

Building a Sustainable Workforce through Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: A Case Study on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Culture at E&Y with special reference to their DE&I report of January 2025

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Abstract

In recent years, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) have evolved from peripheral initiatives to central pillars of organizational strategy, particularly within multinational corporations. As the global workforce becomes more diverse and interconnected, companies are under increasing pressure to create inclusive environments that promote social equity and drive sustainable business performance. A 2020 report by McKinsey & Company reveals that companies in the top quartile for ethnic and cultural diversity on executive teams are 36% more likely to outperform their peers in profitability, reinforcing the growing consensus that diversity in leadership is not just a moral imperative but a business necessity.

This case study examines Ernst & Young (EY), a global professional services firm with a significant presence in India, and its structured DEI strategies. It analyses how these initiatives intersect with workforce sustainability—a concept that integrates inclusive talent practices with long-term organizational resilience and innovation. While many organizations express commitment to DEI, few demonstrate measurable and systemic implementation. EY's public DEI reports, participation in global benchmarking frameworks, and leadership-level inclusion strategies provide a robust context for exploration.

The study seeks to explore the relationship between DEI strategy and workforce sustainability in the Indian context, with a focus on inclusive leadership, organizational culture, and equitable policy design. Using a qualitative single-case study approach, this research aims to offer actionable insights for both academic literature and real-world DEI practices.

Keywords: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Workforce Sustainability, Inclusive Leadership, Organizational Culture

Introduction

Ernst & Young (EY) is the result of a merger between two early 20th-century accounting firms, Ernst & Ernst (1903) and Arthur Young & Company (1906). The firms combined in 1989 to form Ernst & Young, later rebranding to EY in 2013 to reflect a more global and modern identity. From its very inception, inclusivity has been an integral part of EY's ethos. Arthur Young, one of the co-founders, was deaf and had low vision—his life experience with disability deeply influenced the firm's early culture and values.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) at EY is not a peripheral initiative or branding exercise, it is central to the firm's leadership philosophy and organizational strategy. EY believes that diverse perspectives, when nurtured within an inclusive culture and supported by equitable practices, enhance decision-making, drive innovation, and lead to more sustainable business outcomes.

This commitment is evident in several of the firm's initiatives. In 2013, EY launched the National Equality Standard (NES), establishing a clear DEI assessment framework that organizations across sectors could adopt. The firm has consistently earned top scores on the Disability Equality Index and has been recognized by Seramount as one of the top companies for executive women. In 2024, EY made history when Janet Truncale was appointed as its Global Chair and CEO, becoming the first woman to lead a Big Four consulting firm—further reinforcing EY's commitment to gender equity and diverse leadership.

Rather than relying solely on policy documentation, EY embeds DEI into tangible actions, measurable outcomes, and strategic leadership decisions. This foundational emphasis on inclusion positions EY as a compelling case for exploring how DEI practices can influence workforce sustainability in the Indian context.

Research objectives

While EY has emerged as a global leader in embedding DEI across its operations, particularly in India, limited academic inquiry has systematically explored how these strategies contribute to workforce sustainability through a qualitative, case-based lens.

This study, therefore, seeks to explore EY's DEI framework and its impact on workforce sustainability in India, with a view to generating actionable insights for other organizations seeking to embed inclusion into the fabric of their business strategy.

This study aims to:

Examine EY India's DEI strategies and their alignment with global frameworks and best practices.

Analyze how DEI initiatives influence workforce sustainability, with a focus on employee engagement, retention, and inclusive leadership.

Explore the role of organizational culture, leadership commitment, and policy frameworks in integrating DEI into business operations.

Identify key enablers and challenges in implementing DEI strategies within EY India.

Generate actionable insights and recommendations to guide DEI adoption in other large Indian organizations.

Research Questions

- How are DEI strategies conceptualized and implemented at EY India?
- What is the relationship between DEI initiatives and workforce sustainability outcomes at EY India?
- In what ways do organizational culture and leadership influence the implementation and effectiveness of DEI strategies?
- What structural, cultural, or contextual challenges has EY faced in its DEI journey, and how has it addressed them?
- What theoretical and practical lessons can be drawn from EY's DEI framework to inform broader organizational practice?

Procedure For Study

The study was conducted through an in-depth qualitative content analysis of EY India's official DEI report titled "*DE & I Interventions That Deliver*" (January 2025). This report was selected because it presents not only an account of ongoing DEI practices, but also offers leadership reflections, quantitative metrics, and strategic insights on inclusion.

The analysis began with a close reading of the report's introductory statements, which refer to a Harvard Business Review study emphasizing the role of leadership accountability in DEI success. This provided the grounding context for identifying patterns related to:

- What interventions were initiated?
- Who was responsible for them?
- How outcomes were being tracked and measured

Following this, qualitative data from the report were extracted to understand:

- Representation of diversity across roles and functions
- Efforts made by leadership to embed equity and inclusion
- Cultural and policy shifts aimed at long-term impact

The qualitative approach enabled an in-depth understanding of EY's internal values, its external positioning on DEI, and the results it seeks to achieve through sustained and strategic inclusion efforts.

Methodology

Research design and approach

This study adopts a qualitative single-case study approach to explore the relationship between Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies and workforce sustainability within Ernst & Young (EY) India. The case study design is particularly suited for this research as it allows for in-depth exploration of complex organizational phenomena within real-life contexts (Yin, 2018).

EY India has been selected as the focal case due to its recognized leadership in DEI initiatives, the availability of detailed and transparent documentation (including the January 2025 report "*DE & I Interventions That Deliver*"), and the firm's public commitment to embedding inclusive practices into its talent strategy. This makes EY a rich site for investigating the operationalization and impact of DEI on long-term workforce sustainability.

The study is interpretive in orientation, seeking to understand the meanings, values, and organizational norms that underpin EY's DEI practices. It relies on document analysis and thematic content analysis of EY's DEI reports and related material to derive insights.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in **Inclusive Leadership Theory** (Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, & Ziv, 2010) and **Social Sustainability Theory** (Missimer et al., 2017), which together frame how leadership behavior, organizational culture, and equitable policy practices foster sustainable work environments.

- **Inclusive Leadership Theory** emphasizes the role of leaders in encouraging diverse perspectives, fostering psychological safety, and creating a culture of belonging. EY's leadership commitment to DEI, as noted in its internal and public-facing documents, aligns with this theoretical base.
- **Social Sustainability Theory** highlights the importance of fair treatment, equity, participation, and respect in work environments. These principles are operationalized through EY's DEI strategy and reflected in metrics such as employee engagement, retention, and representation.

By using these frameworks, the study not only investigates *what* EY is doing with regard to DEI, but also *how* and *why* these initiatives contribute to a resilient, sustainable workforce.

Data Collection Methods

Data were gathered through **document analysis**, particularly focusing on EY's DEI Report ("*DE & I Interventions That Deliver*", January 2025), internal policy statements, leadership communications, and external benchmarking sources (e.g., McKinsey & Company, Harvard Business Review).

Documents were selected based on relevance to the research objectives, credibility of source, and availability in the public domain. Secondary sources were also used to triangulate findings and provide context.

Thematic Content Analysis

A **thematic analysis** was conducted to derive patterns and insights from the qualitative data, using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process:

1. **Familiarization with the data** – repeated reading of EY reports and statements to understand overall content.

2. **Generating initial codes** – labelling key statements related to DEI practices, leadership commitment, culture, and sustainability outcomes.
3. **Searching for themes** – identifying clusters of meaning such as *Leadership Accountability, Belonging & Psychological Safety, Inclusive Talent Policies, Measurement & Impact*, and *Barriers to Inclusion*.
4. **Reviewing themes** – refining themes to ensure they accurately reflect the data.
5. **Defining and naming themes** – articulating the essence of each theme and its relevance to the research questions.
6. **Producing the report** – integrating the themes with the theoretical framework to answer the research questions.

This thematic approach allowed for a structured, nuanced understanding of how DEI operates at EY India, and what mechanisms support or hinder its alignment with workforce sustainability.

Validity And Trustworthiness

To enhance the credibility and rigor of the study:

- **Data triangulation** was used by cross-referencing multiple reports, interviews (where available), and benchmarking studies.
- **Audit trails** were maintained to track how themes emerged from the data.
- **Reflexivity** was practiced throughout the analysis to minimize researcher bias and maintain critical distance from the data.

As the data used in this study are drawn from publicly available documents, no formal ethical clearance was required. However, care was taken to ensure respectful interpretation of content and accurate attribution of all sources.

Results And Findings

EY's 2025 DEI report isn't just a pat on the back—it's a bold call to action. It recognizes that traditional approaches focusing only on representation metrics aren't enough. What matters now is creating an inclusive culture where equity and belonging are actively cultivated across

multiple dimensions—gender, race, disability, LGBTQ+, socio-economic background, and more. They say, “whilst data and evidence of impact for gender is stronger across the board, evidence for other characteristics is still very much in its infancy. Nonetheless, there are promising findings that point to positive impacts across multiple characteristics.

➤ **Inclusive Culture: A Multi-Layered, Evidence-Driven Approach**

Creating a truly inclusive organizational culture goes beyond representation or policy—it’s about ensuring that every employee feels recognized, safe, and valued. A cornerstone of EY’s DEI strategy is the **‘Belonging at EY’** framework, which incorporates inclusive leadership behaviors, psychological safety, and structured initiatives that help individuals connect, share experiences, and feel appreciated.

Inclusive cultures are linked to business growth and innovation, fostering harmony, creativity, and long-term success. According to a *BetterUp* study, a strong sense of belonging can boost job performance by up to **56%**. EY’s *Belonging Barometer* and *Diversity, Equity & Inclusiveness (DEI) Report* identify three pillars essential to inclusion:

- i) Recognizing employees for their unique attribute
- ii) Fostering a keen sense of belonging
- iii) Actively encouraging involvement in communication, decision-making, and informal interactions.

a) **Diagnosing Culture: Culture Audits And Data Analytics:**

- i) Many organizations assume leadership commitment is sufficient to embed inclusivity. However, unless perspectives across hierarchies and geographies are actively sought, critical blind spots may go unnoticed—particularly where diverse employees feel excluded or invisible. Culture audits and employee experience analysis have become vital here.
- ii) EY employs data-driven tools to gauge inclusion sentiment and pinpoint ‘hotspots’ where employee experiences diverge. For example, *Lloyds Banking Group*, featured in the EY report, uses culture analytics and inclusion indices to assess

perceptions of belonging, psychological safety, and access to growth opportunities—enabling targeted interventions.

- iii) *Radziwill (2021)* supports this diagnostic approach, noting that culture is shaped by “unspoken norms, signals, and micro-messages.” Without uncovering these, organizations’ risk assuming inclusion is effective merely because policies are in place. She advocates for a systemic lens—treating inclusion as a dynamic, lived experience rather than a static compliance goal.

b) Equipping leaders and managers: from theory to practice:

- i) Training in inclusive behaviors is one of the most direct levers for organizational change. EY stresses that practical application is critical. Leaders must navigate sensitive conversations, provide adjustments without stigma, and role-model inclusive daily.
- ii) Examples include Aviva’s leadership program,
- iii) which addresses real challenges such as intervening in biased conversations and supporting employees with visible and invisible differences. Deloitte offers inclusive language guides and empathy-based scenario learning.
- iv) Ross and Sabol (2023) argue: "Training that is emotionally engaging and contextually grounded outperforms compliance-led models in building sustained inclusive behavior." They also emphasize the power of peer learning environments, where leaders build accountability and learn from shared lived experiences.

c) Amplifying Lived Experience: Stories That Build Trust

Organizational culture becomes authentic when lived experiences are shared openly and respectfully. Home Group's initiatives, highlighted in EY's report, are powerful examples:

- i) **Life Swap Sessions:** Employees share their personal stories and answer questions during live sessions. This builds empathy and a sense of safety.

- ii) **Action Panel:** Provides informal support channels without requiring formal grievance procedures.
- iii) These initiatives foster trust and community, aligning with Radziwill's (2021) concept of "relational mechanisms of inclusion"—spaces that empower identity expression and mutual support.

d) Integrating Strategy And Humanity: A Sustainable Path Forward

EY's synthesis of research and global practice indicates that inclusive culture emerges through a layered strategy:

- i) **Diagnose** culture using identity-specific data and audits.
- ii) **Equip** managers and leaders to lead with empathy and confidence.
- iii) **Encourage** storytelling to deepen understanding.
- iv) **Iterate** policies and practices based on feedback, not assumptions.

As noted in the EY DEI report: "Culture is what happens when no one is looking. That's why it must be intentional."

➤ **Measurement: Data Analysis From Insight To Impact**

Creating a culture of equity and inclusion requires more than good intentions — it needs data, direction, and deliberate design. EY's DEI report (2022) underscores that measurement is not a compliance tool; it's a strategy accelerator that reveals blind spots, guides action, and tracks progress. Taking a data-driven approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion helps organizations understand where to focus their efforts for maximum impact. There are numerous key business drivers for collecting data on diversity and inclusion, including engagement with internal and external stakeholders; having a better understanding of the workforce to make better decisions; and to ensure fairness in internal processes such as those linked to progression and pay. Companies commonly collect gender data but are increasingly collecting data on other characteristics, to have a broader understanding of their workforce. For example, in addition to gender, signatories to the HM Treasury Women in Finance Charter, most commonly collect ethnicity (74%), disability (55%), and sexual orientation (54%) diversity data. Socio-economic background data is less commonly

collected, with the same report showing that 31% of signatories collect it.²¹ Progress Together have highlighted a lack of clarity among financial services employers on how best to collect this data. In response, it provides practical guidance and introductions to peers who have collected socio economic background data.

a. Data With Depth And Empathy

EY stresses the importance of combining quantitative and qualitative data to create a holistic view of inclusion. Numbers show patterns; stories explain them. Employee engagement scores, attrition rates, and representation metrics must be complemented with lived experience narratives, focus group insights, and open-ended surveys to understand the “why” behind the “what.”

But data is only as good as the trust it’s built on. Psychological safety is non-negotiable. Employees must feel safe enough to be honest. EY and other progressive firms ensure confidentiality, clear consent, and empathetic communication during data collection. This builds both participation and authenticity in responses.

As Mor Barak (2016) explains, “Inclusion is a feeling, not just a number.” Hence, emotionally intelligent data collection methods are not soft approaches — they are strategic enablers of real inclusion.

b. Make Data Actionable: Close The Loop

Collecting data is only step one. What truly builds trust is showing employees how their feedback translates into decisions.

EY recommends closing the loop with transparency. When changes in policy or culture are based on feedback (e.g., flexible work adjustments or inclusive hiring pilots), that connection must be explicitly communicated. This tells employees: your voice shaped this.

The EY report spotlights how Home Group made structural improvements in inclusion practices based on feedback from Life Swap sessions and Action Panels. Similarly, Lloyds Banking Group uses regular inclusion indices and sentiment tracking to revise manager scorecards and culture training modules.

c. Set Smart Targets: From Ambition To Accountability

As the report puts it, “DEI without SMART goals is toothless.” EY encourages voluntary but visible target settings: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound — to create directional clarity and drive accountability across leadership levels.

The FTSE 350’s experience is a compelling proof point: by setting gender targets, women’s representation on boards grew from 9.5% in 2011 to over 40% by 2024. Similarly, ethnicity-based targets showed a 10% year-on-year increase in board diversity within FTSE 250 firms.

These aren't just numbers — they reflect a mindset shift: that representation is a lag indicator of inclusion. Target-setting makes progress intentional, not incidental.

As Thomas and Plaut (2022) note, “What gets measured gets attention. What gets rewarded gets done.” When DEI metrics are embedded into KPIs and leadership reviews, culture change becomes part of the business agenda — not an HR side project.

➤ **Recruitment: Embedding Inclusion - Fair Access From The Start**

EY’s DEI report (2022) underscores that **inclusive recruitment is not a checkpoint — it’s the foundation**. True equity begins at the very start of the employment journey, with inclusive job design and fair, bias-aware hiring practices. It demands that **access, opportunity, and belonging** be embedded from the outset — not retrofitted later.

Systemic Reform In Action: The Gtr Case Study

“Using targeted attraction and inclusive recruitment, they have significantly increased their female hiring for train drivers in quite a short period of time. Prior to these efforts, most cohorts were a maximum of around 12% female; by 2020 that had increased to 25% and today they typically achieve cohorts that are 40% women or more. The female talent was there, they just needed to find ways to access it. They did this by changing the language in their job descriptions and adverts, advertising on specialized boards with higher access to women, and starting a career returners program, which predominantly caters to women.

a) Key Practices Adopted By Ey And Leading Organisations:

- i. Auditing job descriptions** for clarity and inclusive language.
- ii. Forming diverse interview panels** to disrupt unconscious bias.

- iii. **Tracking diversity data** across every recruitment touchpoint via dashboards.
- iv. **Customizing outreach to connect** with underrepresented communities.

EY emphasizes equity in opportunity and the dismantling of systemic barriers. Their internal toolkit, for instance, provides step-by-step guidance to hiring teams on mitigating bias in screening and interviews.

b) Additional proven practices:

- The University of California, Santa Barbara (2022) outlines the need for structured rubrics and inclusive search protocols to ensure transparency.
- Hanover Research (2020) stresses removing non-essential criteria that disproportionately affect marginalized applicants.
- Fershtman and Pavan (2020) analyze how ‘soft affirmative action’ can lead to fairer evaluations without stigma.

c) Winning Moves In Inclusive Recruitment:

- Engage in community-based outreach to widen applicant pools (Carter et al., 2023).
- Ensure AI-driven tools are designed and audited for equity (Bano et al., 2024).
- Emphasize candidate experience and post-hire feedback loops to build trust.

EY further notes:

“Recruitment is the frontline of inclusion. It reflects who is seen, heard, and welcomed into the organization.”

Inclusive hiring is not just about representation — it’s about who is given a fair chance to belong, lead, and thrive.

➤ **Retention And Advancement: Moving From Representation To Real Belonging**

Hiring diverse talent is only the beginning. Retaining and growing that talent is where inclusion either lives or dies. EY’s DEI report (2025) acknowledges this shift bluntly: “If we recruit difference but don’t nurture it, we’re not inclusive—we’re extractive.”

Research: CIPD found that a growing number of companies see the importance of offering

flexible working (66% in 2023, compared to 56% in a similar 2022 survey) and that employees are consistently more satisfied with their job if they have these arrangements available to them.⁴⁶ The ability to work flexibly is valued by people across all characteristics. Specifically for many trans employees, working from home is positive as it allows them freedom and autonomy to be their authentic selves, as well as providing the opportunity to engage more in learning and personal development with friends and family.⁴⁷ A flexible working culture has also been identified as a critical success factor to support those with disabilities, for example.³⁶ Both managers and disabled employees agree that workplace adjustments are less necessary if flexibility is part of how a company's culture is designed. Indeed, the Business Disability Forum suggests that identifying standard and 'simple' ways of working, that do not require formal adjustment processes or assessments, will be helpful for disabled employees, but also the workforce as a whole.

Survey: Great Big Adjustments survey (2019) : 34% of respondents said they hadn't asked for adjustments that would have helped them due to fear that their manager would treat them differently,⁴⁸ which again highlights the importance of focusing on creating an inclusive culture and encouraging the right behaviors among line managers. It is important for organizations to consider the range of needs and positive impacts for different groups, and the systemic reasons behind this.⁴⁹ Allowing employees to balance work, personal commitments, and health needs, for example, will aid the attraction and retention of workers from a more diverse and broader pool.

a) Equity In Development: Levelling The Playing Field

EY stresses that equitable access to opportunity must extend far beyond initial onboarding. Their internal talent systems have been redesigned to identify and remove structural inequities in development and promotions. This includes:

- Auditing performance management systems for bias,
- Ensuring underrepresented groups have equal access to stretch assignments, mentors, and feedback
- Setting advancement targets tied to identity data, monitored annually.

They cite the example of Lloyds Banking Group, which has implemented sponsorship programs that pair senior leaders with high-potential diverse employees—helping address what McKinsey (2021) calls the “broken rung” in advancement pipelines.

b) Psychological Safety As A Retention Strategy

Retention is strongly linked to whether employees feel safe to bring their full selves to work. EY’s Belonging Barometer data shows that employees from marginalized groups are more likely to exit early if they experience subtle exclusion, tokenism, or feel their growth is capped.

Organizations like Home Group and Aviva, spotlighted in the report, treat psychological safety as a leadership competency. They have embedded it in performance evaluations and leadership training. As Edmondson (2019) argues, psychological safety is not about comfort—it’s about **risking vulnerability without fear of penalty**. That’s where loyalty is built.

c) Data That Drives Retention

Beyond exit interviews, EY uses predictive people analytics to spot early signals of disengagement or attrition, especially among underrepresented groups. They track factors like:

- Time to promotion by demographic group,
- Sentiment analysis from pulse surveys,
- Manager inclusivity scores linked to retention data.

This proactive approach mirrors the insight from Thomas and Ely (2023): “Retention is not reactive. It is preventative care for inclusion.”

d) Career Mobility Without Bias

Finally, EY’s report pushes for rethinking advancement criteria. Subjective factors like “cultural fit” or “gravitas” are often code for exclusion.

- Structured promotion panels,
- Transparent role criteria, and
- Inclusive succession planning are all recommended to break what Bhopal (2022) calls the “hidden curriculum” of advancement.

EY's internal audit of promotion data found patterns of stagnation for employees with disabilities and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This led to targeted leadership development interventions and accessibility reforms.

e) **Building Loyalty Through Belonging**

What emerges clearly is this: **employees stay when they grow**—but only if they grow as their authentic selves. Inclusion without mobility is demoralizing. Advancement without equity is hollow.

British Telecom (BT) says: Having a workforce that reflects our customers is mission critical for BT Group to ensure our products and services are accessible and inclusive by design. That's why we aspire by 2030 to have a workforce that is gender balanced, 25% from an ethnic minority background and 17% disabled. On the topic of inclusive meetings, we're strengthening our inclusive management capability by integrating new content into our management training. This includes concepts that managers can apply to running meetings such as creating conditions for psychological safety, active listening, and specific techniques to draw out contributions from different people.

As the EY DEI report asserts:

"Belonging is not just about staying—it's about thriving. Our goal is not just retention but resonance."

➤ **Integrating Strategy And Humanity: A Sustainable Path Forward**

EY's synthesis of global best practices delivers a powerful insight: **inclusive cultures are not organic outcomes — they are designed with intention, strategy, and heart.** A sustainable DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) framework integrates **diagnostic precision, empathetic leadership, and authentic human connection** to create organisations where people are not just employed — they're empowered.

a) **Core Levers For Culture Transformation**

To build lasting inclusion, organizations must:

- Diagnose culture using identity-specific data and regular audits.

- Equip managers and leaders to act with empathy and confidence.
- Encourage storytelling to deepen understanding and connection.
- Rethink recruitment through structured, bias-aware systems.
- Design and measure retention strategies that move beyond surface-level metrics.
- Iterate policies based on real feedback—not assumptions or optics.

b) Equipping Managers: From Training To Daily Practice

Managers play a pivotal role in shaping daily workplace experiences. EY highlights that building inclusive leadership requires more than a one-time workshop—it demands a shift in *mindset, habits, and accountability*.

Reference: aviva's leadership programme:

Aviva has implemented a robust program that helps managers navigate real-world challenges, such as managing unconscious bias and supporting neurodiverse teams. This has significantly improved managerial confidence and employee engagement.

Winning Moves:

- Implement Practical Training: EY uses scenario-based workshops, micro-learning modules, and live coaching to help leaders recognize bias and build inclusive behaviors.
- Promote Empathy and Active Listening: Create space for individual voices to be heard and respected.
- Build Peer Learning Networks: Support cross-functional forums where leaders share best practices and navigate complex DEI dilemmas together.

c) Amplifying Employee Voices: Trust Through-Lived Experiences

Retention is built on trust—and trust grows when people feel seen and heard. Storytelling is not a soft skill; it is a strategic enabler of inclusion. EY's internal surveys reveal that over 80% of employees feel they can “be themselves at work”—a clear marker of psychological safety.

Reference: home group's 'life swap' sessions:

Home Group's initiative invites employees to share personal journeys in open forums. These sessions build empathy, reduce stigma, and strengthen interpersonal trust across the organization.

Winning Moves:

- Create Safe Spaces for Sharing: Ensure employees feel supported, not spotlighted.
- Act on Feedback: Treat stories as data—turn them into action.
- Celebrate Diversity: Publicly recognize the rich mosaic of identities within the workplace.

d) Aligning Culture With Strategy: The Retention Multiplier

Ultimately, sustainable inclusion depends on aligning strategic goals with genuine, people-first practices. When culture and operations move in sync, retention becomes not just achievable—but inevitable.

Key Strategies for Integration:

- Conduct Regular Culture Audits: Track gaps in belonging and monitor changes over time.
- Enable Continuous Learning: Foster fluency in inclusive behaviors through ongoing training and coaching.
- Foster Open Communication: Build a culture where employees can challenge norms and raise concerns without fear.

EY DEI Report, 2025

“By embedding inclusion into the daily DNA of our systems, not just our slogans, we create workplaces where people don’t just stay—they thrive.”

Conclusion: Inclusion As A Living Commitment

Creating an inclusive culture isn’t a destination, it’s a dynamic, evolving commitment. The case of EY, along with other exemplars, shows that inclusion thrives when it’s embedded into the very fabric of organizational life—from hiring and onboarding to development, advancement, and leadership.

What makes this journey sustainable is not perfection, but a willingness to listen deeply, act intentionally, and evolve continually.

Inclusion is not a side project for HR, nor a checkbox for compliance. It is the shared responsibility of every leader, every team, and every system. It's about recognizing that talent is everywhere, but opportunity is not—and taking bold, data-informed steps to close that gap.

In today's world, where workforce sustainability meets social equity, inclusion is no longer a "nice to have." It is the bedrock of resilient, innovative, and purpose-driven organizations. When inclusion is truly lived, people don't just stay—they grow, lead, and thrive. And that, ultimately, is the sign of a future-ready organization.

What Works: Anchoring Inclusion In Strategy And Humanity

Inclusive cultures don't happen by accident. They emerge from sustained intention, action, and reflection. EY's synthesis of global research and lived practice underscores one unshakable truth: inclusion must be built in both strategic and human layers.

Winning Moves For Sustainable Inclusion:

- Diagnose deeply: Use identity-specific data, regular culture audits, and employee stories—not assumptions.
- Equip leaders at every level: Train managers to lead with empathy, equity, and daily inclusion.
- Centre lived experiences: Share personal narratives to dismantle silos and build psychological safety.
- Rewire recruitment systems: Make hiring structured, transparent, and actively bias-resistant.
- Redefine retention: Don't just track attrition—track *thriving*. Who stays, and why?
- Equitize development: Ensure growth opportunities, sponsorship, and leadership roles are truly accessible to not just the dominant group.

And above all: listen, iterate, and evolve.

Inclusion is not a one-time fix. It is a living system—and like all living systems, it requires constant care, courage, and commitment.

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