

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in India, Future Outlook amid Changing Global Narratives

¹Prof Dr Anjali Joshi, ²Prof Dr Nilesh Kulkarni, ³Prof Dr Priti Samant

¹Professor & Associate Dean HR Academics, S P Mandali's Prin L N Welingkar Institute of Management Development & Research, Mumbai

²Associate Professor Marketing, S P, Mandali's Prin L N Welingkar Institute of Management, Development & Research, Mumbai

³Assistant Professor & Associate Dean Finance, S P Mandali's Prin L N Welingkar Institute of Management Development & Research, Mumbai

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the evolving landscape of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) within the Indian corporate sector, with a particular focus on the perspectives and practices of Human Resource professionals. Against the backdrop of global socio-political shifts—such as the rollback of DEI mandates under the Trump administration in the United States—this study aims to assess how DEI is conceptualized, implemented, and received in the Indian context. The paper begins by defining DEI in the workplace, emphasizing its strategic importance in promoting inclusive cultures and equitable opportunities across diverse workforces. Utilizing a quantitative approach, primary data was collected through structured questionnaires distributed to HR professionals across various sectors. The analysis employed descriptive statistics, Chi-Square tests, and ANOVA to evaluate relationships between organizational type, leadership support, implementation challenges, and anticipated future trends in DEI. Key findings reveal both progressive efforts and significant resistance—particularly toward diverse hiring initiatives—highlighting the complexity of embedding DEI deeply into organizational strategy. The study concludes with practical recommendations for strengthening DEI frameworks in Indian organizations, while also acknowledging the limitations of self-reported data and sample scope. This research contributes to a localized understanding of DEI and offers insights that can inform policy, leadership development, and long-term strategic planning.

Keywords: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, DEI India, Human Resources, Organizational Strategy, Workplace Culture, DEI Resistance, HR Professionals

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) have emerged as vital pillars of organizational strategy, especially in the context of globalization, social justice movements, and evolving workforce demographics. DEI in the workplace refers to proactive efforts by organizations to create an environment where individuals of all identities—across gender, race, age, ability, sexual orientation, religion, and socio-economic background—feel valued, treated fairly, and empowered to contribute fully. Diversity emphasizes the presence of differences within a given setting; equity focuses on ensuring fair access, opportunity, and advancement; and inclusion is the active, intentional, and ongoing effort to ensure diverse individuals are meaningfully integrated and feel a sense of belonging within organizational culture.

Globally, the discourse around DEI has seen both progress and pushback. A critical moment came during the Trump administration in the United States, when Executive Order 13950, signed in 2020, restricted federal agencies and contractors from conducting workplace training deemed to promote “divisive concepts,” particularly those related to race and privilege. This rollback not only stifled organizational conversations around

systemic inequality but also cast a chilling effect on DEI initiatives across both public and private sectors. Although the order was later revoked, its implications continue to ripple through boardrooms, especially as some political and business leaders question the efficacy and political neutrality of DEI programs. These global shifts raise important questions about the future trajectory of DEI—especially in diverse democracies like India, where caste, religion, and gender disparities remain deeply entrenched.

India presents a unique context for DEI implementation, influenced by constitutional values, affirmative action policies, and a rapidly modernizing economy. However, the adoption and institutionalization of DEI practices in Indian organizations remain inconsistent. While some companies, particularly multinational corporations, have well-developed DEI strategies, others—especially in the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector—may lack structured approaches or even awareness of DEI as a strategic priority. Moreover, societal biases, limited regulatory frameworks, and the absence of a standardized DEI measurement mechanism pose additional barriers to progress.

This study explores the current and future landscape of DEI in Indian organizations by gathering insights from HR professionals, who often act as key change agents in shaping inclusive workplace cultures. The rationale behind this research lies in the need to understand how DEI is interpreted, implemented, and resisted at the organizational level in India. By focusing on the experiences and perceptions of HR professionals across sectors, this research aims to uncover the underlying dynamics shaping DEI efforts and the factors influencing their success or failure.

Research Objectives

The research paper seeks to address the following objectives:

1. To analyze HR professionals' perceptions of shifts in DEI priorities in Indian workplaces due to evolving global corporate strategies.
2. To explore how DEI strategies differ between Indian firms and multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in India.
3. To examine the key challenges HR professionals face in implementing and sustaining DEI initiatives in Indian organizations.

Rationale and Significance

The significance of this study is twofold. First, it seeks to contribute to the growing body of literature on DEI from a Global South perspective, offering insights that are often underrepresented in international discourse. Second, the findings of this research aim to inform organizational leaders, policymakers, and practitioners about emerging trends, challenges, and opportunities in building equitable and inclusive workplaces in India. In doing so, it hopes to foster dialogue and policy reforms that not only advance DEI but also strengthen organizational resilience, innovation, and employee engagement in the long term.

Definition of DEI in the Organisational Context

Diversity: Refers to the presence of differences within a given setting. In the workplace, this encompasses a variety of personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, disability status, socioeconomic background, and education level. A diverse workforce is not just about hiring people from different backgrounds but also about embracing and valuing these differences.

Equity: Involves ensuring fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all individuals. Equity addresses systemic inequalities by recognizing that different people have different needs and may require varied resources and opportunities to achieve equal outcomes.

Inclusion: The practice of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued. An inclusive workplace actively invites the contribution and participation of all people, striving to eliminate barriers to involvement and belonging.

Implementing DEI in the workplace means developing policies and practices that foster a culture where diverse perspectives are valued, equitable opportunities are provided, and all employees feel included and empowered to contribute to their fullest potential.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. Strategic Value and Business Case for DEI

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are increasingly being recognized not only as moral imperatives but also as catalysts for organizational effectiveness. Research consistently demonstrates that organizations that prioritize DEI outperform those that do not across multiple performance indicators. Bhushan and Kumar.S (2024) report that companies with over 30% women in executive leadership roles generate up to 48% more revenue, underscoring the link between diversity and profitability. Similarly, Olusanya (2023) highlights that a diverse workforce enhances innovation, improves problem-solving capacity, and helps attract top talent.

In the Indian IT sector, inclusivity has been shown to positively influence employee commitment, creativity, and organizational identification (Jha, Pal, & Sarkar, 2023). These outcomes are also reflected in broader organizational settings, as noted by Lohani (2024), who emphasizes the impact of inclusive work cultures on productivity and decision-making. The broader rationale for DEI is captured in the strategic management literature, which links these initiatives to better adaptability in dynamic environments (Han, 2022).

While the business case is strong, limited research addresses how Indian organizations uniquely interpret and apply DEI principles in sector-specific or cultural contexts.

2. The Role of Leadership and HR in Driving DEI

Leadership commitment is consistently identified as a cornerstone of successful DEI implementation. When leaders champion DEI goals, they foster a culture of accountability and inclusion throughout the organization (Samuel et al., 2024). HR professionals play a vital supporting role by translating leadership vision into actionable strategies. Kulkarni (2024) notes that proactive HR approaches—ranging from inclusive hiring to policy reform—contribute significantly to employee engagement and innovation.

Buttinger (2023) recommends that DEI efforts be grounded in data-driven approaches, measurable targets, and embedded across the employee lifecycle. Samuel et al. (2024) further emphasize the utility of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and cultural competency training to sustain momentum. Adegbite (2024) proposes a comprehensive DEI training framework supported by metrics and practical case studies from sectors like healthcare and hospitality.

3. Challenges in Implementation and Structural Limitations

Despite growing attention, many DEI initiatives falter due to structural and cultural barriers. Westover (2024) cautions that tokenistic efforts often fail to dismantle existing power structures, while Castillo, Gaddy, and Reyes (2023) document inequities in hiring expectations and pay structures that persist even in organizations claiming DEI compliance.

Russen and Dawson (2023) challenge conventional DEI sequencing by arguing that inclusion—not diversity—should be the starting point for successful implementation. In India, deep-rooted societal stratification poses unique barriers. Nayak (2023) identifies caste, religion, and regional bias as prominent obstacles that complicate DEI implementation in local organizations.

Technological risks also emerge, particularly in AI-powered recruitment systems that may reinforce algorithmic bias if not carefully monitored (Bhushan & Kumar.S, 2024). These systemic and technical challenges raise critical questions about the sustainability of DEI initiatives without structural reform.

4. Importance of Inclusion and Belonging

Research increasingly acknowledges that hiring diverse talent is only one piece of the puzzle. True DEI success lies in fostering a culture of inclusion and belonging. Starks, Cashwell, and Ardrey (2024) frame belonging as the emotional outcome of effective inclusion, where individuals feel safe, valued, and heard. Fritz and Gresham (2024) echo this view, noting that personal DEI journeys and inclusive leadership enhance organizational culture and community engagement.

Samuel et al. (2024) advocate for cultural competency training and safe spaces, such as ERGs, to cultivate belonging. Frazer, Frazer, and Frazer (2021) emphasize equity as distinct from equality, with equity focusing on fairness and resource redistribution—a crucial distinction in inclusive workplace design.

5. Measurement, Accountability, and Policy Frameworks

An increasing number of studies advocate for measurable, policy-driven DEI strategies. Arunima and Bolar (2023) present a predictive recruitment model using DEI metrics, showing how data can guide fairer hiring decisions. Hebl (2024) also recommends authentic DEI communication and visible recruitment strategies to attract diverse candidates.

Han (2022) and Castañeda (2022) both underscore the need for policy frameworks that embed DEI into organizational structures. Buttinger (2023) adds that consistent audits, leadership alignment, and regulatory pressure—especially in sectors like finance—are essential for DEI accountability.

6. DEI in Indian Organizations: Local Realities and Practices

Global DEI trends must be adapted to the Indian context, where unique challenges require tailored approaches. Nayak (2023) identifies four high-impact DEI practices in India: inclusive hiring, leadership advocacy, culturally relevant programs, and employee retention strategies. Kulkarni (2024) confirms the centrality of HR in enabling these practices.

The case of Flipkart illustrates how DEI can be embedded in an Indian e-commerce firm, aligning business growth with inclusive practices (Sanehi, Kataria, & Jena, 2024). Similarly, Nautiyal (2023) emphasizes that addressing structural barriers such as caste and religion is essential to ensure meaningful change.

7. Emerging Trends and the Future of DEI

Looking forward, DEI is poised to evolve alongside global trends such as ESG alignment, remote work inclusion, and technological integration. Bhushan and Kumar.S (2024) highlight the dual role of technology in enabling and complicating DEI, especially in remote work environments. Adegbite (2024) calls for ongoing research, collaboration, and innovation in DEI practices.

The IDB Group's 2023–2028 DEIB framework shows how global organizations are institutionalizing belonging alongside diversity and inclusion (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging Report, 2024). Nitttrouer et al. (2024) note that although DEI efforts face resistance, the long-term benefits—employee loyalty, social credibility, and innovation—justify continued investment. Tucker (2023) identifies best-in-class DEI organizations as those with dedicated resources, leadership support, and built-in accountability.

SUMMARY

The literature reveals a clear consensus that DEI contributes significantly to organizational success, innovation, and employee well-being. However, it also underscores that effective DEI implementation must move beyond performative actions and consider cultural context, leadership support, and measurable outcomes. In India, DEI

is gradually becoming embedded in corporate strategies, yet structural and systemic barriers persist, and many efforts remain under-documented.

This research addresses a key gap in the literature by focusing on HR professionals in India and their perceptions of evolving global DEI trends. By analyzing both local practices and international influences, this study contributes to the broader discourse on the localization of DEI in emerging economies, while offering practical insights for strategy refinement in Indian organizations.

Research Gaps

1. While the business case for DEI is strong, limited research addresses how Indian organizations uniquely interpret and apply DEI principles in sector-specific or cultural contexts.
2. There is insufficient empirical data on how Indian HR leaders uniquely navigate DEI, especially under global policy influence.
3. More India-specific empirical research is needed to understand how DEI frameworks can overcome ingrained social inequalities and technological barriers.
4. Limited research in the Indian context explores how belonging is experienced or measured across diverse socio-economic groups.
5. Indian organizations lack standardized DEI metrics, limiting their ability to measure success or compare across firms.
6. Most Indian case studies are sector-specific, and broader cross-industry evaluations are still emerging.
7. It remains unclear how global pullbacks on DEI, especially in Western MNCs, will shape practices in Indian subsidiaries.

Hypotheses

Null: There is no significant perceived shift in DEI priorities in Indian workplaces due to evolving global corporate strategies.

Alternate: HR professionals perceive a shift in DEI priorities in Indian workplaces due to evolving global corporate strategies.

Key Variables in the Study

Variable Type	Variable Name	Definition	Measurement
Independent Variable (IV)	Global DEI Trends	Changes in global corporate DEI strategies, budget allocations, or policy shifts.	HR professionals' perception of how global DEI trends impact India (Likert scale response).
Dependent Variable (DV)	Perceived DEI Priorities in India	The extent to which HR professionals believe DEI is gaining or losing importance in their organizations.	Measured through survey responses on DEI investments, hiring practices, training, and leadership commitment.
Moderating Variable (MV)	Company Type	MNCs vs. Indian firms—DEI implementation might differ based on company type.	Survey data on employer category (MNC vs. Indian company).

Control Variables	Industry, Company Size, HR Role, Experience	Other factors that might influence HR perspectives on DEI.	Demographic survey data (industry, years of HR experience, role).
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Table 3.1 Key Variables in the Study

METHODOLOGY

To explore the evolving landscape of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in Indian workplaces from the perspective of Human Resource (HR) professionals, this study employed a quantitative and qualitative research design rooted in primary data collection.

Sampling Method

The research adopted a non-probability purposive sampling method, intentionally targeting HR professionals across a variety of organizations, sectors, and locations in India. This method was chosen to ensure that the data collected came from individuals directly involved in or informed about DEI strategy and implementation in their respective organizations.

Data Collection Techniques

The primary tool for data collection was a structured online questionnaire developed specifically for this study. The questionnaire consisted of five sections: organizational demographics, DEI strategy implementation, individual perceptions of DEI, types of resistance encountered, and future outlook. It incorporated a combination of multiple-choice questions, Likert scale ratings, and open-ended prompts to enable both statistical analysis and thematic insights. The use of an online format allowed for broader geographic reach and convenience in data collection, especially given the professional commitments of the target audience.

The questionnaire was administered to 134 HR Professionals in India, active in various sectors and functions.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis followed a mixed-methods approach. Responses to the close-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, and mean scores, to identify trends in DEI practices, attitudes, and challenges. Chi-square tests of independence were conducted. This helped assess whether statistically significant associations existed. Furthermore, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine if perceptions of DEI effectiveness or resistance differed significantly across different types of organizations (e.g., startups vs. MNCs, or private vs. public sector). These inferential tests added depth to the findings by uncovering patterns not immediately evident through descriptive analysis alone.

These were presented in the form of charts and graphs to facilitate comparison across organizational types and sizes. Simultaneously, qualitative responses from the open-ended questions were subjected to thematic analysis, where common themes, patterns, and contradictions were identified through manual coding. This dual approach enabled the study to triangulate findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the current state and future trajectory of DEI in India.

Data Analysis and Results

Participant Demographics

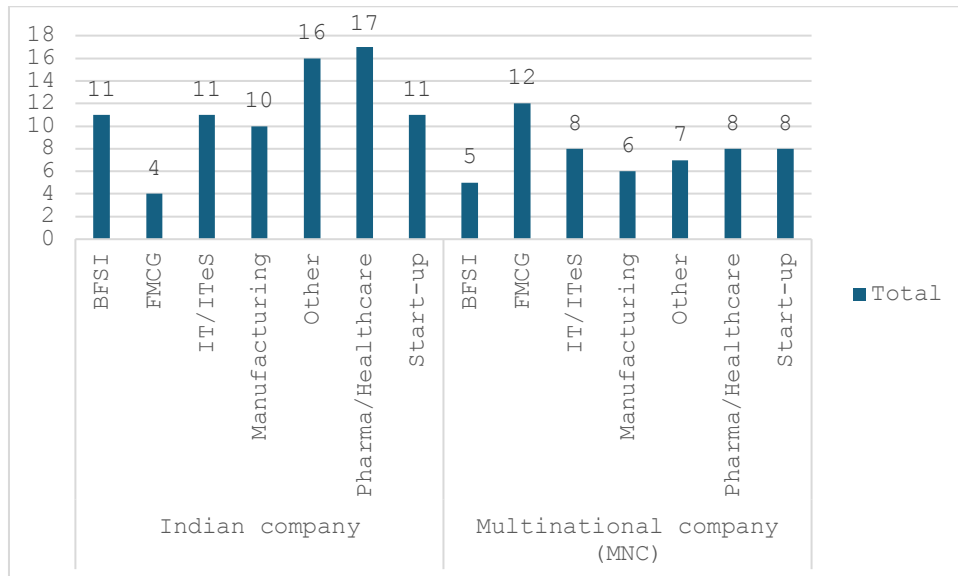
A total of 134 HR professionals from various sectors across India participated in this study. The demographic distribution of respondents is summarized below.

a. Organization Type

Out of 134 respondents, 80 (59.7%) were employed in Indian companies, while 54 (40.3%) worked in multinational corporations (MNCs). This balanced distribution allows for meaningful comparison of DEI perceptions across different organizational types.

b. Industry

Respondents represented a wide range of industries, with the Pharma/Healthcare sector contributing the highest number of responses (n = 25, 18.7%). This was followed by Other sectors (n = 23, 17.2%), IT/ITES and Startups (n = 19 each, 14.2%), Manufacturing, FMCG, and BFSI (n = 16 each, 11.9%). This cross-sectoral diversity offers a broad view of DEI experiences across different organizational ecosystems.



c. HR Role

Participants held various roles within HR functions, with the highest representation from HR Generalists (n = 32, 23.9%), followed by Talent Acquisition (n = 25), Other roles (n = 25), L&D professionals (n = 23), and HR Business Partners (HRBPs) (n = 21). A smaller group of DEI specialists (n = 8, 6%) also participated, providing targeted insights from within dedicated DEI functions.

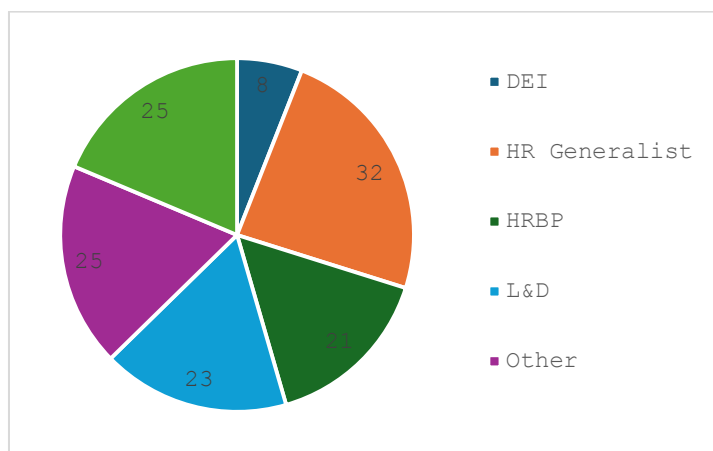


Figure 4.2 Role wise Distribution of the Respondents

d. Years of HR Experience

In terms of professional experience, the sample was well-distributed across experience levels:

- 0–3 years: 36 respondents (26.9%)
- 4–7 years: 37 respondents (27.6%)
- 8–12 years: 25 respondents (18.7%)
- More than 12 years: 36 respondents (26.9%)

This distribution reflects a strong mix of early-career, mid-level, and senior HR professionals, enabling the study to capture generational and experiential diversity in DEI perceptions.

Current DEI Practices in Organizations

Respondents were asked to indicate which DEI initiatives had been implemented in their organizations. The most commonly reported initiative was **Gender Diversity Programs** (n = 56), highlighting a continued focus on increasing representation of women in the workplace. This was followed by **DEI training programs** such as unconscious bias training (n = 22), and **LGBTQ+ Inclusion Policies** (n = 21), which indicate early-stage efforts to expand inclusion beyond gender.

Fewer organizations reported implementing **Pay Equity Initiatives** (n = 19) and **Disability Inclusion Efforts** (n = 18), suggesting these areas may still be underdeveloped in the Indian corporate context. A small number of respondents (n = 14) selected **‘Other’**, referencing informal practices, ad-hoc mentorship programs, or internal awareness campaigns.

These responses reflect a **skew toward gender-focused DEI work**, with emerging attention to other areas such as LGBTQ+ inclusion and training. However, more structural initiatives—like equitable pay and disability inclusion—appear to be **less commonly institutionalized** across the sample.

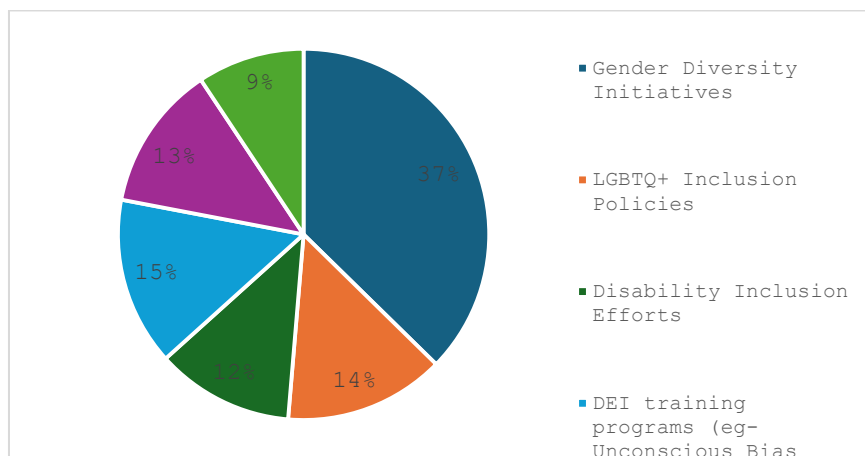


Figure 4.3 Current DEI Practices in Organisations

Figure 4.1 Organisation and Industry wise Distribution of the Respondents

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Analysis of Measured Factors

To understand the general attitudes of HR professionals toward diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) within their organizations, descriptive statistics were calculated across three broad themes: (a) organizational commitment to DEI, (b) perceptions regarding DEI effectiveness and challenges, and (c) future outlook. All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

a. Organizational Commitment

Respondents moderately agreed that their organizations had a clearly defined DEI strategy ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.30$) and that leadership actively championed DEI ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.36$). However, perceptions regarding an actual shift in DEI priorities over the past 1–2 years were comparatively lower ($M = 2.97$, $SD = 1.20$), indicating general neutrality or slight pessimism about momentum.

b. Perceptions About DEI Implementation

Notably, the statement “DEI efforts are a tick-box activity rather than a meaningful change” had a mean of 2.84 ($SD = 1.25$), reflecting mild disagreement but revealing a presence of skepticism among respondents. The perception that DEI compromises meritocracy ($M = 2.69$, $SD = 1.24$) also leaned slightly toward disagreement.

However, respondents expressed concern regarding employee sensitization to DEI ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.47$), and noted a mismatch between leadership messaging and on-ground implementation ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.33$), highlighting gaps between policy and practice. Importantly, the item stating that DEI initiatives are more likely to succeed if driven by business goals received relatively strong agreement ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.47$), suggesting that HR professionals favor strategic, outcome-aligned approaches to inclusion.

c. Future Outlook and Global Influence

Participants were moderately optimistic about the future, with a mean score of 3.60 ($SD = 1.47$) for the statement “DEI will remain a key HR priority in the next 3–5 years in India.” In contrast, perceptions of global corporate influence on DEI efforts in India were more neutral ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.24$), indicating a tempered or mixed view on the extent of international policy impact on local organizational strategies.

		Mean	Min	Max	Standard Deviation
Organisational commitment	My organization has a clearly defined DEI strategy	3.679104	1	5	1.295456
	Leadership in my organization actively champions DEI initiatives	3.432836	1	5	1.356952
	There has been a noticeable shift in DEI priority in the last 1–2 years.	2.970149	1	5	1.201129
Perceptions about DEI	DEI efforts sometimes feel like a “tick-box” activity rather than a meaningful change.	2.835821	1	5	1.245709
	Diverse hiring sometimes compromises on “merit.”	2.69403	1	5	1.239862
	Many employees are not yet sensitized enough to embrace LGBTQ+ inclusion policies.	3.597015	1	5	1.472144
	There is a mismatch between leadership	3.313433	1	5	1.32879

	messaging and ground-level implementation of DEI.				
	DEI initiatives are more likely to succeed if driven by business goals, not just HR.	3.514925	1	5	1.47018
Future Outlook	DEI will be a key priority in India in the next 5 years	3.597015	1	5	1.472144
	Global shifts influence DEI in Indian corporates	3.074627	1	5	1.242281

Table 4.1 Descriptive statistics summary

The descriptive analysis reveals a complex landscape: HR professionals report moderate strategic clarity and leadership support, but also notice implementation challenges and employee-level resistance or disengagement. The generally neutral stance on DEI progress over the past 1–2 years ($M = 2.97$) is consistent with global trends of DEI retrenchment, particularly among MNCs. Meanwhile, the higher agreement that business-aligned DEI is more effective ($M = 3.51$) points to a pragmatic shift in how HR practitioners envision sustainable DEI going forward.

Together, these insights establish a strong foundation for understanding the qualitative context behind the statistical findings, supporting further inferential analysis and thematic exploration in the following sections.

Comparison of Average DEI Shift Scores by Organization Type

To further assess differences in the perception of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) momentum between organization types, the mean DEI shift scores were compared between multinational corporations (MNCs) and Indian companies. Respondents rated the extent to which they believed DEI had gained or lost priority in their organizations over the past 1–2 years using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 indicated "strongly disagree" (i.e., DEI lost priority), and 5 indicated "strongly agree" (i.e., DEI gained priority).

The average DEI shift scores were as follows:

Organization Type	Average DEI Shift Score
MNC	2.96
Indian Company	2.98

Table 4.2 There has been a noticeable shift in DEI priority in the last 1–2 years.

The results indicate that Indian companies reported a slightly higher mean score ($M = 2.98$) compared to MNCs ($M = 2.96$), suggesting a marginally more positive perception of DEI progress. However, the difference in mean scores is minimal ($\Delta = 0.013$) and unlikely to be statistically significant without further inferential testing (e.g., t-test). Both means are below the neutral midpoint of 3.00, indicating that respondents from both organization types generally perceive DEI priority as either stagnant or slightly declining.

While the numerical difference in mean DEI shift perception is small, the results suggest a trend where Indian firms may be slightly more optimistic about DEI progress compared to MNCs. This supports broader findings from the Chi-Square test, which indicated a significant relationship between organization type and DEI perception distribution. These results may reflect the relative stability or even local growth of DEI initiatives in Indian organizations, in contrast to the global retrenchment of DEI programs within many MNCs influenced by

policy changes in the U.S. and EU. However, the closeness of the means also underscores the overall perception of stagnation or slow progress in DEI efforts across the board.

Perceived Shift in DEI Priorities by Organization Type

To test the relationship between organization type (Indian company vs. multinational corporation) and HR professionals' perception of shifts in DEI priorities, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted. Participants were asked to rate whether they had observed a noticeable shift in DEI priorities within their organization over the past 1–2 years, using a 5-point Likert scale. Responses were categorized into three perception groups for statistical analysis: Positive shift (Agree/Strongly Agree), Neutral (Neutral), and Negative shift (Disagree/Strongly Disagree).

A 2×3 contingency table was created with the following distribution:

Org Type	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
MNC	19	11	24	54
Indian Company	31	15	34	80
Total	50	26	58	268

Table 4.3 Contingency Table for Chi Square

Expected counts were calculated based on marginal totals. A Chi-Square test was performed to assess whether the observed distribution differed significantly from the expected values.

Org Type	Positive	Neutral	Negative
MNC	10.07462687	5.238806	11.68656716
Indian Company	14.92537313	7.761194	17.31343284

Table 4.4 Expected Counts for Chi Square

Chi sq	2.35654E-15
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Table 4.5 Chi Square

The test yielded a p-value of 2.36×10^{-15} , which is significantly below the conventional alpha level of 0.05. This result provides strong evidence to reject the null hypothesis, indicating a statistically significant association between organization type and perceived DEI shift.

The findings suggest that HR professionals in Indian companies and MNCs perceive DEI momentum differently. Indian firms reported a higher incidence of perceived positive shifts in DEI priorities compared to MNCs. This could reflect differing strategic approaches to DEI in response to global developments, particularly the rollback of DEI programs in Western corporate headquarters. In contrast, Indian organizations may be experiencing localized DEI momentum driven by cultural adaptation, regulatory awareness, or internal HR advocacy. These results align with literature indicating a growing divergence between global DEI pressures and local implementation practices in emerging markets.

Perceptions of DEI: Indian Companies vs. MNCs

To explore how HR professionals from Indian companies and multinational corporations (MNCs) perceive DEI-related issues within their organizations, five key attitudinal items were analyzed. These items captured views on DEI's effectiveness, strategic alignment, employee engagement, and perceived tensions such as meritocracy and leadership follow-through. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), and average scores were calculated separately for each organization type.

Perception Item	Indian Company	MNC
DEI feels like a “tick-box” activity rather than meaningful change	2.77	2.94
Diverse hiring sometimes compromises on “merit”	2.78	2.57
Many employees are not yet sensitized enough for LGBTQ+ inclusion	3.41	3.85
Mismatch between leadership messaging and ground-level implementation of DEI	3.20	3.46
DEI initiatives are more likely to succeed if driven by business goals rather than just HR-driven	3.11	4.07

Table 4.6 Perception Analysis

The results reveal a **mixed but insightful picture** of how DEI is perceived across different organizational contexts in India.

Respondents from **MNCs were more likely to perceive DEI efforts as performative**, with a mean score of 2.94 on the “tick-box” item, compared to 2.77 for Indian companies. While both means remain below the neutral midpoint, this indicates a mild perception of inauthenticity, especially among MNC respondents.

Interestingly, the **concern that diverse hiring compromises on merit** was slightly higher among Indian companies ($M = 2.78$) than MNCs ($M = 2.57$), though both scores suggest **general disagreement** with this concern, reflecting growing acceptance of inclusive hiring practices.

In terms of **LGBTQ+ inclusion**, MNC respondents scored notably higher ($M = 3.85$) than Indian company respondents ($M = 3.41$) on the statement regarding a lack of employee sensitization. This indicates that **MNCs may perceive greater internal resistance or slower social integration**, possibly due to their attempts to implement global LGBTQ+ policies in more socially conservative Indian settings.

A similar pattern was observed for the perception of a **mismatch between DEI messaging and ground-level implementation**, where MNCs again reported a higher score ($M = 3.46$ vs. 3.20), suggesting **greater perceived gaps between leadership rhetoric and practice**.

Finally, and most strikingly, MNC respondents strongly agreed that **DEI initiatives are more likely to succeed if aligned with business goals** ($M = 4.07$), significantly higher than Indian companies ($M = 3.11$). This indicates that MNC-based HR professionals view **strategic integration**—beyond compliance or HR ownership—as **critical to long-term DEI success**.

Resistance to DEI Initiatives

Respondents were asked to identify which DEI initiatives, in their experience, faced the most resistance or slowest adoption within their organizations. The most frequently cited area of resistance was LGBTQ+ inclusion policies ($n = 57$), accounting for over 42% of all responses. This suggests that gender identity and sexual orientation continue to be socially sensitive and organizationally challenging areas of DEI work in Indian contexts.

Disability inclusion efforts and pay equity initiatives were each selected by 20 respondents, highlighting structural and systemic challenges in promoting equity across physical ability and compensation frameworks. DEI training programs, such as unconscious bias training, were also seen as facing moderate resistance ($n = 15$), possibly due to limited engagement or perceived lack of relevance.

Surprisingly, gender diversity initiatives, which are among the most commonly implemented DEI programs (as shown earlier), were seen as facing the least resistance ($n = 11$). This may indicate greater acceptance of gender-focused DEI efforts, particularly as they are more aligned with compliance-driven and CSR-aligned mandates.

A notable number of participants also selected ‘Other’ ($n = 19$), with open-ended comments referring to caste-based inclusion, religious identity, and intersectional barriers that may not yet be formally recognized within existing DEI strategies.

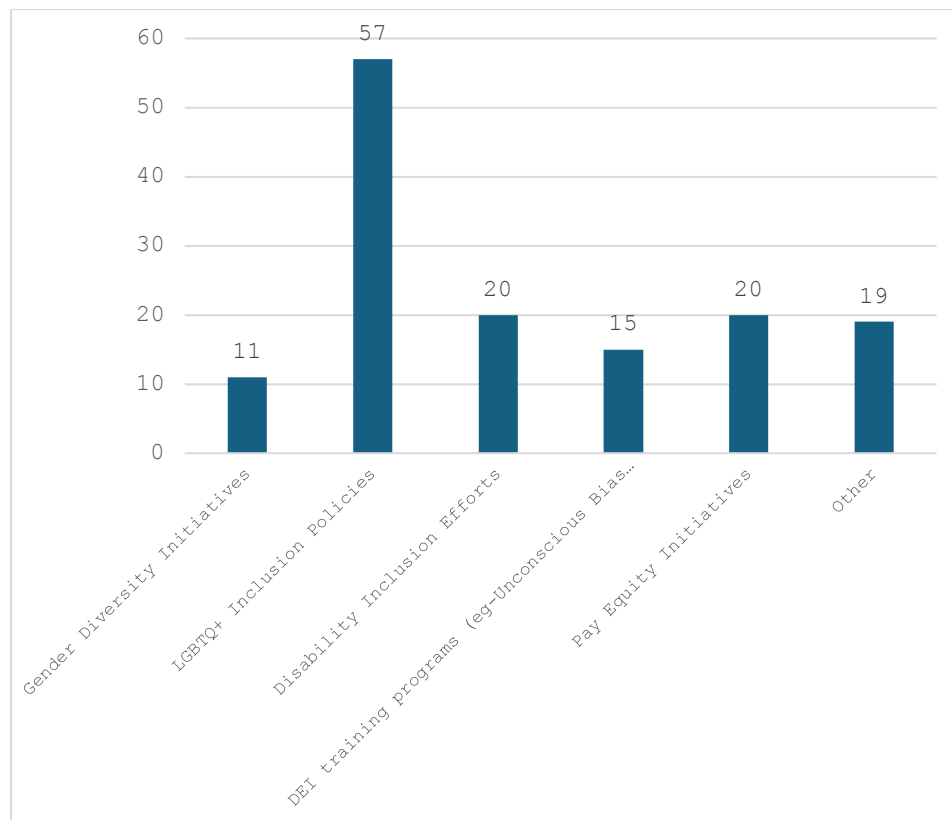


Figure 4.4 DEI Initiatives in order of most to least resistance

These findings underscore that while gender diversity has achieved some degree of institutionalization, more culturally complex or less visible forms of inclusion—such as those related to LGBTQ+ identity, disability, or pay equity—continue to face resistance at both policy and cultural levels. This aligns with previous literature on DEI implementation in India, which emphasizes the importance of social context, legal ambiguity, and leadership conviction in shaping successful inclusion strategies.

Challenges faced in the Implementation of DEI Initiatives

Respondents were asked to identify the **biggest challenges** they encounter while implementing DEI initiatives in their organizations. The most frequently reported barrier was a **lack of leadership commitment** ($n = 45$), indicating that despite policy-level intentions, senior leadership engagement remains inconsistent or superficial in many workplaces. This finding echoes broader literature emphasizing the **pivotal role of top-down accountability** in sustaining meaningful DEI outcomes.

Other frequently cited challenges included **budget constraints** ($n = 21$) and **difficulty in tracking measurable outcomes** ($n = 21$), suggesting that many DEI efforts remain **underfunded** and **data-deficient**, which hinders

both strategic alignment and evaluation. Inadequate training ($n = 16$) and a lack of policy clarity ($n = 16$) were also noted, pointing to gaps in operational frameworks and employee-level enablement.

Additionally, **legal or regulatory concerns** ($n = 15$) and **cultural resistance** ($n = 13$) were reported less frequently but remain important context-specific barriers. These may reflect uncertainty around evolving labor laws, regional diversity, and socio-cultural sensitivities unique to the Indian environment.

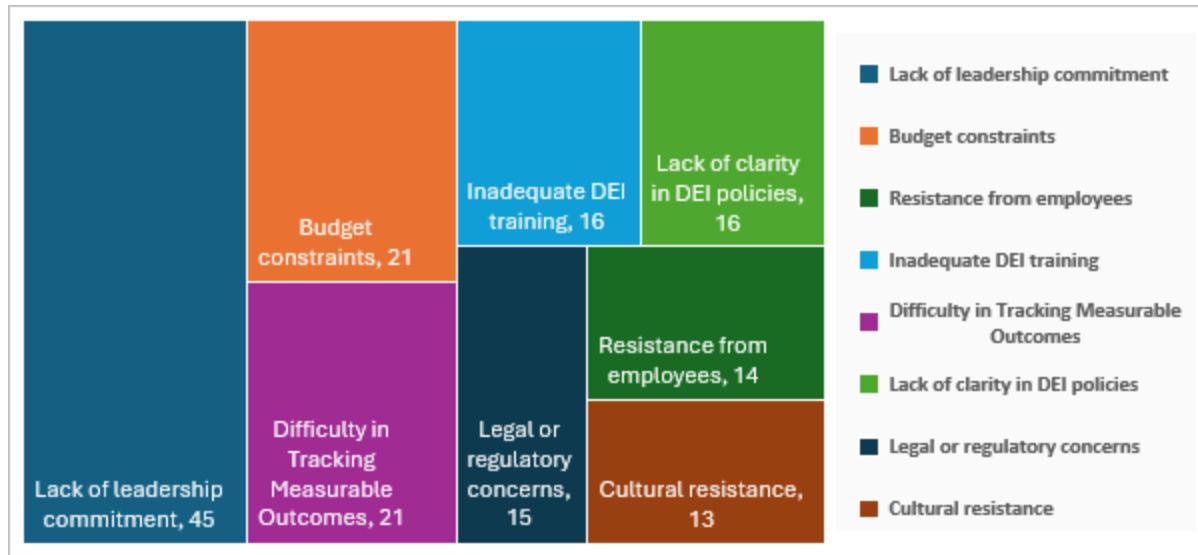


Figure 4.5 Challenges faced in the implementation of DEI Initiatives

The dominance of **leadership commitment** as a barrier suggests that DEI in many organizations is still **not embedded at the strategic level**, limiting its sustainability and reach. The challenges around funding, policy clarity, and training point to **executional gaps**, while cultural and regulatory concerns highlight the **unique socio-political terrain** DEI must navigate in India.

Together, these findings emphasize the need for **holistic, leadership-driven, and measurable DEI frameworks** tailored to Indian organizations. They also support the need for **business-aligned DEI strategies**, as highlighted in previous perception analysis findings.

Industry-wise Differences in Perceived Leadership Commitment to DEI

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether HR professionals' perceptions of **leadership commitment to DEI** varied significantly across different **industry sectors**. The analysis compared the mean scores from seven industry groups: BFSI, FMCG, IT/ITES, Manufacturing, Other, Pharma/Healthcare, and Start-ups. The dependent variable was the Likert-scale response to the statement “Leadership in my organization actively champions DEI initiatives.”

The results indicated **no statistically significant difference** in perceived leadership commitment across industry sectors, $F(6, 127) = 0.92$, $p = 0.49$. While the average leadership scores varied slightly—from a low of 3.09 in "Other" sectors to a high of 3.88 in FMCG—the differences were not large enough to reach statistical significance.

SUMMARY						
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
BFSI	16	51	3.1875	2.295833333		
FMCG	16	62	3.875	1.85		

IT/ITeS	19	69	3.631578947	1.467836257		
Manufacturing	16	60	3.75	2.066666667		
Other	23	71	3.086956522	1.446640316		
Pharma/Healthcare	25	81	3.24	1.773333333		
Start-up	19	66	3.473684211	2.263157895		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	10.16404069	6	1.694006782	0.916531774	0.485393262	2.17072709
Within Groups	234.7314817	127	1.848279383			
Total	244.8955224	133				

Table 4.7 Industry wise Perception of Leadership Commitment to DEI

These findings suggest that, across industries, **HR professionals generally perceive leadership commitment to DEI in a similar way**. The absence of significant differences implies that challenges related to leadership engagement with DEI may be **systemic rather than sector-specific**. This underscores the need for a **broader organizational shift in leadership accountability for DEI**, rather than targeting improvements only within certain industries.

Belief in Business-Driven DEI by Experience Level

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether HR professionals' belief that "DEI initiatives are more likely to succeed if driven by business goals, not just HR" varied significantly by years of professional experience. Respondents were grouped into four experience categories: 0–3 years, 4–7 years, 8–12 years, and more than 12 years. The dependent variable was measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

The analysis revealed no statistically significant difference in mean scores across the four experience groups, $F(3, 130) = 1.01, p = 0.39$. Although the group averages showed some variation — with the 8–12 years group expressing the strongest agreement ($M = 4.16$) and the 4–7 years group the lowest ($M = 3.73$) — these differences were not large enough to be statistically meaningful.

SUMMARY						
Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance		
0-3	36	140	3.888889	1.644444		
4-7	37	138	3.72973	1.813814		
8-12	25	104	4.16	0.806667		
more than 12	36	148	4.111111	0.787302		
ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit

Between Groups	3.962935	3	1.320978	1.011538	0.389899	2.674286
Within Groups	169.7684	130	1.305911			
Total	173.7313	133				

Table 4.8 Experience wise Perception of Business goal driven DEI

The findings suggest that belief in business-aligned DEI strategies is broadly consistent across experience levels. This indicates a shared understanding among HR professionals — regardless of seniority — that DEI efforts gain greater traction when embedded within the core business strategy rather than being confined to HR-led initiatives. The slightly higher scores among mid-career professionals (8–12 years and >12 years) may reflect greater exposure to strategic planning and executive-level decision-making, but the absence of a significant trend confirms that this belief is well-diffused across experience cohorts.

Future Outlook for DEI and the Influence of Global Corporate Trends

To assess expectations around the sustainability of DEI efforts, respondents were asked to rate their agreement with the statement: “I believe DEI will remain a key HR priority in the next 3–5 years in India.” On a 5-point Likert scale, HR professionals from multinational corporations (MNCs) reported a higher average agreement ($M = 3.85$) compared to those in Indian companies ($M = 3.43$). Both means are above the neutral midpoint, indicating an overall positive outlook, but the higher score among MNCs suggests a greater institutional expectation that DEI will remain a sustained focus in the near future.

MNC	3.851852
Indian Company	3.425

Table 4.9 DEI Priority in the Future

In a related question, participants were asked: “To what extent do global corporate DEI trends (e.g., changes in US or EU corporate strategy) influence your organization’s DEI efforts?” Here, MNC respondents again reported significantly higher influence ($M = 3.92$) than their Indian counterparts ($M = 3.18$). This indicates that HR professionals in MNCs are more directly exposed to international DEI trends, and their local strategies are likely shaped by global headquarter priorities. In contrast, Indian companies appear to operate more independently from global narratives, with relatively less reliance on or reactivity to international DEI policy shifts.

MNC	3.92
Indian Company	3.181818

Table 4.10 Do Global Trends influence DEI in India

Together, these findings suggest that MNCs in India are both more optimistic about DEI’s long-term relevance and more sensitive to global corporate trends. This may reflect their integration into broader ESG frameworks and international compliance systems, which place greater emphasis on sustained DEI engagement. Conversely, while Indian companies also report a generally positive outlook, their lower sensitivity to global trends indicates that local DEI strategies are more self-driven and context-specific, possibly due to regulatory, cultural, or leadership-based factors.

These differences highlight the importance of tailoring DEI frameworks based on organization type. MNCs may require tools to localize globally driven initiatives, while Indian firms may benefit from global benchmarking and external engagement to stay aligned with evolving DEI standards.

Open-Ended Responses

a. Qualitative Insights from HR Professionals

In addition to structured items, the survey included three open-ended questions aimed at capturing deeper insights into DEI implementation challenges, prioritization, and the future direction of inclusion efforts in Indian organizations. Thematic analysis of the responses reveals several recurring patterns that align with—and also extend beyond—the quantitative findings.

b. Experiences of Resistance

Respondents shared specific incidents illustrating how DEI efforts are resisted in practice. The key themes were:

Theme	Sample Quotes
Fear of Merit Compromise	“Several senior employees resisted DEI hiring fearing it would compromise merit.”
Implicit Bias / Favoritism	“Unconscious discrimination or favouritism for specially challenged employees.”
Gender-Based Resistance	“Hiring a female boss faced criticism among employee groups.”
Cultural Sensitivities	“Resistance to gender-neutral washrooms.”
Lack of Awareness	“Management says they hire on merit—no understanding of DEI benefits.”

Table 4.11 Experiences of Resistance to DEI

These responses reflect a **blend of implicit bias, cultural discomfort, and poor DEI literacy**, suggesting that resistance is often rooted in **perceptions of fairness**, traditional power dynamics, and **organizational inertia**.

c. Prioritized DEI Initiatives and the Reasoning

When asked to prioritize one DEI initiative for future investment, responses clustered into three major areas:

Initiative	Rationale Highlighted
Gender Diversity	Underrepresentation of women, especially in leadership roles and STEM/Manufacturing sectors .
DEI Training Programs	Seen as a foundational lever : “Without education and awareness, none of the other initiatives can be effective.”
Pay Equity	Framed as an ethical and trust-building imperative : “Equal pay for equal work builds trust.”
Disability Inclusion	Chosen to correct misperception that DEI = LGBTQ+ only

Table 4.12 Reasoning for Prioritising One Dei Initiative

These reflections show a clear **recognition of structural gaps**, but also a strong belief in **behavioral change through education** and **equity-based HR systems**.

d. Recommendations for the Future of DEI in India

Respondents proposed a wide range of strategic ideas, summarized into six actionable themes:

Theme	Example Quotes
Leadership Accountability	“Leadership KPIs should be linked to DEI progress.”
Education & Sensitization	“Sensitization at every level—from senior leadership to frontline staff.”
Policy and Infrastructure	“Invest in accessibility infrastructure.” “Inclusive benefits like insurance for same-sex partners.”
Integration with Business Strategy	“DEI should be embedded in business goals, not siloed in HR.”
Region-Specific Approaches	“We need DEI strategies that reflect local realities.”
Partnerships & Ecosystem Building	“Collaborate with external DEI consultants and NGOs.”

Table 4.13 Reasoning for prioritising one DEI Initiative

Collectively, these insights highlight that **successful DEI implementation in India** will require:

- Structural reforms
- Measurable accountability
- Cultural contextualization
- Continuous investment in **awareness-building and infrastructure**

e. Frequency Table – Thematic Analysis of Open-Ended Responses

Theme	Sub-Theme / Example	Question No.	Frequency
Resistance to DEI Implementation	Fear of merit compromise	Q1	2
	Bias against women leaders	Q1	2
	Cultural resistance (e.g., to gender-neutral washrooms)	Q1	1
	Lack of awareness/understanding of DEI	Q1	1
	Unconscious favoritism (e.g., toward differently abled employees)	Q1	1
	Subtotal		7

Priority Investment	Areas for	Gender diversity (esp. leadership, manufacturing, engineering)	Q2	4
		DEI training (education, awareness, empathy building)	Q2	3
		Pay equity	Q2	2
		Disability inclusion	Q2	1
		Subtotal		10
Future Recommendations	Success	Leadership accountability (e.g., KPIs, visibility)	Q3	3
		Sensitization and training at all levels	Q3	3
		Integration with business strategy	Q3	2
		Stronger infrastructure and inclusive benefits	Q3	3
		Cultural/contextual localization (region-specific strategies)	Q3	2
		Partnerships (e.g., with NGOs, consultants)	Q3	2
		Avoiding tokenism and performative acts	Q3	2
		Subtotal		17

Table 4.14 Thematic Analysis of Open Ended Responses

The open-ended responses offer **nuanced and grounded reflections** on the **human, structural, and strategic dimensions** of DEI implementation. They validate and expand upon the quantitative findings—especially around resistance, leadership gaps, and prioritization—and point toward a **mature understanding among HR professionals** of what meaningful DEI entails. Importantly, they also caution against **performative efforts** and call for **regionally tailored, metric-driven strategies** with long-term institutional support.

Key Findings and Conclusion

1. Persistent Resistance to LGBTQ+ Inclusion and Complex Identities

The survey results reveal that LGBTQ+ inclusion policies face the highest resistance among all DEI initiatives, cited by over 42% of respondents. This highlights ongoing societal discomfort and organizational hesitance to embrace non-normative identities in the Indian workplace. While gender diversity initiatives face comparatively lower resistance—likely due to stronger legal backing and CSR alignment—initiatives focused on disability inclusion, pay equity, and unconscious bias training also face notable pushback. Open-ended responses add further depth, revealing cultural discomfort (e.g., gender-neutral washrooms), implicit biases, and a general lack of DEI literacy, which contribute to this resistance. These insights confirm that socially complex or less visible dimensions of diversity face greater resistance, especially when they challenge traditional hierarchies or are seen as compromising merit.

2. Leadership Commitment as a Critical Barrier

A recurring theme across responses was the lack of leadership commitment, with 45 respondents identifying it as the top barrier to DEI implementation. This underscores the disconnect between policy-level intent and

leadership action, pointing to superficial engagement at the top. Budget constraints and difficulty in measuring outcomes were also common, reflecting executional and operational gaps. The absence of clear policies and effective training further weakens DEI efforts, while legal ambiguity and socio-cultural diversity in India add an additional layer of complexity. The findings indicate that without strong, visible, and accountable leadership, DEI initiatives struggle to gain traction, regardless of sector or organizational size.

3. DEI Challenges are Systemic, Not Sector-Specific

Contrary to expectations, the industry-wise comparison revealed no statistically significant differences in perceived leadership commitment to DEI. This finding suggests that DEI-related leadership challenges are systemic across sectors rather than confined to specific industries. The relatively uniform perception across industries indicates that sectoral best practices alone may not suffice; rather, a more comprehensive approach involving organizational transformation and leadership accountability is needed across the board.

4. Shared Belief in Business-Aligned DEI Across Experience Levels

Another key finding is the consistent belief across experience levels that DEI efforts succeed when aligned with business strategy rather than being siloed within HR. While mid-career professionals (8–12 years) showed slightly higher agreement, the lack of significant variation indicates a shared mindset across HR professionals. This suggests a growing maturity in DEI thinking, where integration with core business objectives is seen as essential for sustainability and impact.

5. MNCs Lead in DEI Optimism and Global Integration

HR professionals in multinational corporations (MNCs) showed higher agreement that DEI will remain a priority in the next 3–5 years and reported greater influence from global DEI trends. This points to the influence of international compliance frameworks, ESG mandates, and parent-company strategies. In contrast, Indian firms, while still optimistic, operate more independently, with DEI efforts shaped more by local realities. This divergence suggests that DEI strategies should be contextually adapted: MNCs need localized implementation of global frameworks, while Indian companies may benefit from global benchmarking and external engagement to stay aligned with evolving norms.

6. Thematic Insights Reflect Real-World Resistance and Strategic Priorities

Open-ended responses provide valuable qualitative insights that complement the quantitative data. Participants cited fear of merit compromise, gender-based bias, favoritism, and cultural sensitivities as lived obstacles in implementing DEI. These reflect deeper organizational biases and cultural discomforts, reinforcing the need for education, awareness, and mindset change. When asked to prioritize DEI initiatives, respondents focused on gender diversity, DEI training, pay equity, and disability inclusion, showing both structural and educational imperatives. Their recommendations for the future include leadership accountability, inclusive infrastructure, policy clarity, cultural localization, and cross-sector partnerships, signaling a comprehensive understanding of what DEI success entails in the Indian context.

Conclusion: Toward Contextual, Measurable, and Leadership-Driven DEI

Taken together, the findings highlight a maturing understanding of DEI among Indian HR professionals, along with a candid recognition of barriers—particularly those rooted in leadership inaction, cultural resistance, and executional challenges. While MNCs appear more aligned with global DEI trends, Indian firms are carving out localized approaches shaped by indigenous social dynamics. For DEI efforts to be truly transformative in India, strategic alignment with business goals, structural investment, and leadership-driven accountability will be essential. Moreover, integrating cultural sensitivities, inclusive infrastructure, and measurable KPIs into DEI frameworks can help build more equitable and resilient organizations.

Implications

1. Need for Focused Interventions in LGBTQ+ and Disability Inclusion

The high resistance to LGBTQ+ policies and disability inclusion efforts reveals deep-rooted cultural and organizational barriers. This underscores the need for sensitization programs, inclusive infrastructure, and policy reforms that address non-visible identities and intersectionality. Organizations must go beyond compliance to build genuine inclusion frameworks, especially for underrepresented or marginalized groups.

2. Strategic Leadership is Central to DEI Success

Leadership commitment was consistently identified as the most significant barrier to DEI implementation. This points to a critical need for DEI accountability at the top levels of management. Companies must institutionalize leadership KPIs linked to DEI outcomes and ensure that senior leaders not only endorse but actively champion inclusion goals.

3. DEI Must Be Integrated into Core Business Strategy

Both quantitative and qualitative responses suggest a strong belief that DEI efforts are more sustainable when aligned with business goals rather than siloed in HR. Organizations should embed DEI within business operations, talent management, and performance measurement frameworks to achieve strategic alignment and long-term impact.

4. Data and Measurement Gaps Impede Progress

Challenges such as lack of measurable outcomes and policy clarity indicate that many organizations are still in the early stages of building mature DEI systems. There is a pressing need for tools that can track DEI progress, assess impact, and communicate value to internal and external stakeholders.

5. Training and Sensitization are Foundational Levers

Respondents emphasized that without continuous training, DEI strategies are unlikely to succeed. Investments in DEI education—particularly around unconscious bias, inclusive leadership, and legal literacy—are essential for shifting mindsets and reducing resistance at all levels of the organization.

6. Contextualized Approaches are Key for Indian Organizations

The differences between MNCs and Indian companies reveal that while global frameworks influence DEI in MNCs, Indian organizations require more localized strategies. Socio-cultural nuances, legal ambiguities, and regional diversities must be accounted for to design relevant and effective inclusion initiatives in Indian workplaces.

7. Cross-Sector and Cross-Experience Consensus Supports DEI Institutionalization

The lack of significant variation in leadership perception across industries and in business-aligned DEI beliefs across experience levels suggests a widespread, systemic challenge rather than isolated gaps. This shared understanding can be a strength—providing a foundation for collaborative action, benchmarking, and peer learning across sectors.

8. Partnerships and Ecosystem Engagement Can Accelerate DEI Outcomes

Recommendations from HR professionals highlight the importance of working with NGOs, consultants, and other ecosystem players. External partnerships can provide the technical expertise, validation, and contextual understanding needed to scale DEI efforts and overcome internal capability limitations.

RECOMMENDATION

The insights from this study underscore the pressing need for Indian organizations to adopt a more strategic, inclusive, and context-sensitive approach to DEI. First and foremost, leadership must play a transformative role in driving DEI from the top. This involves not just verbal endorsements or symbolic gestures, but a demonstrated and measurable commitment to equity and inclusion across organizational levels. To achieve this, organizations should integrate DEI objectives into leadership performance metrics and establish clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) tied to inclusive hiring, retention, and promotion practices. Leadership visibility in DEI conversations, participation in training sessions, and sponsorship of internal inclusion councils can further reinforce top-down accountability.

Secondly, the study highlights the critical need for continuous education, sensitization, and awareness-building across all tiers of the organization. DEI cannot be reduced to a one-time training module; instead, it requires sustained investment in programs that address unconscious bias, foster empathy, and equip employees with the knowledge to navigate diverse workplaces. These programs must be culturally contextualized for Indian audiences, acknowledging region-specific sensitivities, caste dynamics, and traditional mindsets around gender, sexuality, and disability. The inclusion of real-world case studies, scenario-based learning, and immersive experiences—rather than only theoretical content—can significantly improve the relevance and impact of such training.

A third area of focus must be the development of comprehensive DEI policies that are inclusive in both language and implementation. Many respondents pointed to ongoing resistance around LGBTQ+ inclusion, disability support, and pay equity. To overcome this, organizations must establish policies that explicitly recognize and protect marginalized groups. This includes instituting gender-neutral recruitment processes, accessible workspaces, health insurance that covers same-sex partners, and clear grievance redressal mechanisms for bias or discrimination. These policies should be co-created with employee resource groups (ERGs), external experts, and legal advisors to ensure they are both progressive and compliant.

Fourth, data transparency and metrics must become foundational to DEI strategy. Organizations need systems to capture, analyze, and report data on representation across various dimensions, such as gender, disability, sexual orientation, caste, and religion—where voluntarily disclosed. Beyond representation, tracking outcomes like attrition, engagement, and promotion rates across demographic groups can provide deeper insight into systemic inequities. Regular internal DEI audits, employee surveys on inclusion climate, and dashboards for leadership review can aid in course correction and continuous improvement.

Finally, collaboration with external stakeholders—including DEI consultants, NGOs, academia, and government agencies—can accelerate organizational learning and innovation. These partnerships can support the localization of global DEI frameworks, provide specialized training, and facilitate community outreach programs. Especially for Indian firms that operate independently of global DEI trends, engaging with the wider DEI ecosystem can help benchmark practices, access new tools, and build credibility among stakeholders.

Together, these recommendations aim to move DEI from a compliance-oriented initiative to a business-critical and human-centered strategy. By embedding inclusion deeply into culture, systems, and leadership practice, Indian organizations can create workplaces that are not only diverse and equitable but also resilient, innovative, and aligned with the expectations of a global workforce.

Limitations of the study

While this research provides valuable insights into the future of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in Indian organizations through the lens of HR professionals, it is not without its limitations. One of the primary limitations lies in the method of data collection, which relied solely on a structured questionnaire. Although the questionnaire was thoughtfully designed with a combination of close-ended and open-ended questions to elicit both quantitative and qualitative insights, it may not have fully captured the depth and nuance of participants' experiences and organizational realities. The absence of interviews or focus group discussions limited the

opportunity to explore contextual details, emotional undercurrents, or contradictory viewpoints that often emerge in verbal dialogue.

Additionally, the sample size and demographic diversity of the respondents may constrain the generalizability of the findings. While efforts were made to include HR professionals from varied industries and organization sizes, the sample may still reflect an overrepresentation of voices from urban, mid-to-large private sector organizations, where DEI is already a recognized agenda. This may have inadvertently excluded perspectives from smaller firms, rural enterprises, or public sector organizations, where DEI policies and awareness might differ significantly. Moreover, given that participation was voluntary, there is a possibility of response bias—those with a greater interest or favorable view of DEI may have been more inclined to respond, skewing the data toward optimism and progressive viewpoints.

Another constraint is the temporal limitation of the study. The data was collected during a time frame of a month and reflects the prevailing sentiments and organizational practices of that period. DEI is a dynamic field, influenced by socio-political developments, global trends, and regulatory changes. As such, the relevance of the findings may evolve over time, especially if there are significant policy shifts or socio-cultural movements that impact workplace diversity discourse in India.

Lastly, the study did not delve into the intersectionality of identities, such as the interplay between caste, gender, and disability, or the layered challenges faced by individuals belonging to multiple marginalized groups. Future research that incorporates an intersectional lens and utilizes mixed-method approaches—combining surveys with in-depth interviews, longitudinal studies, or ethnographic methods—could offer a more holistic understanding of the barriers and enablers of DEI in Indian workplaces.

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