

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION WITHIN MULTICULTURAL LEADERSHIP IN THE COVID YEARS: A BIBLIOMETRIC STUDY 2019-2022

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Abstract: *According to Harvard Business Review, companies with higher diversity experienced 19% higher revenues, but in the meantime, 57% of employees feel their businesses must assiduously concentrate on diversity and inclusion plans. This article aims to present a bibliometric study of diversity and inclusion (DI) in the COVID years 2019-2022. Our analysis was based on the Scopus database, while the bibliometric research was performed via VOSviewer: version 1.6.17, one of the most utilized academic software tools for constructing and visualizing bibliometric networks. In conclusion, our research questions are answered, underlining that, during the last 4 COVID years 2019-2022 the DI phenomenon was a main vector of multinational leadership (ML) and that physical/mental abilities, race and ethnicity, and educational background are the new main drivers of DI. The value of these findings resides in the agile repositioning of the DI role within multinational leadership and can serve as a reference and guidance both for business professionals and researchers.*

Keywords: diversity and inclusion, multicultural leadership, inclusive leadership, knowledge dynamics, cultural intelligence.

JEL classification: A1, F20, F23

1. Introduction

In 2018, the Boston Consulting Group studied more than 1700 companies from eight countries to analyze the correlation of various aspects of diversity and inclusion (DI) - like gender, ethnicity, race, age, career track, or education with business performance. The result showed that companies that scored high in DI obtained both 19% higher innovation incomes, and 9% higher EBIT margins (Lorenzo and Reeves, 2018). This meant that DI initiatives not only make enterprises better places to work but also stimulate better business performances.

As the last 4 COVID years: 2019-2022 had put pressure on business performances (Bratianu, 2022; Kalogiannidis, 2020), multicultural leadership (ML) was challenged (Paiuc, 2021c), and forced to address diversity and inclusion also as a revenue growth factor. Besides race and gender, which were the main drivers of DI till 2018 (Henne, 2018), the COVID years raised new priorities for DI and ML via the growth of the affected physical and

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mental abilities of the workforce (Cui *et al.*, 2022), and have questioned the cultural intelligence weight and limits (Bratianu, Iliescu & Paiuc, 2021). In this context, we would like to explore the literature to see how diversity and inclusion influenced multicultural leadership during that period of four years.

The study will start with an introduction, followed by a brief literature review that will position and contextualize our research, and will present the writings' gaps and will serve as a base for our research questions. A database and methodology chapter will be dedicated before presenting the results, conclusions, and limitations.

2. Literature review

According to Dictionary.com (2022), *diversity and inclusion* is a conceptual framework that encourages the fair and correct treatment and full participation and engagement of all people, mainly in the workplace, including groups and populations who have historically been underrepresented or subject to discrimination because of their background, identity, disability, and other dissimilar factors. Diversity and inclusion are interconnected concepts (Rwiza, 2019), but they are far from being interchangeable. Diversity is about the rendering of a structure or entity and its knowledge entropy (Bratianu, 2007, 2019; Carrim, 2022), while inclusion (Nguyen, 2022) is about how well the existence, views, contributions, and perspectives of different categories and groups of people are evaluated, appreciated, and integrated into a framework. DI permits and encourage organizations to be more inclusive of various ideas, cultures, and way of living and accelerate the knowledge dynamics and transfer (Bratianu & Leon, 2015; Bratianu & Paiuc, 2022b), leading to improved company culture and trust building. The internal dimensions of diversity (Olu-Ogunleye, Akinbode, & Ogunleye, 2022) are gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and physical/mental abilities. Gender occupies a consistent part of the diversity agenda (Grogan & Dias, 2015), and in December 2022, Dictionary.com selected the word "woman" as its *Word of the Year* for 2022, based on its doubled annual search volume (Adams, 2022). While the race pressure on diversity is decreasing as 48% of Generation Z are racial or ethnic minorities (Parker & Igielnik, 2020), COVID-19, linked to knowmads phenomenon (Paiuc & Iliescu, 2022), brought into the DI's focus the physical/mental abilities (Cui *et al.*, 2022) and challenged the multicultural leadership agility and readaptation pace.

The external dimensions of diversity are related to geographic location, religion and spirituality, personal and recreational habits, revenues, educational and work background, appearance, and marital and parental status; while the organizational dimensions of diversity are linked to criteria such as management status, work field and location, seniority or functional classification (Mor Barak, Cherin & Berkman, 1998). Cultural intelligence, as the main competency for ML (Paiuc, 2021b), has been challenged during the COVID years (Zaman *et al.*, 2021), while the interest for knowledge gathering, dynamics, and sharing increased (Thygesen *et al.*, 2022). In a context in which DI in the workplace is directly linked to performance and can boost innovation by 20% (Lorenzo & Reeves, 2018), increasing diversity and inclusion is not only a moral imperative but a strong business requirement from the multicultural leadership (Tsusaka & Krentz, 2019), as "we are greater than, and greater for, the sum of us." (McGhee, 2021: 289-299).

3. Data sources and methodology

Based on a bibliometric analysis we would like to explore the literature response to the four years of COVID pandemic crisis from the perspective of diversity and inclusion phenomena influence upon the multicultural leadership. The research questions for the present study are the following:

RQ 1: What role did diversity and inclusion play in multicultural leadership during the last four global pandemic years?

RQ 2: What topics were intensified by the pandemic years, and are nowadays the new main drivers of DI?

The present work is based on bibliometric analysis, implemented as per the research protocols presented in tables 1 and 2, in order to answer our research questions. The data was retrieved on the 3rd of December, 2022, from Scopus, one of the most extensive databases of peer-reviewed publications that also facilitates the export of the largest range of data requested by our bibliometric study (Janik, Ryszko & Szafraniec, 2021). The researched timespan was linked to our research timeline and tackles the years 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022 till the 3rd of December. We have not changed the preset searching and filtering Scopus settings for the type of publications, document types; keywords; countries; source types or titles; authors; publication stages; affiliates; funding, and open access - and we have not excluded anything from the above structures. We have run a mix of two text mining investigations – focused on ML and DI in order to discover trends and patterns that could support answers to our research questions.

Table 1: Research protocol for ML

Research protocol 1	Description/ Explanations
Search expressions	“multicultural leadership” or “multi-cultural leadership” or “multinational leadership” or “multi-national leadership”;
Search database	Scopus;
Search fields	All fields;
Type of publications	All types of publications indexed in the Scopus database;
Subject Areas	All subject areas included in Scopus, up till the 3rd of December 2022, for DI
Timespan	2019-2022;
Language	All languages;
Document types; keywords; countries; source types or titles; authors; publication stages; affiliates; funding and open access	We have kept all the preset parameters and have not excluded any.
Techniques for the bibliometric study	Research field charting (descriptive and performance matrixes via advanced search model) embedded with co-occurrence investigation procedure.
Software for bibliometric research	VOSviewer: version 1.6.17

Source: Author’s analysis /processing based on own data

For DI, in *the first stage*, the “diversity and inclusion” expression was searched within the fields: article titles, abstracts, and keywords – with a return of 1908 documents found. 706 publications are linked to the year 2022 – accountable for 37% of our selected timespan writings (2019-2022) – this showing the constantly increased importance of DI. (706 DI-related documents in 2022; 598 in 2021; 377 in 2020, and 227 in 2019).

Table 2: Research protocol for DI – *first stage*

Research protocol	Description/ Explanations
Search expressions	“Diversity and Inclusion”;
Search database	Scopus;
Search fields	Article titles, abstracts, keywords;
Type of publications	All types of publications indexed in the Scopus database;
Subject Areas	All subject areas included in Scopus, up till the 3rd of December 2022, for DI
Timespan	2019-2022;
Language	All languages;
Document types; keywords; countries; source types or titles; authors; publication stages; affiliates; funding and open access	We have kept all the preset parameters and have not excluded any.
Techniques for the bibliometric study	Research field charting (descriptive and performance matrixes via advanced search model) embedded with co-occurrence investigation procedure.
Software for bibliometric research	VOSviewer: version 1.6.17

Source: Author’s analysis /processing based on own data

In the second stage of protocol 2, DI was researched in the Scopus database during two timeframes: 1998 (first appearance of DI) – 2018 and our settled period 2019-2022 but reducing the subject areas to business, management, and accounting; economics, econometrics, and finance; social studies, psychology; decisions sciences; environmental science and multidisciplinary sciences. We have removed all medical, art, energy, and mathematics-related publications to focus on economic and social studies to correctly weigh the physical/mental abilities share within DI, all the rest of the research protocol being unchanged. This new analysis reported 1128 results in the last 4 COVID years (2019-2022) and 476 in the period 1998-2018. The bibliometric software VOSviewer (Visualization of Similarities) with its latest version, 1.6.17 (Van Eck & Waltman, 2021), was utilized to inspect and visualize the *co-occurrence* of keywords, using a *standard full counting method with all keywords* as unit of analysis - in order to utilize the actual content of the exported documents to build a resemblance measure map (Zupic & Čater, 2015).

4. Results and discussions

As presented in the methodology and based on the above research protocols, the four expressions: ML (2019-2022 – all fields, all areas; protocol 1), DI (2019-2022 - all fields, all areas; protocol 2.1), DI (2019-2022 – reduced fields, reduced areas; protocol 2.1.1) and DI (1998-2018 – reduced fields, reduced areas; protocol 2.1.2) were processed via VOSviewer and the keywords' co-occurrences are reflected in table 3.

Table 3: Keywords meeting the threshold and total link strength

Searched expressions	Results [WoS]	Number of keywords [VOSviewer]	Keywords meeting the threshold for a minimum number of occurrences of a keyword of 5	Keywords meeting the threshold for a minimum number of occurrences of a keyword of 3	Total link strength
ML (2019-2022 – all fields, all areas; protocol 1)	63	270	4 (N/A)	16 (linked) ✓	
DI (2019-2022 - all fields, all areas; protocol 2.1)	1908	6866	640 ✓	N/A	94250
DI (2019-2022 – reduced fields, reduced areas; protocol 2.1.1)	1128	4026	257 ✓	N/A	18656
DI (1998-2018 – reduced fields, reduced areas; protocol 2.1.2)	476	1312	42 ✓	N/A	979

Source: Author’s analysis /processing based on own data

The keyword co-occurrence network for DI – as per protocol 1 – as reflected by VOSviewer is reflected in Figure 1. According to Paiuc (2021a), the dimension of nodes and words indicates their significance. The larger the node and word, the more weight it has. The distance between two nodes indicates their relationship, so a short distance typically means a stronger one. If a line separates two keywords, that means they are directly related. If the line is thicker, that means they have more co-occurrence, while the same colored nodes are regrouping under a leading theme or cluster. VOSviewer structured the keywords of ML-related publications into four clusters.

The red cluster (Figure 1, cluster 1, center, seven items) gravitates around gender components of DI within ML („male”, „female”), while the green cluster (Figure 1, cluster 2, left, five items) represents the „diversity” and „cultural diversity” part of multinational leadership. The third blue cluster (Figure 1, cluster 3, center-up, two items) is focused on core „leadership” and the last yellow cluster (Figure 1, cluster 4, right, two items) regroups the „organizational” and „ counseling” aspects of ML.

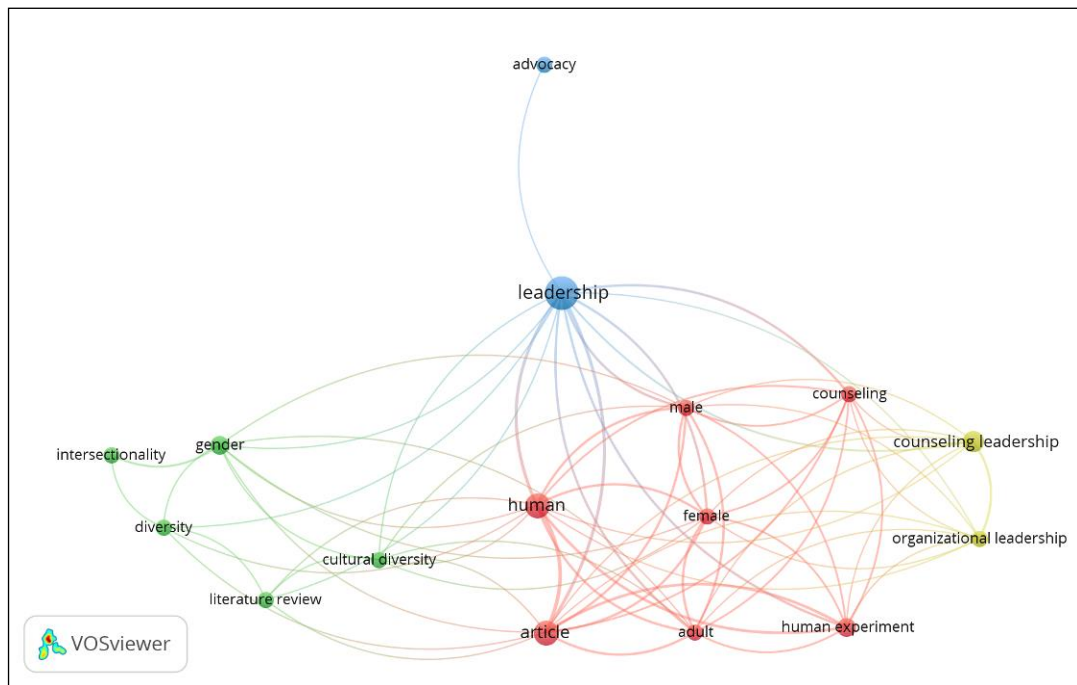


Figure 1: ML: Keyword's co-occurrence matrix-related publications – protocol 1: 2019-2022 - 63 documents with 17 items meeting the threshold of 3 occurrences of keywords -by VOSviewer

Source: Author's analysis /processing based on own data

Considering the above ML's keywords co-occurrences, and, in direct link with the first research question, we found that ML has primary direct strong connections with DI main targeted concepts like "gender" (frequency 4), "male" (frequency 3), „female" (frequency 3), or even "diversity" itself (frequency 3).

Table 4: ML - protocol 2.1: most relevant 17 items by VOSviewer

Position	Keywords	Frequency/ Occurrence	Position	Keywords	Frequency/ Occurrence
1	leadership	13	10	counseling	3
2	human	7	11	organizational leadership	3
3	article	7	12	cultural diversity	3
4	counseling leadership	5	13	literature review	4
5	human experiment	4	14	diversity	3
6	gender	4	15	intersectionality	3
7	male	3	16	advocacy	3
8	female	3	17	Multicultural leadership	3
9	adult	3			

Source: Author's analysis /processing based on own data

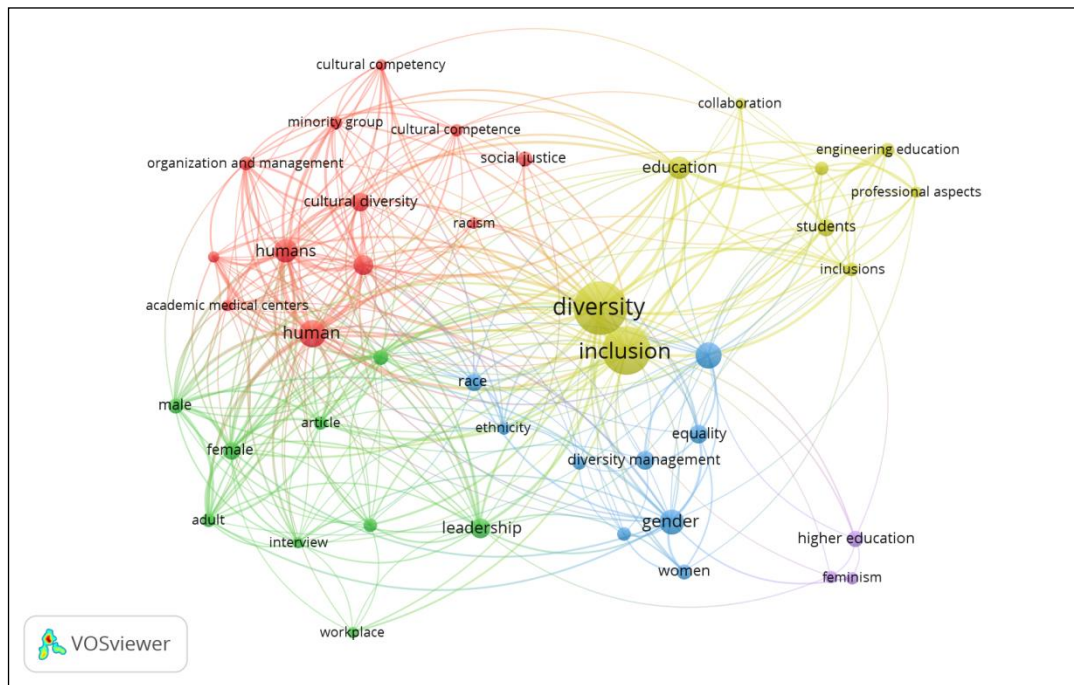


Figure 4: DI: Keyword's co-occurrence matrix-related publications – protocol 2.2.2: 1998-2018 - 476 documents - by VOSviewer
 Source: Author's analysis /processing based on own data

The analysis shows that while the internal dimensions of diversity increased their cumulated link strengths share from 32% to 41% during the last 4 COVID years, the external dimensions of diversity kept their 9% weight. On the downward curve - CQ decreased from 14% to a share of 5.3%, while leadership/management/ was reduced from 14% to 8.3%. All in the context of a growth of education/ learning/ development/study/research share from 20% to 33% and of knowledge from zero to 1%.

In the last four COVID-19 years (2019-2022), the DI's biggest priority change within the internal and external dimensions of DI was the extra focus on physical/mental abilities (from a share of 4% within 1998-2018 to 12% in 2019-2022) as its second main important driver. While gender still remains the most important DI motor – its share was reduced from 22% to 16% during the last four years – in conjunction with the increase in health status interest. Race and ethnicity occupy the third position with an increase in weight from a cumulated 6% to 10%, also based on the 2020 escalation of the „black lives matter” movements (Francis & Wright-Rigueur, 2021) related to the killing of George Perry Floyd.

5. Conclusions

This article, backed by the shared bibliometric study, succeeded in answering both research questions and demonstrates that during the last four global pandemic years 2019-2022, *diversity and inclusion* were the most significant vector for *multicultural leadership*, while physical/mental abilities, race and ethnicity, and educational background reshaped the DI's agenda and priorities. With enormous COVID-19 health challenges - affecting both the mental and physical abilities of the employees, DI was forced to change the focus to health handling procedures, that also being reflected by the massive increase of education/ learning/ development/study/research part of DI from 20% to 33%. The focus of DI moved

from gender and geographical location biases to mental and physical abilities priority and from CQ and Leadership to an extensive reinvention based on education, learning, and research. The answer to the first research question shows that during the COVID-19 pandemic the role of diversity and inclusion became more important due to the global dimension of the pandemic. The answer to the second question strengthens the same conclusion: the main intensified drivers of DI and ML were backed by a massive interest grow in the education/ learning/ development as needed agile but forced reinvention of diversity and inclusion. The conclusions should contribute to new multicultural leadership adaptation programs and be a base for future studies regarding the direct correlation between DI, ML, and business performance.

The main limitation of the present research consists in the fact that the study is based on the Scopus database and does not consider other platforms such as Web of Science or Google Scholar.

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