Inclusion in Indian Organizations: Relating Perceptions to Demographic Dimensions

Kanupriya Shekhar[1] and Sanjay Srivastava[2]

Abstract

This study investigated the perception of inclusion within contemporary Indian organizations, exploring potential variations based on employee demographics. The research adopts a descriptive, quantitative approach, employing the Short Inclusion Scale – an established 8-item instrument – to assess perceptions among a diverse sample of 130 Indian organizational employees. Statistical analyses encompassing descriptive statistics, chi-square test, and ANOVA were utilized to evaluate the research hypotheses. The findings reveal significant discrepancies in perceptions of inclusion initiatives across employee age, religious affiliation, hierarchical level, and tenure. Conversely, no statistically significant variations were observed in relation to gender, sexual orientation, or educational attainment. The discussion delves into the detailed results, limitations of the study, and practical implications for human resource development professionals and managers within Indian organizations.

Keywords: *Diversity, Inclusion, Workplace Demography, Indian Organizations.*

INTRODUCTION

The workplace diversity paradigm, while not novel, has undergone a metamorphosis with the contemporary emphasis on inclusion as a social equity imperative, necessitating organizational introspection. The advent of diversity management in the 1990s coincided with an increasingly heterogeneous workforce, catalyzing transformations in organizational ethos. Phillips, Rothbard, and Dumas (2009) posited that demographic disparities engender fundamental challenges in fostering high-quality interpersonal dynamics within organizations, attributable to status differentials and reticence in personal disclosure. By the turn of the decade, the initial fervor for diversity initiatives had attenuated, as empirical studies illuminated potential drawbacks, including perceptions of inequity, workforce retention challenges, and fiscal attrition (Chatman & Spataro, 2005; Dover et al., 2020; Gonzalez & DeNisi, 2009). This zeitgeist witnessed the ascendancy of inclusion as a cardinal principle in diversity management praxis.

The construct of inclusion, while variously defined, encapsulates the extent to which employees experience a sense of belonging, recognition, and efficacious participation within an organizational milieu (Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998; Pelled et al., 1999; Pless & Maak, 2004; Roberson, 2006). Scholarly perspectives on inclusion exhibit nuanced variations: Pelled et al. (1999) conceptualize it as the degree of acceptance and insider status accorded to employees within their work ecosystem, while Roberson (2006) frames it as the elimination of barriers to comprehensive employee engagement and contribution. Miller (1998) delineates inclusion as the extent to which diverse individuals can participate and contribute substantively. Lirio et al. (2008) accentuates the cultivation of belongingness and the quotidian practice of inclusive behaviours, exemplified by the valorisation of contributions from all organizational constituents. Avery et al. (2008) conceptualize inclusion as the degree to which personnel perceive their institutions as proactively engaging all constituents in organizational objectives and functions, leveraging their unique capabilities. Wasserman et al. (2008) delineate an inclusive organizational culture as one in which individuals representing diverse social identities are afforded opportunities to be visible, vocalized, valued, and integrated into pivotal institutional activities. Holvino et al. (2004) characterize a multicultural, inclusive organization as an entity where the heterogeneity of insights and viewpoints from varied groups informs and shapes the organization's strategic direction, operational practices, governance frameworks, and fundamental principles.

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[1] Research Scholar, SLM MRIIRS, Email: shekharkanupriya@gmail.com

[2] Supervisor Professor, SLM MRIIRS, Email: dss@mrei.ac.in

Despite its burgeoning prominence, the concept of inclusion lacks consensus regarding its definitional parameters and theoretical underpinnings. The past decade has witnessed the emergence of inclusion as an incipient construct within organizational literature (Roberson, 2006), with antecedent research streams in social work (cf. Mor Barak, 2000) and social psychology (cf. Brewer, 1991). Inclusion should be conceptualized as a collaborative endeavor involving stakeholders to engender opportunities, facilitate access, and foster participation. Salient dimensions of inclusion encompass access to informational and resource capital, group involvement, and the capacity to influence decision-making processes (Mor Barak & Cherin, 1998). Pelled et al. (1999) identified congruent dimensions, augmenting the construct with job security considerations. Cox and Nkomo (1991) underscored job involvement as a critical determinant of inclusion, noting its ramifications on career-related outcomes such as organizational commitment, career satisfaction, turnover propensity, and vertical mobility.

Empirical investigations have probed the nexus between diverse demographic attributes and perceptions of inclusion (Mor Barak & Levin, 2002; Findler et al., 2001; Mor Barak et al., 2001; Mor Barak, 2000; Pelled et al., 1999). Mor Barak and Levin (2002) advocate for expanded inquiry into diversity characteristics such as religious affiliation, age, organizational tenure, and hierarchical position. Miller (1998) emphasizes the imperative for organizations to optimize individual contributions, underscoring the need for further exploration of inclusion demographics. Elucidating group-specific perceptions of inclusion or exclusion is pivotal for identifying organizational issues and calibrating interventions appropriately.

Research findings indicate that employees who diverge from their work unit's racial and gender composition tend to report diminished feelings of inclusion relative to their colleagues (Pelled et al., 1999). Conversely, individuals with dissimilar backgrounds but greater tenure or educational attainment reported elevated inclusion levels. A comparative study conducted in California and Israel by Findler et al. (2001) revealed that age and gender influenced inclusion perceptions, with ethnicity, education, and occupational category emerging as significant factors in the California cohort.

Scholarly investigations have also scrutinized the impact of organizational diversity climate on minority experiences and organizational outcomes. Kossek and Zonia (1993) found that perceptions of diversity climate were modulated by hierarchical position, racial/ethnic identity, and gender in a large public university setting. Similarly, Hicks-Clarke and Iles (2000) discerned that gender and managerial echelon influenced perceptions of diversity climate, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction. However, a study by Hopkins et al. (2001) involving 233 managers yielded no evidence of gender or racial/ethnic differences in organizational commitment to diversity or value alignment. Numerous studies have examined receptivity to diversity and diversity management initiatives (Gaze, n.d.; Soldan, 2009; Soldan & Dickie, 2008), revealing variability in receptivity and perceptions across sociodemographic dimensions such as gender and racial/ethnic groups (Soldan & Dickie, 2008). While perceptual differences among community members are ubiquitous, the critical concern lies in the extent to which these perceptions are influenced by group affiliations (in-group vs. out-group) as delineated by social identity theory (Brewer, 1991). Given the increasing salience of diversity and inclusion in cross-cultural organizational contexts, particularly in India, it is imperative to examine perceptual differences among employees based on visible demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, age, religion, category) and less visible dimensions (e.g., sexual orientation, work role, organizational tenure). Consequently, this study sought to assess the magnitude of perceptual disparities regarding inclusion among employees in Indian organizations, predicated on socio-demographic factors. The following hypotheses were tested:

H_{01}: *The frequencies of eight dimensions of inclusion are equally distributed across the five categories of the Likert scale.*

H_{02}: *Demographics of gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, level, tenure and category have no significant differences with perception of inclusion.*

METHODOLOGY

Design and Instrument

The present research used a descriptive, quasi-experimental, quantitative research design to analyse the differences in perceptions of inclusion and demographic dimensions (e.g., gender, age, education, position) among employees in Indian organizations. Inclusion and demographic data were gathered using the Short Inclusion Scale (Workplace Inclusion Scale, WIS) developed by Lennox, Herlihy, Sharar, and Robey (2022) and socio-demographic questionnaire. This eight-item inclusion scale, designed for diversity and inclusion audits, uses a 5-point Likert response format ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." The eight items measure workplace inclusion across eight dimensions, namely, Trust, Valued, Opinions, Opportunity, Recognition, Diversity, Respect, and Team member. Principal components analysis indicated a single component underlying these eight dimensions (Lennox et al., 2022). The scale is empirically supported as reliable (α = .91) and valid (Lennox et al., 2022). The WIS provides a systematic and rigorous basis for conducting diversity and inclusion audits in various corporate settings.

Sample

The survey achieved an 82% response rate, with 152 out of 184 employees completing the survey. Due to missing data, only 130 of the 152 responses were usable for analysis. The demographic groups for this study were categorized as follows: Category into unreserved, scheduled caste (SC), scheduled tribe (ST), and other backward class (OBC); Gender into male, female, nonbinary, and prefer not to say; Age into 21-29 years, 30-39 years, 40-49 years, and 50-59 years; and Sexual orientation into heterosexual and homosexual/bisexual. Tenure was categorized as less than 5 years, 6-15 years, 16-25 years, and more than 25 years; Religion into Hindu, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Jainism; and organizational level of position into entry level, junior management, middle management, senior management, and leadership/executive roles. Details of the socio-demographic composition of study participants is presented in Table 1.

Analysis

Descriptives, Chi Square and Analysis of variance (ANOVA) techniques were used to gain insights into the research objectives. Descriptives were used to find the average score for each item on the Short Inclusion Scale and, thus understanding which dimensions of inclusion are perceived more positively than others. Pearson one-sample goodness of fit Chi Square test was used to find differences in equal proportions across five Likert-categories of eight dimensions of inclusion scale. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the differences between groups regarding the total inclusion score (Church & Waclawski, 1998). This test employs the F-ratio to evaluate the overall fit of a linear model (Field, 2005). The significance level was established at 0.05.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

The Short Inclusion Scale: The means and standard deviations for eight items are presented in Table 2 in order from highest to lowest rated. Each of these items was rated on a five-point scale where 1 was anchored with "strongly disagree" and 5 was anchored with "strongly agree." The table displays mean scores of eight dimensions of inclusion within an organization, based on responses to various items on a Likert scale. The mean scores range from 3.00 to 3.97, indicating a relatively consistent perception of inclusion across all dimensions. While "Diversity" scored the highest (M = 3.97) and "Recognition" the lowest (M = 3.00), the narrow range of means suggests that employees perceive similar levels of inclusion in aspects such as feeling part of a team, being respected, having opportunities, and trust. This consistency highlights an overall balanced perception of inclusion within the organization, with only slight variations among the different dimensions. Cronbach's alpha was used as a measure of internal consistency. An alpha of .853 was computed for this eight-item scale.

Chi Square Test

To test the hypothesis H_{01}, a Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test was conducted comparing the observed frequencies of the eight dimensions of the inclusion scale with the hypothesized equal proportions across the five categories of responses. The chi-square test for the dimension of trust revealed a significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies, $\chi2(4) =78.69$, p<.01. For dimension of being valued, the chi-square test showed a significant difference, $\chi2(4) =58.69$, p<.01. For opinion, the chi-square test revealed a significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies, $\chi2(4) =43.92$, p<.01. The chi-square test for opportunity dimension also revealed a significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies, $\chi2(4) =69.76$, p<.01. For recognition, the chi-square test showed a significant difference, $\chi2(4) =43.61$, p<.01. The chi-square test for diversity showed a significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies, $\chi2(4) =72.69$, p<.01. The chi-square test for respect dimension found a significant difference, $\chi2(4) =54.07$, p<.01. Finally for team member, the chi-square test revealed a significant difference between the observed and expected frequencies, $\chi2(4) =44.23$, p<.01. These results indicate that for all eight dimensions, the observed frequencies significantly differed from the expected equal distribution across the five response categories. This suggests that the responses are not evenly distributed across the categories, and certain response categories are favoured over others for each dimension.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

A one-way ANOVA was performed to evaluate hypothesis H_02, which aimed to compare the impact of various demographic variables on inclusion scores. The demographic factors examined included gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, work role level, tenure, and category. The analysis revealed no significant differences in inclusion perception related to gender, sexual orientation, and category. However, significant relationships were found between age and perception of inclusion (F=3.46; p=0.01). Employees aged 21–29 reported the highest levels of positive inclusion, followed by those aged 30–39, while employees aged 50–59 felt the least included. The analysis also indicated a significant relationship between religion and the sense of fitting in (F=2.02; p=0.04). Sikhs and Jains reported a high sense of fitting in, whereas Hindus and Muslims felt less positively about their inclusion. Furthermore, the level and position within the company significantly influenced the perception of feeling valued (F=8.08; p=0.00). Entry-level and junior management employees felt significantly less included compared to those in middle, senior, and leadership positions. Lastly, tenure showed a significant correlation between the perception of inclusion and length of service (F=4.34; p=0.00).

Interpretation

This study examined perceptions of inclusion in Indian organizations, assessing whether differences in employees' perceptions are influenced by gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, level of position, tenure, and category using a descriptive, quantitative approach with the Short Inclusion Scale. Hypothesis H_{01}, which proposed that the frequencies of eight dimensions of inclusion are equally distributed across the Likert scale categories, was tested using a Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test and found significant differences across all dimensions. Hypothesis H_{02}, which suggested no significant differences in inclusion perceptions based on demographics, was tested using a one-way ANOVA. The results indicated significant differences in inclusion perceptions based on age, religion, work role level, and tenure, but not for gender, sexual orientation, and education.

The descriptive statistics for the Short Inclusion Scale provided valuable insights into employees' perceptions of inclusion across various dimensions within an organization. Each dimension was rated on a five-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating stronger agreement with statements related to inclusion. The narrow range of mean scores for the eight dimensions of inclusion suggests that employees perceive a fairly consistent level of inclusion across all dimensions. Such consistency is indicative of a generally balanced perception of inclusion within the Indian organization. It implies that the organization's efforts to foster an inclusive environment are somewhat evenly felt across different aspects of inclusion. Diversity scored the highest among all which indicates that Indian employees strongly agree that their organization is diverse. The high score on diversity reflects positively on the organization's efforts to promote and maintain a diverse workplace. It suggests that

employees in Indian organizations recognize and appreciate the variety of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences within their work environment. Recognition, on the other hand, received the lowest mean score. While still indicating a neutral to somewhat positive perception, this lower score suggests that Indian employees feel less recognized for their contributions compared to other dimensions of inclusion. This could point to a potential area for improvement. Enhancing recognition programs and ensuring that employees feel valued and acknowledged for their work might help in boosting overall perceptions of inclusion.

The Chi-Square Goodness of Fit Test results revealed significant discrepancies between the observed and expected frequencies across the five response categories for all eight dimensions of the inclusion scale. This indicates that employees' responses to the dimensions of trust, valued, opinions, opportunity, recognition, diversity, respect, and team member were not evenly distributed as hypothesized. For the dimension of trust, the observed responses showed a marked deviation from the expected uniform distribution. Employees were more likely to select neutral and somewhat agree categories, indicating a moderate level of trust but a lack of strong agreement. This suggests that while trust is present to some extent within the organizations, it may not be perceived as robust or widespread among all employees. Similarly, the dimension of being valued exhibited significant differences from the expected distribution, with a higher frequency of somewhat disagree, neutral, and somewhat agree responses. This pattern implies that employees generally feel somewhat valued but there are noticeable gaps, with fewer employees expressing strong agreement. This highlights a potential area for organizational improvement in making employees feel more appreciated and recognized for their contributions. For the dimension of opinions being considered, the observed data again deviated significantly from the expected uniform distribution. A considerable number of employees chose neutral and somewhat agree categories, suggesting that while their opinions are sometimes considered, this is not a consistent experience across the board. This inconsistency points to a need for organizations to create more inclusive environments where employees feel their opinions are regularly valued and acted upon. The opportunity dimension showed a notable concentration of responses in the somewhat agree category, indicating that employees perceive moderate levels of opportunity within their organizations. However, the lower frequencies of strongly agree responses suggest that there is still room for improvement in ensuring that all employees feel they have equal and ample opportunities for growth and advancement. The recognition dimension followed a similar pattern, with a significant number of neutral and somewhat agree responses. This indicates that recognition of employees' efforts and achievements is somewhat present but not pervasive. Strengthening recognition programs could help in boosting morale and enhancing perceptions of inclusion (Mor Barak, 2000). Diversity emerged as a dimension with a high number of somewhat agree and strongly agree responses, indicating that employees generally perceive their organizations as diverse. However, the significant differences from expected frequencies suggest that there are still areas where diversity could be further improved or more consistently recognized across the organization. Respect as a dimension showed significant deviations, with many responses falling into the neutral and somewhat agree categories. This suggests that respect among colleagues and towards employees is recognized to a degree, but is not universally experienced at the highest levels. Efforts to foster a culture of mutual respect could further enhance the sense of inclusion. Lastly, the team member dimension revealed a similar trend, with a concentration of responses in the somewhat agree category. Employees generally feel included as team members, but the lower frequencies of strong agreement point to potential disparities in how included employees feel within their teams. These findings indicate that while there are positive perceptions of inclusion on various dimensions, there is considerable variability, and the expected equal distribution across response categories is not met. This suggests that while some aspects of inclusion are moderately perceived in Indian organizations, there are significant areas for improvement to ensure a more uniformly inclusive environment for all employees. Indian Organizations should focus on addressing these gaps by enhancing trust, valuing opinions, providing opportunities, recognizing achievements, promoting diversity, fostering respect, and strengthening team cohesion to achieve higher and more consistent levels of perceived inclusion.

The one-way ANOVA results indicate that perceptions of inclusion within the organization significantly differ based on age, religion, work role level, and tenure, while no significant differences were found for gender, sexual orientation, and category. This suggests that certain demographic factors influence how employees perceive their inclusion in the workplace, whereas others do not. With age, younger employees, particularly those aged

21-29, reported higher inclusion scores compared to their older counterparts. This finding suggests that younger individuals feel more included in the workplace. This could be due to various factors such as greater adaptability to modern inclusive practices, a more open mindset towards diversity, or organizational efforts that resonate more with younger employees. The perception of inclusion diminishing with age might indicate potential generational differences in expectations and experiences within the workplace (Pelled et al., 1999). Comparing differences with respect to religion, inclusion scores varied notably among different religious groups, with Jain participants reporting the highest mean scores. This variation could be attributed to Indian cultural or community-specific perceptions of inclusion. For example, smaller or more tight-knit religious communities like Jainism might foster a stronger sense of inclusion among their members, both within the community and in their professional environments. This finding underscores the importance of understanding and addressing the unique needs and perceptions of different religious groups to foster an inclusive environment for all. When compared for levels of work role, Indian employees in higher work roles, such as middle management, senior management, and leadership & executive roles, reported significantly higher inclusion scores compared to those in entry-level and junior management positions. This trend suggests that individuals in higher positions feel more included, possibly due to greater access to resources, decision-making power, and recognition within the organization (Miller & Katz, 2002). It highlights a potential disparity where lower-level employees might not feel as integrated or valued, pointing to a need for initiatives that promote inclusion across all levels of the organizational hierarchy. Lastly, Indian employees with longer tenure, particularly those with more than 25 years of service, reported higher inclusion scores compared to those with shorter tenure. This finding suggests that over time, employees feel more integrated and included within the organization. Long-term employees likely have established stronger relationships, a deeper understanding of the organizational culture, and a more secure position within the company. However, this also implies that newer employees may struggle with feelings of inclusion, emphasizing the importance of onboarding processes and continuous support to help them integrate and feel valued from the start. Thus, while the Indian organizations show strengths in promoting inclusion across various demographics, there are clear areas where perceptions of inclusion vary significantly. Addressing these differences by tailoring inclusion strategies to cater to the unique needs of different age groups, religious backgrounds, work roles, and tenure levels can help create a more uniformly inclusive environment. This approach not only enhances the overall perception of inclusion but also ensures that all employees, regardless of their demographic background, feel equally valued and integrated within the organization.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the perceptions of inclusion within Indian organizations, revealing significant variations influenced by age, religion, work role level, and tenure. While overall perceptions of inclusion were relatively consistent, younger employees, those in higher work roles, and those with longer tenure reported higher inclusion scores. The dimensions of diversity and respect scored highly, indicating positive perceptions in these areas. However, lower scores in recognition and discrepancies among religious groups suggest areas needing improvement. These findings highlight the need for tailored strategies to address the specific needs and perceptions of diverse employee demographics to foster a more uniformly inclusive work environment.

To enhance inclusion within Indian organizations, several targeted strategies are recommended for managers and human resource professionals. First, implementing robust recognition programs to acknowledge employee contributions can address the lower scores in this dimension. This can be achieved through regular performance appraisals, awards, and public acknowledgments (Roberson, 2006). Second, tailored onboarding processes and continuous support for new employees can help integrate them into the organization more effectively, improving their sense of inclusion from the start. Additionally, promoting inclusive practices that resonate with younger employees and acknowledging the unique cultural perceptions of different religious groups can foster a more inclusive work environment. Finally, providing equal opportunities for growth and advancement across all work role levels can ensure that employees at all levels feel valued and included. By addressing these areas, organizations can create a more inclusive culture where every employee feels equally valued and integral to the organization's success.

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