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1 Setting the Scene for Diversity in Organizations

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CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to:

- Explain the background for diversity and gender studies as found in organizational and management research.
- Define diversity and diversity management.
- Define inclusion.
- Understand and explain intersectional theory and how it can be used in diversity studies.
- Articulate the main arguments for and against diversity management.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

- Introduction
- Diversity in organizations
- Diversity management: An introduction
- Bridging the gap: Establishing inclusive organizations
- Chapter review questions
- References

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INTRODUCTION

In early European and North American organizational studies one can discern unspoken assumptions that organizations and workplaces are blind to the issues of workforce diversity and differences. For example, scholars have pointed out that organizations and organization studies are gender-blind (Acker, 1992) and colour-blind (Grimes, 2002) rather than gender-neutral and colour-neutral.

Blindness means not recognizing skin colour, gender and so on and their implications (e.g. expectations based on social gender roles, colour/ethnicity-based biases, etc.) in a given context.

Neutrality refers to an ideal society in which gender and minority markers (such as skin colour, accent, clothes, etc.) are insignificant.

This gender and colour blindness occurred because the majority of employees were white men and primarily white male authors were writing for a white male readership (see Calás and Smircich, 1991, 2009; Grimes, 2002). However, since the time of these studies, women have increasingly joined the paid workforce, job mobility over national borders has increased, migrants and refugees are entering host country job markets at increasing numbers, and different sexual orientations are increasingly accepted in many societies. These demographic and societal changes have provoked awareness of the relevance of diversity and difference in organizations and have generated growth in diversity and gender research that contributes to the awareness and acceptance of issues of equality, diversity and difference in the workplace.

When using the terms *diversity* and *difference* in this book, we refer to diversity or difference in terms of social demography and social identity categories among the workforce. Diversity and difference should be understood rather broadly (see next section in this chapter), however, among the mostly used diversity categories are gender, age, ethnicity, and disability, to which we often refer throughout the book as well.

This book addresses issues of diversity and difference in organizations and offers concepts, theories and ways to understand and work with diversity. To begin with, this introductory chapter aims to set the stage in showing that diversity plays a role in organizations. We furthermore offer a discussion on

how to conceptualize and define the term diversity. We argue that intersectional perspectives are valuable in understanding hierarchical differences and discrimination while also trying to avoid stereotyping and the reproduction of certain norms and power relations. We end the chapter by defining diversity management and inclusion.

DIVERSITY IN ORGANIZATIONS

Classical organization and management theories assume objectivity and universality by subconsciously assuming a specific social category is the norm in the organization. From a European and US perspective this norm is identified by organization scholars as consisting of white, middle-age, heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian men (e.g. Acker, 1992; Avery et al., 2004; Avery and McKay, 2006; Brooks and Edwards, 2009; Calás and Smircich, 1991, 2009; Grimes, 2002; Williams, 2006; Williams and Mavin, 2012).

Stop and Reflect

Think about an unspoken norm in your classroom or your work team. What are you tacitly assuming to hold true for all members of your group? (e.g. availability of students/colleagues/teachers; physical mobility of students/colleagues/teachers; certain language skills, etc.) How does the norm affect the group?

When organizations are analysed and understood from a diversity perspective they no longer appear as neutral and objective. Adopting diversity, difference and equality perspectives allows us to see organizations as, for example, gendered, coloured or ethnicized.

Since Max Weber's early examination of bureaucracy (Weber, 1978) various theories of the organization have emerged, ranging from classical theories that view organizations as machines, via neo-classical theories on the social aspects of work, to postmodern perspectives that even question our belief in an objective reality (Hanappi-Egger, 2004; Mills et al., 2005). Step by step these theories have undermined the notion of the 'objective' or 'neutral' organization (Benschop and Doorewaard, 1998) while at the same time highlighting the social and political dimensions of organizations. Today we view organizations as socio-political systems; the role of workers and their identities, interests, preferences, wishes and motives have moved to the forefront of organization

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studies. Harassment and discrimination based on social categories will greatly disturb the social relations of employees, and thus negatively influence teamwork, promotion and competition (Zanoni et al., 2010).

Conceptualizing diversity and difference in organizations

Before the 1990s most investigations of diversity in management and organization focused mainly on the category of women, whereas other minority categories were more or less absent. In a review of leading management textbooks Mills and colleagues (2005) found that very few textbooks dealt with race or ethnicity.¹ However, while gender remains an important diversity topic in organizations, scholars are now increasingly turning to the matter of diversity in a broader sense. The rather elastic concept of ‘diversity’ is often defined using six social categories of age, ethnicity, beliefs or religion, disability, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression. These categories refer to historically shaped groups who have been subjected to discrimination. The European Union (EU) has formulated an anti-discrimination guideline (see Chapter 2) using these six dimensions, and most companies addressing the topic of diversity apply the same categories when attempting to build inclusive organizations. Kandola and Fullerton (1998, p. 7) also support the use of these historically shaped social categories and add more diversity characteristics: ‘The basic concept of diversity accepts that the workforce consists of a diverse population of people. The diversity consists of visible and non-visible differences which include factors such as sex, age, background, race, disability, personality and work-style.’

Exercise

Look up the home pages of some European and US-based companies. Search for their diversity and inclusion statements and find out which diversity dimensions they use. Compare the various companies.

There are various types of diversity categories and ways to categorize minority and majority groups, but they concur in defining diversity as difference. An example of a rather broad definition of diversity is provided.

¹ In German-speaking countries the term ‘Rasse’ (‘race’) is highly controversial due to its association with Nazi ideology. Hence, in several European countries the reference to ‘ethnicity’ or ‘colour’ is preferred.

Diversity is 'the collective amount of differences among members within a social unit with respect to a common attribute, X' (Harrison and Klein, 2007, p. 1200; emphasis in the original).

This definition includes two important aspects. First, diversity is always related to a certain social unit and is thus a 'compositional construct'. As a result, diversity is related to a unit (group, organization, society) but not to the individual members. In this sense, diversity is a relational concept measured against at least one or more particular attributes. This leads us to the second aspect: 'A unit is not diverse per se. Rather, it is diverse with respect to one or more specific features of its members' (Harrison and Klein, 2007, p. 1200).

Key Points

- Diversity is always related to a unit – a single person cannot be diverse.
- A unit is diverse with respect to one or more specific features – such as age, gender or educational background.

Conceptualizing diversity thus means to conceptualize attributes in which a social unit differs from another social unit. This implies specifying how one particular feature or attribute makes a group of people different from another group. So, if for example groups differ in terms of age, they are categorized according to the age differences the members of each group display.

Stop and Reflect

Is your group of students diverse? In what way? What differences can you observe easily? What differences might be hidden? Which differences are relevant for what?

Categorization is helpful by simplifying and guiding our actions and behaviours in our everyday lives, routinizing them, providing structure, bringing order to a complex world (Banton, 2011; Vergne and Wry, 2014) and offering a coping strategy and tool for structuring experiences and remaining in control (Jacob, 2004). For example, sorting laundry into whites and colours is

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one way of steering that activity. Someone doing laundry for the first time may find it a difficult and uncertain task. Sorting laundry routinizes the activity and removes the complexity. Classifying plants as succulent or not serves as a guide for watering them. In the same way, classifying employees as women or men and old or young is a means of sorting perceptions and actions (Bowker and Star, 2000). In the context of equal opportunities and diversity management, categorization is built on a notion that it helps to steer organizational actions such as fair and non-discriminatory treatment of individuals by categorizing them into certain groups. Categorization is thus a means for structuring one's social environment and a guideline for action. Categories can facilitate interaction and common understanding within and across groups. It makes 'the immense diversity of individual entities that we encounter in daily life [...] manageable' (Bodenhausen et al., 2012, p. 318) and 'satisfies a basic human need for cognitive parsimony' (Hogg and Abrams, 1988, p. 72).

Categorization is simply at the heart of human activities and sense-making. We categorize and classify things and people around us. Various studies use the following different attributes to classify members and to measure a unit's level of diversity:

- Visible (e.g. race, gender) and invisible (e.g. religion, sexual orientation) diversity dimensions (Voigt, 2001).
- Person-immanent diversity (e.g. sex, sexual orientation, education, background) and behaviour-immanent diversity (behaviour as a consequence of person-immanent diversity; a person's background is believed to determine how they behave in certain situations) (Thomas, 2001).
- Internal dimensions (which are usually permanent, such as sex, sexual orientation or age) and external dimensions (which are in some way selected and thus may be subject to change, such as education or religion) and work-related diversity dimensions (seniority, division, functional belonging and so on) (Gardenswartz and Rowe, 1994).
- Historically discriminated groups (defined by sex, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, disability, religion) (European Anti-Discrimination Law: Verloo, 2006).
- Surface-level diversity (visible, ethnicity, biological features such as sex or age), deep-level diversity (invisible, observable through interaction such as personality, values, attitudes) (Harrison et al., 1998).
- Task-related (education, experience) and non-task-related (gender, race, ethnicity) (Webber and Donahue, 2001).

Stop and Reflect

Go back to the differences you came up with in the last 'Stop and Reflect' section. Try to sort them into the classification above. Do you encounter something you might have missed before? Is this way of thinking about diversity (classification) helpful? If so, in what way?

Harrison and Klein (2007) point to the fact that there is a lack of clear understanding concerning what diversity really means in a social unit. They suggest that diversity, regardless of the attributes used (see previous list), can be indicative of three distinct features: (1) separation; (2) variety; and (3) disparity. The authors stress that it is important to clarify and understand the meaning of diversity with respect to these three qualities as they all imply different outcomes and are based on distinct assumptions and theories.

Diversity viewed as separation, variety or disparity

Separation refers to differences among social unit members and describes how members differ on a continuum (e.g. age) or a binary attribute (e.g. sex)² (Harrison and Klein, 2007). The assumption behind separation is that the differences in focus potentially cause disagreement or opposition. If unit members differ from each other, they have, for example, different attitudes, values and experiences. All the above-mentioned attributes can be understood as indicative of separation: for instance, age understood as separation implies that people differ from each other according to their age. These differences bring conflicts given that younger and older people may differ in their values, attitudes or behaviour. This in turn could be negatively related to group cohesion and potential group outcome (Harrison and Klein, 2007). The assumptions of diversity as separation are based in 'social categorization' theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel and Turner, 1986) and the 'similarity attraction paradigm' (Byrne, 1997). According to these theories, individuals identify with others similar to themselves through social categorization while separating themselves from distinct 'others'. This in turn leads to the phenomenon of attraction of 'similarity' on the one hand and to conflicts of 'in-groups' (who share certain attributes) with 'out-groups' (who are different in these attributes). Accordingly, diversity in a social unit thought of as separation is used to explain difficulties and conflicts.

² Sex as a binary attribute is highly contested. See Chapter 4 for an in-depth discussion about types of sex.

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Seeing diversity as *variety* entails a more positive stance toward diversity and understands differences as a source of relevant knowledge or experience among unit members. Differences in this regard open up access to unique or distinctive information and resources (Harrison and Klein, 2007, p. 1203). This position is based on the assumption that organizational units are constantly processing information and that the more different pools of information and resources an organizational unit can draw on, the better, more informed, creative and effective decisions taken will be (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996; Harrison and Klein, 2007; Jackson et al., 1995). It is assumed that differences cause variety and add information to a unit, or as Carpenter (2002, p. 280) puts it: differences add to the 'sociocognitive horsepower' of a unit. Understanding age as variety leads to different assumptions than for separation. Age diversity as variety would be assumed to bring about distinct perspectives, information and experiences to a unit and thus increase the information base and thereby units' outcomes. Diversity understood as variety is the basis for the 'value in diversity' perspective that observes positive outcomes of diverse units (Cox and Blake, 1991).

The *disparity* feature of diversity relates to differences connected to valued social assets or resources such as pay or status. This view relates to vertical hierarchical differences that create inequalities tied to differences (Harrison and Klein, 2007). Continuing with the example of age, understanding diversity in the sense of disparity would view age differences in terms of different hierarchies. If, for instance, seniority in a social unit is tied to more pay and more prestige, older people are more likely to be powerful and to dominate the group, whereas younger members might not be able to voice their opinion equally. In that sense, disparity will hinder potential positive effects of variety. Disparity is used as a synonym to inequality in assets, resources or valued goods that members of a unit receive. The basic assumptions are based in theories of stratification (Grusky, 1994). Accordingly, maximum disparity is if 'one individual has everything and everyone else has nothing' (Allison, 1978, p. 869). With regard to diversity as disparity, there are fewer studies that investigate how it affects social units' outcomes. However, there are studies showing that the more power individuals in a certain group have, the more they talk, interrupt and speak out of turn and the more directive they are (Keltner et al., 2003). Power disparity may lead to conformity, suppression of creativity and withdrawal of less powerful organizational members (Pfeffer and Davis-Black, 1992). Thinking of diversity in terms of disparity thus adds an important aspect to conceptualizing diversity in that it points to inequality among different (sub)groups and with it the fact that certain (disadvantaged) (sub)groups might not be equally likely to engage, voice their

views and be heard. In the course of this book it will be important to bear these three distinct qualities of difference/diversity in mind when thinking about diversity management.

Key Points

- Diversity viewed as separation is used to explain difficulties and conflicts related to diversity.
- Diversity viewed as variety is used to explain positive outcomes of diversity/value in diversity.
- Diversity viewed as disparity is used to explain inequality among different (sub)groups.

Stop and Reflect

Think about the differences you encountered among your classmates. Would you view these differences as separation or variety? Do you encounter disparity among different subgroups? Explain your thoughts.

Diversity: Essentialist versus constructionist positions

As holds true for much of the philosophy and methodology employed in social sciences, the approach to understanding and investigating diversity and difference has been influenced by the natural sciences. For example, the use of diversity categories (sex, age, race, etc.) and the accompanying idea that people belonging to the same category (e.g. women) are in essence the same while collectively differing from people belonging to another (here: men) is rooted in Plato's conception of essentialism (Litvin, 1997). 'Plato conceived of the variability he observed in the natural world as reflecting a limited number of fixed and unchanging forms or essences [...] Constancy of essence, bridgeless continuity of species and typical values ("typology") are points of emphasis in the essentialist conception of species diversity' (Litvin, 1997, p. 191). In modern-day organizational diversity research and discourse, remnants of this perspective persist – for example, when talking about 'female leadership', or when presenting benefits of ethnic diversity in the workplace as leading to more 'exotic' food clubs (Risberg, 2006). This is not unproblematic.

Essentialist classification systems are frequently criticized for imposing static distinctions between individuals to create mutually exclusive groups (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000) and assuming that internal homogeneity exists within each

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group. Additional assumptions are introduced to strengthen the classification, so that all ‘homosexuals’, for example, are viewed as possessing similar identities, or ‘men’ are assigned various physical and mental traits considered typical of the male sex, regardless of the validity in each individual case. Specific attributions imposed on ‘target groups’ can serve to reproduce stereotypes.

Essentialism refers to the idea that people have an immutable ‘essence’ that is the root cause of their behaviour. In particular, it is assumed that biological traits are responsible for social behaviour and that certain skills and personality traits are, for example, race- or gender-specific.

There is a debate among scholars studying diversity in organizations as to whether specified groups actually do possess internal homogeneity. One argues, for example, that ‘women’ or ‘Catholics’ or ‘the French’ do not truly exist as definable groups; these categorizations are said to be based on stereotypes which simply cannot be applied to individuals who are supposed to share a group characteristic. This means that even if Susan is labelled ‘a woman’, it cannot be assumed that she displays the range of characteristics attributed to ‘being a woman’ (in stereotypical and essentialist terms such as being relationship-oriented, emotional or intuitive). Similarly, it has been argued that such social labelling imposes a static characterization independent of the relevant social context (Hanappi-Egger, 2012) (see Chapter 4).

In contrast, the *constructionist* perspective assumes that differences are not internal to individuals but rather produced and performed in interaction with others. In other words, the *social* reality is constructed, not given. In relation to diversity, this means that the differences, which occur in particular contexts, are thus a result of social construction, not a matter of fact (Hearn and Louvrier, 2015). Furthermore, the constructionist view adds another perspective to understanding diversity by acknowledging that differences and their relevance are (re)produced within certain power relations that give meaning to differences. Hence, as power is not equally distributed among individuals or among certain groups (for instance, demographic groups), the shared meaning of certain groups – for example, men, women, older, younger, homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, educated, non-educated, managers, employees – and whether they are considered as positive/valuable or negative/non-valuable, displays the power relation within a society or certain social context. According to the power relations at stake, certain differences become noticed and relevant while others

remain invisible and irrelevant. The evaluation of these differences (which group attribute is good or bad) mirrors the power of a certain group that is constantly reproduced and therefore difficult to change (Hearn and Louvrier, 2015).

'In short, constructionists are concerned above all with the *production* and *organization* of differences, and they therefore reject the idea that any essential or natural givens precede the process of social determination' (Fuss, 1989, p. 3).

Example

The Bio-Pharm company is proud of its diverse workforce and communicates openly about how many employees with foreign background they have employed. Yet researchers found structural discrimination in the organization. Almost all employees with a foreign background work in the production department and many of them come from the global South. In the executive team, the few with foreign backgrounds come from northern Europe or North America. The analysis also shows that some production lines are regarded as more prestigious than others, and those production lines are staffed only with majority group workers without foreign backgrounds.

- What can one say about the power structures in Bio-Pharm based on the analysis?
- What attributes of diversity were considered valuable and non-valuable in the organization?

Key Point

Summing up, the *essentialist perspective* of diversity views differences as given and related to certain qualities or characteristics of social groups. *Constructionist perspectives* of diversity assume that differences only come into being by interaction with others. They are furthermore mirroring power relations within social units or societies in that the relevance and evaluation of certain differentiating attributes are only (re)produced interactively.

So far, we have discussed how diversity in organizations is attributing individuals to one social category at a time. However, certain diversity scholars are increasingly critical of this view. They suggest that such an understanding of diversity is limiting the identities of the studied subjects

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to one dimension (Tatli and Özbilgin, 2012), that multiple dimensions are required (e.g. Roberson, 2006), and that organizational diversity should be studied through an intersectional lens that examines overlapping and intersecting dimensions and categories (e.g. Boogaard and Roggeband, 2010; Özbilgin et al., 2011; Prasad, 2012; Syed and Özbilgin, 2009; Zander et al., 2010). Intersectional theory is a way to add more dimensions through axial analyses of social categories (e.g. Essers et al., 2010; Zanoni et al., 2010).

Intersectionality and diversity studies

The term *intersectional* was originally used in feminist and race studies. It was coined to help explain the oppression of African-American women, arguing that their struggle was markedly different from that of white women (or black men) due to the intersection of gender and race (see Crenshaw, 1991), but today it is more commonly used in many other academic fields. Intersectional theorists explore power relationships through a lens of mutual constructions of social categories (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016; Lykke, 2010).

Stop and Reflect

Thinking about intersectionality means taking into account differences among people of a certain group. For example, age. Take a group of 20-30-year-olds. How does (this) age intersect with: Ability/disability? Gender? Social class? Ethnicity? Educational background?

Think about various combinations (intersections) of diversity categories and how they eventually play out (also in terms of power, resources and rewards).

A main attribute of intersectional theory is its focus on the analysis of social categories on multiple axes rather than dealing with single categories: the *interaction* of class and race rather than a focus on class *or* race, for example (Nash, 2008).

Intersectionality is the interconnected nature of social categories as they apply to a given individual or group. It is used as an analytical tool to uncover intersecting structures of discrimination or disadvantage.

With a focus on structural inequalities and discrimination, intersectional theorists aim to explain and understand how the interdependence and mutual constitution of social categories applied on an individual level reflect systems of power, oppression and privilege on a socio-structural level (Acker, 2006; Bowleg, 2012; Rodriguez et al., 2016). Intersectional theory has lately become a popular analytical tool in organization research, including diversity management research. Marfelt (2016) identified two main streams in using intersectionality in organizational research. Scholars following the first stream study various forms of oppression (Hill Collins and Bilge, 2016; Holvino, 2010; May, 2015) in line with the origins of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). More recently scholars have begun to see intersectionality as extending beyond oppression (e.g. Diedrich et al., 2011; Kelly and Lubitow, 2014), using it more as an analytical tool for understanding and explaining the interaction and simultaneous effects of various factors (Hancock, 2007; Lykke, 2010; Zander et al., 2010).

Today many diversity scholars turn to intersectional theory as a way to depart from single-dimension and single-category analysis because intersectional theory provides a more complex view of the multidimensional constructions of identities (Essers et al., 2010). Intersectionality emphasizes the multiplicity of categories as well as their simultaneous and intertwined nature (e.g. Adib and Guerrier, 2003). What intersectionality thus adds to diversity analyses is complexity and more fine-grained explanations and understandings.

Stop and Reflect

Think about your group of classmates. What kinds of intersectionality appear relevant? How does an intersectional perspective add to the complexity in analysing your group and thus in receiving a more fine-grained understanding of it?

Intersectionality makes it possible to untangle and change the impact that differences experienced by various social categories may have on everyday practices in organizations and identify and link internal organizational processes with external societal processes (Holvino, 2010). One major contribution of intersectional analysis is the linking of organizational structures of power and oppression to societal structures (Hancock, 2007). An intersectional analysis can, for example, explain how discrimination in organizations is related to discriminative structures in the society at large. If a certain minority

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group is the subject of discrimination in a society, it is also likely for that group to be the subject of discrimination in the workplace. It offers ‘simultaneous processes of identity, institutional and social practice, brings more complete and accurate analyses and better organization and policy change applications’ (Holvino, 2010, p. 266). Thus intersectionality can be used in diversity and difference studies for more thorough analyses of inequality and oppression, potentially leading to better-grounded organizational and policy changes.

Organizations are not diversity-neutral

Critical studies have changed our way of thinking about organizations in that we recognize that diversity plays indirect, implicit, subtle and often invisible roles. Similarly, theories of gendered, coloured or ethnicized organizations (Acker, 2006; Holvino, 2010) refer to these inherently biased substructures within organizations. We suggest that organizations do not *invent* but rather *reproduce* gender and diversity relations such as the gender segregation of fields of work and structural discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age and disability.

Doubts are often expressed as to whether gender and diversity are in any way relevant to the functioning of organizations since the main features of organizational practices focus on performance, excellence and quality. These indicators are assumed to be completely unrelated to diversity, instead depending on skills, qualifications and other factors perceived as ‘objective’. An argument frequently heard is that regardless of their sex, sexual orientation, religious beliefs and the like, individuals basically have the same opportunities for employment or promotion if they meet the qualification requirements.

In contrast to this view, several scholars have theorized that organizations are gender- and diversity-*blind* rather than gender- and diversity-*neutral* (e.g. Primecz et al., 2016; Thomas and Ely, 1996; van den Brink and Stobbe, 2014). This means that although it may appear as if diversity does not play any role in organizational practices, a deeper investigation reveals the presence of hidden diversity dimensions. Diversity blindness thus refers to the *neglect* of diversity phenomena. For example, training courses that many companies offer to their employees are often scheduled for the evenings or weekends. Sometimes they are held in locations outside the workplace, or even abroad. At first glance it appears that all workers who are selected and show interest can participate; therefore, the measure appears diversity-neutral. However, for people with certain disabilities or people with care-giving responsibilities, it may be very difficult or impossible to attend.

Stop and Reflect

Think about other incidents that might appear neutral at first sight but in fact are diversity-blind. Have you ever experienced such a situation? Discuss in small groups.

Fletcher and Ely (2003) have described four frames to approach the issue of gender in organizations. We amplify them to apply to diversity as we believe similar modes of sense-making pertain to several diversity dimensions:

- ‘Fix diversity’
This approach is rooted in the ‘fix the women’ approach; however, it can be translated to other diversity categories. Following this approach, differences are understood as fixed, and the focus of interest is on the assumption that women and other underrepresented groups lack the skills and knowledge of how to ‘play the game’. Equity, in this view, is to be achieved by the elimination of differences between the groups, meaning that women and members of other underrepresented groups are to be encouraged to adopt prototypical characteristics representing an organizational norm. Depending on the context it could be characteristics such as masculine, mobile, strong, always available and competitive.
- ‘Celebrate differences’
In this view, diversity issues are rooted in socialized differences and separate spheres of activity between the various groups. The problem is identified as a low regard for the skills of women and other underrepresented groups. The solution tends to be to recognize and value these differences as a way for the organization to gain a plurality of values from different types of employees – men, women, majority and minority ethnicity, age groups, religions and so on. This approach also tends to represent an essentialist view of differences.
- ‘Create equal opportunities’
In this view, disparities in how different organizational members are treated and have access to resources and opportunity for advancement are assumed to stem from unbalanced structures of power. Thus a more equal distribution of power between various groups is viewed as a fundamental step to ensure a more objective and less discriminatory treatment of the workforce.
- ‘Revise work culture’
Here diversity is considered to be a central organizing feature of social life, embedded within belief systems, knowledge systems and social practices. Although social practices are designed by and for white, heterosexual, class-privileged men, these are masked to appear neutral. This hidden diversity bias should be identified and underlying access barriers eliminated.

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Stop and Reflect

How would you classify the following measures in terms of the list above?

- The development of a new company mission statement regarding the management of diversity.
- The introduction of a women's quota for a company's board of directors.
- A training course for workers with disabilities aimed at increasing their self-confidence to apply for top management jobs.
- A campaign to promote 'more power for people with a migration in political decision-making'.

Explain your decisions. Based on your own experiences, can you identify other examples of organizational measures or programmes that could be placed in these four categories?

DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT: AN INTRODUCTION

Having defined diversity, discussed several ways to conceptualize difference and seen that organizations are not neutral, we now turn to *diversity management*. This rather popular term refers to the notion that in reaction to growing diversity within organizations, managers must maintain an awareness of the different needs and requirements of their workforce. Managers should also be responsible for the elimination of discrimination and the unfair treatment of minority groups, and consequently should establish inclusive structures.

Diversity management refers to the concept that managers, having acknowledged the value of difference, must strategically and systematically strive to promote equity among the workforce in order to create added value.

Kandola and Fullerton (1998, p. 7) define diversity management as 'founded on the premise that harnessing these differences [social categories such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability and ethnicity] will create a productive environment in which everyone feels valued, where their talents are being fully utilized, and in which organizational goals are met'. Diversity can be managed in different ways (for diversity management practices, see Chapter 9), but examples of typical practices could be to ensure unbiased recruiting, strategies and policies to mainstream diversity (Chapter 7), mentor programmes for minority groups and diversity training.

Kandola and Fullerton's definition raises several important issues relevant to any discussion of diversity in organizations:

1. The definition assumes that diversity is already present in organizations due to an underlying heterogeneity in the societal environment. This relates to the idea of organizations as *open systems*, that is, products of their societal environment which, in turn, reshape this environment (Scott, 1986).
2. It identifies several social categories that determine social opportunities and a risk of discrimination.
3. It opens up the business case for diversity management by referring to the use of diversity for organizational goals. This is the view that diversity, if managed properly, can contribute to the economic success of an organization (see Chapter 3).

As these aspects can be interpreted as both pros *and* cons, diversity management is a subject of contentious debate regarding the validity of some underlying assumptions.

Stop and Reflect

Think about these three issues of diversity in organizations and discuss in small groups: Is diversity already present in all organizations? Which examples do you know of? What do you think about the assumption of properly managed diversity contributing to the economic success of an organization?

It is often argued that the focus solely on management is skewed by ignoring the contribution from all other organizational members. Also the rather functionalist belief that diversity can be 'managed' has come under criticism (see, for example, Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000). From a functionalist view, diversity is merely seen as a resource, as a means by which to optimize performance. Finally, the business case approach is often posited as being in opposition to the efforts of anti-discrimination movements (Kelly and Dobbin, 1998) (for a more in-depth discussion, see Chapter 3).

Diversity management – a concept spreading across the world

Some diversity research investigates how the concept of diversity management spreads and becomes infused in companies around the world (e.g. Kamp and Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004; Nishii and Özbilgin, 2007; Risberg and

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Søderberg, 2008). Anti-discrimination legislation in the USA and other countries and the high legitimacy of diversity management as a concept in global companies have led to a rapid diffusion of diversity management across the world. However, what organization theory scholars found was that several companies took over diversity management as a label but never integrated the ideas into their organizational processes (Ahonen and Tienari, 2009; Boxenbaum, 2006; Süß and Kleiner, 2008; Vedder, 2006). Neo-institutional scholars call this decoupling strategy, which means that if organizations face external pressures (such as the pressure to implement diversity management), they potentially decouple what they say from what they do (Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Accordingly, companies may officially state that they value diversity and perform diversity management, yet they haven't really changed their practices.

Stop and Reflect

The concept of decoupling describes what is often called 'window-dressing' or 'lip service'. Think about other examples where, to your knowledge, organizations were decoupling what they said from what they did.

Despite the diffusion of diversity management as a global concept, studies have shown that local contexts also affect the implementation of diversity management across Europe (Heres and Benschop, 2010; Singh and Point, 2004). Syed and Özibilgin (2009) discuss how the socio-demographic setting in Europe differs from the US setting, arguing that diversity management in the latter is not simply transferable to the European context since the legal frameworks, as well as cultural backgrounds, are quite different (Verloo, 2006). One apparent difference is that European companies are used to gender equality or gender mainstreaming measures and laws that they easily integrate into diversity management practices (Klarsfeld et al., 2014). While these studies are rather 'neutral' in that they describe what is going on and how diversity management spread globally, others take a more critical stance.

Diversity management: A problem or a solution?

Several studies have shown that efforts to recruit and include representatives of socially disadvantaged groups sometimes end up reproducing stereotypes and stigmatization (see, for example, Gilbert et al., 1999 and Chapter 5). The specification of target groups for diversity management and the introduction of measures to foster acceptance and integration may lead to effects very

different from those intended. In fact, they may even provoke counter-reaction and backlash, as well as resistance by groups in power and those being questioned (Dwyer et al., 2003; Johnson, 2006).

This means that an explicit focus on diversity management for specific target groups may be more problematic than it first appears. On the other hand post-modern approaches that emphasize a *fluid* identity construction (referring to the complexity, dynamism, temporality and context-dependency of identity) have been criticized from an anti-discrimination perspective. Such approaches, it is claimed, neglect the historical and systematic discrimination of groups based on ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and religion as well as the male bias (Brodribb, 1992).

This dilemma of how to specify groups historically discriminated against without merely reproducing stereotypes cannot be easily resolved. However, for *analytical* purposes it is certainly helpful to refer to those social groups which historically have suffered some form of discrimination while at the same time bearing in mind this risk of reproducing stereotypes.

Stop and Reflect

The managers of a food company located in Germany decide to hire a sales person from the immigrant Turkish community in order to better serve clientele from the same community. In addition to the obvious benefits that the new employee's language skills will bring, it is assumed that he or she will be familiar with Turkish culture, and consequently better able to identify what 'Turkish immigrants want'.

Does this staffing method invoke any stereotypes regarding people with a Turkish background who live in Germany? What expectations might be placed on the Turkish employee, and which roles might he or she be forced to adopt? Which problems could the employee face? How might the other workers react to this measure?

Can you find similar examples from your own environment in which such stereotypical assumptions are held?

In line with the arguments presented above, some diversity studies analyse how diversity management contributes to inequality and inequity in organizations (Holvino and Kamp, 2009; Marfelt and Muhr, 2016; Muhr, 2008; Oswick and Noon, 2014; Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010). Some studies show how organizations are embedded in societies in which the financial bottom line and shareholder value prevail. In such organizations, diversity and diversity managing efforts are evaluated in terms of being economically valuable or not, while the moral or even anti-discrimination efforts of diversity management are neglected. Critical diversity management studies also point to how the

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‘individualization’ of diversity (the view that everybody is different and valuable) suggests that everyone forges his or her own destiny independently, neglecting the role played by structural inequalities and discrimination in determining outcomes for individuals (e.g. Syed and Özbilgin, 2009). Nevertheless, organizations do not value all differences equally, and thus some ‘differences’ fall short of positive evaluation. Subsequently, some individuals are structurally discriminated against because they are perceived as possessing less ‘valuable’ characteristics (Bührmann, 2017; Kalev et al., 2006; Lederle, 2008). Hence, the business case view of diversity has been criticized (Hanappi-Egger et al., 2007; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000; Mensi-Klarbach, 2010; Prasad and Mills, 1997) and closely examined in relation to business ethics and theories of empowerment (Noon, 2007; Wetterer, 2002; Wrench, 2005).

Key Point

Diversity research with a *business case* approach focuses on factors that impact organizational outcomes. They thereby do not investigate how organizations are structured and organized. *Critical* diversity research examines how organizations are structured and how they function. They analyse organizations’ impact on (re)producing inequality in and around organizations.

BRIDGING THE GAP: ESTABLISHING INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATIONS

More recently, the term *diversity management* has been replaced or sometimes accompanied by the term *inclusion*. We therefore introduce this term and its various definitions to show the differences and commonalities between these terms and concepts.

Inclusion means enabling and valuing the participation of all employees so that they can contribute fully to the organization.

Accordingly, Roberson (2006, p. 215), states that, ‘inclusion represents a person’s ability to contribute fully and effectively to an organization’. This definition focuses on the individual and his or her abilities. On the other hand Pless and Maak (2004, p. 130) have pointed out that ‘diversity management has to be built on solid normative grounds, on founding principles, understood as pillars of a culture of

inclusion. [...] [I]n order to unleash the potential of workforce diversity, a culture of inclusion needs to be established.' Pless and Maak make clear the necessity of providing a structural framework for the individual contribution. More recent definitions point to a more nuanced understanding of inclusion by defining how a climate of inclusion eventually plays out. Inclusion is 'the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness' (Shore et al., 2011, p. 1265). Accordingly, the two aspects of uniqueness and belongingness work together to create a climate of inclusion. Inclusion in this sense is not an ability of an individual, nor a vague climate, but is dependent on the individual's perception of belongingness and uniqueness. Understood this way, inclusion depends on whether or not the individual feels valued as a unique person that belongs to the work group/organization. Given this climate, an individual will be able to fulfil his or her full potential and contribute to improved group performance. Inclusion describes an environment where different people may exhibit different styles of working, thinking, language and so on, as opposed to a climate where individuals are urged to conform to a norm – for instance, dress codes, or adopting the language of a certain group, such as the management team. Hewlin (2009) talks about putting up facades of conformity where employees have to suppress their individual values and selves to pretend organizational belongingness. Genuinely inclusive organizations view diversity as a resource from which the whole organization can learn and benefit rather than maintaining a dominant norm (Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Shore et al., 2011).

Example

The difference between diversity and inclusion has been described in different ways by companies, consultants and researchers. Here are two popular metaphors:

Diversity is the mix; inclusion is getting the mix to work well together.

Diversity is getting invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance.

Stop and Reflect

Think about your group of classmates. How would you evaluate the level of inclusion? How would you evaluate the diversity climate? Is every member perceiving his or her belongingness and uniqueness to be adequate? Do you think that the level of inclusion is important for the working environment in your class? Explain your thoughts.

Exercise

In 2015 *Forbes* published an article on why diversity and inclusion should be a top priority for companies (Bersin, 2015). Read the article and discuss the content and arguments.³

- How is talent management connected to company performance according to the article's author?
- Does the article distinguish between diversity and inclusion? If so, how?
- Reading the article from a critical point of view, what are the weaknesses of the findings presented in the article?

CHAPTER REVIEW QUESTIONS

- What are the reasons for the increased interest in diversity and equality issues from organizations and scholars?
- How was diversity and equality understood in classical organization and management theories?
- What role do categories and categorization play in the concept of diversity?
- What is meant by diversity as separation, variety and disparity? What are the important differences between each of these notions?
- How would you describe 'diversity blindness'?
- How can intersectionality change the understanding of diversity in organizations?
- What are the main critiques of diversity management?
- What is meant by 'inclusive organizations'?

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³ The *Forbes* article (Bersin, 2015) can be found following this link: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/josh-bersin/2015/12/06/why-diversity-and-inclusion-will-be-a-top-priority-for-2016/#597e2ef42ed5>.

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