Diversity and inclusion in an emerging market context

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Abstract

Purpose – The extreme demographic misrepresentation of organisations is a key business and societal issue in South Africa (SA). The purpose of this paper is to provide organisations that are committed to the creation of a diverse and inclusive environment with key considerations that need to be managed in order to create more diverse drive transformation.

Design/methodology/approach – This research uses a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques to gain an understanding of the elements that need to be managed to enhance perception of inclusion in the SA workplace.

Findings – The study finds that key inclusion elements that need to be transformed at an organisational level include “senior leadership”, “organisation climate”, “organisational belonging”, “communication” and “transparent recruitment, promotion and development”. At an interpersonal level or relational level, inclusion components include respect and acceptance, the “line manager/subordinate relationship” (which includes the subordinates experience of dignity, trust and recognition), “engagement” which includes decision-making authority and access to information, and finally the “individual’s relationship with the organisation’s vision and values”. Finally, at an individual level, factors which influenced inclusion, and therefore required attention in recruitment or management were “personality”, “locus of control”, self-confidence which includes self-esteem and “power”.

Research limitations/implications – While this research facilitated “deep” insight into the diversity and inclusion components, this study could have been enriched through exploring diversity and inclusion in other organisational contexts. Second, while the InclusionIndex™ survey provided a useful base measure of inclusion for this research, the use of a survey as the primary research tool might have been leading to the respondents. Third, because the InclusionIndex™ survey was used as the exploratory tool, and was the respondents’ first exposure to the diversity and inclusion terminology, the survey became the informal frame of reference for diversity and inclusion, and thus might have influenced the focus group discussion and semi-structured interview responses.

Practical implications – Using these diversity and inclusion considerations, leaders of pluralistic and multicultural organisations can focus their attention on developing inclusion areas that are weak and require more consideration. Second, this research aims to establish that inclusion extends beyond recruitment of diverse individuals to a process driven at organisational, interpersonal and individual levels.

Originality/value – These management considerations are important and valuable because they can be used to guide systemic change in organisations, driven at organisational, interpersonal and individual levels. This approach will help organisations to move beyond employment equity compliance, to a commitment to multicultural diverse and inclusive organisations.

Keywords Leadership, Developing countries, Organizations, Organizational culture, Workplace, Management culture

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

“Diversity”, in the introduction of this research, refers to an employee base that is representative of the differences apparent in the broader society (Wah, 1999). “Inclusion” involves acknowledgement and utilisation of these individual differences in their work environment, such that the individual is engaged and his/her performance is subsequently enhanced (April et al., 2009; Giovannini, 2004). While this definition of diversity does not visibly consider the historical disadvantage in South Africa (SA), it opens the possibility for SA organisations to appreciate all forms of visible and non-visible diversity (Milliken and Martins, 1996). This creates an opportunity for SAs to move past negative, exclusionary criteria associated with “diversity management”, such as race, gender and in some organisations, disability. The opportunity to appreciate visible and non-visible diversity should not be replaced by the need to address historical disadvantage through employment equity in SA but rather necessitates the management of diversity and inclusion so as to include an appreciation, acknowledgement and utilisation of difference which includes a commitment to achieving employment equity.

An unfortunate legacy of the SA apartheid regime is a workforce that is unrepresentative of the country’s demographic population. While 74.1 per cent of SA’s economically active population is black, individuals from this group who work in the private sector account for 18.5 per cent of top management, 21.8 per cent of senior management and 36.3 per cent of professionally skilled employees (Commission for Employment Equity, 2012). These statistics illustrate that despite some good intentions, organisational commitment to the Employment Equity legislation is weak. Despite the introduction of Employment Equity legislation (Republic of South Africa, 1998) to address the racial, gender and disability imbalance, the Commission for Employment Equity (2012) reports that since the introduction of the Act in 1998, white SAs continue to dominate most occupational levels. Furthermore, the recruitment, promotion and organisation training spend of this group exceeds all other groups. While the report suggests that men are more likely to be recruited than women, the Commission for Employment Equity (2012) states that white women have seen the most benefit from Employment Equity legislation. Thomas (2002a) and Booyesen and Nkomo (2010) assert that employment equity and affirmative action are not considered a strategic business issue by senior management and the intended outcomes of the legislation are thus hindered by their lack of commitment.

Many organisations are focusing on achieving quotas and equity targets that assist compliance with legislation but do not address fundamental organisational and individual change (Booyesen, 2007; Horwitz et al., 2002), which would show commitment to the transformation agenda and the benefits thereof. Shore et al. (2009, 2011) assert that there is a growing need to integrate diverse individuals in organisations through inclusion. This research builds on work by Schultz et al. (2008), Ferdman et al. (2010), Roberson (2006), Davidson and Ferdman (2002), Pless and Maak (2004), Mor Barak and Cherin (1998) and Louw (1995) to explore the research question “What are the components that drive diversity and inclusion in a corporate workplace in South Africa?”. This research aims to identify key organisational practices and processes that need to be managed or instated in order to create a diverse and inclusive environment. “Diverse” refers to the representation all forms of visible and invisible difference including but not limited to race, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, education, class, rank and age. Since each individual is a unique product of multiple group membership, inclusion relates to the acknowledgement and respect granted to
every employee’s unique difference. These insights can be used to help organisations understand the strengths and weaknesses of their diversity and inclusion practices, but can also be used to understand areas which need to be developed to create a culture where individuals feel respected and valued for their unique contributions.

**Literature review**

The challenge with diversity and inclusion literature is that the definition of diversity and inclusion varies between researchers (Prasad et al., 2006). For example, when Cox and Blake (1991) address diversity management in multicultural organisations, it is clear through their definition of a multicultural organisation that inclusion is an implicit outcome of this organisation type. Other authors such as, Roberson (2006), Ferdman et al. (2010), Davidson and Ferdman (2002) and Pless and Maak (2004) use the terms diversity and inclusion to ensure the explicit understanding of inclusion in their research. While SA diversity and inclusion literature is most relevant to this research, academics have focused largely on the progress of employment equity (Booysen, 2007; Booysen and Nkomo, 2010; Human, 2005; Horwitz et al., 2002; Nkomo and Kriek, 2011; Thomas and Jain, 2004). As the research on inclusion is lacking in SA literature, for the purpose of this review, authors who explicitly mention inclusion as an output of their research (Ferdman et al., 2010; Pless and Maak, 2004; Roberson, 2006) have been referenced.

The way researchers define diversity and inclusion is relevant because it affects their research approach. Since this question relates to understanding the components that should be managed in order to drive a diverse and inclusive environment, a review of components listed in diversity and inclusion models and inclusion literature follows.

**Diversity and inclusion: components from diversity and inclusion management models**

The literature suggests that when creating a multicultural organisation, top management need to show their commitment (Allen and Montgomery, 2001; Booysen, 2007; Thomas, 2002b) to the change process by clarifying their organisation vision (Allen and Montgomery, 2001; Booysen, 2007; Thomas, 2002b) and through communicating the business, moral and legal imperatives for change (Booysen, 2007; Human, 2005; Thomas, 2002b). Human (2005) says that leaders should define what they mean by “diversity” and should be clear about the type of culture they want to create (Booysen, 2007; Thomas, 2002b). Booysen (2007) suggests that a diversity leadership team should be elected, a diversity strategy created and that employees should be co-opted into the diversity and inclusion journey through clear communication. Cox and Blake (1991) assert that there should be an organisation identity which includes all identity groups present in the organisation. Further, they recommend that cultural bias in the form of prejudice and discrimination should be systemically addressed and stress that “minority” cultures should be integrated into the organisation’s norms and values (Cox and Blake, 1991). Thomas (2002b) advocates that organisations should reengineer structures to support their diversity journey. These might include changes to the training and educational programmes, affirmative action programmes, targeted career development programmes, performance appraisals, reward systems, HR policy and benefit changes, language of job descriptions and job evaluations (Allen and Montgomery, 2001; Cox and Blake, 1991). Thomas (2002b) further suggests that change should happen at all levels of the organisation including organisational, interpersonal and personal levels (Louw, 1995; Schultz et al., 2008).
Inclusion elements

While the previous section examined diversity and inclusion components from related management models, the next section reviews components highlighted in diversity and inclusion studies.

Roberson (2006) and Gasorek (2000) highlight that a diverse and inclusive environment should be representative of diverse groups and should foster flexibility and choice (Mor Barak and Cherin, 1998). Pless and Maak (2004) suggest that the leadership style of the senior leadership team is important, and suggest that leaders use, and employees experience, a cooperative leadership style. The importance of two-way communication and open and frank communication was highlighted, as was the importance of leadership providing feedback to employees (Davidson and Ferdman, 2002; Ferdman et al., 2010; Mor Barak and Cherin, 1998; Pless and Maak, 2004). Gasorek (2000) mentions the advantages of cross-departmental integration, which increases the connection employees have to one another. This affects the employees’ experience of belonging in the organisation and attracts prospective employees to the organisation (Gasorek, 2000). Mor Barak and Cherin (1998) and Pelled et al. (1999) suggest that individuals should have access to information that they require to do their jobs and to informal networks and resources which support their performance. Employers should encourage work group involvement (Davidson and Ferdman, 2002; Mor Barak and Cherin, 1998; Pless and Maak, 2004), should solicit contributions from employees and give the input fair consideration (Davidson and Ferdman, 2002; Ferdman et al., 2010; Pless and Maak, 2004).

Gasorek (2000) asserts that employees should feel that their contributions are valued, and should be involved in participative decision-making and problem-solving processes (Gasorek, 2000; Mor Barak and Cherin, 1998; Pless and Maak, 2004). Davidson and Ferdman (2002) suggest that employees should have some work autonomy and should be empowered to make career decisions (Mor Barak and Cherin, 1998; Roberson, 2006). Davidson and Ferdman (2002) also recommend that employees should be able to use their individual talents to make a difference in the organisation through being part of a successful initiative or conducting a meaningful task. They mention that employees should be treated fairly, and should feel validated, accepted and appreciated. This is also supported by Pless and Maak (2004) who advocate that employees be recognised for work well done and should show and experience respect. Pelled et al. (1999) maintain that perception of inclusion is enhanced when employees experience job security.

The broad range of elements which influence inclusion makes the implementation more complex for practitioners who are searching for comprehensive diversity and inclusion solutions. The outcome of this research, which is a consolidation of these elements into a set of diversity and inclusion management considerations, makes the application of these elements more accessible to practitioners.

Research methodology

The aim of this research was to gain deeper insight into the components which influence the perception of diversity and inclusion in the SA workplace. Using a constructivist epistemology (Feast and Melles, 2010), the researcher employed a mixed-method approach (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004) to conduct exploratory research in this field. This was done in four iterative phases using three data collection techniques. Phase 4 is a set of diversity and inclusion considerations and is most interesting to the reader because it is a consolidation of the preceding three phases. Focus groups
(phase 1) were used to understand whether the research was possible in this organisation. If the organisation was found to be disinterested in diversity and inclusion (monolithic), it would not have been conducive to further exploration. Since management and the organisation were visibly supportive, phases 2 and 3 were used to establish which components influenced perceptions of inclusion. In phase 2, an inclusion survey called the InclusionIndex™ was used to provide a base understanding of the items which influenced perception of inclusion in the organisation. In phase 3, semi-structured interviews were used to deepen the understanding of other individual inclusion or exclusion issues. In phase 4, these findings were consolidated with inclusion literature to form a model of diversity and inclusion management considerations.

The research was conducted in a division of an established global multinational in SA. The division has a turnover in excess of R4 billion (approximately $600 million) per year. All 425 employees working in this division participated in the research. The organisation was chosen because at the time of the research it was deemed by a corporate research survey as one of the best companies to work for and because it was renowned in SA for its leading diversity practices. The multinational operates in the fast moving consumer goods industry, and is based in 34 countries globally. The human resource strategy for the group is decentralised, but their commitment to a high-performance culture is maintained through sharing best practices across the group.

In phase 1, six focus groups were held with managers throughout the division. Two main questions were discussed: “What are the advantages of having a diverse and inclusive environment?” and “What are the challenges in driving a diverse and inclusive environment? In phase 2, 248 respondents completed the InclusionIndex™ survey[1]. The survey uses 73 questions to assess individual perception of diversity and inclusion across ten categories: “senior managers”, “immediate manager”, “values”, “recruitment”, “promotion progression and development”, “fitting in”, “bullying and harassment”, “dialogue”, “organisational belonging” and “emotional well-being”. In phase 3, the semi-structured interview was developed with two intentions. The first was to understand new components which individuals felt contributed to their inclusion, and second, to confirm that the factors that had been identified in the survey, affected perception of inclusion. Forty-two semi-structured interviews were conducted with employees that were identified using a stratified random sampling technique.

Data from phases 1 and 3 were analysed using content analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The semi-structured interview data were divided into two sections. Confirmatory data from the survey were analysed empirically, i.e. 90 per cent of respondents felt that communication impacted on their inclusion, while 10 per cent felt there was no relationship between communication and their perception of inclusion. The items that respondents indicated impacted on their inclusion/exclusion were themed using Atlas-ti. The data from the survey (phase 2) were initially analysed using a means analysis to understand the broad trends emerging from the data. To deepen the understanding of the data, correlations were then run to identify the significant relationships between items from the various factors (Field, 2005). Finally an exploratory factor analysis was used to reduce the data and to understand which factors and items were most significant to the study (Newsom, 2005). The exploratory factor analysis was run using maximum likelihood estimation.

Phase 4 involved the consolidation of phases 2 and 3 and related literature. The significant findings of the correlations and factor analysis were combined with the themes from the semi-structured interviews to establish a consolidated outlook of the key variables of the research.
Results
Phase 1: focus group. Although the focus group revealed a number of diversity and inclusion challenges, some interesting benefits were highlighted by the participants. Since management were seen to be supportive of inclusive practice, the researcher was able to continue with the research.

Phase 2: InclusionIndex™ survey. The InclusionIndex™ data proved to have high-internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s α of 0.96 for inclusion factors one to nine. The emotional well-being factor was excluded from the data because this factor had a Cronbach’s α lower than the recommended 0.60 value. Items from the survey correlated at a significance level of 0.01. The factor analysis revealed nine dimensions which accounted for more than 90 per cent of the variance. The significant factors identified in the factor analysis were: individual relationship with organisation vision and values, individual engagement through direct line manager, individual sense of belonging in the research organisation, dialogue around diversity and inclusion, bullying and harassment (which translated to being accepted and respected), recruitment and promotion, representative diversity (diverse environment), engagement and senior management.

Phase 3: semi-structured interviews. Two sets of important data originated from the interview process. The first was to gauge (confirm) whether significant items from the InclusionIndex™ survey related to their perception of inclusion, and if so, why. In summary, respect, trust, organisational belonging, communication, acceptance, recognition and decision making were seen as relating highly to the individual’s perception of inclusion.

The second purpose of the interviews was to identify themes that interviewees identified as important in driving their personal inclusion/exclusion. Respondents felt that the items which influenced their inclusion were: the valuing or recognition of individual contribution, being valued by their managers, and their relationships and sense of belonging with their team members. This was followed by being invited to social events, the individual’s personality/attitude, being cared for as a whole person, good communication and organisational belonging. The items which were seen to influence exclusion were the old boys’ club, personality/attitude, organisation policy, not being invited to social events and not having empowered decision making.

Phase 4: set of diversity and inclusion management considerations. As discussed above, the findings from the previous phases were consolidated with relevant literature to build the set of diversity and inclusion management considerations (Figure 1). The set was created considering items which repeated themselves in more than one phase of the research, or was highlighted as an important factor in one of the phases. To enrich the understanding of the model, contributions from literature have been included in the presentation of results.

In order to create sustainable inclusion practice in organisations, it needs to be embedded into the organisation at three different levels – organisational, interpersonal and personal (Cox, 1993; Herriot and Pemberton, 1995; Kendall, 1995; Louw, 1995; Schultz et al., 2008). The researcher therefore structured emerging themes into these three levels.

“Representative diversity” forms the basis of this model because inclusion becomes relevant in heterogeneous environments. While representative diversity is the outcome of many diversity management programmes (employment equity/affirmative action targets), inclusion requires a more fundamental shift in organisations that begins with
the representation of difference at all levels of the organisation, including but not limited to gender, disability, race and ethnicity.

The organisational level in this diagram depicts an inclusion climate, which is created through leadership and through the structure and processes of the organisation. “Interpersonal” relates to the perception of diversity and inclusion that is created through relationships at work. “Personal” relates to the individual’s characteristics which affect their perceptions of both their interpersonal relationships and the organisation.

Organisational components
The following organisation elements were identified as important by this research: “senior leadership”, “organisation climate”, “organisational belonging”, “communication” and “transparent recruitment, promotion and development”.

Organisational component: senior leadership. The “senior leadership” component concerns whether diversity and inclusion are important to senior management, whether they really care about the well-being of individuals and whether they genuinely appreciate the differences in people (InclusionIndex™ survey). It also relates to whether leaders keep employees informed about diversity and inclusion issues, and whether employees understand how their goals relate to the organisational objectives. The interviews found that fairness of senior leadership is an essential trait, while literature in the field mentioned the importance of the diversity of the senior leadership team (Prahalad and Bettis, 1986) and a co-operative leadership style where leaders assume “facilitative and enabling roles” (Griggs and Louw, 1995, p. 12).

Organisational component: organisational climate. The “organisational climate” component addresses whether the organisational climate is inclusive in structure, process and policies. Respondents indicated that these processes could include human resource processes such as a comprehensive performance management process, which facilitates goal setting and performance monitoring, but may include training for line management on how to drive inclusion at an individual level. Participants also mentioned that policies such as flexible working times and place, maternity/paternity
leave or education assistance policies are examples of how an organisation can regulate the environment in order to accommodate individual needs.

Organisational component: organisational belonging. The “organisational belonging” component refers to the individual’s sense of belonging in the organisation, and refers to whether the employee fits in well at the organisation, and feels committed and dedicated to the organisation (InclusionIndex™ survey). According to the interviews, organisational belonging is driven through individuals identifying with their team members, feeling integrated into their teams, feeling supported by their colleagues and being invited to social events.

Organisational component: communication. While the InclusionIndex™ only measured “dialogue” around diversity and inclusion issues, the qualitative research suggested that open and transparent communication is one of the key components that drive an individual’s perception of inclusion. This extends to whether individuals regularly see and hear about diversity and inclusion, and whether they are well supported on issues. The literature mentions that it also addresses the perception of informal networks, whether individuals have access to the information they need in order to do their jobs (Pelled et al., 1999), and whether the organisation is open to dialogue and open and frank communication (Davidson and Ferdman, 2002; Ferdman et al., 2010; Mor Barak and Cherin, 1998; Pless and Maak, 2004).

Organisational component: fair and transparent recruitment, promotion and development processes. This component concerns the fairness and transparency of these processes and the availability of equal opportunities for progression and recruitment of individuals from diverse backgrounds (InclusionIndex™ survey). Development, specifically, refers to career development plans for all individuals in the organisation. A development plan does not necessarily mean that all employees will be promoted within the organisation, but suggests that employees will be provided with the training and development to grow their competencies and skillset in line with market requirements (Mor Barak and Cherin, 1998; Roberson, 2006).

Interpersonal components
This study supports Louw’s (1995) finding that valuing and respecting individuals is important, but adds that the relationship between the line manager and subordinate, engagement and the individual’s alignment with the organisation’s vision and values are of importance at this level.

Interpersonal component: respect and acceptance. In both the survey response and the semi-structured interview, respect was highlighted as one of the most important drivers of diversity and inclusion, followed closely by acceptance. In this context, respect and acceptance involves an appreciation or acknowledgement of individuality and/or regard for the employee as a person, but also extends to the soliciting and valuing of his/her individual contribution (Davidson and Ferdman, 2002; Ferdman et al., 2010; Gasorek, 2000).

Interpersonal component: individual engagement with their immediate line manager. This factor emerged as important during every phase of this study. “Individual engagement with their immediate line manager” involves managers valuing individual contributions, treating subordinates with dignity and fairness and caring for them as individuals (InclusionIndex™ survey). In the semi-structured interviews respondents indicated that feeling valued, recognised, empowered and knowing that their opinion mattered, were key to their perception of inclusion. Since trust ranked as highly as
respect in the qualitative research, and line managers are considered key to this experience, they are seen as pivotal to an employee’s perception of inclusion.

**Interpersonal component: engagement.** “Engagement” refers to the culture of engagement within the organisation, beyond the manager-employee relationship. It relates to whether the organisation supports difference, and removes a threatening environment (InclusionIndex™ survey). Respondents also indicated that it relates to whether diverse views and opinions are solicited from employees and are heard. Decision making forms part of this component because in an engaging environment, decision making is decentralised, and individuals are empowered to make decisions (Gasorek, 2000; Mor Barak and Cherin, 1998; Pless and Maak, 2004).

**Interpersonal component: relationship with organisation’s strategy, vision and values.** This component relates to the individual’s awareness and alignment with the strategy, vision and values of the organisation. Awareness of the vision relates to the communication of the strategic goals, vision and values, and extends to whether individuals are able to relate to the organisation’s values (InclusionIndex™ survey). It further relates to whether diversity and inclusion are valued components of the strategy, vision and values; and whether there is alignment between the organisation’s goals, vision and values and the individual’s goals.

**Personal components**
At a personal level, it was evident during the qualitative research that an individual’s perception of inclusion varied according to the personal dimensions outlined in Figure 1: “personality”, “locus of control”, “self-confidence” underpinned by “self-esteem” and “power”.

**Personal component: personality.** While personality was raised by participants as a variable which influenced inclusion, it emerged as a factor which influenced interest to participate in the interviews and contributions to the interviews. While some participants had strong views about what inclusion or exclusion meant for them, others were not interested in being included in the organisation, despite long tenure and/or being happy in their jobs.

**Personal component: locus of control.** While individuals with high internal locus of control (internals) perceive that they are in control of their experiences and responses, individuals with high external locus of control (externals) perceive the opposite, that they have no control over their experiences and responses (Boone et al., 2005; Loosemore and Lam, 2004). It became apparent during the semi-structured interviews that while some individuals placed a high value on the organisation doing things to ensure they were included, others felt that it was their responsibility to make themselves feel included.

**Personal component: self-confidence.** Several respondents (particularly blue collar workers) indicated that they were not comfortable to participate in the study without the support of other individuals (usually the shop steward). The reason for this confidence gap related to a language barrier. Absent self-confidence was also raised by managers as a barrier to inclusion concern in the focus groups.

**Personal component: self-esteem.** Mruk (2006, p. 3) says that “self-esteem has to do with an abiding sense of worthiness as a person”. In this research, self-esteem relates to a sense of “I deserve to be treated well” or “I am worthy of equal treatment”. It has been differentiated from confidence because low self-esteem need not have an external manifestation; it simply affects the individual’s response to his/her environment, which affects his/her perception of inclusion.
**Discussion**

This research set out to answer the question: What are the components that drive diversity and inclusion in a corporate workplace in SA?

The set of diversity and inclusion considerations is built on a foundation of “representative diversity” which suggests that in order to build multicultural, inclusive environments, organisations should continuously focus on achieving diverse representation on all levels. This is a very important point in SA, where organisations are increasingly speaking of inclusion, but are untransformed with respect to racial, gender and disability representation at middle and senior management. Representative diversity also includes all forms of visible and non-visible diversity, but race, gender and disability have been highlighted given their priority status in the Employment Equity legislation in SA.

The research established that once organisations have established a strategy to create and maintain the representation of difference, inclusion is created through systemic transformation at organisational, interpersonal and individual levels. It became evident that inclusion does not necessarily require new activities, but is the outcome of strategically aligned processes such as recruitment, promotion, development and performance management. Respondents favoured processes which promoted equality and fairness; such as competency-based interviews with panel selection, performance management processes which included comprehensive goal setting and goal review, development based on performance or business need and promotion based on performance. Respondents also felt that inclusion was affected through the transparency of the communication process and through engaging leaders who managed performance equitably and who showed care and concern for employees of the organisation. The interpersonal level related to the individual perception of being treated with dignity and respect (self), their engagement in their job, and understanding how the job linked into the organisation’s vision. The individual level highlighted that individuals are different and inclusion needs differ accordingly. The implication is that recruiters should ensure that new recruits are appropriately aligned or attuned to the culture the organisation wants to create. For example, an individual that does not have concern for their own inclusion, might not understand someone else’s need for inclusion and will therefore need to be supported or developed in this respect.

**Implications**

There are a number of external forces that are forcing SA organisations to become more inclusive. Large companies that are seeking lucrative government contracts are required to show evidence of transformation on a number of measures including racial, gender and disability representation. Since these companies are broadly faced with the same challenges faced by the multinational organisation studied in this research, these diversity and inclusion considerations may aid their transformation.
transformation leaders can focus their attention on developing inclusion areas that are weak and require more consideration. Since many of the elements in the model are synonymous with good HR or business practice, many large companies already practice components such as strategic talent management (analysis, recruitment, promotion, development and engagement). Creating inclusion is therefore more easily achievable in these contexts because it requires refinement of existing processes.

Diversity management strategies in SA organisations is largely associated with the recruitment of historically disadvantaged SAs including blacks, coloureds, Indians, females and disabled individuals. This is a hindrance to racial, gender and disability transformation because it shifts the attention from a meaningful outcome such as inclusion, to an employment equity compliance output such as recruitment. Pluralistic and multicultural organisations need to understand that a revised focus on recruitment, is one of many first steps to creating inclusive work environments. If this mind shift is not established, recruitment and turnover of new recruits will persist as assimilation prevents individuals from being included at work.

SA’s demographic misalignment in organisations makes its context unique. While the diversity challenge of most western countries is to raise diversity concerns of minority groups such as race, gender, disability and ethnicity, minority concerns, or ensure that minority issues are represented, in SA diversity management usually relates to ensuring that historically disadvantaged individuals, who constitute approximately 80 per cent of SAs population, are integrated into all levels of SA organisations. Given the country’s history of discrimination and prejudice, organisations need to approach the inclusion change process holistically, considering all the organisational, interpersonal and individual elements discussed in Figure 1. Practitioners can use these considerations to deepen their understanding of the factors that will influence the creation of an inclusive environment in SA. For example, if leaders proceed with a transformation strategy that is not supported by senior management, as is the case with many SA organisations, it is not likely to succeed because the strategic commitment in terms of time and leadership (behaviour) will be absent. Similarly, an organisation that is not lead by a comprehensive performance management system will fail to maintain performance objectivity and equality amongst employees, which respondents indicated is very important to their perception of inclusion. Further, inclusion is negatively impacted when employees feel that they are not treated with respect and dignity and are not valued by their line managers for their contributions. While these are a few illustrations of how inclusion is effected, it is important that practitioners consider all aspects of all three levels of the model in order to create pluralistic or multicultural environments in SA.

While there is a lot of symmetry between this research and western models, the complexity of the SA workplace requires a comprehensive approach to creating an inclusive environment, where individuals that were unable to effectively assimilate to the white male-dominated culture were actively excluded. It is important to understand that this exclusion results in higher turnover and higher absenteeism of previously disadvantaged groups, and impacts negatively on productivity (Booyse, 2007; Daya, 2010). These impacts can be reduced through replacing the expectation of assimilation with inclusion. There is also a social impact of inclusion. When the representation of “previously disadvantaged” individuals increases in organisations, so will the diverse representation of mentors, which is important in shifting negative patterns of discrimination and for establishing role models from all groups. A second social impact relates to the distribution or access to “higher” income. Given that the
representation of blacks has largely been confined to jobs at a blue collar level, wealth
generation has experienced a similar restriction. Inclusion equitably allows access
to senior positions which comes with a greater earning capacity. In the long term this
will have a big impact on appropriately distributing potential income which is
currently inequitably held in SA.

It is encouraging that the SA landscape is changing. Women graduates exceed the number of men graduates by 2 per cent, and black graduates are slowly
on the incline (Republic of South Africa, 2012/2013). If this encouraging social pattern continues into organisations, there will be an increasing demand for organisations
to be more inclusive of these groups, meaning that practitioners will increasingly
value input into the elements which need to be transformed to create inclusive
organisations.

Miller (1998, p. 152) proposes that ‘building an inclusive organisation requires a
serious commitment to fundamental change in the structures and behaviours of
organisations. Although this view is echoed by Allen and Montgomery (2001) and
Thomas and Ely (1996), the literature in this field does not provide consolidated
guidance on which organisational structures and behaviours require attention
and focus.

Research limitations

The research organisation is a pluralistic organisation (Cox, 1993) where there is
commitment to transformation. The organisation is a self-declared learning organisation,
and is focused on high performance. This research would not have been possible in a
monolithic organisation which showed no interest in inclusion. As mentioned earlier,
many SA leaders show no commitment to transformation. Employment equity is seen as
a legislative compliance issue for many organisations who demonstrate little interest in
transformation or in research in this area because they do not regard diversity and
inclusion as valuable to their organisation.

While this research facilitated “deeper” insight into the diversity and inclusion
components, this study could have been enriched through exploring diversity and
inclusion in other organisational contexts. Second, while the InclusionIndex™ survey
provided a useful base measure of inclusion for this research, the use of a survey as the
primary research tool might have been leading to the respondents. Third, because the
InclusionIndex™ survey was used as the exploratory tool, and was the respondents’
first exposure to the diversity and inclusion terminology, the survey became the
informal frame of reference for diversity and inclusion, and thus might have influenced
the focus group discussion and semi-structured interview responses. As a corollary, it
became clear during the semi-structured interviews that the survey allowed
respondents time to think about their own perception of diversity and inclusion
through the lens of the survey.

Although SA diversity and inclusion literature is most relevant to this research,
research in this area is largely focused on employment equity, which does not build
knowledge on how to create inclusive work environments. This limitation has been
overcome using research by European and American researchers, but it is not a
replacement for local contribution and comparison.

There is no literature available which examines the relationship between the
“personal” components of this research and perception of inclusion. The researcher
would suggest that research be conducted to understand the relationship between
inclusion and the concepts of personality, locus of control, self-confidence, self-esteem
and power. This can be done quantitatively, qualitatively or using a mixed-method approach. Given that no known research has already explored the relationship between inclusion and these constructs, interviews can be conducted to explore the relationship, which can be followed by a survey to confirm the findings. Alternatively, the relationship between personality and inclusion could be explored through a survey, because there are known dimensions to personality which can be mapped in a survey. While constructs such as locus of control, self-confidence, self-esteem and power can be structured into a survey, understanding the relationship with inclusion will be best explored through a more personal approach such as an interview.

Note
1. Validity and reliability of the InclusionIndex™ survey was established in 2007 (Schultz et al., 2008).

References


Further readings


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About the author
Dr Preeya Daya is a Senior Lecturer in Human Resources (HR) and Organisational Behaviour at the University of Cape Town’s Graduate School of Business. She joined the GSB following an international corporate career in HR where her focus related to enhancing business performance through transforming HR and organisational development initiatives; including diversity and inclusion, leadership, performance management, employee engagement and human resource information systems. Preeya is also an academic advisor at the Achievement Awards Group where she conducts research on HR best practice and provides in-house solutions for optimising performance. Through her research and industry alliances, Preeya is passionate in her pursuit to enhance organisation and institutional excellence through strategic engagement and utilisation of people. Preeya completed her undergraduate degree in HR and specialised in organisational behaviour for her masters and PhD degrees. Preeya lectures in HR and organisational behaviour on the Associates in Management (AIM), Post Graduate Diploma in Business Administration (PDBA) and executive education programmes at the GSB; and runs an MBA elective on harnessing performance through inclusion and on global diversity literacy for visiting (international) MBA students. Her research focuses on understanding diversity and inclusion in emerging market contexts and on building tools for creating more inclusive workplaces. Her second research interest relates to employee engagement/disengagement. Dr Preeya Daya can be contacted at: preeya.daya@gsb.uct.ac.za

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