**Diversity Management Practices and Ethnic Minorities’ Well-Being: An Explorative Study**

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Stream 6: Operationalizing Diversity Management in Organizations around the Globe, Managing the Organization, Strategy and Culture of Difference to achieve genuine outcomes

Chaired by Erica French and Glenda Strachan

**Abstract**

This explorative study aims to investigate organizational practices deployed to manage diversity and their effects on ethnic minority employees’ well-being. Drawing on a qualitative, multiple-case study in three small and medium enterprises (SMEs), we inductively identify practices that manage diversity by fundamentally shaping the organizational culture and work system. We then show how they foster specific dimensions of ethnic minority employees’ well-being yet curbing other ones. The study contributes to the existing literature by documenting diversity management (DM) practices that are more mainstreamed than ‘classical’ DM practices (i.e. bias-screened HR practices, diversity training, networking and mentoring programs). It further shows that, although specific combinations of such practices effectively manage diversity, they present trade-offs for their well-being.

**Key words**: diversity management practices – ethnic minority employees – SMEs – work system– organizational culture – well-being

**Diversity Management Practices and Ethnic Minorities’ Well-Being:**

**An Explorative Study**

***Introduction***

Ethnically diverse organizations face the difficult task of creating organizational contexts in which their employees experience well-being. Personnel’s well-being is necessary for organizational functioning and performance, as it enhances job performance, lower absenteeism, reduced turnover intentions, and more discretionary work behaviors (for a review, see Warr, 1999). However, a substantial body of literature has consistently found a negative relation between employees’ ethnic minority status and their well-being ([Sparks, Faragher, and Cooper, 2001](#_ENREF_5)).

Some studies have examined the relationship between the share of ethnic minorities and their well-being. Ethnic minorities who are a numerical rarity at work have been found to experience lower well-being, higher depression, anxiety and stress (De Vries and Pettigrew, 1998; Jackson, Thoits, and Taylor, 1995; Reskin, McBrier, and Kmec, 1999). Minority employees working among a large proportion of co-ethnics might experience higher well-being (Brass, 1985; Mehra, Kilduff, and Brass, 1998; Ibarra, 1995), yet this is not always the case (Enchautegui-de-Jesús, Hughes, Johnston, and Oh, 2006; Forman, 2003). Other studies have addressed the causes of ethnic minorities’ lower well-being, including stereotyping (Konrad, Winter and Gutek, 1992), perceived discrimination (Ryff, Keyes, and Hughes, 2003), bullying related to their race/ethnicity (Fox and Stallworth, 2005), and perceived segmentation in jobs (Forman, 2003). Detrimental effects might also result from more subtle forms of discrimination and racism (Deitch et al., 2003), such as minorities’ exclusion from professional and informal networks (Ibarra, 1995; Mor-Barak and Levin, 2002), treatment as outsiders, or reinforcing their lower status in everyday interaction (Van Laer and Janssens, 2011).

Despite this persuasive evidence, not much is today known on the relation between DM practices and ethnic minority employees’ well-being. The effects on minorities’ well-being of DM practices commonly advanced in the scientific and practitioner literature – i.e. bias-screened HR procedures, diversity training, networking and mentoring programs – have rarely been studied (e.g. Ragins and Cotton, 1999). Not only, there is even indirect evidence that such practices might thwart minorities’ well-being, as they might reinforce stereotyping and trigger majority employees’ ‘backlash’ (Bond and Pyle, 1988; Linnehan and Konrad, 1999; Kidder, Lankau, Chrobot-Mason, Mollica and Friedman, 2004). Therefore, explorative research is warranted on novel DM practices and their effects on ethnic minorities’ experiences of well-being.

This qualitative multiple-case study extends existing DM literature by examining ethnic minority employees’ experiences of well-being and relating such experiences to the organizational practices deployed by the organization to manage diversity. Empirically, we investigate three ethnically diverse Belgian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) – a gas stations company, a cleaning company and a floriculture company. SMEs are suitable to investigate DM because, as they have relatively limited financial resources (Cardon and Stevens, 2004; Marlow, 2002), they are less likely than bigger firms to implement DM solely for legal compliance or reputation building (cf. Edelman, 1992). This is particularly true for SMEs in Belgium, as this country lacks a tradition of strong equal opportunities/affirmative action legislation (own reference).

From the case analysis, we inductively identified two main types of practices used to address diversity: practices creating a specific organizational culture and practices shaping the work system. Each organization used a distinct combination of these two types of practices, with specific effects on ethnic minority employees’ well-being. In the discussion, we reflect on the nature of the identified practices in the light of the existing literature and show their mixed effects on well-being. We conclude with the limitations of our study and avenues for future research.

***Methodology***

Explorative multiple-case studies are suitable to address how and why questions in a ‘real-life’ research settings (Yin, 2009) and to build theory from empirical data through the identification of converging and diverging patterns within and across cases (Eisenhardt, 1989).

*The study*

The three case studies were conducted within a larger government-funded research project on DM practices in Belgian SMEs – companies with maximum 250 employees. SMEs are important as they employ 69.8 percent of European employees (European Commission, 2003). We specifically selected companies with a substantial share of ethnic minority employees – 29% to 44% of the total personnel – as such companies are ‘extreme cases’, particularly likely to implement DM practices (cf. Eisenhardt, 1989).

*Data sources*

The main data source are 46 semi-structured interviews conducted by the first author with the owner(s), managers, supervisors and employees in various jobs and with both ethnic majority and minority backgrounds (see Table 1). In each company, between 12% and 21% of the total personnel was interviewed. Respondents were autonomously selected from a list of people with specific socio-demographic profiles and in different jobs provided by a contact person.

Insert Table 1 about here

The questionnaires consisted of open-ended questions on their own background, experience of working in the company, interpersonal relations, human resource management (HRM) and diversity. In interviewing ethnic minority employees, particular attention was paid to formulating questions in a simple, concrete language, as many would not be speaking in their mother tongue. Interviews took place at the workplace during working hours, lasted between one and two hours, and were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. To complement the interview data and triangulate it (Myers, 2008; Yin, 2009), in each company we further collected documents on the HRM and DM policies, job vacancy ads, the website, the by-laws, newspaper articles, etc. Finally, unstructured observations during company visits were noted in a logbook and used to further support the data interpretation.

*Data analysis*

The data analysis occurred in steps, each of which involved thorough discussions between the authors ensuring inter-researcher reliability, enhancing the quality of the analysis. We first reconstructed each case to get a sense of the company, its history and vision on diversity. We then analyzed ethnic minority and majority employees’ accounts of their well-being experiences. To do so, we deployed Ryff’s (1989) six dimensions of well-being – self-acceptance, positive relations with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life and personal growth – as sensitizing concepts (Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

Different from definitive concepts, sensitizing concepts give general guidance in approaching empirical instances (Blumer, 1954), offering starting points for building analysis, “ways of seeing, organizing, and understanding experience” (Charmaz, 2003: 259).

In each company, ethnic minorities’ accounts were rather consistent, often pointing to the same dimensions, either positively or negatively. For parsimony, we only included in the findings those dimensions mentioned by more than one respondent. Although our focus was on ethnic minorities’ well-being, we compared ethnic minority and majority employees’ accounts to exclude the possibility of opposing effects of DM practices on the two groups. We found little discrepancy between them, on the contrary, accounts largely converged. The cross-case comparison showed on the contrary distinct experiences of well-being in each company, each combining different dimensions.

In a third step, we inductively identified organizational practices mentioned by interviewees as relevant to managing an ethnically diverse workforce or, more generally, as influencing minority and majority employees’ experiences. Following Kostova and Roth, we considered practices any ‘organization’s routine use of knowledge for conducting a particular function that has evolved over time under the influence of the organization’s history, people, interests, and actions’ (2002: 216). From the within- and cross-case analysis, we could identify two types of practices: 1) practices shaping the work system and ‘fitting’ individuals into it –i.e. job design, the degree of interdependence between employees, training policies and work-life balance arrangements –, and 2) practices shaping the organizational culture, which created and enforced norms and values, the perception of and interaction with one another, approaches to decision making and problem solving (Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, and Neale, 1998). Within each case, we could triangulate nearly all identified practices across types of interviewees and data sources, and excluded from the analysis those we could not verify.

In a fourth and final step, we reconstructed the relation between the well-being dimensions in ethnic minorities’ accounts and the company’s practices. We then compared the cases to check for similarities and differences. An overview of the overall results is presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

***Findings***

*The gas stations company: DM though cultural integration and work interdependence*

Founded in 1988 by two brothers of Italian origins, the gas stations company started with exploiting one gas station for a multinational gasoline supplier and grew to a middle-sized company. The shops offer, next to a wide range of products such as food, drinks, magazines and car supplies, also car rental and carwash. In every shop there is also a food corner serving sandwiches, pizza’s and drinks, and a coffee bar. All are open 24/7 every day of the year. The company includes two general managers (both ethnic minorities), 6 staff personnel in the main office (1 ethnic minority), 19 shop managers running the gas stations (13 ethnic minorities), and 132 employees in the shops (60 ethnic minorities). Fourty-four percent of the personnel has a foreign background from Morocco, Turkey, Italy, and other European Union and eastern European countries. Jobs are not segregated: both ethnic minority and majority employees work as cashiers and in the food corners. The company considers personnel diversity an asset to serve its ethnically diverse customers.

In their accounts, minority employees often expressed a sense of well-being by referring to the extremely positive relations with co-workers, supervisors and management. They mentioned being treated in a fair, non-discriminatory way, mutual attention for each others’ professional and private concerns, and working together on an equal footing regardless of one’s position. An employee of Philippine origin told us:

*“[This company] is yeah, so good for me. […] there here is a nice atmosphere, actually. Yeah, it’s different, I feel different. I’m accepted and I’m a non-native speaker. You’re part of the family, so to speak. You know… that feeling, and yes, that’s good.”*

Various interviewees used the metaphor of the family, describing manifestations of solidarity beyond mere professional relations:

*“[The general managers] are a sort of father figure for their personnel. Yeah, that also gives you a warmer feeling, huh. For example, if you told the foreman: ‘I’ve got financial problems, can you lend me some money’? They won’t do that [in another company], huh. […] That bond, it’s close, it’s warmer, it’s like a family.”(employee of Turkish origin)*

In some cases, respondents recounted opportunities for personal growth in the company. A shop manager with Turkish background told us:

*“In 2006 they suggested that I become a shop manager. And then I said: ‘No, I can’t see myself doing that’. Because at that time I couldn’t rely on myself one hundred percent. So then I continued working. After a year, they told me I would be capable of doing this. Then I felt more ready, I took the challenge and now I’ve been doing this for three years.”*

Yet at the same time, interviewees experienced a strong social pressure to always be available and having little autonomy in such a very cohesive work environment:

*“I always say to them that they can call me first to stand in. So when someone calls in sick, yeah, there is much extra pressure for me to stand in. When at that moment I’m somewhere visiting, then I say: ‘Sorry, I need to go to work’. Then I feel obliged to come to work.” (employee of Turkish origin)*

Along the same lines, others mentioned feeling exhausted or missing out on their social and family life because they were constantly being scheduled extra work shifts to stand in for absent colleagues or received all late night work shifts. These accounts indicate limited employees’ autonomy, rendering them highly reliant on other company members for approval.

These experiences of well-being axed on positive relations with others and opportunities of personal growth yet a low sense of autonomy were fostered by the unique combination of practices we found at the gas stations company, which created an integrative organizational culture and organized work interdependently to make maximal use of skill complementarities.

Various practices encouraged the integration of all employees in a strong company culture and supporting informal relations among employees and between them and managers. They included a non-hierarchical management style showing personal commitment towards employees, social activities supporting informal integration of all employees (i.e. parties, drinks and teambuilding activities), the enforcement of anti-discriminatory norms towards employees and customers, and providing food adapted to religious and non-religious requirements and customers.

A worker of Turkish origins stated:

*“[Shop managers] pay very much attention to [discrimination]. Also towards the customers. If they behave inappropriately or reprimand the personnel, then the manager will address them ‘You’d better take it down a peg or two, this is my staff!’.”*

This highly integrative organizational culture was anchored onto a highly interdependent organization of work. Employees were assigned to work teams to complement each other’s competencies. For instance, personnel were allocated so that individual employees with specific lower language knowledge or disability, could be helped by their colleagues. This policy enabled the company to flexibly deploy personnel in multiple jobs, a common way to deal with small and irregular work volume in SMEs (Cardon and Stevens, 2004; Marlow, 1997). A shop manager of Turkish origin explained:

*“For example, I’ve got two or three people for maintenance who also work as a second cashier at peak times. These people have limitations […] For example, there’s somebody who has a short memory and who is short-sighted, you name it. Usually I schedule him with a capable person he can always fall back on whenever he has a tough time.”*

Yet the focus was not solely on individuals’ lack of competencies but also on additional ones. A general manager explained to us:

*“[Ethnic minority employees] can solve many things within these cultures. Both positive and negative situations. I’m thinking about conflicts sometimes, about aggression and racism. […] So, for example, on a Saturday or Sunday morning, when you pass this station, many young people are returning from a night out. If you have a number of employees with the same ethnic background as those youngsters, then there is little aggression and few fights.”*

The complementary, flexible allocation of personnel in the work system was supported by a well-developed training policy ensuring that individuals learned up to their potential. The company offered language and technical training as well as on-the-job training for new recruits. An employee of Uzbekistan origin confirmed this:

*“Sometimes you very much get assessed on the job interview, and on which answers you give. And imagine if I couldn’t find the right words just at that moment and would be assessed based on that. […] And they said: ‘Just come and try, we’ll see’.”*

Furthermore, tailor-made career guidance enabled capable and motivated individuals to grow into a managerial job at their own pace, offering them maximal professional chances.

Taken together, the practices of cultural integration and work interdependence deployed by the gas stations company to manage diversity appeared to foster ethnic minority employees’ well-being in terms of positive relations with others and personal growth at the expense of their autonomy. These findings echo the existing research on the positive relationship between strong, diversity-friendly organizational cultures (Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, and Neale, 1998; Findler, Wind and Mor-Barak, 2007; McMillan-Capehart, 2005), developmental HR approaches arrangements (own reference), and cooperative work arrangements (Allport, 1954) on minority employees’ well-being. However, they also nuance this literature by pointing to the trade-off such organizational contexts present in terms of limiting (ethnic minority) employees’ experience of autonomy, due to the strong normative control exerted by the organizational culture and by peers (cf. Ikuko, 2002; O’Reilly and Chatman, 1996; Zanoni and Janssens, 2007), negatively affecting their well-being.

*The cleaning services company: Diversity management through cultural differentiation and work separation*

The cleaning services company is a middle-sized family company founded in 1976. Today owned by one of the founder’s sons and his wife, it offers regular cleaning services and window cleaning as well as specialized services for polishing natural stone floors and aluminum joineries. The business is run with a focus on establishing long-term cleaning contracts with clients – mainly SMEs, non-profit organizations and private homes. The company includes the general managers (both Belgian majority); 3 middle-managers in managerial support and supervisory functions (Belgian majority); and 62 workers (25 ethnic minorities). Thirty-seven percent of the employees are ethnic minorities with backgrounds from Turkey (both first and second-generation), Greece, Poland, Thailand and several African countries (mostly first-generation migrants). All are employed in cleaning jobs. The company had a non-discriminatory vision on diversity, stressing workers’ ability to meet the company’s expectations independent of their ethnic background.

In the interviews with us, many ethnic minority employees expressed feeling well at work by referring to a strong autonomy and ownership of their jobs. The following excerpts are illustrative:

*“I’m used to this. And I’ve got my own, uhm… the ground floor and first flour are mine. And that makes me feel stronger. They’re mine and they need to stay clean.” (employee of Polish origin)*

*“Sometimes, for example, here I do the two classrooms and then I go down here. But when I come to school and the children are still there, then I have to change and maybe start in the classrooms and then come back here. And that's my own decision. So, nobody tells me: ‘you must start here, or you must be there’. (employee of Cameroon origin)*

At the same time, respondents stressed environmental mastery over their work by talking about their ability to arrange work hours. For instance, an employee with an Algerian background recounted:

*“So last Tuesday was the Feast of Sacrifice. So I said to [middle-manager]: ‘I won’t come to work. Because everyone is at home, I’m not coming to work’. And [middle-manager] understood. […]And those hours I divided them over the other days of the week. I worked an hour extra every day, so no problem.”*

Others mentioned being able to adapt their working hours to important family transitions, such as a newborn or children starting to go to school, or to combine work and a Dutch language course.

Yet respondents were not entirely positive. Some mentioned negative aspects, such as a lack of opportunities to develop relationships with co-workers and management’s inattentive style:

*“I once asked [my supervisor]:‘Why is that they never even give chocolate or a card for Christmas or… (laughs)?’ […] I did business administration, and it said if your worker is doing well, you have to send a card to show appreciation, or to compliment, but they don’t do that. No (laughs). (employee of Cameroon origin)*

Along the same lines, other respondents, including majority ones, told us they never saw the general managers, or that management did not even contact them when they were on a long sick leave due to an occupational injury. Negative feelings were sometimes attenuated by the positive relation to their direct supervisor and, in some cases, with the client’s personnel.

Ethnic minorities’ experiences of well-being highlighting autonomy and environmental mastery yet also a lack of opportunity to develop positive relations with others appeared to be stimulated by the unique combination of practices creating an organizational culture of individually negotiated support and practices organizing work by strictly separating individual workers.

The cleaning services company implemented a number of practices discouraging interaction among cleaners and between them and general management. Cleaners hardly ever came to the company premises, job coaching was outsourced, and no social activity was organized. Employees only interacted on a regular basis with their supervisor, who had an informal, supportive management style:

*“I’ve got [the supervisor’s] telephone number. When I need something, I call him, he always helps me. When my husband was ill and had to go through surgery, he helped me to go on leave.” (employee of Algerian origin)*

This differentiated, one-to-one culture was enabled by an organization of work separating individual cleaners by assigning them to different work sites or parts of them (i.e. different floors). This specific work organization enhanced individuals’ sense of ownership and responsibility for their work and enabled the company to tailor support and work schedules to individuals’ competencies and needs. For instance, management provided visual instructions to cleaners with limited language knowledge to ensure that they understood their jobs. Or the supervisor provided extra support to find transportation to the cleaning site or to facilitate the communication with the client:

*“When employees are just starting to learn Dutch and they only speak English, I tell the customer to ask to contact me whenever there’s a problem. I also go on site and double check if the cleaning lady has understood everything that needs to be done.”*

The company was also extremely flexible in function of individuals’ personal and cultural needs:

*“When there are holidays for certain religions, then they often take up leave days, or something like that. […] Or they work a few hours more each day and divide these over the other days. And I don’t bother about that.”(supervisor with Belgian background)*

Special requests were however negotiated on an individual basis, based on employees’ own commitment and flexibility towards the company rather than on general rules. The general manager explained:

*“You give and you take. To somebody who works at its best, you easily grant favors which are usually not given, arrangements which are not on paper. But if someone brings in a two-week sick leave certificate five times a year and that person asks to go to Turkey for three months during the summer holidays, then uhm… then we don’t allow it. […] If people work on sites with others, then I prefer not to let them [to take longer holiday leave]. Because then you favor someone over someone else, and then you get tensions […]. If people work on sites alone, it’s much easier. You can replace them. And then you don’t have to avoid conflicts.”*

Interestingly, the company had a general explicit policy of keeping cleaners’ workload within acceptable limits, in order to foster long-term employment relations and increase service quality:

*“If you really want to go under the market price, then you need to reduce working hours […]. If you give them too much work, this implies they will much easier quit, that they will go elsewhere to find a job. This is because the work rhythm gets too high, they get injuries, more stress… We want to keep working hours reasonable to get the work done.”(general manager)*

Taken together, cultural differentiation and work separation at the cleaning services company seemed to foster ethnic minority employees’ well-being in terms of autonomy and environmental mastery yet at the expense of positive relations with others. Work separation echoes pre-industrial, informal, one-to-one employment relations (cf. Thompson, 1967), eliminating the possibility not only of (inter-cultural) conflict but also of social relations between employees and limiting those with management to a minimum. The ‘sustainable workload’ approach (under pressure of shortage on the labor market) and the informal line management style, however, do appear to attenuate its negative effects on employees’ well-being.

*The floriculture company: Diversity management through cultural non-discrimination and work standardization*

Founded in the 1980’s, the floriculture company grew from a small family business to a middle-sized company. The company grows different sorts of houseplants, and breeds varieties of one specific ornamental plant. The company is structured as follows: a board of four directors among whom the company founder (all Belgian majority); a general manager (1, Belgian majority); 6 middle-managers (all Belgian majority); 19 production administrators and accounting clerks (all Belgian majority); 3 supervisors (all Belgian majority); and 90 workers (32 ethnic minorities). Twenty-nine percent of the 112 employees has a foreign background, most of them from Turkey, Bulgaria, former Yugoslavia, and several African and Asian countries. The company is vertically segregated along ethnicity, as minorities were all in operative jobs in the company’s laboratory and in the greenhouse. The company had a non-discriminatory vision on diversity, stressing the need to find personnel and the irrelevance of ethnicity.

In their accounts, minorities stressed above all feeling positively about being able to flexibly combine their work with their private life. Workers mentioned for instance being able to change their work schedule along with transitions in their life and unforeseen circumstances, such as caring for a family member falling ill or needs deriving from their foreign background. An employee of Turkish origin told us:

*“On Wednesdays I usually don’t work. My kids are at home then, and they don’t like being alone. […] And sometimes on Wednesdays I work overtime, to be able to go on holiday. So I work a little more for a few weeks. Because Turkey is so far away huh, a month would be too little to visit my family over there.”*

At the same time, many ethnic minority respondents mentioned feeling exceedingly controlled in their jobs:

*“The negative thing I feel is uhm, I would say [a lack of] trust. They don’t trust us. […] There should be more autonomy. But here they just want to control you. Even after ten years they have to control you.” (employee of Nigerian origin)*

Such feeling was shared by their majority colleagues.

Although nobody mentioned conflicts, minority interviewees described inter-group relations as rather superficial. The following quote is revealing:

*“Actually, I would have contacts with everybody, but not everybody is as open to have contacts with others. Mostly with the Belgians, yeah, having contact is a little difficult. […] I don’t know why, I think they really distinguish between the foreigners and the Belgians. I saw it in the cafeteria. The Turkish sit together. And us, we don’t belong here.” (employee of Mexican origin)*

Majority respondents confirmed this, and when in between interviews the first author shared lunch breaks with the workers, s/he noticed that majority and minority workers sat at separate tables and had minimal contact.

These accounts portray experiences of well-being with high environmental mastery through work-life balance but low autonomy in one’s job and weak relations between minority and majority employees. Such experiences were fostered by a unique set of practices deployed by the floriculture company to manage its diverse personnel through a culture of non-discrimination and a work system centered on standardized jobs.

A number of practices at the floriculture company created a non-discriminatory culture. The company enforced anti-discriminatory norms, offered a menu adapted to religious and non-religious food requirements, and ensured that social activities were accessible to employees with childcare responsibilities. Moreover, managers adapted communication to employees’ language knowledge:

*“If we need to discuss administrative matters with them, we ask another employee [who can translate] to clarify what we want to explain to our employees, so that they certainly understand. […] But of course, there are also a few Asians here, and they speak English. So then eventually, you start talking in English.” (manager with Belgian background)*

Although these practices effectively avoided conflict between ethnic groups, they appeared inadequate to foster positive majority-minority relations among co-workers as well as between workers and management.

This organizational culture was anchored onto a work system based on independent, standardized jobs under strict surveillance, enabling the company to employ low-skill workers and easily replace them at different stages of the plant breeding:

*“Everyone gets trained so they can be deployed everywhere. These tasks are actually not that difficult. So when everybody can be deployed everywhere, they’re also easily replaceable. For example, we’re now making up work schedules for the holidays […], then you can much easier shift people if they’re able to do all tasks.” (manager with Belgian background)*

Conversely, this allowed workers themselves to flexibly arrange their work schedule.

Complementary practices ensured that workers with limited skills could optimally function in the work process. For instance, minority workers with a limited knowledge of Dutch were put next to other minority workers who could translate work instructions to them:

*“There are different tasks who need to be done in pairs. And then we look at who we schedule together. If there’s someone who lacks language skills, who can’t properly fill in the forms… then it becomes perfectly possible just by working together with someone else.” (supervisor with Belgian background)*

In-sourced language coaches occasionally also provided on-the-job language training. To stimulate employees’ personal development, the floriculture company offered a wide range of trainings, including floriculture training but also IT and cross-cultural training. The general manager explained:

*“I think that at least half of our workers have participated in one of the IT courses we offer. There are only very few workers in our company who really need IT for their work, four I think. They have taken these trainings, but for the others it’s more about developing general knowledge.”*

The broad training policy was seen by the HR manager as a way to foster social cohesion among workers. Yet the general manager expressed doubts about its effectiveness to this end:

*“Also [the training on] working together with people from different cultures, mostly minority workers register for this. This might seem logic at first sight, but actually it isn’t. It should rather be the Belgian workers who follow the training (laughs).”*

Taken together, the practices implemented at the floriculture company created a non-discriminatory culture and standardized work, allowing minority employees’ environmental mastery yet curbing their autonomy and not supporting positive inter-group relations. High standardization – the strong disciplining of people’s time-space paths to be the same as one another’ (Glennie and Thrift, 1996) – maximized workers’ substitutability enabling flexible work-life arrangements. Yet, together with high surveillance, it decreased individuals’ sense of autonomy.

***Discussion***

This explorative multiple-case study of Belgian SMEs employing an ethnically diverse personnel allowed us to analyze in-depth how specific sets of DM practices relate to minority employees’ experiences of well-being. We found two main types of organizational practices deployed by the companies to manage diversity: practices shaping specific organizational cultures and practices shaping work systems. Through intra- and cross-case analysis, we could reconstruct unique combinations of these two types of practices shaping distinct ethnic minority employees’ experiences of well-being, including both positive and negative dimensions (cf. Ryff’s, 1989). Hereunder, we first discuss the identified organizational practices stressing their distinguishing features vis-à-vis practices commonly studied in the DM literature. We then reflect on our findings on ethnic minorities’ well-being in the light of such practices. We conclude with the limitations of our study and future research lines.

The companies included in this study all managed diversity by means of various related practices which shaped key organizational processes (cf. Roberson, 2006). Both the multiplicity of these practices and their mainstreamed nature stand in stark contrast with the focus of the existing DM literature on single, designated HR practices. Whereas the ‘classical’ DM practices attempt to correct individuals’ cognitions and behaviors negatively affecting minorities in the workplace, the practices we found fundamentally organize the workplace in ways that are compatible with diversity (cf. Glastra, Meerman, Schedler, and de Vries, 2000; Scott, Heathcote, and Gruman, 2011; own reference), mainstreaming it into key organizational processes. In particular, the practices which emerged from our cases created specific combinations of 1) an organizational culture ensuring – at the very least – the effective non-discrimination of ethnic minorities and 2) a work system ensuring a dynamic fit between the work processes and diverse individuals’ competencies, expectations and needs.

The idea that organizational cultures are important to create diversity-friendly organizations is well established. Some scholars have stressed that organizational cultures should allow employees to bring their entire set of identities into the workplace rather than requiring them to assimilate to majority norms (own reference; Cox, 1993; Hornsey and Hogg, 2000; Linnehan and Konrad, 1999; Shore et al., 2011). Others have rather argued that specific types of organizational cultures, namely collectively oriented ones, foster positive outcomes in diverse organizations both at the individual and team levels (Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, and Neale, 1998; McMillan-Capehart, 2005). Our three organizations are however characterized by quite distinct organizational cultures, only sharing a basic non-discriminatory character. Possibly, such an organizational culture represents a minimal condition for managing diversity, yet diversity-friendly organizational cultures might further be quite heterogeneous, ranging from encompassing, strong cultures – as in the gas stations company – to minimalistic, ‘transactional’ ones – as in the cleaning company – with distinct effects on minorities’ well-being.

A second important type of practices in our cases organized work compatibly with and/or valorizing the competencies of a diverse personnel and, conversely, enhancing this latter’s competencies and/or compensating for their lack thereof. Altogether, these practices attempt to dynamically enhance the fit between personnel and work system in a dynamic way. The importance of the fit between individual workers’ needs and work systems to enhance well-being and performance is not new (cf. Mumford 1983; 1991), although it has infrequently been applied to diversity (Powell, 1998; Kalleberg, 2008). More generally, diversity scholars have pointed to the need to organize work in ways that are better suitable to make the best of the greater heterogeneity of competencies, expectations and needs deriving from an ever more diverse workforce (Zanoni and Janssens, 2007; own reference). The three organizations we studied achieved this through quite different work system configurations all attempting to enhance the fit.

The identified mainstreamed practices fundamentally adapt organizational structures and processes to a diverse personnel, reducing the effort ethnic minority employees’ generally have to make – by virtue of their minority status – to function as expected in the workplace. This might explain why the accounts of well-being of respondents belonging to majority and minority groups come to converge, in se a sign of structural integration of minorities (cf. Cox, 1991). The simultaneous intra-case convergence and across-case divergence of well-being of majority and minority employees suggests that well-being experiences reflected more the tradeoffs inherent to the companies’ specific combinations of cultures and work systems than employees’ own ethnic background. These results prompt us to consider organizational factors to explain minorities’ well-being other than majority-minority relations in work groups (Reskin, et al., 1999.) and minorities’ relative number in organizations (Jackson, Thoits, and Taylor, 1995; Forman, 2003; Enchautegui-de-Jesús, Hughes, Johnston, and Oh, 2006), although we do not exclude that these aspects might play a role.

The nuanced picture of well-being we could draw based on Ryff’s (1989) six dimensions points to the need to differentiate between different dimensions of well-being in the workplace not only for majority employees (cf. de Jonge and Schaufeli, 1998) but also to fully capture ethnic minorities’ experiences. Specifically, the mixed relationship between specific combinations of organizational culture and work system and the dimensions of minorities’ well-being calls into question the concept of ‘best DM practices’ (Cox, 1994), illuminating the tradeoffs inherent to any set of practices.

*Limitations and future research*

Our multiple-case research design enabled us to generate new theoretical insights (Eisenhardt, 1989) from the rich empirical data capturing key features of the organizational context (Myers, 2008). The downside of this approach is that its results are not statistically generalizable. Moreover, our research design excludes assessing the effects of single DM practices on minority employees’ well-being, something that further research might also want to investigate.

Limitations of this study are also related to our company sample. First, the identified practices might possibly be difficult to extrapolate to larger organizations with more complex organizational structures. SMEs are known for their more centralized decision-making on HR issues in the person of the owner-manager (Cardon and Stevens, 2004; Hornsby and Kuratko, 2003), and the use of informal practices to substitute for or complement formal ones (Bacon and Hoque, 2005; Harney and Dundon, 2006). Larger organizations might possibly face greater challenges to implement similar practices, as personnel is managed more through formal structures and practices yet the implementation of these latter across more hierarchical levels is likely to be less consistent. Further research could evaluate the role of formality and informality of DM practices for their effectiveness.

Second, our selection criteria lead to a sample of companies with (ethnic minority) employees mainly in low-skill jobs, which is as a specific type of company, although a common one in the strongly ethno-stratified labor market in Belgium (Tielens, 2005; Verhoeven, 2000). Although more research on the well-being of employees in more subordinate positions is needed (Sparks et al., 2001), we should be aware of limited generalizability to companies employing minorities in higher ranks. Further research could address well-being of minorities in other types of jobs.

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**Table 1: Overview of the interviewees**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Gender** | **Ethnicity** | **Function** |
| **Gas stations company** | | | |
| Interview 1 | Male | Italy | General manager |
| Interview 2 | Female | Belgium | Shop manager |
| Interview 3 | Male | Turkey | Shop manager |
| Interview 4 | Male | Belgium | Shop manager |
| Interview 5 | Female | Belgium | Shop employee |
| Interview 6 | Female | Belgium | Shop employee |
| Interview 7 | Female | Belgium | Shop employee |
| Interview 8 | Male | Belgium | Shop employee |
| Interview 9 | Male | Turkey | Shop manager |
| Interview 10 | Female | The Philippines | Staff employee |
| Interview 11 | Female | Turkey | Shop employee |
| Interview 12 | Female | Italy | Shop employee |
| Interview 13 | Female | Greece | Shop employee |
| Interview 14 | Female | Turkey | Shop employee |
| Interview 15 | Female | Uzbekistan | Shop employee |
| Interview 16 | Female | Belgium | Shop employee |
| Interview 17 | Male | Italy | General manager |

Table 1 *(continued)*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | | **Gender** | | **Ethnicity** | **Function** |
| **Cleaning services company** | | | | | |
| Interview 1 | Male | | Belgium | | General manager |
| Interview 2 | Male | | Belgium | | Middle-manager |
| Interview 3 | Female | | Algeria | | Worker |
| Interview 4 | Female | | Belgium | | Worker |
| Interview 5 | Female | | Cameroon | | Worker |
| Interview 6 | Female | | Nigeria | | Worker |
| Interview 7 | Female | | Belgium | | Worker |
| Interview 8 | Male | | Greece | | Worker |
| Interview 9 | Female | | Belgium | | Worker |
| Interview 10 | Female | | Poland | | Worker |
| Interview 11 | Male | | Belgium | | Middle-manager |
| Interview 12 | Male | | Belgium | | Middle-manager |
| Interview 13 | Male | | Belgium | | Worker |
| Interview 14 | Male | | Belgium | | Worker |
|  |  | |  | |  |

Table 1 *(continued)*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Gender** | **Ethnicity** | **Function** |
| **Floriculture company** |  |  |  |
| Interview 1 | Female | Belgium | Middle-manager |
| Interview 2 | Female | Turkey | Worker |
| Interview 3 | Female | The Netherlands | Worker |
| Interview 4 | Female | Belgium | Worker |
| Interview 5 | Female | Nigeria | Worker |
| Interview 6 | Female | Belgium | Supervisor |
| Interview 7 | Female | Cuba | Worker |
| Interview 8 | Male | Belgium | Director |
| Interview 9 | Female | Belgium | Worker |
| Interview 10 | Female | The Philippines | Worker |
| Interview 11 | Female | Belgium | Worker |
| Interview 12 | Male | Nigeria | Worker |
| Interview 13 | Female | Mexico | Worker |
| Interview 14 | Female | Turkey | Worker |
| Interview 15 | Male | Belgium | General manager |

**Table 2: Ryff’s (1989) six dimensions of well-being**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Dimension** | **Description** |
| **Self-acceptance** | Positive attitudes toward oneself. |
| **Positive relations with others** | Ability to love, having strong feelings of empathy and affection for all human beings and the capacity of love, deep friendship, and identification with others. |
| **Autonomy** | Self-determination and the regulation of behavior from within, resistance to enculturation and an internal locus of evaluation, whereby one does not look to others for approval, but evaluates oneself by personal standards; deliverance from convention, in which the person no longer clings to the collective fears, beliefs, and laws of the masses. |
| **Environmental mastery** | Ability to choose or create environments suitable to one’s psychic conditions, participation in activity outside of the self and the ability to advance in the world and change it creatively through physical or mental activities. |
| **Purpose in life** | Beliefs that give one the feeling there is purpose in and meaning to life, a sense of directedness and intentionality, such as being productive and creative. |
| **Personal growth** | Ability to continue to develop one’s potential, to grow and expand as a person, the need to actualize oneself and realize one’s potentialities, openness to experience. |

**Table 3: Overview of the findings**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Gas stations company** | **Cleaning services company** | **Floriculture company** |
| **Dimensions of well-being** | Positive relations with others (++)  Personal growth (+)  Autonomy (-) | Autonomy (+)  Environmental mastery (++)  Positive relations with others (--) | Environmental mastery (+)  Positive relations with others (+/-)  Autonomy (-) |
| **Organizational culture** | Integration:   * Non-hierarchical management style showing personal commitment * Social activities supporting informal integration of all employees * Enforcement of anti-discriminatory norms towards employees and customers * Menu adapted to religious and non-religious food requirements of diverse personnel and customers | Differentiation:   * Supervisor’s informal, supportive management style * Work adaptations for private and cultural needs are negotiated on a one-to-one basis between supervisor and individual employees * Job guidance for new minority employees outsourced to external coaches | Non-discrimination:   * Management style adapted to employees with limited language skills * Social activities adapted to employees’ childcare responsibilities * Enforcement of anti-discriminatory norms towards employees * Menu adapted to religious and non-religious food requirements of diverse personnel |
| **Work system** | Interdependence:   * Personnel deployment adapted to minorities’ additional or lacking language skills * Personnel deployment adapted to minorities’ additional cultural skills * Personnel deployment adapted to low ability workers * Flexible deployment of personnel in various jobs * Flexible arrangements of shift work among workers * On-the-job training for new employees and managers * Training to enhance occupation-specific skills * Training to enhance minorities’ language skills * Custom training and career guidance for employees with managerial aspirations | Separation:   * Personnel deployed at different work sites and different work processes * Work organization adapted to individual employees’ private and cultural needs * Work organization adapted to minorities’ language skills * Work instructions adapted to diverse personnel’s different levels of language proficiency * Supervisor compensates employees’ limited language skills in relations with customers * Sustainable workload over time | Standardization:   * Personnel deployed in standardized, jobs * Close surveillance of workers * Flexible work arrangements to meet employees’ private and cultural needs * Training to enhance occupation-specific skills * Training to enhance interpersonal and intercultural skills * Training to enhance minorities’ language skills * Personnel deployment adapted to minorities’ additional or lacking language skills * Working conditions adapted to low ability workers |