Long abstract (max. 1500 words)

**Organisational decoupling in diversity management:**

**A winning strategy or a hollow victory? (title)**

The effects of diversity decoupling (short title)

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**Introduction**

After the recent killing of George Floyd and the subsequent worldwide protests, many big brands and corporations expressed their support for the Black Lives Matter movement and black communities on social media. Meanwhile the actual integration of black people in higher level company positions remains low. Among Fortune 500 companies for example, less than 1% of the CEO’s are black (Korn Ferry, 2020). This is one among many illustrations of organisational decoupling in the domain of diversity management (hereafter also referred to as ‘diversity decoupling’). Organisational decoupling refers to gaps between organisations’ talk on the one hand, and their concrete actions and / or results on the other (Bromley & Powell, 2012; Brunsson, 2019). Indeed, although a majority of organisations *say* that they consider diversity and inclusion as an important issue (Deloitte, 2017), the actual *implementation* of diversity and inclusion in organisations remains low (Amis, Mair & Munir, 2020; Deloitte, 2017; Mor Barak, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2018).

In this paper, we will investigate whether diversity decoupling damages the image that members of high and low status groups have of a company, as well as their anticipated work experiences. More specifically, we hypothesize that *decoupling between* the *talk* of an organization and its achieved *results* predicts increased perceptions of organisational hypocrisy and a reduced sense of inclusion. We study thus, to what extent diversity decoupling undermines the exact objectives that motivate organisations to publicly support diversity and inclusion, that is conveying a positive company image and creating a diverse and inclusive work environment.

**Methodology**

Two experimental studies were conducted. A third experimental study is underway. The first study (N = 204) was designed as a pilot study to test the experimental manipulation of diversity decoupling. 57.4% of the participants in this pilot study were male, 41.7% were female and 1% self-described as transgender or non-binary. Based on the results of the manipulation checks in this first study, the immersion of the participants was enhanced in the second study. For the second and main study, we recruited 236 participants, based on a power analysis (done with G\*Power 3.1)[[1]](#endnote-1). 61.9% of the participants were male, 37.7% were female and 0.4% did not wish to answer the question.

The studies, conducted online, were presented as examining first (company) impressions **based on minimal information. The pieces of information presented were the company’s mission and the evolution of its workforce.**The variables manipulated were the mission of the organization (pro-diversity talk; present or absent) and the progress made (positive diversity results; present or absent) in terms of (gender and cultural) diversity in the workforce over the past five years. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the following four conditions: 1) pro-diversity talk present but progress absent (decoupled condition, NS1C1[[2]](#endnote-2) = 54; NS2C1[[3]](#endnote-3) = 54); 2) pro-diversity talk and progress present (NS1C2 = 56; NS2C2 = 61); 3) pro-diversity talk absent but progress present (NS1C3 = 54; NS2C3 = 44); 4) pro-diversity talk and progress absent (NS1C4 = 40; NS2C4 = 77). After reading the information, the participants of the first study (pilot study) responded directly to the manipulation check items. The participants in the second study first performed an immersion task before completing the manipulation check items and the scales measuring the perception of organisational hypocrisy (Goswamy, Ha-Brookshire & Bonifay, 2018; α = 0.92) and the sense of inclusion (Jansen et al., 2014; feeling of belonging, α = 0.95; feeling of authenticity, α = 0.98).

As mentioned, the third experimental study is currently in development. This study has as an objective to understand better the psychological processes underlying the findings of the first two studies. In particular, we are looking into processes related to high and low status group membership. To do this, we will manipulate the status of the participants (high or low status) and the presence of decoupling (present or absent).

**Main results**

Preliminary analyses of main study (Study II). See Table I of Attachment I.

Main analyses of main study (Study II). *Perception of corporate hypocrisy.* A Helmert contrast analysis confirmed that participants in condition 1 (decoupled condition) (*M*C1 = 3.96) perceived significantly more corporate hypocrisy than the participants in the three other conditions (*M*C2+C3+C4 = 3.01) (*t*(232) = 5.54, *p<* .001, *C*=0.95, 95% IC =[0.61, 1.28]). The results of the simple contrasts analyses are summarized in Table II of Attachment II. These simple contrast analyses showed that when *positive diversity results are absent,* individuals perceive more corporate hypocrisy when pro-diversity talk is adopted than when pro-diversity talk is not adopted. When *positive diversity results are present*, the presence (or absence) of pro-diversity talk does not influence the perceived corporate hypocrisy.

*Sense of inclusion.* The Helmert contrast analysis confirmed that participants in condition 1(*MC1*= 4.48) have a significantly lower sense of belonging than the participants in the three other conditions (*M*C2+C3+C4= 4.85) (*t*(232) = -2.18, *p< 0.05*, *C*= -0.37, 95% IC =[-0.70, -0.04]. Their sense of authenticity (*MC1*= 4.25) is also significantly lower than the other conditions (*M*C2+C3+C4= 4.72) (*t*(232) = -2.24, *p<.05*, *C*= -0,48, 95% IC =[-0.89, -0.06]). The results of the simple contrasts analyses can be found in Table III and Table IV of Attachment II. These analyses reveal that when *diversity results are present,* individuals report a similar higher sense of belonging in the presence or absence of pro-diversity talk. When *diversity results are absent*, the presence or absence of pro-diversity talk does not influence the sense of belonging. For the sense of *authenticity*, we also found that when *positive diversity results are absent*, the presence or absence of pro-diversity talk does not lower or increase sense of authenticity. When *positive diversity results are present* however, individuals will report more sense of authenticity when pro-diversity talk is also present. Overall, no significant differences were found between men and women.

**Discussion (preliminary)**

Based on the current state of this research, it appears that adopting pro-diversity talk without providing evidence of progress in the domain of diversity leads to higher perceptions of organisational hypocrisy and a reduced sense of inclusion. These findings have thus important implications for organisations. More concretely, in contradiction to many company practices today which are focusing mainly on pro-diversity talk, it seems essential to combine a pro-diversity discourse with evidence of progress in the domain of diversity management. This could allow organisations to reduce perceptions of organisational hypocrisy and to stimulate a sense of inclusion.

Previous studies conducted with low status (Wilton et al., 2020) or high status group members (Kaiser et al., 2013) suggest that these two groups react differently to expressed diversity cues by organisations. The third study in development, in which the status of the participants and the presence of decoupling will be manipulated, will allow us to investigate more in detail whether and how diversity decoupling affects high and low status group members differently. This will be, to our knowledge, the first time that the reactions of low and high status group members to diversity decoupling are compared in the same study. Besides looking at the effect of diversity decoupling on the perceptions of corporate hypocrisy and the sense of inclusion of high and low status group members, we will also measure its effect on other anticipated work experiences (organisational commitment, person-organisation fit).

**Appendix**

**Attachment I – Preliminary analyses of main study**

Table I: Descriptive statistics and correlations

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Variables** |  |  |  |  | **s** |
| 1. | PCH\_score | - | - | - | 3.29 | 1.17 |
|  |  | - | - | - |  |  |
| 2. | Inclusion\_belonging | -0.713\*\* | - | - | 4.72 | 1.13 |
|  |  | < .01 | - | - |  |  |
| 3. | Inclusion\_authenticity | -0.699\*\* | 0.807\*\*\* | - | 4.58 | 1.43 |
|  |  | < .01 | < .01 | - |  |  |

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

**Attachment II – Main analyses of main study**

Table II: Effect of Talk-Result decoupling on perceived corporate hypocrisy (Helmert & simple contrast analyses)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Conditions** |  | **N** | **C1** | **C2** | **C3** | **C4** | **C2+C3+C4/3**  (MC2+C3+C4=3.01) |
| C1 | Talk present, Progress absent | 3.96 | 54 | - | 1.14\* | 1.16\*\*\* | 0.54\* | 0.95\*\*\* |
| C2 | Talk present, Progress present | 2.82 | 61 | - | - | -0.02 | 0.60\* | - |
| C3 | Talk absent, Progress present | 2.80 | 44 | - | - | - | 0.63\* | - |
| C4 | Talk absent, Progress absent | 3.42 | 77 | - | - | - | - | - |

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Table III: Effect of Talk-Result decoupling on sense of belonging (factor 1 of sense of inclusion) (Helmert & simple contrast analyses)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Conditions** |  | **N** | **C1** | **C2** | **C3** | **C4** | **C2+C3+C4/3** (MC2+C3+C4=4.85) |
| C1 | Talk present, Progress absent | 4.48 | 54 | - | 0.69\*\*\* | 0.51\*\*\* | -0.1 | -0.37\* |
| C2 | Talk present, Progress present | 5.17 | 61 | - | - | 0.18 | -0.79\*\*\* | - |
| C3 | Talk absent, Progress present | 4.99 | 44 | - | - | - | 0.61\* | - |
| C4 | Talk absent, Progress absent | 4.38 | 77 | - | - | - | - | - |

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

Table IV: Effect of Talk-Result decoupling on sense of authenticity (factor 2 of sense of inclusion) (Helmert & simple contrast analyses)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Conditions** |  | **N** | **C1** | **C2** | **C3** | **C4** | **C2+C3+C4/3**  (MC2+C3+C4=4.72) |
| C1 | Talk present, Progress absent | 4.25 | 54 | - | 1.05\*\*\* | 0.42 | 0.05 | 0.48\* |
| C2 | Talk present, Progress present | 5.30 | 61 | - | - | 0.63\* | -0.52\*\*\* | - |
| C3 | Talk absent, Progress present | 4.67 | 44 | - | - | - | -0.47 | - |
| C4 | Talk absent, Progress absent | 4.19 | 77 | - | - | - | - | - |

\*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

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**ENDNOTES**

1. Assuming a moderate effect size (f = 0.25) with 95% statistical power and an alpha level of .05 for a between analysis of variance (4 groups), the sample size needed was 210 participants. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. S1C1 = study 1 (pilot study), condition 1 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. S2C1 = study 2 (main study), condition 1 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)