

Inclusion and Diversity in Healthcare Organizations' Teams

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Abstract. *Inclusion and diversity (D&I) are an integral part of an organization's success in today's world due to the impact they can have on employees and managers in all fields of activity. Teams and organizations are shaped and changed in ways that were not considered years ago. The review of the literature showed what D&I are, the differences between the two, and the impact on organizations worldwide, as well as in Romanian organizations. The research goal is the analysis of the differences in perception of manager and team members regarding D&I in healthcare/clinical research organizations, since one of the values of the organization analyzed is inclusion. The research method used for this study is quantitative research using a self-administered questionnaire, with structured questions. The 53 responses received were processed with Mann-Whitney nonparametric test in IBM SPSS Statistics software. The results showed that managers put greater emphasis on D&I than team members. Considering the global structure of the organization, the aspects of D&I have a great importance within management teams, their effects being able to influence team performance, the motivation of their members, and especially employees' retention. The findings underscore the managerial implications, particularly those within the healthcare sector, in prioritizing and actively cultivating diversity and inclusive environments. In addition, research contributes to the theoretical background by providing empirical evidence that substantiates and enriches existing theoretical frameworks related to organizational inclusivity.*

Keywords: diversity, inclusion, D&I, team, manager, healthcare.

Introduction

New concepts used in organizations, such as diversity and inclusion (D&I) were described by Boakgomo (2020) using the best words as 'Diversity is asked to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance'. The two concepts are interconnected, but they also need to be analyzed first separately, and then together, in order to better reflect and understand the approach that exists or not in a certain organization, as well as similarities and differences between them.

There is an increased interest in the two concepts and the assimilation in organizations, from the point of view of leadership and human resources departments, as well as increased curiosity and understanding of how the D&I are present in an organization from the employees and

future employees. The interest of the organization is reflected by strategies and tactics for diversity and inclusion in the workplace. In particular, the research identifies a gap in the existing literature on the limited attention given to these aspects within the specific context of organizations in Romania. This highlights a research gap to understand the unique challenges and opportunities related to D&I in this context. Furthermore, considering the impact of the presence or absence of D&I on organizational performance evaluation, both current and future, becomes crucial in this context. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to analyze whether the perception of managers and team members in the clinical research organization regarding D&I is different.

Based on the theoretical framework, the research presents a study on the perception of D&I from the point of view of managers and their team members in a clinical research organization in the field of healthcare to observe if there are differences in perception in the two roles, through quantitative research of the answers received to the research questionnaire and analyzed in IBM SPSS Statistics software. The results and conclusions will be used together with the theoretical framework to identify potential solutions to the present state of D&I as seen from different organizational positions.

Literature review

Theoretical concepts of diversity and inclusion

In recent years, the concepts of D&I have been frequently heard in the organization, regardless of the field of activity, due to the importance it has regarding the central resource of the organization, the employees. Therefore, diversity refers to the characteristics of the individual that give it its unique character (Sharma, 2023) or the entire spectrum of individual differences. According to Gayan (2023), modern organizations must focus on the following seven types of diversity: race and ethnicity, age and generational characteristics, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, religious and spiritual beliefs, various types of disability, as well as status and socioeconomic status.

Inclusion (Daley, 2022) represents equal access of all employees to resources and opportunities in the organization, and the difference between the two is given by the fact that diversity means the presence of differences such as those previously mentioned in an organizational environment, while inclusion represents a practice of the organization by which it ensures that employees feel valued and supported by the organization and have a sense of belonging to it. Moreover, in the specialized literature, there has been an extensive discourse on the significance of identification in the formation of internal and external groups and how they are included in the organization (Shore et al., 2011). Identification with social categories, as discussed in the literature, involves a “symbolic attachment to the group as a whole” (Roccas & Brewer, 2002, p. 89). Through social identification, individuals develop bonds with each other due to their common affiliation with the social group. Thus, the existing literature indicates that individuals possess numerous social identities, forming the foundation for both distinctiveness and resemblance to fellow group members (Roccas & Brewer, 2002). The complexity of social identity underscores the subjective amalgamation of multiple social identities by individuals, allowing the reconciliation of situations where individuals may serve as outgroup members based on one social identity while concurrently belonging to the ingroup on account of another social identity characteristic.

A study presented by Bush (2023) shows that when employees do not feel valued and taken seriously by the employer, they will choose to leave the organization at some point. And when they feel valued and treated fairly by the organization, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or age, they will feel pride in their work, feel motivated to perform their work activities, and stay

longer in that company (Bush, 2023). Therefore, when an organization has an inclusive work environment, it will retain and attract talented employees who will bring value (Bush, 2023), and the first step is to create and implement D&I rules and policies in the organization. Additionally, leveraging a diverse range of perspectives to engage individuals has significant potential to improve our ability of organizations to innovate (Swartz et al., 2019). Research (AlShebli et al., 2018; Freeman & Huang, 2014; Page, 2019) indicates that teams comprised of diverse thinkers demonstrate superior performance in intricate tasks, showcasing improved problem solving, increased innovation, and more accurate predictions. These outcomes collectively contribute to improved overall performance and results when diverse teams are tasked with addressing a specific problem.

According to Washington and Patrick (2018), there are three requirements that must be present in organizations' strategies for diversity and inclusion: treating employees with respect, appreciating employees for their strengths, and leaders doing what is right. At the same time, beyond the essential goal of attracting and retaining a diverse workforce, Wong (2020) identifies various advantages that organizations can derive from embracing D&I. Embracing diverse perspectives within the workforce can lead to the development of innovative ideas, enhancing the organization's problem-solving capabilities. Furthermore, the inclusion of diverse voices in decision-making processes has been associated with improved overall performance. Ultimately, organizations that prioritize D&I are not only better positioned for success, but also experience increased profitability and positive results.

Wong (2020) shows that in high-diversity teams the team performance is higher with up to 30% than in the nondiversity ones. Furthermore, this study (Wong, 2020) showed that there is a 19% increase in revenue of companies that have diverse management teams than in companies with less diversity.

Despite the above considerations, organizations can still confuse the two terms, D&I, as they are intertwined (Washington and Patrick, 2018), but still completely different. Thus, according to Washington and Patrick (2018), diversity refers to representation, while inclusion is a connection for employees in terms of talent and innovation. Therefore, both need to be present in an organization in order to have growth in business and talents.

In order to achieve all these, organizations can consider possible solutions (D&I strategies and policies) (Wong, 2020), such as establishing the organization's standards based on objective criteria, frequent recognition and reward of employees, the use of metrics for D&I, collection and analysis of employee feedback, incorporate D&I into the hiring process and documentation of the practices and policies.

In Romania, the D&I concept began to be incorporated into organizations, as an adaptation of human resource (HR) practices and policies adapted to national legislation, as well as our culture and mentality (Cimpoca, 2020). In 2018, Romania became the 21st state in the European Union to have a Diversity Charter and a member of the European Diversity Platform. This Charter was signed by 110 companies, representing approximately 150,000 employees. As presented by Cimpoca (2020), the company MKOR (Market Opportunity Research) conducted the first study on D&I management in Romania, between August and December 2019, on a sample of 77 organizations. The following conclusions have been identified (Cimpoca, 2020): most of the organizations studied support D&I principles and more than 70% of organizations believe that when the work environment is diverse and inclusive, it increases employee motivation and satisfaction, as well as that 78% of organizations provide equal pay and benefits for equal work. Furthermore, 69% of the organizations questioned have incorporated D&I into the hiring process,

and lastly, the organizations analyzed use indicators to measure D&I practices. However, 52% of companies surveyed do not have the necessary tools to monitor D&I progress and over 50% of other organizations do not monitor results (Cimpoca, 2020).

It can be concluded that, although the management of D&I is in its early stages in Romania, there is interest from organizations that follow global practices; thus, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ1: *Are there differences in perceptions between managers and team members in the clinical research organization about diversity?*

RQ2: *Are there differences in perceptions between managers and team members in the clinical research organization regarding inclusion?*

Considerations about clinical research organizations

The clinical research organization is a company registered in Romania since 2008 (Mfinance, 2023) with the purpose of activity according to the NACE code for research and development in biotechnology. From internal data, the number of employees in Romania reached approximately 130. This multi-national organization provides clinical research services to pharmaceutical companies, covering the entire life cycle of pharmaceutical development and commercialization, and can be tailored to fit small local tests or large global programs. The company expanded in the following years to other countries in Europe, but also to North and South America, Israel and Asia, both by opening offices in these countries and by acquiring companies offering laboratory services, imaging services, personnel services, phase I clinical trial units, consulting services, and clinical research organizations. The company created a *global innovation hub* in to advance clinical development and launched a research group for medical devices and diagnostics, and today employs around 40,000 people working in over 40 countries, in various structures customized according to the needs of the companies that use these services, innovative services in the market with emphasis on the use of technology, this representing a competitive advantage of the organization.

The values of the organization were redefined in 2022 (Iconplc, 2023), as follows:

- *Integrity:* we always do the right things.
- *Collaboration:* we are better together when working as a team.
- *Agility:* we are passionate about providing innovative solutions to customers.
- *Inclusion:* We value diversity and care about the success of our people.

Methodology

This research aims to analyze whether there are differences in perceptions between managers and employees (team members) in healthcare/clinical research organizations on D&I. The research method used for this study is quantitative research through a self-administered questionnaire, with structured questions (Ștefan et al, 2021) and is part of a larger project, in which qualitative results were reported elsewhere (Căruceru and Ștefan, 2023). To create this questionnaire, several standard questionnaires on the topics of management, teams, D&I, from the online questionnaire platforms, such as QuestionPro (QuestionPro, 2023), SurveyMonkey, (SurveyMonkey, 2023) and SHRM (SHRM, 2023) were analyzed. Thus, after consulting these sources, the main variables of this research were the following:

- *Diversity:* was measured using eight specific items that refer to the characteristics of an individual that give him his unique character and the full spectrum of individual differences.

The reliability of the scale was evaluated by means of Cronbach Alpha coefficient ($\alpha = 0.935$).

- *Inclusion* ($\alpha = 0.953$): was evaluated with the help of 14 items that sought to measure the degree to which respondents perceive that they have equal access to resources and opportunities in the organization. In addition, inclusion was assessed as a practice of the organization that ensures that employees feel valued and supported by the organization and that they feel comfortable with it.

All items were evaluated on a 5-point scale, from *Total disagree* to *Total agree*. Demographic questions were also included in the questionnaire. Furthermore, before completing the questionnaire, potential respondents were informed of the purpose of the study and that their participation in the survey is completely voluntary and anonymous.

The questionnaire was administered between 20 May and 15 June 2023, through a convenience sampling procedure, using the Google Drive platform. The link to the questionnaire was sent to the target population, which included employees of an organization in the healthcare industry. The collected characteristics of managers and team members (employees), as well as their perception of D&I in the analyzed organization, were considered.

After the distribution of the questionnaire, 53 valid responses were collected, which were used in this research. To identify differences in perception between managers and team members about D&I in the organization to which they belong, the Mann-Whitney nonparametric test was used, since the variables of interest did not meet the presumptions for parametric tests (i.e., departure from the normal distribution revealed by Shapiro-Wilk and Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests and sample size). Mann-Whitney test is the nonparametric version of the T-test for independent samples; in this case, the median is used to compare the two groups rather than their mean (Olariu et al., 2023; Pallant, 2021). IBM SPSS Statistics was used both to describe the research sample and to perform nonparametric tests.

Results and discussions

The research sample has several characteristics regarding its status as employees. Based on the answers received, the distribution of the 53 respondents according to age shows that most of them (52.830%) are between 36 and 45 years old, followed by those between 26 and 35 years old (22.642%), indicating a balanced ratio of employees, considering the degree of specialization and education required in this field of activity. According to seniority in the organization, the results highlight that 60.377% of the respondents have more than 5 years of seniority, indicating that the employees are motivated to continue working in this organization and that the management has the appropriate management systems, methods, and techniques for retention of employees in the organization.

Regarding the distribution of the 53 respondents according to the roles (positions) held in the organization, 71.698% of them are managers, and 28.302% are executors (team members). Additionally, all respondents work in virtual teams and are not native English speakers, 26 of the respondents consider themselves to have an expert level of English, and 24 - at a knowledgeable level, which indicates an advanced level of knowledge of this foreign language, an important aspect in virtual teams, showing that there will be no obstacles in the correct and complete perception of written or verbal messages communicated within the teams.

Before answering the research questions, descriptive statistics of the research variables were performed as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of research variables

Items		Mean	Standard deviation
Diversity			
DIV1	Management of the organization encourages diversity.	4.717	0.455
DIV2	Management shows that diversity is important through its actions.	4.717	0.455
DIV3	The organization is committed to improving employee diversity.	4.830	0.379
DIV4	The organization promotes a work environment that allows employees to be themselves at work without fear.	4.491	0.846
DIV5	The organization respects the individuals and values their differences.	4.547	0.774
DIV6	In the organization, employees value colleagues whose backgrounds, beliefs, and experiences differ from their own.	4.321	0.956
DIV7	It was easy to meet people from different backgrounds than mine in the organization.	4.887	0.320
DIV8	Employees of different backgrounds interact well in the organization.	4.547	0.607
Inclusion			
INC1	The management of the organization treats all employees fairly.	4.377	0.904
INC2	Employees of different backgrounds are encouraged to apply for senior positions.	4.604	0.599
INC3	Employees of different backgrounds are treated fairly in the internal promotion process.	4.321	0.894
INC4	There is a career development path for all employees.	4.604	0.689
INC5	My personal experience in the organization led me to better understand the differences between my colleagues.	4.604	0.599
INC6	Company policies or procedures encourage diversity, equity, and inclusion.	4.887	0.320
INC7	I know and understand the procedures for reporting incidents of discrimination and/or bias in the workplace.	5.000	0.000
INC8	I believe that the organization will take appropriate action in response to incidents of discrimination and/or bias.	4.943	0.233
INC9	Management of the organization demonstrates a commitment to meeting the needs of employees with disabilities.	4.321	0.894
INC10	Employees of different ages are equally valued by the organization.	4.377	0.837
INC11	Racially, ethnic, sexual, and gender-based jokes or slurs are not tolerated by the organization.	4.830	0.379
INC12	The organization provides an environment for the free and open expression of ideas, opinions and beliefs.	4.491	0.697
INC13	My manager is committed to and supports diversity and inclusion	4.604	0.840
INC14	My manager handles diversity and inclusion issues satisfactorily.	4.547	0.845

Source: The authors' own research with SPSS.

Analyzing the results in Table 1, it can be seen that with regard to the diversity variable, the respondents from healthcare / clinical research organizations appreciated to the greatest extent the fact that the diversity in organization to which they belong is reflected by the fact that (1) at the level of the organization it was easy to meet people of different backgrounds ($M = 4.887$; $SD = 0.320$), (2) the organization is committed to improve employee diversity ($M = 4.830$; $SD = 0.379$), (3) the management of the organization encourages diversity ($M = 4.717$; $SD = 0.455$) and (4) the management shows that diversity is important through its actions ($M = 4.717$; $SD = 0.455$).

On the other hand, regarding the inclusion items, respondents from clinical research organizations mentioned that inclusion occurs to the greatest extent through the fact that (1) they know and understand the procedures for reporting incidents of discrimination and/or bias in the

workplace ($M = 5.000$; $SD = 0.000$), (2) they believe that the organization will take appropriate action in response to incidents of discrimination and/or bias ($M = 4.943$; $SD = 0.233$), and (3) because the company policies or procedures encourage diversity, equity and inclusion ($M = 4.887$; $SD = 0.320$).

To answer the research questions, the nonparametric Mann-Whitney test was used, the results being processed in SPSS software. Thus, the differences in perception of the respondents with the role of manager and those with the role of employee (team members) about diversity in medical/clinical research organizations are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Diversity by manager (N = 38) and employee (N = 15) roles

Items			Mean ranks	Sum ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Z	p
DIV1	Management of the organization encourages diversity.	Manager	34.500	1311.000	0.000	-7.211	0.000
		Employee	8.000	120.000			
DIV2	Management shows that diversity is important through its actions.	Manager	34.500	1311.000	0.000	-7.211	0.000
		Employee	8.000	120.000			
DIV3	The organization is committed to improving the diversity of its employees.	Manager	31.500	1197.000	114.000	-5.191	0.000
		Employee	15.600	234.000			
DIV4	The organization promotes a work environment that allows employees to be themselves at work without fear.	Manager	34.500	1311.000	0.000	-7.148	0.000
		Employee	8.000	120.000			
DIV5	The organization respects the individuals and values their differences.	Manager	34.500	1311.000	0.000	-7.116	0.000
		Employee	8.000	120.000			
DIV6	In the organization, employees value colleagues whose backgrounds, beliefs and experiences differ from their own.	Manager	33.908	1288.500	22.500	-6.318	0.000
		Employee	9.500	142.500			
DIV7	It was easy to meet people from different backgrounds than mine in the organization.	Manager	30.000	1140.000	171.000	-4.101	0.000
		Employee	19.400	291.000			
DIV8	Employees of different backgrounds interact well in the organization.	Manager	33.553	1275.000	36.000	-5.712	0.000
		Employee	10.400	156.000			

Source: The authors' own research with SPSS.

Based on the results of the nonparametric Mann-Whitney test, illustrated in Table 2, it can be highlighted that there are statistically significant differences between managers and employees regarding the perception of diversity in medical/clinical research organizations, measured through the prism of all eight items. Furthermore, by analyzing these differences based on the values of the mean ranks, it can be emphasized that, for the eight items, managers value diversity in organizations more than employees. All these results provide answers for RQ1.

Regarding the differences in the perceptions of managers and team members about inclusion in medical/clinical research organizations, they are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Inclusion by manager (N = 38) and employee (N = 15) roles

Items			Mean ranks	Sum ranks	Mann-Whitney U	Z	p
INC1	The management of the organization treats all employees fairly.	Manager	34.500	1311.000	0.000	-6.777	0.000
		Employee	8.000	120.000			
INC2	Employees of different backgrounds are encouraged to apply for senior positions.	Manager	34.026	1293.000	18.000	-6.349	0.000
		Employee	9.200	138.000			
INC3	Employees of different backgrounds are treated fairly in the internal promotion process.	Manager	34.500	1311.000	0.000	-6.472	0.000
		Employee	8.000	120.000			
INC4	There is a career development path for all employees.	Manager	32.645	1240.500	70.500	-5.356	0.000
		Employee	12.700	190.500			
INC5	My personal experience in the organization led me to better understand the differences between my colleagues.	Manager	31.342	1191.000	120.000	-3.924	0.000
		Employee	16.000	240.000			
INC6	Company policies or procedures encourage diversity, equity and inclusion.	Manager	30.000	1140.000	171.000	-4.101	0.000
		Employee	19.400	291.000			
INC7	I know and understand the procedures for reporting incidents of discrimination and/or bias in the workplace.	Manager	27.000	1026.000	285.000	0.000	1.000
		Employee	27.000	405.000			
INC8	I believe that the organization will take appropriate action in response to incidents of discrimination and/or bias.	Manager	28.500	1083.000	228.000	-2.811	0.005
		Employee	23.200	348.000			
INC9	Management of the organization demonstrates a commitment to meeting the needs of employees with disabilities.	Manager	32.842	1248.000	63.000	-5.041	0.000
		Employee	12.200	183.000			
INC10	Employees of different ages are equally valued by the organization.	Manager	33.434	1270.500	40.500	-5.524	0.000
		Employee	10.700	160.500			
INC11	Racially, ethnic, sexual, and gender-based jokes or slurs are not tolerated by the organization.	Manager	29.408	1117.500	193.000	-2.778	0.000
		Employee	20.900	313.500			
INC12	The organization provides an environment for the free and open expression of ideas, opinions and beliefs.	Manager	33.789	1284.000	27.000	-5.859	0.000
		Employee	9.800	147.000			
INC13	My manager is committed to and supports diversity and inclusion	Manager	33.000	1254.000	57.000	-6.152	0.000
		Employee	11.800	177.000			
INC14	My manager handles diversity and inclusion issues satisfactorily.	Manager	34.500	1311.000	0.000	-7.110	0.000
		Employee	8.000	120.000			

Source: The authors' own research with SPSS.

The results of the nonparametric Mann-Whitney test, presented in Table 3, show that based on the mean ranks values, managers appreciate to a greater extent the impact of inclusion in medical/clinical research organizations, compared to employees in these organizations, these

differences in perception being statistically significant in terms of 13 of the 14 items specific to the measurement of inclusion. Based on the above, answers to RQ2 are provided.

The purpose of applying for the Mann-Whitney test is to observe whether there are significant differences between the two analyzed roles, managers and team members (employees). Based on the results obtained for managers ($N = 38$) and employees ($N = 15$), and considering the value of $p < 0.05$, we conclude that there are significant differences between the two roles, which provides answers to the proposed research questions.

Regarding the perception of managers and team members toward D&I in the organization, the results show that managers have a better perception than employees about these aspects, and this can be analyzed by the organization to see if the differences are given by the information received by the two roles from the organization or their perceptions. Managers rated maximum marks for most of the questions regarding D&I, while the marks given by employees are lower, with a single exception regarding an item specific to inclusion, namely "I know and understand the procedures for reporting incidents of discrimination and/or bias in the workplace".

Considering the global setup of the analyzed organization, the aspects of D&I are of great importance within management teams, their effects being able to influence the performance of the team, the motivation of their members, and especially the retention of these employees in the organization. Velazquez (2022) mentions that inclusion in the organization is difficult to promote and measure due to an unclear definition of the term leadership and the need to ask employees for feedback on this. There are several solutions proposed for this, such as training for leadership regarding active listening and unconscious bias, creation of an inclusion council involved in goal-setting, the hiring process, and retaining the employees, as well as creation of employee resource groups (ERGs) that provide a safe space for common interests discussions (e.g., new parents, women). This is a new reality of the work environment, and companies and managers need to learn and adapt to navigate it, in order to keep human resources in the organization, to maintain and grow their competitiveness, as well as to have employees feeling included in the organization. A further analysis can be done on the initiatives and committees in the organization in this research that supports D&I, which indicates the organization's interest in them and confirms the theoretical concepts previously addressed. At the same time, there are a series of events on D&I that take place yearly, with the participation of employees from all the countries where the organization from the study has offices, and these events are highlighted through articles accompanied by pictures on the company's intranet, which is accessed by all employees.

Conclusion

Our research shows that D&I within the organization are well represented compared to other organizations, there is preoccupation from the top management for the implementation of some D&I measures and policies in the organization, such as transparency in the hiring process, support from managers during the integration period within the team, and the presence of global support committees on various D&I topics.

Organizational and practical implications. Research is of practical importance for healthcare/clinical research organizations by highlighting the need to address D&I concerns within management teams. This practical application can foster a more inclusive workplace culture and promote a shared understanding of these critical values. Furthermore, the research identifies a gap in the attention given to D&I in the Romanian context, which presents an opportunity for organizations to develop customized initiatives that address unique challenges and opportunities within the local context. Practical implications extend to strategic planning, calling organizations

to assess and improve current D&I practices, considering the specific nuances of the healthcare sector, to improve team performance, member motivation, and employee retention for long-term success.

Theoretical implications. Research contributes theoretically by enriching the understanding of D&I within organizational contexts, particularly in healthcare/clinical research organizations. By substantiating existing theoretical frameworks with empirical evidence, the study improves the theoretical foundation surrounding organizational inclusivity. Additionally, the theoretical implications of this research lie in highlighting the theoretical frameworks related to D&I, addressing contextual nuances, and highlighting the significance of integrating these principles into organizational strategies for sustained effectiveness and performance in healthcare/clinical research organizations in Romania.

Limits and future research directions. Regarding the limitations of this research, one of them is given by the sample size of the analyzed and the specific characteristics of the country analyzed, Romania. It is interesting to observe and analyze whether, in a larger sample, the conclusions obtained are supported or if other success factors or obstacles regarding team management are identified. The use of technology and mostly artificial intelligence that will change the environment of organizations, as well as the automation of certain repetitive processes, will allow managers and members of teams to focus on activities with a high degree of complexity and the development of other skills that will appear in the future, a fact that can be analyzed in the following research.

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