**Title- Bridging Borders: Exploring Immigrant Employees' Perspectives on Organizational Inclusion.**

Immigrants are of great importance for the global economy. With the migration rates rising constantly and individuals moving away from their households for better education or lifestyle, there is an anticipated increase in diversity in the workforce. According to World Migration Report 2021 by the United Nations, the number of international immigrants as a percentage of the world population has increased steadily in the last 50 years. The policy changes during the Trump administration in the USA and “Brexit” in Europe, has caused immigration to become a political tool for governments to use according to their own convenience (Dwertmann and Kunze, 2020). While immigrant employees bring multi-cultural experiences, better connections for global markets and improved productivity (Jaumotte, Koloskova and Saxena, 2016) to the table, we can see increasing friction lately from political leaders and policy makers leading to an uneasy environment for immigrants to exist and grow (Harrison, Harrison, and Shaffer, 2019). Apart from this, immigrant employees face a range of other issues. Salaff, Greve and Ping, (2002) highlighted instances in Canada where the education qualifications of Chinese migrants were disregarded on account being foreign. The chances of getting an interview reduce significantly by having a different accent or name that does not sound native (Booth, Leigh and Varganova, 2011). It was also observed in many European countries that over one out of three capable candidates that had immigrant background were wrongfully ignored from initial stages of the recruitment process (Syed, 2008). Exploitation of immigrant employees by way of poor working conditions under the pretext of providing local experience by firms has also been noted (Kosny, Santos and Reid, 2016).

A recent study has revealed that over 2 out of 5 people of colour face racism at their workplaces in the UK (Nabbi and Cooban, 2022). With changes in employee demographics in the form of different kinds of nationalities, languages, ideologies, religious beliefs, etc it has become crucial for employers to understand and embrace the importance of equity, diversity, and inclusion at workplace (Gill, McNally, and Berman, 2018). While there are studies conducted by Doz and Hong (2013), Mazur (2014), Zimmermann A (2022), and many others on organizations that are striving to implement Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) policies continuously and effectively, there is less research on the point of view of immigrant employees and their stance on the importance of diversity and inclusion. Given the lack of research on EDI impacting immigrant employees, the slow progress of diversity in organizations, and rise in the number of immigrants globally every year, it is crucial to validate the opinions and address the concerns of immigrant employees. Given that Gen-Z is now entering the workforce, it is also crucial to understand how they function because Gen-Z is different from their older peers in a way that they want to bring transformation to systems that do not help them grow. They aspire for an environment that is a lot more inclusive and strive to give everyone a chance to embrace themselves truly. According to Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell (2019), Gen-Z graduates intended to strongly influence and add value to their future workplaces. Gen-Z employees are very aware of the realities around them (Mineo, 2022) and are a lot more comfortable to take on bigger risks and tasks if they feel like the organization promotes a culture of being ok to not always succeed (Schroth 2019). These findings show that the needs and requirements of Gen-Z employees differ from that of their older colleagues highlighting the demand for policies and practices that empowers them.

In order to voice their point of view, this paper aims to understand immigrant employees’ perception towards inclusiveness of the organizations they are working at. Our research tried to understand factors that influence immigrant employees' decisions to apply for jobs and remain engaged with the organizations. Second, we look at their expectations and concerns when it comes to EDI practices and their workplaces. Lastly, we attempt to gauge if their willingness of being assimilated to the host country influences their perception of inclusion at work. The study was conducted on older Gen-Z and young Millennials that fall into the 20–30-year-old age bracket working in the UK. Qualitative research and the primary data was used in this study by arranging one on one semi structured interviews with seven immigrant employees from India, Ecuador, and Bangladesh. One-on-one semi structured interview being a conversational technique helped gauge in depth insights from the respondents. The sample was also selected keeping in mind the age group and type of organization (SME) they worked at. The age of the participants was between 20-30 years and all of them worked in organizations that consisted of not more than 250 employees. We intend to gauge the level of importance of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion to young immigrant employees and the factors that would help them grow at work.

The results of the study could be divided into three categories- the immigrant employees’ preference for job selection, importance of diversity in companies and expectations of workplaces. The findings also help us better learn of the workplace and social assimilation of immigrant employees into the dominant culture. We also attempted to find out the existence and possible impact of EDI policies in SME firms and observe the lack of it in most cases. Lastly, we also shed some light on Gen-Z as the newest members of the workforce and their experiences and expectations of workplaces.

Firstly, our research discovered that when it comes to young immigrant employees, the most important factor while applying at their current workplace was the need for professional growth. This factor also corroborates with the existing literature where Maloni, Hiatt and Campbell (2019) deduce that Gen-Z employees have a strong desire to add value to their workplace. We can confirm the same for Gen-Z immigrant employees who want to be an asset for the organizations they work at along with the desire to grow and excel professionally. Along with this, we also understand that young immigrant employees attempt to gauge any signs of judgement, prejudice, or bias during the recruitment process. This helps them assess the workplace culture that is reflected in the hiring stage. Another factor that came out to be as important for immigrant employees while searching for jobs was the need for better social ties and connections as they would prefer to work in a diverse team. Immigrant employees perceive having a strong workplace social network as being important to their professional aspirations as they desired better social networks with natives of the foreign country as well as people from their home country in order to help them grow professionally and develop their skills. Last but not least, we also find out that while a visa sponsorship is not the most important factor while seeking employment, many young immigrant employees think it is crucial in order to live in the UK for a prolonged period of time.

Second, we find that while the presence of EDI policies was not the most important consideration for immigrant employees when looking for jobs, having diversity in teams and an inclusive workplace was extremely necessary for personal wellbeing, individual growth, and opportunity to network. They do seek organizations that treat them with the equal amount of respect and importance as the native employees and it is crucial for them to feel like they belong in their teams and to be viewed as an equal, given the expertise they bring along with them to the table. Inclusion is important to immigrant employees in action rather than words as they would prefer having initiatives from their managers that positively impacts them professionally and personally instead of having policies on paper that might not be implemented well. For example, one of the participants organizations allowing her to take her paid leaves altogether, in order to visit her home country for over a month is the kind of policy that immigrants need which are suited to their requirements. We also do not find any support for discrimination at workplace as highlighted in the literature by Udah et al. (2019), Carangio et al, (2021), Zhan and Zhou (2020), however this could be due to the fact that the participants mostly (most of them had peers of their age) worked with colleagues in the 20-30 year old demographic and as highlighted by Mineo (2022), Gen-Z in the workforce is a lot more empathetic than their older counterparts such as Gen-X and Boomers. We also understand that although many SME firms lack policies or initiatives aimed at equity, diversity, and inclusion, their mindfulness to the immigrant employee’ situation and effort to be sensitive towards their wellbeing is what makes a difference to them. We could also establish from our findings that having an environment of inclusivity in the organization and a feeling of belongingness with the colleagues are the main reasons that would encourage older Gen-Z and young Millennial immigrant employees to continue working at any workplace.

Third, we also found that although there was a feeling of gratitude in the minds of the participants for being able to work in their preferred domain, having better and structured policies aimed at smoothening the onboarding and welcoming process could help them transition easily into the role. It can be noted that the lack of such policies could be because the workplaces of the participants were small or medium sized. As many SME firms are not well structured, it may be difficult for them to implement diversity and inclusion policies specifically focused on immigrant employees. According to Lai, Shankar and Khalema (2017), optimal information sharing, appreciation of diverse cultures, and shared behaviour of sensitivity are very significant for immigrant employees at workplaces in Canada. Our findings show a similar trend for immigrant employees working in SMEs in the UK as they are already willing to do their best at work, and a little help from managers and colleagues could help with their performance and productivity. There is also a need for being sensitive to the requirements of immigrant employees as their personal circumstances are very different from the native employees which may sometimes negatively impact their performance and productivity. Helping employees with their wellbeing and realising that the wellbeing needs of immigrant employees are not the same as their colleagues who have lived in the UK for a very long time could help bridge this gap and create an environment of inclusiveness to foster growth.

We could also conclude that there is an underlined expectation of immigrant employees to try to get assimilated into the dominant culture. This is something that was observed in the existing literature; and our research also reveals the willingness of 20–30-year-old immigrant employees to social integration. However, our findings show that the participants are only willing to assimilate themselves into the foreign culture provided they are treated with respect and can voice their opinions whenever required. It is evident from the results that older Gen-Z and younger Millennials do not have a problem with being assimilated into the social setting they are working with, provided they can maintain their distinct point of view. They are also willing to learn and grow with diversity to help them pick and choose attributes they can use to develop their personal and professional lives. Although being a part of a team and a sense of community is important to them, personal aspirations and individual preferences overpower the idea of fitting into any norm.

From the existing literature it is evident that immigrant employees are a crucial part of any economy especially for the western countries. While they move abroad for either a better lifestyle, improved employment opportunities or higher quality education, immigrants are constantly trying to fit in along with the attempt to maintain their distinct identity and tackle the consequences of deep-rooted prejudice in the society. Our findings show that workplaces can make a significant impact on immigrant employees, personally as well as professionally by being receptive to their needs, creating a sense of inclusiveness and providing resources to help them work with their full potential. Lastly, we also observed that there is still a very pressing requirement for SME firms to work on their EDI policies. Through the research we also learn that most firms did not have any policies that mandated diversity or catered to inclusive practices. It is imperative that SME firms focus on implementing policies aimed towards creating a diverse, equitable and inclusive work environment given the number of young immigrant employees entering the workforce every year specifically in small and medium sized firms.

There are some strong implications observed in our findings for managers and employers working with 20–30-year-old immigrant employees in the form of their job preferences, work expectations and need for diversity. The research also has a few limitations such that it only included participants who are natives to countries in south Asia and south America. Thus, one extension of this research could be to understand perspectives of immigrants from other countries as the perception of any individual is influenced by their beliefs, attitudes, cultures etc. The study also does not take into consideration low skilled immigrant employees and focuses on highly skilled immigrants with a graduate or postgraduate education qualification. This could lead to further research on young low skilled immigrants, their concerns and expectations from workplaces and experiences working with natives.

**A brief autobiographical note about the author-**

As an immigrant myself, I have always been deeply interested in the topic of inclusion, particularly in the workplace. My journey from India to the United Kingdon has exposed me to various challenges and opportunities, shaping my perspective on the importance of creating inclusive environments for individuals from diverse backgrounds. My academic pursuits led me to pursue an Msc in International Management from Loughborough University, London. During my studies, I engaged in various research projects, where I honed my skills in critical analysis, problem-solving, and scientific inquiry. These experiences solidified my commitment to do research in the domain of EDI.

Throughout my academic and professional career, I have been committed to understanding the experiences of immigrant employees and advocating for their inclusion in the workforce. My research interests have focused on exploring the barriers faced by immigrant workers, as well as identifying strategies and policies that promote their integration and success within organizations. Drawing upon my own experiences, I am dedicated to contributing to the body of knowledge on this critical topic. Through my research, I aim to not only advance theoretical understanding but also inform practical interventions that foster a culture of inclusion and harness the talents and perspectives of immigrant employees for organizational success.

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