

How's DEI in India doing?



Background

We've been curious about what the backlash against DEI in the US means to companies in India; both from the point of view of being a learning organisation that offers several workshops in the space of inclusion and from that of being people who care deeply about fairness and equity. So we created a short survey that we invited people who champion DEI within their organisations to take. 62 kind souls responded in April-May 2025 and the document that you are about to read captures their inputs.

We kept the survey entirely confidential to make it safe for people to express themselves freely.

If you have questions about this or about the work we do, please feel free to ping the friendliest person at [Navgati deepa@navgati.in](mailto:Navgati.deepa@navgati.in)

Top line?

Despite global shifts in DEI discourse, most organizations in India are maintaining or expanding their DEI initiatives, with a continued focus on gender inclusion, representation, and inclusive leadership. While investment levels are largely expected to remain stable, organizations continue to face challenges with leadership buy-in, measuring impact, and balancing multiple diversity dimensions.

Organizations are increasingly recognizing the need to move beyond representation metrics to more holistic approaches that embed inclusion into organizational culture and business processes. There's also growing interest in expanding DEI focus beyond gender to include dimensions such as disability, LGBTQ+ inclusion, neurodiversity, and age diversity.

To find out more like what people are focusing on within this space; how they measure it; challenges they face and support they need (including one person who said "please tell me I am not alone at the beginning of the journey", yes, we feel you and you're not alone), read on.

To give you a quick sense of the demographics, 39% of respondents said their companies were in the technology space, the rest were mainly from financial services, manufacturing, retail/e-commerce; healthcare and the automotive industry. In terms of organisation size, 55% of respondents are from large companies (>2500 employees).

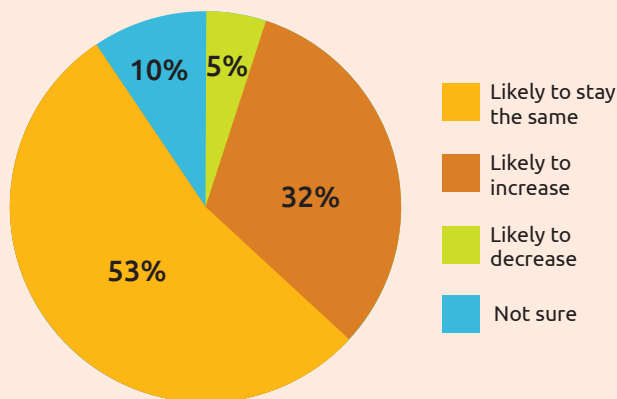
In terms of how DEI is managed, 57% of respondents said it is managed within HR; 34% said they have a dedicated DEI team or a DEI leader without a full team.

Please do remember that this isn't meant to be a quantitative survey so if you write back and ask us for a complicated cross-tab, we'll give you a sheepish smile and offer you a cupcake instead.

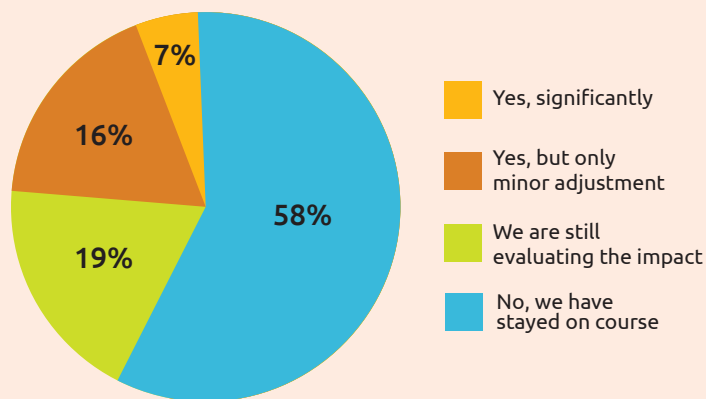
What's happening to DEI initiatives?

Most respondents felt like their organisations were going to either stay the course or increase spends on DEI this year (85%); yay for India. A similar number (74%) felt that global DEI challenges have not impacted or only minimally impacted their approach.

How would you describe your outlook on investment in DEI initiatives in your organisation for the coming year?



Have recent global policies influenced your approach?

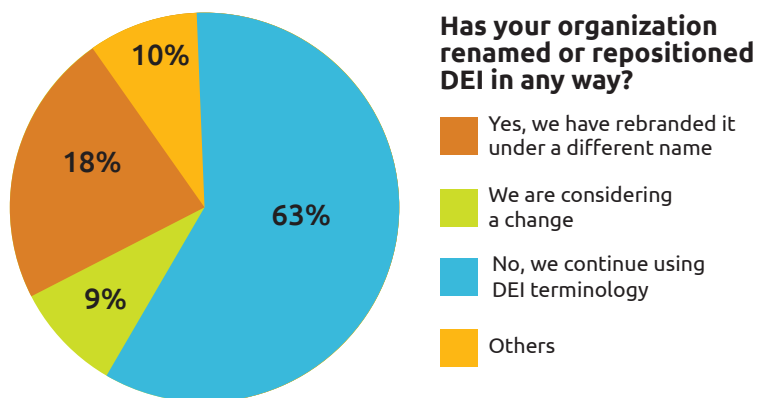


The people who have expanded their focus on DEI talk about increased investment in gender inclusion; also on including People With Disability. One person spoke about focusing on neurodivergence.

Is there a change in branding?

27% of respondents have/are considered rebranding; we are interpreting this as creatively finding ways to keep the focus on DEI while managing external pressures. A rose by any other name and all that jazz.

The new branding tends to be in the space of "Culture & Belonging" or "People & Equity." Where changes have been made, there appears to be a focus on removing the word diversity.



Has your organization renamed or repositioned DEI in any way?

- Yes, we have rebranded it under a different name
- We are considering a change
- No, we continue using DEI terminology
- Others

What are you focusing on in 2025?

The most common focus areas for DEI initiatives (in order of frequency of mention):

83%
Gender Inclusion

77%
Representation and Hiring Diversity

73%
Inclusive Leadership Development

73%
Psychological Safety and Employee Well-being

67%
Equity in Career Growth and Compensation

50%
LGBTQ+Inclusion and Allyship

43%
Accessibility and Disability Inclusion

40%
Age Diversity and Inclusion

27%
Addressing Bias in AI and Technology

23%
Inclusion of Veterans and Ex-service Personnel

Some emerging focus areas mentioned by respondents: Neurodiversity inclusion; Caste/race inclusion and Early careers/Generation Z inclusion.

How do you measure success?

Organizations are using various metrics to measure DEI impact:

77% Representation at Leadership Levels*	70% Employee Engagement Surveys	53% Retention and Advancement of Diverse Talent	43% DEI Training Completion Rates
40% Pay Equity Analysis	13% Business Performance Impact**	7% No Formal Metrics	*The most common metric **(e.g., innovation, customer engagement)

What challenges do you face in implementing DEI initiatives

Leadership Buy-in and Accountability:

Resistance or lack of authentic commitment from leadership

Implementation in Remote Locations:

Difficulty implementing initiatives in manufacturing or remote sites

Unconscious Bias:

Persistent unconscious biases in hiring, advancement, and day-to-day interactions

Balancing Priorities:

Struggling with addressing multiple diversity dimensions simultaneously

Resource Constraints:

Limited bandwidth, budget, and dedicated personnel

Measuring Impact:

Challenges in quantifiably demonstrating business impact of DEI initiatives

Geographic-Specific Challenges:

- Adjusting to changing US regulatory environments (for multinational companies)
- Balancing global DEI frameworks with local cultural contexts

Some verbatims to give you a sense of the feedback

- *Greater collaboration between HR and business would lead to more sustainable changes. Also need to be intentional about not taking performative actions without meaningful follow-ups!*
- *There is an anticipation of more scrutiny on language and commitment from US based stakeholders*
- *Any representation based initiative that may be interpreted as creating a quota for hiring is being morphed to stay in line with changes in regulatory laws in the US*
- *The ownership of DEI is a challenge. We tried moving away from DEI being an HR agenda and while a DEI council has been introduced, holding the council accountable is the challenge too.*
- *There is a feeling that DEI initiatives dilutes meritocracy which is a hard perception to change.*
- *Showcasing inclusivity without making it look like preferring one gender over another*
- *Too much is being crammed under diversity initiatives. It is as if the world wants to have differential slices for every kind of representation, while the whole has not been addressed yet. We are still grappling with gender diversity and how to ensure that women don't feel burnt out trying to balance home and work, and here we are on the other hand talking about neuro diversity and creating sensory friendly environments. It is just too much for a workspace to endure.*
- *Leadership push back (paraphrasing) "Now that the global sentiment is to bring back hard workers and not have these woke sentiments / focus on including rich kids and women, can we go back to hiring people who need the job, will show loyalty and suck it up and deal with mild to medium levels of managerial bullying"*
- *The lack of official benchmark data (representation at various levels) at the peer company level within a specific industry is a challenge as well.*

What do you need to advance your DEI Goals?

Getting buy in from leadership

This seems to be one of the biggest challenges articulated by the group. Getting true leadership buy in and direction is something almost everyone felt would be useful as would having targets driven from the top. As one respondent said "It needs to be driven like any other business goal and not treated as something separate".

It also sounds like people would like their top leadership to get more feedback and inputs on how inclusive they are being.

Inclusive leadership development

The second most important area that came up was creating a mindset of inclusion, as a way of being, amongst top and middle management. Specifically through leadership development programs that focus on building intentional inclusion and psychological safety

Shared industry resources

It sounds like professionals working in the space would really appreciate a forum to learn from each other. This can be a lonely journey and learning from each other, receiving validation or even having a space to share common struggles would be helpful. Some specific inputs people would like (verbatim)

- *An allyship newsletter from experts in the field, with the lens of the regional/cultural nuances, that addresses not only the professional work environment in corporate India, but the home environment as well. This would really help DEI practitioners in organizations to bring up and highlight more sensitive topics and have uncomfortable, but real conversations.*
- *How do you prioritise? What are the best practices? And please tell me I am not alone at the beginning of the journey*
- *Help in articulating the business case for DEI; better tools to measure DEI impact, especially "leading" rather than "lagging" indicators*
- *Data on representation at various levels within specific industries in India*

Content and Education:

Resources that communicate DEI concepts effectively without alienating audiences

Innovative and engaging ways to sensitive people and also some tools that may help people consciously to be unbiased. Content that can be shared, that speak with a calm tone, don't say things like, for example, "check your privilege" Content that maybe makes the point with humour, like that British video on drinking tea, that has now become the standard for talking about consent in POSH workshops (Found the video and loved it! Google tea and Thames valley police if you haven't seen it)

If you had free rein, what would you do with your DEI initiatives?

When asked what they would do with DEI initiatives given free rein, respondents spoke about:

Structural Integration:

Embedding DEI into core business processes rather than treating it as separate.

Focus on Inclusion:

Moving beyond representation to fostering a truly inclusive culture

Practical Support:

Implementing tangible support systems

Targeted Development:

Creating focused leadership development for underrepresented groups

Measurement and Accountability:

Implementing clearer metrics tied to performance reviews and compensation

Pay Equity:

Addressing pay gaps more aggressively

Expanded Scope:

Including more dimensions of diversity beyond gender caste, socioeconomic background)