DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION (D&I) IN THE FOOD INDUSTRY IN COLOMBIA: AN EXPLORATION OF PRACTICES, ENABLERS, AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

Diversity and Inclusion practices have emerged in the corporate sector to build an inclusive workplace for marginalized groups. Often, D&I practices are associated with Human Resources (HR) policies, reasonable adjustments, diversity statements, D&I training, and partnerships to advance D&I efforts. Considering that most D&I research is conducted in the Global North, this case study aims to expand D&I literature in Global South settings. With that purpose, I explore D&I practices in the food industry in Colombia, with a focus on enablers and barriers. The study was conducted in partnership with the Colombian National Business Association – ANDI, one of the most important actors in terms of representing the private sector in the country. I conducted 17 interviews representing 14 companies. Interviewees oversaw D&I efforts, under HR and Sustainability offices.

The study findings present five enabling factors that facilitate D&I practices: institutionalizing D&I work, creating a culture of awareness, building a support network, measuring, and evaluating D&I work, and establishing partnerships. Together, the enabling factors establish a model to implement D&I practices in corporate settings. Despite efforts made to create a more inclusive workplace, evidence shows that companies face structural, cultural, and conceptual barriers that hinder the development of their D&I strategies and negatively impact marginalized populations. While most companies adopt an identity-conscious approach (as opposed to identity-blind) these strategies are mostly focused on gender equity, but categories such as race and ethnicity are not included. The study also presents evidence on the importance of certifications, rankings, and partnerships to enhance D&I strategies, as they incentivize knowledge exchange and provide practical tools.

Findings show companies are heavily influenced by Global North approaches to D&I. Practitioners acknowledged the challenge of implementing practices that seem to be disconnected from the socio-cultural aspects of Colombian society. As D&I practices are imported and adopted without a critical perspective, they fail to build a diverse and inclusive workplace that responds to all employees' needs.

To past, present, and future diversity practitioners,
We shall see a better world.

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INTRODUCTION

Demographic changes, socio-political conditions, and practitioners pressure gave birth to a set of practices aiming to transform the workplace into a more diverse and inclusive space. What we know now as Diversity practices have a long history in the United States tracing back to the Civil Rights Movement and legal mechanisms such as Affirmative Action (AA) and Equal Opportunity regulations (Nkomo et al., 2019; Kapoor, 2011). Influenced by these antecedents, the main goal of diversity practices was to increase the number of marginalized populations in the workplace (Leslie, 2019), but since its evolution, it has been coupled with other words such as inclusion, adding individuals experience and their sense of belonginess and uniqueness (Shore et al., 2011). Later on, equity was added, recognizing and rectifying past injustices (Mor Barak, 2022). Nowadays, the most common approach to Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) practices in the corporate sector is to use them as a vehicle intending to mitigate the barriers marginalized populations face to access stable jobs (often front-line workers), thus, improving their social and economic capital. Systematic exclusion based on gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, sexual orientation, physical abilities, and other categories have created barriers that make economic and social inclusion more difficult for people whose identities are far from those who are considered the dominant group in a determined context.

In practice, D&I initiatives are primarily embedded in Human Resources (HR) processes, although, other applications have been conceptualized and applied throughout the value chain, such as in procurement and in inclusive distribution. Some of the D&I practices identified in the literature are diversity statements, diversity training, targeting recruitment from marginalized groups, mentoring programs, affinity groups, flexible work policies, ensuring job security, incorporating D&I positions, establishing D&I plans, measuring D&I metrics, and setting D&I-based performance evaluations (Mundy & Seuffert, 2020; Wang & Fang, 2020; Leslie, 2019; Nishii et al., 2018; Derven, 2014; Kalev et al., 2006). D&I practices can also be found at the start of the value chain, known as Supplier Diversity initiatives, which aim to expand the number of minority-owned businesses that supply to Large Purchasing Organizations (LPO) (Blount, 2021). At the other end, we found Inclusive Distribution Networks, partnerships between larger companies and micro-businesses located at the base of the pyramid looking to reach market

segments that traditional channels do not have access to (Trujillo and Puerto, 2021). In this study, I focus on the first group of D&I practices targeting workplace transformations.

Most of the research done around D&I in the workplace comes from the Global North, and it shows that D&I outcomes are mixed and often contradictory. On one hand, research shows that companies implementing D&I initiatives increase employee engagement, employee satisfaction, enable innovation, reduce employee turnover, increase productivity and efficiencies, and reduce operational costs (Blackwell et al., 2017, Brimhall & Mor Barak, 2018; Goswami & Kishore, 2017; Ohunakin et al., 2019). However, D&I practices can also have undesirable effects, for instance, increase discrimination, decrease the performance of marginalized populations, decrease representation of minoritized groups, and decrease engagement of dominant groups (Leslie, 2019). Researchers also warn that negative effects vary across targeting groups (i.e., Blacks vs. Asians) (Kalev et al., 2006).

Demographic composition and socio-economic conditions make D&I a critical issue in Colombia's society. According to official sources, in a country of 48 million people, there are 2.98 million self-identified afro-descendants (DANE, 2019), 3.1 million people with disabilities, 1.9 million people belonging to indigenous and tribal communities (DANE, 2019), 8 million people victims of the conflict (RUV, 2020), and 76 thousand people recognized as former combatants (ARN, 2022). In addition, since 2014, the country has become a host (or in other cases a place for transit) for Venezuelan migrants fleeing their country, according to official sources, there are an estimated of 2.477.588 Venezuelans (GIFMM, 2023). Furthermore, Colombia is one of the most unequal countries in the region. In 2021, Colombia registered a Gini coefficient of 0.523, 39.3% of the population was under the poverty line, and 12.2% under extreme poverty (DANE, 2022). In 2022, the multidimensional poverty rate was 12.9% (DANE, 2023). Looking at other metrics, we can see that unemployment rates are higher for minoritized groups than national averages, and monthly incomes lower. For instance, in 2021 monthly average income (DANE, 2023) per household was $115 dollars for indigenous communities, $191 for afro descendants, and $291 for non-ethnic households, revealing a huge gap across population groups. In terms of unemployment rate the gender gap is also evident, latest results (March, 2023) show that the unemployment rate for men was 9.2%, while for women it was 15.2% (DANE, 2023). The structural inequality and exclusion these groups experience is indisputable.

On the other hand, Government agencies, non-profits, and consulting firms have developed incentives and tools to drive D&I work in Colombia. Since the late 90s, the Colombian Government has issued taxation policies aiming to incentivize the employment of people with disabilities, women, young adults (18-28), older adults (older than 62), victims of the conflict, former combatants, and people under the poverty line. Companies can apply for an income tax discount if they employ one or more of these groups. Although every mechanism works differently, tax benefits often have an expiration date, and companies can use them for a determined period (except in the case of people with disabilities). Public recognition instruments such as certifications, seals, and rankings are another driver for D&I work. Initially led by non-profits and consulting firms, and then joined by the Government, these instruments assess company performance regarding their D&I work. Often, they focus on one population group, gender equity being the most used, however, organizations are trying to transition to gender equity *and* diversity, to make them more comprehensive and respond to their participants' needs. Overall, companies can certify their inclusion practices on a broad level, obtain a seal for a discrimination-free workplace, or certify their work on gender equity.

I investigate the D&I practices of Colombian firms in the food industry develop to include marginalized individuals who have been left out of the socio-economic dynamics of the country. I chose the food industry because of its unique position to implement D&I practices along the value chain. For instance, (i) they generate thousands of jobs, opening a window to hire marginalized populations; (ii) they buy raw materials such as milk, cocoa, fruits, nuts, among others from smallholder farmers who often face barriers (technological, financial, logistics) to access larger markets; and (iii) they distribute their products in businesses located in the base of the pyramid such as small stores in marginalized neighborhoods. Based on this context, my research questions are the following:

RQ1. What diversity and inclusion practices are implemented by food industry firms in Colombia?

- **RQ1.1.** Do they all implement the same type of practices?
- **RQ1.2.** And how do they decide what practices to pursue?

RQ2. What are the enablers and challenges to diversity and inclusion practices in the food industry in Colombia?

I conducted a case study in partnership with the Food Industry Chamber located under a larger organization, the National Business Association of Colombia (ANDI). The Food Industry

Chamber clusters a total of 63 companies that are in the business of chocolates, biscuits, retail food, ice cream, cold cuts, dairy, and pasta. With the support of the Food Industry Chamber, I was able to contact company officers and conducted 17 interviews representing 14 companies. Although other sources were consulted, this research is primarily based on the company officers' perspective, following scholars such as Portocarrero and Carter (2022) who argue that to clarify the current ambiguity around the concepts of Diversity and Inclusion, exploring how managers define and understand both terms can contribute to this discussion from a practitioner's standpoint. In this study, I will use the terms minoritized groups and marginalized individuals interchangeably to describe those specific groups (previously mentioned) who, due to their intrinsic characteristics, face disadvantages compared to others. Likewise, I will use the term D&I practices or D&I initiatives interchangeably to refer to any of the examples provided.

Considering that D&I as conceptual and managerial constructs were born in the U.S. surrounded by their socio-historical conditions, this research contributes to the scarce literature illustrating applications of D&I outside of the Global North. As Jonsen et al. (2011) pointed out, close to 90% of the published articles on D&I were written by anglophone researchers whose study sites were also located in their own country. Furthermore, qualitative research on D&I represents less than 10% of the total studies conducted on D&I and from the total studies, those taking place in the food industry are less than 5% (Yadav & Lenka, 2020).

The document is organized in five sections. First, I start by exploring current discussions in the literature regarding definitions of Diversity and Inclusion, and findings from empirical studies that looked at how individuals perceive diversity and define inclusion. I then examine the two main ideologies in diversity, identity-blind and identity-conscious, as well as practices associated to each of them. From there, I move to the second section where I explore the Colombian context and present with more detail tax incentives and public recognition instruments aiming to drive D&I work. The third section contains the methods where I provide specifics about how I conducted the study, including the data collection and data analysis phases. The fourth section encompasses the findings, which are divided into enablers and practices of D&I work, practices targeting diversity workforce in Colombia, and barriers D&I workers face. I end with a discussion and conclusion connecting my findings with current discussions in the D&I literature.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to inform this study on the theoretical background and empirical research conducted around Diversity and Inclusion. I will start by exploring the conceptualizations behind these two terms, and findings from different studies that have tried to understand how individuals construct meaning around diversity in different settings. Then, I will explore diversity ideologies, that is, whether organizations frame diversity with an identity-blind or identity-conscious approach. Later, I will look at theorizations on diversity practices, how they have been classified, and what empirical research tell us regarding D&I applications from a Human Resources perspective. I will end this section with a summary on how D&I is conceptualized and applied in other segments of the value chain: Supplier Diversity and Inclusive Distribution Networks (IDN).

I want to note two important characteristics of diversity literature. Jonsen et al. (2011) argue that the diversity field is not very diverse, as it is heavily dominated by anglophone researchers. In their review, they found that close to 90% of articles published were written by Americans, Canadians, Australians, and British. The remaining percentage was published by Europeans and researchers in Japan. The authors also highlight that the diversity field is not transdisciplinary, and research mostly come from management and psychological studies. These results are not surprising if we consider the historical conditions that gave birth to diversity as a managerial construct, however, they do have implications for researchers and practitioners implementing diversity practices in the Global South, as the study settings and theoretical paradigms may not relate to theirs.

A second characteristic is related to the focus and methodology used for this investigation. Studies looking at D&I in the food industry are scarce, and qualitative research on D&I accounts for less than 10% of the total studies (Yadav & Lenka, 2020). A systematic review (Yadav & Lenka, 2020) of 128 D&I articles published from 1991 to 2018, found that 6.03% of studies were conducted in the manufacturing sector and only 3.45% in the food beverage industry. The most represented industry is academic institutions with 15.52% of the studies, followed by the public sector (12.07%), hotels and restaurants (6.03%), IT industry (6.03%), and mixed industry (8.62%). In terms of methods, almost half of the studies (49.06%) were quantitative-oriented, followed by conceptual reviews (23.57%), literature review (8.93%), mixed approach (8.93%), and qualitative studies (8.93%).

1.1.Defining Diversity and Inclusion

1.1.1. Diversity

Diversity as a construct has evolved in the last 30 years, and there is consensus among scholars that the term is often taken for granted and rarely explicitly defined (Harrison & Klein, 2007; Kapoor, 2011; Unzueta et al., 2012; Ozbilgin et al., 2015). Early analysis of diversity definitions categorized them as going from narrow to broad conceptualizations, where narrow approaches constrained diversity to race, ethnicity, and gender, while broad definitions referred to all differences among individuals (Nkomo & Cox, 1996). Diversity has also been coupled with words, such as Workforce Diversity, (DiTomaso et al., 2007; Mor Barak, 2019), Global Diversity (Ozbilgin et al., 2015), and Managing Diversity (Jonsen et al., 2011; Mor Barak, 2017). Different terms aim to represent various applications and understandings of diversity in the workplace.

With regards to the history of diversity as a construct, scholars trace it back to the early ’90s in the United States as a response to a political context, a predicted change in demographics (Nkomo et al., 2019; Kapoor, 2011), and to replace older terms such as Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action (Oswick & Noon, 2014). Nkomo et al. (2019) claim that two external factors fueled the change from antidiscrimination compliance and affirmative action to a generalized idea of diversity. The election of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s as U.S. President initiated a conservative ideology that “advanced (…) the dismantling of race-conscious affirmative action in employment” (Nkomo et al., p. 501, 2019). To counter Reagan administration efforts, Human Resources experts created a narrative arguing that companies should adopt equal opportunity practices beyond complying with the law, and rather as part of a competitive advantage, which gave birth to what is now called the business case for diversity (Portocarrero and Carter, 2022).

Another factor influencing the emergence of discussion around diversity is the publication of the report *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers for the Twenty-First Century (Johnston & Packer, 1987)* by The Hudson Institute (a conservative think tank), which forecasted that by 2000 women and racial and ethnic minorities would constitute most of the new hires to the workforce and only 15% of employees would be US-born white males. Although the predictions were subsequently proved wrong by the Bureau of Statistics, scholars and practitioners proposed a change in practice and research to respond to the new context (S. M. Nkomo et al., 2019; Kapoor, 2011; Oswick & Noon, 2014).

Based on a review of human resources, business, and organization literature, Mor Barack (2022) presents three types of diversity definitions. Narrow category-based definitions describe diversity as encompassing groups protected under discrimination legislation in the U.S. such as gender, race, ethnic population groups, national origin, disability, and age. Mor Barak asserts that definitions under this group were mainly proposed by anglophone scholars describing diversity in the context of such countries (USA, Canada, United Kingdom, etc), which limits their application in other geographies. Broad category-based definitions include all the above groups, plus social class, cultural background, caste, marital status, and sexual orientation, signaling a distinction between visible (observable attributes) and invisible (underlying attributes) diversity. A third type are definitions based on a conceptual rule, focusing on "symbols, values, and norms" (Mor Barak, p. 148, 2022) that are shared by a group. This type of definition distances from the other two which are more focused on individuals' specific characteristics, while this one looks at the conceptual factors that inform individuals sense of belonging. Under this last category HR managers can bring everyone under the diversity umbrella (i.e., employees across the political spectrum). However, Mor Barak (2022) warns that treating all differences equal trivializes a history of discrimination, prejudice, and exclusion. To overcome the limitations presented by these definitions, Mor Barak (2022) proposes a conceptual alternative which is the one adopted in this study:

> "The division of workforce into distinction categories that (a) have a perceived commonality within a given cultural or national context and that (b) impact potentially harmful or beneficial employment outcomes such as job opportunities, treatment in the workplace, and promotion prospects—irrespective of job-related skills and qualifications" (p. 240).

This definition is not constrained by traditional categories (gender, race, or ethnicity), but rather opens it up to those that are relevant in a specific context. In the case of Colombia, historical sociopolitical conditions have created a population group composed by former combatants, veterans, and victims of the conflict whose characteristics need to be understood according to its particularities. And even when looking at traditional categories such as race or ethnicity, they unfold differently according to the socio-historical context in which they are embedded. A second element of the definition describes why diversity matters. Belonging to one group impacts employment outcomes regardless of performance or qualifications. Thus, marginalized

populations face access barriers to find a job or limited professional growth just because they belong to a group that is perceived as inferior, less capable, and even undesirable.

1.1.2. Inclusion

The term inclusion has emerged as a conceptual tool that enables an environment where individuals, groups, and societies leverage the positive impacts of diversity (Nkomo, 2014). However, Shore et al., (2011) note that as a concept, inclusion remains a construct without consensus on "its nature and its theoretical grounds" (p. 1263). Thus, Ferdman (2014) presents a framework where he groups definitions of inclusion in different levels: individuals, leaders, groups, organizations, and society. The author (2014) claims that inclusion is a practice experienced individually and collectively, therefore it needs to be considered in multiple levels of analysis.

Individuals

At this level, the conceptualizations of inclusion are related to how individuals feel in a group or organization. It points to the experience of an individual in an organizational setting. Mor Barak and Cherin (1998) assert that inclusion refers to how "individuals feel part of critical organization processes" (p. 48). Similarly, Hayes and Major (2003) define inclusion as an "individual's (…) perception of belonging, [being] a valued member in the larger organization" (p. 5). Belonging is characterized by Hubbard (2004) as having two aspects, one related to social connections, the ability to form special bonds and to communicate with others, and the second one, as social acceptance which refers to how an individual feels with other people, a "sense of comfort and entitlement" (p. 218). Shore et al. (2011) add another element to the definition, uniqueness, they define inclusion as "the degree to which an employee (…) satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness" (p. 1265). In summary, inclusion is not only about how feelings toward an organization or a group of people, but also if that environment enables a safe space where individuals can fully express who they are and they are valued because of that.

Leaders

Recent studies suggest the importance of leadership to build an inclusive culture in an organization (Mundy & Seuffert, 2020; Tang et al., 2015). Booysen (2014) defines inclusive leadership as "an ongoing cycle of learning (…) that enables individuals and collectives to be fully part of the whole such that they are directed, aligned, and committed toward shared outcomes (…) while retaining a sense of authenticity and uniqueness" (p. 306). Inclusive leaders

are not afraid of being vulnerable, they display qualities such as "flexibility, fluidity, self-awareness and mindfulness" (Wasserman et al., p. 180, 2008). Likewise, an inclusive leader brings to the table those voices and perspectives that otherwise would not have a place in decisions and conversations (Nembhard and Edmonson, 2006).

Groups

Ferdman (2014) claims that when a group of people embraces inclusion, they engage in a set of practices that reflect values such as respect, equality, collaboration, and approach conflicts productively and authentically. Miller (1994) asserts that for inclusive groups disagreement "leads to more effective solutions and successful adaptions" (p. 39), and cultural differences are seen as a contribution. Furthermore, Ferdman and Davidson (2004) claim that being in an inclusive group requires us to acknowledge our differences and similarities, both at the individual and group level, so we become aware of our "intergroup realities" (p. 33).

Organizations and Complex Systems

The last level of analysis proposed by Ferdman (2014) is where individuals, leaders, and groups interact and display their skills and values. To be inclusive, an organization enacts policies throughout its systems to address diversity and ensure opportunities for everyone, such as evaluating its Human Resources practices and revising the basis on which decisions are made. At the societal level, inclusion is supported (or not) by a set of "policies, practices, values, and ideologies" (Ferdman, p. 20, 2014). Theoretically, this level of analysis is probably the one that has gained more attention. At this level, the common theme is how an organization builds an inclusive culture, supported by actions, policies, and practices, where every individual feels that their difference is valued, accepted, and has a rightful place (Davidson and Ferdman, 2002; Miller and Katz, 2002, Wasserman et al., 2008).

1.1.3. D&I from an Organizational Culture lens

Theory on organizational culture can shed light on the in. terplay between D&I and accepted behaviors across different company levels. Shein (2010) asserts that daily life situations (for instance, discrimination and exclusion) at an organization can be explained and understood by looking at their organizational culture. Shein (2010) points at behavioral regularities, group norms, espoused values, ideological principles, customary rules, shared meanings, mental models, and collective celebrations. Shein (2010) argues that an organizational culture has four characteristics, (i) it provides an organization with stability, as its expressions are constant and

difficult to change; (ii) it encompasses the less tangible and visible assumptions of those who are part of a group, offering depth which feeds into the stability part; (iii) it is omnipresent, as it sustains all group and individual interactions, and finally (iv) it integrates all its different components into a larger coherent paradigm.

The synergy between an organizational culture and D&I work is key to understand the trajectory of a company engaging in these issues. Spataro (2005) identifies three types of organizational culture, (i) differentiation, (ii) unity, and (iii) integration. In differentiation, individual characteristics are placed with positive or negative values. Those with more preferred characteristics perform better and have more influence over their peers. On the other hand, a unity culture suppresses individual characteristics and aims to unite all employees around one collective identity represented in the organization. Finally, a culture of integration values diversity across all employees, acknowledging that individual difference comes with potential benefits for the organization. Spataro (2005) argues that a culture of integration is the one that presents more opportunities to implement diversity in an organizational setting, however, it requires decoupling advantages with specific characteristics (of the dominant group) and replacing them with explicit support to contributions based on uniqueness and difference.

As organizations transition to a culture embracing D&I, it is necessary to understand first how culture works. Shein (2010) proposes three levels in which an organizational culture can be analyzed. Artifacts encompass the visible and tangible characteristics of a group, language, physical environment, aesthetics (both in spaces and people), and accepted ways of social interaction. The second level refers to a group's beliefs and values about what is right or wrong, and what will work or not. Shein (2010) claims that those beliefs often come from leaders and undergo a process of social validation through which peers assess if a specific belief or value has chances to succeed in their work. If it does, then it transforms into a shared assumption whose job is to reduce anxiety in uncertain contexts where it proves to be useful. Finally, basic underlying assumptions reveal the deepest level of an organizational culture. They encompass what members of a group consider to be reality and what they take for granted as they have repeatedly succeeded in implementing a specific belief. At this level, Shein (2010) argues, "cultures tell their members who they are, how to behave with each other, and how to feel good about themselves," (p. 29) which then indicates why altering culture increases levels of anxiety. Using Shein's (2010) analysis and Ferdman's (2014) multilayered model of inclusion, we can

see how having a D&I policy will not be enough, if leaders' behavior does not represent their commitment to D&I and are then incapable to impact individuals' beliefs and values.

1.1.4. Empirical Research Understanding D&I

Research looking at D&I practices has found that overall, individuals' perceptions are not very far from how both concepts have been conceptualized. Francke and Beauregard (2017) aimed to understand from the employees' perspective how the concept of inclusion was perceived in the Peruvian context. Participants described three main characteristics associated with the meaning of inclusion: belonging, uniqueness, and equal treatment. According to the authors, the results are consistent with the literature considering inclusion as the feeling of being "included" rather than as conditions to be met. Tang et al. (2015) looked at the meaning of inclusion and inclusion management in the Chinese context. Seven management inclusion practices were identified: inclusive teamwork, inclusive communication, inclusive decision making, fairness treatment, inclusive leadership, tolerance, and inclusive adaptation. The authors found a particular element in the Chinese understanding of inclusion: tolerance. For the participants, inclusion meant tolerating employees' errors and mistakes. According to Tang et al. (2015), "the Chinese emphasize tolerance […] because the Chinese culture emphasizes social harmony" (p. 868), therefore mutual consideration and reciprocity are expected. Roberson (2006) conducted a survey with Human Resources and Diversity officers inquiring about definitions of diversity and inclusion and the attributes associated with both terms. Definitions of diversity focused on demographic composition, whereas inclusion was connected to organizational strategies aimed at fostering employees' participation and leveraging diversity effects. Participants identified 30 attributes of diversity and inclusion, "namely affirmative action policies, representation of different demographic groups, respect for differences, and diversity education and training" (Roberson, p. 219, 2006).

Another body of literature, looking at perceived diversity, suggests that individuals construct diversity meaning in ways that benefit their in-group agendas. Unzueta et al. (2012) found that individuals from dominant groups would think an organization is diverse when there was occupational heterogeneity[1] but homogeneous racial composition. In contrast, participants with low social dominance saw occupational heterogeneity and low levels of racial diversity as

[1] In the context of this literature, occupational heterogeneity refers to Individuals coming from various disciplines or fields who perform different tasks, for instance, accountants, engineers, marketers, communicators, etc.

detracting the goals of D&I strategies. Unzueta & Binning (2012) conducted a series of four experiments to test how Asians, Blacks and whites perceived diversity in an organization. Unzueta & Binning (2012) tested diversity as incorporating two variables, numerical representation and hierarchical representation, that is the number of employees with marginalized identities who are part of an organization, and how they are distributed across hierarchical positions. The authors found that while Asians and Blacks perceived diversity as having representation in both variables, for whites, as long as there was numerical representation, it was enough to declare an organization as diverse. Bauman et al., (2014) conducted a study with three tests to find out how Asians and Blacks would perceive diversity. In both cases, they signaled a group as diverse if it included a member of their own racial group. Moreover, Bauman et al. (2014) found that previous experience with discrimination enhanced minority groups concerns about whether their in-group is represented.

While definitions of inclusion tend to agree on policies and practices to improve marginalized individuals' experience, definitions of diversity change according to individual identity. This is particularly important, as research (Kaiser et al., 2013) has shown that installing D&I practices may lead dominant groups to think that their organizations are sufficiently diverse, regardless of whether those practices are effective or not. In other words, individuals may agree on the need to have inclusion policies but will judge the diversity of an organization based on their own social motives. Thus, a white male CEO could think their company is diverse enough if D&I practices are adopted, minoritized identities are represented (at the bottom of the organizational chart), and all managers are white (and most likely male).

From these studies, two important characteristics are salient. The first one is that in all cases except in Roberson (2006) the subjects were not related to D&I work, and in some cases (Bauman et al., 2014; Unzueta & Binning, 2010, 2012) they were recruited in laboratory settings with an economic incentive to participate in the study. While that still unveils individuals' perceptions, recent research (Portocarrero & Carter, 2022) indicates that to understand comprehensively diversity strategies, the perceptions of D&I managers must be considered as they are often the ones who construct the meaning behind them. A second characteristic is the research study site. Only Francke & Beauregard (2017) and Tang et al. (2015) conducted their research outside the U.S. Tang et al. (2015) provided a particular characteristic to the understanding of D&I in the Chinese context, revealing tolerance as an important feature of

inclusion. Francke & Beauregard (2017) assert that for their subjects, inclusion was also associated with work conditions, in particular with salary, benefits, and job security which speaks about work conditions in developing countries. I want to note that Francke & Beauregard (2017) announce their research as a Latin American perspective on D&I, however, their study was conducted in Peru, in their capital city, Lima, which does not represent the diversity of South and Central American contexts. The characteristics of these empirical studies point to the lack of research in the Global South, and the necessity to learn more about D&I workers perspective.

1.2.Diversity Ideologies

Scholars (L. M. Leslie & Flynn, 2022; V. C. Plaut, 2010) have identified two major ideologies under which approaches to Diversity fall: identity-blind and identity-conscious. Table 1. summarizes each of them, describing their main material manifestations, benefits, and consequences in the workplace. Identity-blind ideologies refer to those aiming to minimize individuals experience, examples include colorblindness (ignoring differences), meritocracy (equitable treatment), and assimilation (adopting dominant groups' behavior) (Leslie et al., 2020). On the other end, identity-conscious ideologies are represented by multiculturalism, which aims to explicitly recognize differences across employees as a source of value for the business (Stevens et al., 2008). Leslie & Flynn (2022) explain that when looking at diversity ideologies we are thinking of approaches but also their effects. Thus, identity-blind ideologies pose that diversity is inconsequential (colorblindness), detrimental (assimilation), or are simply agnostic (meritocracy) of their effects, whereas identity conscious (multiculturalism) see it as beneficial. It is important to note that these two major ideologies have antecedents in different judicial opinions. Scholars (V. C. Plaut, 2010; Plaut, 2014) often cite Justice Harlan who in 1896 upheld a Jim Crow law on Louisiana railroad cars segregation, ruling that "separate but equal" was not a violation of equal rights. On the other hand, multiculturalism was born in the center of civil rights movement.

Ideology	Description	Diversity Value	Benefits	Negative Impacts
Colorblindness	Noticing differences makes us vulnerable.	Diversity is inconsequential.	Reduces prejudice and stereotyping.	Negatively related to support Diversity policies. Unrelated to discrimination.
Meritocracy	Everyone has equal opportunity.	Agnostic attitudes towards diversity.	Reduces discrimination.	Negatively related to support Diversity policies. Unrelated to prejudice and stereotyping.
Assimilation	Nondominant groups behave like the dominant group.	Diversity is detrimental.	-	Negatively related to support Diversity policies. Increase prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping.
Multiculturalism	Acknowledges differences and seeks to redress historical disadvantages.	Diversity is beneficial.	Reduces stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination and increases support for Diversity policies.	Jeopardize diversity efforts as nonminority groups backfire arguing that multiculturalism excludes them.

Table 1. Diversity Ideologies based on (Leslie et al., 2020; Leslie & Flynn, 2022; Plaut, 2010; Plaut, 2014; Stevens et al., 2008).

Despite efforts to make clear distinctions between each ideology, empirical research (Leslie et al., 2020; Plaut et al., 2009) asserts that evidence is mixed and often contradictory, suggesting that effects of each ideology vary across in-groups. For instance, in multiculturalism

where minority groups see positive effects, but dominant groups see it as detrimental to their agenda. Having clarity on each ideology, at least on what each of them values, is important to better understand the assumptions that lie at the center of D&I practices and what companies want to achieve when they approach diversity. An important factor to consider is that all these ideologies refer to dominant vs minority groups, which in the U.S. context is clear which categories fall under each group (whites vs. Blacks, Hispanic, Asians, …). But the same is not true for other contexts where gender categories (male vs female), for instance, may be more relevant, and racial and ethnic groups may not be seen as minority groups, even if they are.

1.3.Diversity and Inclusion Practices

Conceptualizations of diversity practices define them as actions "developed and implemented by organizations" (Yang & Konrad, 2011, p. 8) aimed at "improving the workplace experience and outcomes" (Leslie, 2019, p. 540) of marginalized groups. Leslie (2019) argues that diversity initiatives have three main goals: increasing representation of marginalized groups, reducing gaps in career outcomes between dominant and minority groups, and increasing sense of belonging (Shore et al., 2011) among marginalized employees. Based on the work of previous scholars, Leslie (2019) identifies three types of practices (see Table 2): (i) nondiscrimination practices establish that decisions are made based on qualifications and not personal characteristics; (ii) resource practices aim to provide marginalized populations with additional support to bolster their professional growth; and (iii) accountability practices aim to enhance organizational diversity policies by appointing responsible teams and establishing evaluation systems. It should be emphasized that these practices take place in the realm of Human Resources departments, and other applications of D&I practices exist along the value chain. The focus of this study lies on the former.

1.3.1. Applications of Diversity and Inclusion

As mentioned before, diversity and inclusion practices aim to remove barriers that prevent underrepresented groups from finding a job and improve their workplace experience (Portocarrero and Carter, 2022). In this section, I explore empirical research illustrating examples of the three types of D&I practices. In most cases, I present studies looking at the implementation of diversity practices at the firm level, however, examples from other settings (educational) are also included. I also aimed to focus on qualitative studies, but as mentioned before, they account for less than 10% of the research on D&I (Yadav & Lenka, 2020). Across

typology, two studies (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020; Derven, 2014) provide examples for each practice-type. Before I conclude, I identify barriers to implement D&I practices.

Type of Practice	Description	Examples	Diversity Ideology
Nondiscrimination	Makes decisions based on qualifications and not individuals' characteristics.	Merit-based decision making, Diversity training.	Identity-blind
Resource	Offers additional support to marginalized populations to bolster their professional growth.	Preferential treatment, targeted recruitment, diversity statements, targeted training, diversity networking groups, diversity mentoring programs.	Identity-concious
Accountability	Creates institutional mechanisms to further D&I efforts at the organizational level.	Diversity plans, diversity performance evaluations, diversity positions, grievance systems.	Identity-conscious

Table 2. Typology of Diversity Practices based on Leslie (2019).

Nondiscriminatory practices

In 2020, the global consulting firm McKinsey conducted a study (Dixon-Fyle et al., 2020) with more than 1000 companies in the five continents to analyze their Diversity and Inclusion strategies. The most represented regions were the United States, Asia-Pacific, and continental Europe. Participants represented different sectors of the economy: consumer goods and retail, energy, heavy industry, telecom and media, finance, healthcare, and transportation. Based on their results, two practices can be connected to this category: (i) establishing zero-tolerance policies against discrimination addressing microaggressions and non-inclusive behaviors, and (ii) enabling an environment of advancement and opportunity for traditionally excluded populations facilitates the achievement of meritocratic conditions. Examples of training (Derven, 2014) include China Merchants Bank that provides training to build self-awareness and multicultural competence.

Resource Practices

Policies that offer support to marginalized populations range in form, scope, and focus. Dixon-Fyle et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of assuring and enabling diverse talent at the different levels of the company, from the operational to executive roles. The authors suggest that D&I activities should go beyond traditional efforts in gender and ethnicity and be thoughtful about what other dimensions of diversity they can prioritize (age, race, disability, etc.). Based on in-depth interviews with D&I leaders from six companies[2], Derven (2014) identifies best practices, among them establishing affinity groups and providing targeted training. For instance, Sanofi incorporated key D&I messages in its onboarding processes and leadership curriculum. In analyzing these examples, the author concludes that successful D&I initiatives "must be adapted to each region, requiring a multi-faceted approach embedded into organizational practices and policies" (Derven, p. 91, 2014).

Examples of resource practices targeting specific groups also highlight their functioning in corporate settings. Mundy & Seuffert (2020) present how the understanding of inclusion and diversity is linked to the context and its participants, in this case, best practices regarding gender equity: commitment to diversity, inclusive culture, D&I initiatives, mentoring, sponsorship, affinity groups, flexible work, and path careers. The study finds that a law firm with a D&I program focused on gender equity needs very specific strategies, for example, the section on flexible work and job sharing was given more importance than others because women need flexible schedules for caring activities. Based on a content analysis of 34 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports, Gould et al. (2019) identified four practices that integrate disability efforts into diversity and inclusion strategies: diversity and inclusion statements, employer resources groups, supplier diversity, and hiring and recruitment. The CSR reports have become a major tool companies use to communicate their social and environmental actions. Among the four practices, having a D&I statement as well as efforts in hiring and recruitment were the most common. Based on a literature review, Wang & Fang (2020) present four practices to manage age diversity: peer mentoring, participative decision making, ensuring job security, and training to counter age-related stereotypes. The authors stress that age-related diversity efforts need to consider ensuring job security, given the fact that older people fear

[2] Volkswagen, Sodexo Health Care and Government Services, Sanofi, L'Oreal, BASF North America, and China Merchants Bank New York.

losing their job in a working culture that does not value them. Another example is peer mentoring which in this case aims to create spaces for sharing knowledge bringing together different generations.

Researchers have also looked at how specific practices benefit companies and impact population groups. Jonsen et al. (2021) did a content analysis looking at diversity statements and the purposes they serve. Based on websites from 75 companies in five countries (USA, Germany, Spain, France, and the UK) they found that diversity statements were used to attract talent, position the company as an employer of choice, and acknowledge individual diversity dimensions. The latter suggests that companies were interested in highlighting different diversity categories. Visible differences such as gender, disability, age, and race were the most salient. Deep-level dimensions such as education, family situation, and opinions and beliefs were also present. Jonsen et al., added evidence to prove the business case for diversity, by demonstrating that D&I strategies have become an element to attract new talent and position the company as an employer of choice.

Accountability Practices

The goal of this type of practices is building a strong institutional support, through formal processes and increasing responsibility across the organization. In their study, Dixon-Fyle et al., (2020) found two examples targeting leaders: (i) building an inclusive culture supported by leaders where employees can be themselves in an environment that fosters diversity, and (ii) placing core business leaders at the center of the D&I strategy to assure leadership accountability and capability. In Derven (2014) findings, developing measuring systems, creating partnerships to advance D&I efforts, and using D&I as a source for innovation were catalogued as best practices. Concrete examples come from three global companies: BASF tracks the impact of leader behaviors on D&I talent performance; L'Oréal created a think tank selecting employees to gather consumer insights about marketing and multicultural messaging; and Volkswagen leverages its dealer network to institutionalize D&I practices.

1.3.2. Barriers to D&I Practices

Empirical research also sheds light on the types of barriers D&I workers face implementing their strategies. Tang et al., (2015) identify challenges from three different perspectives, a) on the employer side, related to executive support for organizational practices; b) on the employee side, referring to low participation in inclusion-related activities, and c) in implementation, related to

the costs of executing inclusion practices as well as evaluating them. When looking at types of companies, state-owned, and foreign-invested firms saw employees as the main challenge, while private companies (Chinese-based) viewed all three as equally challenging. Based on in-depth interviews, Kluch et al., (2023) looked at the experience of professionals appointed as Athletics Diversity and Inclusion Designee (ADID) working in higher education institutions affiliated to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the U.S. Based on their qualitative analysis, Kluch et al., (2023) identify five-type of barriers. Structural barriers refer to isolation on campus, lack of infrastructure, resources, and lack of diverse representation in their organizations. Cultural barriers represent the negative impact of athletics culture and lack of buy-in. Conceptual barriers reflected lack of understanding of DEI and the absence of DEI standards. Emotional barriers illustrate the impact of DEI work on the mental health of ADID professionals. Finally, social/relational barriers indicated ADIDs' low sense of belonging and difficulty connecting with internal and external stakeholders. Even though Kluch et al. (2023) study is conducted in a higher education setting, it illustrates DEI workers experience, and presents an initial typology to understand barriers in advancing DEI efforts.

1.4.Applications of D&I along the value chain

1.4.1. Supplier Diversity

In the literature of D&I, practices associated with procurement have been categorized as *Supplier diversity*, a concept that has evolved since it first appeared in the early 2000s in the United States and the United Kingdom (Blount, 2021). It refers to programs carried out by Large Purchasing Organizations (LPO) that intend to expand the number of "ethnic-minority-owned businesses that supply goods and services" (Ram & Smallbone, 2003). Later, scholars broadened the scope and referred to businesses led by women, veterans, persons with disabilities, micro-businesses, and local businesses (Adobor & McMullen, 2007; Sordi et al., 2021). Recent scholars (Sordi et al., 2021) claim that describing supplier diversity just by looking at business ownership is too simplistic and that the question should be "who benefits?" emphasizing the creation of employment by businesses involved in supplier diversity programs. According to the literature, supplier diversity can help organizations improve their operational performance (risk reduction and cost control), build relationships with their stakeholders, and contribute to strategic objectives (Worthington, 2009).

Sordi et al. (2021) conducted a benchmarking study with over 50 companies to explore how they leverage their supplier diversity programs. Based on their results, the authors were able to identify seven successful enablers when implementing these strategies: (i) support from senior leadership, (ii) internal and (iii) external collaboration, (iv) supplier mentoring, (v) visibility to the program, (vi) establishing goals and targets, and impact and recognition. According to their study, they also characterized seven factors that support supplier diversity programs: culture, competencies, strategy, ecosystem, governance, planning and measurement, and communication. Sordi et al. (2021) approach highlight the importance of developing the skills both in the company procurement team as well as in the suppliers to achieve success. They also suggest that supporting the program must come in formal and informal terms, linking strategic corporate policies to building a culture of inclusion.

1.4.2. Inclusive Distribution Network (IDN)

An IDN aims to create partnerships between micro-distributors located at the base of the socio-economic pyramid (BOP) and large corporations. According to a report published by the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB), an IDN "enables successful micro-enterprises in distribution chains, while advancing strategic market development goals for companies or social enterprises alike" (p. 12, 2014). For instance, a company such as Nestlé or Unilever, interested in reaching marginalized communities' markets, can develop an IDN to achieve its commercial goals and at the same time promote economic development in marginalized communities.

Based on the literature, Trujillo and Puerto (2021) identify two main outcomes for IDNs. On one hand, IDNs are "market based, scalable solutions aimed at alleviating poverty and bringing empowerment to their beneficiaries" (p. 90). Companies gather more specific knowledge about BOP markets, increase their share of marginalized communities' markets, gain negotiation power with retailers, boost their reputation, and strengthen their relationships with marginalized communities. At the same time, micro-sellers, increase access to working capital, and to the company's marketing resources. They also improve entrepreneurial skills, self-esteem, and motivation. A more critical view centers on the challenges of implementing an IDN. Trujillo and Puerto (2021) describe what they call "organizational ambidexterity" (p. 91) as having two different business models inside one corporation, which creates a fight of interests between managers, cost of capital, and approaching the IDN from a paternalistic point of view, while resources are allocating to other more profitable business models.

Trujillo and Puerto (2021) assert that when IDNs are scaled up, corporations keep their competitive advantage, but marginalized communities no longer have access to the same value. Scaling up an IDN entails modifications in dimensions such as distribution costs, route planning, use of information and communication technologies, inventory management, and financial sustainability. Once these adjustments take place, traditional distributors reinforce their power by creating more dependent relationships; micro-sellers see the previous flexibility reduced, and at the same time face a harder effort because there are other micro-seller competitors in the same area. Finally, trust between the two parts is disrupted and a return to "business as usual" is inevitable. Trujillo and Puerto's (2021) study limited by their sample, as they study five IDNs across Latin America, only two of them directly managed by companies, and the other three with the participation of non-profits. However, it points out a discussion around how IDNs have not created a business model yet that can prove to create value for an extended period for corporations and marginalized communities alike. Most of the adjustments are done to attain a breakeven point, therefore a significant number of resources are needed to achieve success in this inclusive business.

2. D&I IN THE COLOMBIAN CONTEXT

In this section, I first describe tax policies designed by the Colombian Government aimed at increasing the employability of underrepresented groups. Then, I explain additional incentives driving D&I strategies, such as certifications and rankings sponsored by business organizations and non-profits that recognize diversity and/or inclusion work.

2.1.Tax Incentives

The Colombian Government has developed a series of tax incentives aimed at increasing the employment rates among marginalized populations. The Government offers the private sector to deduct from their income tax the amount of money paid in social security fees associated with the creation of new jobs. This incentive was created in the law 1429 in 2010 and it applies to young people, women, victims of the conflict, people under the poverty line, and people with disabilities. Other tax benefits were introduced after this law including additional groups.

Age – Young Adults (18-27 years)

Reading across the different laws and programs created to incentivize the economic inclusion of the youth, the goal has been to help young people overcome the barriers they face when looking for their first job. One of the barriers recent college graduates face in Colombia (and around the developing world) is not having prior work experience. When looking for jobs, most companies ask them for one year or two years of experience. Seeking to overcome this problem, the Government created the program "40.000" jobs helping companies pay the 6-month salary of a young person who does not have prior experience. In return, the government asks firms to hire them for an additional period of six months. Other legislative pieces have incentivized young people's employment by eliminating requirements such as proof of military service and asking companies to consider internships as work experience (Law 1780 of 2016).

Former Combatants – people under Reintegration and Reincorporation routes

Before describing the incentives for this population, I consider it important to provide the sociopolitical context that surrounds them. In the last 20 years, the Colombian Government has created two routes to help former combatants to build a new life in mainstream society. The difference between those two terms (reintegrate and reincorporate) is tied to two different political and historical moments in Colombia. Reintegration encompasses a series of public policies and programs designed as a response to the Peace Agreement signed in 2005 between the Colombian Government and the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (United Self-Defenses of

Colombia). On the other hand, after the Peace Agreement with the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) signed in 2016, emerged another route called reincorporation. Both routes aim for the social inclusion of former combatants ensuring access to services such as education, health, legal assistance, and economic opportunities among others.

The reintegration and reincorporation routes are administered by the Agency of Reincorporation and Normalization (ARN). The ARN incentivizes the inclusion of former combatants in different ways. First, they offer an education awareness program to companies and their employees to avoid common misperceptions and stigmatizations of former combatants. These training spaces are accompanied by other firms that have successfully employed them and want to share their best practices and lessons learned. Once a business is "ready" to hire them, the ARN helps in the process of selection, finding suitable candidates, and articulating with other governmental agencies to provide supplementary training. Once the person is hired, the ARN continues its route providing access to mental health services.

The incentives to include former combatants are probably the most integral because they consider both sides. On one hand, the government provides participants with the opportunity to improve their skills (soft and hard) and thus improve their profile. On the other hand, companies can access different services that help them build an inclusive work environment enabling the employment of this population group. Not to mention that firms can also benefit economically from accessing the tax income deduction stated in the 1429 law.

Victims of the conflict

The incentives to employ victims of the conflict are mainly economic. Companies can do an income tax deduction following the 1429 law (2010) and the 2732 decree (2012). As explained above, the 1429 law allows businesses to discount from their income tax the amount of money paid in social security fees associated with new jobs created to hire marginalized populations, in this case, people who were forcefully displaced because of the conflict. The 2732 decree is of special interest because it focuses on the intersection of being a woman and a victim of the conflict (and other types of violence), and enables companies to deduct from their income tax, twice the amount of money paid in salaries during a fiscal year. For example, if a business hired a woman victim of violence during 2021, and paid her a total of 2.000 dollars, they are entitled to discount from their income tax of a total of 4.000 dollars.

Veterans

The Colombian government does not have formal incentives for the inclusion of veterans, however, the Ministry of Defense developed the program "*Preparación para el Retiro"* (Retirement Preparation) which provides training for veterans who are transitioning from military to civilian life.

Women

Two incentives have been designed to increase women's employability. Law 1429 (2010) provides the benefit of an income tax deduction for businesses hiring women who are older than 40 years old, and have been unemployed in the past 12 months. The 2732 decree (explained above) is focused on women who were victims of violent situations: conflict, domestic violence, or sexual abuse.

People with Disabilities

The incentives for hiring people with disabilities are economic and strategic as they go beyond the income tax deduction. An interesting fact is that looking at the legislation, the incentives related to the inclusion of people with disabilities were the first ones to be adopted. The 361 law was passed in 1997 and it included the following stimulus:

- Companies can deduct from their income tax, twice the amount of money paid to a person with a disability during a fiscal year. See the example in the women-violence intersection explained above.
- If 10% of a firm's employees are represented by people with disabilities, they will be preferred in public and private biddings.
- Companies trying to access public credits will be prioritized if their project involves the permanent and active employment of people with disabilities.

It is important to note that to claim this benefit, the employee must provide to their employer a document from a health insurance company certifying his or her level of disability.

Groups under the poverty line

For this population, the government offers two types of incentives. In accordance with Law 1429, businesses that generate new jobs and employ individuals earning less than 1.5 times the minimum wage can enjoy economic benefits. They are allowed to deduct the total amount paid in social security fees (including health and retirement contributions) from their income tax. Another incentive is working closely with the Department for Social Prosperity (DPS, acronym in Spanish) which has a strategy aimed at fostering employment among marginalized

communities, with a focus on poor people. DPS helps companies find candidates by publishing business job openings and providing complementary training if needed.

Ethnic Groups

There is only one incentive for employing ethnic groups (Afro Colombians and Indigenous communities) and that is a recognition of compliance with the 169 Convention related to indigenous and tribal rights.

Age

The most recent incentive introduced in terms of diversity and inclusion is related to hiring people above the age of retirement[3] who do not have a pension. The 2040 law (2020) states that businesses can deduct from their income tax a total of 125% of the salary paid to a person who fulfills the requirements. However, this benefit has an additional requirement. To apply for the tax reduction, people above the age of retirement must comprise 2.5% of the total of a 100 employees-company. For every additional 100 people, the percentage increases by 0.5, until it reaches a limit of 5%. This is an interesting change as it asks companies not only to hire but also to increase their numbers. Table 3 presents a summary of the different incentives and the Laws and Regulations that support each vulnerable group.

Table 3. Incentives to promote the employment of marginalized population groups in Colombia.

Group of population	Type of incentive	Supported by
Young people (18-28 years)	Income tax deduction Salary contribution Discounts on social security payments	Law 1429 of 2010 Law 1786 of 2016 40.000 jobs program
Former Combatants – Reintegrated or Reincorporated people	Income tax deduction Support training	Peace Agreements. Law 1429 of 2010
Women	Income tax deduction Discounts on social security payments National and international recognition	Law 1429 of 2010 Decree 2733 of 2012 *Equipares* certification
Conflict Victims	Income tax deduction. Support training	Law 1429 of 2010 Law 1448 of 2011 Decree
Veterans	Public recognition	-

[3] In Colombia, the age for retirement is 57 for women and 62 for men.

Table 3 (cont'd)

People under the poverty line	Income tax deduction. Support hiring process	Law 1429 of 2010
Ethnic groups	Public recognition	International Labor Organization, Convention 169
People with disabilities	Income tax reduction Preference in Government contracting Preference access to Government credits	Law 316 of 1997 Law 1429 of 2010 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) – United Nations
Age (Workers older than 62)	Income tax reduction	Law 2040 of 2020

2.2.Certifications, Rankings, and Seals

In this section, I explore certifications, rankings and seals sponsored by business organizations, non-profits, consulting firms, and Government agencies. Beyond the public recognition, their value also lies on the information these organizations provide to corporations. Since most of these instruments are based on assessment tools, organizations offer companies an evaluation of their D&I work, recommendations on what they should improve, and offer additional technical assistance if contracting their services. Table 4, at the end of the section, summarizes all instruments.

Latin America Inclusive Companies Ranking

This ranking is supported by the Diversity Chamber, a private, non-profit organization, Colombian-based, founded in 2012 as the LGBT Chamber of Commerce and has since evolved to encompass multiple minority and diverse population sectors. It emerged as an initiative aimed at strengthening and empowering the LGBTI community in the country, both economically and socially, through joint strategies to enhance the development of businesses, entrepreneurship, products, and innovations targeted towards the LGBT segment. Since their organizational transformation, they now focus on the following diversity dimensions: sexual and gender diversity, ethnic or racial origin, migratory or national origin, special needs or disabilities, generational or intergenerational differences, and Latin America (Cámara de la Diversidad, 2023).

According to the information published in their website, the purpose of the Ranking is to recognize companies' efforts in creating a discrimination-free environment. Their assessment instrument is based on the United Nations Standards of Conduct for Business, with a focus on tackling discrimination against Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Trans & Intersex People. The standards

encompass five norms divided into four levels: *At all times*, (i) respect Human Rights; *in the workplace*, (ii) eliminate discrimination and (iii) provide support; *in the marketplace*, (iv) prevent other Human Rights violations; *in the community*, (v) act in the public sphere (United Nations, 2017). The instrument is broken down into a checklist where companies can rate their performance from 1 to 10. It then asks open-ended questions to gather information about best practices that can be shared among interested companies.

Since they were accepting applications during the time of writing of this thesis, I was able to access the instrument. I found that despite the focus on LGBTQ+ groups, the Chamber of Diversity uses the broadness of the statements and applies them to seven categories, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, race, former combatants and veterans, political opinion, visible and invisible differences. For each of the five principles, the checklist is made up of practices such as diversity policies, training, leadership support, D&I teams, measurement and evaluation, communication strategies, and furthering D&I efforts along the value chain.

PAR Ranking

PAR Ranking is supported by Aequales, a multi-Latin business conglomerate headquartered in Colombia that provides tools for closing gender gaps in the workplace based on measurement, consulting and technology. Aequales does consulting aiming to transform organizations through gender equality, promoting equal working conditions and opportunities for men and women by enhancing employees' capacities. Since 2015, they have carried out the PAR Ranking, an annual, free, and confidential tool for measuring the gender equality conditions of organizations in Latin America. The PAR Ranking seeks to disseminate and reward organizational practices and policies that promote gender equality. Companies apply voluntarily seeking an initial assessment of their gender equity work.

Their assessment instrument is composed of four dimensions (Aequales, 2023). *Goal management* evaluates strategic planning for closing gender gaps through objectives, indicators, targets and resources, as well as the implementation of corporate policies with a gender focus. *Organizational culture* looks at awareness-raising actions and welfare measures that allow a gender-based personal/work balance, promoting an inclusive culture and the prevention and punishment of sexual harassment at work. *Structure* assesses the number of women and men in leadership positions and other hierarchical lines of the organization. Finally, talent *Management* focuses on recruitment procedures, promotions, and salaries, as well as good practices in the

Human Resources Division, focusing on gender and female leadership. In all public documents PAR Ranking refers to four evaluation dimensions, however, in their website they also include a fifth one, looking at COVID-19 management practices which measures the gender-based approach during the pandemic.

Based on the data collected, PAR Ranking publishes reports per country (Aequales, 2023) providing relevant data about the state of Diversity and Inclusion programs in Colombia. From the 252 participating companies in 2022, 94% disaggregate their employees' information by gender, 11% have inclusion employment routes for transgender individuals; 17% have adjusted their recruitment practices to candidates with disabilities and 16% have developed partnerships with external organizations to hire employees with marginalized ethnic and/or racial identities. In terms of gender equity, Aequales reveals that women are paid 27% less than their male peers, 26% women hold CEO positions, the percentage of female presence in executive boards is 33%, and women represent 39% of front-line workers.

Equipares Certification

Equipares is a certification program that recognizes large organizations, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and public entities that successfully implement effective actions to close gender gaps. They promote cultural transformation of work environments to ensure the inclusion of all individuals, advancing towards more equal environments, and improving life quality for workers. Equipares is supported by a partnership between the Labor Ministry and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Their assessment consists of five phases and seven evaluation components (Equipares, 2023). It starts with a (i) diagnosis, after which the applicant receives technical support to (ii) design and (iii) implement a work plan. Once completed, (iv) a second evaluation takes place with an internal and external audit that verifies compliance of the Equipares norm. Based on the results, the applicant receives (v) a certification that can be in two levels, gold, or silver. Public information does not disclose the difference between each of them. According to their website, their evaluation is based on seven dimensions: Sexist-free communication and Inclusive Language, work-life balance with shared responsibility, promotion and professional development, training, remuneration and salaries, work environment, health and quality of life, and workplace harassment and sexual harassment. Since 2014, Equipares has provided support to 81 companies, 6 small and medium-sized enterprises, and 6 public entities.

Inclusive Companies Seal

This certification is supported by the National Business Association of Colombia – ANDI (per its acronym in Spanish), a non-profit organization whose main purpose is to expand and promote economic, social, and political principles within a free enterprise system. ANDI is currently the country's most important non-profit organization with more than 1100 members that represent around 40% and 55% of the national GDP. ANDI groups companies that belong to different sectors of the economy: manufacturing, financial, food, mining, health, agriculture, services, among others.

To implement its social strategy, ANDI has developed the *Strategy for Inclusive Competitiveness* which aims to incentivize and advise its affiliates to include vulnerable populations. ANDI prioritizes the following groups: victims of the conflict, populations under the poverty line and extreme poverty, former combatants, people with disabilities, ethnic groups, migrants, and veterans. This strategy is framed in the post-conflict era, after the signature of the Peace Agreements the country signed with the FARC guerrillas in 2016 (Fundación ANDI, p. 16, 2021). The *Strategy for Inclusive Competitiveness* addresses three main lines of work: procurement, employment, and distribution. For each line, ANDI has developed a methodology that guides companies through different phases to include vulnerable populations. Each methodological phase offers guidelines and tools to help companies run auto-evaluations that provide recommendations and action plans.

Under the *Strategy for Inclusive Competitiveness*, ANDI promotes the Inclusive Company Seal (Fundación ANDI, 2021), a program that acknowledges organizations embracing inclusion. The program aims to create a business community dedicated to addressing social challenges within their business strategies. By obtaining the seal, companies enhance their reputation among consumers and employees, adding value to their products and distinguishing themselves from competitors. The inclusive company seal focuses on three key areas: inclusive employment, inclusive procurement, and inclusive distribution. Companies are invited to apply to one of them. Inclusive employment involves eliminating barriers in the selection and hiring process to provide quality jobs to vulnerable populations. Inclusive procurement aims to engage ventures led by vulnerable populations as suppliers. Inclusive distribution focuses on developing and strengthening the distribution networks of products or services from vulnerable populations. To earn the Inclusive Company Seal, certain criteria must be met. The inclusion actions should

be sustainable, forming part of the company's overall strategy and supported by formal policies. The actions should also have a positive impact, benefiting both the company and the individuals involved. They should be relevant, aligning with business objectives and the needs of marginalized populations within the value chain. Lastly, the actions should be replicable, serving as a model for implementation in other areas of the company and as a reference for best practices in Colombia's private social investment ecosystem.

Non-Discrimination Seal

The Ministry of Interior, in collaboration with ICONTEC[4], has undertaken efforts to strengthen the Observatory for the Promotion of Inclusion and the Fight against discrimination or stigmatization with the initiative called "Colombia is for everyone." As part of this initiative, they have developed a non-discrimination seal (ICONTEC, 2023) and a technical reference to implement effective practices aimed at reducing various forms of discrimination. The overarching goal of this initiative is to create a supportive environment and provide resources that enable companies to implement effective measures for reducing discrimination and ensuring equal opportunities for all individuals.

The non-discrimination seal serves as a written declaration issued by a certification entity, verifying the fulfillment of requirements outlined in the technical reference. To facilitate the implementation of this seal, the Ministry of Interior and ICONTEC selected 25 companies to participate in a pilot program. These companies receive free 24-hour technical support, which includes a comprehensive entry diagnosis and measurement. The assessment process provides insights into the current state of actions undertaken by each company, aligning with the provisions specified in the technical reference. The findings of the diagnosis will help identify areas with the greatest potential impact, informing the development of a work plan. The work plan will be formulated collaboratively between the participating companies and the Ministry of Interior. It will primarily focus on implementing key actions aimed at reducing the identified gaps and addressing various forms of discrimination.

Friendly Senior Citizen Seal ("Sello Amigable – Adulto Mayor")

The Ministry of Labor launched in 2021 the Friendly Senior Citizen Seal program (Ministerio del Trabajo, 2023) with the aim of promoting the employability of senior citizens who have

[4] Colombian Institute of Technical Standards and Certification.

reached the age of retirement but do not meet the additional requirements to get a pension. This program recognizes the labor rights of senior citizens, but also aims to integrate the business sector strategically to stimulate their employment through the implementation of good practices. Companies that obtain the Friendly Senior Citizen Seal will receive a 120% income tax deduction for hiring senior citizens for a minimum duration of one year, and it will also be considered a tie-breaker factor in public bidding processes.

Instrument	Sponsored by	Type of Organization	Focused on	Access
Latin America Inclusive Companies Ranking	Diversity Chamber	Non-profit	Overall inclusion	Free
PAR Ranking	Aequales	Consulting firm	Gender equity	Free
Equipares Certification	Ministry of Labor and UNDP	Public/non-profit partnership	Gender equity	Requires a fee. Not disclosed
Inclusive Companies Seal	ANDI	Non-profit, business organization	Inclusion along the value chain.	Free for ANDI affiliates
Non-Discrimination Seal	Ministry of Interior	Government agency	Free-discrimination workplace.	Not disclosed
Friendly Senior Citizen Seal *(Sello Amigable – Adulto Mayor)*	Ministry of Labor	Government agency	Inclusion of older adults	Not disclosed

Table 4. Certifications, Rankings, and Seals incentivizing D&I work in Colombia.

3. METHODS

I approached the research questions with a case study design (Saldaña, 2011; Marshal, 2021), aiming to do an in-depth examination of how food industry firms implement D&I strategies in Colombia. The study focuses on the practitioners' perspective on the factors that enable D&I work, and the main challenges companies face trying to implement these practices. Prior studies (Derven, 2014; Jonsen et al., 2021; Tang et al., 2015) looking at D&I work across industries have used in-depth interviews and content analysis as tools for data collection and analysis. To conduct this study, I partnered with the Colombian National Business Association (ANDI). ANDI is divided into sectorial chambers, one of them dedicated to the Food Industry. The chamber clusters 67 affiliated companies operating in the business of chocolates, biscuits, retail food, vegetal oils, ice cream, cold cuts, dairy, and pasta. The first contact with ANDI staff took place in June 2022. Early interactions with the director of the Food Industry Chamber helped to introduce the research goals and co-design a course of action to approach the participants. The spirit of the partnership with ANDI is collaborative and aims to be a win-win for both sides, with that said, they did not interfere in the study design, but rather provided recommendations to establish a more successful interaction with the participants.

Initially, I built a matrix to learn more about the 67 companies affiliated with the Food Industry Chamber. I first categorized them according to their place of operation and whether they are owned by Colombian capital or foreign investors under the assumption that this will reveal differences in terms of D&I work applications. Those that only operate in Colombia were categorized as national. Those headquartered in Colombia, but with operations across the Americas were categorized "multilatinas" and foreign companies as multinationals. As I am trying to explore the meanings behind diversity and inclusion in the Colombian context, it is important to distinguish how each one of these groups defines and approaches these terms. I also looked for information published on companies' websites and official documents (mainly sustainability reports) related to D&I strategies. I browsed their websites and did a Google search typing the name of the firm accompanied by the words: "diversity" and "inclusion." I reviewed the website of each company seeking diversity and inclusion statements or if they publish information related to D&I actions. Collecting this information allowed me to have a better context about the sector itself and the work companies are doing, facilitating an early identification of their initiatives (or lack of them) before I started the interviews.

3.1.Data collection

The data collection was divided into three phases. Phase one consisted of a round of semi-structured interviews with key informants involved in D&I work, but with an external perspective to the private sector, that is personnel working in NGOs, government agencies, and United Nations, among others. I conducted six interviews from July to August (2022), five in person and one over zoom. All interviewees held manager positions and oversaw D&I strategies offering technical assistance to companies interested in implementing D&I work. During the interview, I asked about D&I practices, motivations behind starting D&I work, enabling factors to scale-up initiatives, and meanings associated with D&I. The data collected in this first round of interviews informed the upcoming two phases. Based on the themes that emerged from my conversations with these informants, I adjusted the survey and the interview questionnaire applied to company officers.

Phase two established the first contact with the participants. Food Industry Chamber staff sent an email with a questionnaire to its affiliates presenting the study and myself as the researcher. I did not do the first contact directly because of two reasons. First, data regulations prohibit ANDI staff to share emails with someone not belonging to their organization. Furthermore, it seemed reasonable that ANDI staff would send the email, hoping that existing trust between them and the participants would positively impact recruitment. In the email sending the questionnaire, we assured participants that results would be anonymous and aggregated. We also explained how at the end of the process, companies would have access to the research findings through a policy brief report.

The survey consisted of seven questions, four with multiple answers, and three open-ended questions. The survey asked participants about D&I practices, motivations to pursue D&I work, benefits and challenges of implementing D&I strategies, and definitions of D&I. Questions from the survey were drawn from prior studies (Roberson, 2006; Tang et al. 2015), and for those that had multiple answers, the prompts were based on data collected in the first round of interviews. The survey was open from late July to late August 2022, with reminders sent out throughout that period. In total, 14 companies participated, 43% multinationals, 29% multilatinas, and 29% national companies. Most of the respondents came from Human Resources (HR) units, and others from Sustainability and Corporate Affairs offices. Before participants

submitted their responses, there was a question asking them if they would like to participate in an interview to do an in-depth exploration of their case.

Phase three took place from mid-August (2022) to early-January (2023). I did 17 interviews with the 14 companies that participated in the survey. In terms of composition, 43% were multilatinas, 36% multinationals, and 21% national companies. In two companies I was able to interview two different officers, and in one firm I did two interviews, the initial one and a follow up with the same team, two officers from the HR department. All the interviews were conducted over zoom and in Spanish. Except for two interviewees, all the others granted permission to record the interview. Interviews lasted from 35 to 55 minutes. I created a field notes journal to record in a reflective way interactions with the participants (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Using an Excel spreadsheet, I divided my journal into three columns, personal reflection after the interview, responses connected to the literature, and direct answers to my research questions. From the two interviews that were not recorded, I took handwritten notes and transcribed them right after the interview was over. For those I was able to record, interviews were transcribed using a transcription online platform, cleaned by a research assistant, and finally I read them all before starting the analysis to make sure there were not typing errors or overall inconsistencies.

Participants in phases 2 and 3 came from two groups within the organization. Human Resources Officers: leading managers responsible for the overall HHRR strategy or for specific dimensions such as Welfare officers, People & Organization, and Organizational Development. Key informants: employees whose work are directly or indirectly tied to Diversity and Inclusion practices, for instance, Sustainability managers, Human Rights specialists, and Corporate Affairs officers.

In the interviews, I asked participants to reconstruct the process that led to establish D&I practices in their company. Seidman (2019) argues that "reconstruction is based partially on memory and partially on what the participant now senses is important about the past event" (p. 9). Following this approach, I started by asking participants about their role in the firm, how their job was related to D&I, and from there, about the company's D&I practices (if any). I asked them how their D&I work started, and what motivated the company to incorporate this approach. Then we moved to the process of implementation, inquiring about factors that enabled their work, as well as challenges they faced. The final questions were geared towards opportunities in the

medium and long term to expand their process, as well as how policymakers could enhance their strategies. In the first interviews, I ended the meeting by asking participants how they understood or defined diversity and inclusion, although I tried different questions, I could see participants struggled to answer it, therefore, I dropped it and allowed more time to other questions. Throughout the data collection, I noticed that interviewees were describing how they understood diversity and inclusion without being asked directly.

To successfully conduct the interviews, I followed Seidman's (2019) active listening practice to create a favorable environment for my time with company officers. Seidman (2019) argues there are three levels of listening: (i) listening to what the participant is saying, (ii) identifying the inner and public voices of the participant, and (iii) being aware of the process as much as the content. For me it was important to constantly check transitions between inner and public voices because as Ahmed (2017) points it out, D&I work might be driven by reputational demands, therefore, D&I managers are often pushed to present it as checked item in a to-do list. Because of that, I thought it was important to look for participants' inner voices and delve into their personal opinions. To limit my interactions, I followed another Seidman's (2019) advice suggesting that instead of talking during the interview to clarify or comment on the informant's answers, the interviewer can take notes, write down a keyword, and ask later about it. That way, the interviewer can do follow-up questions without interrupting the participant. By applying this practice, I was able to take notes at the right moment, enabling the participants to discuss their responses freely.

3.2.Data Analysis

To conduct the data analysis, I did three coding iterations. I coded the interviews using a blended approach. I applied a bottom-up approach, based on Linneberg and Korsgard's (2019) definition, of "developing codes and data by using phrases and terms used by the participants themselves" (p. 263), and a top-down, "employing ideas from my theoretical framework" (Campbell, p. 24, 2016). Before starting coding, I went back to my field notes, and noted patterns across interviews in the column 'answers to my research questions,' this provided a first snapshot of themes and codes I would later find in the in-depth analysis process. The first coding iteration took place in October (2022). I randomly chose five interviews following the three types of companies described above, three multilatinas, one multinational, and one national company, aiming to develop codes representative of the data set composition. I read through the interviews and used

first-cycle codes: in vivo, descriptive, process, values, and versus (Saldaña, 2016). With the first iteration, I was looking to develop a topic inventory and identify how officers were referring to D&I work processes. While coding, I wrote memos from each interview, noting questions that rose from the transcript, as well as writing definitions for some of the more frequent codes. I coded the five interviews in a Word document using the comment function. After this, I listed all the codes in a separate document and grouped them into categories. I read through the codes several times, trying to go from nouns to more in-depth analysis (Saldaña, 2016). The result of the first iteration was an initial codebook.

The second and third coding iterations aimed to refine the coding book (See Table 5). In a second iteration (December - 2022) of the analysis, I picked another five interviews, following the same composition of firms' categories, and tested the initial codebook. This allowed me to refine codes, subcodes, and define each of them and developed a more robust codebook (see table 1). In the final iteration, I coded all interviews with the most recent coding book using MAXQDA. Considering I had 17 interviews, most of them with an average of 40 minutes, I used software to organize the data and find excerpts easily. In the third iteration, a couple of new codes emerged, however, they were not answering any of my research questions and they were prevalent in less than five participants. I kept them in case they were useful for future work or to back any of my findings. In the final part of the analysis, I used second-cycle coding: pattern, axial, and theoretical codes, aiming to "develop a sense of categorical, thematic, and theoretical organization" (Saldaña, p. 234, 2016) of the existing codes.

Coding in three iterations served different purposes. It allowed me to better know the data, develop codes and definitions that more accurately represented the participants' voice, and finally to explore different responses to the research questions. As I made progress through my coding iterations, I could see how my coding skills evolved. I started coding paragraphs with only one code, and ended with paragraphs coded with multiple codes, as I split them into sentences using a more in-depth analysis.

CODE NAME	DESCRIPTION
Incentives	Drivers that motivate and encourage D&I work inside an organization.
Baseline Conditions	It refers to distinctive elements that favor the creation of a diverse and inclusive environment
D&I Practices	It refers to practices that establish diversity and inclusion work at different levels of a corporation.
Diversity in the Workforce	This code refers to the different population groups companies are trying to target. These groups are based (mainly) on surface characteristics, gender, sexual orientation, ableism, age, etc. As opposed to deep characteristics, such as personality traits, political ideology, among others. The purpose of this code is to gather information about D&I practices companies are implementing for each group.
Barriers	It refers to ideas, imaginaries, and structures that slow or stop the implementation of D&I practices.
Diversity and Inclusion conceptualization	This code refers to company officers' understanding of diversity and inclusion. It encompasses explicit definitions, ascribed meaning to both terms, attributes associated with doing D&I work, and theoretical frameworks under which D&I work is located.
Partnerships	Joining efforts with other organizations from various backgrounds as a key activity to advancing D&I work

Table 5. Coding Book.

3.3.Validity & Positionality

The validity of this research lies on three elements: triangulation, process, and self-examination (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although the findings are based on the practitioners' perspective, I looked for two additional sources, the voices of those who work on D&I in Colombia outside of companies, and the public information disclosed by the participating companies contained in websites, reports, and other documents. These two additional information sources were present throughout the different study phases, in the design, analysis, and findings writings. Regarding process, I am confident that the three coding iterations with multiple techniques rendered a refined codebook that reflected with accuracy the participants' voice. The use of a combined

inductive-deductive approach, having the codes dialogue with recent theoretical development in the literature enhanced the findings and provided me with clarity. Finally, I have described how I did intensive memoing throughout this process, with the purpose of capturing each stage of the research, but also, looking to self-evaluate how my own positionality and biases may influence my research.

Connected to that last point I want to disclose my positionality as a researcher and individual. My intellectual interests are inextricably related to my identity and to who I am. I am interested in understanding and explaining social inclusion processes. These are important to me because as a gay man, son of divorced parents in a catholic society, growing up in the border of two countries, and being familiar with the feeling of being an outsider, I know firsthand the effects of being excluded. During my bachelor's studies, I was an LGBT activist, leading the student group of my university. I also did my undergraduate thesis with lesbians and gays living on the Pacific coast of Colombia, one of the poorest and most violent regions of the country, inhabited mostly by Afro Colombians and Indigenous communities for whom having a different sexual and gender identity meant crossing race and ethnicity barriers. Studying D&I practices is my contribution to the development of strategies that enable a more diverse and equitable society.

Finally, I identify myself with constructivism and critical epistemology. The former assumes that “reality is socially constructed [that] there are multiple realities, or interpretations of a single event” (Merriam and Tisdel, 2016, p. 9). And the latter sees reality as “subjective and constructed on the basis of issues of power” (Lather, 2006, p. 8). However, I engaged in conversation with my advisor, committee members, and peers to constantly reflect on how my ideas, prejudices, political, and academic beliefs influence my research. This is of particular importance given that my research is intimately connected to my own life experience, therefore, my interpretations of reality oscillate between my personal beliefs and my academic knowledge.

4. FINDINGS

The findings are divided into three sections. The first section answers RQ 1, which asks about what diversity and inclusion practices are implemented by food industry firms in Colombia. In addition, it partially answers RQ2, which inquiries about the enablers and challenges to diversity and inclusion practices in the food industry in Colombia. Furthermore, it provides an insight on how participants decide which practices to implement (RQ 1.2.), it particularly looks at what is driving D&I practices within Food Industry firms. The second section aims to answer if all companies are trying to implement the same type of practices (RQ 1.1.) by describing what has been called in the literature as workforce diversity (Mor Barak, 2022), that is which diversity dimensions companies are trying to target. The last section answers the second part of RQ2 by categorizing the challenges to D&I practices in the Food Industry in Colombia.

4.1.D&I Drivers

I identified two primary drivers that serve as motivation and encouragement for D&I initiatives within organizations: reputational incentives and business incentives. While both factors catalyze D&I efforts, they serve distinct purposes. The former aims to attain public recognition for the company's implemented practices, whereas the latter aligns business needs with the implementation of D&I practices.

4.1.1. Reputational Drivers

Companies are aware that doing D&I work is something that society and stakeholders demand. Making their commitment public and submitting their procedures to external evaluations assure consumers, investors, and employees that the organization is making a serious effort to create a more inclusive and diverse workplace. Reputational drivers come in the form of certifications, rankings, and joining collective agreements. Across companies, participants identified Ranking PAR and the Equipares Seal as the most salient reputational drivers. They are both focused on gender equity and tend to be the most used because of the relevance they have gained in the private sector agenda. Often, companies set their participation in an external evaluation process as one of their D&I goals, which means submitting their practices to a third-party assessment. In some cases, companies know in advance the evaluation methodology and have prepared to fulfill the requirements, in others, they are in an initial stage of their D&I strategies and use the evaluation as a tool that gives them a diagnosis of their current state.

> With those insights we obtained from those evaluations, which were not only like audits where we looked at each policy, we delved into the data, and so on, but also involved asking people directly. We also went to factories to conduct surveys, asking people questions like, "How do you perceive your development process as a woman?" or "How do you think maternity leave can affect or not affect your professional growth?" People responded openly, and that allowed us to gain highly relevant insights to understand how to shape future strategies, focusing not only on key performance indicators (KPIs) but also on what lay behind them—the effectiveness of our policies and practices. (Company Officer #20).

> We carried out everything from the Ranking Park platform, which I considered important to have. For instance, the specific gender equity aspect was not as detailed before, lacking a clear diagnosis of what exists and what doesn't, what actions we need to take, and what the plans are. Nowadays, we have made significant progress in that regard. We now have a more specific approach to gender equity, identifying what is present and what is lacking, as well as outlining the necessary actions and plans to address it. (Company Officer #8).

With an evaluation that comes with the Equipares certification the company conducted surveys with employees who are impacted by D&I practices. As shown by the participant, collecting the data not only served the evaluation purpose, but provided additional input that prompted reflection about the effectiveness of the company's policies. As represented in these quotes, participants find value in measurement tools provided by external organizations, however their impact goes beyond performing an assessment. In the medium-term, evaluation efforts contribute to building a larger institutional structure that enables D&I work. Participants expressed how following the certification methodology provided a deeper awareness of D&I issues which in turn incentivized a corporate transformation that sought to include women, but also other population groups.

Reputation is not only achieved by certifications or rankings, but also by association with practices that are deemed to be better. Multilatinas and national companies see D&I practices as a way to resemble companies in the Global North, almost as if D&I was a trend they need to follow to become a "world-class" company. In some cases, participants also argued that D&I work would help them build an employer brand that attracts young people in the workforce who are interested in societal issues.

> I am convinced that this [D&I work] is what we must do, and even more so given the company's vision, which is to be a world-class company. I was saying, that sounds very nice on paper, but 'what does it imply to be a world-class company?' Diversity and

> inclusion. That's one of the issues that must be checked. Because if not, we are not going to be a world-class company. (Company officer #10).

4.1.2. Business Drivers

Companies reported starting D&I work as a response to corporate or business demands. In multinationals, this took place when their headquarters launched a global D&I initiative sending guidelines to each of their regional or national teams. Often, these guidelines include prioritized population groups, goals for the region, and a set of practices meant to help them establish their own process. Company officers acknowledged that they still have decision-making capabilities to adapt global strategies to their context.

> As it is part of the global objectives of (name of company), therefore, [the] Andean [region] has to comply with the global objectives and what will [the] Andean [region] do to add to this strategy. (Company officer #7).

> Each country has to contribute, but the Committee asks the country. The Committee says to the country, "I have made a commitment to the Global to increase female employment by two points by 2022". How are you, as a country, going to contribute to the goal? Right? (Company officer #9).

Another participant pointed out to that to be connected to the Global North was another reason that pushed them to start D&I work. Multinationals conduct audits to their suppliers as part of an effort to guarantee that their values and societal commitments are followed along their value chain. One participant reported how as part of Corporate Social Responsibility audits, they were asked about their D&I work. As D&I work becomes more important for multinationals, they try to expand these practices to business partners across the globe. As mentioned by the participant, companies in the Global South must comply, otherwise they risk losing business partnerships that are important to them.

> And we began to see that we have very large customers, (...) let's say that we are their suppliers. For example, [name of company], [name of company], well, in the case of suppliers (...) These audits are super strict, super complex, they are audits that really review each operation point by point, they are very important audits and for us they provide important points to review where we are failing, what needs to be improved, and these audits, you have to pass them, you have to make an action plan of what you have left, and this action plan you have to present it to them again. And that's when this issue [D&I] started to come up a lot. We see that, for example, there is an important challenge in equity and diversity, because we are still in that process, we are making progress. So, when they ask us, ‘Hey, do you have a policy?’, we are working on it and the idea is that this year we will be able to start implementing it. (Company officer #9).

4.2.Enabling Factors and Phases of D&I

Based on the participants' account, I identify five enabling factors that enable the progress of D&I initiatives. Each of them aims to reach a specific goal, for instance, building an institutional infrastructure that supports D&I actions, but they also work together, for example, changing cultural norms by installing an inclusive employment policy that is communicated across the organization by different leaders.

- **Institutionalize D&I Work:** incorporating a D&I approach across corporate documents, policies, and formal processes.
- **Changing Cultural Norms:** aiming to alter cultural models and values by providing D&I training, transforming internal communications, and promoting activities that celebrate marginalized populations.
- **Build a Support Network:** identifying leaders across the organization who can champion D&I efforts and replicate practices in their units.
- **Measure and Evaluate D&I work:** collecting information that provides input to further D&I work.
- **Develop partnerships:** seeking external help to learn about D&I, enhance D&I practices, and exchange knowledge.

In Figure 1, I argue that each of these enabling factors represent a stage in an organization trajectory to incorporate D&I practices, with partnerships as a cross-cutting activity that provides technical assistance to each phase. Phase 0 refers to activities companies do before starting in-depth D&I work. Across participating companies, in all cases a top-down approach was adopted, hence, I do not frame leadership support as an enabling factor, but rather as prerequisite condition to D&I practices. Figure 1 suggests a linear path, however, the arrow in the bottom side indicates the iterative nature of D&I work. Change takes place slowly, and often companies undertake a step-by-step approach, piloting their practices, adjusting, and re launching. D&I work does not end, as people come and go, new situations emerge that require an innovation, additional programs, or simply just a change.

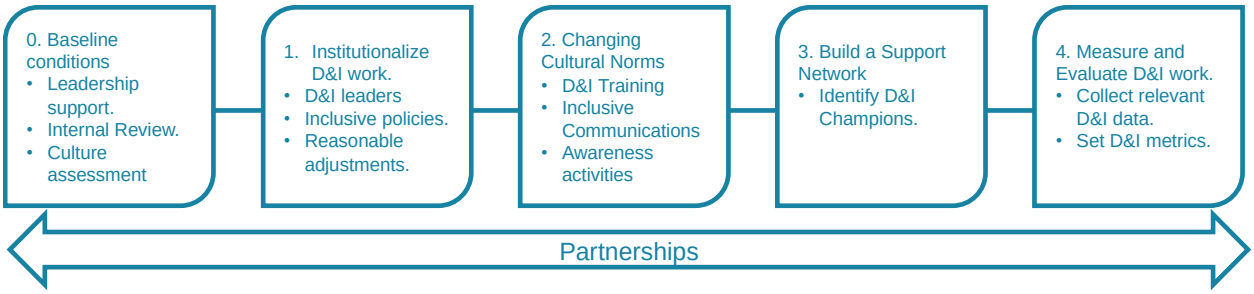

Figure 1. Phases of D&I work.

4.2.1. Phase 0: Baseline Conditions

Creating the right environment for implementing D&I practices is determined by multiple factors such as organization size, corporate culture, and organizational structure. In this phase, I highlight three elements based on the participants' account about how their process evolved. These are the starting point before diving into the D&I. In the case of companies that get to move to phase 1 and beyond, the conjunction of these characteristics established the baseline to advance D&I work. On the other hand, companies struggling to have explicit conversations about D&I or to start doing on D&I lack of one or more of these elements.

Leadership Support

Participants indicated that D&I strategies are often implemented with a top-down approach once the leader of an organization supports the idea of working on these issues. Levels of engagement vary across organizations as I will explain below. In some cases, there is explicit support which refers to leaders' acknowledgment of the importance of diversity and inclusion practices and requesting specific units to implement processes around them. In other cases, leaders actively contribute to a specific course of action, usually it tends to be related to obtaining D&I certifications. Active contribution may also imply offering specific ideas of what it means to be a diverse and inclusive firm, using D&I language in public events, including D&I as part of management meetings, and participating in D&I initiatives such as D&I committees.

> For us it has been super key, obviously, apart from what is done, the management's commitment, that our Market Head always has words related to diversity and inclusion in all the spaces he talks about, the welcome he gives to people. In the quarterly [name of event] that we have here, there is always a chapter of Diversity and Inclusion. (Company Officer #20).

However, participants also indicated that executive support is not enough, and suggested the need for support from leaders across the organization to scale up D&I practices.

> Executive leadership tells you, "I agree with the policy." The Executive tells you and then, of course, if you ask him to say "go and tell that to your people," well, yes, he goes and listens to you and says yes, that he agrees and that he thinks it is incredible and wonderful, and the environment, and the improvement of the [working] climate.... And there is a well-structured discourse in relation to the value of diversity and inclusion, but he does not handle the people on a day-to-day basis. (Company officer #9).

Organizational Culture Assessment

At the start of D&I strategies, company officers need to understand where their organizational culture stands and how they can use it or change it to continue their D&I efforts. For instance, as Spataro (2005) suggests assessing if their culture is one of differentiation, unity, or integration. Participants reported drawing on existing values in their organizational culture that align with those of D&I practices. They took advantage of current frameworks to base their D&I work on concepts employees were already familiar with, facilitating conversations about inclusion in an environment that fosters D&I values.

> There is something that characterizes us at [name of company], and it's that we are a company with a very warm and open culture. Right? let's say that all departments were very willing to support us. So what I was sharing with you, I would say, 'come on, let's meet with the leaders,', and the leaders were very attentive, [they would respond with] 'let's do it, how cool, let's talk to the temporary services company that accompanies us, come on, let's align ourselves, let's be like this, let's manage the process in this way.' (Company officer #5).

Multilatinas and national companies are looking at their own organizational cultures and corporate identities to see how D&I work fits with their values.

> I would say (name of company) is top (talking about D&I practices) and you are immersed in those from the moment you enter the company, right? It doesn't matter how you dress, and if you arrive with your hair dyed half orange, half green, if you are wearing piercings, and have tattoos, even better... On the other hand, I feel that here [my current company] we are beginning to walk this path. Right? For example, [we have to tell people] 'look, in an interview do not ask about religion, or politics, (...) do not even ask about their husband, that is none of your business'. (…) We are starting to work on that. So there is a long way to go, because I have some points of reference that I experienced and we still have a long way to go. (Company officer #10).

Participant #10 works nowadays at a national company, and the company he characterized as more open was a multinational. Thus, multinationals have already a culture in place that is provided by their headquarters, and multilatinas have been creating a culture that resembles those of multinationals, but with components closer to the Colombian context. For instance, participant #5 suggests their culture is "warm" naming a characteristic that could be linked to cultural norms in Latin America. Another participant, working at a multilatina, describes how they transition from "prohibition" to a more open culture:

> There was a restriction on people who had tattoos, people who had tattoos could not enter the organization because of health issues, because they looked bad, and so on.

> Today we do not have that anymore. We allow people with tattoos because it is part of their personality. (Company officer #13).

Internal review

To complete their overall assessment, D&I workers need to understand to what extent their own corporate process are exclusionary. Whereas organizational culture guides employees' assumptions (Shein, 2014) about how the work is done, written documents materialize those beliefs into formats, guidelines, protocols, etc. In the initial stage of D&I strategies, participants acknowledged looking at current practices that might not be inclusive, most often human resources processes, such as recruitment, selection, onboarding, training, and performance evaluations. Thus, changing those is primordial. Participants acknowledge that the universe of D&I work is as vast as they can think, therefore, they need a direction which is often understood as focusing their efforts in one population group.

> We also [needed to] understand what we had, what we did not have, because that can be the starting point for the whole strategy that we develop. (Company Officer 8).

> It's not just a trend to say "oh, we have people with hearing disabilities" in logistics and administrative areas, what we also understood is that we had to prepare ourselves to make this type of inclusion within the company. (Company officer 13).

In doing this internal review, teams started creating a path to implement D&I practices that helped them decide about initial steps and how to move forward. First, looking at processes that needed to be changed, and second, deciding on which dimension of diversity they wanted to tackle first, gender equity, racial issues, disability, etc. It is important to note that these conversations were reported by officers working in multilatinas and national companies. Multinationals did not describe the internal review because they comply with plans laid out by their headquarters, changing their processes in a more structured fashion.

4.2.2. Phase 1: Institutionalize D&I work

Once a company has created the conditions to implement D&I practices, they focus on a set of actions that make D&I more explicit across the organization. These actions do not happen in a particular order, rather they are complementary to each other and constantly evolving. They aim to a create a supportive institutional infrastructure that enables in-depth D&I work, for instance, moving from D&I statements or policies to applying them by creating programs, like for example the inclusion of transgender women in a business unit. The companies participating in

the study that are more advanced on D&I work implement all the practices described in this phase, whereas firms in their initial stages often only have a policy or statement that supports D&I.

Leaders

One of the mechanisms to institutionalize D&I work is appointing a person (or team) responsible for implementing D&I practices or adding these responsibilities to someone already working in the company. Among the companies participating in the study, none of them reported having a position solely devoted to D&I, but rather this is part of the job of managers working in Human Resources (HHRR) units. In some cases, participants were the heads of HHRR departments, and in others they were part of HHRR teams, but with a focus on employee's wellbeing or organizational culture. D&I work is also led by units such as Sustainability, Corporate Affairs, and Human Rights offices. This shows that companies placed D&I issues under existing offices already addressing societal issues. Often, D&I leaders are the ones proposing changes to processes or drafting new ones, helping redesign communication strategies, seeking partnerships with external organizations, leading certification, or evaluation processes, providing D&I training to other leaders, and overall, gathering all the information related to D&I efforts. It is important to note that in most cases, D&I leaders did not have prior experience working on D&I issues, they are often the first ones receiving training from their headquarters or external parties. As we will see later in section 4.3, lack of knowledge is one of the barriers D&I workers face.

A small segment of companies reported having volunteers leading parts of their overall D&I strategy. Multinationals are more prone to have this operational structure as they create affinity groups who are voluntarily led by employees across the organization. Often, people who accept this role do not have D&I work incorporated into their job description, nor are they necessarily compensated for the work they do. The following quote shows one of these cases.

> I am a chemical engineer and I work as an account manager in the food segment. So, the work I do in terms of diversity and inclusion is something parallel to my role. In the company, there are different networks, [that] reinforce diversity practices, there is a women's network, there is another one for the LGBT community, and there is another network that focused on people with disabilities. There are different networks and, well, the one you identify the most with, you join it. (Company officer #12).

Across multinationals, having affinity groups has been a way of involving employees with D&I efforts. Leaders of these small groups coordinate regular meetings, organize

celebrations around important dates, and lead any targeting the specific population group. Affinity groups are not a common practice among multilatinas and national firms, in part because D&I strategies are still very new in these organizations, and most of them find themselves scaffolding the D&I work structure.

Policies

Commitment to D&I becomes stronger when it is reflected in corporate documents. Companies formalize their support issuing D&I policies or making sure other corporate policies echo their pledge to diversity and inclusion. Relevant documents include Human Rights declaration, Ethics Code, Conduct Code, Non-Discrimination statements, among others. Documents vary in size, approach, and direction, according to the company's strategy. However, for participants, having an official document serves one purpose: legitimizing D&I work in the company. Participants reported feeling more confident about their work when they were supported by a corporate policy stating the organization D&I commitments. Participants indicated the need to make clear that D&I is an organizational strategy, rather than an individual project. What likely lies underneath this statement is that D&I workers know their work may have a backlash across the organization, and it is easier to navigate when they have the support of a corporate policy.

Corporate documents facilitating D&I work are constantly evolving. Statements that explicitly condemn discrimination in the workplace is often a starting point. From there, companies move to design policies that speak to their culture and reflect their own values. National and multilatina firms reported looking for external organizations' experts in D&I to advise them on writing their policies. Teams working in multinationals use global policies issued by their headquarters. Across the different categories of companies, participants reported the limitations of putting those documents into practice.

> When an organization talks about diversity and inclusion, it is not only [about] the development and construction of guidelines or policies, which many can do and it is an important step (…), but to apply it and live it. (Company officer 18).

> So, it's a little bit like trying with these policies that are so global and so inclusive and so corporate of [name of company] to start from there, from what should be done, to a Colombian culture where I say like... 'you can't talk like that, that joke, it's not funny anymore...that joke can be hurtful to someone.' (Company officer 4).

The main limitation of policies is that they are statements, but as such they do not change reality. This challenge is seen by participants differently. Some officers acknowledged that having a

policy is just an initial step, but there is more work to do before its impact can be felt across the organization. Others see a challenge in applying policies that are considered "global" and "inclusive" in a context that seems to have counter cultural norms, in particular the challenge of implementing D&I policies, changing people's behaviors. For example, jokes or expressions that were seen as acceptable are no longer correct and even if the policy enforces a type of behavior, more efforts are needed before changing the way people behave.

Reasonable Adjustments

One of the aims of D&I practices is to change operational processes to increase marginalized populations' sense of belonging and bolstering their professional careers. The term "reasonable adjustments" or "reasonable accommodations" has been widely used in disability studies to reflect changes in the workplace meant to reduce barriers for people with disabilities (Campbell, 2023). However, based on the participants' account, "reasonable adjustments" have evolved to represent a transformational tool aiming to include a broad range of populations beyond people with disabilities. Following participants' description on how they developed their strategies, I identified three ways (see table 6) in which companies do reasonable adjustments to their processes.

Audience and motivation are the main differences across categories. While the first one targets all employees on the assumption that each of them has a unique life situation, the other two focus specifically on marginalized population groups' needs. Another factor to consider is how reasonable adjustments are implemented. Companies rectify exclusionary policies when they notice existing processes that are an access barrier for traditionally excluded groups, in this case we see the example of a company creating an alternative recruitment assessment adapted for hearing-impaired candidates. Companies may also notice that marginalized populations are not receiving the support they need from the organization, and therefore issue policies or establish programs aiming to cover those needs. Like for example, a company created a program offering assistance to employees transitioning genders. Enacting reasonable adjustments poses a simple but important to question to D&I workers, "what's first, the egg or the chicken" (Company Officer 12). In some cases, companies are aware that certain population groups are going to require several reasonable adjustments, and prepare themselves before bringing them into the company, but in others, like the one described by officer #13 (in Table 6) only until they take place, companies realize the urgence of acting.

Type of Adjustment	Description	Evidence
Flexible individual policies	Making corporate policies more flexible so they adapt to all employee's needs. Examples include time flexibility arrangements and offering different types of wellbeing benefits to respond to a diversity of needs.	"We always provide balance to all employees. What working day do you want to choose? We have six types of working days and which days do you want to come into the office? That's it (...) you choose according to your characteristics and your needs, which days and at what time you want to come in and get off." (Company officer 6).
Rectifying exclusionary policies	Adapting current policies, processes, and infrastructure to eliminate access barriers for marginalized populations. Examples include adapting HHRR processes to candidates with diverse needs.	"So, those tests (recruitment assessments) are all reading, you sit at a computer, you read and you mark the answer. That test, for example, for people with hearing disabilities, you know sign language is a language like any other, like Spanish, English. So when a person who uses sign language reads in Spanish, they misinterpret what Spanish is saying, (...) so we had to, for hiring people with hearing disabilities, have a different test that we developed ourselves and applied with an intern." (Company Officer 9).
Creating targeted policies for specific groups	Creating new policies, processes and/or providing new infrastructure to increase feelings of inclusion in specific population groups. Examples include having an interpreter for corporate events, mental health programs for specific populations groups, etc.	When a person tells us that they are going to make a gender transition, there must be a supporting process by the organization, because we understand that there are many changes that they will go through, not only in their physical aspect, but also psychologically. (Company Officer 13).

Table 6. Types of Reasonable Adjustments.

4.2.3. Phase 2: Changing Cultural Norms

> I am not only saying this within the organization, I am saying it at a general level, that we have to work on diversity issues, [but] no matter how many procedures we fix, no matter how many ramps we install, no matter how many partnerships or job linkage initiatives, or quotas or whatever we impose, this is not going to work if people do not have a change of mindset or remove the biases and stereotypes that they have in their head. (Company Officer 12)

As shown before, organizational cultures play a key role in the creation of inclusive and diverse workplaces. Officer #12 echoes the sentiment that many of their colleagues share, formal structures matter, but the true catalyzer of D&I work is cultural change. Based on the participants' account, I identified three avenues to achieve that goal: providing D&I training, sending messages aligned with D&I values, and intentionally fostering employee's awareness toward D&I.

Training

Part of the challenge to successfully implement D&I practices is the lack of knowledge around these terms. To overcome this barrier, companies provide D&I training to their employees aiming to increase awareness about this topic. The first group of employees who access D&I content are those directly responsible for D&I practices. Participants reported focusing on the meaning of D&I, challenges faced by marginalized populations, as well as relevant regulations associated with specific groups.

> You start to understand what a migrant is and (…) the whole issue of the LGBTIQ+ community. We begin to understand all the gender issues, what it means, [why] a migrant is different from a refugee. Right? To understand the big umbrella that diversity, equity, and inclusion involves. (Company Officer 5).

According to the participants' account, it is possible to say that D&I training takes place at two levels. Core D&I teams seek in-depth training looking at relevant D&I concepts, dimensions of diversity and how to operationalize D&I practices. In contrast, training focused on middle-level managers and front-line staff aims to convey why D&I is important, what corporate policies are supporting D&I, and how a diverse and inclusive working environment looks like. In other words, what type of behaviors the company leadership is looking for. Most participants reported focusing on implicit bias training, gender stereotypes, and using inclusive language.

> So, again, what I was saying before, education [is key], because all of this does not go away with a code of conduct that you have to sign and that you may respect or not, but

> look, why it is not okay for you to say that or look why it is not okay for you to act this way. So, we tied it very much, again, all to education. (Company Officer 4).

D&I trainings serve different purposes. One is to increase awareness around behaviors that can be considered exclusionary and discriminatory towards specific population groups. Instead of explaining conceptually what D&I means, the goal is to show employees how exclusion might be reflected in their day-to-day interactions. To do this, it is essential to use a language that can be understood across different levels of education. A second purpose is helping people understand the company commitments to D&I and why they are important. This is more geared towards middle-level managers because D&I teams need them to replicate the message in their core groups. Providing training was reported as a key practice across the different types of companies, the main difference is how they access the content. Multinationals rely on their global capabilities translated into digital courses developed by their headquarters, whereas national and multilatinas look for consulting firms, NGOs, and international cooperation agencies offering training as part of their portfolio or programming agenda.

Communications

Another mechanism to increase awareness towards D&I is by designing communication strategies that reflect the cultural change. Table 7 summarizes the three goals companies are trying to achieve with their communication practices. In Spanish all nouns have a gender, traditionally, managerial positions were written in the male form. Participants reported transitioning to neutral ways of using the language, when possible.

Participants found challenging to sustain communication strategies in the medium and long-term and to use a clear language when explaining D&I efforts. Communications are always evolving and need to respond to the context and targeted audiences. In the case of employees, it is important to consider personnel rotation or turnover. Regarding the context, companies are expected to adjust their D&I communications according to what is happening in sociopolitical terms. Another challenge is using terms that everyone can understand. One of the participants makes it very clear, *"the glass ceiling and the sticky floor are terms that not even Mandrake*[5]

[5] Mandrake was a wizard in a comic series launched in the 1930s who had superpowers. In Colombia, where the comic became very popular, a phrase started to be employed to express something that could only be known by someone with superpowers, Mandrake.

understands. I had a hard time explaining to them what a glass ceiling was and what a sticky floor (...) that's not convenient either." As D&I work has evolved, D&I practitioners in the Global North have come up with technical terms, in the form of metaphors to describe phenomena where exclusion and discrimination can be observed. Although "glass ceiling" and "sticky floor" are common in the gender balance work (Lloyd-Jones, et al., 2018), similar terms have become popular in relation to other population groups.

Goal	How is this achieved?	Type of Communication	Evidence
Represent diversity across the organization.	Using official communication channels (email, social media, corporate TV, etc) to display different types of people who are part of the company. For instance, diversity of families, same-sex couples, pet parents, among others.	Internal	Then we began to send messages [including] mothers or fathers of pets, the [different] types of families, and the respect for those families that are composed of same-sex parents. And then around that we started to generate conversation as well. (Company Officer 13)
Reflect inclusivity in corporate policies	Conveying changes to existing practices explaining benefits that are now available for both men and women (i.e. parental leave), familiarizing employees with new policies (i.e. code of conduct) or existing ones when onboarding new employees.	Internal	So we started to look at this communication platform, we had to make a rollout that would reach everyone, that was not just an email, [and say] 'look, there is a [ethics] code, read it and accept it. (Company officer 8)
Reflect D&I commitments to external stakeholders.	The focus is on using inclusive language when posting job openings. Another way of communicating to external stakeholders about D&I is having CEOs participate in public forums as active supporters of D&I.	External	When they [the communications team] launch a statement, they also have that sensitivity, and they are, for example, using neutral language when they publish a job posting. (Company Officer 20).

Table 7. Goals and uses of inclusive communication.

Awareness activities

Another way to display D&I efforts is to change the way companies celebrate important dates and to include new ones commemorating events that are relevant marginalized populations. In the first case, companies adopt a more inclusive approach for traditional celebrations such as mothers' or fathers' day, incorporating images of different types of families. Increasingly, companies have joined commemoration dates such as pride month, disability day or have changed the way in which they approach women's day, for instance, highlighting the relevance of women across different levels of the organization.

> On Mother's or Father's Day, what we do is not to celebrate the mother and the father, but to celebrate the family. And if I am a dog mother or if my family is composed of two women or two men, (...) it was like starting to generate respect [for that] and above all [to encourage] an open dialogue, and a change of mindset. (Company officer 13)

> Almost all these dates are associated with the dates that formally the United Nations has also declared (…) of the dates to be celebrated around diversity and inclusion. For those dates, we always have, at least, we have a statement, and from there on, if we want to do some activity with our staff, well, we do it. (Company Officer 4).

Types of awareness activities vary across companies, most importantly they become a platform to communicate the organization's values around D&I. Beyond established dates, some companies reported organizing specific events to discuss a D&I initiative. For examples, events where companies talk about the inclusion of a recently hired population group and share stories of their lives, looking to increase employees' awareness by connecting them to the stories of marginalized populations.

4.2.4. Phase 3: Building a Support Network

Champions/Allies

D&I teams are aware that to succeed they need to bring onboard other teams and high-profile managers across the organization. Often, D&I teams lack the necessary knowledge to identify how a D&I initiative might impact manufacturing processes or need input from direct supervisors to design a successful communication campaign. However, it is not only about specific knowledge, but also about decision-making capabilities. For instance, if a company wants to start hiring people with disabilities, or increase the number of women in a factory, they need the manager's approval to launch the program and design a successful trajectory. Support networks are often built as organizational spaces in multinationals and multilatinas in the form of

D&I committees. They become a task force looking to facilitate and enable D&I work by providing input, proposing new initiatives, and joining efforts towards collective goals. In the case of multinationals, committees are connected to regional and global groups that are communicating with each other, sharing practices, guidelines, and goals.

> I was providing you with lot of context about the scope of regional and global initiatives because based on that, for example, we can review best practices that we implement in Europe or the ones we are implementing in the United States, Australia, or any other region. Do you see? For instance, in LATAM, we have made progress in implementing good practices such as having gender-neutral restrooms. (Company Officer 4)

> The Global Diversity and Inclusion Committee asks me every year for the regional goal for female hiring, right? Then they will ask the regional diversity and inclusion leader what the region will commit to (…) the Committee tells the country, "I committed to the Global Committee to increase female hiring by two percentage points by 2022." Now, country, how will you contribute to the goal? Got it? (Company Officer 9).

Although national companies do not have formal committees, participants acknowledged the importance of having a top-down approach to enable their work.

> So, it's about top-down approach, right? Because, I mean, once you have convinced or made the management and the leadership team aware, I believe you can cascade those policies and make them cross-cutting, gradually working with the culture. It's not as easy to implement it from the bottom-up perspective (Company Officer 10).

> Here I think that the success is that people have made this model their own, because that is how it is, they make this work. We, as a management area, allow people to come to the interviews, but here it is the bosses who decide if they admit the person, if they hire them. (Company Officer 14).

In building a support network, D&I work is disentangled from HHRR teams and it becomes everyone's which in turn increases participation, provides context information for all involved units and furthers the impact of D&I initiatives. Policies, adjustments, and communication strategies are creating the structure, but it is up to leaders to make decisions that reflect D&I values.

4.2.5. Phase 4: Measure and Evaluate D&I Work

Companies use measurement tools to inform their D&I work at different stages. At a broad level, collecting demographic data (often, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) help D&I professionals prioritize which dimension of diversity they should focus on. Climate assessments are another tool companies use to evaluate metrics such as sense of belonging. Once

companies dive into one dimension of diversity, say, gender equity, metrics become more specific, looking for instance at equal compensation, leadership positions by gender, turnover rates, etc. These two approaches were the most common among participants, however, it is important to say that most participants did not have a complex measurement system, and rather were in their initial stages.

> We do an annual measurement of work with purpose, which is what we call work environment and culture. The culture issue that I just told you about our corporate culture, how we are in each of these aspects to identify strengths, continue identifying gaps from diversity, equity and inclusion and continue working on an action plan to close those gaps and improve on a daily basis. (Company Officer 6).

> If I have that information, I can somehow start working on actions, but if I don't have it, it is more difficult and I don't even know what I am doing. Let me give you an example, at [name of company] we have more than 50% of the millennial population. But not everyone knows it. How I reach them with a message, how I am going to tell them, how I am going to explain it to them, if it is going to be through a video, if it is going to be through a talk, it is like knowing which audience you are also reaching. (Company officer 8).

> Last year 2021 started a workforce diagnosis with a gender focus. This was done by the World Bank and we also did, when we signed up for [name of program], beyond the agreement, they also offer a measurement tool and that measurement tool gives you some light on how we are doing. (Company Officer 15).

4.2.6. Developing Partnerships

Across all cases, companies sought external help to launch their practices, enhance current ones, learn about D&I, and exchange knowledge. I use the term partnerships in its broadest sense, as companies engage with external actors in different ways, which means financial resources, time invested, and goals vary. In some cases, there are formal agreements between two parties with a specific goal, for instance implementing a program to hire Venezuelan migrants. In others, companies are interested in having access to a specific service offered by a third party, for instance seeking training about how to better work with a specific population. Companies also establish dialogue among themselves, sometimes across industries or within, looking to exchange lessons learned and best practices that help each other to succeed in their work. It is important to note that in this case, NGOs perform as brokers between companies, since they know that it would be easier if company officers learn from their peers rather than from them. I argue that partnerships catalyze D&I work by providing specific services and connecting

companies with organizations of different nature (private, public, non-profit) to enhance their initiatives. Table 8 summarizes goals, outcomes, and provides evidence for each of them.

Goal	Outcome	Evidence
To access specific services that are needed to develop, enhance, and scale-up D&I initiatives.	Access to experts who provide technical assistance to D&I initiatives. Access to frameworks and specific tools that facilitate D&I work.	"We have had approaches with NGOs regarding the issue of cognitive disabilities. They have already explained to us their model and how we can work together. We have also engaged with the Family Compensation Fund, where they, along with the RLT (Labor Relations Team), have assisted us in conducting a job assessment, and we are about to begin the stage of interviews or a survey that needs to be conducted." (Company Officer 14).
To connect with relevant actors (private, public, and non-profit) who have experience on D&I.	Knowledge exchange. Learning details about the implementation of D&I practices across companies.	"In those four meetings we have participated in, the exchange of knowledge has been incredibly interesting. It opens your eyes to what Bancolombia is doing, for example, or what IBM is doing, as they are also present. I believe that such a forum is very necessary because sometimes you see big brands and you think, "Well, obviously, they must have it," like Google. But even Google is learning from your good practices." (Company Officer 4).

Table 8. Goals and outcomes of partnerships.

4.3.Diversity in the Workforce

In this section I explore the population groups companies are targeting as part of their D&I work. Figure 2 represents the number of participating companies focusing on a specific population group, it is important to note that some companies focus on only one, while others have programs for each of them. Most companies reported practices focused on gender equity, followed by disability, LGBTQ+, age, migrants, and reconciliation. A small number, n=2 (represented as N/A) reported not having a focus on specific populations, either because their approach to diversity is holistic or because they still have not reached a prioritization stage in their D&I work. For each of the population groups, I provide an account of what companies are doing, barriers they are facing, and strategies to overcome those. Overall, companies have a

shared understanding of each population group. For instance, under the age category, corporations agree on an approach that considers both young and older adults. Regarding migrants, most efforts are concentrated on hiring workers coming from Venezuela. I found discrepancies regarding the meaning of gender equity, for the majority it meant balancing women and men participation in the workplace, but for others it also included LGBTQ+ issues. In one case, a company had a D&I strategy with distinct strategies for each population group, but as the implementation evolved, male employees pushed back arguing feelings of discrimination. As a result, management shifted the focus to a holistic approach that values difference in all employees and does not distinguish specific identities.

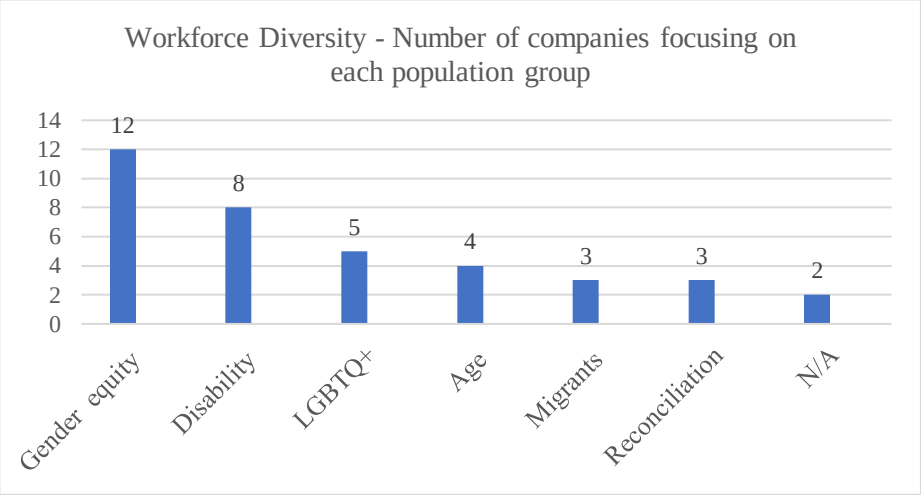

Figure 2. Workforce Diversity – Focus per population group. Based on data collected during the interviews and review of official documents.

Companies design their programs with different approaches based on incentives, their internal review, and cultural assessment. Compared to other dimensions, there are more external organizations (consulting firms, NGOs, and Government offices) assessing how companies are doing in terms of gender equity. This translates into a larger offer of assessment methodologies and technical assistance to build gender equity strategies in corporate settings. Clear metrics help setting standards which can have a positive impact as companies commit to structural changes and dedicate their efforts to achieve specific goals. On the other hand, working with other groups is more challenging since companies do not have guidelines to implement, for example working to dismantle ableism in the workplace is perceived as something that needs longer periods of preparation, the same occurs with LGBTQ+ focused work. While in almost all groups the focus

is on attracting personnel with those identities, when it comes to sexual orientation and gender identity diversity the approach is to guarantee a workplace free of discrimination.

For the most part, the categories resemble what firms in the Global North are trying to achieve, however, there are two particularities salient to the Colombian context. The first one is the absence of race and ethnicity as part of the main groups. Even though almost 10% of the Colombian population belongs to afro descendant or indigenous communities, there are no specific strategies to address their socioeconomic inclusion. Participants working in multinationals argued that discussions about race are more relevant in countries such as Brazil and the U.S. where according to their perspective race is an issue as opposed to Colombia where it is not. It was pointed out that companies operating in cities with a larger afro-descendant population, such as Cali, probably deal more with race issues. Four out the 14 companies participating in the study have operations in territories heavily populated by Afro descendant communities, and none of them address race or ethnicity as part of their D&I strategies.

> Obviously, perhaps in the United States, that issue is much more important because the Afro community is much more important in terms of numbers. But here, unless you are in a city like Cali or something like that, or coastal, where perhaps the population is larger, it doesn't make sense to manage it in a company that is supervised in Bogotá. (Company Officer 4).

Colombia's sociopolitical context has had an influence in workplace dynamics. In the study, 3 of the participating companies reported actions aimed at former combatants and victims of the conflict. Compared to other groups, actions geared towards this group are not disclosed as publicly, fearing retaliation in a very polarized environment. Another relevant phenomenon is the Venezuelan migration crisis. 3 of the participating companies also reported strategies to hire Venezuelan migrants and described obstacles navigating regulations issued by the Colombian government, which in part can be explained due to the lack of experience with migration phenomena, since historically Colombia has seen few migration waves.

4.3.1. Gender Equity

Gender is transparent. We have men and women. We should all have the same opportunities in a company. (Company Officer 6).

Working on issues associated with gender, in particular those related to imbalances between men and women is the focus across companies participating in the study. I identified three reasons why addressing gender imbalances is their primary emphasis. Following the quote from

company officer 6, gender is described as "transparent," something that can be easily seen and counted. However, from the perspective of corporations, their workforce does not reflect how Colombian population looks like since their factories tend to have more men than women, and in terms of corporate leadership, less than 35% of those positions are occupied by women (Aequales, 2022). This leads to a second reason; the manufacturing industry has placed women mostly in office environments. Several participants pointed out that for a long time there has been a bias that heavy industrial operations are for men, and women are welcomed but not in factories. A final explanation is the increasing number of external organizations (consulting firms, NGOs, and Government offices) that offer[6] technical support to help close the gender gap. Often, those capabilities translate into measurement tools accompanied by toolkits, that offer a diagnosis and next steps with concrete activities to advance their gender efforts.

> When I say that I want to be a mirror of the society in which my business operates, which is one of the organizational statements, well, I should have 49-51 [%] hired in my organization, which is the proportion of female participation in the labor market, 51% women, 49% men. When I started leading the process, only 22% of the company's population were women. Today we are reaching 32%, which means that in six years we have moved the score by 10% and we are stagnant. (Company Officer 9).

> [We started] seeking to equalize those percentages of participation that we had between men and women in the company, understanding that we are a manufacturing company and manufacturing companies tend to have a higher percentage of male participation due to the factory role, the industrial role. (Company Officer 6).

Although every company has a different situation in terms of gender balance, their concerns have been also reported elsewhere. The most recent (2022) Ranking PAR reveals that only 26% of women are in CEO positions, only 33% participate in boards, and 39% in entry level jobs. Although Ranking PAR results are aggregated for all industries in Colombia, they provide an overall view of gender equity across sectors. The upside is the number of organizations supporting these efforts and were identified during the interviews. An example comes from officer 12 who identifies as supporters: a United Nations agency (UNDP), two

[6] Non-profit organizations and government agencies offer support as part of their agenda which often is focused on closing the gender gap in workplaces. Consulting firms have developed assessment methodologies and technical assistance solutions for companies doing D&I work. In almost all cases, private companies pay to access these services.

business organizations (ANDI and the LGBTIQ+ Chamber of Commerce[7]), a consulting firm (Aequales), and one university (CESA). This support is not found across other populations groups, and later we will see how participants identify the lack of external organizations as a barrier to advance D&I work in other dimensions.

Across companies, there is a focus on creating the conditions to adequately employ women in jobs traditionally occupied by men. Because of the large manufacturing operations in the food industry, often the goal is to increase female presence in factories or in roles associated with logistics operations, such as truck drivers. Based on the participants' account, one of the main barriers is bringing women into factories and keep complying with Occupational Safety and Health Standards (OSHS). According to Colombian regulations, women and men can lift different amounts of weight, which means that for certain roles where employees need to lift a higher weight, women may not qualify for the job. To overcome this issue, companies report buying equipment such as mechanical arms that make lifting easier, both for men and women. Another issue is associated with having the necessary infrastructure to comply with OSHS, in terms of number of bathrooms and common areas needed by number of workers. One participant pointed out their factories were built with "a vision" with no women in the picture, therefore, adapting them has been a slow process where investment is needed. For logistics operations, the main barrier is finding women who have the driver licenses type authorized for medium and heavy trucks.

> For example, in factories, the vast majority of factory workers are men. So there's a strong effort that we're making to get more and more women into operational jobs, [however] (…) when understanding what those requirements were [to get more women into operational jobs], we began [to see] what it required and also put ourselves in the position of the factory manager, for example, where today Colombian law states that a man can carry twice the weight of a woman. So, to guarantee that a job can be occupied by both a man and a woman, most likely I have to adapt it, buying mechanical arms which is a very high investment that not all factories today possibly have the capacity to do in the short term. (Company Officer 20).

> So today we have to invest a little more in infrastructure to be able to hire more women, because for example, the bathroom batteries are no longer enough and there's a technical standard for safety and health at work that says there needs to be a certain amount of square volume of oxygen per person, so you have to have I don't know how

[7] This Chamber recently evolved to the Diversity Chamber, and it is explained in the context section of the thesis. I assume the participant was not aware of the name change.

> much space for that. So there's an important mix in investment between safety and health at work and this issue of diversity and inclusion. (Company Officer 9).

It is important to consider where these efforts are taking place and what they entail. Multinationals and multilatinas displayed different strategies to assure women are hired in factories, whereas in national companies the evidence is mixed. Some reported making a slow progress, and in one case, there was such a strong push back to a D&I strategy focused on gender equity, that the team had to back up and change the direction. Participants identified factory managers as gatekeepers of these efforts because if they do not support the D&I initiatives, they may refuse the changes suggested because these might not align with their management priorities. Bringing women into factories can have a high socioeconomic impact as they provide hundreds of jobs for women in economic hardship, however, similar efforts are not found in the leadership level where they are also needed.

Practices to create a more inclusive workplace for women vary across companies including changes in the recruitment process, reviewing pay ranges, implementing time flexibility policies, establishing affinity groups, among others. In one case, a company adopted a more comprehensive approach, and decided to look at gender equity across their value chain. For that, they partnered with an international cooperation agency and together they developed a series of pilot projects to include female beekeepers, women employed as heavy truck drivers, and entrepreneurs who own small stores and sell the company products.

4.3.2. Disabilities

When I discussed the possibility of hiring people with disabilities the answer was often "we need to prepare first." Across participants, bringing people with disabilities into their companies requires gaining specific knowledge, capabilities (i.e., learning sign language), and making sure the infrastructure/equipment they might require is available to them. D&I teams start by familiarizing themselves with the different types of disabilities as well as legal frameworks that seek to protect people with disabilities when they are employed. Participants reported partnering with non-profit organizations that provide training and support during the hiring process, including shortlisting a pool of candidates for the company and pointing out key factors during the recruitment. Some companies reported running a diagnosis as a first step to identify possibilities and barriers to include people with disabilities. Most efforts are focused on how to

make existing processes more accessible, for instance, adapting assessments for candidates with hearing impairments.

> We are in a process called Diagnostic Evaluation of accessibility, we are doing this with RECA[8], to identify the actions we need to take internally [before we] bring them [potential employees with disabilities] in. Although they [the organization] told us that we are a company that can easily be inclusive to them, we want to prepare ourselves so that they can really be well received and not feel ourselves like we are learning. (Company Officer 15).

Companies need to make their spaces and processes adequate to be able to hire people with disabilities which often ends up hindering the number of candidates companies can effectively bring in. On the other end, companies are mostly offering entry level jobs with no clear path for employees to be promoted to other positions. In one of the interviews, the interviewee suggested that it was easier to hire people with disabilities, in particular in reference to people with cognitive disabilities, in job positions with repetitive tasks, than in those with a more professional-based needs.

> What are we currently looking for to enhance this? It's not just about having people with cognitive disabilities, but also giving them new opportunities within the organization. How? By creating a career plan so that they not only feel they can be present in the operational part, but of course, can be a trainee operator and then a master trainee operator." (Company Officer 13).

An assumption among participants is the belief that people with disabilities are a homogenous group, disregarding the diversity and the various levels of skills across them. Such belief often translates into a bias against them. Reasonable accommodations around accessibility and infrastructure are necessary as a first step, but more structural changes are needed to enable the professional and personal development of people with disabilities.

This leads to inquiry about what drives companies to start this process in the first place and what their goal is. Of all the marginalized population groups, hiring people with disabilities has the most attractive tax incentive, however only one participant mentioned it and explicitly said “we are not doing it because we get a 200% tax return” (Company Officer 14). Another reason could be reputational, but compared to gender equity where there are rankings and certifications, no similar instruments exist to recognize companies that employ people with

[8] RECA is an organization that provides technical assistance for companies interested in implementing inclusive employment programs. Its acronym stands for “*Red Empleo con Apoyo*”, Employment Network with Support.

disabilities. In the case of gender equity, those mechanisms have opened the door to start conversations, develop new practices, and sustain an infrastructure, but without a constant assessment and clear metrics, other populations face the risk of being treated as something done in the checklist of diversity work.

4.3.3. LGBTQ+

Companies do not have standardized practices to address the needs of LGBTQ+ individuals. Compared to other groups, where it is evident that there is a clear intention to make them feel more included, reasonable adjustments seem to be introduced after practitioners experience situations they do not know how to navigate. Part of the reason explaining this approach is that companies are not trying to intentionally hire new employees with LGBTQ+ identities, but rather aiming to create an environment where current employees with any of those identities feel welcomed. Communication tools seem to be the one-to-go mechanism to welcome sexual orientation and gender identity diversity. For instance, including images of same-sex couples in corporate messages, celebrating pride month, among others. Participants had mixed views about pride month celebrations. Recently, it has become a trend among corporations to change the traditional colors of their logo for those of the rainbow flag, signaling their support for LGBTQ+ rights to both employees as well as consumers. Some acknowledged their companies are not there yet, and more open conversation about LGBTQ+ issues is needed internally but also externally, unveiling a fear companies have, losing a share of the market if they are explicit about their support to an LGBTQ+ agenda. Others were critical about doing it and implied that changing the logo is meaningless if inside the company there is not an inclusive environment.

> They saw the colorful logo on LinkedIn and say, 'this company works really well on the issue of sexual orientation', well, go and join that company and get to know the culture, and see if they really accept difference. (Company Officer 6).

Beyond communication tools, a multinational reported having an affinity group for LGBTQ+ employees and allies. While traditionally affinity groups have been a tool used to create a safe space for marginalized populations, in this case, it aims to increase employee's awareness regardless of their sexual orientation. Ultimately, their goal is to strengthen interactional capabilities to avoid situations where intolerance or discrimination may take place. Despite these efforts, participants reported making more significant changes when situations involving LGBTQ+ employees arose and ended with undesirable outcomes.

> This person filed an ethics complaint, saying 'I felt discriminated against because of my gender transition, by my leaders, by my colleagues.' She [the person who filed the complaint] left the organization, [then] we went to visit the store [where the person was working], to understand from that complaint what had happened, and that's where we found a (...) reality. So, they [the person's colleagues] said 'sorry but look, we didn't know how to do it [how to react to the gender transition] and we didn't do it with bad intentions,' because that's how it was and that's what they told us, 'one day she was Michelle and the next day she was Michael.' (Company Officer 13).

> And then finding out, as [name of person] said, now it's like 'oh my God, he married a person of the same gender,' so it caused an outcry among those of us in human resources, but well, okay, we have to keep going, he claims his benefits, brings his documents, enjoys his days. And it has been like the starting point, the day-to-day, of the situations that have arisen for us (Company Officer 10).

Practices to address LGBTQ+ inclusion seem to evolve according to "day-to-day" situations. However, they seem to have imbalanced outcomes depending on where you are in the LGBTQ+ spectrum. Thus, it is easier for a gay male to present his marriage license, and get access to the benefits that heterosexual couples get in the company, than for someone transitioning genders who is discriminated by their co-workers causing their resignation. The same level of preparation corporations see as necessary to bring in people with disabilities it is not offered when it comes to transgender employees. Regarding transgender people, another concern was connected to Occupational Safety and Health Standards (OSHS). As mentioned before, OSHS regulations in Colombia indicate that women and men can lift different weights, so in the case of transgender employees, companies struggle to navigate what happens when either of them transitions to the opposite gender. Overall, the LGBTQ+ case shows that practices of inclusion are necessary beyond the recruitment stage, and constant assessment is needed throughout the life cycle of an employee.

4.3.4. Migrants

Part of the corporate response to the Venezuelan migration has been opening job opportunities for Venezuelans who can legally work in Colombia. Migrants coming from Venezuela account for more than 2.5 million people, and from that group less than 10% have a regular status that allows them to work (GIFMM, 2022). Partnered with NGOs and Government agencies, companies started to explore how to include this population. Part of the work is understanding regulations, from basic terminology such as what "regular status" means and how Venezuelan migrants can acquire it, to what training is needed to prevent xenophobic situations. Companies

first identify what job positions migrants can take on. This analysis is based on requested qualifications, licenses, and degrees. Venezuelan migrants struggle validating their degrees in Colombia, in part because of the poor institutional infrastructure in Venezuela that slows bureaucratic processes, and on the other hand validating a foreign degree before the Colombian Government has a price that often migrants cannot afford. Thus, most of the positions migrants can apply to (and what companies can offer) are those where they can easily learn a set of skills and no educational degree is needed. To facilitate their inclusion, companies have changed some HHRR requirements such as security clearances and required experience to make sure the company can hire them. D&I teams also organize awareness sessions with the hosting units and their leaders to describe the process, why it is important for the organization, and answer potential questions.

> Let's say that the decision to involve migrants is also related to analyzing what roles they could apply for, right? If it's a more operational role, where the person doesn't require as much experience, we can train the skill. [Before we started] each business unit evaluated what types of roles could be open to including different people. We sat down with them [the hosting unit] and explained a bit, "Come on, as a company, we're opening up our big umbrella, our big project, we're making it visible, we're going to involve people who are migrants. For everyone's peace of mind, they went through a normal selection process, just like all of us who joined the company, we made sure everything was complied with, and their salary is the same as the people we are already part of company, within the scales and so on." (Company Officer 5).

Companies face internal and external barriers in the process of including migrants. An example of internal barrier is offered by Officer 5 describing the training the company has to provide conveying that no additional benefits were given to the migrants during the hiring process, with an emphasis on economic compensation being the same as what other employees receive. Other trainings are based on fostering cultural competencies (Jacqueline, 2002) such as cultural awareness, cultural awareness, and cultural sensitivity. On the other hand, with regards to external barriers, despite the robust response of the Colombian Government by creating legal instruments that grant regular status to Venezuelan migrants, other important organizations have not adapted their infrastructure at the same pace. Banks, and institutions that provide benefits to all workers in companies are not allowing Venezuelan migrants to have access to their services, either because they do not accept their documents, or because not all family members have a regular status.

4.3.5. Age

Companies address age under the assumption that certain segments of the population, located in specific age ranges, face barriers to find a job and develop their career. The Colombian government is concentrating its efforts in young candidates ages between 18-28. Lack of prior experience becomes the main barrier for youth to find a job, leading to high rates of unemployment, which according to the latest report is 17.1%[9] (DANE, 2023) for youth, almost doubling national rates, 9.5% (DANE, 2022)[10]. Compared to other groups, few companies reported addressing age as one dimension of diversity. Based on their account, it was difficult to establish what strategies were put into place to attract and retain either of those segments of the population. However, common examples include creating internship programs, loosening experience requirements, and identifying positions for older employees.

> We have the age-related one, which is one of the most recent ones, because we also started last year with our [name] program, focused solely on young people between 18 and 28 years old. This is to contribute to the issue of unemployment and the pessimistic situation that young people are currently facing after the pandemic and how this situation has affected them. We are beginning to see how we can work with older adults or people who are close to retirement, who are unemployed and looking for job opportunities, but say 'no, they won't hire me because I'm already too old.' (Company Officer 12).

4.3.6. Reconciliation

Reconciliation refers to actions aimed to hire victims of the conflict, ex-combatants, as well as veterans of the conflict. Only a couple of companies reported having a strategy in place to facilitate the inclusion of this large population group. Alianza Soluciones is an NGO that serves as a middleman between candidates and companies interested in hiring personnel from this group. The NGO trains the candidates in skills needed by the industry and provide other services such as psychological support. One of the barriers is attracting candidates to urban centers since most of them live in rural areas. As a response, Alianza Soluciones has shifted to supplier initiatives, and bringing together smallholder farmers and companies in the food industry that buy fresh produce. Compared to the other groups, initiatives aiming to hire personnel coming

[9] While companies and Government programs group young people between 18-28 years old, the National Statistics Department groups them between 15-28 years old.

[10] The National Statistics Department provides quarterly unemployment rates for young people, but it releases national rates monthly. The data presented for young people corresponds to the September-November 2022 quarter, and the national rate is the data for November of the same year.

from this group are not disclosed publicly as doing it might put it in risk employees' safety. In a very polarized environment, hiring ex combatants seems to be a high-stakes decision. Officer 10 works in a national company and for them, the decision to hire demobilized personnel should be taken by the company owners, suggesting that it is not only a management decision, but it also speaks about where the company stands in the political spectrum.

> "To go further, 'hey, are you open to hiring demobilized personnel?' We haven't done it and I don't know if we're willing to do it, because the discussion has to escalate, and it will have to reach the company's owners." (Company Officer 10)

4.4.Barriers to Diversity and Inclusion

Following Kluch et al., (2023), I identified three barriers – structural, cultural, conceptual – that companies face to do D&I work. Table 9 summarizes each barrier, presents examples, and proposes practices that can be used to mitigate the barriers. Overall, these barriers have two main negative effects. On a broad level, they hinder the establishment and development of D&I practices. On an individual level, they affect people with marginalized identities as they face multiple hurdles to get a job, and if they get it, then their career path might be negatively affected as structures, assumptions, and lack of knowledge play against them.

I did not include two barriers identified by Kluch et al., (2013), because I found they were not pertinent for this study. Kluch et al., (2023) report that emotional barriers are connected to a negative impact on Athletics Diversity and Inclusion Designees' (ADID) mental health because of an intense workload and a constant dialogue that does not yield tangible results. In my study, only one participant pointed out to the fact that D&I responsibilities were added to their existing job duties, however, in their account there were no explicit mentions to mental health impacts. Kluch et al., (2023) see the social/relational barriers as ADID professionals lack of sense of belonging and struggle developing social connectedness with key stakeholders. Kluch et al., (2023) explain that most of their participants identified themselves with minoritized identities which in many cases led them to feel out of place since they were the only ones with those identities in their workplace. In my study, participants agreed that building relationships across the organization to enhance D&I work was crucial. Often, the challenging part was related to getting buy-in from their counterparts, finding common ground, and changing existing models, and those are explained in the structural, cultural, and conceptual barriers. However, none of them suggested that they felt out of place, or that it was hard to connect with others.

Once they had executive support, they were able to form relationships rapidly as their D&I work was understood as an organizational policy rather than an individual effort.

Barrier	Definition	Example	How to mitigate it?
Structural	Macro and micro characteristics that hinder D&I work.	'It can't be that the government tells me one thing (gender balance) and then on the other hand tells me that men can handle a certain weight, let's say ten kilos, while women can only handle five. Right from the start, there's already discrimination when it comes to lifting loads.' Company Officer 12.	Institutionalizing D&I: inclusive policies and enacting reasonable adjustments. Developing partnerships with external actors.
Cultural	Existing models whose values are exclusionary.	'We are in Colombia, where the culture have not evolved much yet when it comes to these issues of diversity and inclusion, and we are still resistant to what is different, to what is normal.' Company Officer 4.	Engaging executive leadership and doing cultural assessments. Creating awareness: D&I trainings, inclusive communications, and awareness activities. Building a support network: D&I champions.
Conceptual	Lack of understanding about D&I and marginalized populations.	'Organizations truly need people who have knowledge and understanding of inclusion and diversity, not just enthusiasts who like the topic and want to work on it.' Company Officer 7.	Creating awareness: D&I trainings.

Table 9. Barriers to D&I. Based on the study conducted by Kluch et al., (2023).

4.4.1. Structural Barriers

The first set of barriers encompasses characteristics of the systems in which D&I practitioners are trying to implement their initiatives. I make a distinction between macro and micro characteristics. The former is related to regulations around the employment processes of marginalized populations, that is, conditions under which they are hired, retained, and norms to terminate their contracts. The latter refers to corporate characteristics that may hinder the

development of D&I initiatives, for instance organizational process that cannot be easily changed, or even physical infrastructure that becomes an access constraint, particularly for women and people with disabilities. The significance of these challenges relies on the fact that D&I workers do not have the decision-making capabilities to address them by themselves. These barriers are embedded in larger structures that answer to political and economic interests and are largely dependent on executive leadership and higher instances of power.

Navigating regulations

As explained in the context section, a clear example of these are the regulations issued to enable the integration of Venezuelan migrants into the workforce. Participants pointed out that different societal organizations, such as banks and Family Welfare Funds[11], have their own interpretation on providing their services to migrants, creating confusion in company officers about what is feasible and how to get around it. On the other hand, companies trying to include Venezuelan migrants have sought training to understand the Temporary Protection Status for Venezuelan Migrants, a legal instrument issued by the Colombian Government in 2021 that offers protection to people fleeing Venezuela to acquire a resident visa for a 10-year period.

> This has been quite a challenge from a legal standpoint because what happens is that it's not so easy to hire Venezuelan individuals into organizations from a legal perspective. You see, unfortunately, each of the entities, such as Social Security, financial institutions, and others, operate not by regulations but by their own specific rules and requirements. (Company Officer 13).

Another point of misunderstanding came from regulations around the inclusion of women in manufacturing operations. Company officers complained that according to the law, men and women can lift different amount of weight, creating the need for a reasonable accommodation when bringing women into positions that may require lifting above the authorized amount. Article 392 of the resolution 24000 (1979) states that men can lift 25 kilograms (55 lb.) and women 12.5 kg. (27 lb.) Title XIII of the resolution is devoted to the employment of women and minors and goes further into detailing the differences between men and women, by explicitly affirming in its 702 article "working conditions must be adapted to the smaller structure of a woman's body and her lower physical strength compared to men." (Resolution 24000, 1979). At the same time other articles ordered equal opportunities for men and women, asking companies

[11] In Spanish, Cajas de Compensación Familiar, see definition in previous finding's sections.

to provide equal training to both men and women, and requiring them to include a woman representing their female peers at Hygiene and Safety committees. However, companies needed to adopt these measures only if they were hiring women. Although other regulations on this matter were issued in the 90s, and the 2010s, none of them have changed the norms on lifting loads in working places.

> It can't be that the government tells me one thing (gender balance) and then on the other hand tells me that men can handle a certain weight, let's say ten kilos, while women can only handle five. Right from the start, there's already discrimination when it comes to lifting loads. Why not, if women, with their diversity and biological and physical condition, are maybe capable of handling some loads? (…) So why not lower the load for men and bring them to equality? I mean, that way we encourage companies to create more inclusive mechanisms or equalizing tools that level the playing field when it comes to handling loads. Both men and women would benefit from this. Men might see a decrease in work-related illnesses, while women might have increased opportunities to access job positions where they would never have been considered before due to load-related issues. (Company Officer 12).

Finally, only one participant explicitly referred to laws that regulate the employment of people with disabilities. Companies have felt discouraged to hire this group because they fear what is called "strengthened employment stability', supported by article 26 of the 361 Law, which indicates that employers cannot fire employees with disabilities without an authorization from the Ministry of Labor. The initial rationale of this article is to prevent contract terminations based on discrimination.

> So, many companies, even today, still have concerns about hiring people with disabilities due to all the legal burden surrounding such hiring. It's not just about legal aspects; it's about protection and the interpretation of that protection. The question is: How far does it go? What are the implications? Therefore, the real motivation behind assigning the role of introducing diversity and inclusion culture to the Chief of Labor Relations, whose main responsibility is also ensuring legal labor compliance, was to overcome that bias or concern, that fear of hiring people with disabilities. (Company Officer 9).

However, researchers at Fundación ANDI (2021), explain that recent interpretations by the Supreme Court have clarified that the authorization is only required when the reason to terminate the contract is related to incompatibilities among the employee's abilities and the requirements to perform the job. In cases where there is an objective reason for the dismissal, the authorization is not required. Furthermore, the Supreme Court in its sentence SU-040 of 2018 establishes that the strengthened employment stability mechanism does not operate in the case of employees (with

disabilities) who were hired under an inclusive policy. Since it is assumed that their condition was the base for hiring them.

Internal structures

Operational and organizational structures might exhibit exclusionary features and therefore hinder D&I work as adaptations and learning processes take time. Existing structures operate under the assumption that all employees have the same needs, and changing those entail time, resources, and a coordinated effort.

> These conversations [with leaders across the organization] before opening up any inclusion opportunity began to present us with these challenges, which sometimes even caused delays in certain projects. We understood that this process of making reasonable adjustments is a time-consuming process, as we have to negotiate with finance for budgeting and with the factories for the necessary adaptations, along with the leaders, and so on. [However] it's not just about the factory telling us 'No, it can't be done', but also explaining why it is important and how it will not only benefit women but also relieve men from lifting heavy weights if a mechanical arm is implemented. (Company Officer 20).

Internal structures may have an overall effect to D&I strategies, while others represent a challenge for specific population groups. Lack of resources, lack of support, and poor institutional infrastructure can have a broader impact as they decrease organizational readiness to adopt D&I strategies. Other barriers, such as deficient physical infrastructure (in some cases this could mean even a bathroom or a place for women to change), were reported as having a negative impact mostly on women and people with disabilities. Participants reported that some of their buildings were constructed with an exclusionary vision, either because ableism was assumed as the rule, or because manufacturing plants were thought to be dominated-male spaces. Acknowledging that current infrastructure only meets the need of a specific population group, requires support from different management levels, resources, and a change of vision about who is welcomed in an organization.

> Another hurdle, I can tell you, is that we have to invest in some work centers, in installed capacity, for example, personal hygiene. Our plants were obviously built with a vision... Our plants were built many years ago in Colombia, the most recent one was built in 2017 and obviously, it has a completely different configuration, but the others are very old, 25, 30, 35 years old, and their facilities, for example, for women, are not sufficient in terms of capacity. (Company Officer 9).

4.4.2. Cultural Barriers

D&I practices entail a cultural change that often finds resistance from existing models wanting to preserve the values they guard. Based on the culture categories proposed by Shein (2010), I identify three levels (see figure 1) in which culture operates to hinder D&I work. Macro-culture refers to the influence of social, political, religious, and ethnic factors across society. Organizational culture encompasses the values, behaviors, and assumptions that are consider valid in the context of a larger group. And finally, those two inform individuals' behavior, beliefs, and personal values, that help them navigate their day-to-day in a workplace.

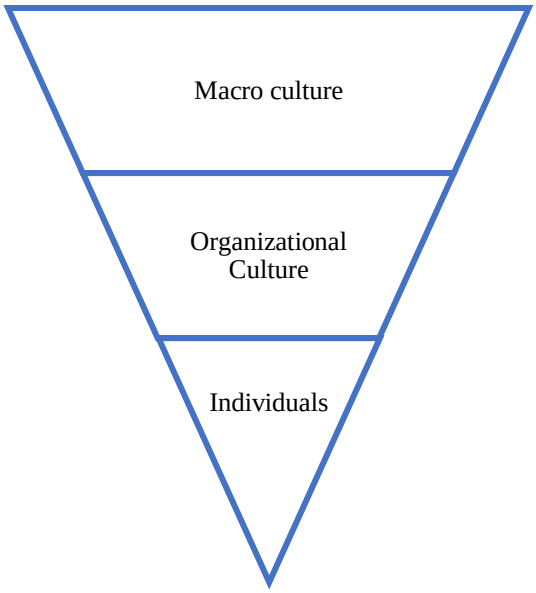

Figure 3. Cultural barriers levels.

Macro-culture

Participants recognize the culture of the country represents a barrier to do D&I work. Participants were provided examples of situations in which employees replicate behaviors that are part of their upbringing where they may be validated but are now in dissonance with the company's culture. Some participants suggested that D&I work comes with a set of values that are foreign to the Colombian culture. This is salient for participants from multinationals having to adapt global policies in a context that still does not feel as open and ready for them.

> We are in Colombia, where the culture hasn't evolved much yet when it comes to these issues of diversity and inclusion, and we are still resistant to what is different, to what is normal (...) So, it's a bit of an attempt with these global, inclusive, and corporate policies of [name of company], starting from there, from what should be done, to a

> Colombian culture where I say like... "oh, you can't talk like that, that joke is no longer funny... that joke can be hurtful to someone." (Company Officer 4).

> Companies have had a tough time... we have to re-educate ourselves on what we were taught at home. The issue of equity, for example, is a very prominent topic in Latin American countries. I remember when the first to be served were the grandfather, the father, and then the boys, and the last ones to sit down were the women, if they were allowed to sit down at all. (Company Officer 14).

Organizational Culture

Various expressions of organizational culture, such as values, ideology, processes, and practices can become an obstacle to the implementation of D&I work. At a broad level, participants pointed out that in some cases their organizational values impacted the advancement of D&I. Practitioners from national companies expressed that the owner's personal ideology (a family in both cases) influenced the development of D&I strategies, including what topics could be covered into their D&I actions. As it is shown in the quote below:

> It is a family company, a super conservative company, overly conservative, and managing these issues in a conservative family company is not that easy, it's not that easy because they are super catholic. (Company Officer 6).

Installed practices were another obstacle to D&I. For instance, dress codes seeking to homogenize employees and reflect a unified corporate culture. In one case, a company reported that they used to present new employees emphasizing the university they went to, creating segregation and biases towards the new hires. Finally, organizational culture is also reflected on what employees feel is accepted in their context, for instance, homosexual employees assessing if their workplace environment is safe enough for them to come out, or the other way around, employees reacting to a claim for couple benefits when it comes from a homosexual employee.

Individuals Biases

Based on the influence of macro-cultures and organizational cultures, individuals form their own ideas about the world, resulting in biases they used to navigate their workplace. According to the interviews, employees' biases end up becoming an access barrier for marginalized populations, as employees assume that a person with X, Z, Y characteristics is better than the other one, just because he/she exhibit those features. Examples of situations in which these issues become evident are when they bring their own ideas about the capacities of someone with disabilities, or assuming that only candidates from private universities can do well, or judging someone based

on their physical appearance, etc. D&I workers acknowledged that this is an endless task, because implicit bias workshops can just do as much, and then they also face the turnover challenge, meaning that someone new arrives to the company, and then they need to start all over with a new person.

> No matter how many procedures we fix, how many ramps we install, how many alliance initiatives or employment programs or quotas we impose, it won't work if people don't undergo a mindset change or eliminate the biases and stereotypes, they have in their heads (Company Officer 12).

Biases and Gender roles

Across participants, they were most likely to provide examples of how employees' biases are informed by hetero normative and patriarchal structures. In the case of women, their male peers think they are capable of certain tasks, but not those that are often performed by them, or women who are considered "pretty" should not be sent to work in unsafe environments, because they are most likely to get robbed. In one case, a company that was pushing a D&I strategy centered on gender equity saw a push back from male employees who asked to halt the initiative because they were going to become a "feminist organization."

> However, it came a point where we only talked about women, women, women, and men started to raise their hands and said, no, we can't turn this into a feminist organization because we are too feminist, we are too focused on giving priority to women, (...) so wait a second, let's stop. (Company Officer 6).

On the other hand, male employees whose physical appearance, behavior, or other features deviate from the standard paradigm of strong masculinity are more likely to be recipients of harassment comments or to feel less safe in their workplace environment. One of the participants provided a description of how biases operate in workplaces differentiating the office spaces vs. manufacturing operations. The former is assumed to be a more "corporate space" where social norms indicate that discriminatory comments are not welcomed. Whereas the latter follows its own rules and offensive comments might be validated and less likely to be socially punished by other employees.

4.4.3. Conceptual Barriers

Lack of understanding about D&I or about specific populations can become a barrier to advance D&I efforts. On a broad level, participants pointed out that they did not have technical knowledge to implement D&I initiatives which ended up hindering the extent to which they can

scale up their practices. In other cases, they pinned it on the company, since there were not clear guidelines about what D&I meant for the organization, resulting in several initiatives scattered around the company that could not be understood as part of one umbrella. Larger corporations that have different business units or that were recently merged with another company faced similar difficulties, as they had to come up with a unified concept across different corporate cultures. As explained before, participants acknowledged that in some cases they did not know how to handle specific situations, for instance understanding the nuances across the different types of disabilities. Lack of this knowledge might end up affecting the employee or preventing organizations from bolstering their initiatives.

5. DISCUSSION

D&I work is still a nascent enterprise in Colombia. Despite sending the initial survey to 67 companies, only 14 of them participated in the study. Low participation was not surprising to me, as I knew from my initial search across websites and reports that only a small number of corporations were having explicit conversations about D&I. Starting efforts on D&I have focused on what food industry firms identify as their major challenge: achieving gender balance. Structural and cultural barriers show that women have less opportunities to be employed. Several participants mentioned the lack of facilities to hire a large number of women within their manufacturing operations, and if they get a job, gender stereotypes will most likely play against them. Furthermore, biases about women's capabilities make it harder for them to succeed in jobs where females are perceived as unfit.

Across participating companies, D&I practices are mostly connected to the Human Resources realm. In the study design, I chose the Food Industry because of its potential to develop D&I applications throughout the value chain, implementing supplier diversity programs or looking at inclusive distribution networks. However, across companies only one mentioned a clear example of implementing an inclusion program (with a gender lens approach) along the value chain. A few others indicated having supplier diversity programs, but they were not understood as a D&I initiative, but rather as sustainable supplying programs where environmental variables, such as climate change awareness and sustainable agriculture practices were more relevant. I identified operational and conceptual reasons that explain this approach. Multinationals do most (if not all) of their procurement outside of Colombia, which means that even if they implement supplier diversity programs (as it is the case with some of the participating companies), they do it in other geographies. Multilatinas and national firms identify their procurement as a material factor of their sustainability strategies, thus, their connection to the core business is seen as more relevant than it is for D&I initiatives. Another explanation lies in the corporate framing to D&I work. For most of companies, D&I responds to Human Rights compliance and sustainability efforts, with a focus on SDGs promoting gender equity and zero discrimination in the workplace. Based on those two main frameworks, companies equate D&I practices with Human Resources work, rather than any other echelon of their value chain. Regarding inclusive distribution networks, it seems like it is still a new concept and has not made it yet to corporations. While I found references to supplier diversity programs (with that name or

others) in multilatinas and multinationals websites, I did not observe any mention to inclusive distribution networks.

5.1.Theoretical Implications

According to the categorization of diversity practices found in the literature (Leslie, 2019) participating companies exhibit practices across the three types, non-discrimination, resource, and accountability, but fail to implement actions that can scale up their initiatives. Table 10 summarizes practices found in the study for each company type (Multinationals, multilatinas, and national firms) and those that were not observed. In resource practices, none of the companies developed additional training programs focused on bolstering new skills in marginalized populations, thus, helping them gain new knowledge that serves their professional development. For instance, establishing a project to hire people with disabilities, and including professional training so they can move from operational tasks to more complex work. Also, none of the companies had mentorship programs within their D&I strategies aiming to foster employees' career. This is critical because both practices help the professional growth of marginalized populations, moving from dismantling access barriers to paving their way for advanced career development.

In accountability practices, none of the participants mentioned implementing evaluations aiming to assess managers' performance to meet the organization's diversity goals. Furthermore, only in few cases, D&I workers had performance assessments tracking their own work. Lacking corporate D&I evaluation instruments suggests that D&I work is the responsibility of only one team (in most cases, one person), instead of a cross-cutting activity shared by managers across the organization, which in turn slows progress towards achieving a more diverse and inclusive workplace. Along company types there are also differences in how they approach accountability practices. Multinationals and multilatinas resemble each other, but the latter lacks affinity groups, a widely shared practice in Global North companies. On the other end, national companies lack key actions that would help them materialize their diversity statements, for instance, targeted recruitment, diversity plans, and appointing a point person to overseeing D&I work.

Type of Practice	Multinationals	Multilatinas	National	Not found or not reported in any category
Nondiscrimination practices	Merit-based decision making. Diversity training.	Merit-based decision making. Diversity training.	Merit-based decision making.	-
Resource practices	Targeted recruitment. Diversity statements. Diversity networking groups.	Targeted recruitment. Diversity statements.	Diversity statements.	Preferential treatment. Targeted training. Diversity mentoring programs.
Accountability practices	Diversity plans. Diversity positions. Grievance systems.	Diversity plans. Diversity positions. Grievance systems.	Grievance systems.	Diversity performance evaluations

Table 10. D&I practices in Colombia based on data collected and Leslie's (2019) categorization of D&I practices.

On a theoretical level, I identified additional practices that can enhance Leslie's (2019) categorization. Under resource practices, those aiming to provide additional support for marginalized populations, reasonable adjustments and awareness activities can contribute to advance D&I goals. In Leslie's (2019) model, targeted recruitment aims to increase marginalized populations' access to jobs, but additional practices are needed to describe how access takes place. Across participating companies and population groups, adapting processes for marginalized employees was necessary to guarantee their inclusion (i.e. changing recruitment assessments, installing mechanical arms, modifying interview processes). Changes occurred at the entry level when companies are recruiting, but also as new hires fully integrate into the organization. Awareness activities are another mechanism companies use to make explicit to all employees the importance of D&I work. Commemorating important dates (pride month, disability day, women's day, etc) was an avenue to start conversations around D&I. Under accountability practices, those aiming to incorporate D&I work into the organizational processes by measuring and increasing responsibility, I found that building a support network was a key activity. Leslie's (2019) categorization includes diversity performance evaluations, but before managers' performance is evaluated based on D&I metrics, it is a necessary to increase their

awareness towards D&I issues. Among participating companies, D&I workers reported the importance of talking to managers across different departments, and co-creating their projects with them, as they have an insider perspective D&I workers lack.

Another avenue to discuss D&I practices is to see their interplay with Shein's (2010) three levels of organizational culture. Figure 4 represents the three levels of culture coupled with D&I practices identified in this study. On the first level we find artifacts, the visible characteristics of a group. In this context, they encompass inclusive policies, communication strategies, and statements that explicitly support D&I work. The second level looks at espoused beliefs and values, which according to Shein (2010) they often come from the organization's leaders. For this study, I place leadership and D&I champions under this level, since they have the capacity to influence other employees and cascade down beliefs and values that facilitate D&I work. Under the last level, I present some of the basic underlying assumptions collected throughout the interviews that hinder D&I work. For instance, beliefs that assign specific roles to men and women, or thinking that people with disabilities cannot be hired until the company is "ready," or that race, and ethnicity are not relevant issues in Colombia, and thus should not be addressed.

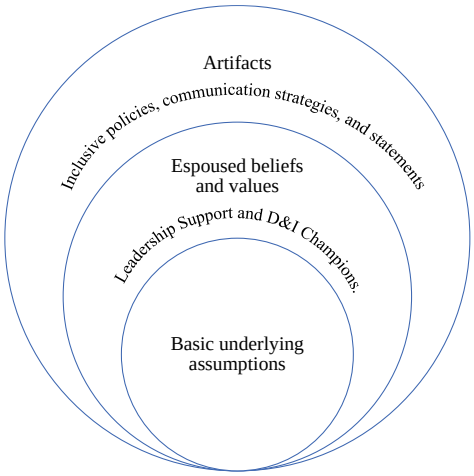

Figure 4. D&I practices analyzed using Shein's (2010) three levels of culture.

As Figure 4 shows, most of the D&I practices fall under the artifacts level, however, as Shein (2010) warns us, at this level is difficult to decipher an organization's culture. In contrast, leaders can play a key role in changing team's beliefs, however, in most companies D&I practitioners have struggled to build support networks with their peers, resulting in limited support from cross-cutting departments. Having other managers across the organization

championing D&I strategies decentralizes D&I work and set more examples to all employees of inclusive values. National companies represent the most concerning scenario because leaders' support is not explicit and, in some cases, what gains more relevance is managers' reluctance to embrace D&I work, disincentivizing employees' support and reinforcing counter beliefs. Although practices provide institutional support, dismantle access barriers, and intentionally aim to include marginalized populations, their impact is limited if they are not largely backed by leaders across the organization with the capacity to change the most basic assumptions of an organization's culture.

5.2.Policy Implications

The Colombian Government has supported D&I efforts on two main fronts: issuing tax incentives and enacting public recognition instruments. Table 11 summarizes available support for each population group. On taxes, the Government has issued legislation incentivizing the employment of marginalized populations by granting tax discounts to companies hiring these groups. On the other hand, recognizing companies through certifications and seals has been another avenue to incentivize the adoption of D&I practices in the private sector. Despite targeting several groups, taxation policies have two main challenges. Issuing a law and/or decree is not sufficient to see their implementation come to success. Stronger institutional infrastructure is needed to enable understanding and access to tax benefits. Connected to this initial challenge, companies do not seem to value tax-benefits as a driver to further D&I work. In the initial survey, only 1 participant indicated tax discounts as a motivation to implement D&I practices, and in the interviews, none of the participants mentioned it. In one case, a participant (Company Officer 14) recounted how they decided to exclude tax-benefits policies in a kick-off presentation looking to implement an inclusive employment program targeting people with disabilities (the group with more tax benefits). For them, tax incentives were not the reason driving their work.

Overall, D&I practices are enhanced by reputational drivers and external partnerships, rather than taxation policies. Certifications and seals provide knowledge, frameworks, and practical tools that help D&I workers overcome conceptual barriers. For instance, participants mentioned how after participating in the *Equipares* certification they gained a deeper understanding of D&I, established metrics to assess their D&I work, and started exploring inclusive programs for other population groups. Focusing governmental efforts on expanding

mechanisms that enhance companies' capacities on D&I could be useful for those companies that seem to be more isolated and with less resources to launch their programs. This is particularly salient in multilatinas and national companies lacking installed know-how, as opposed to multinationals that have access to guidelines provided by their headquarters. Despite the positive effects of public recognition instruments, the downside is that they prioritize specific population groups over others. One of the reasons companies focus more on gender equity is because there are more rankings and certifications measuring that dimension of diversity than there are for other groups. Considering the unintended gap these mechanisms create, the government could also focus on those population groups that lack either of the two incentives. For example, as Table 11 shows, ethnic groups and migrants are at a considerable disadvantage in comparison with other marginalized populations.

Population Group	Taxation Policy	Public Recognition Instrument
Young people (18-28 years)	Law 1429 of 2010 Law 1786 of 2016 40.000 jobs program	-
Former Combatants – Reintegrated or Reincorporated people	Peace Agreements. Law 1429 of 2010	-
Women / Gender Equity	Law 1429 of 2010 Decree 2733 of 2012	*Equipares* certification
Victims of the Conflict	Law 1429 of 2010 Law 1448 of 2011	-
Veterans	-	-
People under the poverty line	Law 1429 of 2010	
Ethnic groups	-	-
People with disabilities	Law 316 of 1997 Law 1429 of 2010 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) – United Nations	-
Age (Workers older than 62)	Law 2040 of 2020	Friendly Senior Citizen Seal *(Sello Amigable – Adulto Mayor)*
Migrants	-	-

Table 11. Governmental support for D&I practices in the private sector.

5.3.Practitioners Implications

Managers in the food industry in Colombia understand diversity and inclusion in similar ways to Global North cognitions; however, they fail to incorporate local nuances into their conceptualization. Across participants, diversity was associated with demographic composition, and inclusion with policies and initiatives aimed at increasing employees' sense of belonging. A common sentence used to define both terms was "diversity is to be invited to the party, and inclusion to be asked to the dancefloor" (Company Officers 10, 18, 14). In this sentence, diversity efforts are connected to dismantling access barriers for marginalized populations, while inclusion is associated with improving individuals' experience once they are hired. The resemblance is not surprising if we consider how practitioners are informing themselves, those working at multinationals are following Global North guidelines, and those in multilatinas and national firms see D&I work as a characteristic of "global" companies, suggesting that following international examples (located in the Global North) is the right thing to do.

A consequence of "copying" guidelines is that companies are not incorporating local knowledge in their understanding of diversity. Across participating companies, most of them adopt an identity conscious approach, one that values and seeks difference (L. Leslie et al., 2020) as opposed to identity blindness, that aims to minimize any individual characteristics (Plaut, 2014). Only one company explicitly affirmed adopting the latter approach. Others did not specify any of the two, as their strategies are in a starting point lacking clarity about how they understand diversity and inclusion. Among those that embrace an identity conscious approach, it seems like some differences (gender, disability, and sexual orientation) are more valued than others (race, ethnicity) that get ignored. Thus, leaving behind groups such as afro-descendants, indigenous communities, and those negatively impacted by internal conflict dynamics. In a study conducted in the U.S., Unzueta et al., (2012) found that dominant groups construe diversity in a way that "legitimizes attitudes toward policies that affect racial hierarchy" (p. 307), that is, dominant groups alter their idea of diversity to enhance hierarchy structures that benefit them. Kaiser et al. (2013), found that when a corporation has diversity practices in place, dominant groups think their organizations are more inclusive than what they are. In the presence of diversity practices, dominant groups "become less sensitive to recognizing discrimination against minorities" (Kaiser et al., 2013, p. 516) only because they think their organizational policies prevent discrimination behavior. What I am finding in my research is similar to these two studies, the

dominant group leading corporate D&I strategies (educated, middle-upper class, urban groups) sees diversity as pertaining to specific groups (gender, sexual orientation and disability) as opposed to including others (i.e., ethnic groups) that could challenge their status quo. On the other hand, dominant groups may believe that because they have anti-discrimination policies in place, racism is not a critical issue, and therefore, should not be prioritized.

Empirical research done in Colombia in the context of the job market shows how critical racism could be for someone trying to find a job. Rodriguez et al., (2013) conducted a study in Bogotá (where most of my interviews were done) to identify if race was a variable that affected candidates' opportunity to get a job. Based on the information of 16 volunteers, the authors created resumes that were sent to a total of 707 job openings. The resumes included distinct characteristics, for instance, the candidate's photo, address, political participation, gender, among others. Rodriguez et al. (2013) found that afro descendant candidates had a 7.79% less probability than other groups to receive a follow-up call, while white candidates saw their chances increase by 3%. The authors concluded that in Bogotá a black person has less chances to get a job than a white candidate. Another study, conducted by Bermúdez-Rico & Caicedo-Riascos (2022) looked at the trajectory of 22 afro-descendant individuals who graduated from Universidad del Valle[12]. In their findings, the authors described how participants experienced systemic racism in their workplaces. Participants described situations where their race placed them in a subordinate position, it became a motive to receive racist comments, and it framed their relationship with their colleagues and supervisors. From the 22 subjects, Bermúdez-Rico & Caicedo-Riascos (2022) identified a group of 11 who were able to access better jobs, in part because they received graduate degrees and/or learned a second language (English in all cases). Among this group, they recognized they were often the only black person with a position that involved managerial responsibilities, and their capabilities were put into question because of their race. These two studies show that racism in the workplace exists in the country, even in places like Bogota. The fact that the participants in the study believe that racism is not a problem in the context of Colombia shows how disconnected they are from the realities of marginalized groups.

[12] A public university located in Cali, the third most populous city in Colombia, largely inhabited by Afro descendants.

Based on the drivers that motivate D&I strategies, we find an additional explanation suggesting how D&I practitioners create their strategies and which populations get prioritized. As mentioned above, certifications, rankings, seals, and any other type of public exposure incentivize companies to promote change in their workplace. Most companies reported starting their D&I work because they wanted to be part of one of these mechanisms. Looking closely, assessment by a third party brings about different changes. On one side, it installs capacities and builds an institutional infrastructure (policies, inclusive procedures) that will deliver a desirable outcome for the company, such as getting certified or obtaining a good position in a D&I related ranking. Furthermore, companies see value in public recognition, thus, they will try to sustain D&I work because they want to keep that reputation. Despite those outcomes, other consequences end up hindering the overall goals of D&I. In Colombia, the two most relevant instruments of public recognition are geared towards gender equity, *Equipares* and Ranking PAR, which means that inclusion metrics and standards are framed with a gender lens looking at the imbalances between men and women. Regardless of the overall enhancement that certifications and rankings provide for D&I strategies, other populations face the risk of being treated as something done in the checklist of diversity work. Without constant assessment, clear metrics, and external support, practitioners struggle to develop comprehensive strategies that create opportunities for multiple marginalized groups, as they lack the knowledge and incentive to do it.

5.4.Limitations

One of the main limitations of this study is that I will not be able to provide any insight into the efficacy of D&I practices across the Food Industry. By design, I intentionally decided to focus on the practitioners' perspective and did not inquire about whether companies achieved their intended outcomes by talking to employees. In some cases, participants mentioned changes in employees' perception during external evaluations that enabled them to learn how employees were approaching D&I issues. I suggest two ways in which future research could address this issue. For a qualitative study, researchers might need to focus on only one company or develop a specific set of criteria that enables them to identify their subjects. This is because D&I practices can target the overall population, such as communication strategies, or a specific group, such as hiring people with disabilities. To assess whether D&I practices are reaching their goals, researchers may need to focus on just one type of practice. Although I am not a quantitative

researcher, another approach may be to analyze data from surveys related to D&I metrics. For example, companies measure the working climate environment, so researchers could establish a timeline and see if there are any changes.

Another limitation of my study is that I attempted to draw conclusions across the food industry, but the reality is that multinationals, multilatinas, and national companies are experiencing D&I at different stages. Richer results and more specific recommendations could be obtained if future research focuses on the experience of only one type of firm category. Multinationals are leveraging global capabilities and practices that put them ahead of their peers, but they face the challenge of implementing policies designed for the Global North in Colombia, often observing a misalignment with the local context. Multilatinas are an interesting case because they are attempting to emulate practices from multinationals while incorporating variables grounded in the Colombian context. National companies are slowly starting to have conversations around D&I and acknowledge they have a long way to go. This study uncovers these nuances, but more research is needed to explore more deeply the experience of each category. A study of this type would need to increase the number of participating companies and have more than one person participating from each company. In this study, I had two cases where people from different units participated, which gave me a more holistic understanding of how D&I was being implemented.

Finally, I think it would be interesting to learn about the CEOs' perspectives. All of my participants indicated that D&I practices always start with the support of CEOs, as initiatives are born with a top-down approach. However, some questions arise. Are CEOs receiving input from boards and investors that translate D&I into a more compelling issue? What is the role of CEOs beyond approving the incorporation of D&I into their companies? How do they impact leadership models that are positive for D&I? Since all participants recognize executive leadership support as a key enabling factor for D&I, I believe that learning more about their perspective can shed light on challenges, enablers, and how to design more successful D&I practices.

6. CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I looked at the implementation of D&I practices, challenges, and enablers of D&I among companies working in the food system in Colombia. Based on the participants' accounts, I offer a framework encompassing five enablers and practices attached to them that describe a route companies are following to implement a D&I strategy in their organizations. Furthermore, I describe which population groups companies in the food industry are targeting and their experience in the process of including them. Based on previous research, this study further develops challenges practitioners face when adopting a D&I approach as part of their work. It shows that despite efforts to institutionalize D&I, stronger and bigger forces get in their way. As Ahmed (2017) puts it, diversity practitioners face a wall, one that can be immaterial, reflected in cultural models, but also concrete as physical spaces only welcome certain groups. Similar to previous studies, this research confirms the ambiguity of D&I as concepts. Not only practitioners struggled defining them, but most organizations lack a clear definition (if any), misleading efforts and causing confusion about the real purpose of D&I.

This research contributes to the D&I literature in different levels. On one hand, it adds evidence to the calls of previous researchers suggesting the importance of looking at the role of HR managers and diversity professional, the institutionalization of D&I work, and models to implement D&I practices (Yang & Konrad, 2011) Methodologically, it adds to the few studies conducted with a qualitative approach and in the context in which D&I practices are implemented, as opposed to studies conducted in laboratories with individuals who are not related to D&I (Jonsen et al., 2011). More importantly, it presents evidence of how D&I practices are implemented in a non-U.S. context, which has been suggested as one of the weaknesses of the D&I field.

As a pioneer empirical study looking at D&I practices in Colombia, this research signals several future research directions. For instance, one of the participants suggested that implementing D&I practices across different corporate spaces (the office vs. the factory) needed distinct approaches. How can practitioners become aware of the different social norms that mediate social interactions in each space and thus adopt D&I that speak to those who will be directly impacted? Analyzing how individuals in those spaces perceive diversity will add to the strain of the diversity field looking at how perceptions of diversity change across groups. Another place to look at is what role taxation policies have played to foster D&I practices. This

study provides evidence that companies that access certifications on D&I are more likely to expand and enhance their strategies, but it is not clear if taxation policies have delivered their promise of working as an incentive that increases the number of marginalized populations employed in formal jobs. As shown in this document, the Colombian Government has issued multiple mechanisms that aim to incentivize the hiring of marginalized population groups, but across participants, none of those seemed to have significant relevance. A final direction to look at is the role of diversity workers. By design, I did not inquire about how leading the implementation of D&I practices has affected them on a personal level. Previous scholars (Kluch et al., 2023) have pointed out that D&I workers often pay an emotional cost in doing their work. Future research could look at how in the Colombian context advocating for D&I affects professionals emotionally, as well, as their relationships with their colleagues.

In a polarized, exclusionary, and unequal society as the Colombian one, D&I has the potential to become an avenue to help minority groups improve their socioeconomic conditions. However, if companies only aim to hire a couple individuals from each marginalized group or congratulate themselves because they have opened the factory door to women, D&I will only be an instrument to show they have done the homework, a performative, corporate, greenwashing instrument.

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