ROLE OF HR PRACTICES IN DRIVING PERCEIVED INCLUSION AT WORKPLACE: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT
It is possible to create a more cohesive, connected, and inclusive workplace by utilizing HR practices and employee perceptions of workplace inclusion practices. There have been research studies on inclusion and diversity, but the relationship between HR practices and inclusion remains unexplored. To close this gap, this study investigates the conceptualization and characterization of IT-ITES employee perceptions of workplace inclusion, as well as the role of HR practices in nurturing a sense of workplace inclusion. This study surveyed 250 employees from IT organizations in Delhi-NCR, India, in order to comprehend the peculiarities of the Indian workforce and business requirements. Research findings emphasised that organizations are responding to diversity management through legal mandates, programs, policies, and strategies. Employees in the IT-ITES sector prefer to remain in companies where they feel included and valued

Introduction
In the past, diversity research predominantly focused on the "problems" of diversity, including inequality, prejudice, affirmative action, and tokenism (Shore et al., 2009). The research study by Jackson & Joshi (2011) established and continues to generate myriad insightful theories and empirical studies. Nonetheless, as the arena of diversity and inclusion has progressed, academicians continue to focus on how diversity has the potential to enhance workplace practices and organizational mechanisms to foster the untapped value of diversity (Gonzalez & DeNisi, 2009). In accordance with the views expressed by Cox (1991) in his discussion of multicultural organization, scholars are pursuing methods to integrate individuals from different backgrounds in organizations. Creating inclusive work environments is an emerging area of study in this field (Bilimoria,et al., 2008). In the past decade, the term inclusion has been in its infancy in the realm of organizational literature (Roberson, 2006), although analogous studies has been conducted in the field of social services (Mor Barak, 2000) and psychological science as well (Brewer, 1991). In spite of increased attention in recent years, inclusion remains a novel concept for which there is no consensus on its nature or theoretical foundations. Since the 1960s civil rights movement, the diversity and inclusion (D&I) function has become an accepted norm in numerous significant American corporations. It began with discrimination-remediating affirmative action legislation.

The concept of diversity and inclusion has shifted from a focus on compliance to a much broader scope, which encompasses numerous facets of diversity (such as ethnicity, race, cultural background, gender, age, sexual identity and preference, physical abilities and values,

etc.) and draws attention to a climate where all employees feel appreciated, respected, and able to participate fully. In addition, India is an emerging global economic superpower with sustained economic growth and high development rates. MNCs gravitate to India as a result of its extensive potential markets and inexpensive production resources (labour) (Khanna & Yafeh, 2007). However, an acute shortage of skilled and professional labour has been a crucial HR challenge in India (Budhwar, 2009). Consequently, firms are increasingly engaged in a "war for talent" to recruit and retain the best talent from the talent pool. Some organizations have implemented diversity management as one of their most important human resource initiatives to draw in and retain talent (Cooke, 2011; Cooke and Saini, 2010).

THEORITICAL BACKGROUND

Individuals desire a sense of belonging in addition to being acknowledged for their distinct qualities, which is one of the most unique aspects of our framework of inclusion. Certain diversity theories and associated variables (like demographic similarity) place a greater emphasis on the benefits of similarity, accentuating the belongingness theme as opposed to the uniqueness theme. For instance, the predominant theoretical perspectives in diversity research (relational demography, the concept of social identity, and the commonality-attraction paradigm) argue that people seek to belong to groups and tend to treat those in their in-groups with greater favour compared to those in their out-groups (Byrne, 1971; Lemyre & Smith, 1985; Riordan & Weatherly, 1999). Regularly, statistical results focused on these diversity models are employed to corroborate the notion that individuals who have similarities to their work groups show predominantly positive attitudes due to their sense of belonging. For example, racial similarity appears to be correlated with greater liking and contentment, more substantial interview ratings, and improved interpersonal behaviour coupled with decreased conflict in relationships, intention to leave, and turnover (Buckley et al., 2007; Chatman et al., 1998; Chattopadhyay, 1999; Godthelp & Glunk, 2003; Riordan & Shore, 1997; Tsui et al., 1992; Wiersema & Bird, 1993). Moreover, gender similarity is positively related to trust, LMX, cohesiveness in the group, emotions of competency, emotional connection, and intention to continue (Pelled & Xin, 2000; Shapcott et al., 2006; Tsui et al., 1992). However, study results generated by this focus on similarities (belongingness) have frequently been erratic (Mannix & Neale, 2005; Riordan, 2000), indicating that demographic similarity may not always promote a sense of belongingness on its own and may not be sufficient to guarantee positive outcomes (Riordan & Wayne, 2008). As suggested by our framework, we argue that uniqueness should be valued alongside belongingness in work groups in order to promote the perception of employee inclusion. By satisfying human requirements for belongingness and uniqueness, these perceptions should have more consistent effects on outcomes pertinent to individuals in work groups, such as pro-organizational attitudes and behaviours.

According to Chen and Tang (2018), perceived inclusion refers to the employees' perception of their status of inclusion in the workplace. This concept provides a new perspective for understanding the experiences of employees within the complex work system nowadays. The research on how HR practices adopted by various organizations influence the perception of inclusion in employees, inevitably pave the way for new opportunities and fresh prospects to

build a more cohesive, connected, and inclusive workplace. In an era where different opinions and perspectives are becoming increasingly inevitable, the synergy between HR practices and inclusion could become a game changer. The perception for inclusion which comes naturally, various HR practices adopted by different organizations could prove the spark that creates the fire of inclusion in the organization.

Despite the fact that numerous research studies on inclusion and diversity have been conducted, HR practices and employee perceptions of workplace inclusion practices remain unexplored. Consequently, the following research topic was formulated:

RQ1: Do HR practices influence the perception of inclusion among employees?

To investigate this question, our study employs survey data to determine the extent to which perceived inclusion is influenced by numerous HR practices implemented by an organization that facilitate diversity and inclusion. The survey was intended for IT and ITES sector employees. The objective is to provide a comprehension of the opportunities and obstacles IT-ITES employees face in promoting diversity and inclusion within their organization. As perceived inclusion is domain- and culture-specific, the significance of context for identifying its determinants acquires prominence. Moreover, empirical evaluations of perceived inclusion are scarcely researched. This study aims to establish a more systematic and quantifiable approach to perceived inclusion in order to fill this gap.

This study creates a collaborative framework for different HR practices, such as Recruitment & Selection, Training & Development, and Performance Appraisal, to promote organizational inclusion. Through this theoretical framework, policy modifications can be enacted to improve employees' adaptability to a diverse and inclusive organizational climate. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by identifying and empirically validating the HR practices that are pertinent for inclusion, initiating a process in this manner. The findings of this study will encourage additional research on the antecedents of perceived inclusion in various organizational strata.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The investigation of existing research on the management of diversity through different HR approaches and practices, with a primary focus on feasible HR diversity management practices utilized by business organizations on a regular basis such as diversity related recruitment & selection programmes, diversity training programmes, diversity support groups, diversity audits, etc., indicated the fact that diversity management has a positive impact on performance results at three levels, namely individual, team, and organizational.

A theoretical study conducted by Martins (2015) attempted to determine the relationship between the efficacies of Diversity Management (DM), human-resource development (HRD), Organizational learning (OL), and diversity learning (DL) suggested that organizations seeking to improve the HRM/DM role and performance of FLMLs must adopt a holistic strategic approach that includes OL and FLML strategies

Another study demonstrated the opinions and understandings of Australian managers about workforce diversity management (WDM), along with the practices and incorporation of WDM in organizations in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane, suggesting that workforce diversity is not well understood or valued, especially by non-HR managers. According to Paul J. Davis and Yuliya Frolova, organizations do not assign WDM a high priority, and executive engagement with the topic is restricted (Davis et al., 2016).

The empirical analysis demonstrated barriers to the transferability of DM and, consequently, distinct organizational approaches. The investigation failed to identify a major shift in DM practices. The findings are consistent with the relational framework and suggest that headquarters and foreign subsidiaries must be considered separately, which theoretical models should take into consideration (Bešić & Hirt, 2016).

Examining the diversity management practices of three leading IT companies in India, all of which are Indian multinationals with operations in different parts of the world, revealed that global operations, a dynamic business environment, a reliance on knowledge, and a talent shortage are among the primary reasons for focusing on diversity. Gender diversity and nationality diversity have garnered more attention than diversity of the differently abled, the underprivileged, race, ethnicity, and age group (Buddhapriya, 2013). D&I has evolved from a focus on compliance to a broader concept that encompasses numerous elements of diversity (such as race, ethnicity, cultural background, gender, age, sexual identity and preference, physical abilities and values, etc.) and emphasizes an inclusive environment in which all employees are respected, valued, and able to contribute fully. A study discovered that diversity management (DM) independently is not adequate to boost performance at work. Alternatively, a strategy needs to be adopted which fosters inclusiveness among employees by taking their views into consideration and nurturing their self-worth (Sabharwal, 2014).

Another study found that increasing workforce diversity must be accompanied by inclusiveness and equality. Inclusion and a method for measuring equality should accompany diversity. In addition, the organization must ensure that inclusion and equality are not just words on a page, but that they are a reality in every organization (Sposato et al., 2015).

To disseminate the best practices for diversity and inclusion, in-depth interviews were undertaken with diversity and inclusion executives from Volkswagen, Sodexo Health Care and Government Services, Sanofi, L'Oréal, BASF North America, and China Merchants Bank, New York. These interviews highlighted the importance of inclusion strategies and programmes to local needs; embedding practices throughout the organization; multiplying impact through external partnerships; and utilizing this as a competitive advantage. (Derven, 2014).

The examination of diversity management programmes employed by fourteen Diversity Inc.-recognized top companies for diversity revealed a suite of complementary and highly related diversity management practices: corporate diversity council, diversity training programmes, supplier diversity, employee networking and mentoring, cultural awareness, support for women, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) support. (Madera, 2013).

The study that examined the extent to which organizations in Australia use human resource management practices to manage workforce diversity revealed that workforce diversity management is merely "average". In the areas of recruitment and selection, as well as training and development, insufficient diversity management practices were identified. As migrant employees do not cause problems and are extremely compliant, organizations in Australia pay insufficient attention to the challenges that workforce diversity presents. Nevertheless, these organizations desire numerous advantages from their multicultural workforce (D'Netto & Sohal, 1999).

Thus, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There is a positive relationship between recruitment & selection (RS) and perceived inclusion (PI).

H2: There is a positive relationship between training & development (TD) and perceived inclusion (PI).

H3: There is a positive relationship between performance appraisal (PA) and perceived inclusion (PI).

Fig. 1 depicts the proposed framework of the hypothesized model. Using SPSS AMOS 26.0, the significance of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables will be examined.
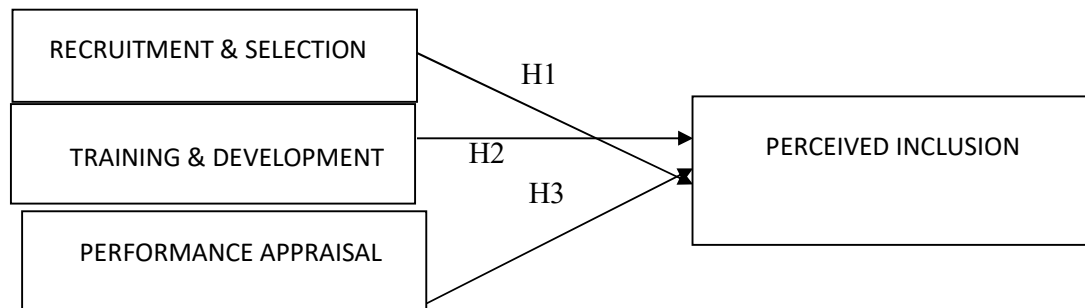

Fig. 1: CONCEPTUAL MODEL

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The design of this study was both descriptive and causal in nature. The design of the research project utilized survey methodology with a structured questionnaire. A sample of 250 employees from IT organizations in Delhi-NCR, India's largest and second most populous metropolitan area, and one of the country's main IT hubs, was collected (Kundu & Mor, 2017). The liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991 prompted a large number of foreign operators to enter the Indian market (Budhwar & Varma, 2010), and they require an understanding of the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of the Indian workforce and business requirements, such as diversity issues (Woodard & Saini, 2006).

PROBLEM STATEMENT: When considering the feeling of belongingness, there are a lot of factors which influence the perception of inclusion in employees. For different employees different factors are of importance viz. for some decision making priorities may be important, while for others information sharing may be important or for some level of participation may be of great importance etc. In fact, the expectations and needs of the employees vary with time. Still there should be some common factors which facilitate to study the perception of employees regarding inclusion at workplace.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY: To study the impact of various HR Practices on perceived inclusion at workplace.

PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION:

The primary data was collected from respondents through personal interview based on structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to obtain and elicit the information required to study influence of HR practices on perceived inclusion. The questionnaire was administered to employees of IT firms. Moreover, secondary data was collected from various research papers from different sources like Google Scholar, Research Gate and ..

TOOLS FOR DATA ANALYSIS

SPSS AMOS 26.0 software was used on the collected data and the analysis was done through SPSS software to derive significant inferences. Following the completion of field work, the collected data were tabulated. Interpretations emerged after collecting data, collation and summarization. The final conclusions were drawn on the basis of findings from the analysis. Table 1 represents the characteristics of the collected sample.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	141	56.4
Male	103	41.2
Others	6	0.024
Age		
Between 20 and 30	37	14.8
Between 31 and 40	103	41.2
Between 41 and 50	94	37.6
Above 50	16	6.4

Tenure		
Less than one year	13	5.2
1-5 years	60	24
5-10 years	80	32
More than 10 years	97	38.8
Total respondents	**250**	

Significance of the study

This study analyzed employees' perception to understand their preferred factors and HR practices to develop inclusive workplaces. This study will facilitate HR practitioners, policy makers and researchers to apply HR practices at workplace.

Data analysis and findings

In a venture to identify HR practices which significantly impact employees' perception about inclusion at workplace. Additionally, from the identified HR Practices, it has also been intended to determine the most crucial HR practice which has highest impact on perceived inclusion of employees.

According to the reliability statistics presented in table 2, the value of Cronbach alpha is higher than the accepted 0.70, therefore null hypothesis is rejected. Consequently it may be stated that instrument is reliable and can be utilised with factor analysis to perform further investigation.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.910	21

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

The results of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Table 3) indicates the suitability of the data. KMO measure of sampling adequacy is 0.731 implies that the data is suitable for factor analysis. Moreover, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity shows a significant p-value<0.001which signifies that variables are adequately correlated and further analysis can be conducted.

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.731
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1848.292
	df	210
	Sig.	.000

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test

SPSS AMOS 26.0 was used to analyze the data as the "Mardia's multivariate skewness and kurtosis" test was conducted using "Web power" software (Cain et al., 2017; Mardia, 1970). The results showed that the data were multivariate normal as the multivariate normality critical ratio lies within the range of -1.96 and + 1.96.

Measurement Model

In a measurement model, the psychometric properties of the measures were evaluated (Ong & Puteh, 2017). To establish the validity of the measures, the factor loadings, composite reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were calculated (Hair et al., 2017). Items PI4, PI5, RS5, and PA1 with factor loadings less than 0.7 were eliminated from further analysis. All other constructs had adequate factor loadings, with CR > 0.70 and AVE > 0.50, establishing convergent validity. In addition, Cronbach's alpha (CA) was used to evaluate the reliability of the instruments. Blunch (2012) found that the coefficient of agreement (CA) for all study constructs was greater than 0.7, indicating that they met the minimum reliability criterion. Table 4 contains a comprehensive outline of the validity and reliability metrics. As depicted in Figure 2, the measurement model evaluation consists of peripheral loadings, path coefficient (β), and coefficient of determinants (R^2).

Table 4: Reliability and Validity

Constructs and item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Factor Loading	AVE	CR	CA
Perceived Inclusion				0.660	0.853	0.884
PI1	3.872	0.813	0.823			
PI2	4.012	0.884	0.791			
PI3	3.096	1.835	0.834			

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PI 4	4.136	0.836	0.606			
PI 5	3.860	1.058	0.604			
Recruitment & Selection				0.518	0.811	0.872
RS1	4.028	0.823	0.705			
RS2	4.122	0.750	0.726			
RS3	4.017	0.871	0.703			
RS4	3.885	0.941	0.768			
RS5	4.122	0.750	0.665			
Training & Development				0.624	0.833	0.765
TD3	3.741	0.903	0.817			
TD4	4.032	0.845	0.785			
TD5	4.000	0.853	0.784			
Performance Appraisal				0.571	0.799	0.822
PA1	4.126	0.880	0.617			
PA2	3.731	0.913	0.711			
PA3	3.640	0.931	0.804			
PA4	4.084	0.793	0.767			
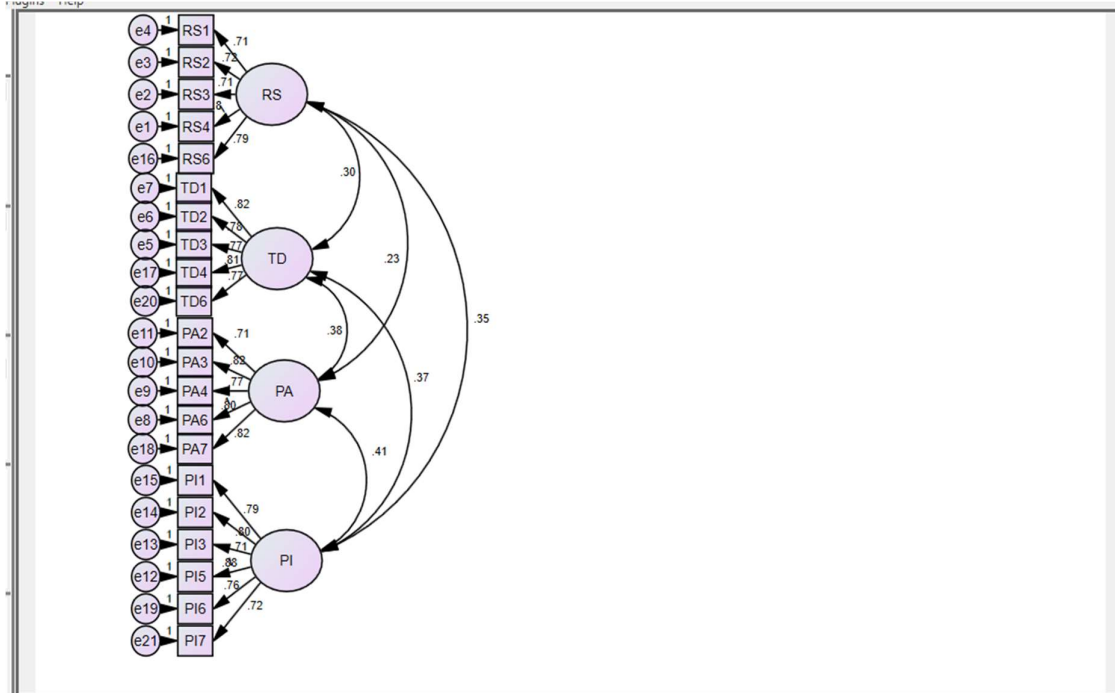
Fig. 2: Measurement Model

The Fornell-Larcker criteria and Hetertrait-Monotrait (HTMT) were then utilized to ascertain the discriminant validity of the constructs (Henseler et al., 2015). Values for the HTMT ratio that are less than 1.00 are regarded acceptable. According to Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion, the square root of each construct's AVEs must be greater than the construct's highest correlation with any other construct in the analyzed model. Table 5 demonstrates that the square root of AVEs and correlations of all constructs are greater than the diagonal correlation values, indicating discriminant validity.

Additionally, the HTMT ratio was used to evaluate discriminant validity. To avoid multicollinearity problems, the HTMT ratios of the constructs should be less than 0.90 (Hair et al., 2019). Table 6 demonstrates HTMT results and verifies discriminant validity.

Table 5: Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion)

	RS	TD	PA	PI
RS	**0.720**			
TD	0.304	**0.790**		
PA	0.228	0.299	**0.755**	
PI	0.353	0.365	0.405	**0.812**

Table 6: Discriminant Validity (Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio)

	RS	TD	PA	PI
RS				
TD	0.314			
PA	0.229	0.312		

PI	0.364	0.386	0.434

Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

After validating the constructs and evaluating the measurement model, the structural model and its causal links were evaluated. The researchers evaluated the reflective constructs' structural model using the methodology proposed by Gaskin et al. (2019). Initially, the model was evaluated for collinearity using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) index. All VIF values are below the threshold value of 5.0, indicating that the model is not multicollinear (O'Brien, 2007). Thus, CMB was eliminated from our analysis as a potential concern. Second, the model was evaluated for goodness of fit using SRMR (0.08) and NFI (> 0.8) values of 0.047 (0.08) and 0.857 (> 0.8), respectively. Thirdly, SPSS AMOS 26.0 was used to evaluate the significance and relevance of the structural model's relationships. The calculated path coefficients assisted in validating the hypotheses. Table 8 displays the outcomes of β, t value and p value. All positive values of β are displayed, indicating a direct relationship. To approve or reject the hypothesis, the t-value threshold of 1.96 is used. In addition, the effect magnitude is calculated using the formula $(R_I^2 - R_E^2) / (1-R_I^2)$ and interpreted as weak between 0.02 and 0.15, moderate between 0.15 and 0.35, and strong above 0.35.

In Table 8, the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed hypotheses are evaluated. RS (β = 0.150, t = 2.550) and TD (β = 0.180, t = 2.227) were found to have a significant positive relationship with PI, whereas PA (β = 0.061, t = 0.876) did not have a significant relationship with PI. This indicates that PA has no positive relationship with PI.
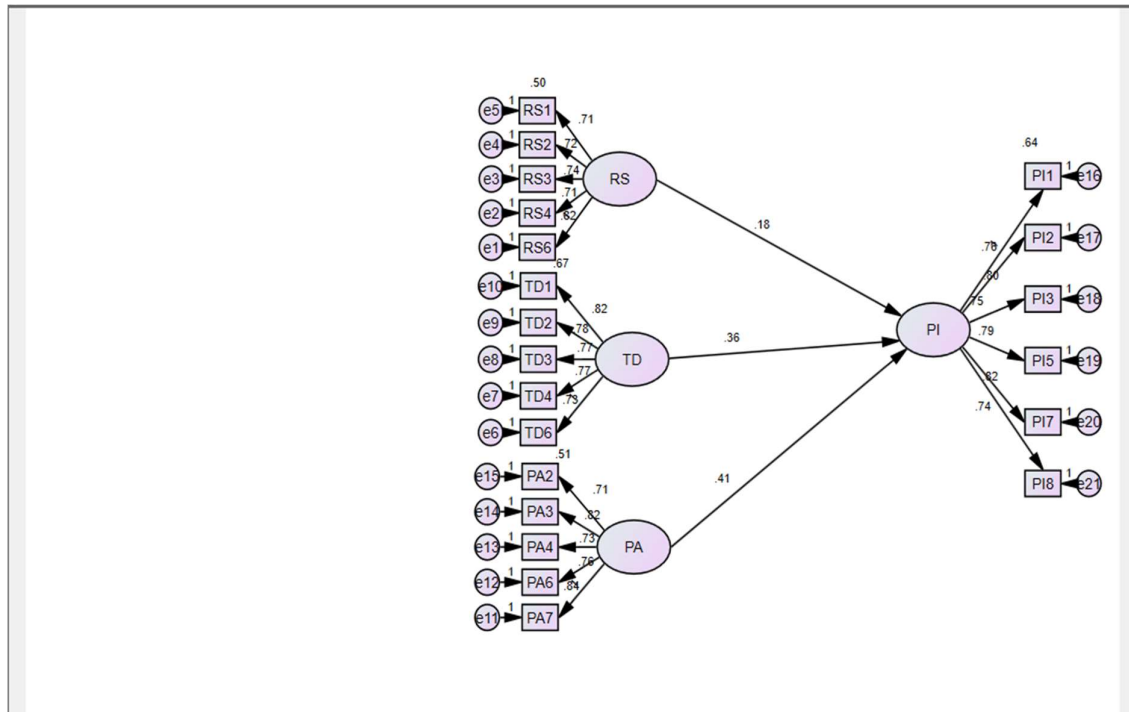

Fig. 3: Structural Model (SEM Analysis)

Table 7: Fitness size of structural Model

Overall fit	Value obtained	Remarks	Cut-off
Chi- Square	2.533	Good	<5.0
GFI	0.863	Good	Near to 0.9
CFI	0.907	Moderate	>0.9
RMSEA	0.078	Good	<0.12

Table 8: Hypotheses testing and effect size

Hypotheses	β	t-value	p value	Effect size	Interpretation	Hypothesis
H1 RS→PI	0.15	2.550	.011	.353	Strong	Supported
H2 TD -→PI	0.18	2.227	.026	.365	Strong	Supported
H3 PA-→ PI	0.061	0.876	.381	0.040	Weak	Not Supported

Discussion

The study sample consisted of 57.6% female respondents and 42.4 % male respondents. Majority of employees working in IT-ITES sector are between the ages of 31 and 40, and have tenure more than 10 years. This demonstrates that employees prefer to stay in the companies where they feel included and valued (Offerman & Basford, 2014). Today, there exists a spectrum of organizational responses to diversity management. Some organizations are responding to legal mandates, while others are concentrating on specific programmes and policies, and still others are instituting comprehensive HR diversity strategies to foster change in culture and work processes. In 2002, SHRM and Fortune magazine conducted a survey to investigate the effects of the post-9/11 economic challenges on diversity initiatives. Despite minor fluctuations, the 2002 survey revealed that corporate expenditure on diversity and inclusion initiatives remained constant, with funding for diversity training related to race and ethnicity even increasing marginally.

In this research study HR practices and the perception of employees about inclusion were examined. The focus of the study was on the role of HRM practices and policies (in terms of recruitment and selection, training and development and performance appraisal) in creating diverse and inclusive workplace. The findings of the study indicate that the conceptual framework proposed in this research study is pertinent in understanding perception of employees about inclusion. The empirical framework's validity and reliability can be illustrated by the measurement of its metrics. The findings from the analysis of structural model agree with two hypotheses significantly.

Recruitment and Selection is positively associated with perceived inclusion (**Hypothesis 1).** This indicates that Inclusive HR leaders and practitioners proactively partake in the recruitment and induction of new entrants. They have the flexibility to alter themselves and their workplace

culture to make room for fresh recruits with eclectic qualifications, professional backgrounds, perspectives as well as ways of working together. However, the results indicate that this relationship has a strong effect. Recruitment and selection policies adopted by the organizations significantly impact the perception of employees about inclusion.

Hypothesis 2 is also supported, which states that training and development has a positive and significant effect on perceived inclusion. These results are supported by literature confirming the role of diversity training and mentoring in enhancing perceived inclusion of employees at workplace (Avery & McKay, 2010).

Hypothesis 3 is not supported, which states that Performance appraisal system has significant effect on perceived inclusion. This indicates that Performance Appraisal systems fail to ensure equitable growth opportunities to employees within an organization regardless of their position, identity and social backgrounds. Therefore, it can be conclude that inclusionary practices go beyond traditional performance appraisal, this needs attitudinal shift and re-alignment the way managers currently think about and conduct performance appraisal.

CONCLUSION

The study was motivated by the difficulties HR practitioners and policymakers encounter when attempting to quantify HR practices and Perceived inclusion in order to monitor its development. Consequently, this study offers a novel perspective on how to conceptualize and characterize IT-ITES employee perceptions of inclusion. It also examines the role of HR practices in fostering a sense of workplace inclusion. In an era when diverse viewpoints and opinions matter, antiquated systems and cultures will inevitably give way to new opportunities. Consequently, new opportunities for a more cohesive interconnected and inclusive workplace are gaining traction.

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