

**Long abstract for the 10th Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
International Conference**

28th -30th of June, 2017

Brunel University / London, UK

Stream 13: **To be underway. Conditions constitute Chances and
Borders of Diversity Learning**

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Paper Title: **Diversity as a cross border business culture in Europe? –
Representational voices of diversity management in stock
exchange-listed companies in the European Union**

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Diversity as a cross border business culture in Europe? – Representational voices of diversity management in stock exchange-listed companies in the European Union

Abstract

Diversity management (DM) as management concept is around in the West for two decades now. Almost all multinational corporations (MNC) and the majority of stock-exchange listed companies in Europe, the USA and Canada have implemented DM. Based on the concept of diversity as polyphony, the aim of our paper is to explore the national and cultural context-dependent polyphonic representational voices, respectively communicative practices, of DM strategies and of the addressed diversity dimensions in stock exchange listed companies in Spain, Portugal, Czech Republic, Poland, Sweden, Belgium and the Netherlands. With our comparative data analysis we wish to make a contribution to the cultural, trans/national and (eventually) border crossing context-dependent qualitative understandings, respectively constructions and reproductions of (in)justices and perceived fairness in DM discourse within the European Union and it's (national) borders.

Keywords: stock exchange-listed companies, country specific, voices, frames, plurality

1. Introduction

Diversity management (DM) as management concept is around in the West for two decades now. Almost all multinational corporations (MNC) and the majority of stock-exchange listed companies in Europe, the USA and Canada have implemented DM (see for example Singh/Point 2006, Nishii/Özbilgin 2007, Bell et al. 2011, Tatli 2011). These companies either set only selective measure or implement DM as an organizational strategy targeting one or more diversity dimensions (represented as socio-demographic variables e.g. gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, ethnicity, religion) depending on their legal context and their cultural specifics. Thus, DM is a relational concept and refers to the micro, meso and macro level (Syed/Ozbilgin 2009). DM is defined as “the systematic and planned commitment by organizations to recruit, retain, reward and promote a heterogeneous mix of employees” (Ivancevich/Gilbert 2000, 75). For application, DM offers either an anti-discrimination or a business perspective, or both (Cox/Blake 1991). As such, DM includes the instrumental

perspective of ‘how to fulfil legal measures’ (Wrench 2007) and/or ‘how to make differences between individuals work for the organization’ and focuses gaining competitive advantage and enhance organizational or team performance (e.g. Labucay 2015, Scott et al. 2011).

However, DM is not an uncontested management concept (see e.g. Bendl/Bleijenbergh/Henttonen/Mills 2015, Litvin 1997, Zanoni/Janssens 2004) and critical voices highlight that these ends are not achieved with DM measures. Trittin/Schoeneborn (2015) provide an overview of these critics: On the one hand, the constructive critics, argue for more language- and suppression-oriented, intersectional DM approaches with a focus on fluid representations of diversity dimensions in order to fight inequality (e.g. Gotsis/Koretzi 2013, Tatli/Özbilgin 2012, Tomlinson/Schwabenland 2009, Zanoni et al 2010, Janssens/Zanoni 2005 and 2014). On the other hand, the radical-critics refuse that human diversity is manageable and contest the business rationale of DM. For them, DM does not address the contextual conditions of power, privilege, inequality and disadvantage but reproduces domination and alienation as the socio-demographic perspective reinforces (instead of overcome) the separation and distinction. Ahmed (2012) even states that DM is a non-performative concept, as it does not produce the effect that it names.

Apart from all these different critical research voices, however, in Europe DM is on the agenda of MNCs and stock exchange-listed companies. Starting in 2017 stock exchange listed companies have to make a diversity report for the first time (Austrian Governance Codex 2015) and since 2000 the EU antidiscrimination legislation has triggered enormously the focus on diversity management in the corporations in the different EU countries. However, the DM implementation in organizations may differ depending on legal resources, cultural context and other nation-state specifics as well as organizational features such as sector, size of the organization, ownership and different stakeholder etc.. Singh/Point (2006) investigated how specific notions of gender and ethnicity are integrated into diversity discourses presented on 241 top European company websites. They found that diversity statements sometimes appear to reinforce existing business stereotypes of women and ethnic minorities, and in a few discourses, create new ones, particularly evident in photographs illustrating the diversity webpages. In 2006 gender and ethnicity were those diversity dimensions which were mostly featured in DM strategies and DM research (Bendl 2012). However, ten years later DM focuses on more than these two diversity dimensions (Zanoni/Janssens/Benschop/Nkomo 2010) and has gone through a phase of professionalization (Ahonen/Tienari 2009) which may refer to organizational approaches focusing on intersectionality, fluidity and a more nuanced plurality

of voices. Thus, the aim of our paper is to explore the cultural context-dependent polyphonic representational voices, respectively communicative practices, of DM strategies and of the addressed diversity dimensions. In this paper context-dependent refers to stock exchange-listed corporations in the following member countries of the European Union: Spain and Portugal, Czech Republic and Poland, Sweden and Denmark as well as Belgium and the Netherlands (altogether 187 corporations). We intend to answer the following research questions by analyzing the companies' websites: What is the national/cultural context-dependent message which corporations communicate with diversity management and the applied diversity management dimensions? How do broad national belief systems and institutional orders influence DM strategies? Are there similarities/differences in representations of DM across national borders? With this comparative perspective we contribute to increasing knowledge about diversity management as practice facilitating the reproduction of (in)equalities as well as inclusion and exclusion at the same time and add new perspectives on the DM from a fairness and business-case perspective. As we link our data to the instrumental as well as to the radical and constructive critical perspective of DM, we also will be able to update this literature.

Our long abstract is structured as follows: After the introduction we present our theoretical framework highlighting diversity management as polyphony as introduced by Trittin/Schoeneborn (2015). Then we give information about our study and research method and end with first impressions on our data.

2. Theoretical approach of the study

For Trittin/Schoeneborn (2015) organizations refer to “precarious social entities that necessitate to become continuously (re)incarnated in and through the occurrence of interconnected communicative practices”¹. Thus, they see striking similarities to the notion of ‘polyphonic organization’ (Hazen 1993) and adopt this concept in order to attend to the plurality of voices in organizational contexts (e.g. Christensen and Cornelissen 2011, Cooren and Sandler 2014). With such a perspective the authors emphasize that it is “worthwhile for organizations (and society more generally) to embrace dissent and the plurality of voices in a dialogic way”². According to Bakhtin (1984) notions of polyphony, a polyphonic viewpoint

¹ This and the other quotes refer to the following version of the paper of Trittin/Schoeneborn 2015 published online on 02 September 2015 (DOI 10.1007/s10551-015-2825-8). This version, however does not offer page numbers.

² DOI 10.1007/s10551-015-2825-8

considers organizational practices and, thus also DM practices, as “multi-centered, non-linear, and intersubjective activities” (Belova et al. 2008, 494). As such, if the organization speaks or acts, many different voices (individual, group, and/or societal discourses) may present their perspective through it. So, organizations are incarnated through communicative practices that allow actors to claim authority to speak in the organization’s name. Thus, what is ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the organization is contextually bound and tends to be continuously negotiated through organization itself (see Trittin/Schoeneborn 2015). For Trittin/Schoeneborn (2015) DM is a “form of organizational boundary management that needs to be receptive to the diversity and complexity of environmental and social voices, while being able to ensure the organization’s status as a (more or less) distinct entity, at the same time”³. As a consequence, centripetal forces (such as hegemonic tendency towards homogeneity and/or harmonization) and centrifugal forces (such as heterogeneity and diversity) co-exist in organizational settings. Applied to DM, this polyphonic perspective allows exploring contradictory, paradox, and ambivalent as well as consistent and congruent voices expressing/creating/reproducing DM strategy and meanings of diversity dimensions. As the voices are cultural and context-dependent, the (bordered) national context of the analysed companies is included in these voices. This also means that country-specifics are already negotiated through the organization itself.

3. Study details and method

As mentioned above, in our study we focus on the representational voices of diversity management in stock-exchange listed companies in eight different national EU contexts. We take the public English-written websites of organizations as our data of analysis. Criterion for our sample of nations was a geographical and cultural bandwidth on the one hand. We included countries – in terms of representation – from the European South (Spain and Portugal), East (Czech Republic and Poland), North (Sweden and Denmark) and West (Belgium and the Netherlands). On the other hand, we wanted to create a sample, which consists of members of different years of admission to the European Union – as the membership to the European Union works as a common ground particularly in terms of a shared legal fundament of anti-discrimination. In this sense, we included EU member states with different years of EU membership representing the various waves of EU enlargements: Belgium and the Netherlands

³ DOI 10.1007/s10551-015-2825-8

serve as examples for charter members, which founded the European Union – formally known as European Community – in 1958, Denmark is a national representative of the first enlargement in 1973, Spain and Portugal represent countries which formed the third enlargement in 1986, followed by Sweden, which joined the European in 1995 and finally the Czech Republic and Poland as EU member states since the year 2004 (European Union n.d.).

In each national case we focus on the range of national companies, which are included in the specific national share index. The following Table 1 presents the relevant indices and, thus, the numbers of companies included in our study[1]:

Country	Share Index	Number of companies included in our study	Source
Belgium	BEL 20	20	Euronext (n.d. c)
Denmark	OMX Copenhagen 20	18[2]	finanzen100.de (n.d.a)
Poland	WIG 30	30	GPW (n.d.).
Portugal	PSI 20	18	Euronext (n.d. a)
Spain	IBEX 35	34[3]	Bolsa de Madrid (n.d.)
Sweden	OMX Stockholm 30	29[4]	finanzen100.de (n.d.b)
The Czech Republic	PX-GLOB Index	13[5]	Prague Stock Exchange (n.d.)
The Netherlands	AEX	25	Euronext (n.d. b)

Table 1: Share Index Base

Altogether we included 187 European companies in our analysis.

In terms of the different diversity dimensions included we do not only focus on the ones protected by the European antidiscrimination-law (also gender, sexual orientation, age, religion and believes, ethnicity/race and disability). We also involve two dimensions, which are not legally protected and, thus, are harder to address from a structural perspective. The first dimension is social class – one of those diversity dimensions which has been neglected in diversity management discourse for quite a long time and has come on its agenda only recently. The second dimension which we want to shed light on is obesity and its representation (Bell/McLaughlin 2006) at the companies' websites. Altogether, eight diversity dimensions are in our focus of analysis in eight different EU countries.

In methodical terms, we have developed a matrix for analysis with six main categories which serve us to identify the different voices on DM:

1. Mission statement including corporate values, target groups, mission statements, corporate visions, corporate goals and code of conducts or ethics;
2. Arguments related to diversity management in terms of benefit arguments and cost arguments;
3. Terms regarding to diversity or diversity-policies or -strategies and in relation to one of our defined individual categories like it's nomination, definition and/or concrete measures;
4. Organisational structure like the composition of the top-management-structures, the workforce demographics, the in/existence of a diversity unit, department or manager and the in/existence of an internal quota system;
5. The structure and contents of each website in terms of in/direct access to diversity-contents, provided languages, the diversities and inequalities (re-)produced within pictures, photos and videos on the websites;
6. The website's accessibility like features to increase the contrast, to adjust the font size, the use of subtitles or sign language for films and videos, the possibility to use a screen reader.

With these criteria we will not only get a profound picture of representational voices of diversity management in the stock exchange listed companies but also see how the respective country contexts shapes these representational DM voices.

4. First impressions of our results

Our data analysis contains quantitative as well as qualitative aspects. In this first impression of our results we are able to provide an overview on the quantitative data of our study. The qualitative analysis of the data is in the making at the time of the proposal submission and will be presented at the EDI Conference 2017.

Related to our matrix of analysis, every company could reach up to 216 points in total by referring to DM in general or to one of our eight defined diversity dimensions in one or more of our matrix categories. As Table 2 shows, even the most elaborated national result do not nearly achieve the maximum points (see Table 2): Apart from the Czech Republic and Portuguese data, in which some companies do not refer to DM at all, all companies in Belgium, Denmark, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the Netherlands have voiced DM at their websites in on or the other way (the national points range starts with 0). Focussing diversity dimensions as a cultural economical issue reveals as internationally and border crossing viable on the first sight as our data show.

Country	Points range of organizations referring to DM	Number of companies included	Points-average	Ranking Position
Belgium	8-41	20	24,4	3.
Denmark	4-26	18	15,2	7.
Poland	6-43	30	17,9	5.
Portugal	0-40	18	16,5	6.
Spain	6-51	34	29,5	2.
Sweden	7-36	29	22	4.
The Czech Republic	0-27	13	9,2	8.
The Netherlands	12-56	25	33	1.

Table 2: First National Comparison Results

Considering existing DM literature, which shows that the organization of gender issues within organizations has a long history already (Bendl 2012), the fact is not surprising that the diversity dimension gender ranks first in all country contexts (see Table 3). The transnational similarities in terms of engagement with the diversity dimensions age, race/ethnicity and disability reveal that these dimensions seem to be of equal importance in the respective context, as they crowd on the positions 2, 3 and 4. The diversity dimension class scores on rank 5 followed by the dimension religion on rank 6. These data also show that voices on the diversity dimensions sexual orientation and obesity lag far behind in the companies' attention. Unless different national and cultural contexts there seems to exist an international and cross border

common ground in dealing with different diversity dimensions at least regarding the relevance each of our defined dimension takes in comparison to the others.

Country	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Age	Religion	Race/ Ethnicity	Disability	Social class	Obesity
Belgium	1	8	3	6	2	5	3	7
Denmark	1	6	2	5	3	4	8	7
Poland	1	8	2	6	5	3	4	7
Portugal	1	7	2	6	3	5	4	8
Spain	1	7	4	6	3	2	5	8
Sweden	1	7	2	5	3	4	6	8
The Czech Republic	1	7	4	8	5	2	3	6
The Netherlands	1	7	4	6	2	3	5	8
Average position	1	7,125	2,875	6	3,25	3,5	4,75	7,375

Table 3: Position-Ranking of different diversity dimensions focused by the companies

Table 1-3 present the quantitative overview of our data for a first orientation. However, of importance for the topic of the stream is the qualitative analysis of our data. In our comparative qualitative analysis for the EDI Conference 2017 we will present what plural cultural voices frame the DM strategy and the diversity dimensions within this European sample. As, according to the theoretical framework these representational voices have already incorporated the national cultural country-context, with this data analysis we will not only contribute to the instrumental, constructivist-critical and radical-critical discourse of DM but also highlight the relational and contextual aspects of these voices. With our qualitative data analysis of the companies in the different EU contexts we also hope to make a contribution to the cultural context-dependent qualitative understandings, respectively construction and reproduction of (in)justices and perceived fairness within DM discourse.

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- [1] Reporting Date for all the member companies within each of the indices is March 2016.
- [2] Actually by the time our data was collected, one company – the Nordea Bank, a company with it's registered office in Stockholm – was already included in the Swedish share index and therefore included in the Swedish analyse. Furthermore, the number of counted companies in the OMX Copenhagen 20 is 18 regarding our study, as there can be found two shares of Moller-Maersk within the index.
- [3] As only companies with headquarters in Spain were taken into consideration and ArcelorMittal has it's headquarter in Luxembourg, the company number for the Spanish sample reduced from 35 to 34 in total.
- [4] Only companies with headquarters in Sweden were taken into consideration.
- [5] Only companies with headquarters in the Czech Republic were taken into consideration.

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