Corporate Age Discrimination and Inclusion as a Mitigating Measure: *A Sri Lankan Perspective*

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Abstract

Age discrimination and its harmful effects are widespread. However, the corporate sector's contribution in causing it has received neither due attention nor appropriate counteraction. While practising age discrimination, organisations strive to curb the same as they are challenged by an acute lack of knowledge and expertise. Discrimination/Inclusion predominantly deals with race, colour, religion, etc., ignoring age discrimination/ age inclusion. Further, the constructs of Discrimination/ Inclusion have no dedicated theories, nor have been adequately studied, tested, or measured in the corporate context. This presents a grave theoretical and empirical void which the current study aims to address. Given the study's exploratory nature, qualitative research under the Interpretivist paradigm employing in-depth one-on-one interviews of 20 employees and two focus groups of six employees each was adopted. Based on thematic analysis of data, the study found three key findings (Annexure I & II); *one*, organisations generate age discrimination through age-based bias, age-prototyping and institutionalisation of discriminative practices. *Two*, under the individual factor, work-related generational competency/ incompetency creates age discrimination. *Finally*, inclusion is experienced through feelings of "uniqueness and belongingness" and "conducive climate and supportive infrastructure" that supports performance and wellbeing.

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INTRODUCTION AND STUDY OBJECTIVES

As age discrimination is rampant globally, the corporate sector contributes to the phenomenon by employing diverse generational cohorts (Gursoy et al., 2013; Lancaster et al., 2002; SHRM, 2019; Zemke et al., 2000). The corporate sector generates Age discrimination through a variety of individual and organisational level factors. On a personal level, it breeds multiple forms of bias, and on an organisational level, institutionalised bias and unfair resource allocation targeting the different generational cohorts give birth to Age discrimination (Gursoy et al., 2013; Lancaster et al., 2002; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; North & Fiske, 2016; Perry et al., 1996; Perry & Finkelstein, 1999; SHRM, 2019; Zemke et al., 2000). Although Inclusion has been accepted as the remedy for all forms of discrimination, Age inclusion is grossly neglected in the organisational context as inconsistencies, ambiguity, and lack of tools for implementation and measurement exist (Jansen et al., 2014; Shore et al., 2011). While organisations battle to eradicate Age discrimination, on the other hand, they strive to create Age inclusive workplaces since a generationally diverse workforce is recognised as a competitive advantage to be nurtured and built (Baran & Kłos, 2014). However, practicing managers and organisations are challenged with the critical dearth of knowledge and expertise to address the vital issues (Gordon, 2018).

The literature reviewed on the constructs of Diversity, Discrimination, and Inclusion primarily deal with protected features such as ethnicity, race, colour, language, religion, etc., leaving Age discrimination and the remedy Age inclusion neglected (Rudolph et al., 2020; Shore et al., 2011). Further, as age changes with time, it also interacts with all other contextual elements along the timeline, making Age discrimination dynamic (Finkelstein et al., 2015; Fisher et al., 2017). Age discrimination also does not have a specific underpinning theory but is generally explained through social theories. Similarly, Inclusion does not have a universally agreed-upon definition or an underpinning theory (Jansen et al., 2014; Shore et al., 2011). Therefore, the current study addresses a multifaceted, dynamic theoretical void in the Age discrimination/Age inclusion literature.

A significant fact revealed by the literature is that 'discrimination and inclusion' are both social concerns and are primarily studied under the social context, leaving the organisational context of Age discrimination and Age Inclusion critically neglected. Thus, the existing scarce theories and knowledge do not adequately cover the phenomena, nor have they been tested in an organisational context (Fisher et al., 2017; Jansen et al., 2011; Shore et al., 2011). Further, the few existing studies are predominantly on the Western world, ignoring non-Western contexts. Therefore, the lacuna in the literature related to Age discrimination and Inclusion prompts the research questions: 'How does Age discrimination manifest within organisations? and 'How can inclusion be experienced and

its role within an age-diverse workforce in organisations?'

Attempting to find answers to the raised research questions, the study suggests a conceptual model depicting the corporate, individual, and organisational level factors producing age discrimination and Inclusion experienced through individual and organisational factors and the moderating role of Inclusion. In the corporate context, on an individual level, within an age-diverse workforce, age bias is generated due to multiple Age cohorts possessing unique and distinct characteristics coming together in the workplace supported by the Generational Theories (Kupperschmidt, 2000; Mannheim, 1952) and the Social Theories (Tajfel & Turner, 1985; Turner, 1987). Age-Prototype-Matching is another individual level stereotype producing Age discrimination (Perry et al., 1996; Perry & Finkelstein, 1999). On an organisational Level, Age discrimination is generated by Institutionalised Bias (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and Unfair Resource Allocation (North & Fiske, 2016). Inclusion is conceptualised to have the individual components, 'Uniqueness and Belongingness' supported by The Optimal Distinct Theory (ODT) (Brewer, 1991). As for the organisational factors of Inclusion, 'Conducive Climate' is supported by Diversity Climate (Cox, 1994) and Age Diversity Climate (Boehm et al., 2014) and 'Supportive Infrastructure' supported by the works of (Miller, 1998; Roberson, 2006). Employees' experiencing Uniqueness and Belonging(ness) in a Conducive Climate for Age inclusion, complete with Supportive Infrastructure, mitigate Age discrimination and negatively impact the relationships between Age discrimination and the elements producing it.

This study contributes to the existing meagre literature on Age discrimination and Age inclusion in multiple ways. Firstly, the study reveals the contribution and role of the corporate sector in producing Age discrimination and the remedy of creating Age inclusive workplaces. Secondly, the study sheds light on the manifestation of Age discrimination in the corporate context through individual and organisational factors. Thirdly, the study conceptualizes Inclusion to contain individual and organisational components and supports the conceptualisation by bringing three theories together and empirically validating the same, successfully addressing Inclusion in an organisational context. Finally, the study provides insights to practicing managers and directions for future research on preventing Age discrimination and building Age inclusive workplaces.

The rest of this paper is structured to explain the literature reviewed on Age discrimination and Inclusion, bringing Age Diversity Climate (Boehm et al., 2014), Diversity Climate (Cox, 1994), and the Optimal Distinct Theory (ODT) (Brewer, 1991) to explore and bring forth new insights. The next segment explains the concept indicator model with the propositions and the supporting literature. After that, the methodology, data analysis, and discussion of findings are described in detail. The paper concludes with the theoretical

contribution, managerial implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Age Discrimination

Due to global aging, as youth entering the labour force decreases, forcing the elderly to continue to work beyond retirement age. This extends the upper age limit of retirement, accommodating several generations in the workplace, resulting in an age-diverse workforce. An age-diverse workforce gives rise to age biases, prejudices, and stereotypes that lead to Age discriminatory outcomes in critical domains such as selection and recruitment, training and development performance appraisal, career opportunities, and disciplinary actions and penalties (Shore et al., 2003; Finkelstein et al., 2015; Lawrence, 1990; Maurer & Rafuse, 2001; Shore et al., 2003).

Reviewed literature on Age discrimination takes a two-way course of Ageism and Age discrimination. According to Butler (1968), Ageism is the systematic stereotyping / discrimination against older people referring to their old Age, similar to discrimination against sex or race. Since "Ageism" generally focuses on the discrimination of older people, discrimination of younger people is studied under the term 'Reverse ageism.' According to Corell et al. (2010), discrimination is negative behaviours targeted at individuals/groups, although they have not committed any offense deserving same, solely they belong to the persecuted group. As per Dovidio et al. (2010) discrimination is explained as a behaviour that creates, sustains, and reinforces disadvantage for certain individuals/groups at the expense of certain other individuals/ groups. McConachie (2014) states that treating people differently harms their fundamental dignity as human beings. The construct 'Discrimination' does not have a dedicated theory and is generally explained by Social Theories such as the Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1985) and the Self-Categorisation Theory (SCT) (Turner et al., 1987).

Bias

Bias is the subjective perceptions that are often baseless and is the common terminology that encompasses prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination. While stereotypes form the cognitive bias, prejudice is the emotional or attitudinal outcome, and discrimination is the behavioural outcome (Fiske, 2000, 2004; Nelson, 2009). Prejudice is how people perceive, feel about, evaluate, and their intended (negative) behaviour towards a person /group. Prejudice is defined by Allport (1954) as an antipathy based on faulty and inflexible generalisation. Stereotypes influence how individuals perceive and process information (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996) and relate to group members who are transmitted through socialisation, media, language, and discourse. Stereotypes are also known to ascribe attributes and behaviours and create emotional responses such as anger, disgust, etc., that harm people and their groups,

systematically influencing perceptions, interpretations, and judgments promoting discrimination.

As per this study, individuals of a particular age group may be shaped by a confluence of political-economic-socio-cultural-historical events of that era, influencing them to have similar beliefs, values, attitudes, perceptions, inclinations, characteristics, and behaviours that are both unique and distinct that set each age group apart from one another. An Age diverse workforce would consist of several such different age groups coming together in the workplace, creating age-based bias, friction, and conflicts leading to Age discrimination, the study's dependent variable. Thus, the study presents the first proposition

P1: An Age diverse workforce produces Age discrimination

Age-Prototype-Matching

Age-Prototype-Matching can be explained as assigning an age expectation or tagging an age label to the job position (Perry et al., 1996; Perry & Finkelstein, 1999). It is also a form of stereotyping bias as Age becomes the criteria for selection over competency and performance. Thus, Age-Prototype-Matching produces Age discrimination. According to previous studies, Age-Prototype-Matching (Perry et al., 1996; Perry & Finkelstein, 1999) occurs mainly during the process of hiring and promotions when employee age is compared and validated against a prototype that has been pre-determined based on the

stereotyping of certain jobs considered to be for older employees and others for younger employees. This form of stereotyping is commonly found in job advertisements suggesting age ranges for jobs. Common corporate practices include withheld promotions and rejection at job interviews where senior management and consultative positions carried age expectations for older employees. At the same time, executive roles were reserved for the younger candidates. Thus, the study presents the second proposition

P2: Age-Prototype-Matching produces Age discrimination

Institutionalized Bias

As the organisational factor of age discrimination, 'Institutionalised Bias' is described as the organisations' response to the influence and coercion of the biased norms and practices of the industry, the society, and the labour laws by adapting discriminative practices. The Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) supports this phenomenon as it explains that institutions confirm a sector-specific homogenisation for reputation and survival by adopting collective norms and practices of the industry/ environment. Data analysed confirms age discriminative practices, pointing to the compulsory retirement law, the unjust industry practices such as stipulated years of experience, Age –prototype-matching, and non-competency-based evaluations that create and sustain age discrimination. Thus, the study presents the third proposition

P3: Institutionalized Bias produces Age discrimination

Unfair Allocation of Resources

An age-diverse workforce produces resource-based tensions (North & Fiske 2013;2016), which gives rise to the notion of 'allocation of resources within them measured by 'Return on Investment (ROI). Thus, organisations attempt to maximise resource allocation and ROI in terms of employing and investing in employees based on economic considerations such as cost and ROI connecting to age preferences rather than competency and performance (Abrams et al., 2016; Kooji & Zacher, 2016; Maurer & Rafuse, 2001). North and Fiske (2013;2016) explain the resource tension as being a three-fold scenario involving 'Succession, Consumption and Identity' emphasizing that older employees are viewed as blocking the younger from enjoying the resources and opportunities, being the burden consuming resources, as well as, prescriptive-stereotyped, deserving to be omitted unjustly. A common practice is that the younger employees are given the opportunity while missing older workers closer to the retirement age from training and development programs. Thus, the study presents the fourth proposition.

P4: Unfair Resource Allocation produces Age discrimination

Inclusion

The literature presents Inclusion as a multifaceted concept and has given it multiple definitions. This study endorses the definition based on the fairness standpoint, which defines Inclusion as impartiality, fairness, justice, and full contribution at the individual/group levels ensuring members of diverse have equal access to opportunities, decision-making, and authority and are actively sought after for their differences (Holvino et al., 2004). The extent to which employees are enabled to participate and contribute and remove obstacles to the full participation and contribution of employees in organisations is another view held by Miller (1998) and Roberson (2006). This study conceptualises Inclusion to consist of individual components, 'Uniqueness and Belongingness' and organisational components 'Conducive Climate and Supportive Infrastructure.' The individual component 'Uniqueness and Belongingness' are derived from Optimal Distinct Theory (ODT) (Brewer, 1991), which holds that there are two opposing human drives: validation (similarity) to others and Uniqueness (individuality). According to ODT, individuals seek to find a state of equilibrium between the two conflicting needs as they opt to retain an optimal level of Uniqueness and Inclusion in their groups. The organisational component 'Conducive Climate' is derived from synthesising Diversity Climate (Cox, 1994) and Age Diversity Climate (Boehm et al., 2014). While Diversity Climate stresses the individual and intergroup bias/conflict-free environment supported by appropriate policies practices and structural processes, Age Diversity Climate emphasises employees' collective perception of fair and non-discriminatory policies, practices,

procedures and rewards towards all age groups. 'Supportive Infrastructure' is derived from the definition of Miller (1998) and Roberson (2006), who emphasise infrastructure that facilitates the fullest contribution of all employees.

The researchers argue that Inclusion is the remedy for all forms of bias and discrimination. The sustaining foundation of a fair and non-discriminatory environment has a moderating effect on the relationship between the independent variables producing Age discrimination. Further, Inclusion has a direct causal relationship with Age discrimination as well for the said reasons. Thus, the study presents the fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth propositions.

P 5: I*nclusion inversely moderates the relationship between Bias and Age discrimination*

P 6: Inclusion inversely moderates the relationship between Age-Prototype-Matching and Age discrimination

P 7: Inclusion inversely moderates the relationship between Institutionalised Bias and Age discrimination

P 8: Inclusion inversely moderates the relationship between Unfair Resource Allocation and Age discrimination

*P 9: Inclusion inversely affects Age discrimina*tion

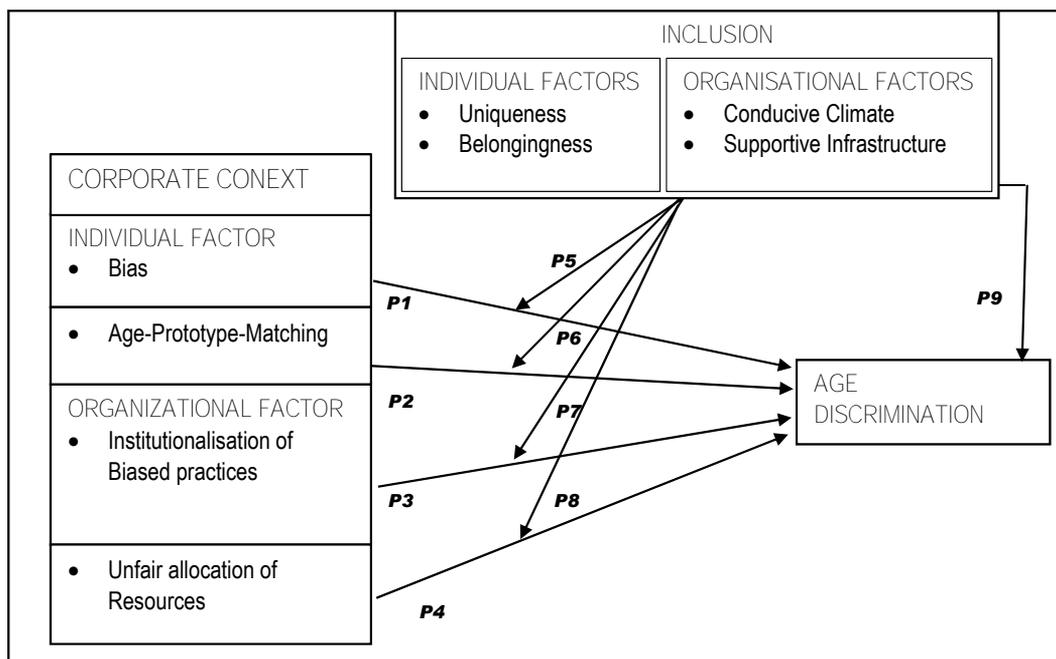Accordingly, the Concept Indicator Model is presented in accordance with the arguments raised.

Fig 1: *Concept Indicator Model*

RESEARCH METHODS

Given the study's exploratory nature, as per Saunders et al. (2019), a qualitative methodology under an Interpretivist philosophy was adopted. Thus, interactive-in-depth one-on-one interviews and focus groups captured people's lived experiences, interpretations, and perceptions (Creswell & Clarke, 2007). An Inductive Approach to theory development through interpreting raw data captured from people was adopted as per Saunders et al. (2019). An interview guide was developed and utilized for reference, ordaining consistency, coverage, direction, and focus. A total of 44 individuals performing managerial work in the private sector were chosen as the sample for the interactive-in-depth-one-on-one-interviews and the focus groups

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis was carried out as per the seven steps prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2013). An excel worksheet was used in compiling the transcript data into initial coding, secondary coding, categories, and themes linking the constructs. A 'complete coding' method was adopted, resulting in 368 initial codes collated to arrive at 57 categories that formed the nine themes (Annexure III). The themes were based on the 'Central Organising Concept' as it links the themes to the codes anchoring them in the raw data. Trustworthiness of the study is ensured by adhering to the criteria prescribed by scholars (Emden et al., 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010). Triangulation is facilitated

by checking the key outcomes to be in accordance with multiple participants as well as conducting two focus groups of 6 individuals to ensure compliance with Denzin (2008) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011). In a study under an Interpretivist philosophy, triangulation adds depth, breadth, complexity, and richness to the research as per scholars Denzin and Lincoln. Interviews were also audio recorded using two devices to capture and retain the originality of the content as per the actual words and language used by participants.

The study aims to explore the 'Corporate Contribution' towards the manifestation of Age discrimination and mitigating Inclusive measures. The study was conducted in response to the critical dual challenge faced by managers and organisations, firstly, in battling increasing Age discrimination and secondly, in building Age inclusive organisations that nurture an age-diverse workforce, identified as a competitive advantage. Existing literature on Diversity, Discrimination, and Inclusion predominantly cover protected attributes such as race, colour, language, religion, etc., neglecting Age discrimination and Age inclusion. Age discrimination/ inclusion does not have underpinning theories devoted to them, creating a noticeable theoretical void. Further, as Discrimination and Inclusion are both social concerns, studies conducted in the organisational context are scarce as no theory has been developed, implemented, tested, nor measured in an organisational context. Hence, in response to the multifaceted void in the literature and the lack of expertise

in organisations, this qualitative study was conducted guided by Interpretivist and an Inductive approach to theory development. Data were captured through interactive-in-depth-one-on-one interviews and focus groups.

As per this study (Annexure I & II), age diversity is identified, acknowledged, and confirmed by employees in organisations. Findings on the relationship Bias – Age discrimination revealed that in an organisational context, Age-based bias is mainly due to work-related-competency/incompetency of the age-diverse workforce that leads to Age discrimination (Baily, 2009; Gursoy et al., 2013). Findings on the Age-Prototype-Matching – Age discrimination relationship reveal that this type of Age discrimination mainly occurs in recruitment and promotions affecting the younger workers and recruitment and training opportunities affecting the older workers (Perry et al., 1996; Perry & Finkelstein, 1999). The findings also confirm that the identified diverse characteristics are unique and consistent with the literature that holds that diverse generations possess diverse sets of skills (Kupperschmidt, 2000). The study also confirms that the 'Institutionalised Bias' produced Age discrimination, especially in the training and development domain discriminating the older workers, which is also confirmed by the literature (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). 'Unfair Allocation of Resources' produced Age discrimination is revealed to mainly affect the older workers nearing the retirement ceiling as they are rejected as not financially viable or worthy of

development, which is also supported by the literature (Abrams et al., 2016; Kooji & Zacher, 2016; Maurer & Rafuse, 2001; North & Fiske, 2013)

Considering the impact of Inclusion, the findings reveal that experiencing uniqueness-an individual factor of Inclusion - mainly focus on opportunities for employees' contribution and the necessity to be a part of strategic decision making and other critical organisational processes, support for the personal achievement such as educational, professional and career development, financial goals as well as appreciation and recognition for work done and rewards for it. The findings confirm that experiencing Uniqueness is an element of employees' experience of Inclusion. As per the findings, 'Belongingness' is also a part of experiencing Inclusion. Findings reveal that 'Belongingness' is expressed as the feeling of being an integral part of the present and future of the organisation, being cared for, experiencing organisational assistance in achieving life goals and dreams of self and family, experiencing long-serving and job/financial security and personal wellbeing. Taking a holistic view, the individual factors of Inclusion, Uniqueness, and Belongingness are established by the findings and held by the literature (Brewer, 1991; Shore et al., 2011). Under the organisational factor 'Conducive Climate,' findings reveal that respect, a non-threatening environment, fairness, and non-discriminatory actions, and all such elements that protect the emotional and physical wellbeing are included and held by the literature (Ferdman & Davidson, 2002; Ferdman &

Deane, 2013; Holvino et al., 2004). Findings also reveal the need for a supportive performance environment with 'Supportive Infrastructure,' enabling them to perform their job role and contribute fully. Scholarly works support the above findings that removing all obstacles is necessary to allow full participation and contribution (Roberson, 2006); similarly, everyone needs to participate and contribute fully (Miller, 1998) to create and sustain Inclusion.

Thus, as per the role of Inclusion, firstly, the findings reveal that Inclusion prevents/ eliminates Age-based bias as Uniqueness and Belongingness are two features that create feelings of Inclusion for all irrespective of their age. Previous studies confirm the above findings (Brewer, 1991; Shore et al., 2011). Secondly, through a Conducive Climate and Supportive Infrastructure, Inclusion is experienced through a fair and non-discriminative policy, practices, and procedures through a supportive organisational environment for performance and wellbeing. The literature supports this (Boehm et al., 2014; Cox, 1994; Ferdman & Davidson, 2002; Ferdman & Deane, 2013; Holvino et al., 2004; Miller, 1998; Roberson, 2006). Therefore, the findings confirm that Inclusion inversely impacts (moderating factor) the relationship between Bias, Age-prototype-Matching, Institutional Bias, Unfair Resource Allocation, and Age discrimination. The study also confirms that inclusion, taken as a whole, has an inverse causal relationship with Age discrimination as it directly acts against/ mitigates bias.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This section presents the conclusion, theoretical contribution, and managerial implications as well as limitations of the study and directions for future research.

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore the corporate sector's contribution to age discrimination and the mitigation through age inclusion in response to the identified theoretical and empirical gaps. The objectives identified by the study were the individual, and organisational factors of Age discrimination and Inclusion and the role of Inclusion within an Age diversified workforce. The study's objectives were successfully met as the study answered the research questions raised and addressed the knowledge gap. In summary, findings reveal that age-based-work-related competencies produce age discrimination within MGW, in an organizational context. Further, this impacts individual performance and achieving goals, affecting colleagues' output and the organization. As per Inclusion, findings revealed that, from an individual's point, Uniqueness and Belongingness are connected to acceptance, engagement in the organisation's key processes and its strategic goals, and being recognised, appreciated, and rewarded for it. A conducive climate is experienced in an organizational context through a supportive environment for performance and employee wellbeing enabled by fair and non-discriminative policies, practices, procedures, and

systems. In addition, it is found that Age-prototype-Matching, 'Institutionalised bias actions' and 'Non-supportive/Inadequate Infrastructure' 'Unfair allocation of resources' producing Age discrimination. All findings are duly supported by the literature as well.

Theoretical Contribution

This study firstly contributes to the meagre literature on Age discrimination and Age inclusion in view of age diversity in the organisational setting. The study also brings together the individual factors 'uniqueness' and 'belongingness' as per the Optimal Distinct Theory (ODT), (Brewer, 1991) and the organisational factor 'Conducive Climate' supported by Diversity Climate (Cox, 1994) and Age Diversity Climate (Boehm et al., 2014), and 'Supportive Infrastructure' (Roberson, 2006; Miller, 1998) to address Age inclusion successfully in an organisational context. This forms the second key theoretical contribution of the study.

Managerial Implications

The study discusses three managerial implications in accordance with the findings. Firstly, awareness of desired/undesirable behaviours is to be created. Then the desired/expected behaviours are to be internalised from the initial stage of recruitment. Employees are also recommended to be sensitised as to the conflicting age issues. It is also the Organisations' responsibility to internalise and reinforce correct values through training programs. Managers could also benchmark the

best practices of inclusive workplaces worldwide. Secondly, the lack of work-related competencies causes the study highlighted bias and age discrimination. Cross-mentoring, being successfully administered, can curb issues linked to work-related-generational incompetency. Finally, a conducive organisational climate with a supportive infrastructure that nurtures performance and well-being is crucial for employees and organisations alike. Such a climate consists of infrastructure with systems, processes, procedures, and supporting policies and practices. It is noteworthy that technology is identified as a critical factor facilitating the same.

Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

The researcher emphasises the time constrain as the major limitation and recommends longitudinal studies to bring forth valuable insights on changes/impact of time on the inclusive efforts. Longitudinal studies on the effect of cross-mentoring are recommended as well.

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Conflict of interest

The author declared having no conflict of interest in the research work.

Annexure I

Summary of the data analysis for each theme

Table 1

Summary of the Interpretation of the Theme Age Diversity based Multi-generational Workforce (MGW)

Excerpts	Interpretation	Theme	Construct	Theory
"… I would say about the older generation is that their maturity counts a lot. ... in the emotional context and the organizational business decision making …in the context of relationship building… …Maturity helps in quality business decision making also." (GY-3 Yasri) "Boomer generation are experienced… …they are stubborn, do not listen to other's opinions. They are also not interested in learning… … new improvement, training &development. They are very rigid. Averse to new technology based changes… …As for Gen. Z, Not caring, not helpful, not loyal at all.. They wanted to climb the career ladder fast… … expect promotions with vehicles and grand salary packages… …they are techno-distracted more than being tech-smart. They don't follow or try to understand the requirements, they don't concentrate, don't follow instructions. Careless and give no attention to detail. Just try to finish the job and leave. Don't take the responsibility or care to help out the other to finish job and meet deadline. They don't believe in working hard, responsible or accountable. In case of challenging hard work they just leave and hop job.(GY-2 Rangi) "Young are coming with qualifications… smart, Tech-savvy. They have skills and tech-knowledge. Are efficient."(GB-3 Renzi) "I work in a team of all ages. Boomers have experience and tacit knowledge and they expect respect. Workwise dealing with them is difficult as they are set in their ways, rigid, conservative, and averse to risk, not tech savvy and youngsters working with them get frustrated. They do not take criticism/feedback positively. Generation X are easy to work with. Team oriented, accessible, casual, easy to approach, innovative, hard dedicated workers but can be judgmental and critical of the younger people. Generation Y are flexible, tech savvy, find smart and easy ways to work, quick to understand and more global. They are aggressive and go-getters. Qualified and experienced in modern organizational practices. Generation Z is responsive, agile, smart, tech savvy, multi-tasking, advanced in communication devices, connected world-wide. They lose focus as they are tech distracted, demand personal free time to pursue other interests.' (GX-5 Prasna)	Each generation is attributed and acknowledged with positive and negative characteristics forming generational diversity. The different skill sets and experiences each generation possesses and their attitude towards work, co-worker, communication and relationships and attitude towards the organization is confirmed. Taken together these form the generational competency/incompetency that has positive/negative impact on individuals work performance, Colleagues, Teams and organization.	Age diversity based multi-generational workforce	Multi-generational workforce (MGW)	Generational Theory

Table 2

Summary of Interpretation of Theme Bias as an Individual Factor Promoting Age Discrimination within MGW

Excerpts	Interpretation	Theme	Construct	Theory
"I won't recruit the old over 50 people. "Can't teach an old monkey, new tricks" (GB-1 Thelope) "…workwise dealing with Boomers is difficult as they are set in their ways, rigid, conservative, and averse to risk, not tech savvy and youngsters working with them get frustrated. They do not take criticism/feedback positively. Generation X are easy to work with. Team oriented, accessible, casual, easy to approach, innovative, hard dedicated workers. Generation Y are flexible, tech savvy, find smart and easy ways to work, quick to understand and more global. They are aggressive and go-getters. Qualified and experienced in modern organizational practices. Generation Z is responsive, agile, smart, tech savvy, multi-tasking… …, connected world-wide. They lose focus as they are tech distracted, demand personal free time to pursue other interests.'(GX-5 Prasna) "I had four individuals and two positions I wanted to promote the best who was a Gen. Z, but the company had policy based on seniority and experience. So I had to tell him that he was not promoted. While two of the average performing staff were promoted just because they were considered matured. I felt bad couldn't break company protocol set by the organization." (GX-2 Geony) "As a recruitment consultant, I don't short list older generations generally for executive jobs. They don't fit in and are not adoptable. For management positions I don't consider younger people. I know it is discrimination but it is looked at as a criteria by the organization. May be its bias.." (GX-3 Subaji)	The hostile perception and harsh wording and manner in which the negative characteristics are expressed reveal strong bias. Descriptions of the impact of negative characteristics such as 'no focus due to tech distraction or 'rigid, not tech-savvy and thereby co-younger workers getting frustrated' etc…reveal hostile sentiments such as disapproval, anger, frustration, etc….On the whole, perceived negative attitudes (rigidity, careless, irresponsible) work ethics (loyal, disloyal, job-hopping, self-centered) and behavioral outcomes (inability to use technology, no focus due to tech-distraction, change resistant, change embracing, risk-averse or risk taking) together with the impact on work and colleagues (slow. stagnation, not paying attention to detail) confirm bias such as prejudice and stereotype. Convergence of all the said elements could lead to age discrimination based on bias.	Bias as an individual factor promoting age discrimination within MGW	Age discrimination	Social Identity Theory (SIT), Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) Theory of Fault-lines

Table 3

Summary of Interpretation of Theme Age-Prototype-Matching as an Individual Factor Promoting Age Discrimination within a MGW

Excerpts	Interpretation	Theme	Construct	Theory
"As a recruitment consultant, I don't short list older generations generally for executive jobs. They don't fit in and are not adoptable. For management positions I don't consider younger people. I know it is discrimination but it is looked at as a criteria by the organization. May be bias but…".(GX-3 Subaji) "When my boss left they didn't give me the promotion although I was familiar with the work. They took another person and said I was too young, not mature enough for the job."(GX-5 Prasna) "I have experienced discrimination when I (Gen, Y) performed consistently well above my targets continuously compared to 3 others (Gen X)… … when the promotions were given they got higher positions than me. Management while appreciating / recognizing my performance told I need more number of years of experience to be in that position." (GY-3 Yasri)	The data reveals that selection is not competency-based or any other performance-based criteria but simply because of the hiring individual's bias regarding the age expectation of the jobs. The individuals' who hire demonstrate preconditioned and set age expectations for the jobs and candidates who do not 'fit in' with this expected/set Age-Prototype/profiles are rejected. It is also evident that individuals, irrespective of their age groups and the organizations, are practicing Age-Prototype-Matching stereotypes as a normalized routine practice. Data sets forth Age-Prototype-Matching stereotypes as a compelling agent, as the younger and older generations both perceive 'job-age fit' as a requirement, rather than a discriminatory practice	Age-Prototype-Matching stereotypes as an individual factor promoting age discrimination within a MGW	Age discrimination	Social Identity Theory (SIT), Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) Theory of Faultlines

Table 4

Summary of Interpretation of Theme Institutionalized Age Discrimination as an Organizational Factor Promoting Age Discrimination

Excerpts	Interpretation	Theme	Construct	Theory
"We have a compulsory retirement age of 60yrs." "When selecting For T&D employees below 40 are considered. Others are not. This is so as the organization feels it's a waste of money as older people are at the end of their career nearing retirement.(GX-1 Geony)	Firstly, it is evident that the age discriminative policies and practices based on the retirement ceiling prescribed by the law is being used against employees in the form of forced/ compulsory retirement.	Organizational factors of age discrimination- Institutionalized age discrimination.	Age discrimination	Institutional Theory
"People close to retirement age are not given training because organization considers training as an investment and that will be lost on an old person. We have a retirement ceiling of 55 yrs."(GX-5 Prasna)	Secondly, the data reveals several sub-level age discriminative policies and practices crafted that are a by-product of the compulsory retirement policy, such as the T&D policy where employees over 40 are excluded from T&D activities.			
"Yes the young have to get qualified and have adequate experience to climb the ladder. It is not discrimination it's the requirement of the position according to the organizational hierarchical system. Even in the case of innovative ideas, all happen within the job framework and they are appreciated within the team/section. But have to wait to fulfill all requirements to rise up to the next level."	Thirdly, the justification for such policies are expressed in a manner that is not discriminative, but requirement of the job, organization, or industry confirms the heavy societal influence, which holds Age discriminative practices as customary and routine by normalizing age discrimination.			
"As for age discrimination, the hierarchical set up is such that being a knowledge based management consultancy organization experience is valued. Therefore, older people are privileged, have control over resources, system and information and select the best opportunities since they are influential/ powerful. The younger people don't have much say. That is how this field is." (GY-1 Rangi)				

Table 5

Summary of Interpretation of Theme 'Non-supportive/Inadequate Infrastructure' as an Organizational Factor Promoting Age Discrimination

Extracts	Interpretation	Theme	Construct	Theory
"We are given the resources and latest systems, processes and methodologies to work with… … very technology driven automated environment that uses robotics, etc… We are also trained to work on them…updating our knowledge exposure and skill sets…information is shared on the latest best-practices of the industry and plan to implement them… …As we are KPI driven and performance is rewarded, appreciated, recognized accordingly and hence everything is transparent, free and fair. No partiality, favoritism, biases or discrimination. It is a place where everyone is treated equally and fairly." (GY-1 Kris) "As for Dialog there is a culture of appreciation, it is wholly technology driven, target based performance evaluation, fully automated set-up. They also have an open culture with flexibility in work schedules, job rotation, job enrichment, and so many other options and choices offered to suite employees… …The HR plays a big role in formulating policies and practices that are employee friendly… … It is happy, dynamic high-tech driven organization. I love it here. You are treated well and in a fair manner." (GY-3 Yasri) "We are a heavily systems driven organization. Standards are set for all work and employee, production and other domains of organization. We are KPI driven and our performance is captured, monitored and evaluated. No room for discrimination in such a thoroughly automated system. Our training needs are also captured and training provided for all. No Age discrimination or discrimination/ unfair treatment of any sort." (GY-5 Suji)	Insights from the excerpts firstly reveal the inadequacy in the organizational processes, which diminishes performance and productivity. Secondly, the culture of non-supportiveness is unfair, unethical and intimidating, and threat is revealed. Thirdly, the participant elaborates the cumulative result in the form of a harmful organizational climate that makes employees feel "cold. No human affection or goodness" and the subsequent employee behavioural outcome of employee turnover and damaged organizational reputation. On the contrary, infrastructure such as automated technology driven, KPI driven, etc… infrastructures and systems such as communication systems and HR systems ensure fair, transparent environments where bias and discrimination (age discrimination too) do not/ cannot exist.	'Non-supportive/ Inadequate Infra-structure' as an Organizational Factor Promoting Age Discrimina-tion	Age dis-crimina-tion	Age diver-sity Climate Diversity Climate

Table 6

Summary of Interpretation of Theme 'Unfair Allocation of Resources' as an Organizational Factor Promoting Age Discrimination

Extracts	Interpretation	Theme	Construct	Theory
"We have a compulsory retirement age of 60yrs." "When selecting For T&D employees below 40 are considered. Others are not. This is so as the organization feels it's a waste of money as older people are at the end of their career nearing retirement. (GX-1 Geony)"	The excerpts reveal that financial considerations such as investment in employee training and development activities are allocated unfairly towards the younger people as older people are rejected as not worthy/waste investing.	Unfair Allocation of Resources as an Organizational Factor Promoting Age Discrimination	Age discrimination	Age diversity Climate Diversity Climate
"People close to retirement age are not given training because organization considers training as an investment and that will be lost on an old person. We have a retirement ceiling of 55 years." (GX-5 Prasna)	Secondly, organizational resources such as opportunities for progress, information and positions of power is unfairly held within the seniors in hierarchical organizations discriminating against the young. In such a case, the older individuals are looked upon as a stumbling block consuming resources (unfairly allocating resources for themselves) and blocking the younger generations from climbing the ladder. This deprives the more youthful generations of financial gains, career advancement, achievement, recognition, and rewards.			
"As for age discrimination, the hierarchical set up is such that being a knowledge based management consultancy organization experience is valued. Therefore, senior partners are privileged, have control over resources, system and information and select the best opportunities since they are influential/powerful. The younger people don't have much say. That is how this field is." (GY-1 Rangi)				

Table 7

Summary of Interpretation of Theme 'Uniqueness' as an Individual Factor Promoting Inclusion

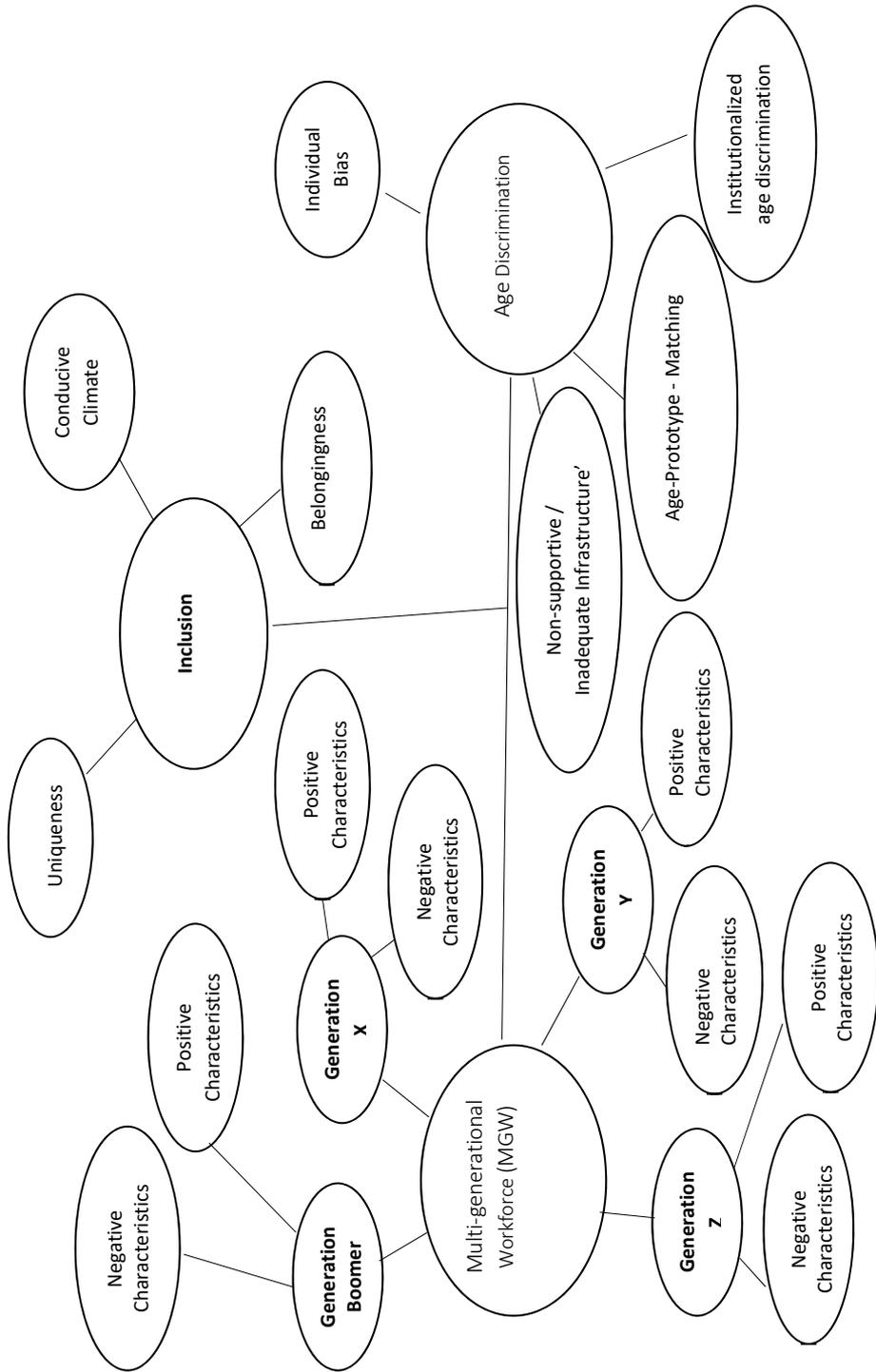| Excerpts	Interpretation	Theme	Construct	Theory
"We have a portal to post our accomplishments, interests, client appreciations and other academic qualifications/training developments. HR keeps track of those and when a vacancy comes first gives it to the existing staff who are eligible"… "That's the best thing always they give several options to choose so everyone's needs are accommodated. Facilitates our studies, interests, hobbies, relaxation…etc… Job rotation happens bringing new learning" (GZ-3 Githi) "They develop self and others.. Help people to fulfill their dreams. Several have built homes, bought vehicles, and have expensive holidays. They have achieved financial prosperity. We are very competitive and won the regional prize. Won the 'Million Dollar Round Table' competition 7 times. We are committed to win again. Closely work as a team. We get recognition and support from HQ. I was given a latest hybrid car. Children are studying overseas. I am grateful to the company. I am motivated to win the Best Branch trophy this year." (GX-1 Sitara)	Feelings of uniqueness are identified as being recognized and organization providing systems to capture individual achievements. Flexible work arrangements to accommodate needs, facilitate education and personal interests, and develop opportunities are all identified as promoting unique experiences. Organization facilitating the achievement of personal/family goals and fulfilment of dreams and recognition/appreciation of career achievement is identified as the provision of uniqueness.	Uniqueness as an individual factor promoting inclusion	Inclusion	Optimal Distinct Theory (ODT)

Table 8.

Summary of Interpretation of Theme 'Belongingness' as an Individual Factor Promoting Inclusion

Excerpts	Interpretation	Theme	Construct	Theory
"Recognition/appreciation gives sense of being useful, contributing to the company…To have belongingness is freedom to choose, make decisions, to implement and to perform meaningfully." (GZ-4 Kavi) Managers take prompt action when issues are reported and solve them. That makes people safe and secured. They know they are heard, and taken care of. They are confident to come and tell problems… … Even personal problems are sorted for them and needs taken care of. We attend family events of each other and are like family. Often we share food…… It gives a sense of family and belongingness… … maintaining personal touch and showing empathy, compassion and love. That holds people. That's the crux of belongingness. (GB-4 Magert)	Organization is required to facilitate the free environment to make choices and contribute in a meaningful manner, which gives a sense of belongingness. Another view of caring, home/family-like environment with personal touch/connections ensuring feelings of 'taken care of/ we are there' brings forth feelings of belongingness. On the whole, being supportive in achieving personal goals and satisfying personal needs/ wants is recognized as caring (note they comprise the uniqueness factor as well). Organizational actions that support personal growth, development, achievement of individual needs/wants is perceived as concern for wellbeing, which is strongly connected with belongingness	Belongingness as an individual factor promoting inclusion	Inclusion	ODT

Table 9.

Summary of Interpretation of Theme 'Conducive Climate' as an Organizational Factor Promoting Inclusion

Excerpts	Interpretation	Theme	Construct	Theory
"Current organization (WNS) is a wonderful place to work for. Here too there are different age groups. But the very old are not rigid and distant and uncaring at all. They are up to date in technology and modern standards. They help us, understand our problems. Listen to us and together we arrive at solutions. They say we are creative, they encourage and appreciate our work. Here it's an international culture we have, in consistent with our parent company in the UK. Open, transparent, free and people are happy." (GZ-3 Githi) "Culture is the base for inclusion to happen. Taken care of feeling is comforting. Events to reinforce inclusion such as frequent gatherings, movie days, lunches, picnics, B'day parties, etc… Appropriate systems in place such as, compensation, learning & development, evaluations, targets and goals, etc. Transparency and communication, etc… all strengthen free and fair culture. On an individual basis I am recognized for my output and given the autonomy of working online from home. It makes me feel good. Working from home facilitates personal /family life needs and I feel grateful to the company. I also see the caring and understanding ways in which my needs were accommodated. If not for this arrangement I would have left, losing my job. They kept me demonstrating that I am valued and wanted. It's a touching feeling of belongingness." (GX-3 Subji	Organizational environmental elements such as open culture, systems, standards, technology, transparency, free and fair policies and practices and management elements such as communication, problem solving, decision making and personal elements such as recognition, appreciation, rewards, flexibility to accommodate personal/family wants, socialization and emotional elements such as taken care of, comfort, being valued, being wanted, happiness and wellbeing are all constituents of the organization climate.	Conducive Climate as an organizational factor promoting inclusion	Inclusion	Diversity Climate Age Diversity Climate

Annexure II
Thematic Map

Annexure III
Summary of Coding to Form Themes

Code	Category	Theme	Construct
Positive/negative traits and behaviours, Generational Diversity, Young, Old, Age groups, Generations	Positive and Negative generational characteristics	Age diversity based Multi-generational workforce (MGW)	MGW
Denial of Promotions/Training & Development opportunities/ Mundane tasks/ No Knowledge sharing/ Not respected/ Ignored/ omitted from all decision making/ No information sharing/ Incivility	Prejudice , Stereotyping and discrimination of young and Old	Bias as an individual factor of Age discrimination	Age discrimination
Maturity, seniority requirement for promotions/ Prescribed number of years of service/ Matured look or personality/ Need for no. of years of experience/ Older employees not suitable for executive jobs/ younger employees not suitable for senior Management jobs/ IT, marketing, Sales jobs for the young	Creating age expectations for jobs / Ignoring/Omitting Performance criteria / Perceptions of age-based job stereotyping in job profiling / Individual screening based on age stereotypes	Age-Prototype-Matching as an individual factor of Age discrimination.	Age discrimination
Mandatory retirement age/ Retirement ceiling/ Not hiring certain age groups/ Age discriminative policies, practices and protocols/ Absence of policies& practices/ No training & development for older people/ not included in organizations future strategic plans/ Organizations protocol on promoting seniors/ there are more senior s expecting the promotion/ Industry standards and practices incorporated in organization	State induced Age discriminative systems / Organizational profit/performance induced age discriminative systems / Industry induced age discriminative systems	Institutionalized Age discrimination as an organizational factor of Age discrimination	Age discrimination
Not KPI driven/ processes and systems not automated/ No QC systems/ No HRM systems/ Non-high-tech environment/ No performance management systems/ No monitoring systems / Not digitalized/ not transparent/ No feedback sharing/ No performance support/ Malpractices/ Abuses/ Mismanagement/ Politics/ Polarization/ threatened/Confusion/ Fear/ Victimization	Non-performance supportive/ hard to work / Poor, Non-efficient systems/ processes & procedures / No Information sharing/ confusion/ corruption/ Politics/ Threat & Fear / Not ethical/ transparent	Non supportive/ Inadequate infrastructure, as an organizational factor of Age discrimination	Age discrimination

Code	Category	Theme	Construct
Everyone retires at 60/ Over 40 not considered/ Others are not/ Profitable/ Not feasible / Non- viable investment/ Waste / Waste on time effort and money/ Investment yielding productivity/ Value addition / younger/ Energetic/ Learn fast / Interested / uninterested / below 40yrs considered/ nearing retirement age not considered/ T& D effort lost on old/ powerful/ influential/ this is how this field is/	Over 40 not considered for T&D and grooming as the ROI is less/short lived	"Unfair Resource Allocation" as an organizational factor of Age discrimination	Age discrimination
	Hierarchical organization structures support the older to continue in positions, enjoy financial and other resources.		
	Experience, power and influential older workers prevent the younger from rising up in the corporate ladder		
Requirement to climb the corporate ladder/ hierarchical set up cannot be ignored/ privileged due to experience influence and power/ the young don't have a say	The younger don't have access to information, resources and financial career prospects due to the old holding on to them.		
Valued/ Rewarded/ Value addition/ Contribution/ Recognition/ Cross-mentoring/ Passing on tacit knowledge/ opportunity to contribute ideas/suggestions/ Be part of organizations strategic planning/ Be part of organizations future/ Personal touch/ Safe/ Secure/ personal needs taken care of/ counselling/ Individualistic unique approach/ Creative new ideas recognized & rewarded/ Innovation appreciated/ rewarded/ Freedom.	Support for individual career/life goals	"Uniqueness" as an individual factor of Inclusion	Inclusion
	Unique talents/contributions encourage		
	Recognition/ Appreciation/ Rewards		
	Be part of organization's future		
	Freedom of expression/ Voice heard		
Valued and feel wanted/ Involved in the organizational strategic core processes/ Personal needs/ Wellbeing/ Second home/ Long serving/ Grow with the organization/	Support for individual career / life achievements/ Fulfillment of dreams	"Belongingness" as an individual factor of Inclusion	Inclusion
Facilitate /encourage achievement of personal goals in life/ Facilitate fulfillment of dreams/	Contribution & Unique talents/ Recognition/ Appreciation/ Rewards		
Personal development and advancement/ T&D and exposure/ Feelings of safety and security/	Be part of organization's future/ Valued/ wanted/ Taken care of/ Friends/ trust/		
Friends/ people who could be trusted/ Caring/ concerned / help in times of need	Help/ Concern for Wellbeing		
KPI driven/ Automation of systems/ Quality Control Systems/ HRM systems/ Technology driven/ Transparency/ Conducive environment	Employee friendly performance support Systems/ Automation/ QC/ HRM systems/ Technology driven/	Conducive Climate as an organizational factor promoting inclusive climate	Inclusion
Environment of respect / No favoritism/ bias/ discrimination/ Equality/ Ethics/Human Values/ Age-friendly/ Free and fair environment/ Open Culture/ Org. structure/Management style/ Flexible work arrangements/rewards/HR friendly systems	Human/employee friendly environment		
	Flexible work/time schedule/ location/ mode of work arrangement		
Exposure and growth opportunities	Age friendly culture (first name)		