

3.3.5 Interview Results

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Summary: Cultural Diversity in Organizations (France, Luxembourg, Spain, Poland, and Germany)

Interviews were conducted in April-May 2025 with 46 representatives of organizations of different types.

1. Definition and Perception of Cultural Diversity

Across all interviews, cultural diversity is commonly understood as encompassing varied backgrounds and perspectives, with an initial focus on national and ethnic identities. Broader interpretations including social class, neurodivergence, disability, and regional subcultures are often underrecognized.

Organizations generally acknowledge diversity as a value, but only a few consistently frame it as a strategic business advantage.

Interviewees consistently view cultural diversity as a strength that enriches team performance, fosters innovation, and improves adaptability—especially in client-facing and international roles. Diverse teams are seen to bring complementary perspectives, driving creativity and enhancing service quality.

2. Initiatives and Practices

There is a strong consensus on the importance of intercultural competence in managing diversity effectively. Key components include self-awareness, openness, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to navigate differences constructively. However, formal diversity initiatives are rare, especially in small or mid-sized organizations.

Where present (mainly in large international companies or research institutions), initiatives include:

- o Unconscious bias training
- o Inclusive recruitment policies
- o Language courses
- o Scholarships for underrepresented groups
- o Onboarding programs for international hires

Most diversity actions are informal, such as:

- Team-level accommodation efforts
- Celebrating cultural events
- Peer-led onboarding support

Informal intercultural learning occurs through day-to-day collaboration, peer exchange, and shared work experience.

3. Diversity Management Evolution

Diversity efforts are evolving unevenly:

- o Some progress is seen in larger or newer companies.
- o Many efforts are reactive or performative, lacking sustained investment or institutional follow-through.

Structural constraints (e.g., French legal restrictions on tracking ethnicity) influence the scope and focus of initiatives—shifting emphasis to gender and disability inclusion.

4. Prioritization and Assessment

Few organizations prioritize diversity dimensions explicitly; when they do, it's often around visible markers like gender or nationality.

Evaluation of diversity efforts is limited or absent:

- o Mostly informal or anecdotal
- o When measured, it typically focuses on gender representation

5. Challenges Identified

Language barriers are significant, especially in multilingual countries like Luxembourg.

Generational tensions and different expectations across age groups surface in some sectors (e.g., research).

Limited training access based on contract status or seniority restricts inclusion efforts.

6. The Role of Leadership and Organizational Culture

Effective promotion of cultural diversity depends heavily on leadership commitment. Where management actively supports diversity, it tends to be integrated into recruitment, onboarding, and staff development practices. Conversely, in organizations where leadership is less engaged, diversity efforts often remain fragmented or symbolic.

7. Organizational Differences

Large, global companies: More diverse by nature, more likely to embed diversity in broader strategies and show openness to audits and structured initiatives.

Small companies and tech firms: Often rely on performance-based hiring, show less formal commitment to diversity, but may respond positively if clear business value is demonstrated.

8. Support Needs

Organizations express a clear need for:

- Simple, scalable, and legally compliant tools
- Practical training, ideally short and affordable
- Communication aids across languages and education levels

- Support for housing/integration for international recruits (notably in Luxembourg)

9. Interest in Audits

Mixed reactions:

- o Positive when linked to business benefits, ease of use, and ROI
- o Skeptical when diversity is seen as a sensitive or divisive topic

Interest increases with employee support or demonstrated organizational advantages

Overall Takeaway

While organizations recognize the value of cultural diversity, formal mechanisms are underdeveloped, particularly in small or resource-constrained settings. Larger companies and research institutes are more proactive. Tools and training must be practical, business-aligned, and customizable to overcome barriers and promote meaningful inclusion.

Interview Summary (France)

Number of interviewees - 10

1. Definition of Cultural Diversity

Most participants see cultural diversity as involving varied backgrounds and perspectives, although their first association is with national/ethnic cultures.

2. Initiatives Addressing Cultural Diversity

Formal initiatives are rare across these interviews. Most actions are either informal or externally driven. Rare exceptions (they are observed mainly in big international companies, private universities) are mandatory training for recruiters on unconscious bias, manager training on inclusive recruitment, tools to accommodate candidates with disabilities (hearing aids), company-wide training to ensure comprehensive approach.

3. Evolution of the Approach to Diversity

Evolution is uneven—some signs of progress (especially in larger or younger firms), but often stalled by external or structural limitations. Awareness of cultural diversity importance is growing informally.

4. Prioritizing Diversity Dimensions

Diversity dimensions are not actively prioritized. When they are, it's mostly implicit or focused on visible identity markers like gender or nationality. An HR specialist said that her company is tracking gender ratios of applicants through the recruitment process (gender equality index is required for all companies). However, French companies cannot track ethnicity (unlike UK/US), it is against the law, so they focus on disability inclusion.

5. Perception of Cultural Diversity

All recognize diversity's value, but practical implementation varies. Only a few companies frame it consistently as a business advantage. Diversity embedded within broader sustainability and development strategies. The strongest appreciation of diversity appears where there's a clear business case (international markets, operational efficiency, sustainability). However, many organizations maintain a performative or reactive stance, lacking structural commitment. Cultural diversity is not a core priority—it's acted upon only when it aligns with immediate business objectives, often lacking institutional follow-through or investment.

6. Communication Challenges

Challenges exist mostly in global collaborations, while others see communication as manageable or don't address it directly.

7. Ensuring Inclusion.

Formal mechanisms are rare. Only a few examples of structural inclusion practices exist: inclusive recruitment, mandatory unconscious bias training for recruiters, scholarships for underprivileged international students funded by a diversity committee.

There is limited access to training depending on contract status or seniority.

Most efforts are informal (colleagues helping with onboarding, teams accommodate communication themselves).

8. Evaluating Effectiveness

Assessment is rare or nonexistent in most organizations. When present, it is limited in scope (e.g., gender diversity metrics) or informal (based on anecdotal evidence).

9. Support Needs

Identification of tools, resources, or types of support that would help the organization manage cultural diversity more effectively. All organizations could benefit from **simple, scalable tools** to assess and support cultural diversity, tailored to their operational constraints.

10. Interest in Intercultural Competence Audits

Mixed interest. Advocates are keen, while others are either cautious or unconvinced of the value.

There is interest in intercultural competence audits, but it is conditional. Organizations express interest in audits only if:

- Tools are business-oriented, show clear benefits or ROI
- Easy to use
- Legally compliant

There is a clear distinction between the cultural diversity policies of large international companies and those of smaller local ones, with the former typically investing more effort into promoting cultural diversity initiatives. Smaller or less mature organizations may not currently assess diversity, but they often recognize the potential benefits of doing so as they grow or develop.

Interview Summary (Spain)

1. Definition of cultural diversity

Most of the interviewed organizations understand cultural diversity as the coexistence of people with different cultural backgrounds, nationalities, languages, religion. Some companies also include generational or gender diversity. Several interviews highlight that diversity not only refers to visible differences but also to values, customs, communication styles, and ways of working.

2. Initiatives addressing cultural diversity

Most initiatives focus on celebrating diversity days by organizing events, with some companies also implementing intercultural training, inclusive onboarding, coaching (for expatriates in leadership positions) and mentoring inclusive recruitment, and formal or informal practices to foster a coherent culture of inclusion. Some organizations in multinational companies have special ERGs that propose and execute cultural diversity initiatives.

3. Evolution of the approach to diversity

Organizations are moving from reactive to more intentional diversity management, influenced by legal, global, and talent-related factors. Some now see diversity and inclusion as an employee-driven expectation, not just a compliance issue. Cultural diversity has started gaining more attention in the last few years.

In recent months, due to recent governmental changes in the U.S., many multinational companies have experienced a shift in their approach to (cultural) diversity. Some initiatives have slowed down, and organizations are reassessing their DEI strategies. Some of them are rephrasing what they are doing. For example, one company has changed from “DEI in the workplace” to “Respect in the workplace”.

4. Prioritizing diversity dimensions

Cultural diversity is mainly prioritized when the company operates in international contexts, works with global teams, or employs foreign personnel. This is especially true in business groups or multinationals and less so in SMEs or startups. However, other dimensions such as gender or age and disability are also considered depending on the sector or business reality (mostly gender). Neurodiversity has started appearing on the DEI agendas. Some organizations do not prioritize any dimension but mention a holistic approach to inclusion.

5. Perception of cultural diversity

It is mainly perceived as an opportunity for learning, innovation, and openness to international markets. However, it also presents challenges in communication, pace, leadership styles, value differences, shared understanding (expectation alignment), or decision-making, as people operate from different mental frameworks and “coordinate systems.” In most organizations, it is still a secondary or implicit matter rather than a firm strategic purpose. It is valued as a future strength but lacks clear strategies for now.

6. Communication challenges

Misunderstandings (language differences, or different interpretations within the same language, lack of understanding of nuances or lack of explicit information assuming that it is understood), communication styles, ways of sharing feedback, and the use of technology not adapted to diverse contexts (older age, lack of understanding of English as a corporate language).

7. Ensuring inclusion

Informal spaces often dominate as the primary way inclusion is practiced. Some companies promote inclusion through unconscious bias training for hiring managers, initiatives in the framework of inclusive onboarding, and tailored programs for inpatriates, while also fostering safe, informal spaces for cultural exchange.

8. Evaluating effectiveness

Actions related to cultural diversity are in general not consciously or systematically evaluated.

9. Support needs

There is a need for greater cultural awareness at the top management level, along with practical tools and training to understand the *why* behind behaviors, manage intercultural challenges, and move from intuition to structured strategies—supported by benchmarks, case studies, indicators, and onboarding materials.

10. Interest in intercultural competence audits

As long as the process is practical and not too long, adapted to their business/sectoral reality, they would be interested. Some interviewers would expect to provide simple, applicable recommendations or show business impact to justify the adoption of these actions/tools/strategies, they would be interested. Some companies value the audit or self-diagnosis tool as a way to raise awareness and a starting point to improve team cohesion and increase market efficiency/competitiveness. Consultants see it as a valuable support for their work, especially if it is free of charge.

Interview summary (Luxembourg)

We have lead 10 interviews amongst companies in the fields of construction, insurance, health, research, cleaning services, telecommunications and tech. Below we address the main common points and differences.

Common Points

1. **Definition of Cultural Diversity:**
 - o All interviewees define cultural diversity as the inclusion of people from various nationalities, races, genders, and backgrounds. This common understanding highlights the recognition of diversity as a multifaceted concept.
2. **Current Initiatives:**
 - o Most companies do not have formal initiatives or programs specifically targeting cultural diversity. Actions taken are often informal, such as celebrating cultural events or providing language courses.
3. **Challenges:**
 - o **Language Barriers:** A recurring challenge across all companies is the language situation in Luxembourg. Luxembourg has three official languages: Luxembourgish, French, and German. Unlike countries with regional language differences, such as Belgium or Spain, all three languages can be needed depending on the job and work environment. This creates unique communication challenges, as employees must often navigate multiple languages in their daily work.
 - o Generational tensions are also mentioned, particularly in research environments where younger employees have different expectations compared to older colleagues.
4. **Perception of Diversity:**
 - o Diversity is generally seen as an asset that brings different perspectives and enriches the workplace culture. However, there is a lack of formal policies or strategies to manage it effectively—even within large companies with over 1,500 employees, where one might expect more structured approaches to be in place.

Differences Between Companies

1. **Company Size and Industry:**
 - o **Small Tech Companies:** These companies often do not prioritize cultural diversity due to their small size and the specific demographics of the tech industry. Hiring is based on performance, and there are no formal diversity initiatives.
 - o **Large Organizations:** Larger organizations with a naturally diverse workforce due to their global operations tend to have more embedded diversity. They offer language courses and onboarding programs but still lack formal diversity initiatives.
2. **Approach to Diversity Management:**
 - o **Universalist Approach:** Some companies believe that explicitly discussing diversity can lead to discrimination. They focus on creating a good atmosphere and hire based on competence rather than diversity goals.

- o **Open and Transparent Philosophy:** These companies maintain an open approach, hiring based on qualifications and using informal methods to address diversity-related challenges.
- 3. **Interest in Audits and Training:**
 - o **Open to Audits:** Companies that see diversity as an asset and recognize occasional challenges are more open to participating in intercultural competency audits and training programs.
 - o **Skeptical of Audits:** Companies that do not perceive significant diversity challenges or believe that discussing diversity can cause issues are less motivated to participate in audits.

Profiles of Companies More Open to Cultural Diversity

1. **Research Institutes and Large Organizations:**
 - o These organizations are naturally diverse due to their global operations and collaboration with international institutions. They recognize the benefits of diversity and are more open to exploring further training and audits to enhance diversity management.
2. **Tech Companies:**
 - o Smaller tech companies may not prioritize diversity due to their specific industry demographics and focus on performance. However, they are open to audits if they see clear benefits, such as improved gender diversity in tech.

Needs and Support Desired

1. **Training and Tools:**
 - o Companies express a need for practical training programs tailored to their size and industry. Affordable options and short courses are preferred.
 - o Tools that improve communication across different languages and educational backgrounds are also desired.
2. **Housing and Integration Support:**
 - o Larger organizations, particularly those in Luxembourg, need support with housing and integration for international recruits due to the challenging housing market.

Motivation for Participation

1. **Demonstrable Benefits:**
 - o Companies are motivated to participate in audits and training if they see clear benefits, such as improved internal communication, collaboration, and a better work atmosphere.
 - o The potential for increased productivity and a better reputation also serves as motivation.
 - o One interview suggested the idea of a public label as a benefit, which could enhance the company's reputation and demonstrate its commitment to diversity.
2. **Employee Support:**
 - o **Small Companies:** Employee support plays a significant role in small companies. If employees show strong interest in diversity initiatives, management is more likely to consider and implement them. The close-knit nature of small companies means that

employee preferences can have a substantial impact on decision-making.

- o **Large Companies:** While employee support is also important in large companies, decisions are often influenced by broader organizational goals and policies. Large companies may have more structured approaches to diversity management, and employee feedback is one of many factors considered in decision-making.

Conclusion

The analysis reveals that while there is a common understanding of cultural diversity, the approach to managing it varies significantly between companies. Larger organizations and research institutes are more open to working on cultural diversity due to their naturally diverse environments and recognition of its benefits. In contrast, smaller tech companies and those with a universalist approach may not prioritize diversity but are open to initiatives if they see clear advantages. The key to motivating participation lies in demonstrating tangible benefits and ensuring strong employee support, particularly in small companies where employee preferences can significantly influence management decisions.

Additionally, the perception of cultural diversity is often narrow, focusing primarily on nationalities, races, and religions. There is less recognition of broader aspects of diversity, such as social class, neurodivergence, subcultures, and regional cultures. Expanding the understanding of cultural diversity to include these dimensions could further enhance the effectiveness of diversity initiatives and create a more inclusive workplace environment.

Interview Summary (Poland)

Number of interviews conducted: 12

Key findings:

1. Activity around cultural diversity

All organizations interviewed are engaged in activities that support cultural diversity. They focus on developing skills related to communication, collaboration, and fostering mutual understanding among employees from different cultural backgrounds. Organizations emphasize educating employees about cultural differences and supporting leaders in managing global teams.

2. Lack of unified definitions and approaches

Organizations do not rely on a single, consistent definition of cultural diversity or a universal model for working in this area. Actions are usually driven by current needs, individual initiatives, or market inspirations (e.g., using Erin Meyer's model).

Cultural diversity is most often understood as the coexistence of different communication styles, values, work approaches, and attitudes toward hierarchy and relationships in the workplace. It also includes awareness of differing perspectives stemming from cultural and national backgrounds.

3. Practical actions as a starting point

Organizations often begin with practical solutions, such as providing materials in multiple languages, organizing language courses, or offering support from individuals helping new employees adapt. Channels and groups are created where employees from various cultures can exchange experiences and challenges related to adapting to a new culture or learning about others. In many cases, this topic emerges in response to specific operational issues (e.g., hiring a tax advisor to assist managers on international contracts).

4. Scope of cultural competence development activities

The most common activities include communication in multicultural teams, employee integration, motivating people from different backgrounds, delivering feedback in a clear and constructive manner, and preventing exclusion and discrimination.

5. Varying levels of advancement

Some organizations have a clearly defined strategy (DEI is part of the global strategy) and specific goals related to cultural diversity (as HR KPIs), implemented by dedicated teams or individuals. Others operate more spontaneously – bottom-up and without rigid frameworks.

6. Motivations for action

Organizations act both for formal reasons (compliance with law) and out of a belief that supporting diversity positively influences workplace atmosphere, engagement, and team effectiveness. They recognize that employees feel safer and more connected when they are accepted and understood. The approach to cultural diversity has evolved alongside organizational growth and increased involvement in international projects. Currently, there is a stronger focus on soft skills, empathy, and consciously managing culturally diverse teams.

7. Role of leaders and managers

Leaders play an important role in promoting diversity. They participate in meetings, training, and conversations that help them better understand challenges and share best practices. They are often the initiators of activities within their teams. In global organizations, openness to diversity and experience with multicultural teams are assessed already during recruitment.

8. Formal activities and internal events

Common activities include onboarding components and events that promote learning about the cultures present in the organization, such as cultural days or shared culinary experiences. Some companies offer intercultural competence training or sessions focused on collaboration with specific cultures and create assimilation programs for expats and their families. Mentoring programs are also implemented, where working with cultural diversity is one of the focus areas. Organizations often celebrate various holidays important to the cultures and nationalities represented within them.

9. Changes in language and approach

Instead of speaking about “diversity and inclusion,” there is a growing tendency to use language around building inclusive and open organizations. Cultural diversity is seen as one of many aspects of this broader approach. In global organizations (with 50 or more cultures represented), cultural diversity is treated as a natural state and more often approached in terms of general diversity challenges rather than purely cultural ones. The prevailing discourse focuses on openness and curiosity, regardless of the type of diversity.

10. Challenges reported by organizations

The most common difficulties involve communication, meeting styles, approaches to goals and teamwork, as well as integration outside of work. Challenges also arise from differing expectations regarding responsibility and hierarchy, and language barriers. Misunderstandings and unconscious biases can also lead to reluctance or unequal treatment.

11. Lack of effectiveness measures

Most organizations lack formal methods for measuring the effectiveness of diversity initiatives. Occasionally, feedback is gathered after training sessions or from engagement surveys or employee questionnaires about trust culture, sense of safety, or knowledge of different cultures. However, systematic tools are missing.

12. Need for simple and practical tools

Organizations are open to using self-assessment tools, provided they are intuitive, brief, and offer concrete feedback. They see value in tools that allow them to assess how they are doing, how they compare to similar organizations (in terms of sector or size), and what can be improved in intercultural development.

13. Ideas for development

An interesting proposal is to create a space for experience-sharing among leaders from different companies – for example, through regular meetings or peer support groups. Such an initiative could strengthen competences and inspire the implementation of new solutions.

Interview Summary (Germany)

1. Definition of Cultural Diversity

Brief summary of how the interviewee defines or understands cultural diversity.

German organizations are expanding their understanding of cultural diversity to encompass the seven dimensions recognized by the Charta der Vielfalt: age, ethnic origin and nationality, gender, physical and mental ability, religion and worldview, sexual orientation, and social background. This expanded definition moves beyond simple nationality-based categorizations to include invisible differences such as educational backgrounds, work-life balance approaches, and communication styles. However, the limited sample suggests that while awareness is growing, practical implementation varies significantly across organizations.

2. Initiatives Addressing Cultural Diversity

Description of any concrete actions, programs, or initiatives the organization undertakes related to cultural diversity.

The four interviewed organizations reported implementing various diversity initiatives, consistent with the broader trend of the rest of the German companies signing the Charta der Vielfalt. Common initiatives mentioned include:

- Culturally mixed teams and international collaboration projects

- Intercultural competence training programs focusing on German business culture and communication styles
- Language training programs to address communication barriers
- Mentoring programs pairing diverse employees with experienced leaders

3. Evolution of the Approach to Diversity

Information on whether and how the organization's approach to diversity has changed over time.

The limited interviews suggest a progression from basic legal compliance to recognizing diversity as a business imperative. Organizations mentioned moving from superficial diversity measures to more integrated approaches, though the small sample size limits the generalizability of this trend. The evolution appears to be driven by recognition that cultural diversity has a stronger impact on innovation than other diversity indicators

4. Prioritizing Diversity Dimensions

Insight into how the organization chooses which diversity aspects or dimensions to focus on.

The four interviews indicated that organizations typically prioritize gender diversity due to legal requirements, followed by cultural/ethnic diversity. Age diversity receives moderate attention, while LGBT+ and disability dimensions often remain underrepresented

5. Perception of Cultural Diversity

How cultural diversity is viewed within the organization (e.g., opportunity, challenge, obligation).

The interviewed leaders expressed understanding of diversity as an economic success factor and driver of innovation

6. Communication Challenges

Any examples or reflections on communication issues that arise due to cultural differences.

The limited interviews revealed challenges including language proficiency variations, communication styles, and cultural hierarchy expectations. German business culture's emphasis on direct communication and precision can be misinterpreted by employees from other cultural backgrounds

7. Ensuring Inclusion

Ways in which the organization ensures inclusion of employees from different cultural backgrounds.

The interviewed organizations reported implementing structured mentoring programs, inclusive career planning, and bias-reduction in recruitment

8. Evaluating Effectiveness

Description of whether and how the organization evaluates the impact of its diversity efforts.

The interviews show a lack of systematic evaluation methods and that they rely mostly on informal data collection methods.

9. Support Needs

Identification of tools, resources, or types of support that would help the organization manage cultural diversity more effectively.

The interviewed organizations identified needs for intercultural competence training, clear communication protocols, and technology solutions that could systematize the monitoring of these important KPIs.

10. Interest in Intercultural Competence Audits

Whether the organization would be interested in participating in an audit and what would make such a process valuable.

The organizations interviewed expressed genuine interest in having access to structured methods for evaluating their intercultural competence. They particularly valued tools that could provide actionable insights rather than just theoretical frameworks. The interviewed organizations emphasized their preference for assessment tools that are practical and easy to implement rather than overly complex or theoretical. They expressed particular interest in evaluation methods that could help them move beyond basic compliance measures to develop more strategic approaches to intercultural competence.