**A multi-level exploration of politics of privilege**

This paper focuses on an understudied dimension of workforce diversity: the politics of privilege. In framing diversity, political actors at different layers of the society have unequal access to, and ownership of power and resources. Privileged institutional and individual actors hold greater power in legitimising assumptions and processes that benefit them in organisations and in the society at large. One result of this power imbalance is that privilege is naturalised whilst disadvantage, which is associated with the lack of privilege, is rendered invisible (Acker, 2006). The power holders define the rules, norms and values to maintain their position and keep disadvantaged individuals or groups in their place (Hurtado, 1989). In this paper, we will offer a framework through which privilege is conceptualised as a multi-actor, dynamic and negotiated process that is generated through politics making at multiple levels. Following a Bourdieuan approach, we define politics making as a process of struggle for gaining hegemony over ‘legitimate naming’. Particular attention will be devoted to conceptualising and operationalising the processes that are involved in creating, constructing and sustaining privilege which would enable us to look at politics of diversity and politics of non-diversity from the lens of power and privilege.

The framework that the paper will present combines two key Bourdieuan concepts, i.e. the field and different forms of capital, and Layder’s multilayered research map. Both Bourdieu and Layder offer fruitful theoretical ideas to highlight the political and negotiated nature of the social world, and the interplay between agency and structure. The Bourdieuan idea of (1998) field of power, which is defined as the space of relations between agents who hold different forms of capital, is particularly relevant when one wants to frame diversity as a political process (Bourdieu, 1998). In conceptualising the field of diversity as a field of power, our paper aims to understand the positions of institutional and individual actors in the social and organisational hierarchies. These positions are however always relative and relational as they are meaningful only within the rules and structures of the particular field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Furthermore, the amount of legitimacy that is accorded to a particular position in the field is not absolute but constructed in relation to other field positions. As Jenkins (2002:85) argues positions stand in the field in relationships of domination, subordination or equivalence (homology) to each other in terms of access to goods and resources which are described as capitals (Jenkins, 2002:85). Capital accumulation involves a political process whose outcome generates the privileged positions and actors that hold the power of legitimate naming and making of formal and informal rules of the field.

Politics of diversity, or the politics of privilege in the case of our paper, involves both structural and agentic forces. The structural forces include the field’s historically embedded inertia mechanisms, which enforce the status-quo in the matrix of field position vis-à-vis capital endowment. The agentic forces, on the other hand, are the outcome of the presence of multiple actors with different interests, stakes and agendas. These structural and agentic forces together generate the processes of politics of privilege (in access and ownership of capitals), which in turn, determine the realities of disadvantage, diversity and non-diversity at work. Therefore, in our interpretation, two fundamental properties of a Bourdieuan field are, (1) the relations and structures of power that are the function of the capital distribution, and (2) the politics of sustaining or overturning the existing power relations, or in other words the existing balance and distribution of capital across different field positions. In framing the structural and agentic forces that are in play in politics of privilege, we will adopt Layder’s (1993) research map which situates history, social and organisational context, interpersonal relations and individual influences in a single framework. This research map allows us to employ a multi-layered perspective which accounts for time and context. The paper will then elaborate the politics of privilege between institutional and individual actors across layers of interpersonal, organisational and societal contexts with a keen attention to the dimensions of power and legitimacy as the key constructs of privilege. Finally, we will discuss the outcomes of the politics of privilege for diversity or non-diversity at work.

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