**Conference General Stream: Conference Theme: Resistance**

**A CRITICAL VIEW OF INCLUSIVE ORGANISATIONS THAT MOVE BEYOND MANAGERIALISM AND DIVERSITY PRACTICES FROM A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE**

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**ABSTRACT**

In this article, I explore and analyse the dynamics of creating inclusive organisations in a ‘resistant’ environment for equality, diversity and inclusivity. My particular focus is to examine the existing theories and concepts of inclusive organisations and compare them with the South African experience. South African organisations, generally, have put an enormous effort into effective diversity management; however, the ideal of equality and inclusion has often remained elusive, due to resistance and lack of interest by the country’s leaders who despite following legislative procedures have somewhat failed to drive the managerialism and practices that drive the empowerment of all. The options for South African leaders are limited, however the understanding, acceptance and practice of equality, diversity and inclusivity, might help its organisations to create inclusive organisations in the long run.

South Africa’s leaders will need to develop additional skills of social learning and to capitalise on cultural differences. Gain an inordinate consideration of how people perceive inclusion and what meaning they attach to feeling included and excluded, as well as in influencing decision-making processes.

Considering that Resistance can manifest in different ways and at different levels, my aim is to extend the theory to understand the term ‘inclusive organisations’ and how subtle and unconscious bias cultivates into resistance in playing against building inclusivity in country’s workplaces. My argument is largely based on wider diversity and its intersectional dimensions such as gender, immigrant and cultural-diversity integration, inter-culturalism and diversity management literature pertaining to the socioeconomic integration of diversity from South African perspectives.

Through a literature review, I will investigate some South African diversity practices which may go beyond the managerial and diversity applications, and provide practical insights that might work best in this unique environment. I will compare South African diversity inequalities and inclusion perspectives with the theoretical insights of academics and organisational leaders. Finally I will explore proclivities that might prompt future organisations to present diversity management as morally ‘praiseworthy’ and ‘good’ organisational practice, to explain inclusivity.

This article articulates a theoretical framework, explores resistance to equality and inclusion in a unique environment with history of apartheid. It provides Conclusions; Limitation; Implications and Originality and Value

**KEY WORDS:** inclusive organisation; resistance; inequality, bias, gender identity; racial identity; multiculturalism; South Africa; diversity management; B-BBEE

**INTRODUCTION**

The global workplace is increasingly becoming more employee diverse. This change in the workforce is inevitable (Roberson and Kulik, 2007) and a major cause of new tensions, resistance and challenges especially to equality and inclusion. Numerous factors, such as transnational labour migration (Krings, 2007), free movement of labour (Roberson and Kulik, 2007), rise of the millennials (Gen X and Y), entry of new talent leading to the shrinking of the skills gap, women’s entry and men’s outpacing, rise of the blended workforce, technological advances, and more, are contributing to this. At present there are approximately 232 million migrants around the world, representing 3.1 per cent of the global population (ILO, 2018). In terms of gender diversity, female contribution is about 37 per cent of the global GDP, despite the ratio of the sexes being about 50:50, and in some developing nations female business ownership is as low as one to six per cent (Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) Annual Report, 2018).

All these factors constitute directives for organisations to address equality, diversity and inclusivity elements in the workplace proactively – by arguing for diversity as a competitive advantage and to reach previously untapped markets (Roberson and Kulik, 2007).

Most literature on equality, diversity and inclusivity (Bernstein and Bilimoria, 2013) comprises gender and race studies, owing to increasing struggles of women in the formal labour force, and the long history of minorities’ and women’s workplace disadvantages (Flanagan and Green, 2013). I favour conceptualising and theorising gender progression when arguing about inequality, as it directs particular attention to the gender differences underlying the debate. However, gender theorising is more complex if it is not captured within the concept of intersectionality that encompasses more than just the intersections of race and gender, when gender process interacts with other forms of inequality (Acker, 2012). Hence from a wider diversity perspective, to avoid the critical gap in equality, diversity and inclusion literature, I attempt to address the comprehensive diversity issues created by other forms of inequalities beside race and gender.

Most often inclusion as a concept is argued through emphasis on interrelationship between inequality and diversity, which are vaguely and loosely defined (Dobusch, 2014). If the critical intersectional diversity, inclusivity and inequality issues do not form part of the wider critical arguments (Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, and Nkomo, 2010), the underlying assumptions regarding diversity and inclusivity concepts at the intersectional level will be mere rhetoric and insufficient to expose the conflicting interests and the full understanding of the meaning of these concepts.

In South Africa, while more and more leaders are embracing diversity, resistance is still an issue. Most often, research studies have argued the concept of resistance from male and White concentration. In South Africa, resistance towards equality, diversity and inclusion does associate with male and White. Scholars such as Crisp and Meleady (2012) propose that resistance to diversity can evolve from rational processes that influence relations between different groups in society. They further clarify that the "us" versus "them" boundaries are created due to this, thus resistance to diversity may stem from the conflict between social categorization and modern heterogeneous social environments. In South Africa, inclusion of all races and women has presented negative impact on ‘White' identity, perception of their privileges’, opportunities and feeling of ‘anti-white’ bias (i.e. racial disregard) (Scheepers, Ellemers, and Sintemaartensdijk, 2009). Similarly, men in general in South Africa feel the threat with women’s entry and progression in jobs, due to fear of losing their superior identity and status in society. Thus South African society is facing resistance to inclusion of equality and diversity, owing to controlling efforts to reduce bias, prejudice and stereotypes from workplaces.

**PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY**

To gain a critical perspective on the meaning of the concepts of equality, diversity and inclusivity, I explore efforts of various authors who defined these terms in the theoretical and conceptual sense, which goes beyond the managerial and diversity applications, to create a new conceptual and theoretical comprehension with a specific focus on the South African context.

My aim is to understand the meaning of the term ‘inclusive organisations’, which is defined in numerous ways throughout Western literature. I therefore focus on South African workplace examples to reveal a unique perspective of this country’s movement towards equality, diversity and inclusion.

Most South African organisations consider inclusion to be achieved when they have employed the required staff quotas to reflect a diverse mix of people in the workforce – despite having few directives to develop capacity to leverage diversity as a resource (Bernstein and Bilimoria, 2013; Roberson and Kulik, 2007). The question thus arises: Is having the right numbers and population mix enough to claim the qualification ‘inclusive’? (Mor Barak, 2000).

Without concerted attention to the practices of equality and inclusion, diversity has possibly created negative performance outcomes, as cited in this article, and has led to individuals experiencing tension when interacting with those who differ from themselves (Bernstein et al., 2015; Crisp and Turner, 2011). In South Africa, while more and more leaders are embracing diversity, resistance is still an issue.

Shore, Randel, Chung, Dean, Ehrhart, and Singh (2011) state that “consensus on the nature of the construct of inclusion or its theoretical underpinnings has not been achieved yet”. Since the definition of inclusivity lacks clarity and structure and is still earnestly debated, inclusivity is often understood as being interchangeable with diversity. For this reason, I examine the theoretical concept of inclusion from various perspectives, usingtheSouth African context to lend it a unique dimension.

While some early works, such as those of Cox (1991 and 1993), depart from multiculturalism and diversity management, and extent to inclusive organisations (Harrison, Price, and Bell, 1998; Pless and Maak, 2004; More Barak, 2000). In this study, I compare South African inequality, diversity and inclusion perspectives with the theoretical insights of academics and organisational leaders. My aim is to extend the theoretical understanding of the term ‘inclusive organisations’ to finding ways of developing innovative management and organisation-based theory, by using existing theories. My argument is largely based on wider diversity and its intersectional dimensions such as gender, immigrant and cultural-diversity integration, inter-culturalism and diversity management literature pertaining to the socioeconomic integration of diversity from South African perspectives.

**CONCEPTUALISING INCLUSION AND RESISTANCE AS ITS BARRIERS**

While some scholars refer to inclusion as individual’s or subgroup’s sense of efficacy, belonging and value in the workplace (Bernstein and Bilimoria, 2013; Roberson and Kulik, 2007), others think that the term is implicitly defined (Dobusch, 2014). Dobusch (2014) contends that inclusion is rarely defined with clarity in studies. Pelled, Ledford, and Mohrman, (1999) define inclusion as “the degree to which an employee is accepted and treated as an insider by others in a work system”. They measure inclusion on the basis of employees’ self-evaluation of their influence on decision making, their access to sensitive work information, and their job security in combination with demographic characteristics (age, race and gender) (Pelled et al., 1999).

In their attempt to conceptualise inclusion as a construct, scholars have essentially concentrated on theorising workplace diversity, with slight attention to inclusion (Shore et al., 2011). Thus the emergent and conceptual underpinnings of the construct of inclusion (Pless and Maak, 2004) are based on the moral theory of recognition that already has limitations. Hence literature on inclusion as a construct is inadequate (Shore et al., 2011; Pless and Maak, 2004). Another study shows inclusion as a “relational construction rather than an essential conception of social reality” (Özbilgin, 2009), thus suggesting inclusion as a process, influenced by context, history, individual views and perspectives and strategic goals set by organisations. Raffo and Gunter (2007) use Brewer’s (1991) optimal distinctiveness theory to explain employee inclusion in work groups as consisting of both the sense of belonging and sense of distinctiveness, this led them to subsequently develop a framework of inclusion. I use their framework as a basis for reviewing equality, diversity and inclusion literature.

Arguably Gauthier (2016) explains inclusion in connection with specific dynamics that can lead to exclusion of immigrants and individuals who are socially and culturally diverse and are considered as outsiders in the integration process, of a work system. Dobusch (2014) and Janssens and Zenoni (2008) specify the development of measurement criteria for inclusion, by creating mechanisms to identify and measure inclusion.

In illustrating the success of equality, diversity and inclusion, the effect of resistance cannot be overlooked. Organisations inured to societal inequalities create systems, structures and practices of exclusion (Carolissen, Shefer, and Smit, 2015) by reinforcing social relations through continual practice of inequality and neglect to creating inclusion mechanisms. The structural existence of social boundaries persist if the excluded individual’s turnover remains high (Silver, 1994). Presence of resistance to diversity and inclusion intensifies if pressure for equality, right mix and right numbers increases, as the dominant (professional) group feels challenged by entry of the minorities in workplaces (Dass and Parker, 1999).

Dass and Parker (1999) argue that "resistance" transpires from being reactive, stressing on psychological and behavioural effects such as denial, avoidance, defiance and/or manipulation to reserve rank and position. According to Thomas (2012), resistance to diversity may be intentional or unintentional behaviour of individuals and/or organisations, eroding the diversity opportunities for “learning and effectiveness”. The effect of feeling a threat due to entry of previously excluded majority groups, the dominant non-minority groups may perhaps resist their inclusion. Oblivious that by creating stable, inclusive intersection mechanisms, solutions to achieving emotional engagement and driving participation of diverse employees by inspiring a sense of belonging and membership in them, inclusivity goals can be achieved (Shore et al., 2011).

Dobusch (2014) in her contribution to a more differentiated concept of inclusive organisations examines the concept of exclusion and inclusion from four thematic expositions: *social order –* creation of social bonds contrary to the background of specialisation and differentiation; *social exclusion –* exclusion due to structures that link to position, power and reputation, leading to inequality or exclusion due to inherent legitimisation of inequalities; *inclusion and exclusion as a relation –* conjointly reliant on each other; *inclusive organisations –* inclusion and diversity seen as connected, and inclusion as a standard goal controlled by management measures. She found that attention must be paid to the “excluding effects of including measures and subsequent changes in power relations”, as oversight in looking at the bigger picture of organisational power relations can lead to challenges, in creating equality and inclusion.

**EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY CONTEXT IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Although the diversity and inclusivity context in South Africa resembles that of the rest of the world, its axiology is unique due to existing inherent inequality and difference in the way South African organisations comprehend diversity management. South Africa is one of the most diverse countries in the world owing to its cultural, ethnic, racial, gender, class and disability factors, and an influx of migrants from greater Africa and Asia. This continually challenges the country’s systems, structures and policies, in its quest to include diversity, along with people’s divergent beliefs, values and assumptions. Another uniqueness of South Africa is that its majority black population is the minority population among those employed and working. Most South African businesses, while facing enormous socioeconomic challenges, want to be committed as responsible and active corporate citizens, by being non-discriminatory.

Moreover, in South Africa, inequality results in deeply entrenched social and economic exclusions that inhibit sustainable human development and societal inclusion (Soudien, Reddy and Woolard, 2019). Over the past couple of decades,while apartheid legacies have remained entrenched in contemporary organisational practices (Carolissen, et al., 2015), the country’s equality, diversity and inclusivity context has largely been driven by legislative processes, for example: affirmative action, equal opportunity legislation and the broad-based black economic empowerment process (B-BBEE) (Mathur-Helm, 2005). B-BBEE involves the empowerment of all black people in the country (Pike, Puchert, and Chinyamurindi, 2018), which includes mixed race (coloured) and Indians (Van Wyk, 2010).

Given that research on workplace diversity initiatives largely concentrates on either numerical diversity (based on legislative requirements) or racial climate (Vargas, Westmoreland, Robotham, and Lee, 2018). Congruently in South Africa, legislation focuses on quota and numerical representation based on race and sex (Bernstein et al., 2013). While both facets of diversity are critical, legislation alone is unable to facilitate (Apex people Solutions, 2018) deep-level intercultural interactions that enable individuals to learn from one another and build cross-boundary skills (Harrison et al*.*, 1998) essential for creating inclusive organisations.

Thus, while legislative policies may ensure representation and the right mix of employees, but do not guarantee employees’ sense of belonging, membership of the system, and full engagement in the workplace (Kitchen, Williams, and Gallina, 2015) evolving from relationships at multicultural level, imperative in building skills of appreciating one another from cross-boundary cultures. Kitchen et al. (2015) found an association between individuals’ sense of belonging and their health and social well-being that depends on social unity skills and intercultural relationship skills (Kitchen et al., [2015](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4546026/#CR16); Shields, [2008](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4546026/#CR23); Choenarom, Williams, and Hagerty, [2005](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4546026/#CR3)). Thus asserting that absence of sense of belonging and social well-being may affect an individual’s ‘value in life’ and ‘copying mechanisms’, further affecting individual’s motivation, health and happiness.

Dass and Parker (1999) argue that there is no single best way to manage integration of workforce diversity, but that most workplaces depend on the degree of pressure for diversity, the type of diversity in question, and managerial attitudes.

Sense of membership in a social group for most individuals is determined by their social identity, which plays a part in forming their self-concept. According to Harrison et al. (1998), social identity dynamics are created when demographic and attitudinal diversity affects the individual’s or group’s social integration. Bernstein et al. (2013) and Davidson and James (2007) state that social integration is a process through which newcomers, minorities and a diverse workforce are integrated into the social structures of the host workplace. This integration is hindered by challenges in developing interpersonal relationships within culturally diverse groups owing to fear of bias and being judged and stereotyped. Ely, Meyerson and Davidson (2006) name these challenges ‘stereotype threats’. The emotional commitment of employees to the workplace and the actions that employees take to ensure the organisation’s success, are good signifiers of sustainability for any company (Tenerife and Galingan, 2018; Jones, 2010).

Inclusion is measured on the basis of employees’ self-evaluation of their influence on decision making, their access to sensitive work information and their job security (age, race and sex) (Pelled et al.,1999). In South Africa inclusion, membership, engagement, equality, and participation of employees (Dobusch, 2014), is determined by employees social and cultural identity and thus employees sense of efficacy, belonging and value in the workplace, which is flawed for many in the country’s workplaces. Besides, lack of awareness and/or stereotyping by majority employees are also the possible causes for deficient inclusiveness (Dobusch, 2014).

Currently, fighting on several fronts in terms of economic, sociocultural and political challenges, South African leaders are struggling to remain abreast of priorities. Creating transformative organizations is achievable, but creating inclusive organizations is challenging. Individuals from multicultural backgrounds in the country, are trying to find ways of coexisting in non-hostile and non-combatant ways (Bernstein et al., 2013). Multicultural workplaces require more innovative actions such as deep social diversity etiquettes (Harrison et al., 1998), intercultural learning (Ely and Thomas, 2001), and the skills to capitalise on cultural differences. Thus while evidence shows the value of corporate equality, diversity and inclusion perspective that has embarked on new paradigm in the country’s workplaces, with more and more organisations participating in equality and diversity training however, everyone is not involved or committed. Most corporate leaders resent and resist either being forced to comply with legislation and or do not ascribe to transformation of the country and significance of the cause.

**UNDERSTANDING WHY SOUTH AFRICAN COMPANIES CHOOSE TO COMPLY WITH BROAD-BASED BLACK ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT (B-BBEE)**

The Broad-based black economic empowerment (B-BBEE) Act as a policy and strategy is associated with the theory of social justice (Pike et al., 2018) and was introduced by the South African government to correct past inequalities, by substantially increasing the number of black business owners and controlling new and existing small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by increasing the number of black executives in senior positions, and increasing their income levels within qualifying B-BBEE companies (Pike et al., 2018; Department of Trade and Industry, 2016).

Therefore, through B-BBEE, the South African government prompts all qualifying companies to comply with legislation, and provides support only to compliant companies by modifying the B-BBEE legislation to become investor-friendly (Chingwaru, 2014). Thus the B-BBEE strategy management not only promotes the success rate of SMEs, but it also enhances investment in black ownership and control (Steyn, 2015).

Pike et al. (2018) and Oosthuizen and Naidoo (2010) are of the opinion that B-BBEE compliance has both advantages and disadvantages for all SMEs: financial gains are an advantage, but administrative obstacles are a shortcoming. Moreover, support to small businesses has not been adequate, hence they are not progressing (Benjamin, 2014; Luiz and Gaspari, 2007).

Implementing an equitable society is a massive endeavor. Corporate organizations have so far made progress in areas such as supplier development and procurement. For a number of organizations it is easier to achieve the diversity goals of numbers at junior and middle management levels. However, achieving diversity goals at senior and executive management levels and at shareholder and ownership levels is a struggle for many (Mtongana, 2017). Most business leaders feel liable to transform their businesses in terms of representation and to create inclusive organizational cultures, but many fail to achieve the latter. Most workplaces do not use mechanisms – other than legislation and the B-BBEE strategy – to manage the social integration processes that leads to employees’ sense of membership, belonging, engagement and participation – which would, according to Bernstein et al. (2015), involve a variety of approaches at the organizational, group and individual level.

South African organisations that are most likely to cooperate with B-BBEE transformation are the large multinational corporates which can afford the cost of employing, training and developing the previously disadvantaged workforce. The Information Technology (IT) and telecommunications firms are dependent on government licensing and regulations, which can fail in the absence of compliance. Thus the business impetus to transform cannot afford to be ignored.

Moreover, the strategy is driven by several needs such as nature of the business, e.g. liquor and mining industries have to be compliant, as they supply to government and public sectors. Since, they do not qualify for an official declaration, they have to complete a full formal audit. The EME (exempt micro enterprise) businesses below Rand 10 mil, can ensure a compliance certificate and get exempted from rating. Fifty one percent to hundred percent black owned QSE (Qualifying small enterprises) between R10 mil to R50 mil, can only get exemption from compliance, by acquiring a compliance certificate. Virtually 50% Black Owned QSEs cannot use declaration, therefore have to essentially go through a formal rating process.

The second in the list of likely compliers are medium-sized organisations, such as technology-based small and medium-sized enterprises that can provide a platform for growth. They are obliged to transform despite their struggle to implement best practices, to avoid government penalties for non-compliance. The penalties can be anywhere between R1.5 million and up to 10% of annual turnover (Business Tech, 2017).

Least likely to comply with B-BBEE transformation are smaller companies which are in survival mode. Sometimes, they comply out of fear of penalties, which can range from no government support to no business partnerships with government. Given this, certain companies still choose not to comply with the B-BBEE codes, as they resist the strategy. They either do not supply to the government or do not need to provide a compliance certificate to the client. While certain companies favour completing structural alterations before being audited, others are unable to meet the requirements due to budget constraints or oversight of initiative implementation.

Subsequently, the B-BBEE credentials of potential suppliers are used by many companies, they promote and publicise their ranking through B-BBEE status. Some businesses work through ethics and high moral values, hence they do it to correct the inequalities placed through apartheid, and thus comply with legislation. Consequently, to a large extend all state, public and private business enterprise in business with public or government are obligatory to comply. Often these equality compliance strategies turn into challenges for South African organisations.

**BIAS RESISTANCE AND INCLUSION**

Hewstone, Rubin, and Willis (2002) reviewed extensive literature on bias and its effect on in-groups and out-groups in organizations, and have effectively linked social bias with social identity and social membership. Thus when evaluating workgroups and team contributions in building community, social capital and trust (Putnam, 2000), and interethnic friendships (Briggs, 2007), there is always uncertainty. Diversity in organizational structures and hierarchies has traditionally influenced outcomes such as turnover and performance (Milliken and Martins, 1996) and in contemporary societies it is often found to inhibit rather than promote solidarity and social capital (Bradshaw and Fredette, 2012; Putnam, 2000; Siciliano, 1996). Herring (2009) found that in interrelationship conflict and social exclusion, diversity can become damaging to the productivity of the workforce, even though research has demonstrated that racial and gender diversity is associated with increased sales revenue, more customers, greater market share, and greater relative profits (Herring, 2009). Diversity can also become damaging to the organizations, when individuals with lack of skills and qualification are employed due to government legislation of affirmative action and quota.

Thus, accomplishing constructive diversity performance outcomes is intricate, as sometimes it is bias that cause’s diversity to bring more relational conflicts.

South African organizational leaders sometimes become oblivious due to bias, and lose faith in the advantages of their diverse workforce. Organisational leaders in South Africa are struggling to find common ground within cultural, social, ethnic and class differences. They need the skills and mechanisms to channel their efforts in the right direction, through a deeper understanding of intercultural learning (Ely and Thomas, 2001).

Often bias is at unconscious level and leaders are unaware of it, however it’s enough to create obstacles that inhibit equality, diversity and inclusivity mechanisms to channel freely. South African organisations are losing opportunities on various grounds such as: cost to the business due to abstaining from utilizing effective diverse talent pool, not being able to show the capability to make ethical decisions regarding inclusion of all and transformation of the nation, and losing out on tapping into new markets.

Leaders are unaware of the subtle bias as it is often at the unconscious level, and essentially occurs when individuals with natural tendencies gravitate towards those similar, or alike, to them. These subtle and unconscious biases have been functioning against the equality, diversity and inclusivity goals. It is further affecting the insights, sensitivity and awareness of the managers and leaders regarding skills, capability and insights of the diverse individuals, thus affecting decisions regarding recruiting and hiring, career and promotional aspects and talent management in South African workplaces.

South African organisations and society at large are continually seeking ways to build on solid social capital and social structures to connect diverse individuals and groups. The aim is to form bonds that produce cross-cultural trust, learning, comfort and skills (Bernstein et al., 2015). However, in building inclusive organisations, South African leaders are intensely focusing on building mechanisms to achieve quota numbers and representation, while embracing a vision of becoming learning organisations and enablers of best practices through social justice, where the contributions of all people are valued in the mainstream workplace. They need to persevere these goals of building inclusive organisations through cultural assimilation of employees, to which bias often becomes a threat, hence they need to develop self-awareness. They need to crystalize the meaning of inclusion by appreciating, acknowledging and utilizing the differences amongst individuals and groups within workplaces and society at large.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In this article I explored the nature and characteristics of the inclusive organisation concerning the equality and diversity agenda. I discuss resistance to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion from a transdisciplinary perspective, by examining the manifestation of resistance, beyond various levels of theory and practise to understand the term ‘inclusive organisations’ and how subtle and unconscious bias get translated into resistance in playing against building inclusivity in country’s workplaces. I attempted to analyse the dynamics of such work environments in South Africa.

My research concentrated and explored the established measurable indicators of inclusion and covered potentially inclusive practices. I acknowledge that while a consent on the identity of inclusion as a construct and its theoretical underpinnings has not been achieved yet, existing research indicates that inclusion is a relational construct rather than a conception of social reality. Hence, inclusion refers to process, context, history, individual views and perceptions and strategic goals.

Furthermore, I examined ethical conduct of leadership, managerial style and effective diversity and inclusivity practices within South African organisations. For corporate leaders, the challenge of focusing on individuals depends on changing mind-sets, abandoning established habits and developing useful strategies and perspectives for more authentic engagement. Perhaps cultivating the trends of mindfulness, self-awareness and sensitivity towards diversity might help.

Organisations in this country need to be attentive of the policies and practices that drive the equality and empowerment of all. Managers need to understand intercultural learnings and essentially commit to develop the skills to capitalise on cultural differences. They should gain a clearer understanding of how people perceive inclusion and what meaning they attach to feeling included, as well as whether they feel part of the critical organisational processes and feel confident in participating in and influencing decision-making processes.

South African organisational leaders have learned to recognise opportunities constituted by space for interaction, communication and decision-making by utilising the potential of diversity, however, they have to learn to practise equality and inclusion through these opportunities.

Diversity denotes a workforce representation of different communities, cultures, races and gender groups, and other previously disadvantaged individuals; and inclusion implies the notions of value, respect, obligation, acceptance, giving credit, and full utilisation of people. For this reason organisations must learn to essentially present inclusion and diversity management as morally ‘praiseworthy’ and ‘good’ organisational practice.

**RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

**LIMITATIONS:**

Even though this article explored and identified ‘unique’ and ‘sensitive’ characteristics of the equality, diversity and inclusivity concepts and mechanisms, it is a conceptual article and could have added more significance with the empirical approach, using data and a survey method. A survey would have provided more insights into the issues raised. The empirical research might have clarified and highlighted the challenges and resistance in the form of human behaviour, actions, emotional and psychological mind-sets of the managers and leaders.

While this study has raised awareness and alerted managers and leaders about sensitive and deeper level psychological issues existing at unconscious mind-set, resisting them from embracing diversity, the study has not provided tools to practical implications for managers and leaders to manage equality and inclusion, as the authors presumes that the leaders will have to reflect and explore their own personal strengths to deal with the equality and diversity issues.

**IMPLICATIONS:**

Future research can examine more deeply, the psychological constructs through an empirical methodology, to arrive at more concrete and tangible solutions to some of the leadership issues and provide lessons and tools for managers and leaders to work with and to develop sensitivity, awareness, empathy and emotional intelligence to comprehend bias in self and accept diversity as a competitive advantage. Learn to develop and empower diverse individuals and groups, instead of blaming and disciplining them for lack of skills, qualification and performance.

**Originality/value –** The South African scenario of inclusion is ‘unique’, as due to being resistant and biased, its leaders are oblivious to some of the global trends regarding diversity and inclusivity practises. The fear is that they might lose the battle of equality and empowerment of all. This conceptual study, aims to alert and guide the leaders to move beyond managerialism and diversity practices of focussing on numbers and representation to a more balanced approach to integration, inclusion and empowerment.

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