Uncovering Blind Spots

Outlook on Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging in Indian workplaces

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Sources:

1 Comscore, Total Visits, March 2021

2 Google Analytics, Unique Visitors, February 2020

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Foreword

Widespread awareness and progressive sensibilities, combined with new work modes spurred on by the pandemic, create a conducive atmosphere for inclusivity in Indian organizations.

Greater acceptance of the idea of a diverse workforce has been gaining ground among Indian employers for more than a decade now. The substantial benefits of Gender Equality were known long before the potential addition of USD 12 trillion to global growth[3] was quantified in 2015. Shortly after, the Maternity Benefits (Amendment) Bill, 2016, aimed at reversing the declining trend in women's workforce participation, was passed.

An increase in the adoption of a gender-neutral approaches to human resource policies followed in an attempt to end any systemic discrimination against vulnerable communities.

The upheaval caused by Covid-19, and the new configurations of doing work have accelerated the journey towards Diversity, Inclusivity and Belonging (DI&B). The unprecedented threat organizations faced undoubtedly put brakes on many progressive policies. Despite this, the pandemic has made companies sit up and rethink conventional talent strategies. As a result, DI&B has assumed a level of significance unseen before today.

These developments call for a study of the degree of inclusivity India Inc. has and is working towards. Indeed commissioned a comprehensive, large scale study, which concluded in March 2022 involving the survey of 1,142 distinct employers and 1,430 employees across 10 sectors – such as Banking, Financial Services and Insurance (BFSI), IT and Knowledge Services, Media and Entertainment, Retail, and Telecommunications – and across 11 Indian cities. The research also involved in-depth interviews with Diversity managers and people working in organizations representing vulnerable groups. Our purpose is to make more and more organizations aware of the potential tangible and intangible benefits of DI&B.

[3] Ten things to know about gender equality, McKinsey Global Institute, September 2020

Defining Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging

India's diversity – of people, cultures, beliefs and languages – is not yet fully reflected in the composition of its workforce. But, organizations are transforming themselves as a movement for greater inclusion gets underway.

This study of Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging in Indian organizations was carried out across 10 sectors and 11 cities, and across 1,142 employers and 1,430 employees of small, medium and large businesses.

The need for a truly composite workforce necessitates a clear understanding of the associated terms – Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging. The below description is drawn from research and business literature.

Diversity is the fair representation of different types of people in an organization.

It is a strategic perspective that encompasses all people's differences and weaves these differences into a tapestry of opportunities for individuals and the organization. How diversity is implemented and managed significantly affects thought processes, feelings and sentiments, and behaviour at work. It dramatically influences organizational performance and progress and the degree of job satisfaction experienced by people.

This holistic vision of diversity manifests as people of varying identities bringing their unique perspectives and authentic selves to the workplace - representing the many physical and socio-cultural differences that exist in society in the workplace. As a result, the demographic composition fosters problem solving and innovation, contributes to financial growth, and extends equal career growth opportunities.

Inclusion is the degree to which different people are enabled to participate in an organization's processes.

An inclusive work environment respects all individuals, accepts them as integral to the organization, treats them fairly, and enables access to opportunities and resources to every individual. It is an active integration of people differences – of identities, ideas, talents and perspectives – and their involvement in the organization's mission, goals, decisions, and performance.

This participative culture listens to and enables a superior degree of engagement and contribution by diverse people. Inclusion is necessary for the manifestation and sustainability of diversity in an organization. By facilitating equitable access to resources and making diverse groups a part of decision processes, inclusion brings the idea of diversity to life.

Belonging is a sense of connectedness and of being an integral part of an organization.

The experience of personal involvement and a genuine appreciation of people's full perspectives and true selves brings about this integration of individuals into the organization. Ensuring everyone has a voice at the table, clearing barriers to work and progress, and appreciating diverse backgrounds are necessary steps in creating a sense of belonging.

The tenets that underpin belonging include reciprocating care and acceptance, a mutual sense of being valued, and forming and maintaining strong, stable interpersonal relationships. Equally, belonging means the freedom to express and the opportunity to grow.

What people working in organizations think Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging mean

The Indeed-Valuvox survey identified six different themes which people working in Indian organizations associate with the terms Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging, taken together. **Oneness** is the most dominant theme, and it distils **39%** of all employee opinions that interpreted DI&B to mean an egalitarian culture that treats everyone as an equal. On the other hand, one in every five employees surveyed associated DI&B with a **Sense of belonging**, and about one in seven respondents associate it with a theme of **Equal opportunity**.

Oneness
Treating everyone in the organization as an equal **39%**

Sense of belonging
A shared sense of being part of the organization **20%**

Equal opportunity
A fair and just hiring and career progression mechanism **14%**

Recognition
Acknowledging the contribution of every individual **12%**

Representation
Equitable composition of different types of people **10%**

Respect
Admiration for every distinct quality and ability **5%**

(from the Indeed-Valuvox Employee survey, concluded in March 2022)

How people working in organizations **define** Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging

Diversity Managers, who shared stories of their successful DI&B implementations, broadly concurred with the above themes coined by employees.
Respect, Representation, Recognition (of differences), and **Equal opportunity** summed up the meaning subject matter experts attach to the terms Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging.

Chandana Agarwal

President,
North, 82point5

Diversity, for me, is the acceptance that each of us is unique and therefore has a right to have a point of view that may or may not align with the dominant view. Inclusion is a culture where everybody makes sure everyone else is a part of the community. Belonging is an emotion that is evoked by Diversity and Inclusion, whereone feels fearless, safe, and has the opportunity to voice one's concerns.

Amit Pandya

High Fashion Stylist, Formerly with C. Krishnaiah Chetty & Sons Group of Jewellers (CKC)

I feel these are all terms surrounding inclusiveness – about being together and being a part of the family.

How **Diversity Managers** define Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging

Aruna Newton

Global Head- Diversity & Inclusion,
Sustainability Governance and Reporting, Infosys Ltd.

Respect for another human being, respect for difference as a positive force – something nature teaches you every day; the wide-range of backgrounds
and experiences that make up a group of people.

Vieshaka Dutta

Director - Diversity Equity and Inclusion, Publicis Sapient

Involves and reflects society, comprising people from different communities, backgrounds, genders, sexual orientations, and colours well-represented in an organization; a smart strategy.

Anuradha Khosla

Vice President HR - Head Diversity & Inclusion,
HCL Technologies

Anything that sets one individual apart from another, including the full spectrum of human demographic differences as well as the different ideas, backgrounds, and opinions people bring.

Anuja Ratan

HR Lead, Indeed India Operations

Having heterogeneous groups of people in the workforce; when every individual notwithstanding their differences, has an equal opportunity to be their authentic selves and contribute.

(from the Indeed-Valuvox Qualitative research depth interviews concluded in March 2022)

How aware is India Inc. about Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging?

A fast-changing socio-cultural context has resulted in growing awareness of the need for diversity, inclusion and belonging among Indian employers. The historical marginalization faced by various communities and types of people seems to be thankfully on the decline. Recognition of the potential of DI&B to transform organizations and deliver tangible benefits has replaced the conventional filters employers applied to hiring and talent management.

Rising awareness of DI&B among organizations

- Open to a more diverse workforce which includes transgender, gender-nonconforming people and other marginalized groups
- Offer equal opportunities, benefits, and improve people's everyday experiences
- To cultivate a workplace ecosystem which is strategically designed, considerate and includes under-represented voices

Slightly less than half of all employers surveyed (**44%**) believe that their organizations are "well aware of" or "very sensitive to" the cause of DI&B.

The awareness levels vary widely, however. A marginally smaller proportion (**39%**) believes that DI&B awareness in their organizations doesn't quite measure up, and a significant minority (**17%**) admits to being unaware.

Inclusion and diversity cannot be used interchangeably because simply having a wide roster of demographic characteristics won't make a difference to an organization unless people from the demographic feel welcomed.
-Anuradha Khosla

DI&B awareness among employers

- ► We seriously lack awareness
- ► We are aware, but not to the required extent
- ► We are well aware
- ► We are very sensitive to the cause

An LGBTQ friend, an HR/Training Manager, has been instrumental in normalizing the community through guest sessions and interaction with other HR professionals. Events such as Gay Pride, held in Bangalore, have changed people sensibilities over the years.

-Amit Pandya

The businesses, sectors and cities that lead on DI&B awareness

Business Size

Large Businesses

67%

Sectors

Retail

71%

IT/Knowledge Services

71%

Cities

Chandigarh

80%

Ahmedabad

75%

Business size was found to greatly influence the degree of DI&B awareness.

More than two out of three large businesses (**67%**) belong in the "well aware" or "very sensitive" categories, while nearly three out of four small businesses (**73%**) either have inadequate awareness or lack awareness altogether. Sectors that employ a young demographic in growing numbers – Retail and IT/Knowledge Services – lead awareness among the sectors, while the high literacy[4], high Human Development Index[5] and high per capita income[6] Chandigarh and the rich and populous Ahmedabad[7] lead among the cities surveyed.

Changing social narratives

The social-cultural change we are witnessing has meant that 'Diversity' and 'Inclusion' are on the corporate agenda for Indian companies. Progressive companies let employees choose their preferred pronouns. Some let employees disclose their sexual preferences on internal databases so they can avail health benefits for their partners.

4 Census of India, 2011
5 Human Development Report, 2019, UNDP
6 Per Capita Income in Chandigarh India FY 2012 – 2019, Statista
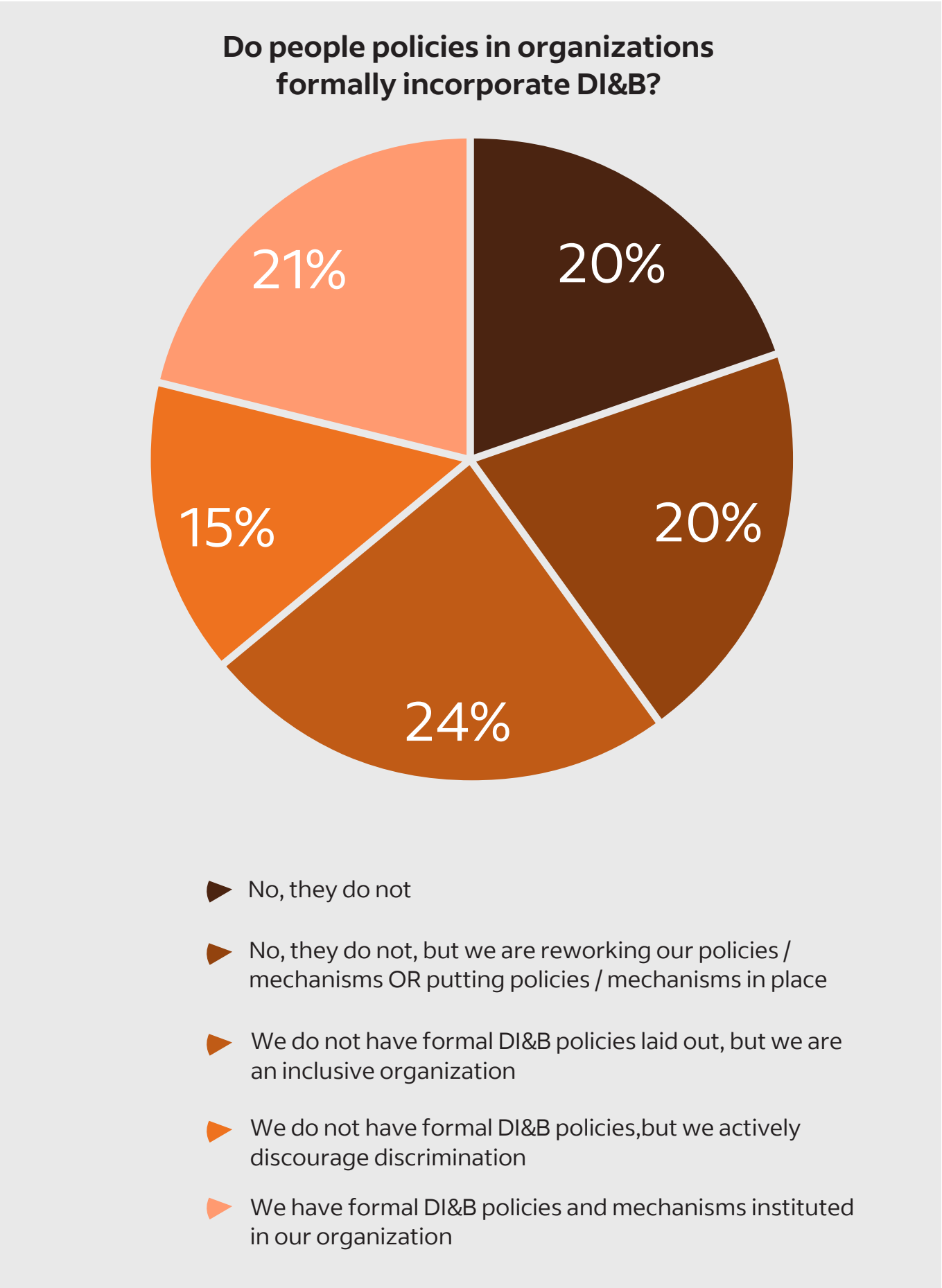7 Census of India, 2011

Source: Creating Inclusive Workplaces for India, PeopleMatters, June 2021

The need for formal DI&B policies

A long term and sustainable DI&B plan requires the formal inclusion of relevant provisions in the organizational people policies. Policy inclusion helps seed DI&B into every stage of the talent lifecycle so organizations can realize its true potential. It also ensures prior management and people buy-ins, and continued support. Most organizations intend to be inclusive, but formalization lags as per the survey.

A significant proportion of the organizations surveyed have either instituted formal Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging policies (**21%**) or begun preparations (**20%**).

An equal proportion (**40%**) do not have a formal approach to DI&B. However, they claim to be "inclusive" or "actively discouraging discrimination".

Do people policies in organizations formally incorporate DI&B?

▶ No, they do not

▶ No, they do not, but we are reworking our policies / mechanisms OR putting policies / mechanisms in place

▶ We do not have formal DI&B policies laid out, but we are an inclusive organization

▶ We do not have formal DI&B policies, but we actively discourage discrimination

▶ We have formal DI&B policies and mechanisms instituted in our organization

The business types, sectors and cities where formal DI&B policies are present and are being planned

Present   Planned

Business Size

Large Businesses	Medium Businesses
37%	19%

Sectors

IT/Knowled-ge Services	Media and Entertainment
33%	71%

Cities

Hyderabad	Delhi
35%	71%

Again, large organizations lead –

37% of all large organizations surveyed have laid out formal DI&B policies.

Surprisingly, however, a more significant proportion of medium-sized (**19%**) and
small organizations (**12%**) than large (**10%**) are on the path to formalization.

IT and Knowledge Services leads, with 33% of the respondents from the sector having instituted formal policies, while **71%** of the Media and Entertainment sector respondents are planning to formalize. The tech-hub, Hyderabad, has the highest proportion of respondents who have instituted formal policies (**35%**), while Delhi, with **71%**, leads the intent to formalize.

The need for DI&B people policies – as per employers

- ▶ 1 star
- ▶ 2 stars
- ▶ 3 stars
- ▶ 4 stars
- ▶ 5 stars

1 star: No need at all
<> 5 stars: Absolutely needed

Publicis Sapient implemented a policy wherein 20,000+ global employees (including 11,000 in India) were to learn the basics of sign language. It was made possible with the help of a Business Resource Group (BRG).
-Vieshaka Dutta

Despite the inertia observed with formalization, most employers surveyed recognize its importance.

Nearly three in five (57%) believe that formal DI&B policies are an absolute or a strong need for their organizations.

Employee opinion on how actively organizations promote DI&B initiatives also reinforces this sensibility. Of the employees working in organizations that have instituted formal DI&B policies, **35%** felt that their organizations actively promote DI&B initiatives. On the other hand, **80%** of the employees working in organizations yet to formalize DI&B policies believe that their organizations fare poorly on this count.

Educated trans-people don't have adequate access to opportunities. This change should come from within the company. I had a conversation about diversity with my HR in the past, and I was told they were working on it. They are collecting information so that they can roll out a policy that is beneficial to all.

-IT employee

How employees rate their organization's active promotion of DI&B initiatives vis-à-vis having a formal policy

80%
Below Average -Poor

Organizations without formal DI&B policies

35%
Good -Excellent

Organizations with formal DI&B policies

Employees wish to work at organizations actively promoting DI&B

73%
employees wish to work at organizations that actively promote DI&B initiatives

Of this, 15% already work at such organizations

The degree of adoption of DI&B in Indian organizations

Over the years, DI&B has gained perspective as an intelligent talent strategy, not just a social good practice. With growing evidence of tangible outcomes, organizations have begun to implement DI&B initiatives, irrespective of formal policies being instituted. DI&B implementation is accelerating, and a surprisingly high proportion of employers plan to roll out initiatives over the next 6 – 18 months.

Regardless of formal policies, most employers surveyed are implementing initiatives that promote DI&B. Five in every six employers (83%) have either implemented DI&B in their organizations or planned. These respondents are more or less equally distributed along the timeline of DI&B implementation.

Nearly half of all employers surveyed (49%) have implemented DI&B initiatives over the past 18 months or more.

And more than one-third will look to implement DI&B initiatives over the next 18 months. Of this, nearly one-fifth are planning adoption within the coming six months.

29%

Fosters a greater readiness to innovate | Enhances customer / market responsivenesses
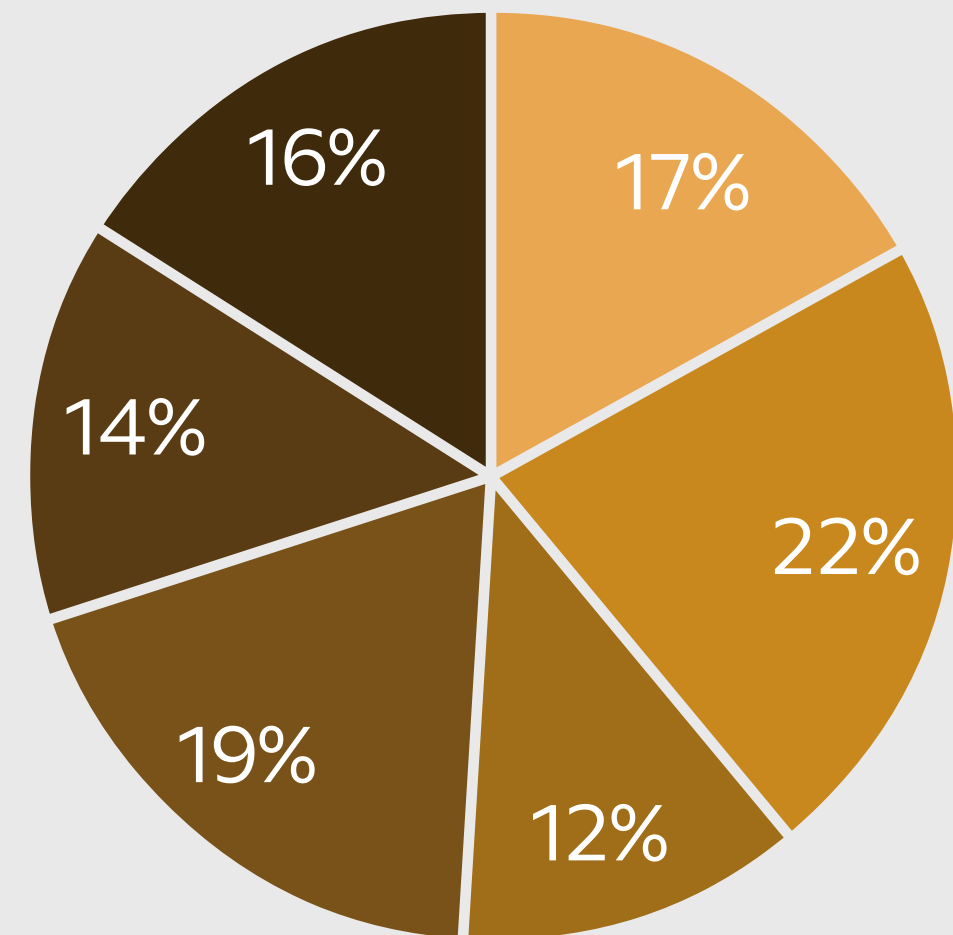
Also, 12.5% believe it increases talent attraction

What drives the adoption and implementation of DI&B initiatives?

Now, several female role models are comfortable in their own skin. They are happy to mentor, support, and build each other up. The millennial generation, oblivious to power distance between genders, has completely broken the male hegemony in some ways. Further, the pandemic has acted as a "Chief Transformation Officer" with families sharing women's load and gaining flexibility.
-Chandana Agarwal

The stages of adoption of DI&B among organizations

Pie chart: 17%, 22%, 12%, 19%, 14%, 16%

- No plans to adopt DI and B as of now
- Will adopt DI and B in the next 12 –18 months
- Will adopt DI and B within the next 12 months
- We have implemented DI andB over the last 6 months
- We have implemented DI and B over the last 6 –18 months
- We have implemented DI andB for over 18 months now

I think the world has always been diverse, it's just that we've taken a long time to recognise it. Today, we are required to adapt, cope, grow, and progress with this awareness.
-Aruna Newton

DI&B adoption levels across business size, sector and city

Adopted   Plan to adopt

Business Size

Large Businesses	Medium Businesses
33%	**20%**

Sectors

Retail	IT/Knowledge -Services
43%	**29%**

Cities

Chennai	Bangalore/ Mumbai
36%	**28%**

Nearly three out of ten employers (**29%**) who have implemented DI&B initiatives, or planned them, expect them to foster innovation and enhance responsiveness. In addition, one out of eight employers cites talent attraction and retention as the motive.

At 33%, the adoption rate is currently the highest among large businesses. However, when it comes to those who plan to adopt, the proportion of medium-sized businesses (20%) outnumbers that of large businesses.

Slightly less than half of all retailers surveyed have already adopted DI&B, and nearly three in ten IT and Knowledge Services providers have planned to adopt in the next 6 – 18 months. Chennai leads cities on adoption with **36%,** and **28%** of all employers surveyed in Bangalore and Mumbai lead on plans to adopt.
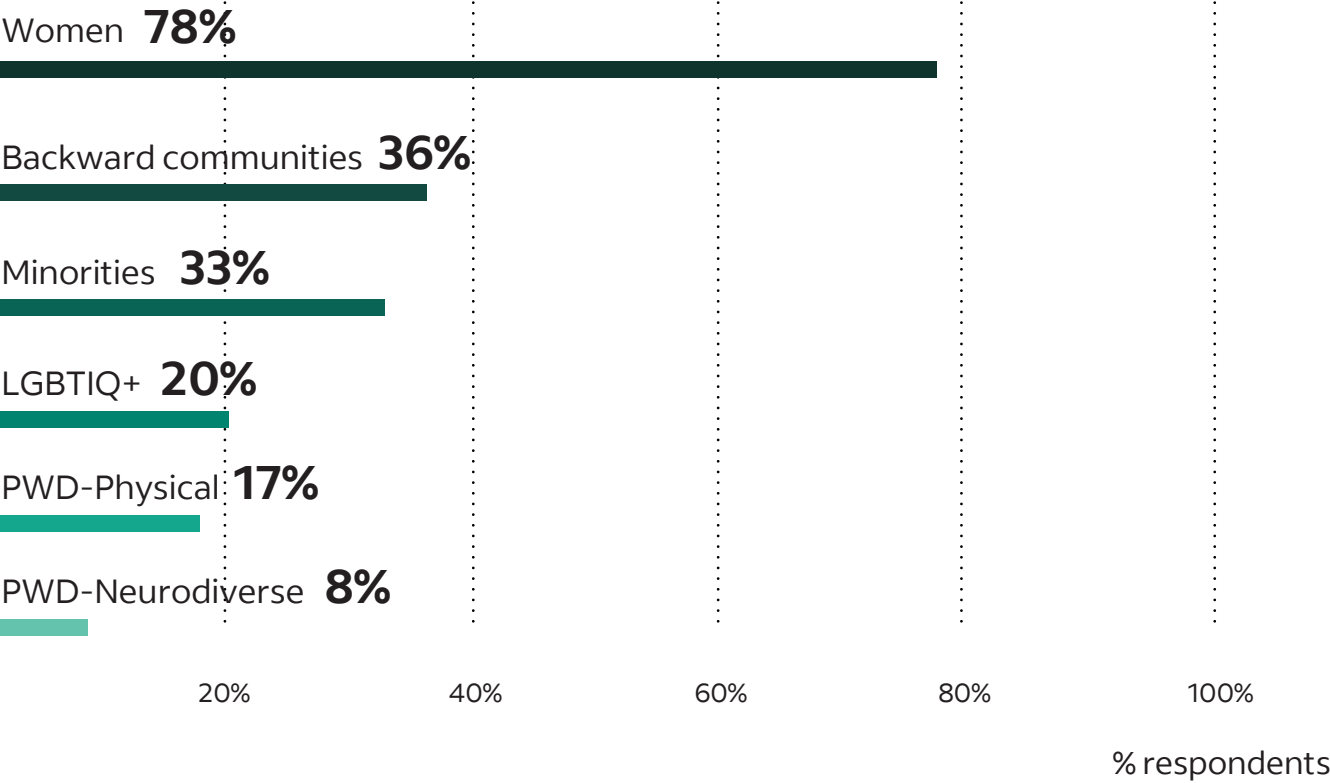
How diverse are Indian organizations?

Diversity in Indian organizations mainly translates into three categories of people. Nearly eight out of ten organizations (**78%**) report employing women, and about one third each report employing backward (**36%**) and minority communities (**33%**). Only one in five organizations or less employ LGBTIQ+ and people with disabilities (physical or neurodiverse).

At Lemon Tree Hotels sign language training is mandatory for employees. This aims to promote ease of communication with employees who are speech and hearing impaired.

Source: Changing landscape for PWDs in Corporate India, PeopleMatters, August 2021

Type of people employed

Women **78%**

Backward communities **36%**

Minorities **33%**

LGBTIQ+ **20%**

PWD-Physical **17%**

PWD-Neurodiverse **8%**

20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

% respondents

Outcomes of DI&B intervention on the employer brand

Employer brand outcomes

Culture associated with ideas, creativity and innovation **77%**

Culture associated with individuality, liberal values and freedom **71%**

Perceived as being accommodative, fair and just **48%**

Stands for protection against discrimination, safety and wellbeing **42%**

Perceived as an equal opportunity employer offering pay parity and empowerment **26%**

None of the above **13%**

20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

% respondents

How DI&B outcomes impact the Employer Brand and shape people behaviour

The intangible benefits from DI&B implementation precede the tangible. Diversity managers consider 'Belonging' to be an outcome of the diversity implemented in an organization and the inclusion it fosters. The shared sense of Belonging leads to better employee engagement and, therefore, enhances the employer brand. The employer brand forms a range of positive associations due to DI&B interventions. Deprioritizing DI&B, on the other hand, has the potential to impact many organizational attributes adversely.
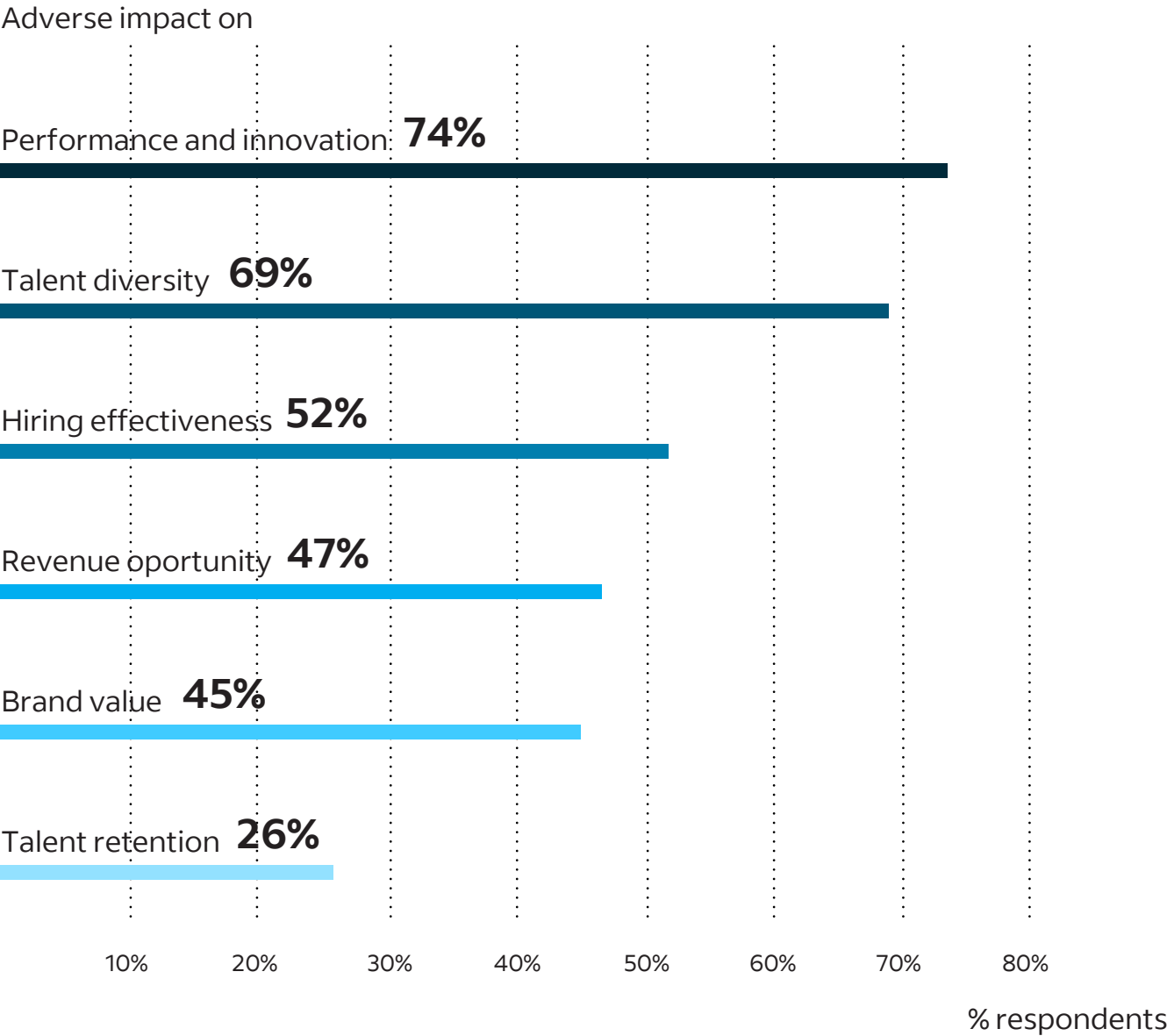
Employers believe that DI&B interventions strongly influence and shape the employer brand in people's minds. The most substantial influence employers think DI&B has is on associations related to organizational culture.

Nearly eight out of ten employers surveyed (77%) believe that DI&B interventions help form an association of ideas, creativity and innovation with the organizational culture.

Seven out of ten (**71%**) believe that the interventions associate the organizational culture with individuality, liberal values and freedom. Other associations include being fair and just (**48%**), standing for safety and well-being, and protecting against discrimination (**42%**).

Also, employers like to think that a lack of DI&B interventions adversely impacts the brand in many significant ways. Substantial proportions of the employers surveyed believe that not prioritizing DI&B could adversely affect organizational performance and innovation (**77%**) and make it hard to attract diverse talent (**69%**). Slightly greater than half of all employers (**52%**) think that it could hit hiring effectiveness, and nearly half believe that deprioritizing DI&B chips away at potential revenue opportunities (**47%**) and value of the employer brand (**45%**).

Impact of deprioritizing DI&B initiatives

Adverse impact on

Performance and innovation **74%**

Talent diversity **69%**

Hiring effectiveness **52%**

Revenue oportunity **47%**

Brand value **45%**

Talent retention **26%**

10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80%

% respondents

Our engagement and pulse surveys give key insights into how Indeedians perceive and experience Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging at their workplace i.e. whether they bring their authentic selves to work, are their opinions valued and heard irrespective of their identity, and do they feel comfortable raising their concerns.

-Anuja Ratan
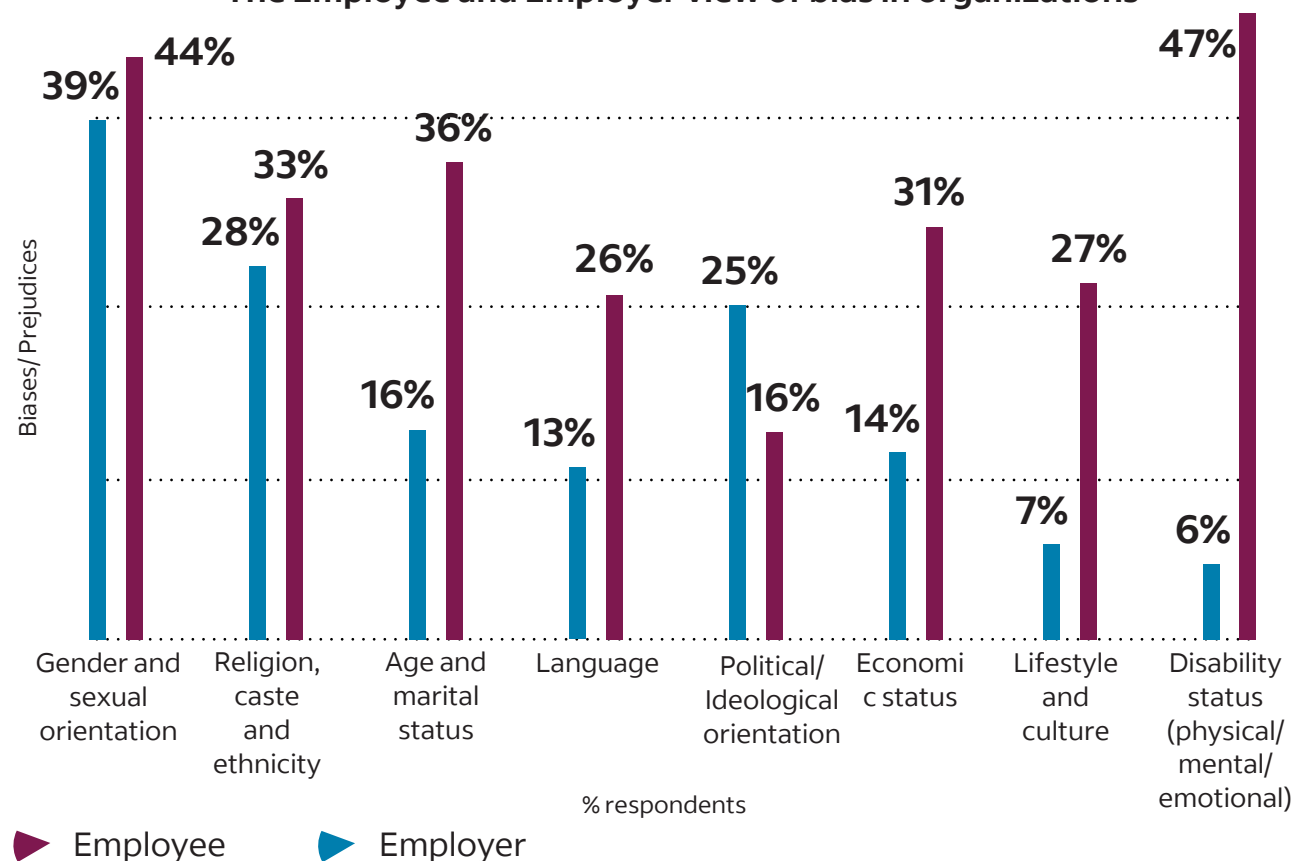
How India Inc. deals with unconscious bias

According to psychologist Daniel Kelly[8] and colleagues, people can be explicitly unbiased, yet implicitly biased. Unconscious Bias, or Implicit Bias, is a deep-seated prejudice that runs counter to our expressed beliefs. Unconscious bias against racial groups, genders, LGBTIQ+, and other marginalized groups is a widely acknowledged phenomenon. Employers recognize the many types of bias in their organization, the survey shows. But, these significantly diverge from employee perceived biases.

Employees recognize a wide variety of biases prevalent in organizations. Biases linked to Disability status (physical/mental) at **47%** and Gender and sexual orientation at **44%** dominate Indian workplaces, followed by Age and marital status (**36%**) and Religion, caste and ethnicity (**33%**).

Employers, on the other hand, see a slightly different picture that narrows down bias in the workplace to Gender and sexual orientation (**39%**), Religion, caste and ethnicity (**28%**) and Political / Ideological orientation (**25%**).

8 Implicit Bias Resource Guide, SHRM, June, 2020.

The Employee and Employer view of bias in organizations

Biases/ Prejudices

- 39% / 44% — Gender and sexual orientation
- 28% / 33% — Religion, caste and ethnicity
- 16% / 36% — Age and marital status
- 13% / 26% — Language
- 25% / 16% — Political/ Ideological orientation
- 14% / 31% — Economic status
- 7% / 27% — Lifestyle and culture
- 6% / 47% — Disability status (physical/ mental/ emotional)

% respondents

■ Employee   ■ Employer

The different discriminatory experiences faced by people at the workplace

Discriminatory experience faced

- Unable to be authentic and express my individuality — **35%**
- Ignored during meetings and occasions of socializing — **24%**
- Felt physically / emotionally threatened — **23%**
- Subjected to physical / emotional violence — **20%**
- Sexually harassed — **20%**
- Ignored / slurs and innuendos during interactions — **20%**
- Ignored for / side-lined in important tasks and projects — **18%**
- Subtle, implicit bias — **15%**
- Biased assessments and passed over for promotions — **7%**
- Ignored / slurs and innuendos during interactions — **2%**
- All of the above — **14%**

% respondents

The most prevalent discriminatory experiences employees have faced

12%

across gender/sexual orientation (except male), experience and size of business

Ignored in meetings/social settings

15%

below 35 years of age and across gender/sexual orientation

Sexual harassment

20%

across city, gender, age and size of business

Cannot bring their authentic selves to work

I think when employees become aware of concepts like unconscious bias in the workplace, they can realize how these concepts show up in real-world situations. They understand different perspectives of their colleagues and encourage them to think about how their actions could unintentionally offend someone. Hence, raising awareness about diversity and inclusion is important to create a happy and positive work environment.

-Anuradha Khosla

Employees face a wide range of discriminatory experiences. More than a third (**35%**) face an inability to bring their authentic selves at work and express their individuality. Nearly one in four believe that they are ignored in social settings and meetings (**24%**), feel physically or emotionally threatened (**23%**) or face slurs and innuendos during interactions (**22%**). One in five have faced sexual harassment and physical/emotional violence (**20% each**).
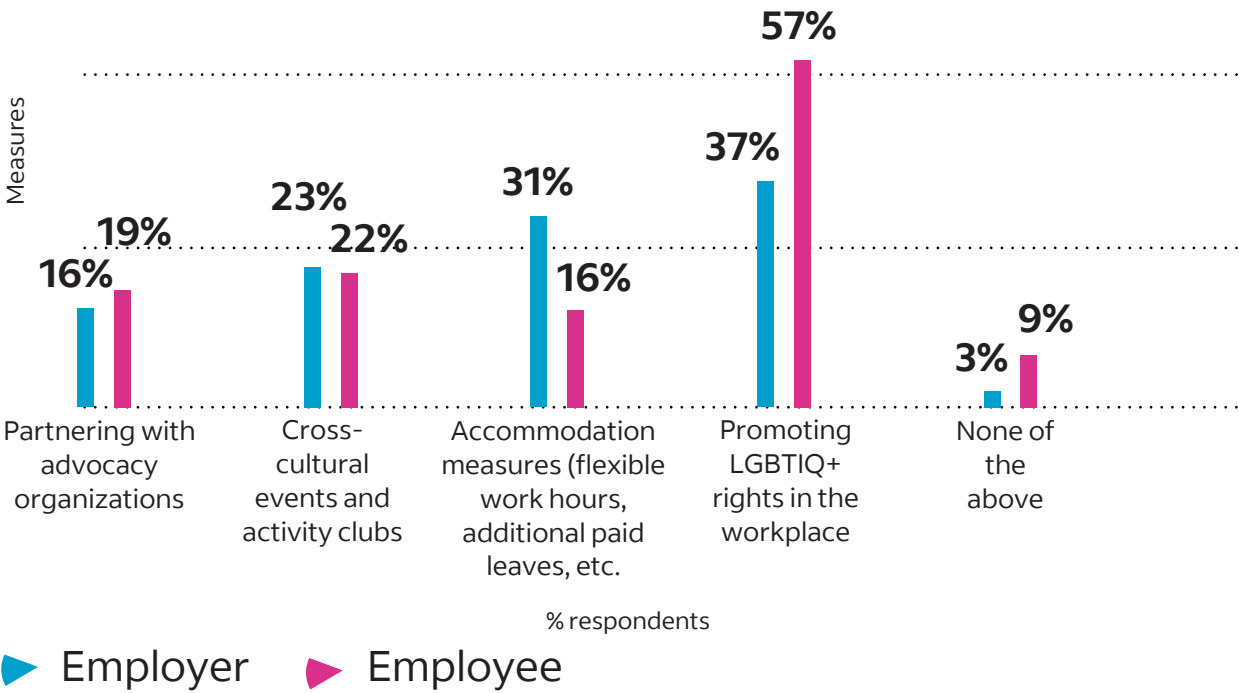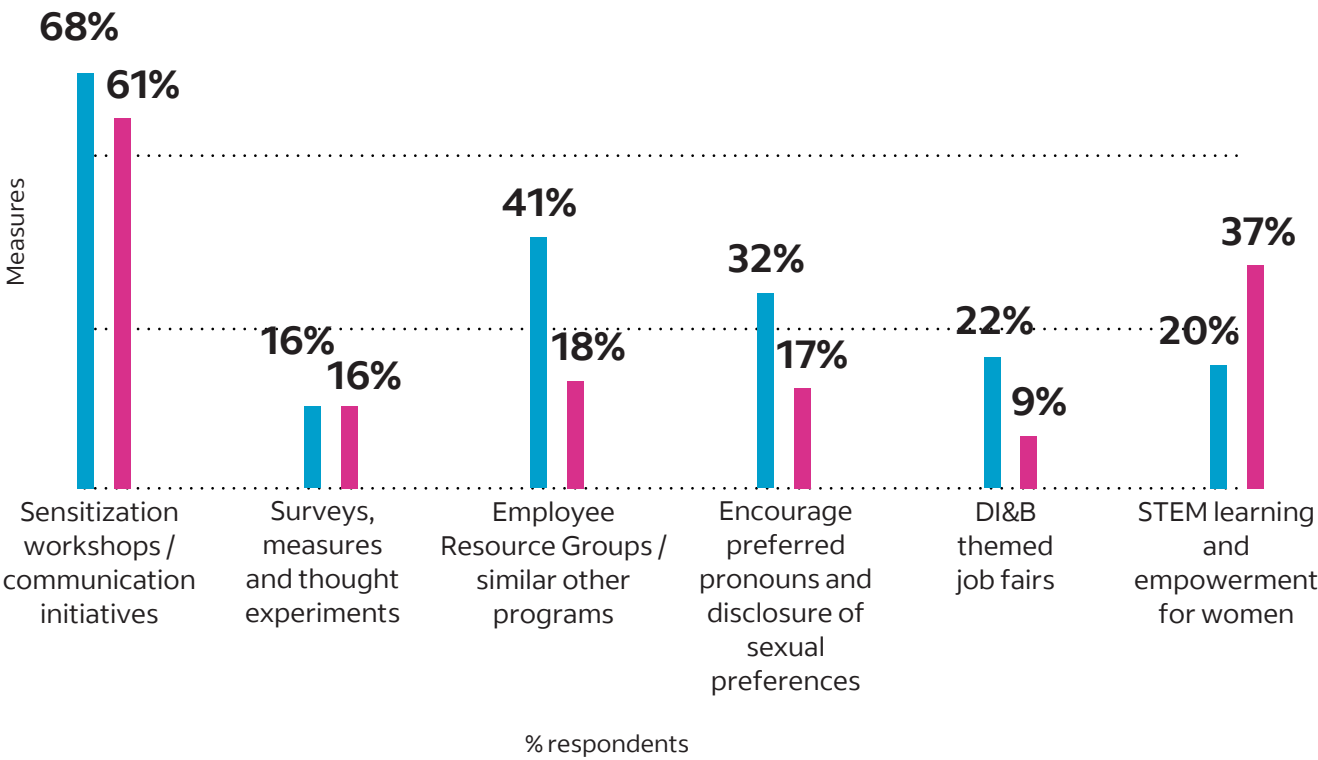
Employees have had differing levels of support from their management. Those who reported the discriminatory experience are equally split between management taking satisfactory action and management taking no action (**26% each**).

On their part, managements have instituted various measures to address these concerns of discrimination and be receptive to inclusivity. The most prominent among these measures are Sensitization workshops and communication initiatives (68%), Employee Resource Groups and similar measures (41%), and promoting LGBTIQ+ rights in the workplace (37%). About three in ten employers also encourage preferred pronouns and disclosure of sexual preferences (32%) or provide flexible work hours, additional paid leaves, etcetera as accommodation measures (31%).

Employee responses about measures undertaken by their organizations are broadly in concurrence with those of employers, with one notable exception – STEM learning and empowerment for women, cited by 37% of the employee respondents as a significant initiative by their organizations.

DI&B measures undertaken by organizations, irrespective of formal policy making

Chart 1 (Measures / % respondents):

Measure	Employer	Employee
Sensitization workshops / communication initiatives	68%	61%
Surveys, measures and thought experiments	16%	16%
Employee Resource Groups / similar other programs	41%	18%
Encourage preferred pronouns and disclosure of sexual preferences	32%	17%
DI&B themed job fairs	22%	9%
STEM learning and empowerment for women	20%	37%

Chart 2 (Measures / % respondents):

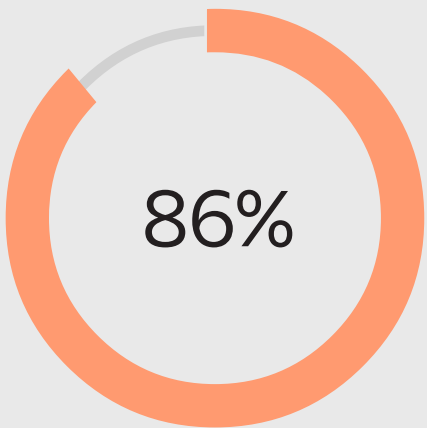| Measure	Employer	Employee
Partnering with advocacy organizations	16%	19%
Cross-cultural events and activity clubs	23%	22%
Accommodation measures (flexible work hours, additional paid leaves, etc.	31%	16%
Promoting LGBTIQ+ rights in the workplace	37%	57%
None of the above	3%	9%

▶ Employer   ▶ Employee

DI&B initiatives help counter unconscious bias in the long run

As recently as five years ago, my cousins in college would refer to Kamanahalli (a locality in Bangalore) as Kamanatti (an illegitimate son) owing to the significant presence of Nigerians. They stopped this mocking once they joined the corporate world. So the corporate world does not just affect your workplace culture, but your personal life as well.
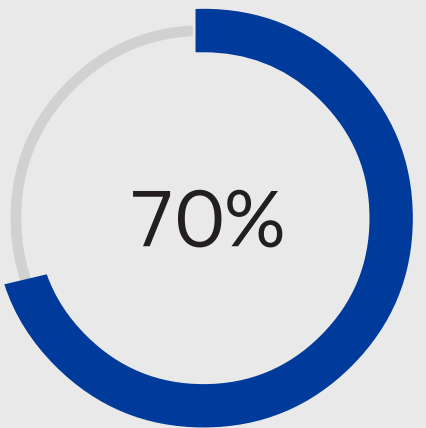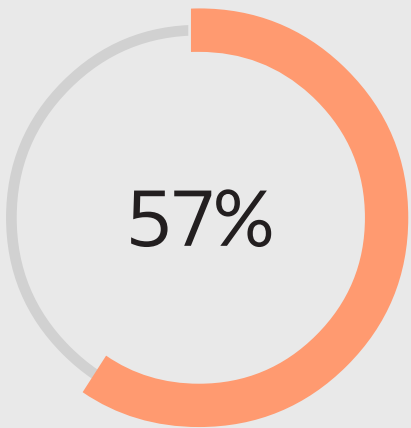
-Retail Employee

Employers believing DI&B initiatives add tangible value also believe they help counter unconscious bias.
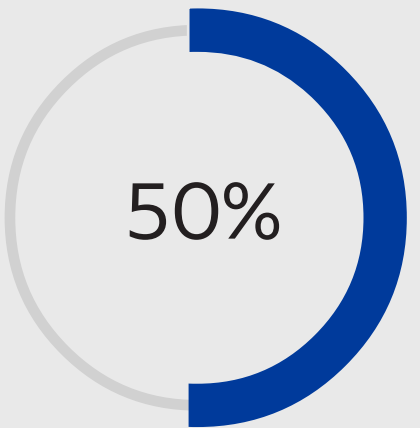
86%
who believe DI&B results in readiness to innovate

70%
who believe DI&B enhances customer / market responsiveness

57%
who believe DI&B yields revenue growth

50%
who believe DI&B helps attract and retain talent

Do you think women need empowerment and are not on an equal pedestal as men?

Yes. Most people intrinsically realise that people need to be treated equally. But our cultural coding interferes in visible and invisible ways. There is a big divide in the way we bring up a girl and a boy and our expectations from them and age plays an important role there. For example, women from my generation lacked enough women role models and lacked role models who were comfortable being women. Many of our role models masculinized their personality to fit into the larger corporate culture. It has taken a lot for us to accept our feminine side and present it. Even today when women present their point of view, they pose them as questions.

Most people end up answering the question rather than perceiving it as a valid view. This manner of presentation is a little submissive, unsure, and most people don't decode this. There needs to be recognition and sensitization to the difference in the way women behave, which the corporate structure does not recognize. There is an unconscious bias towards women and it is easy to overlook creating equal opportunities unless you are sensitive to the different ways genders behave.

What aspects of your identity have helped strengthen your position at your workplace?

An essential part of my identity is that I am a single woman. I am also a trained *Kathak* dancer, and I continue to pursue that passionately. I also facilitate and run a support group for women who have lost their life partner to Covid. When I joined the corporate world, I thought I needed to play by men's rules. So, like the women of my generation, I dressed, spoke, and behaved in a way that was not truthful to my feminine side. Along the way, I lost sight of it and instead took pride in doing things the way men do.

Now that we're moving from competition to collaboration, there is a larger feminization of the culture: wanting to dress up, look good, and not feel bad about dressing up. In the language of the dance, we call it the *Tandav Ras* (masculine essence) and *Laasya Ras* (feminine essence). Our acceptance of our feminine side was thus a manifestation of the *Laasya Ras*. Further, as a performer on stage, you need to connect with the audience. So this persona helps me keep my clients engaged in the conference room. Then the aspect of discipline and *Riyaz* and introspection are all important aspects of personal and professional growth.

People Speak

Chandana Agarwal

President,
North, 82point5

Women are better workers

"The biggest issue right now is unconscious bias; people assume women cannot do many things and overlook them instead of just asking them."

What are some of the changes you see around you today?

I see tectonic changes happening at multiple levels. Firstly, now several female role models are comfortable in their own skin. They are happy to mentor, support, and build each other up. The millennial generation, oblivious to power distance between genders, has completely broken the male hegemony in some ways. Further, the pandemic has acted as a "Chief Transformation Officer" with families sharing women's load and gaining flexibility.

What do you think are some factors that influenced role models and woman-to-woman support systems to come into being in workspaces?

There are enough studies that say employee retention is higher when the team is more diversified. There is also enough data to prove that diverse teams are happier. The corporate world has realized that women are more dedicated and capable of multitasking.

Please talk about the DIB policies implemented across organizations you have worked in.

When I joined my current organization about ten years ago, neither was I aware of any policies nor expected them. Women simply believed they could do without the need for a special policy. However, over the last five years, many diversity policies, training and mentoral programs,

and zero-tolerance sexual harassment policies have come into place. "Ogilvy 30-for-30" is an ongoing, regional-level programme we have initiated. The idea is to identify 30 women across the Asia-Pacific region, train them to become leaders and create a network to reach out to other people.

HR today works on infusion of talent, retention, and reward to further women's empowerment. Infusion is consciously meeting an equal number of people from both genders. Retention is conscious identification of women who can become leaders and providing them with the necessary training to grow into a leadership position. Reward is a regular feature to figure out if there is a pay disparity, which is then corrected. We have also introduced paternity leave and created avenues for women to return to work after their maternity leave.

What is your idea for good Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging policy?

While a lot is done for women, I think a lot needs to be done for men. That said, the biggest issue right now is unconscious bias; people assume women cannot do many things and overlook them instead of just asking them. Again, there are generational differences. My generation wanted to go out of their way to prove that we were good enough. The current generation does not carry the baggage that we did. Gender politics is not a part of their language and culture, and I think that's beautiful.

What do you think is the status of diversity and inclusion across the corporate sector in India?

I think the policies are in place, and so is the intent. The corporate sector is making it possible for women to come and join the workforce. I've just been working with one of the largest consultancies looking to attract women talent at mid to senior levels. This example shows that they have identified the life stages women fall off the workforce – like motherhood or parenting.

What do you think are the factors that influenced this sort of change?

On one hand I think it begins with education. I also think it is because women are better workers. On the other hand socio cultural changes like women playing a far more important role in decision making and financial planning has led to an openness/ eagerness for corporates to hear their views. People have also realized that diversity adds to a certain happiness quotient. Within the socio-cultural context, women are the decision-makers in financial matters. So, it just makes business sense to listen to a woman's cost-benefits perspective. Overall, this makes her an asset.

Manager Speak

Vieshaka Dutta

Director - Diversity Equity and Inclusion,
Publicis Sapient

Role models should showcase behaviour for people to emulate

"Propagating a monoculture would mean everybody is thinking alike, thus crushing creativity."

Is the role of a Diversity, Inclusion, Belonging & Equity Officer distinct from an HR role?

It is a distinct function inside the company because of its tight connection to business and people's success. This is an all-permeable function that connects with employee performance, leadership, business, operations, and human resources. Those committed to employee success are human resource partners whose primary responsibility is to ensure employee success.

How would you link the terms strategy, innovation, and productivity to diversity?

According to a research, gender diverse firms are typically 15% more productive in terms of strategy and innovation than non-diverse organizations. In comparison, several studies throughout the years have shown that racially diverse firms are 35% more productive. This method is conducive to productivity. Additionally, fostering a monoculture would imply that everyone thinks the same way, suppresses originality. When companies recruit individuals with a variety of life experiences and talents, they get the inventive edge necessary for high-end accomplishments. Diversification also shields a business from unforeseeable hazards. For instance, an organisation for which I worked received a major reaction from a segment of society owing to the insensitive marketing of a product. This was despite their industry domination and despite possessing the greatest

advertising agency and marketing wits. As a result, the firm risks losing a portion of its clientele. Thus, diversity serves as a risk management approach as well.

What policy level or other dimensional improvements should be made to existing policies to promote equity in the workplace?

Publicis Sapient is dedicated to cultivating happiness. As a result, we needed to ensure that our policies matched our people's requirements to foster an environment of flexibility in which individuals may function without being constrained by rigid limitations. Our benefits system is broad and extensive; it covers not just hospitalisation but also hormone replacement therapy, cochlear implant therapy, homoeopathy, and psychiatric treatment, among other services. When organisations help employees through times of illness or mental health issues, employees are ecstatic and motivated to return to work once they are well. That is our advantage. That is where diversity, equity, inclusion, and the resultant sense of belongingness must be built.

How do you design a DI&B policy in an organization where the definition is so large or overarching? What are some such initiatives in your organization?

I believe it begins with a deep understanding of your stakeholders and your organisational setting. This also applies to your consumers. To begin, SWOT analysis and data collection on how we now operate are required. Following that, work on establishing a strong platform - one that is fair and equitable to underrepresented groups. Finally, set attainable and meaningful objectives year after year. Each DI&B charter, programme, or strategy takes around three to four years to sink in, settle, and function. Then it is a case of cultural change or development. Individuals must see their role models do such behaviour to mimic it. Finally, we solicit input on every effort and programme we do, and so the net promoter score indicates how well they were accepted.

We offer gender-specific initiatives for women, such as Hawthorne, a hackathon in which over 400 women participate. Additionally, we have programmes focused on mental health, LGBTQ inclusion, and inclusion of persons with disabilities in the organisation, as well as for newly hired people and those who have been with the company for 20+ years to acclimate people to diverse experiences across generations.

Tell us about the projects and initiatives you carry out personally.

I am a member of many all-India groups dedicated to women, mothers, single parents, and LGBTQI+ individuals and their activism. Urban families, particularly nuclear families, are more isolated than ever before. I believe that community support has the potential to transform people's lives and assist them in times of need. Additionally, I facilitate several BNI professionals' groups where we learn from one another.

When I was a new mother and a working woman, it presented several difficulties. I was able to establish a community programme for parenting that benefited both moms and dads. Additionally, it began addressing the problem of men adhering to caring regulations. I'm also quite happy with the work I've done in the LGBTQI+ inclusion sector to raise people's awareness and acceptance. Currently, the effort on accessibility is very close to my heart and I wish to spread the message on how each one of us can make this world accessible for others.

What does it take to create a safe inclusive workplace and normalize the organizational experience for everyone at the workplace?

Creating a psychologically safe environment, recognising our anxieties and prejudices, and being vulnerable. This will result in the desire to create an inclusive environment. If we keep that aim in mind, we will continue to cultivate an empathic workplace. That, I believe, fosters a culture of inclusion, diversity, fair practices, and a feeling of belonging for everyone.
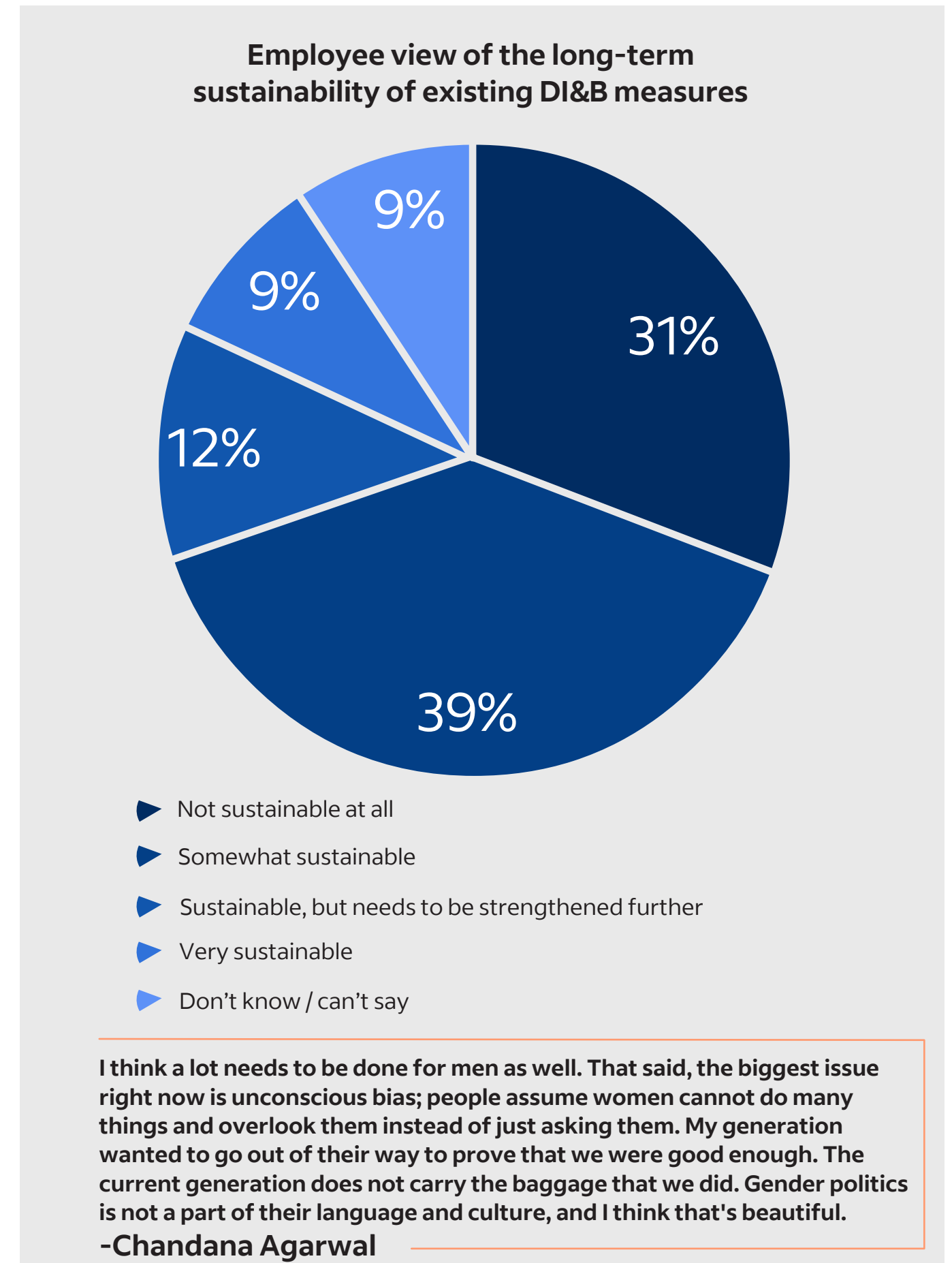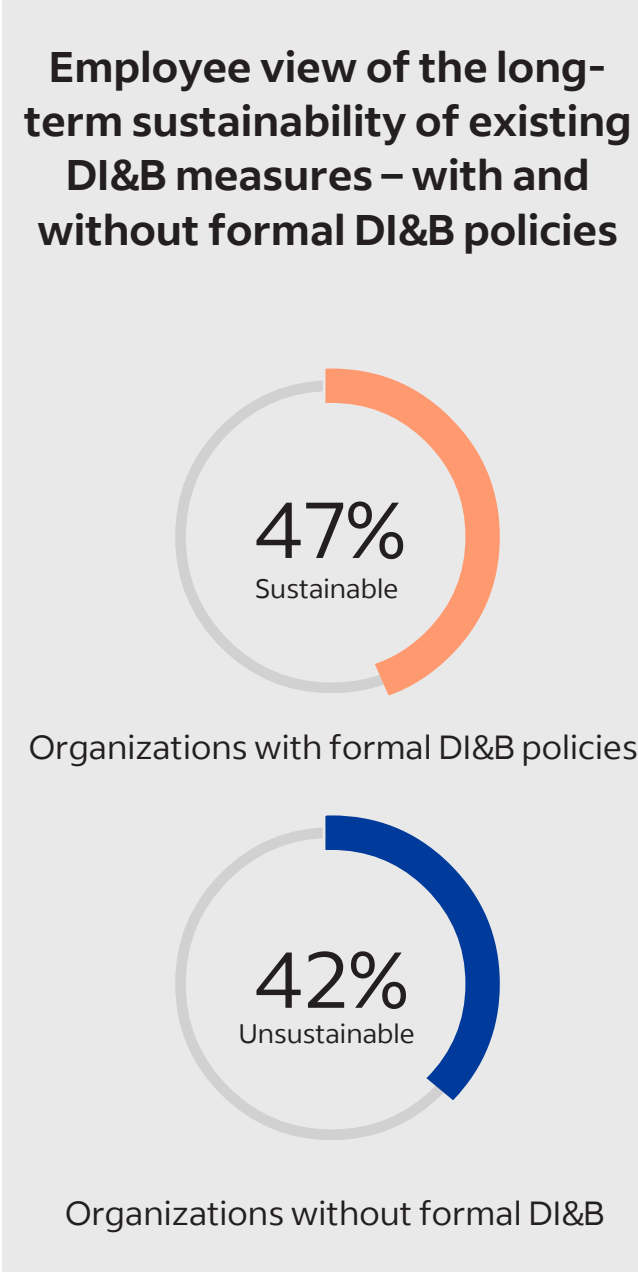
What it takes to achieve inclusivity

India Inc. has some way to go before staking a claim to be fostering an inclusive culture. Employee perception finds DI&B measures wanting. Employers need to focus on better policymaking and more effective implementation to sustain the DI&B measures they undertake. Employees also call for a return to fundamentals and believe that organizations need to have a stronger intent to address issues related to diversity, make cross-functional collaboration more pervasive, and make diversity efforts more credible.

With just **21%** of the respondents reposing faith in the existing DI&B measures, employee scepticism puts a question mark on their sustainability. Two out of five respondents (**39%**) believe the measures are "somewhat sustainable", and three out of ten believe they are unsustainable.

In employees' eyes, the key to sustainability seems to be instituting formal DI&B policies.

Nearly half of all employees who work at organizations with formal policies think the measures undertaken are sustainable.

On the contrary, two out of five employees from organizations that do not yet have formal policies instituted think the DI&B measures undertaken are unsustainable.

Employee view of the long-term sustainability of existing DI&B measures – with and without formal DI&B policies

47%
Sustainable

Organizations with formal DI&B policies

42%
Unsustainable

Organizations without formal DI&B

Employee view of the long-term sustainability of existing DI&B measures

31%
39%
12%
9%
9%

▶ Not sustainable at all
▶ Somewhat sustainable
▶ Sustainable, but needs to be strengthened further
▶ Very sustainable
▶ Don't know / can't say

I think a lot needs to be done for men as well. That said, the biggest issue right now is unconscious bias; people assume women cannot do many things and overlook them instead of just asking them. My generation wanted to go out of their way to prove that we were good enough. The current generation does not carry the baggage that we did. Gender politics is not a part of their language and culture, and I think that's beautiful.
-Chandana Agarwal

Employee view: more / other DI&B measures organizations could undertake

- 21%
- 27%
- 23%
- 17%
- 10%
- 2%

▶ Personalised Interactions

▶ Intent to address issues

▶ Cross functional collaborations

▶ Be authentic in promoting diversity

▶ Provide for better freedom for expression

▶ Mentoring at appropriate times

I think the definition of a sustainable business and sustainability has always had this three-prong definition of people, planet, and profits. In the people component, the employee is an important stakeholder who is starting to exhibit certain characteristics that you have probably not been aware of before. So, the whole notion of a uniform world, where everybody thinks and acts the same is changing.

-Aruna Newton

Adopting a holistic DI&B approach

Long-term DI&B planning, monitoring with short term objectives that are achievable and measurable.

Initiatives across the talent lifecycle, and policies focused internally as well as externally.

A strong business case for DI&B by widespread evangelism via leaders and employees.

A workforce reflecting the diversity of the customer and partner base and collaborative tackling of challenges.

More than one in four employees (**27%**) state that while organizations aim to be inclusive and initiate relevant measures, the intent to address issues on the ground is often missing. One in six employees (**17%**) believe that organizations are not adequately authentic in promoting diversity. Slightly less than one in four advocate cross-functional collaborations as an effective DI&B measure.

A great DI&B journey is built on widespread support and evangelism by leadership and employees alike. Measures and data that lead to multiple, clearly articulated short term goals inform such success. The program is pervasive across touchpoints and covers the entire talent lifecycle. The resultant outcome should then be a workforce composition that matches the diversity of the customer and partner base of the business. Such effective oversight best positions a DI&B program to reap benefits – tangible and intangible –
and prove to be transformational for the organization.

People Speak

Amit Pandya

High Fashion Stylist,
Formerly with C. Krishnaiah Chetty & Sons Group of Jewellers (CKC)

I never wanted to display an LGBTQ label

"I have always been a strong woman with my beliefs and values; I let my work and work ethic speak for me."

Tell us about your experience joining C. KrishnaiahChetty Group of Jewellers.

The Managing Director, Mr Vinod Hayagriv, made a massive impression on me during my 12-year stint at CKC. He is composed, articulate and hardworking. I never had to deal with bullying, and there was no discrimination.
I was surprised, therefore, that some colleagues had expressed their reluctance to work with a gay person. However,
Mr. Hayagriv had brushed it off.
There was reprimanding if I did not perform well or meet deadlines, just like with all others.

Did you experience homophobia elsewhere?

Yes, I had been bullied at school, but nothing major happened. I stayed in the men's hostel in my college, and I can only describe the experience as fun and loving.

Did the Managing Director take up the responsibility of keeping these individuals or the organization informed?

Mr. Vinod considered it a petty issue; he did not even directly address me regarding the same. But then again, there were no significant changes done at the organizational level. So from that standpoint, what matters is the management and their ability to align their goals with the employees. As for me, I never wanted to display an LGBTQ label

I have always been a strong woman with my beliefs and values; instead, let my work and work ethic speak for me.

How did Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging play out in a family-owned business?

In CKC, the contract states that it is an inclusive organization with zero tolerance for harassment. The culture is shaped by speech and behaviour than something on paper. As for the terms, I feel these are all terms surrounding inclusiveness – about being together and being a part of the family. For example, in CKC, the management ascribed to me the role of communicating stigmatic issues with female employees and vice-versa as I handled them comfortably. Another classic example is the need for unisex washrooms – which a person of my identity can enter without hesitation. That is inclusion.

So, could you talk about your job role and what aspects of your identity served as strengths for your role performance at CKC?

I was asked to multitask and be ready to handle multiple roles early on. This communication moulded me to be versatile and flexible towards multiple roles. I started with brand hosting, then fashion styling for shows and groomed clients while mentoring them on dressing, walking, etc. I think the LGBTQ community is quite creative. While my flexibility lies in creativity, I can be strong-headed when I put together a look and do not ever second guess the result.

Could you talk about how you have honed your creative skills and evolved over this period of 12 years?

The best way to learn in the fashion industry is through backstage management. We deal with many clients and a major issue is that we often cannot translate fashion or a creative idea into terms others understand. Communication is key. When I started, there were times when I was criticized by organizers and was even called unprofessional. Over the years, I learned how everything worked and refined my tastes. Now, I have just learned to take both criticism and praise with a pinch of salt.

What are some of the changes you have seen during these 12 years?

When I first came, a guy helped me know the ropes of the job. Now, I am the guy who helps new employees with the ropes. I was specifically mandated to take high-profile clients on a tour of the organization and create an enjoyable experience. An LGBTQ friend, an HR/Training Manager, has been instrumental in normalizing the community through guest sessions and interaction with other HR professionals. Events such as Gay Pride, held in Bangalore, have changed people sensibilities over the years.

How do you handle conflicts in the workplace and your personal life?

When issues arise with employees violating a standard operating procedure, we address them and act immediately. Actions earn employees green and red event cards; the former is for phenomenal performances, and the latter affects the pay structure. In case of minor offences, we take the employee aside and talk to them.

I think we all have a bubble around us overstepping which can make another person uncomfortable. Body language and behavioural education help us make people around us feel safe. I never want to play the victim card and just let my work and skills speak for me.

We have to break it to our loved ones in bits and pieces when coming out. Still, this became an issue when I tried to come out to my parents. When they were entertaining proposals from girls' families, I told them not every male wants to marry a woman nowadays. It is essential to maintain a calm demeanour and refrain from aggression.

Manager speak

Aruna Newton

Global Head- Diversity & Inclusion,
Sustainability Governance and Reporting, Infosys Ltd.

Diversity is evolving with many dimensions

"If a business focuses on business results and forgets its people, what exactly is the business delivering?"

What does diversity mean to you? What does diversity in a workplace context mean?

Diversity put simply means 'different.' Think about it. We've always revelled in the fact that each of us is unique, different. And yet we spend an inordinate amount of time in our lives to be like someone else, to belong! The world has always been diverse; it is just that we have taken a long time to recognize it. Today, we are required to adapt, cope, grow, and progress with this awareness. An organization is only a microcosm of the larger society it is part of. Diversity in a workplace context should mirror the society it is part of.

Do you feel the pandemic has accelerated efforts to create inclusive workplaces?

The pandemic has turned our universe upside down, but amidst all the gloom, there is a silver lining. In the context of IT/ITES companies, it has also provided a great opportunity to explore flexible and hybrid working models that can attract and retain a diverse talent pool. The pandemic has also contributed to a fluid talent marketplace with the 'great resignation' taking centre stage. Therefore, sensitivity to the diverse needs of talent and efforts to strengthen inclusion has increased. Flexible work options have opened up opportunities for talent hitherto unable to participate.

Manager Speak

Are you saying that the focus is more on the business and less on the people?

Irrespective of the sector you are working in, people are instrumental to delivering business results, making them integral to business strategy. A strategy that does not consider the people it employs is not a strategy for any business. So, looking at the people aspects, people metrics, people-related issues as integral to business is a no-brainer. So, if a company focuses on business results and forgets its people, what exactly is the business delivering?

How do you go about planning policies that address an organization's diversity? When do you know which ones are important? How is it decided, and how has it worked out?

It is important for organizations to take a look at all their people policies from an inclusion lens to start with – hiring policies, development/learning policies, rewards and recognition, leave policies; working hours; travel, etc. Inclusive policies are those that consider people from diverse backgrounds. When you start here, you are already halfway to building inclusion.

How do you see corporations looking at future policies of DI&B?

I think organizations should start recognizing that the talent pool available to them is diverse. Therefore,
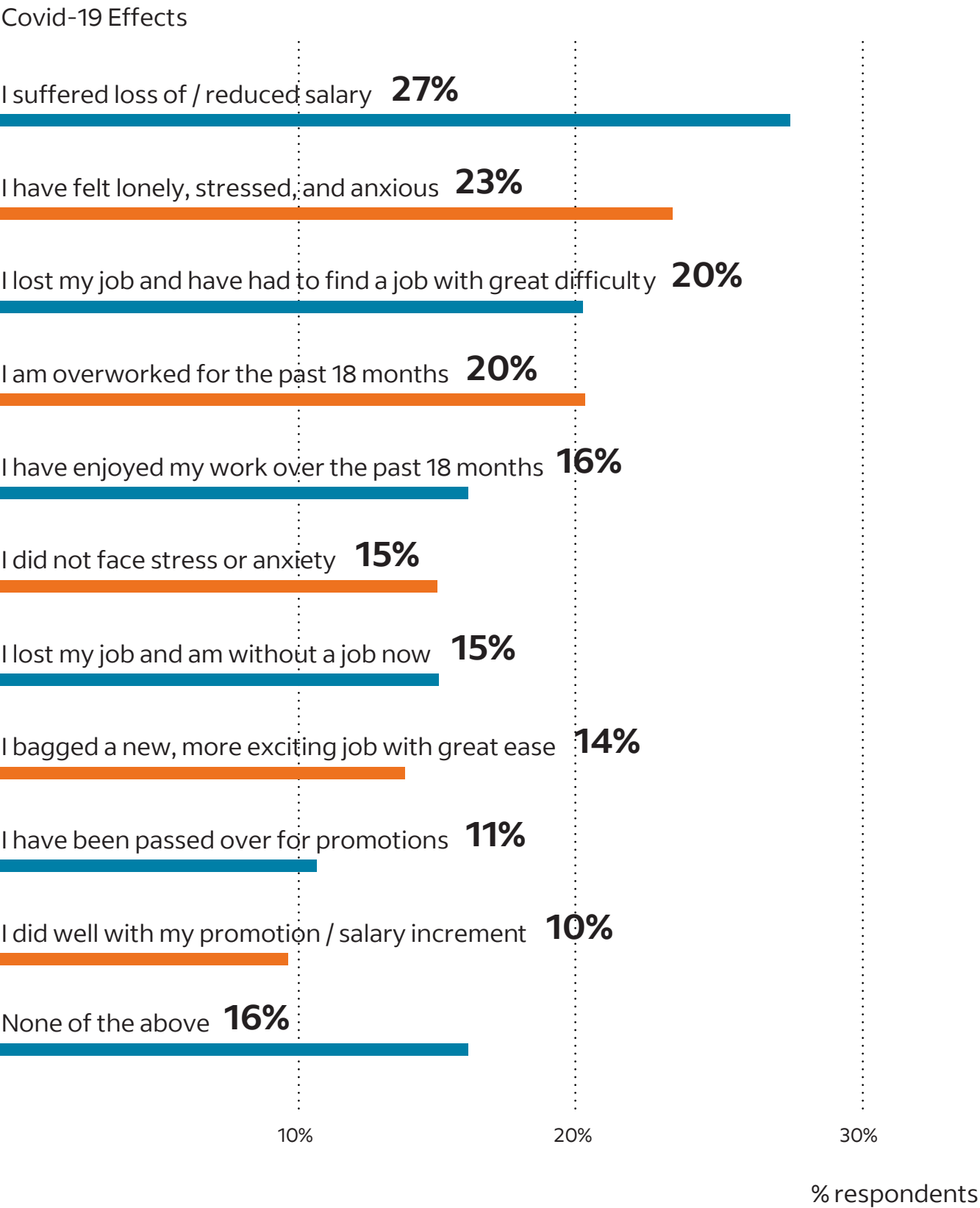
- relook all people policies and processes in the organization from an inclusion lens. Focus on creating an equitable workplace for diverse talent

- Baking Diversity, Equity and Inclusion into the corporation's ethos is key.

- influence an ecosystem beyond your boundaries, the diversity is not happening just inside your workplace, but it has more significant ramifications outside.

The COVID-19 impact on Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging

The pandemic was a watershed event for DI&B, as it was for most other aspects of life and work. The workforce experienced a spectrum of effects – some unfavourable and some favourable. Covid-19 forced an opportunity upon organizations to rethink business-as-usual. And, this included not just DI&B but a more fundamental aspect of caring – for all of their people and beyond. Therefore, a bifocal manner of summarizing the pandemic effect would be what people (and people of different identities) experienced and how their organizations treated them.

How Covid-19 has affected work

Covid-19 Effects

Effect	%
I suffered loss of / reduced salary	**27%**
I have felt lonely, stressed, and anxious	**23%**
I lost my job and have had to find a job with great difficulty	**20%**
I am overworked for the past 18 months	**20%**
I have enjoyed my work over the past 18 months	**16%**
I did not face stress or anxiety	**15%**
I lost my job and am without a job now	**15%**
I bagged a new, more exciting job with great ease	**14%**
I have been passed over for promotions	**11%**
I did well with my promotion / salary increment	**10%**
None of the above	**16%**

10%   20%   30%

% respondents

A fair share of positivity emerged alongside a spectrum of ill effects of the pandemic.
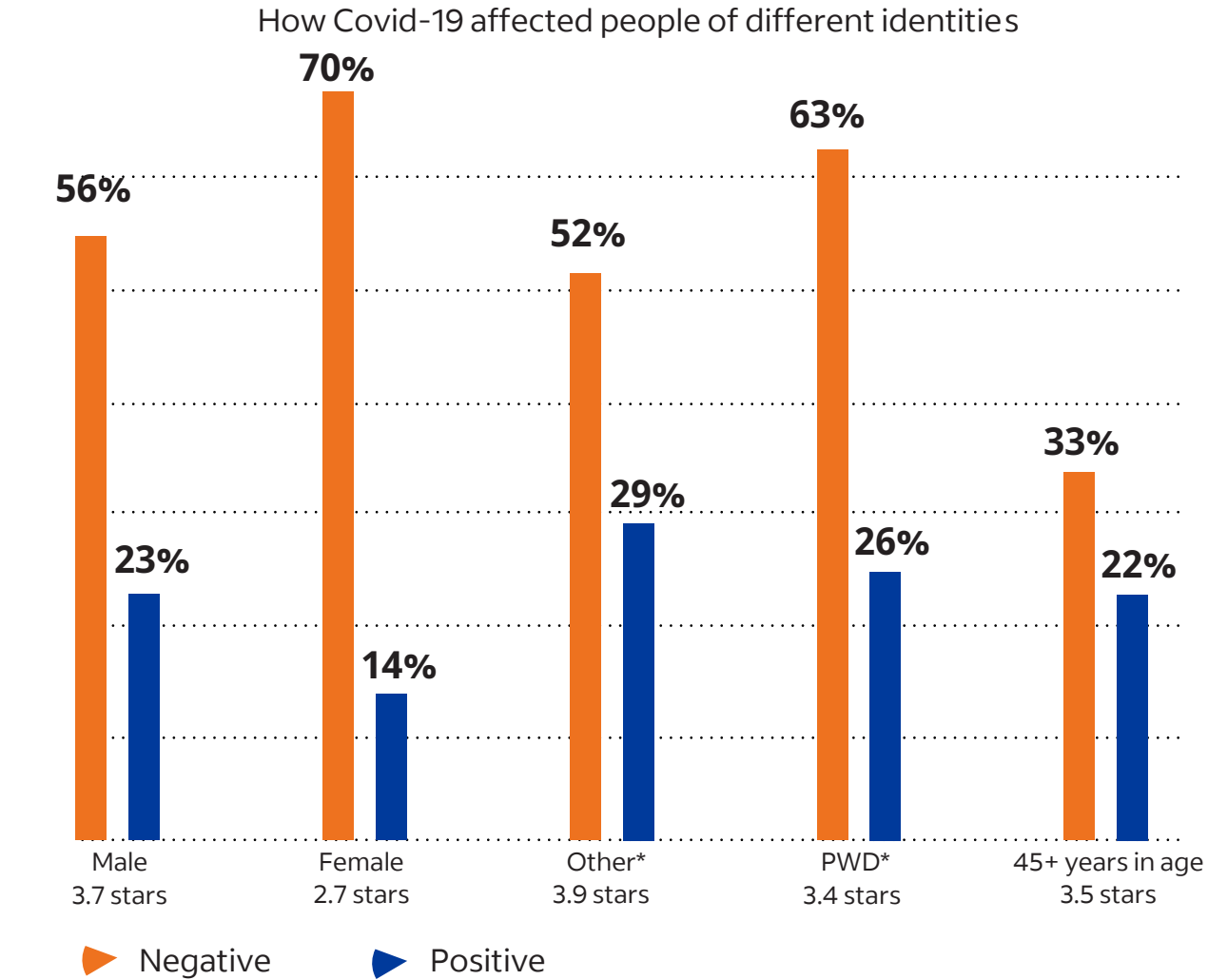
On the one hand, employees lost or received lower salaries (**27%**), felt isolated, stressed and anxious (**23%**) and were either overworked or lost jobs and found new ones with great difficulty (**20% each**). On the other hand, significant proportions of the respondents also indicated that they enjoyed their work in solitude and did not face stress (**16%**), easily landed more exciting jobs (**14%**) and got promoted or received salary increments (**10%**).

An aggregation of positive and negative effects people underwent during the pandemic reveals interesting patterns across different identities surveyed. Female employees seem to constitute both the highest proportion to have experienced negative effects (**70%**), and the lowest to have experienced positive effects of Covid-19 (**14%**).

On this count, surprisingly, the LGBTIQ+ respondents (who identified themselves as the "Other – transgender, non-binary, intersex, etc.") seem to have a relatively better balance of the negative (52%) and the positive (29%) amongst all identities surveyed.

Workers within the 45+ years age category suffered negativity the least (**33%**), and people with disabilities (physical and neurodiverse) came in second on the positive effects (**26%**).

Negative / Positive effects during Covid-19 across different identities

How Covid-19 affected people of different identities

Male 3.7 stars	Female 2.7 stars	Other* 3.9 stars	PWD* 3.4 stars	45+ years in age 3.5 stars

▶ Negative   ▶ Positive

Average rating -how they were treated by their organizations

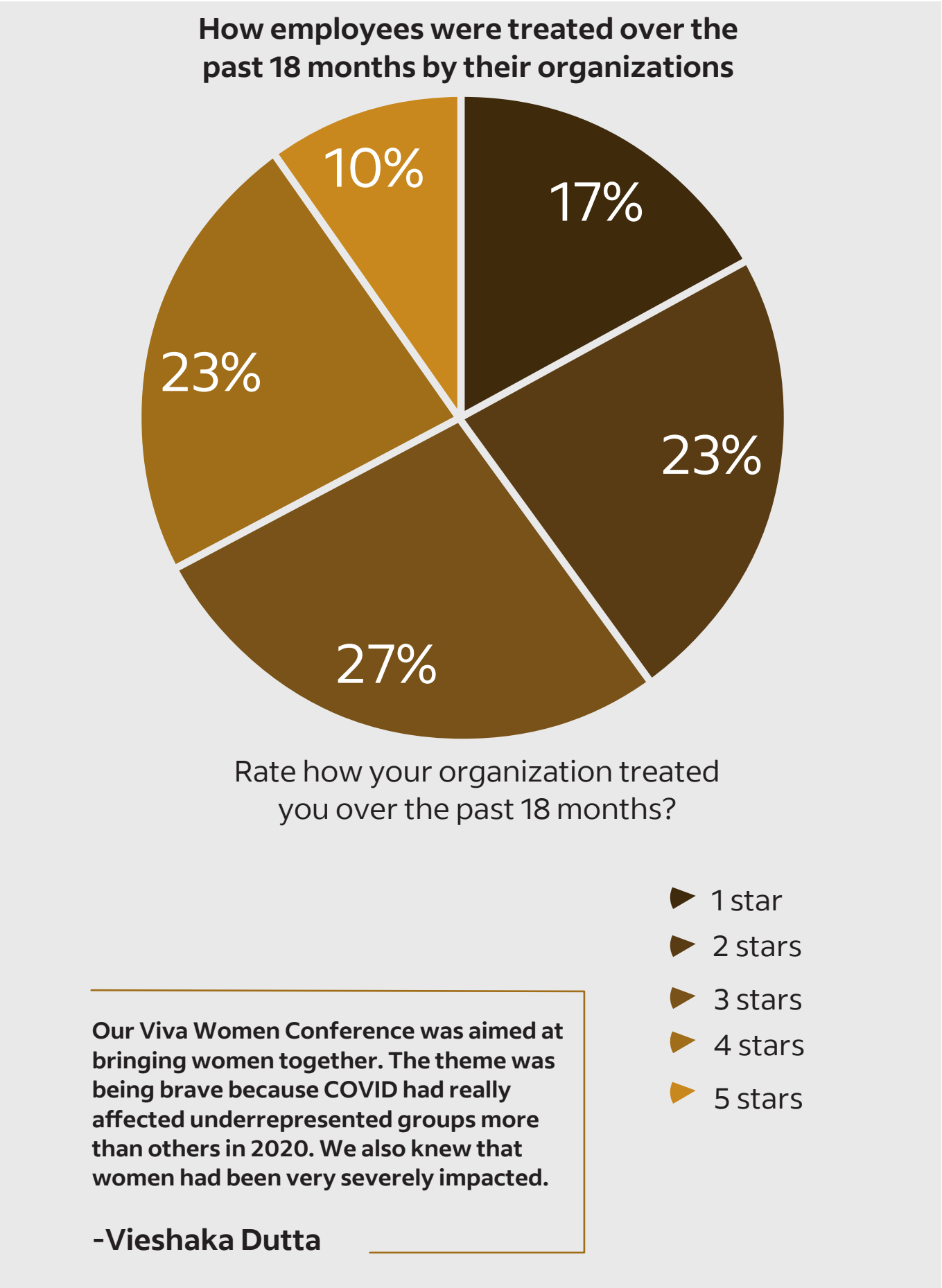*Transgender/non-binary/intersex, etc
**People With Disabilities (inclusive of both physical and neurodiverse disabilities)

Female employees also reported being treated significantly poorer than all other categories of identity surveyed (average rating of 2.7 stars). Conversely, LGBTIQ+ respondents accorded the highest rating of 3.9 stars to their organizations, closely followed by male employees.

How employees were treated over the past 18 months by their organizations

10%

17%

23%

23%

27%

Rate how your organization treated you over the past 18 months?

▶ 1 star

▶ 2 stars

▶ 3 stars

▶ 4 stars

▶ 5 stars

Overall, one in three employees surveyed (**33%**) rated how their organization treated them 4 or 5 stars out of 5. Slightly more than one in four employees (**27%**) rated their organizations 3 stars out of 5, while four in ten respondents (**39%**) gave a 1 or 2 star rating to their workplaces.

From a DI&B perspective, Covid-19 looks like a mixed bag. The LGBTIQ+ community didn't just fare better on the experience; they rate organizations they work at better than other categories of identity. However, this gain for diversity sobers compared to the effect on female employees.

Our Viva Women Conference was aimed at bringing women together. The theme was being brave because COVID had really affected underrepresented groups more than others in 2020. We also knew that women had been very severely impacted.

-Vieshaka Dutta

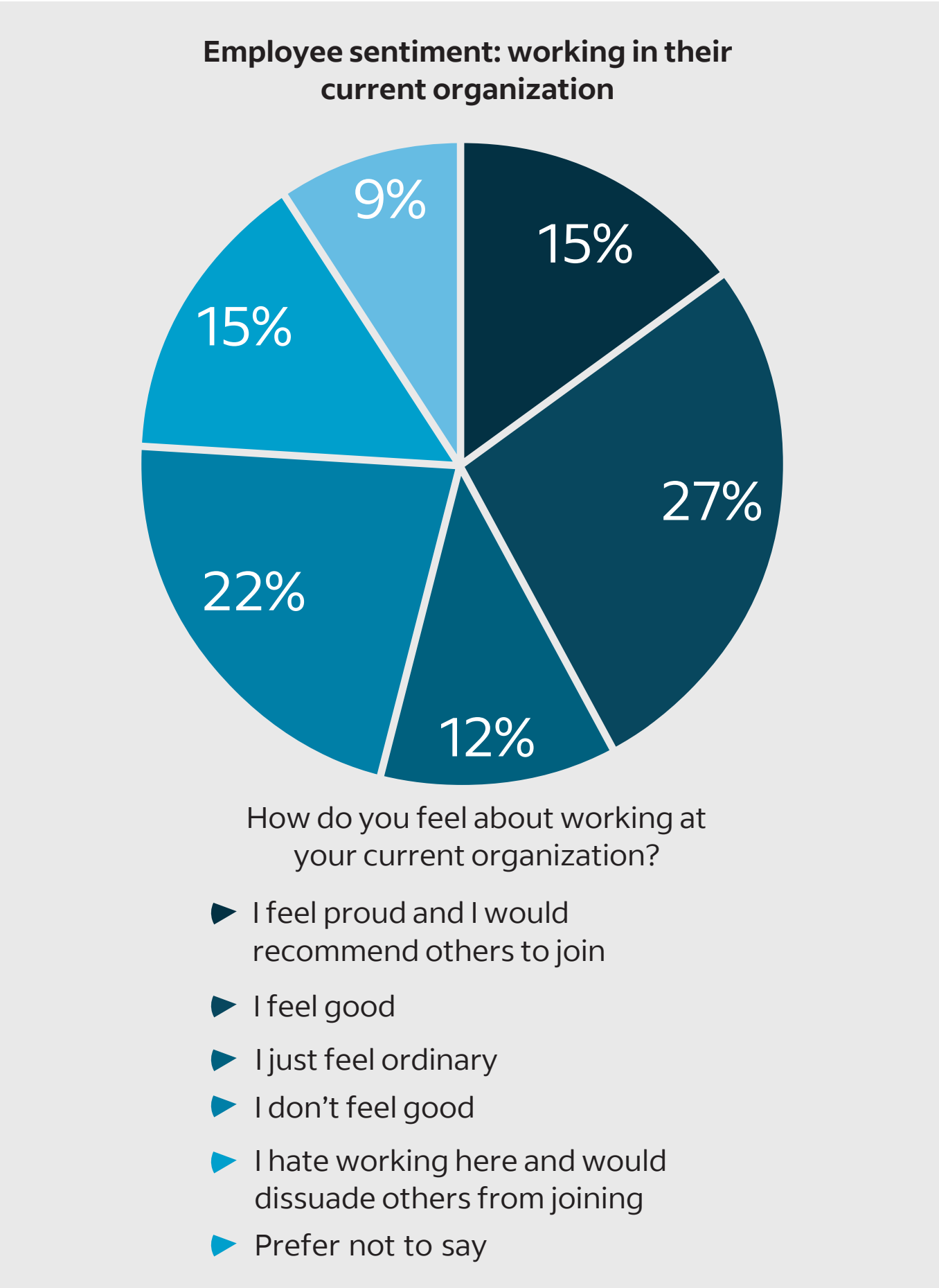# The employee view – listening to the voice of diversity

Organizations committing to DI&B help undo years, decades, and centuries-old discrimination perpetuated through customs, beliefs, and societal taboos. A progressive and socio-culturally aware talent respects and is increasingly drawn to work at equal opportunity workplaces. For talented employees to bring their authentic selves to work, a culture of individuality – irrespective of gender, ethnicity, disability or age – is necessary.

Nearly three-quarters of all employees surveyed (73%**) express a desire to work at organizations that embody Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging.**

Employees are equally split on the sentiment about their current organization. While **39%** say they feel good or even proud of working in their organizations and would recommend others to join, **37%** seem to feel quite the opposite – that they do not feel good or hate working where they are and would discourage people from joining.

> **I think we all have a bubble around us overstepping which can make another person uncomfortable. Body language and behavioural education help us make people around us feel safe. I never want to play the victim card and just let my work and skills speak for me.**
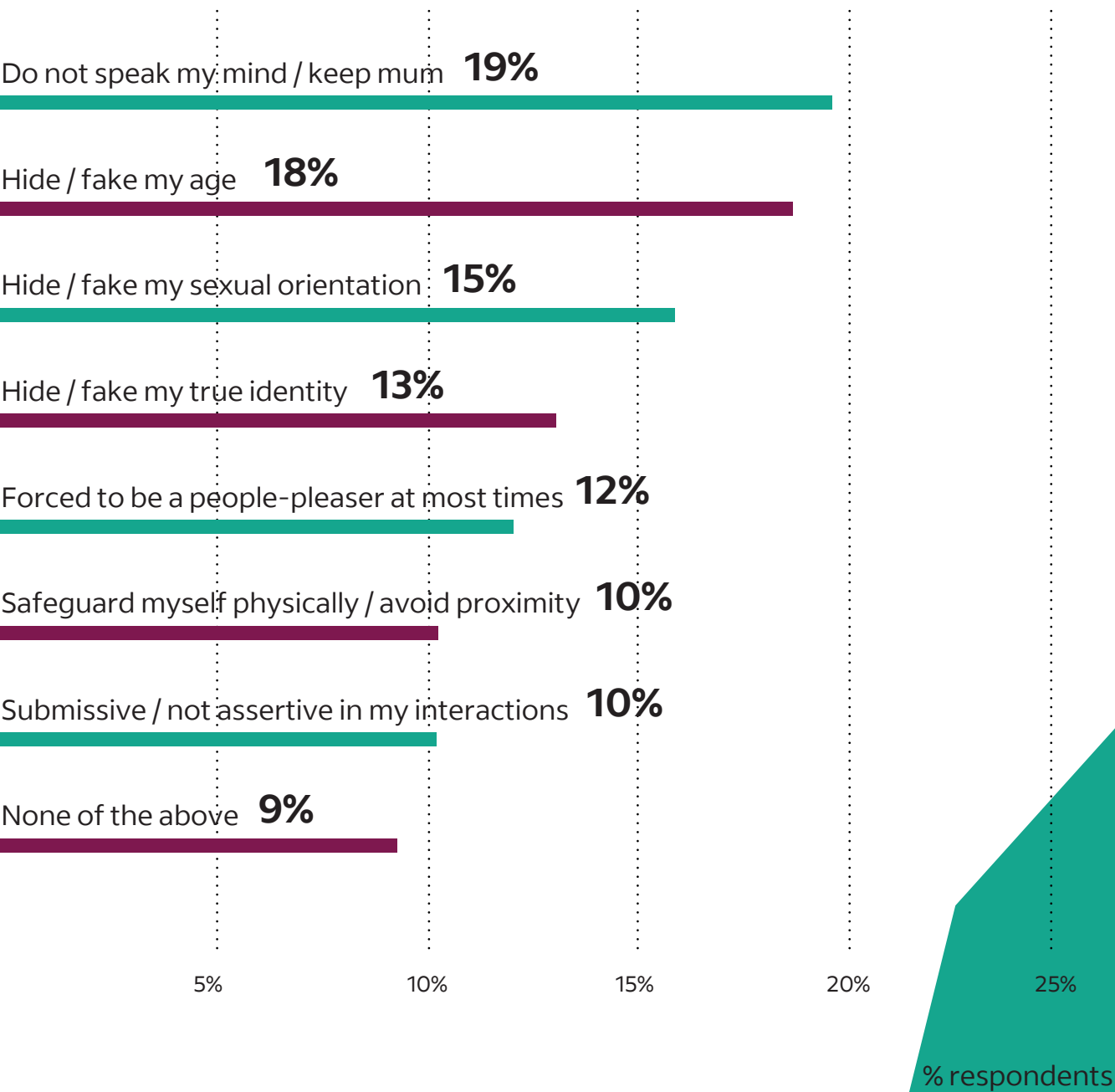>
> **-Amit Pandya**

Employee sentiment: working in their current organization

9%
15%
15%
27%
22%
12%

How do you feel about working at your current organization?

- ► I feel proud and I would recommend others to join
- ► I feel good
- ► I just feel ordinary
- ► I don't feel good
- ► I hate working here and would dissuade others from joining
- ► Prefer not to say

An organization that is not truly diverse can invite a variety of counterproductive behavioural reactions by employees. The most prominent of these is the chilling effect nearly one in five employees (**19%**) feel their organizations impose on them – effectively suppressing expression. Ageism comes a close second, and **18%** of the respondents state that they hide or fake their age. Suppression of sexual orientation (**15%**) and true identity (**13%**) are the other prominent defences employees say they have cultivated to secure themselves against possible discrimination.

Defences people have adopted (behaviours triggered by a fear of rejection or being seen as standing out)

Defence mechanism employed

Do not speak my mind / keep mum **19%**

Hide / fake my age **18%**

Hide / fake my sexual orientation **15%**

Hide / fake my true identity **13%**

Forced to be a people-pleaser at most times **12%**

Safeguard myself physically / avoid proximity **10%**

Submissive / not assertive in my interactions **10%**

None of the above **9%**

5% 10% 15% 20% 25%

% respondents

Nearly two out of three employees surveyed (**67%**) share an egalitarian view of diversity in their current organizations. They believe that their current organizations must or should actively hire for diversity. The rest of the **33%** either leave it to the organization to carry out diverse hiring or are unconcerned about it.

The wish to work in an organization that embodies diversity is slightly more widespread. Nearly three out of four employees (73%**) express this wish to varying degrees – from "someday" to "very much". Of this,** 15% **claim to already work in such an organization.**

Various forums in Indeed (bi-weekly Q&As by CEO and senior leadership, pulse & engagement surveys, slack channels among others) are leveraged to keep our ear to the ground and listen to all kinds of voices, no matter how diverse and different they might be.

-Anuja Ratan

Codes of conduct at the top technology organizations

Tech Mahindra: no gender, race, nationality, caste and creed based discrimination.

Accenture: zero tolerance for retaliation.

Infosys: fair employment practices that provide equal opportunities.

Wipro: a work environment free of any form of discrimination or harassment.

Sources: Codes of Conduct at the top technology companies – from the respective company websites
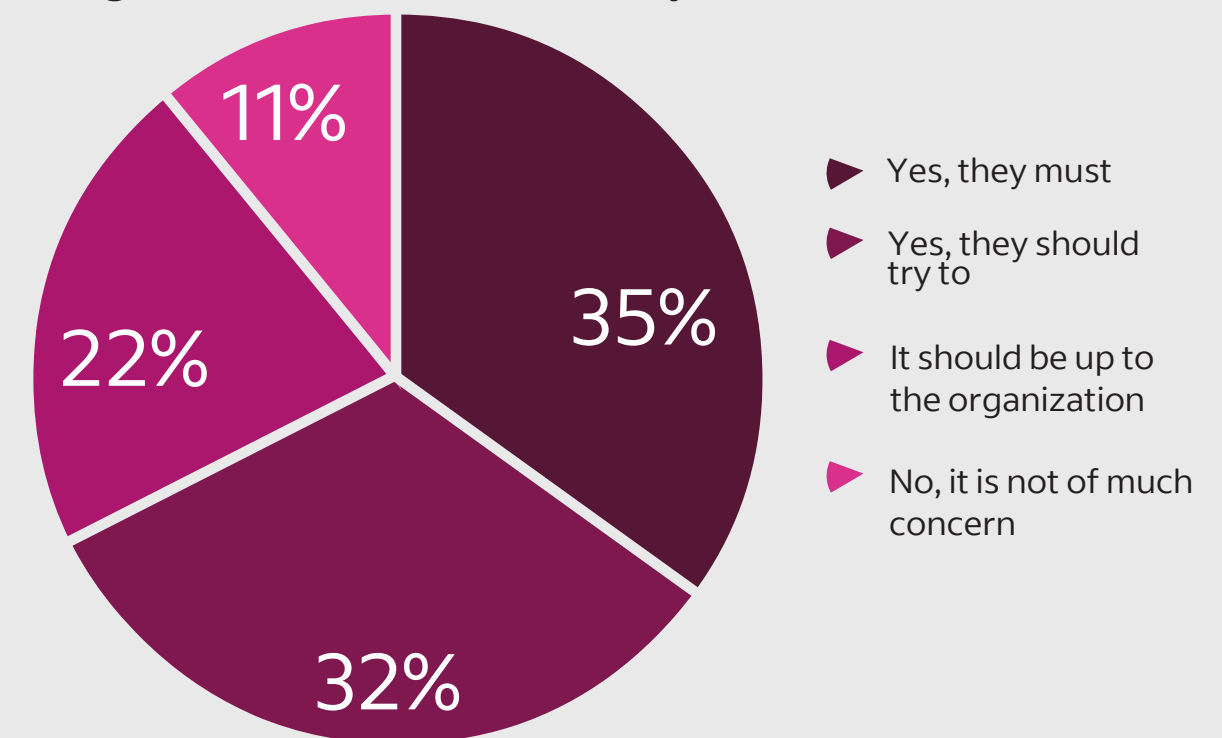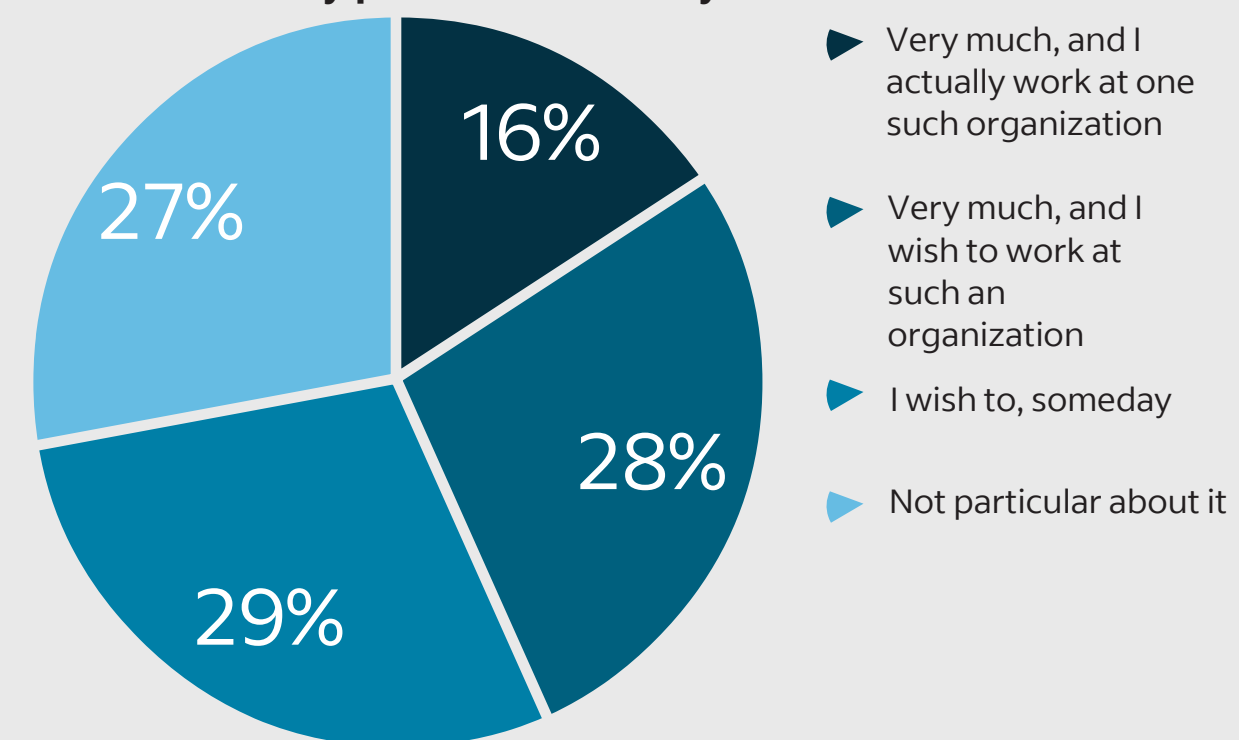
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https://www.accenture.com/in-en/about/company/raise-concerns

https://www.infosys.com/investors/corporate-governance/documents/codeofconduct.pdf

https://www.wipro.com/content/dam/nexus/en/investor/corporate-governance/policies-and-guidelines/ethical-guidelines/code-of-business-conduct-and-ethics.pdf

Employee view: Should organizations hire for diversity

- Yes, they must
- Yes, they should try to
- It should be up to the organization
- No, it is not of much concern

35%
32%
22%
11%

Do employees wish to work in organizations that actively promote diversity?

- Very much, and I actually work at one such organization
- Very much, and I wish to work at such an organization
- I wish to, someday
- Not particular about it

16%
28%
29%
27%

Building a workplace that includes everyone

Building blocks of DI&B leadership

Fostering an inclusive culture
Requires:
Employee awareness and education;
Tackling unconscious bias;
Employee resource groups.

Accessibility for everyone
Requires -
Ramps, automatic doors,
and Braille signage (physical spaces);
Removal of "invisible barriers" (non-physical realms.

Provide Mentorship
Requires -
Advocacy;
Understanding of needs and challenges;
Developing a recognition strategy.

Diversify hiring practices
Requires -
Flexi-work;
Gender-neutrality in roles;
Showcasing organizational diveristy;
Sensitizing recruiters to bias.

Tips on building an inclusive workplace – from Diversity Managers (from the Indeed-Valuvox Qualitative research depth interviews concluded in March 2022)

Organisations should start recognising that the talent pool available to them is diverse. It is not possible to create a different policy for each diverse constitute. However, baking acceptance of diversity into the ethos of the corporation is a massive push.

-Aruna Newton

Propagating a monoculture would mean everybody is thinking alike, thus crushing out creativity. If organizations were to hire people of different life experiences and skills, it would provide an innovative edge required for high achievement.

-Vieshaka Dutta

Diversity & Inclusion can't be limited to a once-in-a-while "initiative." The most important thing a company can do is have its leadership be diverse in gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, education, age, etc.

-Anuradha Khosla

Empathy, psychological safety, an ecosystem that encourages differing views and facilitates equal access to opportunities, and where every individual brings their authentic self to work to deliver outcomes to the best of their abilities, are key to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace.

-Anuja Ratan

A few questions to ask yourselves ...

Are our interview questions reinforcing affinity / confirmation bias?

Are our interview panels diverse and unbiased?

Are we capturing data and feedback for improvement?

Can we do more?

Tips from people on building an inclusive workplace (from the Indeed-Valuvox Qualitative research depth interviews concluded in March 2022)

Even today, when women present their point of view, they pose them as questions. Most people end up answering the question rather than perceiving it as a valid view. This manner of presentation is a little submissive, unsure, and most people don't decode this. There needs to be recognition and sensitization to the difference in the way women behave, which the corporate structure does not recognize.

-Chandana Agarwal

From a small business standpoint, all that matters is the management and their ability to align their goals with the employees.The culture is shaped by speech and behaviour than something on paper.

-Amit Pandya

In addition to initiatives like having an on-call psychologist or support system, companies should work towards formulating and implementing diversity policies. That implementation should be done by letting other people talk or raise their concerns and by allowing people to come up with new ideas.

-Employee from Media organization

Manager Speak

Anuradha Khosla

Vice President HR - Head Diversity & Inclusion,
HCL Technologies

Diversity and Inclusion are business priorities

"Our employees should feel valued and respected and experience a deep sense of safety to bring their whole selves to work."

What is the general nature of Diversity and Inclusion in your organization? Give us an overview of your DI&B policy?

As technology, globalization, and the evolving workforce continue to shape the future of work, we at HCL are hugely focused on Inclusion to maximize talent attraction, growth, and retention strategies. We believe cultivating and showcasing an inclusive culture is an essential component and can result in increased creativity, productivity, and innovation, leading to better business results. To this effect, we have made concentrated efforts to identify, acknowledge & encourage employees from all backgrounds to be part of our global workforce with equal opportunities for growth through various D&I platforms.

At HCL, we believe every employee has the potential & power to strengthen the organization's innovative & creative culture, which can be fully leveraged if one feels included & experiences a sense of belonging at the workplace. We are deeply cognizant of the fact that the power of diversity remains dormant without Inclusion.

Our Key D&I programs address Gender Inclusion, Cultural Inclusion programs, Disability Inclusion, LGBTQ Inclusion to offer all our employees and allies a supportive work environment.

What do you think were the organizational barriers/ challenges to implementing DI&B?

For us, this has been an ongoing journey of learning & progress. We realized that executive sponsorship from the start is the key to success. Additionally, raising awareness and an understanding of the DI&B agenda across all levels is important for achieving organizational buy-in. There needs to be a clear accountability framework to drive the change. The leadership, influencers, such as HR Business partners, talent development teams, and managers should adopt a common DI&B language. Our employees' growing interest and investment to drive diversity further via networks and communities has been critical to our success.

Inclusion requires an active process that includes an awakening and then a mindset you need to cultivate continuously. It can be challenging to shift from long-established habits to more inclusive behaviours, especially when people are not even conscious of being exclusionary. When you are not actively including, you are accidentally excluding.

What are your expectations from DI&B policy implementation?

At HCL, Diversity and Inclusion are more than just beliefs; they are business priorities. We focus on creating and sustaining an enabling environment for all our employees from varied backgrounds. We review and revise our policies and processes from time to time across all critical workforce practices to reduce any biases. When leveraged in its entirety, we believe Diversity and Inclusion leads to sustained innovation. This belief is the very foundation of the Ideapreneurship culture promoted at HCL.

At a micro level, the goal is to build a shared leadership of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at all levels in a systemic manner. There is a clear focus on nurturing and promoting a deep sense of belonging through awareness and sensitization on inclusive behaviours & habits. Our employees should feel valued and respected and experience a deep sense of safety to bring their whole selves to work. This includes facilitating developmental initiatives for career progression, retaining talent and maximizing the potential of our employees.

Our vision is to position HCL as an Employer of Choice and make Diversity and Inclusion part of the brand entity by leveraging internal and external social media channels.

What does it take to create a safe and inclusive workplace and normalize the organizational experience for all constituents of your workforce?

I think when employees become aware of concepts like unconscious bias in the workplace, they can realize how these concepts show up in real-world situations. They understand different perspectives of their colleagues and encourage them to think about how their actions could unintentionally be rude to someone. Hence, raising awareness about Diversity and Inclusion is important to create a happy and positive work environment. This allows employees to think about Inclusion and about how they can make conscious efforts to make everyone feel comfortable and valued. A supportive workplace encourages everyone to contribute to business growth. Certain key aspects can be kept in mind to bring in this cultural transformation:

Start at the Leadership Level
Diversity & Inclusion can't be limited to a once-in-a-while "initiative." The most important thing a company can do is have its leadership be diverse in gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, education, age, etc.

Capability development across Levels
Capability and talent development programs should be developed for the entire workforce. Build a culture of Continuous Learning and innovation.

Demonstrate Inclusive Habits
Transform your workplace into an inclusive environment where teams appreciate and respect the strengths afforded by differences in each person's styles, ideas, and organizational contributions.

Create Common Goals & Confront Unconscious Bias
Laying out common goals is the best way to strengthen the bond between employees. As everyone has some unconscious biases towards certain things and/or people, it is essential to spread awareness and help them take steps towards growing beyond these biases and perform like a team.

People Speak

Employee

works at an offshore media operations company

_____

Support groups create a safe space to voice concerns

"When you don't let a person speakup, grow within a company, or give equal growth opportunities, it adversely affects their mental wellbeing."

Tell us about your experience as a member of the LGBT community in your workplace and life in general.

I lived with my parents till I was 25, and in the following year, after I moved out, I came out to the whole world via an online publication. This decision was marred by insecurity and fear of unacceptance because I knew I would be discriminated against. However, since then, I have been open about my sexuality even in my work. I have been open about my sexuality wherever I worked, although this has led to uncomfortable situations. I have had to keep working at some companies for financial reasons, despite their not having diversity or inclusiveness policies. The company I am now working for also did not have a diversity policy when I joined. But now that they have acquired a company employing many from the LGBT community, they have instituted a Diversity policy.

You talked about your current employer adopting a diversity policy only after taking over another company. Did this impact your performance in any way?

Yes, they did. When the company had no diversity or inclusion policy, a manager had a problem with my sexuality and would pick on me or mock me because I was 'feminine'. It negatively affected my performance and experience. Finally, when I did complain, the manager was given a warning.

So, did you have any support groups or inclusion resource groups in the current or the previous companies?

We don't have a support group, but two other people in the community who are not yet publicly out at work, and I have a catch-up session occasionally – support groups in an organization and non-work spaces help. Among the 1,600 to 1,800 employees across different countries, we don't have a lot of active members from the LGBTQ community or have support groups for diversity. Having such groups can create a safe space to voice our concerns or discomfort.

You mentioned building support groups within the organization through the help of your friend. Is there is any barrier to formal communication to create support groups?

With the ongoing pandemic, keeping or getting a new job is difficult. I don't want to be highlighted for the wrong reasons at the moment. That's the barrier between an employee and an employer. Between international companies and Indian, the former are broad-minded. I think that the only priority in Indian companies will be the work output, so I don't want to highlight myself and create complications.

What is your idea of a good Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging policy?

The first thing we must do to foster diversity is educate people about it. Companies should hire people from different regions or provide opportunities to people from another spectrum. For the last two years, our organization has hosted a virtual, one-hour session every Thursday, inviting external speakers to address topics surrounding DI&B. So far, the speakers have only spoken about mental health. While there are a lot of people who want to voice their issues regarding DI&B, they cannot because we don't have a platform to portray our issues. Employee participation is also poor.

How do you think Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging policies will influence the mental wellbeing of marginalized communities?

When you don't let a person speak up, grow within a company, or give equal growth opportunities, it adversely affects their mental wellbeing. It is not enough to work in a place; a person should be treated well. Our organization has engaged a third party that provides an on-call psychologist. Gender Diversity is getting its due importance as well. It's a long journey for our company, but we are taking the basic steps.

Do you think that the workplaces are getting safer and more inclusive now?

Now, yes. Not when I started working, though. On the other hand, even though we have a policy in place now, we cannot discuss these issues in meetings. So, there is a disconnect. We are not allowed to have direct discussions with the people in charge of implementation; it has to go through the hierarchy. So our ideas and means of implementation go unheard.

In your experience, do multinational companies provide safer environments and better policies to deal with diversity?

Even vendor offices of MNCs have a dedicated spot for support group meetings and separate meeting rooms. They also have separate washrooms for the third gender. While MNCs generally hire diverse people, educated trans-people in my current place of work don't have adequate access to opportunities. This change should come from within the company. I had a conversation about diversity with my HR in the past, and I was told they were working on it. They are collecting information so that they can roll out a policy that is beneficial to all.

Research Methodology

This Indeed-Valuvox research exercise was carried out in three stages.

Stage1: Secondary research – an extensive review of publicly available literature and data.

Stage-2: Primary research – Quantitative research surveys were carried out among 1,142 distinct employers and 1,430 employees from distinct organizations and concluded in the month of March 2022.

Stage-3: Qualitative research – Four Diversity managers and three people working in different organizations participated in one-on-one depth interviews.

Sample design for the Employer Survey:
Total 11 cities
Total 3 Organizational Business Size
Total 10 Sectors

Sample design for the Employee Survey:
Total 11 cities
Total 3 Organizational Business Size
Total 10 Sectors
Total 4 Disability Groups
Total 4 Candidate Identity Groups
Total 4 Age-groups

Annexure

Types of diversity

Type	Based on	Components
Demographic	Demographic background	Age, gender, caste, religion, ethnicity, race, ability and disability status
Experiential	Life experiences	Being a parent, being an employee, former doctor, being a policeman, immigrant, etc.
Informational	Individual knowledge and educational background	Completed schooling, being a graduate, post graduate, professional degree holder and etc.
Fundamental	Individual beliefs and values	Importance of ethics in work place, relationship among the workforce

Dimensions of diversity

Primary Dimensions	Secondary Dimensions	Tertiary dimensions
Ethnicity	Religion	Beliefs
	Economic Status	Assumptions
Age	Sexual orientation	
	Thinking style	Perceptions
	Political orientation	Attitudes
Gender	Work-ex and education	
	Lifestyle	Feelings
	Culture	Values
Disability	Family status	
	Nationality	Group norms

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