization of workplace inclusion as a construct i.e. past researches majorly focused on the relationship between workplace diversity and organizational outcomes but future research should focus on empirically testing the relationship between inclusion and organizational outcomes.

In contemporary organizational theory, often diversity is portrayed as a "double-edged weapon". On one hand if diversity is managed properly through inclusive leadership, practices and policies it will lead to positive outcomes to the organization in the form of increased organizational commitment, job satisfaction and citizenship behavior while on the other hand discrimination on the basis of their dissimilarity will lead to

conflict and poor performance which may result into employee turnover. Therefore, Diversity and inclusion must go hand-in-hand; without inclusive culture individuals will not be able to march towards the path of success. Rather, their retention rate will be a concern for organizations regards culminating the benefits of diverse workforces. Further, consistent audit of organizational climate is must so as to assess the organization's readiness towards inclusion of diversified workforce.

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