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Stream 6: Promulgating diversity: the role of hybridity and international business students' and employees' hybrid identities

Master's Students as Diversity and Inclusion Promoters in Working Life

Summary

In our paper we discuss diversity management and inclusion from the conceptual and experiential perspectives. This complex phenomenon is reflected from the scope of higher education. The key concepts are diversity and inclusion, multiculturalism and multicultural team work as well as ethical issues underlying beneath the encountering. We reflect the theory and the data collected in the action research being conducted in a Diversity Management project carried out by four Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences as part of a larger nationwide development programme for Master's level education, in 2014 - 2015. The development programme is funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture.

The notion of diversity management among work organisations is increasing. Diversity management, when properly designed and implemented, can bring about many desirable improvements in work organisations, such as higher job satisfaction, more solid and transparent talent and competence management, better use of resources, higher team spirit, as well as more innovative products and solutions. It has been suggested that diversity management can greatly contribute to gaining a competitive edge, if implemented successfully. In the end - and that is what business managers look for - diversity and inclusion policies may be a factor to higher returns on human capital investments.

We are aiming at working life oriented and fit for purpose curriculum development to promote master students' competence and skills in diversity and inclusion management. We see the master's degree students as key actors in developing working life and enhancing understanding of diversity as a great potential in organisational human capacity building.

Key words: diversity, inclusion, multiculturalism, diversity management, curriculum development

Conceptual background

Diversity

In this paper, diversity is explored first of all as an opportunity to utilise the varied combination of human skills, talent, competences, characteristics and experiences in building a profitable team of expertise. Following Sippola (2007, 17; see also Nieto & Bode 2008; Timonen & Kantelinen 2013) we explore diversity as a wide concept: it concerns differences relating to age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, and, also consists all characteristics and features of people including capabilities, personality, education, religion, culture, language, lifestyle and marital status. Furthermore, diversity is apparent also in perceptions, actions and working styles (Sippola, *ibid*, 17). Diversity is a complex and all the time changing concept depending on the interpreter: it is context related, relative, selective and also multidimensional (Sippola, *ibid*, 18 – 19).

Diversity and inclusion are always embedded; it is crucial to see the variation of human resources as a potential. The aim is to look for the best possible ways to combine the different expertise to promote organisational productivity and, at the same time, to increase team spirit, joy and well-being.

Multiculturalism

Diversity management calls for profound understanding in multiculturalism in its wide sense. Multicultural understanding is often studied through different kinds of competence models. In the models multicultural

competence is seen as a kind of a tool box which helps to cope with different people in varying situations. Competence is defined by discussing how to modify one's own personal interaction to meet the situational and personal needs. However, multicultural understanding is much more than a tool box; it is an approach to humanity and an ability to encounter the other as a base to manage the diversity in the working community.

We prefer to discuss *holistic multicultural understanding*. When multicultural competence is seen as a holistic approach, the main emphasis is put on understanding the principles of human equality and acceptance of each other's difference (Kaikkonen 2001; Timonen 2011). The difference is archaic and built into all of us. However, we often interpret the other to be the one who is different even though he/she might have the same idea about us. In a way, we all are somehow different but partly blind to our own difference. It is natural to a human to see herself as normal, usual and typical, whereas the other might be seen as odd, strange and different. The understanding of difference and equality is a demanding and probably never ending process, which continues throughout our life time (see Buber 1961). In order to build holistic multicultural understanding one needs support. Related to multiculturalism, we discuss the complexity of the world, sense of difference and the approach in teaching to support the master student in his/her learning path.

Complexity of the world

The base of holistic multicultural understanding lies in a profound acceptance of diversity in our world. The concepts of culture, multiculturalism and transculturalism are useful in exploring the diversity. We discuss culture as a combination of different kinds of shared meanings on a personal level and in a group; however this combination is altering and dynamic (Nieto & Bode 2008). With culture we do mean all the characteristic of human being – age, sex, life history, health, hobbies and other interests, social back ground, talents and competences, sexuality, religion, nationality etc. Culture is always in transition, as the members of each cultural group are in interaction with other groups and the media. The interaction and dialogue shape cultures again and again. Despite the transition, the culture constitutes a context through which we are able to understand ourselves and the others. We need a mirror to reflect ourselves and the reality around us, and it is culture that gives us that mirror.

Multiculturalism goes beyond culture; it is the complexity of our lives and the world around us. Multiculturalism is everywhere; it is the expression of different kinds of cultural features and meanings within and between cultural groups. Furthermore, multiculturalism promotes acceptance and appreciation of these individual and group variants. But nevertheless multiculturalism as a concept is somewhat unclear. It is often defined through the questions of power, majority and minority, wealth and politics (Hall & du Gay 1996). While discussing this we need to ask, who is actually allowed to define culture and multiculturalism and who is allowed to set the rules for the discussion? How do the working organisations deal with these questions? The demand for tolerance, acceptance and appreciation are not self-evident; hence they need to be supported in the working community. This is one of the highly important issues in the master degree education and needs to be enhanced by all teachers.

Diversity is complexity and it cannot be defined in a simple way. Transculturalism fuses the concepts of culture and multiculturalism and it is a part of the working communities, too, even though not yet clearly visible or acknowledged. Transculturalism is interaction of different cultural groups in which all the groups are in transition through this interaction and thus reforming new cultural hybrids (Welsch 2009). Cultural hybrids are more or less open groups, which are typically in a constant change and challenging to define. The world around us is more and more complex; it is difficult to say what is authentic or original. Similarity and difference are in an on-going dialogue; furthermore time and space seem to diminish globally. Difference and change are crucial parts in our lives – this is diversity of our live worlds. Culture, multiculturalism and transculturalism form a base to diversity. There is a deep need to accept the uniqueness and variations of characteristics in humanity – that forms a base for ethically coherent encountering of the other.

Diversity: a sense of difference and similarity

Besides understanding the concepts of culture, multiculturalism and transculturalism, the master degree student also needs to explore how the world around us might cause us a sense of difference. Difference can be a sense of personal minority or majority, an idea about being different from the others or finding someone different from oneself. This distinction between the senses of difference is related to power, control, familiarity or strangeness.

Whatever the base is, it reflects the interaction with the other. The sense of difference might be related to the challenging feelings in interaction such as fear, disgust or suspicion but as well to the motivating feelings such as interest, curiosity and friendship. Exploring the concept and idea of difference helps the student to strengthen her own identity and the motivating feelings of interaction. This is one of the key skills in building effective multicultural working teams and to support the expressions of personal and professional identities in the working community.

The basic dimensions, 'self' and 'the other', are always present in defining and developing 'self' by mirroring it with the other. Supporting identity requires understanding of self, otherness, difference and diversity. Who am I, who are you and what is the world around us are important questions for a learner. Defining self is an on-going dialogue between self, the other and the experiences of the world (Hall & du Gay 1986; Timonen & Piironen 2014). Identity supports the self-awareness when the learner feels belonging in some groups and experiences life in a somewhat meaningful way. One aim of multicultural education is to prevent the learner not to shrink in a too narrow world and not to rely on simplifications (Kaikkonen 2012; Kohonen 2009; Taylor 1991; Timonen & Piironen 2014; see also Bruner 1986).

The concept of human difference can be studied through three different concepts: space, society and language. Space and place are more than physical elements; they represent certain aspects of culture and also support our identities giving us a base to connect ourselves with the world around us. We all have our personal important landscapes which make us feel safe and at home. These landscapes do not even have to be close or real; they might also be shared through meaningful tales in the family. These places can be cherished through memories but they can as well be rebuilt as replicates like "little Chinas" in places far from the originals. Whatever the space or place is, it is interconnected to identity. However, this connection is not always explicit, and a teacher needs to work with this concept to support the student's transformation from implicit to explicit level. Recognising the meaning of space in his/her identity helps the student to understand the meaning of space in the other, too.

We all live our lives within the society around us. Even though we might not always follow or accept the rules of that society, they guide us at least on the implicit level. Each society and working community has its own system of values, norms and rules and we grow up exposed to them. The interaction between the community and an individual formulates our identities and shapes our feeling of the self. When we follow the rules, the cultural standards of our own community, we do not need to think if we are normal or not – the standard model of normal and accepted is inside us. However, we might also juxtapose these standards and make different kinds of choices, but it is much more demanding than living as the majority does. Most of us more or less accommodate ourselves to meet the community's values, norms and rules but it needs to be realised that there is diversity and transition in this system, too. Besides, there might be polarisation of values like simultaneous growth of tolerance and intolerance, a kind of a fight between certain values. Furthermore, the cultural standards are somewhat different in each community, and the master degree student needs to understand this complexity and make mindful choices.

Language is one of the most important means to enable the interaction between people and it also helps to make the cultural features explicit (see Timonen & Piironen 2014). Furthermore, language gives us a path to our inner world and enables us to reflect the reality inside and around us. Language helps us to categorise and understand phenomena; this in turn supports inner talk and the learning processes. Language also helps us to build at least some kind of an understanding about ourselves, our identities and the other. However, language itself is full of cultural meanings; with its vocabulary, structure and implicit as well as explicit meanings it reflects the cultural variations in different societies and communities. Language is both personal and social and can be explored on many levels. Moreover, language is always bound to the outside world, it comes alive and gets meaning when used and by the user – meaning making reflects the mind and the mind reflects the world (Bruner 1986). The student needs to understand the diversity, complexity and cultural bonds of language, too.

Diversity Management from the organisational perspective

Diversity Management (DM) includes policies and actions which create such an organisational culture where justice and productivity go hand in hand. Each member of the organisation can feel he/she is included and respected as an employee, colleague, customer, or any other stakeholder role. (Sippola & Kasurinen, 2014).

Diversity Management is part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Diversity can be seen as richness in an organisation; it's one of the greatest factors contributing to creation of new knowledge (Savileppä 2012). For personnel, the sense of being able to be oneself, to be able to use one's full potential, is significant. Inclusive Management is a new term used to refer to the strategic approach in which Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) are forming the policies which an organisation may choose to adopt and implement.

The latest perspective to Diversity Management is that of including customers to the discussion. "Inclusive Business & Service Design" is a rising focus area in DM in Finland (Sippola & Kasurinen 2014). When introducing the concept of Diversity Management to business decision-makers (managers), the question often rises: how does this show in the bottom line? According to Sippola and Kasurinen (2014), diversity should be seen as a resource, in which case it should be taken into consideration, and as capital, in which case it has lots of implications to leadership and management. A goal-oriented diversity initiative can bring about results, they claim.

An example of very long-term and systematic Diversity and Inclusion work can be found in Sodexo, a US-based service company which operates worldwide. It is advised by practitioners that a goal-oriented diversity programme be designed and implemented. A holistic approach is needed. One should distinguish the most relevant areas in the wide spectrum of diversity: what is it that is most crucial in the light of our company's future that needs most attention? Two to five key areas can be pointed out as focus areas, no more. In case of Sodexo, these are: Generations; Culture & Origins; Gender; and People with Disabilities (Heschung 2014).

Measuring the Impact of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives

The progress in implementing the chosen Diversity and Inclusion programmes and initiatives needs to be shown in order to gain further support from top management as well as motivate those who are in charge of the programmes, in practice. To be able to show trends, growth, development, improved job satisfaction, etc. - systematic follow-up and communication of results are needed.

In addition to quantitative measurement, qualitative indicators are required. It is advised by the practitioners (Heschung 2014) that creating such indicators as a joint effort with managers and superiors helps to commit themselves to the D&I policies and their implementation in the organisation. This approach is not different from the main principles in competence management.

The following questions can help in getting started in D&I work in an organisation (Heschung 2014): "Who are your employees? Are they doing the right things? How is their potential, skills and know-how being utilised at the moment? Where are the gaps and what are the hindrances to a better use of human capital?" Recognition of the current situation is a starting point - diversity management assessment tools can be of help in the current state analysis. Planning of development programs - also called as D&I initiatives - is the next step. Which tools are available? Which tools need to be developed?

The research context

The research context is a Diversity Management project carried out by four Finnish Universities of Applied Sciences as part of a larger nationwide development program for Master's level education, in 2014 - 2015. The development programme is funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The researchers from the four partner universities of applied sciences form a multidisciplinary team of expertise which is utilised in collecting and analysing the data and definitely in the final discussion of exploitation of the results. The master degree students from the HEIs form a kind of a living lab, where the action research is implemented as one part of the development programme.

The research is conducted in some of the Master's degree programmes of Jyväskylä, Kajaani, Karelia and Metropolia universities of applied sciences. The fields of studies involved are business, culture and creative arts, social and health care, social sciences and engineering. The data is collected embedded into the studies and it consists of students' learning assignments (reflective essays). All the students are informed about the research.

The minimum of three years of work experience is a prerequisite for entering a Master's degree program offered at this sector of the dual university sector in Finland, and this is one of the key elements for making this group of students so special in terms of actually being able to change things, improve the current state of management

and leadership, and fulfil the aspiration we have for Master's students: They are expected to renew and develop working life already during their studies.

Pragmatic and constructive approach

In our study we first present the different conceptions the Master's students have about Diversity and Inclusion as they show up in our data. Furthermore, we present snapshots where the learners reflect and analyse Diversity Management and Inclusion in their own working communities. Based on these findings, we discuss the pedagogical approaches and the curriculum development in the Master's degree programmes keeping in mind how they support or should support the students' understanding of and skills in Diversity Management and Inclusion. In discussion, we also explore what kinds of pedagogical skills and understanding the lecturers and instructors should have to be able to promote this important area of learning. In the end, we come up with some suggestions for further development based on the findings in the research.

Method and categories

The research context is naturalistic and the data is phenomenological (i.e. Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007). The research has been conducted integrated into the courses regularly running in the HEIs and no special arrangements related to the study has been done. The instructions have been given by the teachers and the data collection leans on the learning assignments of the courses. However, the instruction of the learning assignment was designed together by the researchers from all the HEIs before the implementation of the courses. The same instruction was used in all the universities of applied sciences. Furthermore, all the students were asked for a permission to use the learning assignments (reflective essays) as a research data. The reflective essays are personal and descriptive in their kind and they represent socially constructed reality.

The data collected in the project (150 student essays from master students of four partner universities of applied sciences) provides rich information and varied views to diversity and inclusion. The students describe diversity and inclusion from their own perspectives and experiences gained in their own workplaces. The organisations represented are varied: there are public and private organisations from many different fields. In this study the discussion is limited to the data provided by some of Karelia and Metropolia students (20 essays). The sampling was purposive (Cohen et al. 2007); first the data was limited to the HEIs represented by the two researchers conducting this study and second, the data was sampled following the saturation point. The data was analysed till the categories and sub-categories came clear enough. The language of the learning assignments is Finnish. The researchers have translated the samples into English trying to cherish the original message. The data is analysed following the research questions explored in this study. However, the whole data (150 essays) will be worked further in some other studies and discussed from different perspectives in the for-coming articles by a group of researchers from the partner universities of applied sciences.

The data of this study was analysed by applying the content analyses approach (i.e. Cohen et. al. 2008). The essays were read through and divided into categories and sub-categories. In this study we discuss three main categories: Concept of diversity, Diversity management and Inclusion. These main categories are divided into sub-categories as follows:

- Concept of diversity: Regulatory diversity; Normative diversity; Cognitive diversity
- Diversity management: Meaning of management; Processes and tools
- Inclusion: Feeling of belonging; Feeling of otherness

The categories and sub-categories revealed themselves clearly from the data, however rich variation came up in the personal interpretation of the phenomena.

Diversity Management in the Master students' workplaces

Concept of diversity

Sippola (2007, 55) discusses diversity in the Finnish context from three perspectives: regulatory (e.g. laws and regulations), normative (e.g. values and norms) and cognitive (e.g. interpretations and frames of thought) diversity. The students' perceptions can be categorised applying the Sippola approach.

Firstly, the regulatory diversity was discussed as follows: the students described different laws and rules defining the questions of equality and discrimination in their workplaces. However, the issues were seen quite complex

and varied. This in turn supports also the theoretical complexity of the concept of diversity: it is a blurred concept which is always context related, changing and inter-related with personal communication and interpretation (i.e. Sippola, *ibid.*).

"We have rules for ensuring equality. I think it comes from the law. And we don't allow discrimination or bullying...I think it is important also to our public image to make these rules visible."

"What I could not stand in diversity management...at least discrimination in recruiting. And with this I mean not in a way you should recruit someone to fulfil some rules of integrating some minorities or ensure balance in sex...you should always be able to recruit the best one for the job even if these principles would not come true."

The master students recognised regulatory diversity but mainly from the perspective of legislation. The regulatory diversity was visible and openly discussed in some of the workplaces, but not in all.

Normative diversity was discussed from the perspectives of hierarchy and organisational values. Some of the master students described their workplace as a multi-floor organ. Yet the approach of mixing/separating the groups varied.

"In a way, we have three floors in our hierarchy: on the first floor, there are those doing the heavy physical work. They share a similar kind of background and they always work in pairs. On the second floor, there is the monitory staff who follow the processes. They do not have much in common but some of them share similar kinds of hobbies in their free time. And the highest level is the management. That is the most varied one. These floors are easily recognisable and they form separate teams."

"We have three groups of employers: assistants, officers and experts. However, each of our teams has employers from all these groups."

Many of the students mentioned that even though there is hierarchy at their workplaces, the boundaries between the groups are not too high and it is easy to communicate between the groups. However, some of the students saw that the position, group or team might work as barrier for inter-group or inter-position co-operation. One's position in the organisation as well as the nature of the position (permanent, temporary) were still seen important dimensions of workplace diversity.

Regarding values, the students strongly brought up respect and fair play. Norms and processes for bullying were discussed in many essays. Also acceptance, tolerance and respect were brought up. The ability of encountering was seen as one of the important skills for all the members of the working community.

"I would not accept any kind of bullying. And we have rules and a process for that, should anything turn out. I would tell my boss right away, if I noticed any bullying."

"I do not understand why there are conflicts because of different ways people think or because of different values...We should be able to have tolerance with each other."

"I do not understand some persons at my working place. They are always negative and racist and speak aggressively about their colleagues. I try to avoid them."

Cognitive diversity was discussed in all the analysed papers. This part of the concept of diversity was recognised the best and was described from many perspectives. The students brought up, for example, the following dimensions: age, education, sex, personal values, hobbies, cultural background, religion, working history, nationality, health, talent, life situation and communicative styles. Organisational cultures were also discussed.

"My working place has been changing to more diverse within time. We used to be more homogeneous but now we are varied in many ways...I think this is due to the change in the working life/life in general."

"In my working field, the experts are more multicultural nowadays. Many come from the neighbouring countries and I think it is good."

"We have many older employees...I am a bit concerned about their ability to have enough strength for the rest of their careers. That should be supported. Aging should be discussed much more. These people know a lot."

"When there was a merger, at first it was a battle between the local and common organisational cultures."

Diversity was also discussed from perspectives of homogeneity and visibility which might appear in a neutral, positive or negative form:

"We are not too diverse. Most of us come from quite a similar educational background, represent the same sex (men) and more or less even the age."

"In my working place the most cultural features come from the home regions of the employees. We can get a lot out of that (using the regional stereotypes)."

"All of us are women. All of us need to speak Finnish but there are two bi-lingual persons and one who speaks another language as her mother language....Most are quite the same age and the younger ones have higher educational background. I do not recognise visible diversity but the non-visible diversity is there...life history, family, home town... We don't talk about our values or religion...One (of us) talks about her illnesses very openly."

"I have noticed that in case of mistakes, the more senior employees blame those coming from different language background even though the mistake wasn't her fault or could happen to anybody."

Again, diversity appears as a blurred concept: it can be visible or non-visible and even if it is non-visible the students somehow can feel it is there. The personal interpretation formulates the individual understanding of the concept.

Diversity management

The master students' perceptions of the second main category, diversity management, can be discussed in two sub-categories: firstly, the significance of management, and, secondly, processes and tools. It was the managers of an organisation who were seen as a key factor in utilising diversity in a positive way; if the management works, the organisation is or at least could be successful. And when management works well, the employees feel safe and work satisfaction remains high.

"I think that diversity management aims at commitment and sharing. It is important that everybody be committed. I see the manager as a coach supporting us.... All new employees are integrated to the teams and the working community... We have a good image and reputation...Everybody can feel respected and it has nothing to do with your age, background, nationality or any..."

"Diversity management is basically encountering, recognition, respect, and understanding....Equality and trust are crucial."

Yet the management, if not working, might also appear as a de-motivator for an employee and the whole community.

"If an employee feels to be treated in an unequal way without a reason, it affects his/her working moral and effectiveness. It also affects the whole working community and weakens the working atmosphere....The same happens if someone gets non-reasoned glory....Reasoning and good bases are always needed."

Processes and tools are the managers' way to deal with the diversity prevalent in an organisation and to involve the members of the working community in team work and co-operation. The students brought up different kinds of questionnaires, barometers, and instructions.

"We have an anonym annual questionnaire about equality. It covers all the employers. Furthermore, there is an open channel for everybody to make an anonym announcement to the managers and directors, whenever they would notice any discrimination or bullying."

"We have annual work satisfaction barometers and some other questionnaires, too. They (HR) are measuring and following it (diversity/inclusion)."

"We have instructions for dealing with conflict situations and a model for a right-away action in case of any difficulty."

Meaningful team building and systemic interaction between the employees were seen highly important and expected from managers. Team building can be supported in official and less official contexts. The students place emphasis on both of these channels.

"It is very important that managers can build trust and commitment. A constructive way to deal with difficult situations is important...to work with how to proceed rather than trying find who is guilty or who has made mistakes."

"Different kinds of recreational events are also important. We do different things related to the well-being at work...It strengthens the team spirit, too."

Inclusion

The feeling of belonging was described to rise up from the feeling of similarity. Sharing similar kinds of interests and free time activities, life situation, educational background, position and/or values were mentioned as a bind between the community members. The feeling of similarity seems to support the experience of being understood and accepted by others. The use of humour was also seen as a channel to inclusion, however, only when the sense of humour is similar. Different senses of humour might cause the feeling of exclusion or even disgust.

"Humour is nice and brings joy to a day...We understand each other. However, somebody not knowing us might find it insulting."

"There are similar kinds of hobbies among many, fishing, motor sports and horses."

The feeling of difference, on the other hand, was described from the other's perspective. The students did not see themselves different; rather, it was the other, like a new member of the working community:

"We got a new employee. He was different from us, quiet, and not communicative...We did not find him fitting in. It was difficult to work with him and our team was not the same anymore."

The understanding of difference and otherness seems to be a challenge – the interpretation is one-way and it seems that the students rarely reflect the difference with a two-way analysis.

Discussion

Curriculum development and Diversity & Inclusion projects of Master's students

In the curriculum development, we aim at promoting the following courses in Master's degree programmes: firstly, personal development and self-management; secondly, management and supervising skills; and finally,

strategic leadership and strategy work. The aim is to support and enhance the crucial competences and skills the Master's students would need to be able to understand diversity and inclusion and to promote Diversity Management in their work organisations. Based on the study, we can also confirm that a Master's student has many challenges in his/her growth to the bases of diversity and inclusion management: acceptance, tolerance and understanding of the complexity of the world. He/she needs to have a solid motivation to learn, conceptual knowledge, as well as willingness to personal growth. In addition, one's understanding of the complexity of difference and otherness needs to be supported. The instructor has an important role in enhancing the learning process.

Research-based development work, even action research, is a recommended approach for Master's Theses included in Master's degree programs at Finnish universities of applied sciences. The Master's Thesis is the most significant part of one's studies, 30 ECTS, thus counting for a half or a third of the whole degree program. A Master's Thesis project is often a development project in a student's own work organisation. In case of Diversity Management topic area, some Master's Thesis projects are conducted for a partner organization other than one's employer. The project may rely on development needs recognised in the organisation by its HR professionals or its management; it may also be based on a current state analysis conducted by a Master's student. In either case, certain focus areas are identified, and the Diversity and Inclusion work can start. Since the time frame for a Master's Thesis is 1 - 2 years, a full action research cycle can seldom be reached.

What can be achieved? Changes in the way of thinking and in skills of perceiving diversity can most likely be seen. The potential ways of inclusion that are appropriate in the organisation as a result of agile pilot projects in specified HR or other areas are expected to lead to rapid improvements. More profound changes in the operative level, let alone changes in the organisational culture - e.g. a proactive strategic approach - requires a longer time. This is where one of the benefits comes from: the Master's students, who study alongside their work, can keep on working and promoting Diversity Management also after they graduate.

The ongoing agile development & testing projects where Master's students play a key role are related to, e.g.

- the rising generations;
- leading virtual teams;
- embracing cultural diversity in teams and projects;
- Diversity Management from a leadership perspective; as well as
- aging.

Having more than one Master's thesis on a given topic area allows for comparisons and different perspectives. All in all, the Diversity Management project where students are promoters of Diversity Management in their partner organisations is expected to increase the impact of R&D work conducted in Master's education. Thus, *the connective model* (Griffiths & Guile 2003; 2001; Tynjälä 2009, 144), also described as *integrative pedagogy* (Nykänen & Tynjälä 2012, 22-23; see also Little 2004), becomes visible in many real activities implemented in Master's studies. Consequently, we believe that the right "target group" in spreading the understanding of Diversity Management in working life is the students attending Master's degree programmes at Finnish universities of applied sciences.

We strongly support the approach of authentic experiential learning in a close working life co-operation. In experiential authentic pedagogy the teacher empowers the student's own ability and willingness to learn and supports his/her learning processes. The teacher can support student autonomy, authenticity and dialogue if he/she puts himself/herself as a whole person to the teaching i.e. dares to be herself, and if she is willing to encounter the learner (Holec 1981; Kohonen 2009; Timonen & Kantelinen 2013).

The Mission of the Diversity Management project

The Diversity Management project at hand, with our research as part of it, aims at finding suitable ways of developing work and work communities holistically for the benefit of individuals, teams, as well as the whole organisation.

Talents, capabilities, skills and the full potential of each member of a work organisation, combined with a positive flow at work, can become a strategic success factor which unites and strengthens the whole organization

(Hakanen 2009). The basis for strategic renewal and competence development is the full utilisation of the resources an organization has - or could have - access to. Postmodern strategy work takes advantage of the diversity in an organization as well as the versatile, unique and diverse potential of its individuals (Juuti & Luoma, 2009)

Master's Students as Promoters of Diversity & Inclusion Work

Students pursuing their Master's studies at universities of applied sciences are in the focal point of Diversity and Inclusion Management. They can bring about change, if we can make them aware of the topic and its importance. By giving them not only know-how but also tools, they can experiment and apply their D&I awareness and skills in authentic learning environments, typically the organisations in which they are employed. They can do this individually or in (multi-disciplinary) teams. In the latter case, they are moving from the integrative model towards the pedagogical model of *network culture* (Nykänen & Tynjälä 2012, 22).

It is expected that already during their studies the Diversity Management competence of Master's students shows positively and becomes visible. After the experience of having used some of the tools, having discussed the Diversity Management issues in their respective organisations, and having internalised the key concepts and understood the significance and potential of DM, we may well expect them to continue doing this as their careers progress. Multiple impact on a larger scale may take place, thus fulfilling the expectation of this sector of Higher Education; Master's students (the future Master's alumni) from Finnish universities of applied sciences are change agents of the renewing working life (e.g. Juuti & Luoma, 2009).

Whether this can be achieved depends a great deal on how well we succeed in higher education to empower the master's students. As found out in our study, not everyone is in a position to influence D&I policy-making. Leaving the power issue aside, we may ask: Can we encourage the students to take action also in situations where traditional organisational structures may hinder or prevent them from doing so? Diversity Management is a complex area where sensibility and diplomacy combined with a determined mode of action are needed. Have the students, many of whom started their studies and careers according to the rules and expectations of the modern society, been able to step into the postmodern society where one's identity is under continuous renewal (Juuti & Luoma 2009, 181)? What kind of pedagogical approach would best support the action research type D & I interventions we're expecting Master's students to plan and implement in their partner organisations?

Our Vision: Competence & Impact

Diversity Management Competence becomes a part of the competence profile of all Master's degree program students at Finnish universities of applied sciences. Diversity, inclusion and strengthening of vitality give a new meaning to managerial and leadership work. New work and the renewing working life call for a new kind of leadership. The joy of work must not disappear, well-being at work can and must be increased, and, at the same time, productivity and efficiency have to stay at a high level in work organisations.

Diversity Management is both a strategic and an operative issue. Shaping the organisational reality towards proactive diversity and inclusion policies could be a role well fitted for Master's students with understanding and appreciation of Diversity Management content. As Collins observes (Collins 2015; see also Timonen & al. 2014), "...most of them are 'mature students', in other words, with considerable work and life experience – an opportunity to not only to study the subject from the somewhat academic perspective, but also to actively engage in the various topics and contribute by recounting their own experiences of working in Finnish and global organisations." During their studies, opportunities for Diversity Management interventions are introduced for developing, testing, and piloting. Some of them may lead to remarkable results as Master's Theses, while others may pave the way for diversity and inclusion policies and programmes that need a longer time period to bring about visible and measurable impact.

From being empowered enough to act as Diversity Management promoters in their organisations - as change agents of the renewing working life, in Juuti & Luoma's terms (2009) - Master's students of universities of applied sciences could reach the level of employee engagement (Byrne 2015, 41-43) where they not only transform their own work to something meaningful and purposeful but where they feel empowered to empower others as well. Diversity and Inclusion Management could offer them and their colleagues a framework for collaborative shaping of the vitality and well-being of the whole organisation. There is so much unused or unrecognised human

potential which Diversity and Inclusion Management can bring to the surface. When understood, recognised, appreciated, and, finally, utilized for the benefit of an individual, a team as well as the whole organisation, a favourable development can reach the working life on even a larger scale. This is an area our project will continue to take a look at in the next few years.

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