

REDUCING INEQUALITIES THROUGH INTERSECTIONALITY

Research Paper

Lakshmi R Rajagopal, SSBM, Geneva, Switzerland, lakshmi@ssbm.ch

Dr. Anna Provodnikova, SSBM, Geneva, Switzerland, anna@ssbm.ch

Abstract

Human race is beautifully diverse, no two human beings are the same, there are differences in background, cultural, social, economic context, in the way we think, behave, and learn – there are infinite variations and dimensions rolled up in each one of us. There is increased awareness of how our uniqueness define us and for this reason Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) strategies at various unit levels have gained prominence – be it at country level or regional level or at an organizational level. Organizations need to appreciate D&I is a business imperative, getting this right has impact not only on the top line and bottom line but also plays a pivotal part in reducing inequalities in the society at large.

That said, D&I strategy cannot be a ‘one size fits all’ approach because of its complex and nuanced nature. Similarly, siloed-hyper customized strategy is also not possible because of its infinite variations. The key to getting this right is through a concept called ‘Intersectionality’. Intersectionality talks about how multiple dimensions of diversity roll up within a single individual. This paper attempts to provide a framework that organizations can explore to understand and unpack the ‘intersectional points’ – doing this may help in reducing micro and macro inequalities and benefit the organizations and the society at large. Intersectionality is the beginning of the long road to Inclusion.

Keywords: Diversity, Inclusion, Intersectionality, Macro, Micro inequality, Intersectionality model, multi-variate dimensions

1 Introduction

In 2015, United Nations released 17 Sustainable Development Goals as a blueprint towards achieving a better and more sustainable future for all of us (United Nations: *Transforming Our World: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2015). These Goals called SDGs address the global challenges we face, including poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice.

For the SDGs to be sustainable and scalable, it is important that they are entrenched deeply into the society – especially by organizations as they focus on building the strategy for their future. For any meaningful, long term, sustained, significant impact, organizations have to educate and imbibe the SDGs as a way of life. These need to be layered on everything organizations do and not merely as a check in the box agenda item or a ‘flavor of the month’ event.

While SDGs cover varied challenges currently faced in societies, this research paper specifically focuses on Goal # 10: Reduced Inequalities. According to United Nations, this goal aims to reduce inequalities, ensure policies are universal in principle, paying attention to needs of disadvantaged and marginalized populations (United Nations: *Transforming Our World: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 2015). This goal covers inclusion of diverse employees, and the approach organizations need to do to ensure equity and equality for all.

Diversity & Inclusion (D&I or DEI) is not a new concept at all, it emerged in the mid 1960s following the introduction of equal employment laws and affirmative action. However, it has become a buzz word recently, before we dive deeper into the topic, it is important to understand the definition of D&I

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion according to Daunt et al (2022), Deloitte Diversity, Equity & Inclusion [Online]. Available at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/> (Accessed: 15 Sep 2022) can be defined as follows:

- Diversity is the variety of people and ideas within an organization. It can be defined as the full range of differences and similarities that make each individual unique, some of which are visible and some of which are invisible
- Equity is about eliminating systemic barriers and privileges, and ensuring all people have fair access, opportunity, resources, and power to thrive
- Inclusion is about creating an environment in which all individuals feel valued and connected. It can be seen as the very act of celebrating and utilizing people's differences to the benefit of the organization, not merely tolerating them

2 Literature Review:

2.1 Impact of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Many organizations have started viewing D&I as a strategic priority. Research has proven that D&I efforts have a bearing on business outcomes. It is said that Diversity by itself will not yield results, key ingredient which transforms the theoretical business case for diversity into bottom line results is Inclusion.

Daunt et al (2022) in their Deloitte research report mention that organizations with inclusive culture are:

- 2x as likely to meet or exceed financial targets
- 3x as likely to be high performing
- 6x as likely to be innovative and agile
- 8x more likely to achieve better business outcomes

While it is easy to measure diversity and monitor progress, it is quite difficult to measure Inclusion, however research says that 'Inclusion' is the key – merely hiring diverse talent is not enough, it's the holistic experience in the organization that shapes whether people are able to bring their authentic selves to work Hunt et al., (2020) Diversity wins: How Inclusion matters [Online]. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/>. Accessed: 10 Sep 2022

2.2 D&I - Business imperative:

While Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) was compliance led when it was introduced, it has come a long way today. It is no more a tick in the box or a marketable ‘nice to have’ concept, D&I has become a ‘business imperative and therefore a ‘strategic priority’ for leadership teams.

With globalization, customers in many sectors are becoming increasingly complex and diverse and a hyper customized approach is required to cater to their changing demands. In financial services or wealth management sector for example, it is estimated that women control over \$20 trillion (27%) of world’s wealth and \$11.2 trillion (39%) of United States wealth. Also, two-thirds of women in US, UK, China, Hong Kong, and Singapore identified as primary decision makers over household assets (Moffitt & Hewlett, 2015). To cater to the changing demographics of customers and the complexities that come with it, it is important that organizations have diverse employee base that would cater to the nuanced customers.

2.3 Dimensions of Diversity

There could be as many as 45-50 dimensions of Diversity (Korn Ferry, *A Taste of D&I*, 2020). These could be around multiple themes like ‘Relational’, ‘Physical’, ‘Values’, ‘Occupational’, ‘Societal’, ‘Cognitive’. While some of these dimensions are visible and are easily identifiable, there are many others that are invisible.

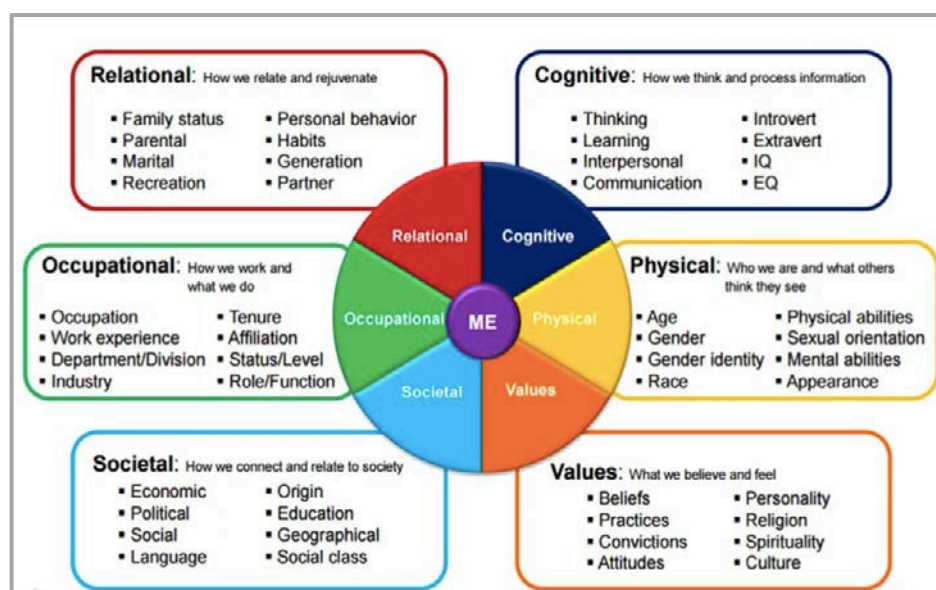


Figure 1. Diversity Dimension wheel by Korn Ferry (Korn Ferry Report - A Taste of D&I, 2020)

Point to note is that most organizations focus only on specific dimensions like gender, race, ethnicity, generational differences to build Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. For any organization to have a sustained long-term impact, it is important to have a holistic approach that encompasses many dimensions. This is where concept of ‘Intersectionality’ comes into play.

2.4 Concept of Intersectionality:

Organizations currently focus on diversity dimensions in a siloed manner like catering to policies or programs that would address a single dimension of diversity. D&I these days is not unidimensional – it is a multi-pronged approach. There are multiple dimensions rolled into one associate. This concept is called Intersectionality and was popularized by a legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw.

Crenshaw, K.W. (2017) states “Identity doesn’t mean intersectionality.” Intersectionality is about the structure that “make certain identities the consequence of and the vehicle for vulnerability” (Crenshaw, K.W. 2017). For instance, a woman employee at the workplace cannot be seen only as a woman, she could be from a specific socio-economic background, belong to a specific race or ethnicity, she could be a person with disabilities or could be a caregiver to elderly parents – thus a multi-diversity dimensional person.

Carbado et al., (2013) sum up the concept of Intersectionality well in their article. They mention that no particular application of intersectionality can grasp the range of intersectional powers and problems that plague the society. Further, the work-in-progress understanding of intersectionality suggests that we should endeavor to move intersectionality to unexplored places (Carbado et al., 2013). In subsequent sections, we will see the impact Intersectionality has on various social and economic metrics.

3 Discussion

Diversity & Inclusion is a buzzword in many organizations today. It is important that D&I needs to be seen as an integral aspect towards achieving business strategy and a clear mandate be given from the top that non inclusive behaviors will not be tolerated. In the D&I maturity model proposed by Deloitte – they mention that highest level of maturity is when D&I is fully integrated into employee and other business processes such as customer experience, innovation, workplace design. The whole organization is accountable and leads the D&I efforts (Juliet Bourke & Dillon, 2018).

Attaining level 4 maturity is the gold standard and an ideal state. It is important to see the progress that organizations make in D&I as embarking on a journey as the road travelled is as important as the destination itself. While it is understandable that different organizations will be at different points in this journey, it is also important to understand pivotal trends that emerge.

3.1 Macro trends

Dialing-up Diversity, but is inclusion included?

There is increased awareness of hiring diverse talent but is the focus on Inclusion good enough? Research by McKinsey states that the efforts of Diversity and Inclusion are not on par. They found that promoting diversity does not ensure a culture of Inclusion Hunt et al., (2020) Diversity wins: How Inclusion matters [Online]. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/>. Accessed: 15 Sep 2022

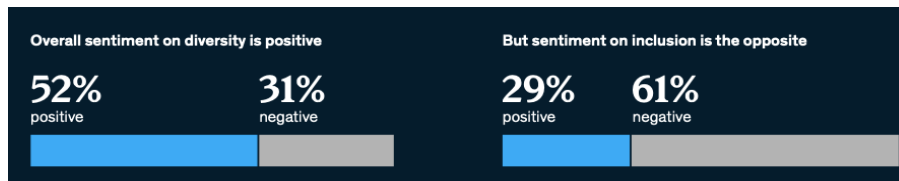


Figure 2. Diversity wins, How Inclusion matters – McKinsey research (Hunt et al., 2020)

The hidden layers

Most organizations base their efforts in moving the needle on certain visible aspects of diversity like gender, generational, race and ethnicity etc. They do not transcend beyond the obvious to include invisible dimensions of diversity like Cognitive diversity.

Invisible aspects of Diversity are very vital for functioning of organizations and future of organizations. Deloitte's research reveals that high performing teams are cognitively diverse. Cognitive diversity is the diversity in the mental frameworks that people use for every action. Cognitive diversity is the difference in our thinking, learning and personality styles and each of us are unique on these parameters.

Not all dimensions will be relevant in all contexts. For instance, 'Race' as a diversity dimension may not be relevant in certain geographies, similarly some countries may have many languages spoken and thereby 'language diversity or language inclusion' becomes an important dimension in the society whereas this may not be applicable in some other societies. If we take an example in organizations, tenure of associates in the organization may be a function of how long the organization has existed and needs to be analyzed. In a start-up environment, if the organization is less than 5 years old, then the tenure of associates in the organization may not be much, though experience could be different.

Dimensions like Cognitive diversity are usually not a top priority dimension that organizations act on. Not looking beyond, the traditional dimensions, to unearth the hidden layers, is a myopic way of addressing D&I in organizations and may yield only short-term benefits.

Why Intersectionality matters

Organizations formulate a D&I strategy basis univariate dimension of diversity. Inclusion and Equity are more complex concepts that cannot be built on univariate diversity.

To build a sustainable organization, focused on a strong culture of equality and inclusion, organizations must focus on multivariate diversity. Intersectionality is a concept that considers multiple dimensions rolled into a single person. Tackling this concept would create a holistic integrated approach which would be a pivotal moment for equity and inclusion.

3.2 Exploring Intersectionality

Since Intersectionality talks about considering multiple dimensions in a single person, the permutation and combination of possibilities are endless. This is one of the topics in D&I that is not fully leveraged and there is an opportunity for focus and impetus to further discussions and research.

For instance, if one takes only two dimensions into consideration, then one can think of Gender-Race intersectionality or Gender-Person with Disabilities or Gender-Sexual orientation, Gender-veteran status, etc. However, if one was to add another dimension of diversity onto this, then the options would be mindboggling.

While it may not be possible for us to unpack every permutation-combination of diversity, we can take couple of sample personas with ‘intersectional dimensions’ to understand better:

- Persona 1: Gender - Race Intersectionality
- Persona 2: Gender identity/Race - Sexual orientation intersectionality
- Persona 3: Gender - person with disability
- Persona 4: Role of socio-economic status in Intersectionality
- Persona 5: Role of Cognitive Diversity in Intersectionality

Illustration of possible personas that exist with just seven diversity dimensions

2-dimensional view (few dimensions)	Gender	Generational	Race	Sexual orientation	Physical/ Mental abilities	Socio economic status	Cognitive Diversity
Gender		●	● Persona 1	● Persona 2	● Persona 3	● Persona 4	● Persona 5
Generational	●		●	●	●	●	● Persona 5
Race	● Persona 1	●		● Persona 2	●	● Persona 4	● Persona 5
Sexual Orientation	● Persona 2	●	● Persona 2		●	● Persona 4	● Persona 5
Physical / Mental abilities	● Persona 3	●	●	●		●	● Persona 5
Socio economic status	● Persona 4	●	● Persona 4	● Persona 4	●		● Persona 5
Cognitive Diversity	● Persona 5	● Persona 5	● Persona 5	● Persona 5	● Persona 5	● Persona 4/5	

● Other possible personas not covered in this document

Figure 3: Intersectionality matrix – Authors’ representation

This is only a Two-dimensional matrix with Seven diversity dimensions, one can create an NxN matrix using the diversity dimensions mentioned in Korn Ferry Diversity Dimension wheel or other missing elements.

Let us unpack the personas mentioned earlier for us to understand how this plays out in the workplace.

Persona 1: Gender-Race Intersectionality:

In multi-racial societies, the study of Gender-Race intersectional point provides for a very interesting study. It is also an important study topic due to the enormous impact an intersectional demographic will provide.

For example, Painter & Rose (2015) through their Deloitte report state that in the US, women of color are projected to make up the majority of all women by 2060, and they already generate \$1 trillion as consumers and \$361 billion in revenues as entrepreneurs. These numbers are huge and would help organizations to understand them better as they would become a very large customer base.

This means that the current demographic dimension in gender-race intersectionality will shift and the dominant group today, will not exist so in future, and the majority may become a minority. Therefore, it would be important to focus on these demographics from a long-term perspective as well.

In subsequent sections, let us analyze the impact of Gender-Race in couple of scenarios like Leadership representation, Career advancement opportunities, Pay parity.

Micro inequities:

Impact of Gender-Race in leadership representation, Career advancement:

Krivkovich et al., (2018) in their McKinsey research report on financial services, state that women of color represent one in five employees at entry level. However, this representation virtually disappears at higher levels. Across 39 financial services companies surveyed by McKinsey, there were only ten women of color in C-suite roles. The reasons for this disparity could be manifold:

- Promotion or lack of it is a significant factor at every step – this is considerably lower for women of color compared to men or white women. Krivkovich et al (2018) state that for every 100 men promoted, only 79 women are, this significantly reduces for women of color
- Some other aspects like cultural nuances, when played out in the corporate world, can be misinterpreted. For instance, if women from a certain culture are expected to be modest, this could be misconstrued by colleagues as a sign of being meek. Similarly, in some cultures, managing an entire household, caregiving responsibilities and parental care responsibilities could fall on the woman, necessitating her to prioritize home over career, leading to attrition
- There could be other reasons which are triggered by women themselves – Women are especially vulnerable to the perfection trap and can be undermined by their tendency to give themselves a hard time, a habit rooted in the desire to be perfect. As a result of this, women may not ‘raise their hand’ to take up new opportunities (Helgesen & Goldsmith, 2018: *How Women Rise: Break the 12 Habits Holding You Back*. Random House).
- ‘The Only experience’: 2/3rd women, feel it is especially important for women starting their career to have women in leadership positions as role models (The Rockefeller Foundation, *Women in Leadership: Why it matters*, nd). In a similar study, one in five women say they are often the only woman or one of the only women in the room at work: in other words, they are ‘Onlys’ (Krivkovich et al., 2018). This is twice as common for senior-level women and women in technical roles: around 40 percent are ‘Onlys’. These could be accentuated if other dimensions of diversity like age, cultural

context, race, and ethnicity are considered. There are not enough studies to prove this effect, but one can imagine the compound effect by amping up the intensity (Krivkovich et al., 2018)

Macro inequities:

Impact of Gender-Race in pay parity:

Representation in leadership is important, but what is also a matter of concern is the impact of Gender-Race in pay parity. El Gharib (2022) gives an example of pay parity issue, she references about UN SDG #1 of reducing poverty and mentions that the factors that aggravate it are deeply rooted in the social, cultural, political, economic structures that shape the world.

El Gharib (2022) mentions that it is important to look at multitude of perspectives, failure of this could jeopardize the achievement of global goals and perpetuate inequalities. Intersectionality can help us understand just how interconnected these challenges are at a global level. To unpack this, an illustration around pay parity is given below:

- In US, women earn 83 cents for every dollar a man earns, however this quickly changes when you factor in additional identities, with a Black woman earning a mere 64 cents for every dollar a white man earns.
- Add on one more dimension of age and the difference is very stark. Foster, (2019) in the Bentley University research report titled '*Intersectionality in the workplace: Broadening the Lens of Inclusion*' talk about pay gap parity for women of color across different ages. The pay gap starts at entry-level, persisting and increasing throughout women's careers. For Black women, a gap of 16 percent grows to 32 percent by mid-career and 39 percent in the later years.
- Below example talks about the pay gap of women across multitude of dimensions – gender-age-race, if it had not considered multivariate dimensions and gone with the traditional way of looking at patterns, then we would have missed out on significant nuances and then inequities would continue to exist (Foster, 2019)

Pay gap for black women starts when they enter workforce & increases with age

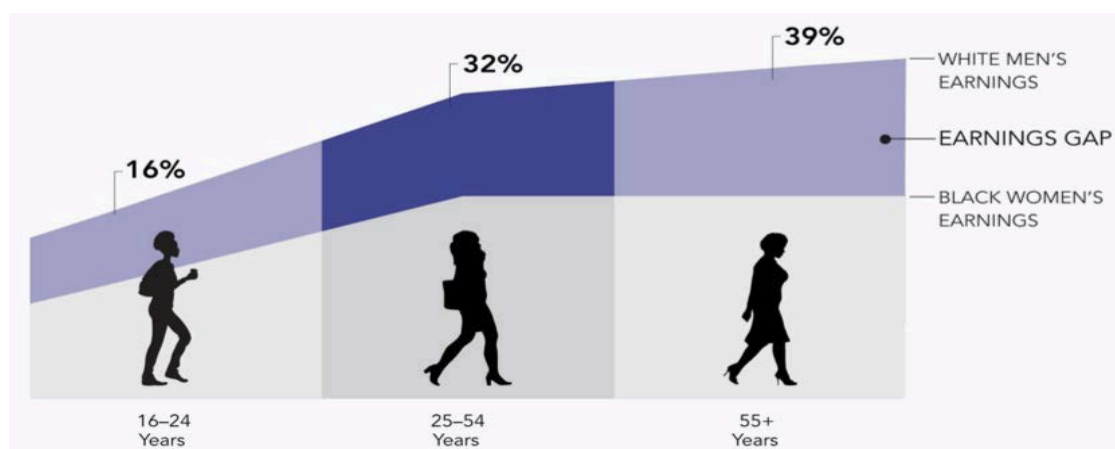


Figure 4: Bentley University research report on '*Intersectionality in the Workplace: Broadening the Lens of Inclusion*' (Foster, 2019)

Persona 2: Gender Identity/Race - Sexual orientation (LGBT+) Intersectionality:

There has been an increased awareness around LGBT+ inclusion in recent years. Around 81 countries around the world prohibit discrimination in employment because of sexual orientation (Catalyst, *LGBTQ+ Workplace Issues*, 2022).

However, like many other dimensions of diversity, LGBTQ+ also bring in multitude of perspectives and facets that one must dive deep to understand and action on this better. On a broader level, the issues faced by gay or lesbian or transgender could look similar, but they bring their own complexities and nuances.

Micro-inequities

Research says that fear prevents the LGBT + cohort to bring their authentic selves to work (Catalyst, *LGBTQ+ Workplace Issues*, 2022):

About half (50.4%) of LGBTQ+ workers in the United States are not out to their supervisors and one-quarter (25.8%) are not out to anyone at work. Comfortability with coming out can differ by gender and seniority in the organization (Catalyst, *LGBTQ+ Workplace Issues*, 2022):

- LGBTQ+ men are much more likely (80%) to be out to most of their colleagues than LGBTQ+ women (58%).
- LGBTQ+ senior leaders are more likely (80%) to be out at work than junior employees (32%).

LGBTQ+ people are often subjected to harmful language: 67.5% of LGBTQ+ employees have heard slurs, jokes, or negative comments about LGBT people in the workplace (Catalyst, *LGBTQ+ Workplace Issues*, 2022).

LGBTQ+ women, meanwhile, are much more likely than those who are not LGBTQ+ to say they do not feel supported by their employers to achieve a work-life balance (41% vs. 27%) and are less likely to say that their employer's commitment to supporting women has been sufficient since the COVID-19 crisis began (35% vs. 44%) (*Deloitte Report - Women @ Work - A Global Outlook*, 2021).

What is even more disconcerting is the fact that they may not have formal avenues to address their grievances. In research conducted by Deloitte, almost 4 in 10 lesbian and Trans women and around 22% of gay or trans men feel their complaints will not be taken seriously (*Deloitte Report - LGBT+ Inclusion @ Work: A Global Outlook*, 2022). Report further says that gay men felt the behavior could get worse post formal complaints.

Given below are marked differences in the way Gender-race or gender-sexual orientation plays out in various scenarios indicating a high level of micro-inequity by way of microaggression (Krivkovich et al., 2018).

Women who experienced Micro-aggressions in the workplace (%)

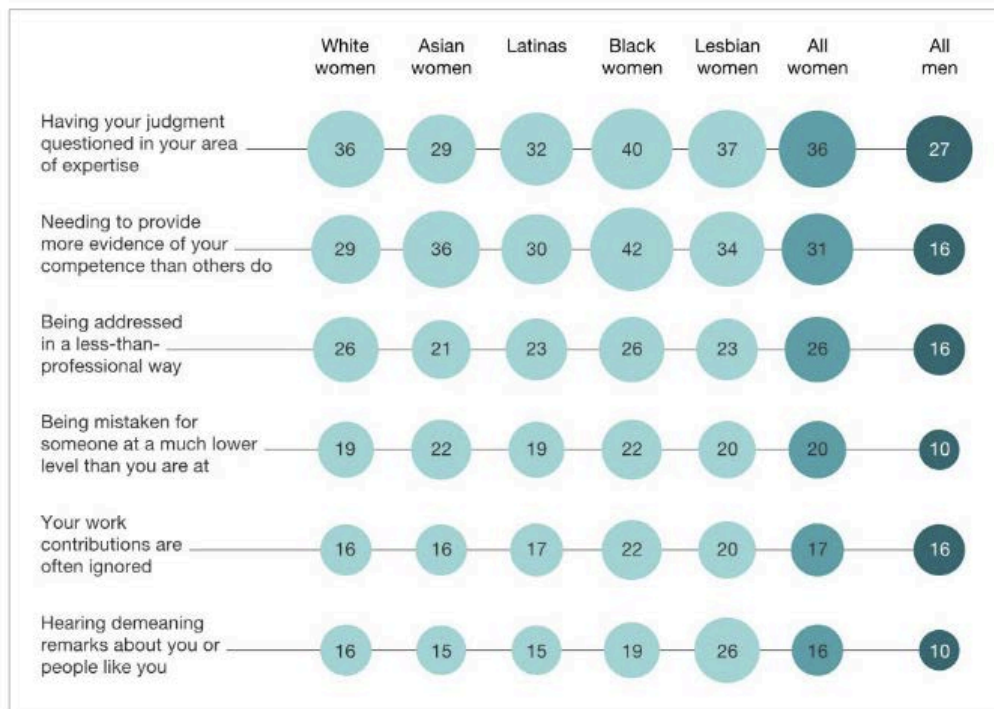


Figure 5: McKinsey report: *Women in the Workplace* (Krivkovich et al., 2018)

Macro inequities:

When applying for jobs, nearly one-quarter (23.7%) of LGBTQ+ Americans have experienced discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, but experiences vary by race and ethnicity (Catalyst, *LGBTQ+ Workplace Issues*, 2022):

- LGBTQ+ people of color – 29.0%
- LGBTQ+ White – 18.3%

LGBTQ+ employees in the US earn 90% for every \$1 the typical worker earns. Transgender employees make 32% less per year than their cisgender counterparts (Catalyst, *LGBTQ+ Workplace Issues*, 2022).

Persona 3: Gender-person with disability Intersectionality:

End to end understanding and strong commitment to move the needle on diversity and inclusion of persons with disability could be quite challenging due to the complexities associated with it – disability could encompass a wide field ranging across physical and mental disabilities including visible and invisible disabilities. Mental health as a topic is being spoken in organizations only recently and more so after the pandemic.

Working on enhancing diversity and inclusion for people with different spectrum of abilities needs concerted multi-pronged approach involving key stakeholders. There could be a large play of micro inequities due to the deep-rooted cultural nuances associated with this dimension

and it could impact inclusion efforts severely. One can imagine the impact of gender on persons with disability where it would be even more nuanced and complex.

A report by United Nations states that Girls and women of all ages with any form of disability are among the more vulnerable and marginalized of society. There is therefore a need to take into account and to address their concerns in all policymaking and programming. Special measures are needed at all levels to integrate them into the mainstream of development (United Nations, *Women with Disabilities*, n.d).

Micro Inequities:

McKinsey report suggests that Women with disabilities are much more likely than women overall to have their competence challenged or to be undermined at work (Krivkovich et al., 2018)

Not much research is available around invisible disabilities, this could impact any gender or race or a person with other dimensions of diversity. Since it is invisible and if not voluntarily disclosed, then it would not be known at all

- Foster (2019) through Bentley University research mentions that about 45% of white men report covering and mental health is sometimes a reason
- Depressive disorders account for close to 41.9 per cent of the disability from neuropsychiatric disorders among women compared to 29.3 per cent among men (United Nations, *Women with Disabilities*, n.d)

Macro Inequities:

The United Nations study further states that (United Nations, *Women with Disabilities*, n.d):

- Less than 5 per cent of children and young persons with disabilities have access to education and training; and girls and young women face significant barriers to participating in social life and development
- The global literacy rate for adults with disabilities is as low as 3 per cent, and 1 per cent for women with disabilities
- Often, women with disabilities are invisible both among those promoting the rights of persons with disabilities, and those promoting gender equality and the advancement of women.
- Among persons with a disability, the jobless rates for Blacks (15.1 percent) and Hispanics (13.3 percent) were higher than the rates for Whites (9.3 percent) and Asians (8.5 percent) in 2021. The rates for Whites, Asians, and Hispanics decreased from 2020 to 2021, while the rate for Blacks showed little change (US Department of labor report, 2021)

Impact:

In a study by McKinsey, shows that expanding labor-force participation among Americans with disabilities who want to work could add nearly \$215 billion to US GDP by 2040 (McKinsey research report, *Intersection: Delivering on Diversity Equality And Inclusion*, 2022). Addressing barriers to work for people with disabilities could boost global GDP by a total of \$400 billion. To realize this potential for growth—and to make equal opportunity a reality worldwide—employers would need to provide assistive technologies, make buildings fully accessible, create inclusive cultures, and offer workers with disabilities more flexibility, without negative consequences for taking advantage of it

Further (Foster, 2019) through their research published by Bentley University find that businesses that champion people with disabilities perform significantly better than other organizations around profitability and shareholder returns - Their revenues are 28% higher, net income is 200% higher and profit margins are 30% higher

Persona 4: Role of Socio-economic status in Intersectionality:

Socio-economic status consists of multitude of factors within the dimension – educational status, financial security of family and self, perceived social status and social class. This dimension has a deep overlay over multiple other factors including physical, psychological health and life expectancy – these have a profound impact on not only individuals, but also on teams, organizations and ultimately the society.

Micro Inequities:

Kelly (2019) in a report published by Forbes talks about how interviewers can be biased based on the social status of candidates that too seconds after they start speaking. They mention that their study shows that even during the briefest interactions, a person's speech patterns shape the way people perceive them, including assessing their competence and fitness for the job. Study says doing this would limit economic mobility and perpetuates inequality (Kelly, 2019).

Macro Inequities:

To illustrate a scenario where socio economic status (SES) has a bearing on one of the diversity dimensions - LGBT+ associates:

Individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender (LGBTQ+) are especially susceptible to socioeconomic disadvantages, SES is inherently related to the rights, quality of life, and general well-being of LGBTQ+ persons (American Psychological Association Report: *Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity & Socio-Economic Status*, n.d.)

- 20 percent of gay men and 25 percent of bisexual men 18-44 years of age are living at or below the federal level of poverty, compared to 15 percent of heterosexual men
- A study of transgender adults in the United States found that participants were nearly Four times more likely to have a household income of less than \$10,000 per year compared to the general population

- LGBTQ homeless youth are more likely than their homeless heterosexual counterparts to have poorer mental and physical health outcomes

Earlier research had shown pay parity among gender and race which is also a socio-economic status metric.

Persona 5: Role of Cognitive Diversity in Intersectionality:

Cognitive Diversity refers to the differences in thinking, learning styles and the personality differences. Human beings are very complex and unique in the way they think and process information differently and bring their unique ideas and perspectives. This is very important in an organizational context as the differences can bring diverse thought processes and ideas to the team. Rather than see this as an advantage, it is seen often as a challenge.

Many times, lone voices are ignored, and decisions are arrived at basis popularity of the decision – this could be due to multitude of reasons – leader’s style, perceived delays in decision making or consensus building or bias at leader’s or team’s end. Specifically, during recruitment, ‘mini-me’ bias or ‘similar to me’ bias can play a major role in hiring people who think like us. If this happens, then there would be no diversity in the team.

Impact of Cognitively diverse teams: Juliet Bourke & Dillon, (2018) in their research prove that cognitively and demographically diverse teams are very valuable and can contribute significantly to innovation and reducing risks.

Impact:

The literature that exists around Cognitive Diversity revolves around its impact of learning mostly and has articles that call out the impact of Cognitive Diversity on decision making, problem solving etc.

The value of diversity of thinking

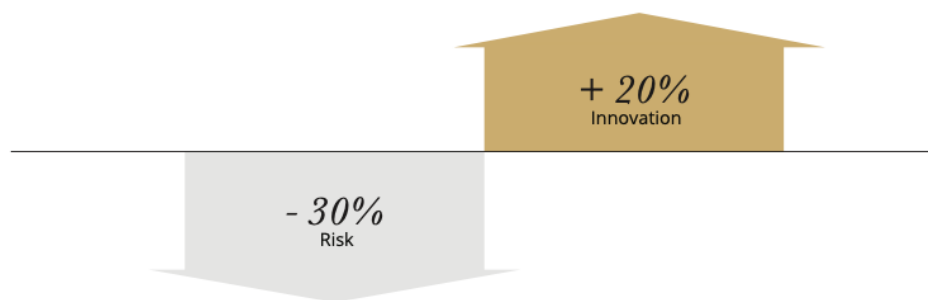


Figure 6: *The diversity and inclusion revolution – Eight powerful truths*
(Juliet Bourke & Dillon, 2018)

This is a very nascent field and is not focused as much as gender or generation in organizations. It is also complex and difficult to measure and manage due to the amorphous nature of elements associated with it. There is a lot more research that is required to be done to understand the nuances better

3.3 Summary of Discussion:

From the above discussions, following inferences can be made:

- **D&I is a business imperative**
 - Focusing on both Diversity & Inclusion would result in better business outcomes
 - Holistic approach to include invisible and visible aspects of D&I is needed
- **Intersectionality as a huge Opportunity area**
 - Organizations still see dimensions of diversity in a univariate fashion, they do not see combination of dimensions in a single human being
 - There is an urgent need to increase awareness of Intersectionality as a pivotal concept in many organizations

- **Existing research around Intersectionality:**

Research around ‘impact of intersectionality’ is very limited, available research led us to the following aspects:

- Current studies around intersectionality are mostly around gender plus another dimension. Additionally, it is more indexed around women
- Existing research unpacks certain combination of dimensions well, like People Of Color + Female or Female + Persons with Disabilities, etc. There is not much research available that unpacks some demographics like White women + other dimensions like Rural / Urban household / First Generation Graduate, etc.
- Similarly, there is not much research around white male + certain other dimensions like Socio Economic background or invisible disabilities or veteran status etc. Also dimensions like cognitive diversity are not researched a lot
- This leads one to believe there could be a sense of ‘perceived privilege’ baked into certain demographics segments which in itself could be a bias
- It is understandable that not all permutations and combinations can be analyzed as it would lead to a unit or individual level of research, there should not be assumptions built into the research like the one mentioned above as that itself could be construed as a stereotype or bias
- Most studies are focused on specific geographies and miss out intersectionality that may be important in other geographies

Impact of Intersectionality:

From limited available research it is evident that intersectionality uncovers inequities in workplace which leads to inequities in society. One can think of these inequities in two broad buckets:

- Macro inequalities like wage gap, hiring discrimination can have a significant bearing on the household income, socio economic status of the household.
- Micro inequalities like micro aggression at workplace can have a huge bearing on Career advancement, differences in title etc.

Further research needs to be done to fully understand the exact impact of intersectionality, current research only barely highlights the challenge. But even with this limitation, it is evident that Intersectionality as a concept needs to be made aware and addressed for any meaningful reduction of inequities in the society.

4. Research Problem

Upon initial analysis of literature, there exists an opportunity to ‘Create awareness around concept of Intersectionality so as to unearth and reduce macro and micro inequalities at the workplace’. This paper attempts to propose an approach that organizations can use, to be more aware and act on intersectionality of their associates. Doing this would uncover inequities and result in better business outcomes, more equitable proposition for associates and in turn, lesser inequities in society.

5. Approach

Creating an approach that would build an inclusive organization steeped in intersectionality may involve three main actors and three levels as given below:

Primary actors:

- D&I teams and HR - enablers of Intersectionality
- Leaders - understand, internalize, and lead this effort from the front. They need to integrate this with business priorities to ensure serious intent to resolving inequalities
- Associates - the most critical group. They need to understand, internalize, and own the concept of intersectionality. Highest level of maturity will be achieved if this is owned and enabled by all in the organization

The Levels:

- **Level 1 – Defining:** This is the initial stage when organization is embarking on the journey towards intersectionality. There is adhoc / sporadic evidence of mention of the concept and is clustered around certain teams / groups / levels. There could be many discussions in meetings on the concept itself and the sphere of influence it would have on the organization
- **Level 2 – Evolving:** One can evidence episodic / programmatic solutions of Intersectionality being played out in the organization, leaders actively talk about it linking it to business priorities and outcomes. In the Evolving stage, there could be a structured, disciplined introduction and discussion of the topic in a number of events rolled out across the organization
- **Level 3 – Transforming:** This is the pinnacle of the model where the concept is deeply entrenched and overlaid on every talent decision / action. Leaders are actively role modelling intersectional behaviors. This level does not see mere programmatic solutions rather a shared sense of common purpose. The tone of this level is building and shaping the organizations for the future

Define-Evolve-Transform (DET) model of Intersectionality

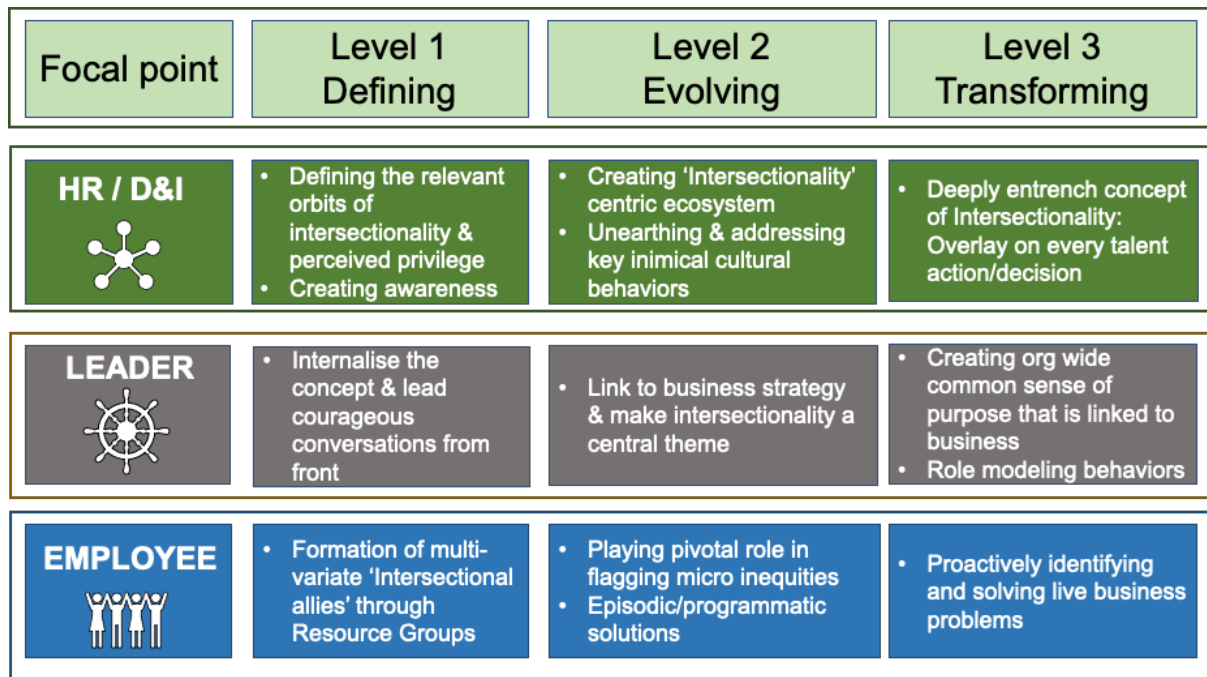


Figure 7: Define-Evolve-Transform (DET) Model of Intersectionality – Author's representation

Given below are some ideas across each tenet and focal point – this is not comprehensive, but more illustrative. Every organization can add or modify these ideas depending on their cultural and demographic context and strategic priorities of business. These need to be steeped by customized research that needs to be done at the organization level.

Level 1: Defining | HR & D&I

- Collecting and analyzing D&I data especially the intersectional points to see the organization profile. Defining high clusters and low clusters by drawing up a matrix will help in strategizing the D&I priorities for the organization. HR needs to ensure high integrity of sensitive intersectional data collected so as to protect the identity of associates
- Creating diverse candidate slates and talent pools to intentionally improve multi-dimensional diversity
- Curating and rolling out awareness sessions around 'intersectionality' by weaving this into business priorities

Level 1: Defining | Leader

- Leaders to practice active absorption of the concept and introspect on the same. Lead the awareness creation efforts proposed by D&I/HR teams

- Have courageous conversations with employees to understand pulse on intersectionality among associates and understand perception of current policies, infrastructure etc.

Level 1: Defining | Associate

- Consume the awareness programs that are created
- Playing pivotal role in participating in data collection efforts, forming multi-dimensional forums to discuss intersectionality among the diversity resource groups

Level 2: Evolving | HR/D&I

- Creating a facilitative ecosystem that includes beyond inclusion and transcends into intersectionality. Some examples could be to look at infrastructure needs of different multi diverse population, addressing inclusive language among different dimensions
- Rigorous roll out of workshops for managers with resource groups to understand bias conscious or unconscious.
- Facilitating peer learning and having uncomfortable conversation with managers to unearth key cultural tenets that are inimical to intersectional inclusion. Hyper customization of content with real examples (personal details masked) is required at this level
- HR/D&I teams to lead unpacking of key concepts like perceived privilege and making it real for managers and associates with a view towards addressing the same systemically

Level 2: Evolving | Leader

- Making Intersectionality a core value for organization and entrenching it into every strategic priority
- Leaders conducting listening posts with associates to unearth inequities in conjunction with HR – establishing psychological safety net to facilitate courageous conversations
- Focus on the managers – rewarding the promotion of intersectional actions at manager level will help move the needle on the inclusion agenda

Level 2: Evolving | Associate

- Active participation in episodic or programmatic solutions being rolled out in the organization
- Associates can be powerful allies. They should not stop with just being aware of the cause they are passionate about. They should develop in-depth knowledge, should flag inequities and lead change to bring about positive outcomes for business

Level 3: Transforming | HR/D&I

- Intersectionality as a concept needs to be overlaid on all talent management actions. Examples may include:
 - At goal setting process, leaders to have inclusive goals measured across the intersectional spectrum as a mandatory goal

- At the time of performance assessment, special focus on data pertaining to underrepresented groups to ensure there is no bias
- Special focus on pay-inequities across intersectional groups to increase parity and eliminate inequity
- HR and D&I to look for ‘perceived privilege’ and look for proactive avenues to debias this concept

Level 3: Transforming | Leader

- In addition to internalizing the concept, leaders need to role model inclusive behaviors so as to create a strong inclusive environment. They should:
 - Openly discuss about personal lived experiences especially the linkage to intersectionality
 - They should lead by example with strong focus for action. They should practice what they speak and move the needle on intersectional metrics decided at the organization level
 - Leaders can take up personal ‘Intersectionality Inclusion commitment’. They should talk about this in public forums and mention the actions taken by them to move the needle
 - Leaders should champion the programs and processes proposed by HR/D&I in their teams

Level 3: Transforming | Associate

- Resource groups mature and can solve live business problems. For instance, if attrition among a / set of diversity dimensions, then resource groups brainstorm and identify solutions.
 - An example of this could be attrition among members of LGBTQ+ community and the resource group catering to this could come up with an integrated and holistic solution to engage and retain such workforce

6. Conclusion

Organizations should understand and appreciate the impact of Intersectionality to unpack the D&I book further and reach out to underrepresented groups hidden by larger dimensions. Moving the needle on intersectionality takes concerted effort of not just HR and D&I teams but the entire leadership, manager community and associates – all marching in tandem to reach the end state.

Building an inclusive workforce of the future is a long journey and the journey is as important as the destination itself. The Define-Evolve-Transform (DET) model mentioned here is only the beginning of the journey and further research is required in this space – specifically around studying the impact and methods of reducing inequities.

REFERENCES

- American Psychological Association report: *Sexual Orientation, Gender identity & Socio Economic Status*. (n.d.). <http://www.apa.org/pi/>
- Catalyst: *LGBTQ+ Workplace Issues*. (2022). <https://www.catalyst.org/research/lgbtq-workplace-issues/>
- Carbado, D. W., Crenshaw, K. W., Mays, V. M., & Tomlinson, B. (2013). INTERSECTIONALITY. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, 10(2), 303–312. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1742058X13000349>
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé W., "On Intersectionality: Essential Writings" (2017). *Faculty Books*. 255. <https://scholarship.law.columbia.edu/books/255>
- Daunt, V., Fitzpatrick, R., Kelleher, A., Wadding, L., & Stafford, O. (n.d.). *Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI)*.
- Deloitte report - *LGBT+ Inclusion @ Work: A Global Outlook*. (2022).
- Deloitte report - *Women @ Work - A Global outlook*. (2021).
- El Gharib, S. (2022). *What is Intersectionality and Why is it important?*
- Foster, T. (2019). *Intersectionality in the Workplace: Broadening the Lens of Inclusion A Curated Research Report*.
- Helgesen, S., & Goldsmith, M. (2018). *How Women Rise: Break the 12 Habits Holding You Back*. Random House. <https://books.google.co.in/books?id=RGYxDwAAQBAJ>
- Hunt, V., Dixon-Fyle, S., Prince, S., & Dolan, K. (2020). *Diversity wins: How inclusion matters*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/31/us/equal-pay-coronavirus-economic-impact.html>
- Juliet Bourke, B., & Dillon, B. (2018). *The diversity and inclusion revolution Eight powerful truths*. www.deloittereview.com
- Korn Ferry report - *A Taste of D&I*. (2020).
- Krivkovich, A., Starikova, I., Yea, L., Nadeau, M.-C., Robinson, K., & Robinson, N. (2018). *Women-in-the-Workplace-2018-McKinsey-Report*.
- McKinsey, *Intersection: Delivering on Diversity Equality And Inclusion* (2022). <https://www.mckinsey.com/media/mckinsey/email/intersection/2021/10/06/2021-10-06d.html>
- Moffitt, A. T., & Hewlett, S. A. (2015). *Harness the Power of the Purse: Winning Women Investors*. Rare Bird Books. <https://books.google.co.in/books?id=X9pFrgEACAAJ>

Painter, M., & Rose, K. (2015). *Women investors: A critical and growing factor for success in the wealth management industry Deloitte report.*

United Nations: *Women with Disabilities – Fact sheet.* Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2015)

United Nations: *Transforming our world: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.* (2015)

US Department of labor: *Persons with Disability: Labor Force Characteristics-2021.* (2022)