



Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Accessibility (DEIBA) in the MICE Industry in Thailand: A Situational Analysis

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Abstract

This paper examines the vital role of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) and currently expands to include belonging and accessibility (DEIBA) within the meetings, incentives, conferences, and events (MICE) industry. As global awareness of inclusivity grows, the MICE sector serves as both a beacon of progress and a reflection of ongoing challenges. The industry has made strides in implementing non-discrimination policies and DEIBA strategies; however, significant gaps remain in achieving true inclusivity, particularly concerning leadership opportunities and accessibility for individuals with disabilities. The MICE industry is urged to foster environments that welcome diverse perspectives to enhance creativity and innovation. Despite these efforts, gender disparities and the impact of anti-DEIBA sentiments present significant hurdles. This paper underscores the importance of expanding DEIBA initiatives to include comprehensive accessibility strategies, as demonstrated by successful legislative examples and inclusive hiring practices. In summary, human dignity and rights represent the most effective approach in today's MICE industry. Through an analysis of current practices and industry insights, this paper advocates for a continuous commitment to DEIBA to drive the MICE industry toward a more inclusive and equitable future.

Keywords: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, Accessibility (DEIBA), MICE Industry, Situational Analysis, Thailand

1. Introduction

For clarity, diversity encompasses a wide range of individual differences—both visible (race, gender, and age) and invisible (including perspectives, experiences)—that enrich the workplace. Equity involves ensuring fair access to opportunities for everyone while recognising and addressing systemic barriers that disadvantage certain groups. Inclusion extends beyond mere representation; it focuses on creating an environment where every individual feel valued, empowered, and actively involved in decision-making (Page, 2023). Awareness of inclusivity is increasing, particularly in the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions) industry, where global events aim to foster welcoming environments for all, this approach enhances creativity and problem-solving by embracing diverse perspectives (Liberty International Tourism Group, 2023). The MICE sector is also encouraged to expand its diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts to include accessibility for individuals with disabilities. Experts at the 62nd ICCA Congress emphasized the necessity of inclusive strategies, illustrated by examples from Wales and industry leaders like Simon Heartfield, which demonstrate the positive impacts of inclusive practices (Puvaneswary, 2023). DEI is also fundamental to a progressive society, promoting mutual respect and understanding while unlocking greater innovation and decision-making potential (Maroof & Kapate, 2023).

Most organisations in the Asia-Pacific region prioritize risk management through non-discrimination policies and some DEI strategies, yet opportunities remain, especially in leadership roles and talent retention (Korn Ferry, 2024). Despite advancements, DEI initiatives often face criticism, with some perceiving them as a form of reverse discrimination, leading to reductions in such programs. An event manager, Chase



Brunson, exemplifies a shift in mindset by seeking employers committed to strong DEI efforts, highlighting the importance of authenticity in enhancing workplace performance (Wagner, 2024). The MICE industry is undergoing a transformation driven by social justice movements, demographic shifts, globalisation, and a growing understanding of diversity's power to boost innovation and engagement. Consumers are increasingly favouring brands that reflect their values, demanding inclusivity in all aspects of business. Diverse teams promote creativity, facilitate well-rounded decision-making, and better cater to diverse customer bases. To create truly inclusive events, the MICE industry must prioritise diversity by implementing strategies such as establishing diversity goals, broadening outreach, offering a variety of event formats, providing diversity training, and tracking progress through data analysis. Diversity is no longer optional; it is essential for the industry's future growth and its influence on other sectors (Meetingselect, n.d.).

In the UK, MICE professionals value accessibility and diversity in event planning but still face challenges like marginalisation based on age, gender, or race, highlighting the need for continued improvements (Dashper & Finkel, 2020). A gender equality report by IBTM reveals significant disparities in leadership roles, with women being underrepresented despite constituting the majority of the workforce. This underscores the need for more profound systemic changes (Rokou, 2022). Meanwhile, Melissa Cherry from Miles Partnership pointed out that anti-DEI laws have hampered engagement in such initiatives, despite evidence indicating that DEI does not negatively impact business. Surveys have revealed significant concerns regarding racial and gender equality impacting meeting location decisions, reinforcing the ongoing relevance of DEI (Palmer, 2024). So, does IBTM Events (2024) reporting and expanding that, a Diversity Alliance report disclosed a significant gap between the UK events industry's professed commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging, and Accessibility (DEIBA) and employees' lived experiences. While many companies claim to value DEIBA, 59% of employees disagree, and 40% doubt their leaders' sincerity. The report also highlights three key paradoxes: DEIBA initiatives do not consistently enhance employee retention; DEIBA training is often ineffective; and leaders' perceptions of DEIBA's impact differ significantly from employees. The report identifies four pillars for success: a genuine commitment to workplace change, which includes active listening and ongoing education; creating equal opportunities through inclusive hiring practices; fostering a sense of belonging by addressing bias and broadening decision-making; and eliminating barriers and biases through sustained, well-resourced DEIBA initiatives rather than just one-off training sessions. The report emphasizes the crucial role of people managers and the necessity for a consistent, long-term commitment to genuinely create diverse and inclusive workplaces, thereby unlocking innovation and productivity.

According to Fletcher (2024), however, the events industry faces several paradoxes in its DEIBA efforts. DEIBA initiatives show mixed results in employee retention. While some employees (37%) are motivated to stay because of these initiatives, a significant portion (32%) report no impact. Despite high attendance rates (64%), DEIBA training is deemed ineffective by many (54%), likely due to irrelevant content. A major disconnect exists between leadership's perception of their DEIBA support (47% claim frequent support) and employee sentiment (59% feel their organisation does not value DEIBA and 40% doubting leadership's sincerity). Middle management further feels excluded from decision-making processes. These inconsistencies underscore a significant gap between the organisation's stated commitment to DEIBA and the actual experiences of its employees.

To implement an event with a DEI (BA) focus, organisers should consider several key aspects throughout the planning process. This includes creating an inclusive registration system that accommodates special needs, ensuring accessible communication before and during the event, utilizing diverse visual content in promotional materials, selecting a venue that is accessible venue with inclusive facilities, offering a variety of catering options, and curating a program featuring diverse speakers while maintaining authenticity. The goal is to create a welcoming environment for all participants, regardless of their background, gender, or other distinguishing characteristics. By integrating these considerations, events can foster greater engagement,



satisfaction, and positive connections among attendees, while also demonstrating a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion. This approach not only enhances the organiser's image but also contributes to a more inclusive and impactful event experience overall (Brüser, 2024).

Unfortunately, there is limited knowledge about DEIBA, particularly within the MICE industry in Thailand. Consequently, this research aims to examine the current state of DEI and DEIBA initiatives in the MICE industry in Thailand, as well as to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with DEIBA in this sector.

Together with this, while initially focused on DEI, the Korn Ferry (2021)'s DE&I Maturity Model and Washington's (2022) framework provide a roadmap for MICE organisations to progressively integrate DEIBA principles and practices. The Korn Ferry DE&I Maturity Model offers a comprehensive framework for organisations to assess their progress in creating a truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace. Instead of simply focusing on isolated initiatives, the model adopts a holistic approach, recognising that DE&I is not a single element but a multifaceted system interwoven into various aspects of an organisation. It emphasises that successful DE&I implementation necessitates a combination of structural changes (policies, processes, systems) and behavioural shifts (mindsets, actions, culture). The model's circular design visually represents this interconnectedness, where each segment reinforces and influences the others.

The five key areas—Market Integration, Risk Management, Awareness, Operations Integration, and Talent Integration—represent crucial dimensions of DE&I. Market Integration examines how a company's commitment to DE&I is reflected in its interactions with customers, suppliers, and the broader market. This includes not only representation in marketing and advertising, but also equitable and inclusive business practices. Risk Management emphasizes the importance of identifying and addressing potential risks associated with DE&I—such as unconscious bias, discrimination, or lack of accessibility, while proactively developing strategies to mitigate these risks. Awareness encompasses the collective understanding and consciousness of DE&I issues throughout the organisation. This involves training, education, and fostering an environment that encourages open dialogue and feedback.

Operations Integration emphasises embedding DE&I principles into the daily operations of the organisation. This encompasses inclusive recruitment and promotion practices, equitable compensation and benefits, fair performance evaluations, and the establishment of a safe and respectful work environment for all. Finally, Talent Integration focuses on DE&I within talent management strategies, which include attracting, retaining, and developing a diverse talent pool, providing equitable opportunities for growth and advancement, and fostering a supportive environment where all employees can achieve their full potential. Each of these five areas is further examined through the lens of structural and behavioural dimensions, highlighting the need for both tangible changes in systems and processes and shifts in individual attitudes and behaviours.

The four maturity levels—Basic, Progressing, Advanced, and Leading Edge—provide a benchmark for organisations to evaluate their position within the model. This framework enables companies to understand their strengths and weaknesses while identifying areas that require attention. The accompanying data further illustrates the significant challenges organisations face in effectively translating good intentions into tangible results. The fact that a substantial percentage of respondents report difficulties in changing behaviours and observing improvements in key metrics, such as engagement and hiring rates of underrepresented groups. This underscores the complexity of DE&I implementation and highlights the need for a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach, as outlined by the Korn Ferry model. Thus, the model serves not only as an assessment tool but also as a roadmap for organisations committed to fostering truly inclusive and equitable work environments (Korn Ferry, 2021).

As outlined in Washington's (2022) framework, many companies adopt DEI initiatives by emulating the practices of others, such as publicly declaring strong support for people of colour or imposing widespread



DEI strategies. However, without proper preparation, these efforts often fail, leading to disillusionment and unfulfilled promises, which leaves minority groups marginalized and damage the company's reputation. For instance, many firms that hurriedly pledged funds in 2020 lacked the structure necessary to implement meaningful changes, resulting in minimal progress. However, understanding the sequential stages of DEI development can help companies focus their efforts effectively: 1) **Aware**: Companies often initiate DEI efforts after triggers like lawsuits or social events, such as George Floyd's murder, prompting introspection and a genuine desire for change. Initially, they might make public statements regarding DEI but need to prioritize honest internal assessments, particularly within leadership. 2) **Compliant**: At this stage, companies meet legal and industry diversity requirements, often viewing DEI as an obligation. Compliance can occur without a deep awareness, but advancing further requires foundational internal work. 3) **Tactical**: Companies progress to the tactical stage by moving beyond mere compliance, actively engaging in grassroots DEI efforts. This includes employee resource groups and creating guidelines for diverse perspectives. They begin cultural change through discussions on bias and inclusive decision-making. 4) **Integrated**: In this stage, a company aligns top-down and bottom-up DEI efforts, embedding DEI into its culture strategic framework. They address discrimination's impacts and can confidently state that DEI is integral to their operations. 5) **Sustainable**: When DEI is ingrained in the corporate identity, an organisation reaches the sustainable stage. At this point, DEI efforts withstand challenges such as economic fluctuations and leadership changes, and continuous improvement becomes a norm.

While distinct, these models complement one another. The Washington Model (2022) provides a broader, but a more concise, stage-based overview of developmental stages, whereas the Korn Ferry (2021)'s Maturity Model offers a detailed breakdown of the key areas within each stage. Imagine the Washington Model as an overall roadmap that guides the organisation through its journey, while the Korn Ferry Model serves a detailed map, highlighting specific landmarks and routes within each stage of the journey. By integrating both models, organisations gain a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of DE&I, allowing them to strategically plan their initiatives, track progress, and build a truly inclusive and equitable workplace. The granular detail provided by the Korn Ferry helps target specific areas for improvement within the broader framework established by the Washington Model, facilitating a more effective and targeted DE&I strategy.

Analysis of the two models revealed a three-stage process: awareness and commitment, utilization and practice, and maintenance.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- 1) To analyse the present state of DEI and DEIBA initiatives in the MICE industry in Thailand
- 2) To explore the challenges and opportunities related to DEIBA in the MICE industry in the MICE industry in Thailand

3. Materials and Methods

Social science research often struggles with true multidisciplinary. However, situational analysis, a qualitative method, offers a valuable approach, particularly within qualitative research (Kalenda, 2016). By focusing on the "situation" as the central unit of analysis, it integrates diverse empirical data, methodologies, theories, and perspectives from different disciplines. This holistic perspective, while complex, prioritises less understood aspects of the situation, yielding deeper insights and avoiding oversimplification (Huutoniemi et al., 2010; Kalenda, 2016). Although primarily qualitative and not universally applicable (Huutoniemi et al., 2010; Kalenda, 2016), situational analysis provides a richer understanding of social phenomena than



traditional grounded theory (Clarke, 2003; Nøjgaard & Bajde, 2021; Ássimos & Pinto, 2022). It facilitates more equitable social policy by prioritising individual and collective differences (Clarke, 2003; Ássimos & Pinto, 2022), and integrates diverse perspectives, including cartographic approaches and non-human actors (Nøjgaard & Bajde, 2021; Ássimos & Pinto, 2022). While strong in relational analysis, situational analysis could benefit from integrating sequential analysis techniques, such as open coding (Hitzler, 2016; Offenberger, 2023). This integration would strengthen its capacity to simultaneously analyse sequential and relational aspects, which is particularly valuable given the prominence of sequential analysis within German hermeneutical social science (Offenberger, 2023) and its use in reflexive grounded theorising and discourse analysis. The incorporation of open coding would bolster situational analysis's capacity for reflexive analysis and ultimately improve the understanding of complex social contexts (Hitzler, 2016; Offenberger, 2023).

This study focused on DEI and DEIBA in Thailand's MICE industry as its central "situation" focus and unit of analysis. An analysis of various online documents could reveal the current state of DEI and DEIBA in this sector, highlighting both its challenges and opportunities. Specifically, terms related to DEI and DEIBA in the MICE industry in Thailand were (re)searched over and over mainly using Google Search to ensure reliability and completeness for a couple of weeks. The online documents and content obtained were then analysed and reviewed.

4. Results and Discussion

This study analysed the current state of DEI and DEIBA initiatives in the MICE industry, identifying key challenges and opportunities and the details were as follows. As for the current situation of DEI and DEIBA, The Thai MICE industry had historically lacked sufficient recognition and implementation of DEI initiatives. The MICE industry showed less focus on DEI compared to the insurance industry (Jiamanukoonkit, 2023). Likewise, Bhiraj Buri Group's CEO, Pitiphatr Buri, emphasized the significance of hands-on experience in implementing inclusive practices, citing improvements in wheelchair access as an example of staff-driven change. He highlighted that accessibility extends beyond physical access to include considerations like larger signage and pet-friendly spaces. Krisanee Srisatin, managing director of Stream Events Asia, highlighted the importance of cultural sensitivity and dietary accommodations in event planning. She stressed the need for partnerships with inclusive vendors, understanding client needs, and incorporating local traditions to create genuinely welcoming and culturally rich experiences (in Somanas, 2024a). So, did Bhiraj Buri (2024) when it highlighted the statement of Pitiphatr Buri, CEO, Bhiraj Buri given in IT&CM Asia that "albeit having a little change, it is necessary so that good experiences can be built among all ... accessibility should not limit to physical accessibility. Instead, it should extend to a billboard that is big enough for the elderly's sight and a place where pets and paws can enjoy their lives. Such accessibility should likewise include a variety of perspectives presented by diverse target audiences."

A review of the study by Ampornpan (2020), Thailand went well in several dimensions, but not much in DEI. When considering another two dimensions of B-Belonging and A-Accessibility. Although A-accessibility was mentioned and appreciated to be a part in creating the MICE industry of Thailand, the meaning and understanding of the word "accessibility" was likely to be limited to physical ease and convenience of transport, i.e. commuting from one place and location to another place and location with public transports available, for instance, traveling from Thai airports to a meeting venue. This finding is supported by the study of Hemsuwan, Jaroenwisan, and Poopirakdee (2024), which highlights that Thailand excels in providing at accommodation and accessibility to meeting venues.

This study also examined the major challenges and opportunities related to fostering DEIBA in the MICE industry in Thailand. Despite growing awareness of DEIBA, its implementation remains significantly underrepresented in many Asian countries, including Thailand. As Jane Vong Holmes, Senior Manager at



GainingEdge, articulated, "DEI has been in the headlines recently due to social injustices – however, we haven't seen a real push for accessibility and support for people with disabilities. The MICE industry is at a pivotal moment where inclusivity is not just a checkbox, but a strategy that impacts the very core of our events and the communities they serve" (cited in Somanas, 2024b). In other words, the recent focus on social injustice has yet to translate into meaningful action regarding accessibility and inclusion for individuals with disabilities in the MICE industry, which is deeply concerning. The industry stands at a critical juncture where genuine inclusivity is not merely a superficial compliance measure but a fundamental strategic imperative that affects the very fabric of our events and the communities we aim to serve. We must urgently address this significant gap.

This underrepresentation could stem from multiple factors: unconscious bias fuelling discriminatory practices; a lack of diverse leadership that hinders the development of inclusive cultures; resistance to change that slows progress toward DEIBA goals; insufficient awareness and education surrounding DEIBA principles; and systemic societal inequalities that restrict opportunities for marginalised groups (Page, 2023). While the events industry showed some strides toward broader accessibility, addressing sensory, intellectual, and parental needs, for instance, as informed work from Down's Syndrome International, significant work remains to fully integrate DEIBA into the core of event planning and execution, reflecting its crucial role in creating truly inclusive and equitable experiences (Turner, 2024).

From the study conducted by Ampornpan (2020) on perceptions of Thailand as a MICE destination, generally speaking, three key findings emerged: Thailand's image is multifaceted, encompassing both general destination characteristics and MICE-specific attributes; international companies evaluate both Thailand's overall attractiveness and its MICE industry strengths; and the study compared Thai and international perspectives on the country's MICE industry.

DEI initiatives had historically received limited attention within Thailand's MICE industry. In contrast, this issue has garnered significant focus on an international and global focus. Likewise, the global MICE industry paid attention to DEI in a lesser extent, but also extended its appreciation for DEIBA. While Thailand is making efforts in DEI, it has not yet achieved the level of maturity or comprehensive implementation observed in some other countries, particularly those in the West or in more economically developed regions of Asia. Pitiphatr Buri, CEO, Bhiraj Buri Group, repeatedly, "We have to design with inclusion from the ground up, not as an afterthought. This is not just about meeting legal requirements but about truly welcoming all" (cited in Somanas, 2024b). Developing a successful DEI strategy requires a tailored approach, thus. The initial phase involves an in-depth analysis of relevant data and perspectives from those most affected, encompassing diverse age groups, ethnicities, religions, sexual orientations, and abilities (Jiamanukoonkit, 2023).

Gabrielle Austen Browne of the Diversity Alliance called the "Driving Success Through Diversity: Data Report 2024" a call to action for substantial, systemic change within the industry. She emphasized the need to move beyond superficial commitments and to take real, actionable steps that genuinely embrace diversity, empowering organisations and individuals to harness the full potential of a diverse workforce (Turner, 2024).

Sustained monitoring and proactive implementation of DEIBA principles within the MICE industry, particularly in Thailand, are critical. DEIBA is not a fleeting trend; it demands concrete action. Future research should conduct a rigorous comparative analysis of DEIBA implementation in Thailand and other Asian countries. The findings will provide essential strategic direction for strengthening the Thai MICE industry's commitment to DEIBA. The evolving global landscape, likewise, necessitates a correspondingly adaptable and comprehensive understanding of DEIBA. Additionally, it is recommended to develop specific metrics and measurement tools to evaluate DEIBA practices within the Thai context.



5. Conclusion

The DEI, expanding to DEIBA in the MICE industry in Thailand: A situational analysis research focused on analysing the current state of DEIBA initiatives and strategies in the MICE industry in Thailand. While exploring the challenges and opportunities related to DEI in the MICE industry in Thailand. A re-evaluation of existing DEI(BA) maturity models, specifically the Korn Ferry (2021) and Washington (2022) frameworks, indicates that the Thai MICE industry is currently in a nascent stage of awareness and commitment to DEIBA principles. Although there is initial recognition of the importance of DEIBA is evident, significant obstacles remain to be addressed. The superficial adoption of DEIBA initiatives is inadequate; substantial progress necessitates a multifaceted approach. This requires not only significant structural and systemic changes within organisations but also a fundamental shift in individual attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours—a key element highlighted by Korn Ferry's (2021) DE&I Maturity Model. Successfully navigating this transition demands a collaborative and sustained effort across all levels of the MICE industry, addressing both organisational policies and individual mindsets.

6. Acknowledgements

This research paper leveraged various generative AI-assisted tools to assist with summarising, paraphrasing, and rewriting, with the purposes of a more perfect language and readability and understandability. However, all content was rigorously reviewed, designed, structured, and approved by the researchers.

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