



# ***RQ: To what extent does DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion), benefit an organization and its stakeholders when implemented correctly?***

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## **Abstract**

DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) is gaining increasing importance all around the world and has shown great results in fostering company growth. Diversity, in itself, is a vast, yet crucial term and encompasses a variety of individuals; different perspectives and experiences enable people to learn more from their peers and help inculcate values as well. Inclusion strives to make all people feel valued and respected; inclusion of diverse voices in a workplace fosters greater workplace relationships amongst co-workers and promotes a safer environment leading to increased profits. Equity refers to fairness and justice, and is distinguished from equality; while equality means providing the same to all, equity means recognizing that we do not all start from the same place and must acknowledge and make adjustments to imbalances. This research paper uncovers how diversity, equality and inclusion when implemented in tandem with each other, can impact stakeholders, primarily the company, employees and its customers. Towards the latter half, this paper introduces the positive impact of DEI through a case study of Microsoft and the negatives of incorrect implementation of DEI through a case study of Nike.

## **Introduction**

***Diversity is the mix, and inclusion is getting the mix to work equitably.***

Diversity, equity, and inclusion, otherwise known as DEI, are three closely related terms with varying meanings. It is only in their combination, that their true impact emerges. Diversity in a workplace implies the acceptance and inclusion of employees of all backgrounds. A diverse workplace is an important asset since it acknowledges the individual strengths of each employee and the potential they bring. Diversity has repeatedly been evidenced as a driver in company growth and success due to the underlying benefits of greater levels of creativity, perspectives and

understanding. For instance, sixty percent of LinkedIn users say that diversity within their sales team has contributed to its success and it has also been reported that diverse companies earn 2.5x higher cash flow per employee (Research and Markets, 2022). Ultimately, however, in order to reap the benefits of diversity in a workplace, the importance of inclusion must be understood. Simply put, inclusion is the backbone for diversity as it supports and helps mould the essence of a diverse setting in such a way that it ultimately benefits all the stakeholders of a company. In line with this, research suggests that inclusive teams are over 35% more productive which leads to the advantage of growth that is expected when diversity and inclusion work in cohesion (Research and Markets, 2022). Finally, equity in the workplace is equally important and refers to treating people in a fair manner and ensuring that all norms and values are followed and that people earn what they deserve.

While DEI is gaining popularity and many firms are trying their best to implement these concepts to leverage their consequent benefits, there are several questions which may arise. For instance, if not implemented correctly, do these concepts have drawbacks? If so, what are they? If a company focuses all their attention towards the implementation of DEI will the outcome always be favourable or not? In line with the aforementioned, this research paper aims to answer the question '***To what extent does DEI benefit an organization and its stakeholders when implemented correctly?***'

This paper argues that DEI may be incredibly important and beneficial to stakeholders when implemented correctly, as evidenced by the Microsoft case study.

## **An Exploration of Diversity, Inclusion and Equity**

### Diversity

Diversity in the workplace is crucial since it can enhance overall operations by utilizing a variety of distinct viewpoints to accomplish tasks and reach conclusions. An organization that employs a varied staff, for instance, will gain from the perspectives of each employee, as they each contribute a unique set of skills and resources. Diversity in the workforce is the representation of people. Several instances of workplace diversity include cultural diversity, gender diversity, age diversity, ethnic diversity and physical ability.

A person's distinct ethnic heritage is referred to as their culture, which might include characteristics from the society in which they are raised, cultural standards of behaviour, and beliefs instilled in them by their family (Gayan, 2021). In the workplace, *cultural diversity* may be quite beneficial, particularly for organizations that collaborate with clients or other enterprises in foreign nations. This is due to the fact that a workforce - that is culturally varied - can instruct all staff members on how to conduct meetings, negotiations, and commercial dealings with respect to unfamiliar cultures.

Having equal opportunities that aren't dependent on your gender; constitutes what *gender diversity* is all about. It refers to answering questions about how men, women, and nonbinary individuals make up a given population. People of diverse genders in the same space, for instance, can inspire staff members to learn about gender-related ideas and foster respect for all gender identities. This can improve relationships with clients or consumers by strengthening interpersonal and communication skills in the workplace (Skills 4, 2020).

*Age diversity* includes the efficient functioning of a firm with more than one generation. It centres on how a diverse range of age groups can work together, and how that can prove to be beneficial; as each generation has a unique set of perspectives and values that they can share (Indeed, 2023).

*Neurodiversity and physical ability* examine whether people with disabilities (visible or not) have their viewpoints taken into account (McKinsey & Company, 2022). People typically assume that a disability is solely related to one's capacity to move physically. Workers may, however, be disabled in a variety of ways, ranging from mental health concerns and learning challenges to restrictions in eyesight and movement. In order to foster diversity, it is imperative to provide accommodations for those with disabilities who possess comparable productivity levels to their peers. A simple example of the aforementioned would be businesses providing ramps and lifts in place of stairs so that the workplace is accessible to everyone.

## Inclusion

Inclusion refers to a term which states that everyone irrespective of their backgrounds, feels welcome and included in an organization. It is an important aspect of the efficient working of a workplace and plays a crucial role in understanding individuals as well. The goal of an inclusive workplace is to make employees feel comfortable in asking for what they need and accepting them regardless of their differences (Indeed, 2022). “Unity in diversity” is a phrase that establishes the relation between diversity and inclusion in a simple manner.

Workplace inclusion is an integral part of creating a positive company culture which helps companies accomplish their primary organizational objectives (Wormington, 2023). Ensuring equal access to corporate resources is an excellent example of inclusive workplace practices. For instance, a workplace that denies certain employees access to various levels of senior management would not be inclusive whereas one that guarantees that team leaders and other corporate members provide equal support to each employee would be. In an article, Gurchiek (2018) suggests that some strategies that help in creating a more inclusive environment include educating our leaders, forming an inclusion council, celebrating employee differences, listening to employees, holding more effective meetings, and lastly, communicating goals and measuring progress.

## Equity

Equity vs Equality is a simple, yet misunderstood concept by many. While equity refers to allocating resources based on need because everyone has different circumstances, equality refers to treating each person the same. For example, there is a family of three watching a match in the stadium, however, the child is too short to be able to look over the fence. In this case, simply stating that the three of them have gone to see the match is equality, as all of them are being treated equally. However, if there is a special seat made available for the child to be able to also get the same view as his parents are getting from that height, then it is termed equity.

Equity, in the workplace, refers to the fair and just treatment of all employees. It includes respecting the employees; which in turn makes them feel included, and thus highlights an aspect of inclusion in equity. Equity in a workplace involves issues related to fairness in pay, opportunities for fairness and advancement in daily work experiences (Pendell, 2022). The success of a workplace hinges on an inclusive and equitable experience. A few ways in which we can achieve equity in a workplace are by hiring for skills, not degrees. Also by accommodating health conditions and disabilities. Thirdly, by offering flexible schedules to each and every one. Lastly, by providing training during work hours (Long, 2023).

Workplace equity is dependent on belonging, equality, and transparency. Furthermore, it can be difficult to establish a company that is totally free from prejudice and discrimination in even diverse settings. While promoting equity first requires effort, research indicates that companies gain from fostering an egalitarian environment.

Overall, Diversity refers to who is represented in the workforce. Equity refers to the fair treatment of all people. Inclusion refers to how the workforce experiences the workplace and the degree to which organizations embrace all employees. Companies that are intent on recruiting a diverse workforce must also strive to develop a sufficiently inclusive culture, such that all employees feel their voices will be heard. Equity comes into place by ensuring that all the employees are treated in a fair and just manner. The aforementioned highlights how DEI are interconnected and interdependent. Diversity affects inclusivity and that in turn affects equity. Companies that are diverse, equitable, and inclusive are better able to respond to challenges, win top talent, and meet the needs of different customer bases (McKinsey & Company, 2022b). For instance, as per statistics published in a report by Miles (2022), nearly 80% of workers report that they want to work for a company that values diversity, equity, and inclusion. In the past couple of years, a focus on a more equitable workplace has become more important for many organizations. In fact, 40% of the workers report that their company has made DEI more of a priority.

## Stakeholder Analysis

### Employees

Diversity in a workplace positively affects employees, as it increases knowledge about each other's cultural backgrounds, and helps them function in a more inclusive manner. Diversity isn't limited to differences in racial background, gender, skill, or religion. Employees with varying ages, educational backgrounds, skill sets, seniority levels, and national and international experiences may also be included. Such a diversified workforce's knowledge, expertise, and abilities can contribute to a variety of creative ideas and solutions - ultimately, individuals enter the organization with unique characteristics and they perceive the world through these diverse attributes (Ahmad, Fazal and Rahman, 2019).

Recruiting a diverse workforce injects personality into an organization's culture. In case an organization ignores the management of workplace diversity, it will eliminate trust, mutual understanding, cooperation and respect among employees which adversely affects employees' performance. But diversity is just one part of the equation. Equity and inclusion are important too. Together, they build a strong organizational culture. Making sure that all employees get equal opportunities, especially those who have been traditionally given few opportunities is commonly referred to as equity. According to the *theory of motivation* known as *equity theory*, employees' motivation at work is primarily influenced by their perception of justice. Workers mentally record all of the inputs and outputs associated with their work, which they subsequently utilize to compare their input-to-output ratio to that of other workers.

Embracing, supporting, and valuing every employee is the act of inclusion. Making everyone feel that they belong and that they matter is crucial to an inclusive workplace. Employees who feel included are most certain to *perform well*. Employees who feel excluded are almost certain to perform at less than their full potential; neuroscience has shown that the human brain processes exclusion in ways that are similar to how it processes physical pain. As per a report published on Bain by Coffman et al. (2023), employees who report feeling fully included are 12 times more likely to promote their companies to others. Approximately 50% of all job seekers now say they view inclusion as very important in a prospective employer.

On the other hand, however, diversity, equity and inclusion can lead to conflicts, biases discrimination and unintended pressure in the workplace. In terms of diversity, when employees perceive their colleagues' goals and interests to be different from their own, they tend to feel more defensive, nervous and uncertain regarding their work. This, in turn, may lead to *aggressive behaviours or interpersonal conflict* (Liu, Zhu and Wang, 2023). In reference to inclusion, the problem of *unconscious bias* arises. An article published by Diversity in Tech (2021) elaborates that we automatically give preference to those who are similar to us - in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation etc. Equity theory suggests that people strive for fairness in their relationships. They want to feel that they deserve as

per how much effort they put in. When people feel like they are not treated fairly, they may tend to become dissatisfied and take action against the situation. This is quite common in workplaces where due to internal conflicts or discrimination, employees tend to react in a certain way which might not always be suitable.

### Customers

Diversity, equity, and inclusion can lead to enhanced customer service as a result of respected employees having a greater urge to respect the company's customers, greater cultural sensitivity as well as more effective meeting and exceeding of needs and wants.

No matter where you come from, or where you work, diversity will always be around you (Lumoa, 2023). Many around you will be from various diverse backgrounds/ethnicities/races/genders etc. Thus, it is obvious that your target group, i.e. the customers will also range from a mix of religion, race, social status' etc. The more diverse your customer experience team is, the better your employees will be at communicating, having empathy, and understanding the buyer. Cultural differences can also intersect with varying communication styles. Specific language uses can come across as abrupt, or using hand gestures could confuse unfamiliar team members. Communication is essential for business success, but so is diversity and inclusion. Cultural diversity can cause misunderstandings at times. For example, maintaining eye contact with the customer in some cultures is considered important, but rude or disrespectful in others.

### Company

Diversity in a company can increase productivity, build a positive organizational culture, spark innovation, and increase employee retention rates (Romeo, 2021). A report by McKinsey and Company found that diverse companies perform better, especially if an organization's leadership is diverse. Diversity has a strong impact on financial performance, as it increases productivity, and in turn results in higher profits. In addition, it leads to improved marketing and customer service through better understanding and accommodation of diverse customer groups and their needs (Romeo, 2023). Diverse talent means you can more easily reach new markets and customer bases that you might not otherwise understand.

Inclusion helps in increasing the engagement of employees. Inclusive companies are also almost three times better at coaching people for improved performance and four times better at identifying and building leaders. Making people better is the key to their engagement, and inclusion seems to give companies a clear advantage. Furthermore, it helps in recruiting good

people and retaining exemplary employees. While recruiting, for example, the prospective employees may not need same-sex fertility benefits or even veteran mentorship services, but they'll still see them as a sign that you appreciate the difference.

Business performances can be significantly improved by fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace. Businesses may boost innovation, decision-making, customer satisfaction, employee retention, and reputation by cultivating a diverse and inclusive workplace (Frei and Morriss, 2023). Lastly, equity - which encompasses fairness, justice, and impartiality - is an essential element of diversity and inclusion efforts in a company. Building an equitable workplace benefits employees and enhances a company's reputation, fosters innovation, and improves overall performance (India Employer Forum, 2023).

## **Case Study of DEI in the Real World**

### Microsoft

Microsoft was founded on April 4, 1975, by Bill Gates and Paul Allen in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The American multinational technology company Microsoft Corporation has its main office in Redmond, Washington. The Microsoft 365 suite of productivity apps, the Edge web browser, and the Windows operating system family are among the company's best-known software offerings. Their mission is to empower every person and every organization to achieve more. They believe technology can and should be a force for good, and that meaningful innovation contributes to a brighter world in the future and today (Microsoft, 2024).

Microsoft operates in 190 countries and is made up of more than 220,000 passionate employees worldwide. At Microsoft, diversity and inclusion are central to their mission to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more. Their goal has always been to broaden the range of perspectives and experiences that make up their workforce to unlock innovation for employees, customers, and the planet. Microsoft maintains a work environment free from discrimination, one where employees are treated with dignity and respect. All employees share the responsibility for fulfilling Microsoft's commitment to equal employment opportunity.

Women make up 31.7% of the global workforce, 25.2% of senior leadership roles, 35.0% of management roles, and 25.8% of technical roles. Furthermore, Black and African American employees make up 6.1% of the US workforce, 3.3% of senior leadership roles, 5.4% of management roles, and 5.6% of technical roles. In their Daily Signals survey sent to a sampling of employees each day, they ask for sentiment on this statement: "At Microsoft, we are diverse and inclusive, meaning that we are open to others' ideas, we value and invite differing perspectives, and we believe diversity is critical to our success." In June, 78.9% of employees surveyed agreed or strongly agreed. The data shows that employees who are favourable to this statement are 1.8 times more likely to stay at Microsoft (Microsoft, 2023).

Furthermore, employee experience is directly impacted by the opportunity for everyone in the workforce to deepen understanding through DEI learning. While required learning consumption remained consistently high, there was a

270.6% increase in employees taking optional courses that allowed them to explore topics such as interrupting microaggressions and breaking down barriers to create more inclusive workplaces. Thus, DEI has managed to impact Microsoft in a positive manner as the company has made significant strides in promoting diversity and fostering an inclusive workplace, over the years, which positively influences its stakeholders and garners a positive brand image.

## Nike

Nike Inc. stands as one of the largest and most recognised athleticwear and global sports brands (Carlson, 2019). Celebrity endorsements with some of the leading names in the sports industry including Tiger Woods, Serena Williams and LeBron James have fuelled the popularity of this brand and continuously contributed to its international recognition and success.

The above being considered, whilst Nike might be doing well from an industry rank perspective, unfortunately, the brand has repeatedly failed to do well from a diversity, inclusion and equity perspective. The last few years specifically have exposed many truths about the manner in which Nike operates. For instance, an article published in The Guardian highlights how “a long-running sexual harassment and gender discrimination lawsuit against Nike has produced more than 5,000 pages of records, including surveys of female employees that allege sexist attitudes and behaviour at the sportswear giant alongside corporate bullying and fears of retaliation” (Helmore, 2022). The documents supporting this lawsuit apparently date back to 2018 and detail the lack of gender diversity and efforts to make female employees feel included and respected in the workplace. One of the female employees questioned on this, for example, described Nike as “a giant men’s sports team, where favouritism prevails and females couldn’t possibly play in the sandbox”.

Beyond a lack of DEI in the workplace, there have also been instances of such behaviour translating to the products created and sold by the company. For instance, in 2019, the brand was forced to drop its Fourth of July sneakers (Saunt, 2023). The reason for the aforementioned was that the sneakers featured an earlier version of the American flag known as ‘Betsy Rose’ on the heel. The reason the brand had to drop this sneaker is because the old flag used in the design has links to an era of slavery. This highlights one instance in which the brand failed to recognise the importance of ethnic diversity in its product line.

While Nike has made efforts to fix and improve their DEI and has several goals in place, which are being actively worked on and gradually being achieved, there is no doubt that the previous instances of a lack of DEI have generated a lot of bad media for the brand and created a largely negative narrative around them. The aforementioned once again goes to show how it is imperative for DEI to be embedded correctly in a company’s operations rather than be a sort of afterthought after years of not understanding the value of these principles in the workplace.

## **Conclusion**

Diversity, equity, and inclusion have benefitted numerous organizations including their stakeholders, when implemented correctly, to quite a great extent. This paper is an extensive summary, mainly concerned with the explanation, scope, and impact of DEI in the 21st century.

DEI, when executed correctly, offers many benefits and leads to the growth rate of many companies. For example, Microsoft fosters an inclusive workplace where staff members are treated with respect and regard. Every employee must uphold Microsoft's commitment to equal employment opportunity. This in turn has led to Microsoft being known as one of the best companies in the world, which has succeeded in correctly implementing DEI. The benefits of DEI in the workplace include improved collaboration, innovation, recruitment, employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, employee engagement, and retention. These benefits help employees stay motivated at work and help companies achieve their long-term financial goals as well.

However, there is a negative side as well. This incorporates unconscious bias, cultural diversity, and workplace discrimination. Communication issues may also arise due to language barriers or generational gaps. Mistrust amongst minority groups also proves to be a con. For example, Nike has been associated with several issues regarding how it fosters diversity, equity, and inclusion. Thus, to overcome such challenges, companies often establish a code of conduct to be followed by all of the employees, including themselves, in the workplace.

If diversity, equity, and inclusion aren't implemented correctly, then this could cause conflicts among the workers in an organization. To maintain a sense of belonging and ensure the efficient working of all employees in the workplace, companies must take all necessary measures to foster a healthy working environment which leads to its success in the future.

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