Diversity management practices in a multinational company in the pulp and paper sector

Práticas de gestão da diversidade em uma empresa multinacional do setor de papel e celulose

Prácticas de gestión de la diversidad en una empresa multinacional del sector de celulosa y papel

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ABSTRACT

Background: Companies with limited diversity show weaker performance compared to inclusive organizations aligned with ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles, although this correlation may not apply universally. Despite these efforts, some diversity-related actions have been inadequate, incomplete, yielded unfavorable outcomes, or proved ineffective.

Purpose: The present study aims to analyze the practices and actions adopted in the diversity management of a multinational in the Pulp and Paper sector.

Method: The research employs a qualitative and descriptive methodology. It also features a case study. The data collection method employed was a semi-structured interview script. Five employees actively engaged in implementing the company's diversity and inclusion initiatives as ambassadors, all representing minority groups, were interviewed.

Results: The company conducted various initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion, encompassing non-discrimination practices, support, and accountability measures. Most of these initiatives were deemed successful by interviewees. The study highlighted the benefits and challenges associated with diversity management practices, indicating progress towards the established goals. Simultaneously, certain practices impacted the personal lives of the participants, while external factors also influenced the outcomes and challenges faced.

Conclusions: The identified practices, along with the reported benefits and challenges, contribute to diversity management and align with existing literature while also reflecting the unique aspects of the company under review, prompting further inquiry and potential future research.

Keywords: ESG; multinational; organizational diversity; diversity management practices; diversity management.

RESUMO

Contextualização: Empresas com diversidade limitada apresentam um desempenho mais fraco em comparação com organizações inclusivas alinhadas com os princípios ESG (Ambientais, Sociais e de Governação), embora esta correlação possa não se aplicar universalmente. Apesar destes esforços, algumas ações relacionadas com a diversidade foram inadequadas, incompletas, produziram resultados desfavoráveis ou revelaram-se ineficazes.

Objetivo: O presente estudo tem como objetivo analisar as práticas e ações adotadas na gestão da diversidade de uma multinacional do setor de Celulose e Papel.

Método: A pesquisa utiliza metodologia qualitativa e descritiva. Também apresenta um estudo de caso. O método de coleta de dados empregado foi um roteiro de entrevista semiestruturado. Foram entrevistados cinco funcionários ativamente engajados na implementação das iniciativas de diversidade e inclusão da empresa como embaixadores, todos representando grupos minoritários.

Resultados: A empresa conduziu diversas iniciativas para promover a diversidade e a inclusão, abrangendo práticas de não discriminação, apoio e medidas de responsabilização. A maioria dessas iniciativas foi considerada bem-sucedida pelos entrevistados. O estudo destacou os benefícios e desafios associados às práticas de gestão da diversidade, indicando progressos em direção às metas estabelecidas. Simultaneamente, certas práticas impactaram a vida pessoal dos participantes, enquanto fatores externos também influenciaram os resultados e desafios enfrentados.

Conclusões: As práticas identificadas, juntamente dos benefícios e desafios relatados, contribuem para a gestão da diversidade e alinham-se com a literatura existente, ao mesmo tempo que refletem os aspectos únicos da empresa em análise, suscitando mais investigação e potenciais pesquisas futuras.

Palavras-chave: ESG; multinacional; diversidade organizacional; práticas de gestão da diversidade; gestão da diversidade.

RESUMEN

Contextualización: Las empresas con diversidad limitada tienen un desempeño más débil en comparación con las organizaciones inclusivas alineadas con los principios ESG (ambientales, sociales y de gobernanza), aunque esta correlación puede no aplicarse universalmente. A pesar de estos esfuerzos, algunas acciones relacionadas con la diversidad fueron inadecuadas, incompletas, produjeron resultados desfavorables o resultaron ineficaces.

Objetivo: El presente estudio tiene como objetivo analizar las prácticas y acciones adoptadas en la gestión de la diversidad en una multinacional del sector de Celulosa y Papel.

Método: La investigación utiliza metodología cualitativa y descriptiva. También presenta un estudio de caso. El método de recolección de datos utilizado fue una guía de entrevista semiestructurada. Se entrevistó como embajadores a cinco empleados que participaban activamente en la implementación de las iniciativas de diversidad e inclusión de la empresa, todos ellos representando a grupos minoritarios.

Resultados: Los autores presentan brevemente los principales resultados y conclusiones de su investigación. Los resultados son las respuestas a las preguntas o hipótesis de investigación y deben organizarse de forma lógica. Si se utilizaron pruebas estadísticas, informe sobre los resultados y el nivel de significación, incluso si no son significativos. En los estudios cualitativos, presente los temas, categorías o teorías resultantes.

Conclusiones: La empresa llevó a cabo varias iniciativas para promover la diversidad y la inclusión, abarcando prácticas de no discriminación, medidas de apoyo y rendición de cuentas. La mayoría de estas iniciativas fueron consideradas exitosas por los entrevistados. El estudio destacó los beneficios y desafíos asociados con las prácticas de gestión de la diversidad, indicando avances hacia las metas establecidas. Al mismo tiempo, ciertas prácticas impactaron la vida personal de los participantes, mientras que factores externos también influyeron en los resultados y desafíos enfrentados.

Palabras clave: ESG; multinacional; diversidad organizacional; prácticas de gestión de la diversidad; gestión de la diversidad.

1 INTRODUCTION

Academic and market research (Badal & Harter, 2014; Brimhall & Mor Barak, 2018; Cox & Blake, 1991; Hunt, Prince, Dixon-Fyle & Yee, 2018) highlight numerous strategic advantages for companies with employees from diverse affinity groups. Cox and Blake (1991) outline benefits such as attracting and retaining top talents, reducing costs related to absenteeism and turnover (especially among minority groups), engaging in marketing strategies targeting new market segments, fostering innovation and creativity, addressing challenges, and enhancing organizational flexibility. Other scholars link diversity and inclusion initiatives to enhanced innovation performance (Brimhall & Mor Barak, 2018; Soranz, 2019; Xie et al., 2020) and other significant benefits. Companies with limited diversity show weaker performance compared to inclusive organizations aligned with ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles (Badal & Harter, 2014; Gillan, Koch & Starks, 2021; Halbritter & Dorfleitner, 2015; Hunt et al., 2018; Roberson & Park, 2007), although this correlation may not apply universally. Furthermore, diversity is deemed crucial for attaining the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Nascimento, Oliveira & Rodrigues, 2022).

Companies implement various Diversity Management initiatives such as workshops on unconscious biases, blind recruitment rules, mentoring programs, and ombudsman channels to address incidents of harassment and prejudice. Despite these efforts, some diversity-related actions have been inadequate, incomplete, yielded unfavorable outcomes, or proved ineffective. While organizations strive for the advantages of diversity and inclusion in management, they also aim to steer clear of the negative outcomes documented in the literature. Therefore, examining diversity management practices in operational settings to assess outcomes and challenges is crucial for informing future endeavors.

This study aims to identify the practices, actions, and policies implemented in diversity management within a multinational corporation operating in the Pulp and Paper industry. The primary goal is to enhance diversity and inclusion at the organizational level. While this sector is typically studied concerning sustainability, innovation, and diversification, there is limited knowledge regarding inclusion and diversity management, presenting a gap addressed in this investigation (Hurmekoski et al., 2018; Johansson, Broberg, & Ottosson, 2021). The research sought to uncover the diversity management practices applied within Company X. Specific objectives include outlining the key benefits and challenges associated with diversity and inclusion practices. The study involved interviews with employees responsible for implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives within the company. It is important to highlight that this research focused on five priority affinity groups within the organization: individuals with disabilities, different generations, LGBTQIA+ individuals, black individuals, and women.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Tung (1993) suggests various methods for defining diversity, with the prevalent definition stemming from the examination of social identity. Diversity is characterized by the differences among individuals who identify themselves as members of specific social groups, including women, black individuals, individuals with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+.

A second theory defines diversity by specific attributes, such as behavior, personality (Kandola & Fullerton, 1994), pedagogical structure (Jamieson & O'mara, 1991), and unique differences, characterizing diversity as individual responsibilities rather than social group affiliations. The third perspective legitimizes diversity's definition through distinctions individuals or groups in society share and their commonalities.

Authors commonly explore diversity by examining people's differences (Mannix & Neale, 2005), despite various perspectives. The literature typically categorizes diversity factors into visible aspects like race, ethnicity, and gender, and non-visible aspects such as professional background, personality, and education level (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 2003; Mannix & Neale, 2005).

Organizational diversity offers opportunities and risks, prompting managers to address this issue systematically. Practices related to affirmative actions, for instance, face significant scrutiny, sparking controversies and political conflicts (Amaral & Ribeiro, 2009; Modesto et al., 2017).

The implementation of diversity management practices is widespread among organizations in both the public and private sectors, particularly in the production and service industries. This is reflected in social responsibility indices. Various factors drive the adoption of diversity and inclusion practices, including concerns about conflicts and efficiency losses due to prejudice and discrimination, feedback from customers or suppliers, scandals involving competitors or partners, internal incidents, compliance with diversity-friendly legislation, senior management awareness, and alignment with diversity-related business models.

Members of underrepresented communities face challenges such as limited opportunities for career advancement, inadequate recognition, and insufficient representation. They should be the primary focus of diversity and inclusion efforts to foster a stronger sense of inclusion (Almeida, 2021; Leslie, 2019; Seabra, 2023; Theophilo, Rattner & Pereira, 2018). By implementing inclusive diversity management strategies, organizations can effectively engage their employees in a more harmonious and productive manner (Ferreira et al., 2019).

Diversity management practices can be categorized into three broad classifications: non-discrimination practices, supportive practices, and accountability

practices, as indicated in Table 1 (Leslie, 2019; Richard, Roh & Pieper, 2013).

Table 1
Diversity and inclusion practices

Non-discrimination practices	Supportive practices	Accountability practices
• Decision-making based on merit involves avoiding bias by using objective assessments. • Training on Diversity	• Preferential treatment • Focused recruitment • Statements on Diversity • Focused Training • Networking groups for diversity. • Mentoring programs for diversity	• Diversity planning • Evaluation of diversity performance • Positions in diversity management • Systems for lodging complaints

Source: Adapted from Leslie (2019).

Non-discrimination practices aim to reduce decision-making errors concerning minorities. The merit-based decision-making process aims to prevent bias by objectively evaluating the merit of an organization's employees through tests, objective assessments, and blind evaluations, where assessors do not consider characteristics like gender and ethnicity (Foley & Williamson, 2018, Leslie, 2019, Soranz, 2019). Diversity training represents another non-discrimination practice. This practice yields results that are frequently scrutinized in the literature, particularly when conducted sporadically, without the support of other diversity-promoting measures, or when it mirrors biases ingrained in the environment (Chang et al., 2019, Noon, 2018).

Support initiatives encompass advantages for marginalized individuals, recognition of diverse populations, and various forms of assistance and prospects for individuals facing challenges. Numerous support initiatives can be identified, including preferential treatment, targeted recruitment, diversity statements, targeted training, diversity networking groups, and diversity mentoring programs (Chang et al., 2019, Leslie, 2019, Soranz, 2019).

Accountability practices, also known as responsibility practices, aid in organizing, institutionalizing, and systematizing diversity management. These practices enhance organizations' ability to monitor and accomplish diversity management goals by assigning individuals responsibility for them (Holck, 2016, Leslie, 2019). Such practices encompass diversity plans, diversity performance evaluation, diversity management roles, and grievance mechanisms.

The implementation of diversity management through inclusive practices is an organizational change that can lead to new conflicts. The need for change challenges the desire for stability, while existing models of behavior and attitudes come under scrutiny, potentially sparking resistance to the new reality (Dover, Kaiser & Major, 2020; Holck, 2016; Nadiv & Kuna, 2020; Velasco & Sansone, 2019). It falls upon the group of managers involved in this transition to employ strategies to overcome resistance and achieve the intended outcomes (Mannix & Neale, 2005). In the context of Brazil, the national landscape must be considered, where marginalized groups have long endured racism, sexism, ableism, xenophobia, and other forms of oppression,

hindering efforts towards inclusion (Almeida, 2021; Oliveira, Oliveira & Cardoso, 2020; Souza Lima, 2021).

3 METHODOLOGY

The research employs a qualitative and descriptive methodology (Gil, 2002; Polak & Diniz, 2011). It also features a case study, offering a detailed and intricate examination of one or a few subjects to facilitate a thorough understanding.

The study focused on publicly traded Company X in the paper and cellulose industry. This organization was selected due to its status as the largest worldwide manufacturer of eucalyptus pulp and one of the top 10 market pulp producers. Additionally, it holds a prominent position in the paper sector, offering approximately 60 brands across four categories: cutsize, coated, uncoated, and cardboard. The choice was also influenced by the company's commitment to diversity and inclusion, essential values in its continuous pursuit of improvement and advancement.

The data collection method employed was a semi-structured interview script with questions tailored to the research objectives, enabling a more comprehensive data gathering approach. Five employees actively engaged in implementing the company's diversity and inclusion initiatives as ambassadors, all representing minority groups, were interviewed.

a. SG (Support Group) Ambassador LGBTQIA+: Human Resources Analyst – E1 (Interviewee 1);

b. SG Women + SG LGBTQIA+ Ambassador: Logistics Operations Leader – E2 (Interviewee 2);

c. SG Generations Ambassador: Maintenance Consultant – E3 (Interviewee 3);

d. SG Black People Ambassador: People & Management Trainee – E4 (Interviewee 4) and, finally,

e. SG DCPs (Disabled Persons) Ambassador: Junior Maintenance Analyst – E5 (Interviewee 5).

Access to secondary data facilitated the analysis of the progression of diversity management policies and actions over the years. This data was sourced from the

company's official website, the Indicator Center, the 2020 Annual Report, and social media platforms.

Data processing was conducted with a qualitative approach, utilizing the content analysis method to analyze the data (Gil, 2002; Polak & Diniz, 2011). This approach involved a series of techniques for examining communications, comprising pre-analysis (material selection and procedure definition), material exploration (implementation of procedures and data processing), and interpretation (drawing inferences and presenting investigation results), as outlined by Bardin (1977).

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Based on the collected information, this section outlines the implementation process of diversity management within the company, highlighting the most effective and least successful practices, perceived benefits, and identified challenges.

4.1 Diversity Management Implementation Process

In 2016, an initiative was launched, leading to the formation of "Plural," a grassroots effort by individuals dedicated to fostering diversity and inclusion through internal organizational initiatives. Originating from a gathering of women sharing experiences of isolation as female leaders in a predominantly male environment, this movement sparked the adoption of similar practices across different departments. By 2018, the group broadened its scope to address LGBTQIA+ and racial equality matters within the company. Nevertheless, the focus remained primarily on discussions rather than tangible measures.

In 2019, the company underwent a merger with one of its major competitors, resulting in the emergence of a new company with fresh cultural influences. Under this framework, the foundation of "fostering diversity for strength" was established, with the company striving to set a benchmark in diversity. Consequently, a new identity was forged post-merger, with a focus on enhancing diversity and inclusion. The Plural group was officially established, broadened, and formalized in 2019, giving rise to four additional affinity groups alongside the Women's group: LGBTQIA+, Blacks, Generations, and DCPs.

In 2019, the sustainability team developed a sustainability strategy through interviews with approximately seven hundred individuals from NGOs, diverse institutions, academia, and industry critics. This process highlighted diversity and inclusion as prominent themes.

Between 2016 and 2020, diversity and inclusion practices were executed independently across various units within the company. This led to situations where certain units might distribute gifts during women's month, while others organized a Live session on Female Empowerment. It was during this period that the company consolidated its diversity and inclusion efforts, ensuring strategic alignment.

To enable effective management, the movement was segmented into five primary fronts: Women (gender inclusion); LGBTQIA+ (inclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals); Blacks (ethnic-racial inclusion); Generations (inclusion and synergy among various age groups); People with Disabilities (inclusion of individuals with disabilities).

Moreover, the movement is supported by ambassadors and allies who are volunteers empowered to advance diversity and inclusion initiatives within their specific units.

4.2 Most Effective Actions

The endorsement from the senior management of the company, as perceived by employees, broadened the scope of outcomes, as reported by respondents, supporting stances in the literature (Qi, 2019; Soranz, 2019). As per one interviewee, all initiatives originating from the top echelons, with the participation and commitment of senior leadership, wielded a more significant influence on the organizational milieu. Consequently, if the cascade of initiatives does not stem from senior management to the operational level, individuals do not attribute as much credibility, and numerous initiatives are, indeed, not implemented (E4).

Interviewee 1 revised the restroom signage, replacing gender-specific labels with inclusive signage indicating the space is designated for all individuals, thereby providing a more welcoming environment for transgender individuals.

The establishment of a school for forklift operators was part of an inclusive initiative implemented by the company. Interviewee 1 highlighted efforts to attract and empower female talent for this role, leading to the launch of a training program in the Três Lagoas unit. This region, characterized by limited educational opportunities, particularly for women without secondary or higher education, often relegated them to domestic roles. The school successfully boosted female participation in the inventory department.

To embrace the initial two transgender employees joining her team, Interviewee 1 organized Plural Day, a forum where each individual could narrate their journey, fostering a culture of mutual understanding with customized mugs. This initiative humanized the workplace for the new employees, ensuring they felt integrated into the organization from day one. Notably, their preferred names were incorporated into their badges and corporate email addresses, demonstrating inclusivity even before official documentation was obtained.

The depiction of diversity on the water tank painting marked a significant achievement that bolsters the company's stance on diversity and inclusion, fostering a culture where respecting and embracing individuals for who they truly are is seamlessly integrated. As mentioned by the interviewee 1, the team garnered a very favorable reaction by sharing images in support of the diversity and inclusion initiative.

Once weekly, the E1 team conducts the Diversity and Inclusion Dialogue (DDI) to dedicate 5 minutes at the start of the shift to discuss D&I. Each week, a different topic related to all 5 GAs of the company is addressed. This occasion also serves as an opportunity for leadership to express the company's stance against inappropriate jokes, disrespect, and prejudice.

The Diversity Café is a monthly event for senior-level administrative staff within the organization. Discussions cover topics such as the rights of minority groups, women in leadership, and moral and sexual harassment in the workplace.

Trainee mentoring has been revised to better align with diversity. The company carefully chose a mentor with a strong connection to gender and race-related topics, which has had a positive impact on the development of E2.

At the Três Lagoas facility, owned by the company Therefore, a roulette wheel was placed in the cafeteria. Employees could spin the wheel for a moment of relaxation and discuss various topics.

The company's initiative in Financial Education has shown to be significant in appreciating employees getting ready for retirement. According to interviewee E5, this initiative should be more consistent and frequent as older individuals retire each month. Being elderly himself, he emphasizes the importance of discussing this matter in the workplace, noting that some of his friends are facing financial challenges due to the lack of preparation within the corporate setting for this stage of life.

Reframing programs, focusing on specific life moments, were selected as one of the diversity initiatives that produced the most favorable outcomes for E4.

> As we progress through life, our values evolve naturally. Discussing the significance of revitalizing life can be crucial at times. Individuals may overlook this due to the fast pace of daily life. Upon reaching old age, many individuals feel adrift, lacking purpose. This can lead to feelings of depression and uncertainty about one's current role. (E4).

The DCPs Talent Bank contains information on candidates from this group who are suitable for various roles within the industrial setting of the company.

Some practices were identified as yielding less significant results and are emphasized in the following subsection.

4.3 Actions With Less Significant Results

This topic discusses actions that were implemented but did not yield the intended outcomes, as indicated by the gathered statements. In contrast to prior efforts, certain aspects rendered them insufficient in raising awareness.

The painting of the forklift aimed to raise awareness of LGBTQIA+ issues within the organization. Interviewee 1 noted a lack of communication and team readiness to accept and understand the significance of a colorful forklift, assuming the team possessed a higher level of maturity and

did not require extensive preparation. Consequently, certain employees assigned derogatory names to the forklift and initially teased those operating it. Implementing awareness initiatives prior to painting the forklift could have prevented or mitigated this situation.

Conducting workshops on PWD experiences was found to be counterproductive, as indicated by research findings. The PWD ambassador believes that activities simulating disabilities, such as using blindfolds or headphones to block external stimuli and assigning tasks for participants to complete, do not effectively represent the experiences of PWDs. These exercises tend to heighten individuals' perceptions of disability, as non-PWDs often struggle with the tasks, leading them to assume that PWDs would face similar challenges. This outcome contradicted existing literature advocating for the benefits of experiential workshops involving disability simulations (Oliveira & Resende, 2017).

4.4 Perceived Benefits

Respondents emphasized various benefits linked to diversity management. Interviewee 1 identified the main advantage of diversity initiatives as fostering a sense of happiness among individuals in an inclusive setting where mutual respect is valued. Additionally, recruiting a team member who uses a wheelchair significantly influenced her personal and professional life. In her role as a manager, she instigated positive changes and impacted people's lives by recognizing talents often overlooked by many companies that do not hire individuals from certain minority groups.

Interviewee 2 highlighted additional benefits. Diverse companies tend to attract increased investment and demonstrate greater resilience. Moreover, it was noted that employees benefit from working in a supportive environment that fosters psychological safety. Lastly, promoting inclusivity by hiring more women, black individuals, persons with disabilities, and fostering a more inclusive environment for the LGBTQIA+ community is a means for organizations to contribute to society and enhance their positioning.

Diversity in E4 is closely linked to profitability, as evidenced by a 2014 and 2017 McKinsey survey indicating that companies with women in executive roles saw a 17% increase in profits, and a 35% increase with black executives. Additionally, the concept of social equity highlights the responsibility of companies, such as company X, in promoting gender balance within their ranks, given that women constitute over 50% of the global population. Hence, it is imperative for organizations to consider this balance as they operate within society.

Another identified factor is a heightened sense of belonging, with employees demonstrating increased engagement when they can freely express themselves and their identities. This fosters enhanced productivity and commitment, creating a mutually beneficial dynamic for the individual (Qi, 2019; Seabra, 2023) being embraced, resulting in heightened productivity and enthusiasm for both

work and the organization. Consequently, a significantly more innovative environment is cultivated, as any form of diversity within a team (whether in age, gender, race, etc.) naturally sparks fresh ideas (E5).

In this context, E5 asserts that individuals take pride in working for a company that is highly productive, has a global market presence, manufactures environmentally sustainable products, or offers appealing benefits. These were all characteristics in the past that instilled pride in employees. The interviewee noted that recently, there has been a shift towards people expressing pride in company X for its focus on ESG.

> The primary source of pride in working at company X is and will continue to be ESG. If asked to finish the sentence 'I work in a company that (...)', I would say: one that demonstrates robust awareness, initiatives, and policies fostering diversity. This currently stands as the foremost source of pride in being part of company X.(E5)

The identified benefits encompass enhanced employee engagement, an enhanced work environment, and financial gains for the organization, as evidenced in prior research (Badal; Harter, 2014; Hunt et al., 2018; Smulowitz, Becerra & Mayo, 2019). Survey participants also noted favorable impacts on their personal lives, indicating a beneficial influence of the work environment on employees' everyday experiences (Beauregard et al., 2020).

4.5 Identified Challenges

Despite the high diversity within the team of interviewee 1, she notes a lack of female representation in its management. She highlighted the company's initiative to train women as forklift operators, emphasizing the necessity for individuals to already possess training, higher education, and job market experience when management positions become available. Consequently, enhancing diversity in senior management poses a significant challenge for the company.

Another challenge emphasized by the black ambassador and SG Negros participant pertained to the company's predominantly black workforce and the challenge of harnessing their talents to cultivate future leaders. Consequently, a career development initiative was initiated in January 2022 for this demographic.

Moreover, despite the inclusive initiatives already undertaken by the organization, there is still a tendency to label individuals with disabilities. Even though this group provides valuable insights, contributes to the company, actively participates, and is committed, there remains a prevalent belief among others that individuals with disabilities may not be capable of fulfilling tasks. Therefore, it is imperative for individuals to have greater confidence in this group, recognizing them as professionals on par with their non-disabled counterparts (E3).

Moreover, despite management's awareness of the significance of the company embodying diversity and striving to reach long-term diversity objectives, it is typical to see a tendency to favor straight white men when selecting and hiring talents, thereby overlooking minority groups. It is imperative to emphasize that fostering diversity is a collective obligation. Every individual must contribute to promoting diversity within their sphere, challenging unconscious biases, and embracing diverse perspectives.

The integration of black individuals and women into the industrial sector poses a significant challenge. While there is a talent pool within the framework of DCPs, a comparable level of effort has not been observed for black individuals and women in the industry. E5 suggests that the company's emphasis on quotas may be perceived negatively by numerous employees, aligning with studies highlighting the contentious nature of implementing racial quotas (Amaral & Ribeiro, 2009; Modesto et al., 2017).

Ultimately, a cultural shift in leadership is essential to not merely tolerate but actively foster diversity, integrating it seamlessly over time. Embracing diversity is a fundamental mission. Hence, E5 highlights this as the pivotal hurdle facing Company X, underscoring the imperative for heightened consciousness to propel management towards genuine promotion of diversity, transcending mere acceptance.

> Ideally, all our managers should embody the role of ambassadors, as they are volunteers. I aspire to be an ambassador, advocating for a cause I believe in. I actively engage in promoting diversity across all levels. Envision the impact if every manager within our organization embraced the ambassador role. (E5).

Despite the initiatives and actions taken, instances of prejudice persist in management's interactions with candidates from the minority groups discussed in the study. For instance, during an interview, Interviewee 4 recounted an incident where the manager made homophobic remarks, using derogatory language. Subsequently, the interviewee utilized the company's reporting tool (ombudsman) to address the issue. The presence of a reporting channel within the company, allowing employees, suppliers, or customers to report incidents anonymously, significantly impacts and offers a sense of security to individuals from minority groups.

The company showcases a diverse range of practices, engaging key minority groups, employees, and managers in the diversity management process, signaling a forward-looking approach to sustaining diversity and inclusion initiatives. Table 2 outlines the identified practices.

Table 2
Identified diversity and inclusion practices within the company.

Effectiveness	Non-discrimination Practices	Practices of Support	Accountability Practices
More effective actions	• Water tank painting • Dialogue on Diversity and Inclusion • Diverse Coffee • Week of Diversity	• Bathroom signage replacement • Social names on the badge and corporate email • Forklift Operator Training School • Plural Day • Mentorship for Trainees • Reframing Program • DCPs Talent Repository • Financial literacy	• Institutionalization of the plural group • Ombudsman (internal and external to the organization) • Diversity and Inclusion Squad • Ambassadors and allies of diversity are volunteers, and autonomous individuals
Actions with limited outcomes	• Painting of a forklift • Workshops for individuals with disabilities	•	

Source: Developed by the authors.

The company clearly implemented both non-discrimination and support and accountability practices, expanding on those outlined by Leslie (2019). While support practices yielded positive outcomes, the same unanimity was not observed with the non-prejudice practices, underscoring the challenges of promoting awareness in a society plagued by discrimination against minorities (Almeida, 2021; Oliveira, Oliveira & Cardoso, 2020; Souza Lima, 2021). Although accountability practices were mentioned, they were neither lauded for their effectiveness nor criticized for their lack of impact. This outcome may stem from the perception of the interviewed ambassadors, who primarily focus on tactical and operational aspects, making these practices and their effects less conspicuous in daily operations.

The identified benefits suggest that the efforts yielded significant outcomes (Hunt et al., 2018; Smulowitz, Becerra & Mayo, 2019; Beauregard et al., 2020), albeit sometimes only partially, aligning with literature indicating that advancements in diversity management implementation can be gradual and encounter obstacles.

The challenges encountered highlight that implementing diversity management is a lengthy endeavor, involving the simultaneous consideration of various pertinent and intricate matters, necessitating time to accomplish goals across all aspects. Identifying the issues faced can serve as a crucial informative component in the learning process, enabling course corrections. Additionally, the struggle to attain desired outcomes through diversity initiatives is compounded by the pervasive presence of prejudice, discrimination, and exclusion within the organizational milieu, reflecting systemic societal norms (Almeida, 2021; Oliveira, Oliveira & Cardoso, 2020; Souza Lima, 2021). Table 3 outlines the benefits and good diversity practices recognized.

Table 3
Benefits and difficulties identified in the company

Identified Benefits	Difficulties experienced
• Inclusive environment in which individuals respect each other • Impact on the personal and professional lives of those involved • Capture talent that many companies choose not to hire • More diverse companies attract more investment and are more resilient companies • Comfortable environment, providing psychological safety • Way for the organization itself to provide feedback and positioning for society • Direct correlation with profitability • Social equity • Individuals who are proud to work for the company • Greater sense of belonging	• Management is not adequately filled by women • Difficulty in leveraging the talents of black and brown people to become leaders • Ableism towards people with disabilities • Some managers outsource minority groups to other areas, admitting the historical pattern of straight white men to their own teams • Inclusion of black people and women in the industrial area • Cultural change in management so that it not only accepts diversity, but promotes it • Situations of prejudice, on the part of management, during interviews with candidates

Source: Developed by the authors.

The establishment of a diverse environment relies on interventions that transform the organizational culture, awareness, and behaviors of its members. The company has demonstrated clear positive outcomes from implementing these practices, along with challenges documented in the literature (Almeida, 2021; Oliveira, Oliveira & Cardoso, 2020; Souza Lima, 2021; Hunt et al., 2018; Smulowitz, Becerra & Mayo, 2019). Nevertheless, the practices perceived by participants appear to lack strong alignment with strategic planning, are of limited scope, and lack substantial theoretical underpinning. The insufficient involvement of strategic sectors may impede the proliferation of a culture of diversity within the organization, despite acknowledgment of support from senior management by interviewees.

Perceived gains are believed to serve as motivators for sustaining and enhancing actions and incentives focused on diversity, enabling effective resolution of encountered challenges within the organization (Mannix & Neale, 2005). Strengthening the institutionalization of diversity management practices will undoubtedly support the enhancement of achieved outcomes and employee satisfaction. Consequently, raising awareness among senior management to engage, broaden efforts, and improve outcomes is essential for overcoming resistance (Soranz, 2019; Velasco & Sansone, 2019).

5 CONCLUSIONS

The company conducted various initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion, encompassing non-discrimination practices, support, and accountability measures. Most of these initiatives were deemed successful by interviewees. The study highlighted the benefits and challenges associated with diversity management practices, indicating progress towards the established goals. The identified practices, along with the reported benefits and challenges, contribute to diversity management and align with existing literature while also reflecting the unique aspects of the company under review, prompting further inquiry and potential future research.

Simultaneously, certain practices impacted the personal lives of the participants, while external factors also influenced the outcomes and challenges faced. The organization has achieved favorable results, albeit not comprehensive, potentially attributed to the brief period it took to embed diversity and inclusion within the company. The documented benefits encompassed financial and social dimensions.

This scenario is unique as diversity management has been institutionalized through the mobilization of the company's employees during a merger with another organization. The future progress is uncertain, but interviews suggest optimistic prospects for continued improvement.

The findings suggest that addressing challenges brings a substantial array of linked advantages, supporting existing literature. Moreover, they emphasize that the complexities tied to its implementation should not be overlooked to prevent avoidable conflicts, obstacles, and inefficiencies. This situation underscores the importance of embracing diversity management thoughtfully and professionally, considering the organizational context. Strategic approaches like benchmarking should be consciously employed in Diversity Management. Mere replication or enforcement of standards may hinder the feasibility of fostering more inclusive management.

The study's limitations encompass the brief monitoring period of the company, the limited number of interviewees, and their tactical/operational viewpoint, which could benefit from exploring other employees within the company. Longitudinal approaches in large corporations emerge as recommendations for future research, along with multilevel studies incorporating diverse hierarchical perspectives and employees affected by diversity and inclusion initiatives, as well as sector-specific investigations. Further exploration is warranted on managing diversity among outsourced staff, an aspect overlooked in interviews, necessitating increased attention. Additionally, there exists a notable knowledge gap concerning non-discrimination, support, and accountability practices, encompassing their attributes and performance metrics.

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