

A systematic meta-review of organizational diversity and inclusion interventions and their associated outcomes

Equality, Diversity
and Inclusion: An
International
Journal

53

Kun Zhao, Wing Hsieh, Nicholas Faulkner and Liam Smith
*BehaviourWorks Australia, Monash Sustainable Development Institute,
Monash University, Melbourne, Australia*

Received 27 February 2024
Revised 21 August 2024
20 December 2024
13 January 2025
Accepted 23 January 2025

Abstract

Purpose – The question of “what works?” for organizational diversity and inclusion (D&I) has captivated practitioners and researchers for some time, but there is a lack of unifying knowledge on what interventions are effective. The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact, outcomes and quality of evidence relating to interventions used by organizations for workplace D&I to inform what works in practice and where there are still evidence gaps.

Design/methodology/approach – This multidisciplinary meta-review – a systematic review of reviews – summarized the effects of various practices, policies, programs and initiatives across dimensions of diversity and disciplines.

Findings – From 37 reviews over 13 years, we identified 12 categories of interventions (e.g. diversity training, de-biasing selection procedures and workplace accommodations) mapped to 22 outcomes. Workplace accommodations and job training were linked with positive outcomes in the age and disability dimensions of diversity. Diversity training was associated with comparatively higher-quality evidence, albeit its effects were largely limited to awareness and learning outcomes. The literature on recruitment, leave and compensation policies reported some mixed effects on D&I.

Originality/value – This meta-review provides a synthesis of the current state of evidence across multiple disciplines and diversity dimensions to guide future research and practical D&I actions. It has implications for research (e.g. greater attention needed for interventions to improve inclusion) and practice (e.g. setting realistic expectations about what change organizations can expect to achieve).

Keywords Organizations, Workplace, Disabilities, Discrimination, Gender, Race

Paper type Literature review

Organizational activities for diversity and inclusion (D&I) have come a long way since the late 1980s during which they have been shaped by global trends in migration, expansion of markets, and the momentum of civil and human rights movements (for a review see Roberson, 2019). Modern diversity practices have evolved into a broad set of activities aimed at various goals, with around 98% of large companies (those with over 1,000 staff) investing in some sort of diversity program (Krentz, 2019). However, knowledge of what practices are effective has not kept up with the investment by organizations in D&I (Guillaume *et al.*, 2013). The effectiveness of many D&I efforts—training and grievance procedures in particular—have been increasingly called into question (Dobbin and Kalev, 2016; Kalev *et al.*, 2006). Furthermore, what little known is poorly communicated to practitioners (Kulik and Roberson, 2008; Kulik, 2014). In their review of 60 years of discrimination and diversity research, Triana

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Funding for this work was provided in part by Inclusive Australia (www.inclusiveaustralia.com.au), a not-for-profit organization seeking to promote change for social inclusion in Australia. Liam Smith is on the board of Inclusive Australia.



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An
International Journal
Vol. 44 No. 9, 2025
pp. 53-71
Emerald Publishing Limited
e-ISSN: 2040-7157
p-ISSN: 2040-7149
DOI 10.1108/EDI-02-2024-0085

[et al. \(2021\)](#) highlighted the continued need to identify tangible steps that managers can carry out and evaluate the efficacy of these practices.

This meta-review—a systematic review of reviews ([Biondi-Zoccai, 2016](#))—is a response to these calls. It synthesizes the evidence across multiple disciplines to examine the outcomes linked to different categories of D&I practices, policies, programs, initiatives, or other activities (collectively referred to as *interventions*). Below, we introduce some seminal studies and frameworks for categorizing D&I interventions, followed by a discussion of current limitations in translating knowledge to practice.

Key studies and frameworks for categorizing D&I interventions

There are many frameworks for fostering diverse and inclusive workplaces, and extensive research has highlighted the systemic and multilevel aspects of D&I practices (e.g. [Mor Barak, 2000](#); [Shore et al., 2018](#)). While many theoretical frameworks have painted a comprehensive picture of the components of diversity management, they translate less well in the practical context where organizations want to know what factors they can change, which is critical for practical guidance. One particular model that emphasizes practical relevance is [Kulik's \(2014\)](#) five components of organizational diversity management systems, which reveals the gap between academic research and the informational needs of practitioners.

[Kulik \(2014\)](#) contends that three diversity system components are related to clear actions that leaders and managers can take: *paradigms* (an organization's values, beliefs, and norms about diversity management), *policies* (organizational goals or objectives for managing diversity), *programs* (formal diversity management activities). The other two diversity system components—*practices* (the implementation of diversity programs by lower-level staff) and *diversity climate* (shared organizational perceptions of diversity paradigms, policies and programs)—are largely measured through micro-level employee perceptions and experiences. While HR research has concentrated heavily on the latter two components, [Kulik's \(2014\)](#) model directs us to move beyond “measuring things that may be important but ‘that managers cannot manipulate’” ([Kulik, 2014](#), p. 134).

We thus turn our attention to actions that organizations can take, some of which have already been standardized and categorized within existing frameworks in the diversity management literature. For example, [Shen et al.' \(2009\)](#) diversity management framework is based on traditional categories of HR management practices, including *recruitment and selection* (e.g. affirmative action programs), *training and development* (e.g. diversity training), *performance appraisal* (e.g. objective performance-focused appraisal systems), and *pay* (e.g. individual-based remuneration systems). Other theoretical frameworks are based on the mechanisms through which activities are thought to achieve diversity, such as *non-discrimination practices* (e.g. merit-based or de-biased decision making, diversity training; [Leslie, 2019](#)). A common approach is categorizing “bundles” of policies and practices—interrelated and synergistic practices thought to bring about greater productivity when combined ([MacDuffie, 1995](#); see also [Boehm et al., 2021](#); [Richard et al., 2013](#)). Importantly, these frameworks—while conceptually useful—have limited practical applicability where they have stopped short of showing empirical links to D&I consequences. [Shen et al. \(2009](#), p. 237) noted that “there has been no empirically proven association of HRM diversity practices with increases in diversity and improved organizational performance”.

Research–practice gaps in informing organizational interventions for D&I

While there is no shortage of popular articles on “what works” with respect to organizational D&I activities, HR managers and organizational leaders wanting to draw on evidence-based practice may face several barriers. First, while many interventions have been put forward—diversity training, standardized tests, metrics, mentoring, and appointing diversity managers and taskforces ([Bohnet, 2016](#); [Dobbin and Kalev, 2015, 2016](#); [Kalev et al., 2006](#); [Kulik and Roberson, 2008](#);

Pedulla, 2020; Roberson *et al.*, 2020)—the maturity and rigor of the research is mixed. There has been little synthesis of knowledge to help time- and resource-limited practitioners weigh up the likely effectiveness and quality of evidence supporting the range of actions that they can take.

Second, the focus on theoretical and conceptual work has meant that less is known about empirical outcomes, with research dominated by diversity-specific outcomes (e.g. representation of women at recruitment; Dobbin and Kalev, 2016). As such, practitioners risk investing in initiatives under the broad umbrella of D&I with no clear goals and without knowing what positive (or negative) outcomes to expect (Nishii *et al.*, 2018).

Finally, as Ayoko and Fujimoto (2023) note, there is “inequity” in how research has engaged with the different dimensions of diversity. Within the HR management, research over the last 60 years has largely concentrated on gender and racial discrimination (Triana *et al.*, 2021). Procknow and Rocco (2016) reported that disability—particularly cognitive and mental—is often omitted from definitions and discussions around diversity. Research on workplace accommodations for age and disability inclusion largely sits within the domain of occupational rehabilitation and public health (e.g. Nevala *et al.*, 2015). In reality, organizations often wish to improve D&I efforts across the spectrum of diversity dimensions—usually gender, race, age, and disability, but as many as 27 different dimensions based on corporate diversity statements (Point and Singh, 2003). The lack of cross-pollination between disciplines has meant that there is a shallow pool of research for comparisons on what interventions work best (Kulik, 2014). Pitts (2006) argued that the “fragmentation of diversity research is arguably its biggest problem” (p. 262). In sum, practitioners wishing to quickly access what actions are effective may find research locked in disciplinary siloes, with publications “driven by theoretical and discipline-specific concerns” (Kougiannou and Ridgway, 2022, p. 472).

The current study

This study aims to address the gaps identified in the previous section by providing a unifying summary of D&I interventions extending beyond the HR management literature and across multiple disciplines. It asks the following questions: (1) What types of organizational D&I interventions have been examined in the academic literature and how effective are they? (2) What outcomes are empirically linked to these interventions? (3) What diversity dimensions are targeted by these interventions?

Given the practical focus of this research, the broad and heterogeneous scale of the literature, and existing pockets of established research (some which have already produced several systematic reviews), a *meta-review* was selected (Hennessy *et al.*, 2019). Researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners seeking to translate scientific findings for applied contexts encounter significant challenges and practical difficulties in synthesizing the large volume of research spanning multiple disciplines (Caird *et al.*, 2015; Khangura *et al.*, 2012). In light of these barriers to feasibility, the meta-review approach is designed to overcome limitations of traditional systematic reviews by providing a timely, succinct, and methodical summary for real-world decision making. In addition, meta-reviews “can have tremendous influence on research, practice, and policy; indeed, if conducted appropriately, synthesis literature is considered the strongest level of evidence, with meta-reviews atop the evidence pyramid” (Hennessy *et al.*, 2019, p. 354).

In the following, this meta-review aggregates and synthesizes evidence from diverse bodies of literature on the impact, outcomes, and quality of evidence to guide organizations taking action for workplace D&I. We begin by outlining the methodology, followed by a presentation of findings categorized by intervention type, and conclude with a discussion of implications for both research and practice.

Method

In this section we present our method based on the main stages of a meta-review (Biondi-Zoccai, 2016), starting with a search strategy followed by quality appraisal of articles. This is

followed by a description of our data extraction and coding of information. For full methodological details, see the [Online Supplementary Material](#).

A protocol consisting of search terms and inclusion/exclusion criteria for this review was developed *a priori* by the authors in consultation with an academic reference librarian. A comprehensive search was undertaken of five databases (PsycINFO, Business Source Complete, Web of Science, Cochrane Library, and Campbell Collaboration Library) in January 2019 and updated in November 2021, for all articles published after 1 January 2009. Inclusion criteria consisted of population and setting (employees in any organization and in any industry in developed countries that are practically comparable to Australia or similar contexts), study designs included in reviews (interventional or observational), and intervention type (activities designed with the goal of D&I).

Title and abstract screening and full-text review were carried out independently by the first two authors (KZ, WH) based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria in January 2019, with discrepancies resolved through discussion, and later by one author (KZ) in November 2021.

Quality appraisal was conducted in duplicate by two authors (KZ, WH) using AMSTAR (A MeaSurement Tool to Assess systematic Reviews; [Shea et al., 2007](#)), a critical appraisal instrument for evaluating the methodological rigor and quality of systematic reviews and meta-analyses. Not all included articles were systematic reviews and eligible for AMSTAR, so articles were also divided into a two-tiered system based on the hierarchy of evidence ([Murad et al., 2016](#)): (1) systematic reviews and meta-analyses, and (2) narrative reviews and scoping reviews.

A number of fields were extracted and articles were coded according to the specific intervention for improving D&I. Where multiple interventions were mentioned, these were coded according to the narrowest distinct intervention reported and care was taken to separate the activities so that they were mutually exclusive. Interventions were then grouped into 12 broader categories for ease of interpretation (see [Figure 1](#)).

In addition, outcomes associated with each intervention were also recorded. For example, extending the working lives of older employees, increasing the share of women on boards, and career advancement of staff from minority backgrounds were coded to the outcome *Diversity in recruitment, retention, or progression*. Each intervention–outcome pairing was also coded according to whether the activity was reported by the review authors to have (1) evidence of being effective (or the authors recommended the intervention based on the evidence), (2) evidence of being weakly effective, (3) evidence of mixed positive and negative effects, (4) evidence of no effect, (5) an unknown effect, a lack of evidence, or the authors did not specify the direction of the effect.

Results

In this section, we first present a summary of the search results, followed by findings organized by the three research questions, and for each of the D&I intervention categories.

Search results

[Figure 2](#) illustrates the search process using a PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses; [Page et al., 2021](#)) diagram. The PRISMA diagram depicts a transparent summary of the search process and is required to meet established standards for reporting in systematic reviews ([Page et al., 2021](#)). The initial search yielded a total of 6,769 citations, after removal of duplicates. Full-text review produced a final list of 37 accepted articles, comprising 4 meta-analyses, 17 systematic reviews, 7 scoping reviews, and 9 narrative reviews (see [Table S1 in the Online Supplementary Material](#)). Articles varied in quality, with only one meeting all eligible AMSTAR criteria ([Gensby et al., 2014](#)) and five meeting three or fewer criteria. Articles came from a range of fields including HR,

Audits, reviews, and assessments	- Processes for monitoring and evaluating efforts in workplace diversity in an open and transparent manner Examples: Organizational assessments, audits, use of company diversity metrics
De-biasing of selection procedures	- Measures taken to eliminate sources of bias in recruitment, performance reviews, and career progression Examples: Blinding of identifying information during recruitment, standardized behavioral interviews, hiring tests, using objective criteria for recruitment
Diversity training and education	- Instructional programs for "facilitating positive intergroup interactions, reducing prejudice and discrimination, and enhancing the skills, knowledge, and motivation of participants to interact with diverse others" (Bezrukova et al., 2016, p. 1228) Examples: Diversity training, awareness training, sensitivity training, cross-cultural training
Flexible work arrangements	- Practices to change standard working arrangements to accommodate employees' needs and commitments Examples: Flexible working hours, part-time work, reduced hours, job-sharing, telecommuting
Health promotion activities	- Organizational initiatives to improve the health and wellbeing of employees Examples: Health checks, health counselling, health screening, occupational health programs
Informal workplace supports	- Supportive actions and relationships with members across all levels of the organization Examples: Emotional support, instrumental support, informative support
Job training and coaching	- Training and career development programs for building employees' knowledge, skills, and behaviors Examples: Job training, coaching, vocational counselling, vocational support
Policies involving recruitment, leave, and compensation	- Formal organizational policies involving pay, leave, compensation, and discrimination Examples: Equal opportunity directives, affirmative action, gender quotas
Role models and mentors	- Formal or informal relationships between a senior employee who provides guidance to a less-experienced employee Examples: Role models, mentors, sponsors (also reverse mentoring)
Visibility	- Practices or programs encouraging greater visibility of employees from marginalized or disadvantaged groups Examples: Display of minority groups or women in advertising or organizational media
Workplace accommodations	"[A]ny change or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things are usually done that would allow an individual with a disability to apply for a job, perform job functions, or enjoy equal access to benefits available to other individuals in the workplace" (Job Accommodation Network, 2022) Examples: Modifying work schedules, changing commute to work, restructuring job duties, adjusting supervisory methods, assistive technology, specialized equipment, flexible work arrangements, job training
Other practices, policies, and interventions	Any remaining activities, activities that were too broad to be meaningfully analyzed in this review, or discrete actions

Source(s): Authors' own work

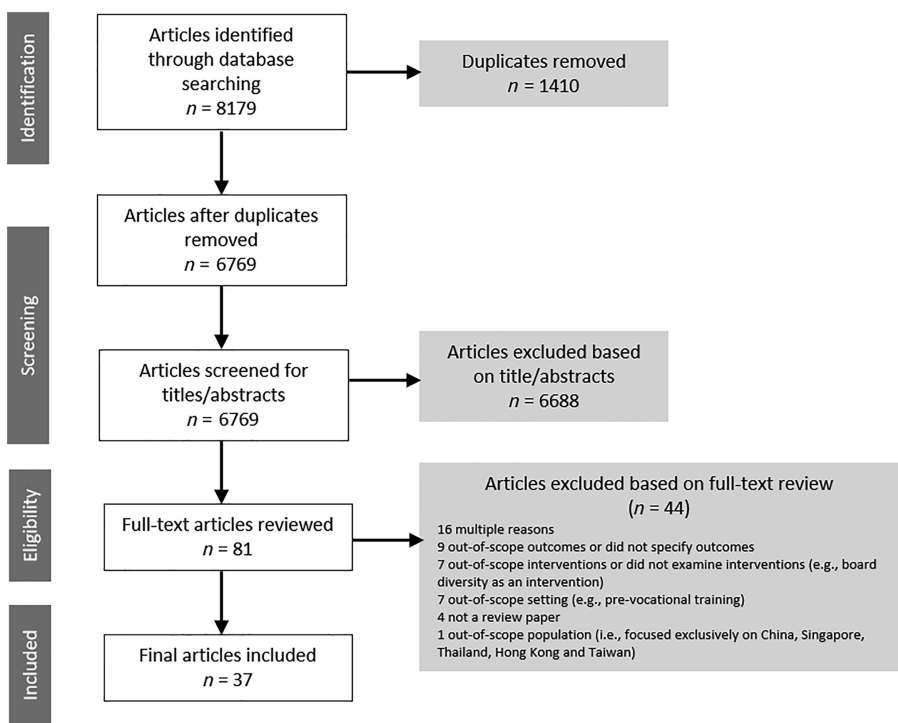
Figure 1. Categories of organizational diversity and inclusion interventions

organizational behavior, applied psychology, vocational rehabilitation, occupational health, and public health.

From the 37 articles, we identified a total of 60 specific practices, policies, programs, or initiatives for organizational D&I, which were grouped into 12 categories. We also identified 22 outcomes which were linked to one or more of these interventions (see [Table S2 in the Online Supplementary Material](#)).

RQ1. What types of D&I interventions have been examined in the academic literature and how effective are they?

[Figure 3](#) presents the number of articles that reported on D&I interventions across the 12 categories, broken down by the type of evidence presented. *Diversity training and education*,



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 2. PRISMA diagram presenting the flow of articles through the review process

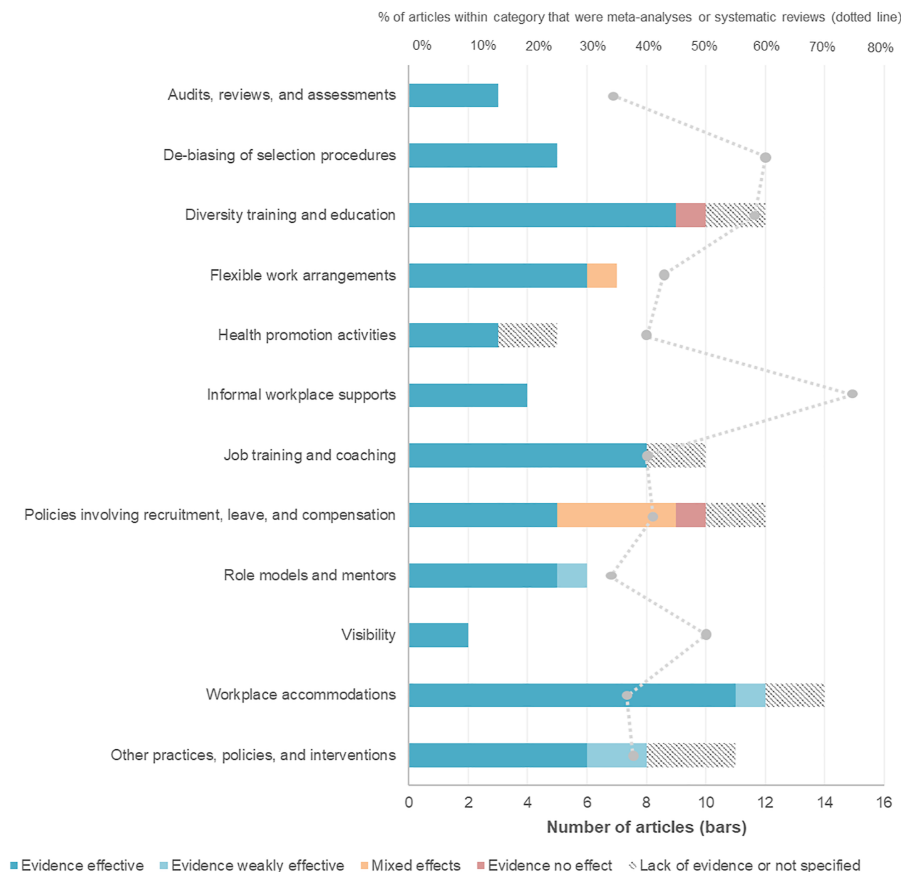
Policies involving recruitment, leave, and compensation, and *Workplace accommodations* were the categories with the most articles (12, 12, and 14 respectively). Longer bars in the figure do not necessarily mean that the category was more effective, rather that the interventions were examined more frequently. For example, more than half of the interventions belonging to *Policies involving recruitment, leave, and compensation* were reported to have mixed effects, evidence of no effect, or a lack of evidence. In contrast, *Workplace accommodations* were found to be more consistently positive, with 12 of 14 articles reporting them to be effective. The dotted line provides a basic indication of the hierarchy of evidence, showing the percentage of articles within the category that were systematic reviews or meta-analyses. *Diversity training and education* had relatively higher quality of evidence compared with other categories, with a higher number of articles *and* more than half of articles being meta-analyses or systematic reviews.

RQ2. What outcomes are empirically linked to D&I interventions?

Due to the search criteria, *Diversity in recruitment, retention, and progression* was by far the most common outcome associated with D&I interventions, and was reported for all categories. Some categories of interventions—*Diversity training and education*, for example—were linked to a range of outcomes, such as learning and behavior, among others. In contrast, *De-biasing of selection procedures* was associated with only diversity outcomes.

RQ3. What diversity dimensions are targeted by D&I interventions?

Age, disability, and gender were the most common specified dimensions of D&I, although ethnicity and race were examined in a number of general D&I articles, particularly those

**Note(s):**

1. Bars indicate the number of articles reporting on interventions within each category, color-coded by effectiveness. Where a single article reported on two specific interventions within a category that were each associated with different levels of effectiveness, the more effective finding was counted
2. Longer bars do not necessarily mean that the intervention was more effective, as this may simply indicate show that the intervention was reported more times
3. The dotted line indicates the quality of evidence for each category, with points towards the right indicating a greater percentage of systematic reviews or meta-analyses in the category

Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 3. Number of articles by D&I intervention category

examining diversity training. In contrast, only one article exclusively focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) D&I (Webster *et al.*, 2018). Categories such as *Workplace accommodations* and *Health promotion* were limited to age- and disability-based diversity. In contrast, *De-biasing of selection procedures* were widely examined with respect to several

dimensions of diversity. Specific findings and evidence quality for D&I intervention categories are reported below.

Audits, reviews, and assessments

Audits, reviews, and assessments included mandatory organizational assessments on topics such as the age composition of the workforce (Dickson, 2015). The quality of the evidence for these interventions was average: they tended to be reported as recommendations and were associated with general D&I outcomes.

De-biasing of selection procedures

De-biasing of selection procedures included practices such as blinding gender information in the recruitment process and standardized behavioral interviews (Alonso *et al.*, 2017; Boehm *et al.*, 2021; Isaac *et al.*, 2009; Schloemer-Jarvis *et al.*, 2022; Yang and Konrad, 2011). Most interventions in this category were associated with outcomes promoting diversity in recruitment, retention, and progression, and generalized across a number of diversity dimensions. For example, Isaac *et al.* (2009) presented a number of effective interventions in their systematic review of approaches for eliminating gender bias during personnel selection, including focusing on job-related competence recruitment, ensuring that women comprised 25% or more of the candidate pool, and committing to job criteria before applicants were reviewed. The quality of evidence associated with this category was higher than others, with more than half of articles consisting of systematic reviews and meta-analyses.

Diversity training and education

Although diversity training has been criticized for having a theoretically-limited and methodologically-flawed evidence base (Alhejji *et al.*, 2016; Kalinoski *et al.*, 2013), the quality of evidence in this category was relatively higher than at least the other categories in this review. More than half of the articles were meta-analyses (Bezrukova *et al.*, 2016; Kalinoski *et al.*, 2013) and systematic reviews (Alhejji *et al.*, 2016; Isaac *et al.*, 2009; Metinyurt *et al.*, 2021; Phillips *et al.*, 2016; Schloemer-Jarvis *et al.*, 2022), with an average AMSTAR score of 6.

Diversity training was typically linked to three major outcome categories: (1) changes in cognitive outcomes, such as knowledge and awareness, (2) changes in attitudes, emotions, and motivations, and (3) changes in behavioral skills and intentions, and to a lesser extent, changes in behavior (e.g. Alhejji *et al.*, 2016). Beyond these, the evidence for training and education to promote diversity in recruitment, retention, and progression was weak. Three articles reported on a lack of evidence or no effect of diversity training on gender equity in hiring and employment-related outcomes for people with disability (Isaac *et al.*, 2009; Phillips *et al.*, 2016; Schloemer-Jarvis *et al.*, 2022). However, some authors pointed to the importance of education as an enabler of disability inclusion. Cavanagh *et al.* (2017), McDowell and Fossey (2015), and Nevala *et al.* (2015) all noted the need for education to overcome employers' lack of awareness of financial support, workplace accommodations, discrimination legislation, and intervention strategies.

Flexible work arrangements

Flexible work arrangements were investigated with respect to improving age (Boehm *et al.*, 2021; Dickson, 2015; Edge *et al.*, 2017; Mahon and Millar, 2014), disability (Nevala *et al.*, 2015), and gender (Gabaldon *et al.*, 2016; Hegewisch and Gornick, 2011) dimensions of diversity. However, some authors cautioned that these practices could backfire where they prevent progression of women to senior positions or increase reluctance among employers to hire women (Gabaldon *et al.*, 2016). Other authors recommended that flexible working

arrangements need to be accompanied by greater transparency and visibility to all employees, including how they may affect opportunities for promotion or salary increases (Lane and Flowers, 2015).

Health promotion activities

Health promotion activities refer to a range of initiatives involving health checks, health counseling, health screening (Söderbacka *et al.*, 2020), occupational health programs (Wilson *et al.*, 2020), and other activities to encourage healthy lifestyles (Boehm *et al.*, 2021; Cloostermans *et al.*, 2015; Edge *et al.*, 2017). These activities have been recommended predominantly as a means of improving the health and work ability of older workers, preventing early retirement, and extending careers for age-based diversity. Although research samples in this category were limited, there was some agreement that they improved work outcomes for older adults (Söderbacka *et al.*, 2020).

Informal workplace supports

Workplace supports refer to supportive actions and relationships with managers and supervisors, along with co-workers (Boehm *et al.*, 2021; Jansen *et al.*, 2021; Nevala *et al.*, 2015; Webster *et al.*, 2018). Webster *et al.* (2018) and Beehr and McGrath (1992) distinguish between three types of social support: emotional (e.g. showing concern, empathizing), instrumental (e.g. intervening as a bystander, corroborating reports of harassment), and informative (e.g. providing advice on addressing workplace discrimination). There was reasonably strong evidence to link these practices with inclusion-relevant outcomes (e.g. improved work attitudes, reduced psychological strain) for LGBT employees.

Job training and coaching

Job training, coaching, and vocational counseling provided by employment support specialists were common initiatives for improving age and disability dimensions of diversity by facilitating employment (Boehm *et al.*, 2021; Carlson *et al.*, 2020; Cloostermans *et al.*, 2015; Dickson, 2015; Khalifa *et al.*, 2020; Mahon and Millar, 2014; McDowell and Fossey, 2015; Nevala *et al.*, 2015; Procknow and Rocco, 2016; Schloemer-Jarvis *et al.*, 2022). Lack of job-relevant investment in skills—especially in using technology and the changing demands of the workplace—was a major barrier to continued employment among the aging workforce (Dickson, 2015; Mahon and Millar, 2014). Procknow and Rocco (2016), for example, suggested that personalized training and career planning development can improve employees' self-determination, self-confidence, and career satisfaction.

Policies involving recruitment, leave, and compensation

Although one of the larger categories in this review, more than half of the 12 articles involving formal organizational policies showed mixed effects, no effect, or a lack of evidence or specificity around known outcomes. Gabaldon *et al.* (2016) found that while gender quotas improved women's access to more senior positions, they were also associated with unintended consequences such as an organization exiting into an organizational form that is not regulated by gender quotas. One review found that equal opportunity directives and statements increased organizational attractiveness to female and minority candidates (Yang and Konrad, 2011), although another suggested that they did not ensure gender equity in hiring and salary recommendations (Isaac *et al.*, 2009). Webster *et al.* (2018) examined the effect of formal policies and practices which were weakly associated with outcomes among LGBT workers. The authors also pointed out the signaling role of formal policies, which can be a visible representation of organizational norms (Webster *et al.*, 2018).

Role models and mentors

Mentoring refers to formal or informal relationships in an organization where a senior employee provides guidance in the form of knowledge, expertise, and skills to a less-experienced employee. Role models allow for professional identification and emulation among more junior workers from diverse backgrounds. This is especially important given evidence that minority workers report greater barriers at the advancement stage (vs. the career entry) where there is a lack of mentors and personal networks (Kilian *et al.*, 2005).

Role models, mentoring, and sponsorship were recommended across a range of diversity dimensions (e.g. Gabaldon *et al.*, 2016; Kapoor and Solomon, 2011; Procknow and Rocco, 2016). Gabaldon *et al.* (2016) noted the difficulty in measuring the role of mentoring given the small number of women in leadership and time lags in outcomes. More recently, the practice of reverse mentoring—whereby more experienced workers are in the roles of mentees paired with more junior workers—has shown some promise in educating about the experiences of minorities in biased systems (Chaudhuri *et al.*, 2021).

Visibility

Two articles recommended strategies involving greater visibility of employees from marginalized or disadvantaged groups. Gabaldon *et al.* (2016) discussed the importance of visibility of women in leadership positions—such as through online databases—to overcome barriers such as identification with gender role expectations. Visibility can also be implemented at the recruitment stage, such as pictorial displays of minority groups in advertising and involving demographically-similar recruiters (Yang and Konrad, 2011).

Workplace accommodations

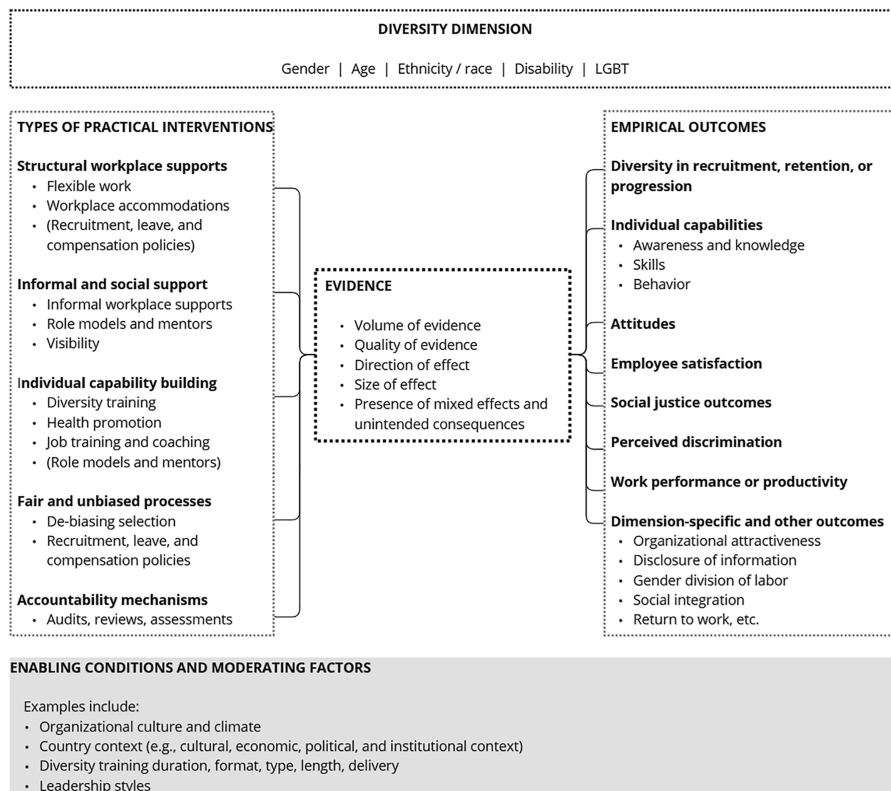
Workplace accommodations consist of modifying work schedules and work environments, restructuring job duties, adjusting supervisory methods, and acquiring specialized equipment (Job Accommodation Network, 2022). It was the largest category of interventions in this review, consisting of 14 articles, and the quality was among the highest (average AMSTAR score of 6.2). Nevala *et al.* (2015) found moderate evidence of specific workplace accommodations (e.g. vocational counseling, change to work schedules, education in self-advocacy) for promoting employment among workers with a physical disability. Among employees with a mental illness, however, McDowell and Fossey (2015) found limited evidence that workplace accommodations resulted in longer tenure.

Discussion

This meta-review spans across disciplines and diversity dimensions to examine a range of D&I interventions and their associated outcomes. We identified 37 reviews published over 13 years, which included 12 categories of practices, policies, programs, initiatives, or other interventions. These interventions were mapped to 22 distinct outcomes and showed varying effectiveness and evidence quality (see Table S2 in the Online Supplementary Material).

We bring these elements together in a practical framework for guiding the selection of organizational D&I interventions (Figure 4). While this framework shares some interventions with existing diversity management frameworks (e.g. Shen *et al.*, 2009), it extends them by taking a multi-disciplinary approach that is developed bottom-up based on empirical links with D&I outcomes, producing a wider set of intervention categories and evidence-driven outcomes. In this framework, interventions are grouped into high-level categories and linked to empirical outcomes. These links are evaluated by a number of criteria: the volume and quality of evidence, direction and size of effects, and presence of mixed effects.

By overcoming conventional boundaries in discipline- and dimension-specific research, this meta-review has revealed varying levels of maturity in understanding workplace



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 4. A framework of elements guiding the selection of organizational D&I interventions

interventions for D&I. It also highlighted a number of influential studies in these respective areas. [Kalinowski *et al.*'s \(2013\)](#) meta-analysis of 65 studies examined the affective, cognitive, and skill-based outcomes of diversity training, along with their boundary conditions and moderators. Likewise, [Bezrukova *et al.*'s \(2016\)](#) broader meta-analysis analyzed 260 studies against a theoretical framework, revealing positive effects of diversity training particularly for reactions to training and learning, and under certain conditions or delivered in specific formats. Beyond diversity training, [Hegewisch and Gornick's \(2011\)](#) narrative review is an example of the unintended consequences of D&I interventions, which highlighted inequalities in employment hours and pay between mothers and fathers, and the impact of long paid maternity leave policies that may reinforce this. Amid growing interest and research on sexual orientation diversity management, [Webster *et al.*'s \(2018\)](#) meta-analysis provided an early useful framework of interventions in the form of workplace contextual supports (e.g. formal policies) and outcomes (e.g. disclosure) for LGBT employees. More broadly, [Yang and Konrad's \(2011\)](#) narrative review provides a higher-level summary of the antecedents and impacts of diversity management practices by drawing on institutional and resource-based theories.

From this broad evidence base, this meta-review has highlighted several key findings. No single category of intervention outperformed all others, but there were several tradeoffs across the quality of evidence, the range of D&I outcomes, the effectiveness of interventions, and the generalizability of results across diversity dimensions. While the volume of evidence was

weighted towards some interventions—for example, workplace accommodations and diversity training and education—these interventions showed shortcomings in other respects. Research on diversity training and education, for example, tended to focus on circumscribed awareness, knowledge, and learning outcomes (e.g. learning about biases) rather than organizational change. The literature on recruitment, leave, and compensation policies showed mixed effects on D&I outcomes. Practical approaches such as workplace accommodations and job training that provided workers with resources and skills were more consistently associated with positive outcomes, but concentrated on age and disability diversity only.

Practical implications

Managers and leaders face considerable challenges in carrying out D&I initiatives, where the need for meaningful organizational change may be met with limited resources, as well as the risk of tokenism, inauthenticity, and backlash. This meta-review has identified directions where resources can be spent efficiently on actions that have the most effect. One major theme from this meta-review was the specificity of links between D&I interventions and over 20 outcomes ranging from learning, career satisfaction, health, and reduction of psychological strain. For example, diversity training was associated with proximal reactions and learning outcomes (Bezrukova *et al.*, 2016; Kulik and Roberson, 2008) but there was little evidence that it translated to widespread diversity in recruitment (see also Kaley *et al.*, 2006).

These findings explain why many organizations fall short of widespread change, as they are at odds with how D&I are often treated in practice. Operationally, diversity and inclusion are often used interchangeably and short-hand as a common banner for any policies or practices relating to aspects of D&I (Jonsen *et al.*, 2021). Many D&I activities, such as education programs, are piecemeal and “band-aid” type actions without a clear connection to an overarching diversity management framework. The current findings help organizations investing in diversity training (or other interventions) set realistic expectations about what they can achieve, and encourage a suite of interventions targeting multiple aspects of diversity (see also Kulik, 2014; Stephens *et al.*, 2020). The findings also help practitioners anticipate where unintended consequences and mixed effects may occur (for a theoretical review, see Leslie, 2019).

Finally, the findings provide insights on the conditions for effective interventions through moderating factors and enabling environments. In the case of diversity training, instructional method (e.g. active, such as roleplay vs. passive, such as reading) and the length of training (e.g. more than 4 h) were critical (Bezrukova *et al.*, 2016; Kalinoski *et al.*, 2013). For other intervention categories such as policies, cultural, political, and economic context were proposed key moderators (Alonso *et al.*, 2017; Hegewisch and Gornick, 2011; Schloemer-Jarvis *et al.*, 2022).

Future research directions

In assessing the state of the evidence on D&I interventions, this meta-review has revealed some gaps in the literature. Some categories (e.g. diversity training and education) were examined with meta-analyses over a hundred studies, and others had virtually no reviews despite compelling arguments from primary research, which would benefit from future tests of interventions (e.g. accountability; Dobbin and Kaley, 2015; Richard *et al.*, 2013).

There is also a need to consider LGBT inclusion in particular (Webster *et al.*, 2018), which has unique considerations (e.g. barriers relating to disclosure) that are not generalizable. Within the disability dimension of diversity, there were few studies investigating accommodations for “invisible” disabilities (i.e. cognitive and psychiatric disabilities; Prince, 2017; Sundar, 2017). It is also encouraging that a recent review has identified a range of activities—accommodations during recruitment, modified onboarding processes, job design

practices, flexible working, training, and employee resource groups—for promoting neurodiversity (Hennekam and Follmer, 2024).

Finally, organizational practices have traditionally focused on diversity and, despite shifting interest to inclusion (Mor Barak *et al.*, 2016), reviews have rarely examined inclusion-relevant outcomes, such as perceptions of belonging, uniqueness, authenticity, participation, and access to resources (Jansen *et al.*, 2014; Mor Barak and Cherin, 1998; Roberson, 2006).

Limitations

We used a rapid meta-review methodology (Khangura *et al.*, 2012) because it is ideal for synthesizing broad bodies of literature in an efficient and methodical fashion. In covering the breadth of research, the tradeoff is depth on the myriad practices, outcomes, and diversity dimensions associated with organizational D&I. It is reassuring, however, that rapid reviews generally produce similar conclusions to systematic reviews and are a sufficiently reliable source for decision-making (Watt *et al.*, 2008).

Nevertheless, the broad search strategy should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings. Effective D&I strategies that do not lend well to interventional study designs are at risk of being overlooked. Some promising approaches that are of practical significance are missing from this review, such as independent ombudspersons (Dobbin and Kalev, 2019), diversity task forces, manager accountability practices, embedding diversity goals into organizational strategy (Dobbin and Kalev, 2015; Richard *et al.*, 2013), as well as initiatives such as bystander intervention and ally networks. These would be better captured through a review of the primary literature.

Contrary to earlier reviews (Colella *et al.*, 2017; Triana *et al.*, 2021), which raised concerns over an over-representation of research on race and ethnicity diversity, and an under-emphasis on disability, our findings revealed a paradox in the opposite direction. That is, disability (and to a lesser extent, age) dimensions of diversity were well represented among the included articles, and along with them, interventions such as workplace accommodations and health promotion activities.

This is unlikely to be due to the search terms, as we intentionally avoided searching based on diversity dimensions (e.g. “race”) to prevent biasing results towards one dimension. One possibility is that given that D&I policies had their starting point in race diversity, research on interventions for race diversity are the “default” and are studied less frequently in isolation to the exclusion of other diversity dimensions. This suggests that while the interventions for race diversity may generalize to other dimensions (e.g. diversity training, de-biasing selection procedures), the reverse may not be true and the findings may be less useful for organizations interested in only racial D&I.

One explanation for the over-representation of the disability dimension that may be related to our search strategy is that we purposefully targeted high-quality empirical reviews, including systematic reviews and meta-analyses. The results may reflect the greater use of these methods (along with intervention-focused research) for studying disability, versus other dimensions that tend to receive more attention in conceptual and theoretical papers. To illustrate, 12 of the 14 included articles mentioning disability in their title were systematic or scoping reviews, and 9 of these came from healthcare and rehabilitation journals—disciplines where systematic reviews are common given their origins in clinical medicine (Chalmers *et al.*, 2002).

Conclusions

In their landmark study on the efficacy of corporate diversity policies, Kalev *et al.* (2006) cautioned against so-called best practices, noting that “[w]e know a lot about the disease of workplace inequality, but not much about the cure” (p. 590). This meta-review brings together intervention-focused research across multiple knowledge bases to answer “what works”. It is intended to serve as key reference to assess and compare the quality of evidence and empirical

outcomes for a catalogue of D&I interventions. The results help bridge the research–practice gap described by Kulik (2014). We have provided evidence on the *policies* and *programs* components of diversity management systems and offer a decision-making resource and clear expectations for practitioners aiming to understand *what interventions* can be carried out for *which* diversity dimensions, and *what outcomes* to expect when implementing them. Although there is still much detail to fill in, we have provided a starting point in making the vast literature of D&I more accessible, relevant, and useful for practitioners.

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Supplementary Material

The Supplementary Material for this article can be found online.

Corresponding author

Kun Zhao can be contacted at: kun.zhao@monash.edu