



Driving sustainability through diversity, equity, and inclusion: A strategic business imperative

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Abstract

This research paper examines how Diversity, Equity and Inclusion play a critical role in promoting sustainable business practices by ensuring equitable treatment, encouraging different perspectives, and eliminating obstacles to success. DEI improves decision making, innovation, employee commitment and builds resilience. This study examines the challenges of implementing the DEI controlled sustainability framework and highlighting successful case studies. Although sustainability and DEI have been extensively studied as distinct fields in existing literature, limited research has been done to examine how they intersect as a framework for long-term growth. This study seeks to close that gap by assessing how incorporating DEI into corporate strategy might improve social responsibility and business performance. By integrating DEI into corporate strategy, companies can achieve social responsibility and long-term growth. This descriptive study, using secondary data from journals, websites and publications, demonstrates that DEI is not merely a moral obligation but a strategic requisite for business sustainability.

Keywords: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Sustainable business practices, Social sustainability, Employee engagement

1. Introduction

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are framework conditions for organizations that want to promote fair treatment and full participation of all people, and certain groups that are subject to historically undervalued or discrimination based on identity or disability. These three ideas (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) represent three closely connected values that companies want to institutionalize through these frameworks. DEI guidelines are often used by managers to increase employee well-being, productivity, cooperation and enhance active communication. (Gill *et al.*, 2018) ^[1].

Green or sustainable enterprises can employ business strategies to achieve these goals and may have little to no negative influence on the local or global environment. Therefore, to ensure that all of their manufacturing activities, processes, and products make up for the current environmental problems while still making a profit, sustainable businesses engage in eco-friendly or environmentally friendly activities. In other words, it is a business that "meets the needs of the present generation without affecting future generations ability to meet theirs". It is evaluated on the basis of how well products use renewable resources and how product designs impact the state of the environment today. Sustainable businesses within their supply chains aim to make up for all three via three-line principles by influencing sustainable development and sustainable distribution based on the environment, company growth and society. (Fowler and Hope, 2007) ^[2]

Companies known for their commitment to DEI are often considered to have more desirable jobs. If employees have a sense of being treated fairly, then they progress and if they are part of an integrated culture, the organization remains healthy. Sustainable companies thrive through effective decision-making. This leads to more robust and effective decisions that contribute to the sustainability of the business work. In today's interconnected world, corporate reputation and brand value play an important role in its sustainability. Organizations that prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion usually build a stronger reputation and become more attractive to customers, investors and partners. (Ayyoob and Sajeev, 2024) ^[14]. Consumers are increasingly attracted to companies that represent Social, Equity and ethical practices. Companies that demonstrate a true commitment to these principles often see an increase in consumer trust and support.

Business sustainability involves adapting to formal landscapes and changes in society as a whole. DEI is an important aspect of adaptability. A diverse and integrated workplace is better equipped to deal with further developing market trends, regulatory changes and public opinion changes. Consider the Covid 19 pandemic that accelerated the need for long distance work and digital solutions. Companies with different teams have access to different perspectives and problem-solving approaches, making them even more agile to adapt to this new reality. Their adaptability contributed to her long-term sustainability.

2. Objectives of the study

- Analysis of the role of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in shaping sustainable business practices across industries
- Examining how an integrated workplace culture affects worker productivity and engagement as well as how it contributes to long-term sustainability
- To identify challenges and obstacles in implementing DEI controlled sustainability practices in businesses
- To propose strategies for integrating DEI into sustainability frameworks.

3. Research methodology

A descriptive research design was envisaged that included research and case studies to evaluate implementation in all industries. Secondary data sources including academic journals, industry reports and company guidelines were analyzed to conclude the results. This study is a review-based research paper that relies exclusively on secondary data sources. The aim is to analyze, integrate and interpret existing literature on Driving Sustainability Through Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: A Strategic Business Imperative to derive comprehensive knowledge and identify knowledge gaps. Secondary sources include magazines, conference processes, books, websites, and more.

4. Importance of the study

The importance of this research lies in investigating how Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) contribute to a sustainable business environment by improving corporate culture, resilience and value creation. A well-managed, diverse workforce not only promotes social sustainability through inclusion, but also promotes economic and ecological sustainability by improving innovation, decision-making and adaptability. By examining the role of DEI in workplace recruitment strategies, team dynamics, and designing fair guidelines, this study highlights internal equity, employee well-being, and impact on long-term business success. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for organizations that strive to balance profitability with ethical responsibility and promote a corporate culture that aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals. (Chukwudi and Eusebius, 2023)^[9].

5. Literature review

i. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)-

Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) is crucial to the success of an organization as it increases creativity, improves decision-making and encourages innovation. Diversity includes a variety of aspects, including caste, ethnic belonging, age, gender, sexual orientation, thinking style, working style, personality, and skills. Implementing DEI faces challenges such as managers' lack of understanding and systematic obstacles, such as systematic discrimination and unconscious bias that can lead to underestimation of historically excluded groups. Organizations can use diversity training programs to improve awareness, acceptance, management, and

communication through diversity dynamics and establish metrics and accountability systems. Recruitment and retention strategies help create a culture of inclusion, allowing employee resource groups (ERGs) to support and distribute valuable information about workplace diversity. (Annet, 2025)^[5]. Diversity includes visible differences such as gender, breed, and nationality, as well as invisible aspects such as style of thinking, socioeconomic class, and personal beliefs. Each of these dimensions can make someone a minority in their work or social environment. Fairness includes fair treatment and access to the same opportunities for all. This eliminates obstacles that prevent participation. It allows individuals to move out of different positions and allocate resources accordingly to achieve the same outcome. On the other hand, inclusion fosters a positive and welcoming workplace that values and incorporates individual differences. (April, 2021)^[17].

The significance of DEI in organizational management was widely acknowledged, especially within the global workforce. The initiative aims to create an integrated environment in which a wide range of people are valued and respected to promote cooperation and innovation. The effectiveness of the DEI initiative to improve organizational performance is inconsistent. DEIs are often associated with higher commitments of employees, but the mechanism driving this connection has been lowered. DEI, employee commitment, and team innovation have evolved as key factors that influence organizational performance. This initiative promotes respect and cooperation, and increases employee satisfaction and creativity. (Azizah and Hidayah, 2025)^[6] Multiculturalism is a complex topic attributed to the increased diversity through migration and coexistence of various religious and ethnocultural groups. Diversity promotes freedom and self-determination, but also presents economic and political agendas and requires a legal framework to ensure social harmony. Integration and adaptation play an important role in the inclusion of immigrants. This involves cultural, social and institutional unity. Structural integration even ensures access to services, while cultural integration promotes mutual respect for norms and values. Multiculturalism supports cultural diversity, bridges between the private and public sectors, protecting civil rights and promoting social acceptance. It promotes equality, democracy, and the inclusion of minorities, ensuring that cultural identity is preserved in a unified society. (Alavervod, 2023)^[19]

Workplace diversity management encompasses strategies, policies, and practices organizations use to capitalize on a diverse workforce. Equity ensures impartiality by addressing disparities while inclusion provides all employees a feeling of belonging. Managing diversity means promoting community and recognizing differences as valuable, preventing discrimination and promoting inclusiveness. Effective diversity management improves innovation, creativity, and the ability to reach more customers, leading to competitive advantages and increased profitability. Research indicates that diversity has a positive impact on job satisfaction and

organizational productivity, especially in relation to creativity. Organizations should manage workplace diversity, equity, and inclusion to attract, retain, and empower diverse talent for long-term success. They must, however, overcome obstacles like prejudices, providing inclusive leadership, encouraging collaboration, and developing fair policies. Many carry out diversity programs without clear guidelines, which can have unforeseen repercussions. Research aims to determine the variables that affect diversity management programs' success or failure and generate actionable recommendations for establishing inclusive workplaces. The primary objectives include assessing current practices, understanding the impact of diversity, identifying challenges, and examining employee perceptions. Qualitative and quantitative methods are applied to understand these challenges and best practices. (Woldeyesus, 2025)^[7]. It is important to establish an integrated culture that recognizes and evaluates individual differences, promotes equity and respect, and provides the same opportunity for all employees. Organizations that prioritize DEIs can have significant benefits, such as increased employee engagement, increased organizational performance, and increased innovation and creativity. A diverse workforce contributes to a variety of perspectives and experiences, leading to innovative ideas and new approaches to solving complex problems. Promotion of fairness and equity creates a more integrated atmosphere that everyone feels valuable and supported. (Kiradoo, 2023)^[18].

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) are becoming increasingly important to businesses. This is due to strong positive relationships between increased diversity and business performance. Not only is DEI correct, it also provides a strong business foundation for gender, ethnic and cultural diversity, leading to outperformance related to profitability, innovation, talent, brand recognition. Embedding DEIs in corporate operations requires regular measurement of progress with management, attitude practice, education and training, commitment to integration guidelines and procedures, and accountability. The most important steps include forming a DEI working group, assessing current guidelines and practices, implementing anti-discrimination guidelines, and providing racial equity training. Quantitative and qualitative DEI metrics are important to guide, support, assess progress and ensure obligations of accountability. Furthermore, transparency in DEI strategies and disclosures are extremely important for stakeholder trust and continuous improvement. (Guterman, 2023)^[8]

As organizations operate in an increasingly globalized, dynamic market, DEI is no longer a moral obligation, but another strategic advantage. A diverse and integrated workforce will increase creativity, expand market coverage, enhance adaptability, ensuring long-term resilience and competitiveness. By addressing fairness and unconscious bias, companies can create fairer jobs that attract and retain top talent, increasing employee satisfaction and increasing sales. Companies that work actively to eliminate unconscious bias and cultivate an integrated culture are looking to greater

satisfaction, retention and cooperation among employees who contribute to long-term sustainability. Furthermore, DEI integration in business strategy strengthens brand appeal and increases market relevance. Companies that prioritize inclusiveness and equity not only improve internal cooperation, but also form stronger relationships with customers, investors and other interest groups. (Stephens, 2022)^[16] As sustainability is a key driver of business success, it is extremely important for companies to understand the impact of DEI on organizational performance.

ii. Sustainable business practices

The foundation of sustainability in human resource management (HRM) is the alignment of organizational activities with economic, social, and environmental sustainability principles. Sustainability, which is broadly defined as the ability to meet present requirements without compromising the ability of future generations to fulfill theirs, is based on the Triple Bottom Line idea, which emphasizes three interrelated aspects: economic, social, and environmental. Economic sustainability ensures resource efficiency and long-term profitability, social sustainability promotes inclusion and employee well-being, and environmental sustainability lessens ecological footprints through green initiatives like waste reduction and energy efficiency. Human resource management (HRM) and other contemporary organizational techniques now place a high emphasis on sustainability. Businesses that use sustainability-based HRM practices have shown improvement in their reputation, employee satisfaction, and global competitiveness. (Soekotjo *et al.*, 2025)^[20] For example, Microsoft promotes inclusiveness into its CSR strategy by investing in different areas through scholarships and mentorship programs and building a pathway for underrepresented groups to access meaningful employment. This project serves as an example of how inclusivity in HRM may be used practically.

The growing awareness of sustainable development has led to the expansion of literature in this field of research. Since the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), businesses have been focused on the environment, humans and planets, and are confident that this will lead to better financial performance. Therefore, the relationship between sustainability practices and corporate financial performance has attracted a great deal of attention from researchers. Approximately 96% of publications reported a positive relationship between sustainability practices and corporate financial performance. The adoption of SDGs highlights the urgency of global companies to ensure sustainability by caring more about the environment, people and planets. (Muhmad and Muhamad, 2021)

A key challenge in HR management is the lack of qualified and motivated employees, as traditional incentives such as competitive salaries are no longer sufficient. This study examines how corporate sustainable business (CSB) practices affect the appeal of an organization from the perspective of potential employees. It focuses on key CSB attributes such as

environmental performance, community relations and duties, and market behavior.

Individuals are attracted to organizations that suit their values and communicate strong sustainability operations. Social identity theory emphasizes the role of group membership in the design of self-concepts, while signal theory shows that sustainable practices send positive information to job seekers. Previous research has shown that socially responsible companies are more attractive to potential applicants, especially to younger generations who prioritize corporate social responsibility. (Magbool *et al*, 2016)

6. About the companies that successfully incorporated DEI in their business model

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) have become essential components of sustainable business practices, fostering innovation, employee loyalty, and overall organizational performance. Several companies have successfully integrated DEI principles into their business models and demonstrated the specific benefits of such a workplace. For example, Johnson & Johnson has invested considerable resources to cultivate an inclusive work environment in which employees' diverse backgrounds contribute to innovative health solutions. The company hopes to achieve 50% female representation worldwide by 2025 and has received several awards for its commitment to DEI, including recognition from the US Veterans magazines and a consistent placement on the *Working Mother 100 Best Companies* list.

Similarly, MasterCard has made great strides in promoting inclusivity within its workforce. The company ensures that women and people of color earn the same wages as their colleagues. Additionally, MasterCard has established nine Business Resource Groups (BRGs) in 47 countries to support a wide range of communities. Their investment in diversity ranges from external initiatives such as Girls4Tech, a STEM program aimed at young girls, fostering early interest in technology and innovation. (Bonaparte and Grant, 2020) Accenture also demonstrates its unwavering commitment to DEI by investing \$1.1 billion in learning and development programs for all its employees. The company actively supports the LGBTQ+ community with an extensive network of 120,000 Pride Allies and provides tools and resources to disabled employees at 32 global centres. (Amla, 2008)^[4].

Technology Giant Microsoft has also put considerable efforts into improving gender diversity and supporting underrepresented groups in the tech industry. The company has implemented shadow programs for internships to increase access to opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds and has reported a consistent growth in female representation. Microsoft also prioritizes accessibility and ensures that all its products and services are inclusive and usable for people with disabilities. (Chukwudi and Eusebius, 2023)^[9]. Similarly, Ernst & Young (EY) advocated diversity in the workplace by increasing the number of female top management representatives by over 20%. Additionally, EY introduced leadership training programs, releasing its first DEI

Transparency Report in 2021, reinforcing its long-term commitment to fostering an equitable workplace. (Sharma *et al*, 2023)^[10].

These companies demonstrate how integration of DEI principles in corporate strategy leads to inclusive work environments, improved employee engagement and sustainable corporate growth. These businesses demonstrate the impact of prioritizing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion as key drivers for innovation and corporate success.

7. Challenges and barriers in incorporating DEI at business

Incorporating Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in businesses presents several challenges and obstacles that companies must navigate through to drive meaningful and sustainable change. One of the main challenges is leadership participation and commitment. Organizational change starts at the top, and without strong support from top management, initiatives may lack the resources and accountability they need. While HR departments and individual managers play an important role in promoting an integrated work culture, top management must actively engage by providing resources, setting clear goals and promoting transparency. Without visible and consistent support from leaders, employees may perceive DEI efforts as superficial, reducing overall effectiveness. (Nwoga, 2023)^[11].

Resistance to change is another significant barrier organizations face. Some employees can view the initiative as unnecessary or as a preference for a particular group, which leads to skepticism and reluctance to engage. This resistance is often based on deep-rooted prejudice, fear of change or concerns regarding losing power and privilege. Overcoming this challenge requires strategic communication, education and initiatives that foster awareness and empathy.

Additionally, systematic barriers and deeply ingrained bias within recruitment, promotion and corporate culture further complicate the implementation of the DEI initiatives. Many organizations unconsciously perpetuate inequality through biased hiring practices or promotion criteria that disadvantage certain underrepresented groups. Addressing these challenges requires an in-depth review of internal guidelines, the introduction of inclusive hiring and talent development practices, and a targeted outreach programme to attract diverse candidates. (Kraus, Torrez and Hollie, 2021)^[12] Limited access to diverse talent, especially in certain industries and regions, can also hinder progress. Organizations need to actively collaborate with educational institutions, community organizations and professional networks to expand their reach and create a pipeline for a wide range of talent.

Finally, the lack of a data-driven approach can impede the successful implementation and evaluation of DEI initiatives. Measuring the effectiveness of a DEI program is important for identifying disparities, setting realistic goals, and tracking progress. However, collecting and analyzing relevant data on sensitive topics, particularly race, genders, and disabilities can be complicated. Without specific data, it can be difficult for

businesses to identify key areas of improvement and ultimately limit the impact of their DEI strategies. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive and long-term commitment from all levels of the organization to ensure that DEI is not only a temporary initiative, but also a fundamental part of the company culture and operations. (Hassan, 2025)^[13].

8. Result & Findings

The Research reveals the increasing significance of DEI in organizations that incorporate sustainable practices, highlighting how these principles affect workplace innovation, employee commitment, and corporate sustainability. Companies that fully incorporate the DEI guidelines report high employee satisfaction and strong workplace morale. Furthermore, this study highlights the role of DEI in promoting an active and productive work environment. Inclusion goes beyond mere expression. Organizations need to maintain a culture that values, respects and allows all employees to contribute. Psychological safety, which allows individuals to express themselves without fear of discrimination, and retaliation measures are a key factor in successful DEI initiatives. (Ayyoob and Sajeev, 2024)^[14].

Despite the perceived benefits, many organizations are troubled with implementing DEI due to deeply rooted distortion, resistance to change, and lack of measurable frameworks for advancement. The study highlights that the effectiveness of diversity needs to involve fairness in order to ensure that all employees have equal access to opportunities and resources regardless of their background. The gaps and differences in occupational progress continue to be a major challenge, increasing the need for organizations to use transparent guidelines that address systemic inequality. One of the main obstacles to inclusion is unconscious bias that often affects workplace interactions and career growth opportunities. (Mahajan *et al.*, 2024)^[15]. Even many employees and managers can unconsciously maintain the bias that hinders DEI's progress. To tackle this problem, organizations have to actively educate and train the organization's members and establish accountability measures.

Despite positive progress, this initiative often faces resistance within the organization. Some employees recognize these programs as a preferred treatment for a particular group, leading to skepticism. This resistance is usually escalated by undervalued groups' loss of power or concerns about opportunities. This makes leadership essential to convey the true purpose and create a fair environment for all. Research suggests that manager participation is extremely important to overcome these challenges.

Managers should be trained to integrate DEI principles into the decision-making process to ensure that the guidelines produce tangible results. Companies that successfully implement DEI often prioritize education, open dialogue and mentoring programs to support employees from a wide range of backgrounds. By promoting an integrated culture, organizations can minimize resistance and create an

environment in which DEI initiatives are more embraced than opposed. (Groenewald, 2024)

This study also provides recommendations to improve the DEI initiative and ensure its long-term sustainability. Implementing structured DEI guidelines with clear and measurable goals is essentially important for the pursuit of progress and necessary adjustments. Managers' commitment is a key factor in success, as managers play a fundamental role in sound decisions regarding promoting inclusiveness within an organization. Additionally, companies should use a data-oriented approach to assess the DEI effect. The results show that companies that are actively engaged in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion not only have an improved internal work culture, but also receive a competitive advantage in the market.

9. Conclusion

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion are not options when pursuing business sustainability. They are essential. Diversity brings new ideas and innovation, and Equity ensures that everyone has the same opportunity. Inclusion promotes a sense of belonging and allows employees to do their best. Together, these factors improve decision-making, attract talent, and strengthen the reputation of the company. Financial performance isn't the only way to sustain your business. It's about resilience, adaptability and long-term success. By implementing diversity, equity and inclusion, businesses can position themselves as superiors in their industry. Further development makes it evident that DEI is not just a strategic advantage that can support sustainability for a company's future, but also a moral requirement. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) have emerged as transformative forces in shaping sustainable business practices, and turning into central pillars of strategic and operational excellence. According to this study, DEI is essential for encouraging creativity, enhancing judgment, and developing a resilient workforce that can handle the challenges of modern corporate settings. DEI enhances an organisation's adaptability to rising challenges - be it technological disruption, regulatory shifts, or social change - with the aid of empowering a diverse team of workers to reply with agility and creativity.

But, the course in the direction of effective DEI implementation is not without boundaries. Challenges along with subconscious bias, lack of leadership commitment, inadequate facts, and resistance to change hinder progress. Addressing these problems requires a multifaceted technique, one that includes strong leadership, targeted education applications, inclusive hiring practices, and the establishment of measurable goals and responsibility systems.

To sum up, the mixing of DEI is vital for organizations aiming to create lasting effect both within and beyond their organizational boundaries. DEI fuels sustainability by cultivating equitable possibilities, nurturing inclusive cultures, and reinforcing ethical responsibility. For businesses looking to thrive in the 21st century, prioritizing DEI is far from a desire - it's a need.

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