INPLASY

Workforce Diversity and Organizational Learning: Mapping Empirical Evidence through a Scoping Review Protocol

Corresponding author:
Juan Carlos Olarte Moyano

juacolarte@gmail.com

Author Affiliation:
Corporación Universitaria de Asturias, Bogotá, Colombia.

Olarte, J.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

INTRODUCTION

Review question / Objective The objective of this scoping review is to map and synthesize the available empirical evidence on the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational learning, with particular attention to the diversity dimensions addressed (demographic, functional, and cognitive), the methodological approaches employed, and the organizational and geographical contexts in which these studies have been conducted. Guided by the PCC framework, the review focuses on workforce populations within organizations (Population), the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational learning (Concept), and organizational settings without geographical restriction (Context). Accordingly, the review seeks to answer the following guiding questions: What empirical evidence exists on the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational learning? Which dimensions of diversity have been considered in the studies? What methodologies and analytical approaches have been used to examine this relationship? And in which geographical and organizational contexts have these studies been developed?

Background Workforce diversity has become an increasingly central topic in organizational studies, reflecting broader social, demographic, and economic transformations. Demographic shifts, globalization, and the growing complexity of organizational environments have intensified the presence of diverse teams in terms of gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, education, and professional background. While diversity has been widely recognized as a potential driver of innovation, creativity, and adaptability, its effects are not linear and depend on the interaction with organizational processes such as knowledge management, leadership, and learning cultures.

Organizational learning (OL) is considered a key mechanism through which organizations acquire, share, and apply knowledge to adapt to changing environments and improve performance. The potential for diversity to enrich OL stems from the integration of multiple perspectives, experiences, and skills. However, unmanaged diversity may also

generate tensions, communication barriers, or conflict, limiting its contribution to learning processes. Thus, understanding the relationship between workforce diversity and OL is crucial for both theory and practice.

Although empirical research has grown significantly, evidence remains dispersed and fragmented. Prior studies tend to privilege demographic dimensions of diversity—particularly gender and age—while cognitive and functional diversity have received comparatively less attention. Furthermore, research is geographically concentrated in Western and high-income countries, with limited contributions from non-Western and developing contexts. Sectoral imbalances are also evident, with a predominance of corporate and educational settings, while public sector organizations, community-based contexts, and traditional industries are underexplored.

From a methodological perspective, most available studies employ qualitative approaches such as case studies, interviews, and ethnographies, alongside quantitative designs based on cross-sectional data and regression models. While these methods provide interpretive depth and valuable associations, there is a notable scarcity of longitudinal, experimental, and mixed-methods designs, which limits the ability to capture temporal dynamics and establish robust causal relationships.

Given these gaps, a comprehensive mapping of the empirical evidence is necessary to synthesize current knowledge, identify patterns and inconsistencies, and highlight areas for further investigation. Scoping reviews are particularly suited to this task, as they allow for systematic exploration of diverse types of evidence, without restricting inclusion to specific methodologies or outcomes. By applying this approach, the present review seeks to provide a structured overview of how workforce diversity influences OL, what dimensions and contexts have been most studied, and what theoretical and methodological gaps remain.

Ultimately, this review will contribute to advancing the academic debate on diversity and OL while also offering practical insights for organizations aiming to leverage workforce diversity as a resource for learning, innovation, and long-term sustainability.

Rationale   Despite the growing recognition of diversity as a driver of innovation and organizational performance, the empirical evidence on its relationship with organizational learning (OL) remains scattered, fragmented, and uneven. Previous studies have tended to privilege demographic dimensions of diversity—such as gender, age, or nationality—while functional and cognitive diversity have received comparatively limited attention. This partial focus restricts the understanding of how multiple dimensions of diversity interact to shape OL processes.

Furthermore, research is geographically concentrated in Western and high-income countries, particularly the United States, with scarce contributions from low- and middle-income regions. This imbalance limits the global representativeness of the findings and hampers the ability to capture how cultural, institutional, and socioeconomic contexts condition the diversity–OL relationship. Sectoral biases are also evident: the corporate and educational sectors dominate, while public administration, health, community organizations, and traditional industries remain underexplored.

Methodologically, the predominance of qualitative case studies and cross-sectional quantitative designs contributes valuable interpretive insights but limits comparability, generalizability, and the capacity to establish causal or longitudinal dynamics. The scarcity of mixed-methods and longitudinal approaches highlights a major gap in understanding how the relationship between diversity and OL evolves over time.

In light of these limitations, a scoping review is needed to systematically map and synthesize the available empirical evidence, identify research trends, and reveal gaps and inconsistencies. This approach is particularly suitable as it allows the inclusion of diverse types of studies and methodological designs, offering a comprehensive overview rather than a restricted synthesis of effect sizes.

By consolidating knowledge on the influence of workforce diversity on OL, this review will not only advance theoretical integration in the field but also provide practical insights for organizations seeking to design inclusive policies and learning-oriented cultures. It will highlight conditions under which diversity enhances or hinders OL and propose areas of opportunity for future research. Ultimately, this review aims to serve as a foundation for developing more inclusive, context-sensitive, and methodologically robust approaches that can inform both academic debate and organizational practice.

METHODS

Strategy of data synthesis The search strategy combined controlled vocabulary and free-text terms related to workforce diversity and organizational learning, using Boolean operators ("AND," "OR") and truncations to maximize coverage. The core search terms included: "diversity," "workforce diversity," "team diversity," "organizational learning," "learning organization," "knowledge sharing," "knowledge management." Search strategies were adapted for each database.

Electronic searches were conducted in the following databases: Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest, EBSCOhost (ERIC and Business Source Complete), and Google Scholar for supplementary records. Searches were limited to publications in English and Spanish, with no date restrictions, to ensure a comprehensive mapping of the literature.

The synthesis strategy followed a descriptive and narrative approach, consistent with scoping review methodology. Relevant information from each study was extracted using a standardized template that included: authors, year of publication, country, institutional context, study type, population or data source, dimensions of diversity addressed, conceptualization of organizational learning, relationship explored, methodological approach, and key findings.

The data were organized into an extraction matrix to facilitate comparative analysis across studies. A thematic synthesis was then conducted, grouping findings into categories aligned with the review questions. This allowed for the identification of recurrent themes, methodological trends, geographical and sectoral distributions, as well as conceptual and empirical gaps. The synthesis focused on mapping the extent, range, and nature of the evidence rather than evaluating the quality of individual studies, in line with scoping review standards.

Eligibility criteria This review included empirical studies conducted in organizational settings involving workforce populations such as employees, teams, managers, and organizational units across different sectors, including corporate, educational, public, and non-profit contexts. The focus was on studies that explicitly addressed the relationship between workforce diversity and organizational learning (OL), considering demographic dimensions (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, nationality), functional dimensions (e.g., professional background, roles, skills), and cognitive dimensions (e.g., perspectives, values, knowledge). Studies were excluded if they referred to diversity only in a generic sense without linking it to OL, or if they focused solely on diversity policies without analyzing learning processes empirically. There were no restrictions regarding geographical region or sector, although studies outside organizational contexts, such as those based exclusively on student populations without workforce application, were excluded. All methodological approaches—qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods—were eligible for inclusion, while conceptual essays, theoretical reflections, book chapters, editorials, and other non-empirical works were excluded. Finally, studies published in English or Spanish were considered, with no time restrictions, in order to capture the historical development and evolution of the relationship between diversity and OL.

Source of evidence screening and selection All records retrieved from the databases were first exported to reference management software, where duplicates were identified and removed. The screening process was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, titles and abstracts were independently reviewed by two researchers to assess their relevance according to the eligibility criteria. In the second stage, the full texts of potentially relevant articles were retrieved and evaluated in detail. Discrepancies between reviewers at any stage of the process were resolved through discussion and consensus, and, when necessary, a third reviewer was consulted to reach agreement. A standardized selection protocol was followed throughout to ensure transparency and consistency in the decision-making process, and the overall flow of study selection was documented in accordance with PRISMA-ScR guidelines.

Data management All records identified through database searches were exported into reference management software to ensure systematic organization and to facilitate the removal of duplicates. After the screening process, the full texts of eligible studies were uploaded into a shared repository accessible to all members of the research team. A standardized data extraction template was designed to capture the key variables of interest, including authorship, year of publication, country, organizational context, study design, population or data source, diversity dimensions considered, conceptualization of organizational learning, methodological approach, and main findings.

The extracted data were compiled into a structured matrix, which served as the basis for descriptive

and thematic synthesis. This matrix allowed for systematic comparison across studies and the identification of patterns, trends, and gaps in the evidence. To ensure accuracy and consistency, data extraction was performed independently by two reviewers and subsequently cross-checked. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved by consensus, with arbitration by a third reviewer when necessary.

All data were stored securely in cloud-based platforms with restricted access to the research team to guarantee confidentiality and transparency. Documentation of each step of the process, including screening decisions and data extraction notes, was maintained to ensure reproducibility and adherence to scoping review guidelines.

Reporting results / Analysis of the evidence The results of the scoping review will be reported following the PRISMA-ScR guidelines to ensure clarity, transparency, and reproducibility. Findings will first be presented through a descriptive analysis, including the number of studies identified, duplicates removed, and records screened and selected at each stage, summarized in a PRISMA flow diagram. The descriptive synthesis will also highlight temporal trends, geographical distribution of studies, and sectoral contexts. In addition, the methodological characteristics of the included studies will be summarized, emphasizing the predominance of qualitative approaches, the presence of cross-sectional quantitative designs, and the relative scarcity of longitudinal or mixed-methods research.

Beyond descriptive reporting, a thematic synthesis will be conducted to organize findings into key categories aligned with the review objectives. This synthesis will map the ways in which workforce diversity has been conceptualized (demographic, functional, and cognitive dimensions), how it has been linked to organizational learning processes, and the outcomes or mechanisms most frequently examined. The analysis will also identify patterns, inconsistencies, and research gaps, including the overrepresentation of Western and high-income contexts, the limited attention to underexplored sectors, and the lack of methodological diversity in empirical designs.

Together, the descriptive and thematic analyses will provide an integrated overview of the existing evidence, allowing for the identification of dominant approaches as well as blind spots in the literature. The findings will be reported in tables, figures, and narrative summaries to facilitate accessibility for both academic and practitioner audiences.

Presentation of the results The results of the scoping review will be presented using both descriptive and thematic approaches to provide a comprehensive mapping of the literature. A PRISMA flow diagram will illustrate the process of study identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, ensuring transparency in reporting. Descriptive results will be summarized in tables that capture key study characteristics, including year of publication, country, organizational sector, methodological design, population, and dimensions of diversity addressed. Additional tables will highlight the distribution of studies across geographical regions and sectors, as well as the methodological approaches most frequently employed.

To complement the descriptive synthesis, thematic results will be organized into categories aligned with the review objectives, including conceptualizations of workforce diversity, its relationship with organizational learning processes, and the mechanisms and outcomes most frequently reported. These findings will be presented in narrative form, supported by summary tables and, when appropriate, figures that illustrate thematic connections and research trends. Graphical representations, such as bar charts or maps, may also be included to show the temporal evolution of publications, sectoral emphasis, and geographical concentration of studies.

Together, these formats will allow readers to visualize the scope, distribution, and thematic patterns of the evidence base, while also identifying underexplored areas and research gaps. The results will be structured in a way that is accessible for academic researchers as well as practitioners interested in the intersection of workforce diversity and organizational learning.

Language restriction English and Spanish only; studies published in other languages were excluded.

Country(ies) involved This scoping review is being conducted in Colombia.

Keywords workforce diversity; organizational learning; knowledge management; inclusion; organizational change; learning organizations; workplace equity; human resource management.

Dissemination plans The results of this scoping review will be disseminated through publication in a peer-reviewed open access journal and presentation at relevant academic and professional conferences on organizational studies, management, and human resources. Additionally, findings will be shared with professional networks and organizations interested in diversity management and organizational learning, in order to support evidence-informed practices. Summaries of the review will also be made available in institutional repositories and academic social networks such as ResearchGate to ensure broad accessibility. When possible, non-technical summaries will be developed to facilitate understanding and application by practitioners, policymakers, and organizational leaders. This multi-channel dissemination strategy is designed to maximize the academic, professional, and social impact of the review, contributing to the development of more inclusive and learning-oriented organizations.

Contributions of each author

Author 1 - Juan Carlos Olarte Moyano.
Email: juacolarte@gmail.com