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Stream 16

‘Fitting in is the opposite of belonging’: creating sustainable organisations through developing an inclusive culture

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Much of the diversity research investigates both visible and invisible diversity to understand ‘how and in what conditions different forms of diversity work?’ (e.g. Guillaume, Dawson, Otaye-Ebede, Woods, & West, 2017; Joshi & Roh, 2009; Mohammed & Angell, 2004). While some scholars focus on demographic differences with the assumption that visible diversity would trigger social categorisation and plausible faultline formations that could hinder coordination and cooperation; others have highlighted the potential benefits of ‘invisible’ diversity, in the form of variety in ideas, knowledge experience etc, with the assumption that this diversity of cognitions would foster a strong foundation for innovation, creativity and performance (Mannix & Neale, 2005; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007; Williams & O’Reilly, 1998). Another stream of research has focused on the effect of diversity management on individual, group and organisational level outcomes. The results of these line of research are equivocal and there is much we still don’t know (Milliken & Martins, 1996; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007).

We contend that one of the reasons this research is inconclusive is because often, we miss a critical component of the discussion and research on diversity- namely, ‘inclusion’. Inclusion is the removal of obstacles to the full participation and contribution of employees in the organization (Roberson, 2006). A discussion on diversity cannot fully get at the core of the dynamics of this organisational phenomenon without taking into consideration the aspects of power, privilege and status that different social groups hold within the organisational context. Thus, for discussions on diversity to be meaningful, the focus of the conversation should start with inclusion where organisations focus on providing a sense of uniqueness and belongingness for all employees, regardless of their race/ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation and abilities (Shore et al., 2011).

We therefore argue that the conversation needs to shift from diversity and the counting of and measuring of how we are all different, to a fundamental discussion on how we can construct, enable, and design organisations where everyone feels included. The question is not whether or how diversity is good for organisational success; it's about how we create inclusive cultures to ensure that diversity of voices and peoples have a sense of belonging and can legitimately contribute towards organisations. Without first developing an inclusive culture, we cannot really begin to understand how to ensure that diversity of knowledge, people, ideas and expertise can actually be realised in organisations in a sustainable manner. To achieve this, Mor Barak (2015) suggests a circular process. One part of the cycle is reactive, where organizations recruit and employ a more diverse workforce. The second is proactive, where organizations invest in active efforts to enhance inclusion and foster organizational effectiveness in their workforce (Mor Barak & Travis, 2009). As noted above, the first stage has been widely researched while the second stage is still in its infancy.

To this effect, in this stream, we want to shift the focus away from a discussion of what kind of diversity 'works' or doesn't, in the diversity discourse. Instead, we want to explore the question: in the organisational context, how do we ensure that inclusive cultures are designed to include all voices, including those with privilege or status, if we are to have safe spaces for meaningful dialogue and real progress? How can we ensure that *all* individuals feel included and have a sense of belonging to the organisations that they are a part of so that they may contribute without hesitation, discrimination and worries about 'fitting in'?

We invite papers, especially interdisciplinary research, grounded in theory, which explore topics such as (please note: This is not an exhaustive list) :

- 1) How much does the context matter- i.e. At the organisational level, what type of leadership actions and organisational policies or processes help create an inclusive culture? What might be practices, leadership behaviours or policies that hinder the creation of inclusive organisational cultures?
- 2) What are some of the individual behaviours that are reflected in organisational culture or team cultures that hinder or enhance inclusion?
- 3) What types of leadership and leadership behaviours support inclusive cultures within teams?
- 4) How can organisations be designed, in terms of spaces for interaction and occasions for dialogue, for inclusion?
- 5) How can aspects of 'white fragility'(DiAngelo, 2011), 'covering' (Goffman, 1968; Yoshino, 2001) and 'othering' (Abu-Lughod, 1991; Dervin, 2012) be managed in social group dynamics within the organisational context?
- 6) What are the trigger points or contextual cues that permit individuals to act on their implicit or explicit biases? Under what conditions do they become activated?
- 7) How can organisational inclusion policies and design ensure that untapped talent from a variety of diverse individuals (e.g. neurodiversity) can be accessed and fostered?

We also invite papers, supported by strong data, from D&I practitioners and those working in the field.

Submissions to the stream can be in the form of long abstracts (up to 1500 words), developmental papers (3000-5000 words, including references) or full papers (no length restrictions) by the deadline of 1 March 2021. Please process your registration and paper submission online via www.edi-conference.org

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