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Diversity Management in a Danish Context: Towards a Multicultural or Segregated Working Life?

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Since diversity management was introduced in Europe in the late 1990s, it has been debated whether this new concept would act as a catalyst of organizational change in favour of underprivileged groups. This article argues that diversity management is interpreted in a specific societal and organizational context, and indicates how strong institutions make their impact on Danish versions of diversity management. On the basis of a case study of the implementation of diversity management in a specific organization, the authors analyse how discourses of diversity management and corporate social responsibility are combined. The study suggests that this version of diversity management potentially leads to changes in the positions of ethnic minorities, primarily in the form of assimilation, as it maintains a focus on the sameness of people, not on the value of difference or otherness.

Keywords: diversity, equality, ethnic minorities, multicultural organizations

Introduction

Diversity management is a management concept which emphasizes the value of difference among people in organizations. Diversity management calls on managers to take advantage of a diverse workforce in order to create sustainable competitive advantage. Several arguments have been used to promote this approach to human resource management (HRM). First, the demographic development

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in most western countries implies that companies have to employ an increasingly more diverse workforce in terms of ethnicity, age and gender. Second, it is argued that globalization of markets implies a stronger quest for innovation and creativity: this, it is reasoned, will be provided by the diverse team (Roosevelt Thomas, 1990). While diversity management holds promise with regard to enhancing organizational effectiveness, it simultaneously claims to imply equal opportunities, regardless of colour, ethnic background, sex, age, etc. (Lynch, 1997). Diversity management is often presented as a renewal of old strategies to combat discrimination and promote equal opportunities; a renewal, which focuses on the individual's capacities and resources, and switches the attention to positive visions instead of identifying problems (e.g. Jacobs et al., 2001).

Colourful metaphors such as the 'cultural mosaic' and the 'salad bowl' give a picture of a harmonious coexistence of different perceptions and worldviews, united to favour organizational objectives (Cox, 1991, 1994). However, this rhetoric is ambiguous when it comes to its perception of the multicultural: does it imply that organizations move towards a pluralistic coexistence of multiple cultures, or does diversity simply mean that the organization comprises a certain percentage of people from different minority groups assimilated in the dominant culture (Prasad and Mills, 1997).

This has been an important issue among scholars of organization studies in recent years. This article contributes to the debate by highlighting the significance of the local context in which diversity management is introduced. Diversity management was developed in the US in the 1980s (Kelly and Dobbin, 1998) and has just in the last decade reached Europe. In most European countries, diversity management is seen as primarily concerning the integration of ethnic minorities in the labour market (see, for example, Berg and Håpnes [2001a], de los Reyes [2000a], Widell [2000], Glastra et al. [2000], regarding the development in Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands). Moreover, the rhetoric appears at a time when a strong discourse in the European context constructs ethnic minorities as a group that represents problems and burdens to society (see, for example, Sampson, 1995; Diken, 2002). So, the question is how the rhetoric of diversity, which contradicts these dominant voices, is received and what impact it might have.

In this article we consider diversity management as a discourse that thematizes notions about difference and otherness; and our

interest is its potential to change the existing discourses in the field to which it is applied, and subsequently to change the social relations. Consequently, we investigate how this rhetoric is taken up in a specific organizational context, and how it is combined with existing discourses on 'us and them'.

The article presents some of the results from a larger research project on diversity management in Denmark. The project was conducted from 2001 to 2003 and consisted of a telephone survey of 48 front-runner companies in Denmark, and two qualitative case studies. The overall aim of the research project was to analyse diversity management's potential to favour the position of ethnic minorities in the organization. This article presents one of the case studies – a study of an organization which typically constitutes the entry point for immigrants into the Danish labour market, namely the shop-floor level in the manufacturing or service sector (Hagedorn-Rasmussen and Kamp, 2003).

The article proceeds as follows: first, we present a review of the literature that has in recent years critically scrutinized the discourse on diversity. We consider ourselves as part of this critical tradition, but argue that we need a dynamic perspective in order to understand how diversity management may bring about change in a specific context. Next, we present a theoretical framework drawing on critical discourse analysis and neoinstitutionalism. From that point of departure we analyse diversity management at two levels. First, we show how the discourse of diversity management as presented in prescriptive literature is indeed heterogeneous and contradictory. We suggest that diversity management draws on four discourses that have different implications for the position of ethnic minorities in organizations. Second, we present a case study which analyses how the discourses of diversity management are appropriated in a specific context. The case study illustrates how one version of diversity management is constructed at the strategic level in the organization, but undergoes a transformation in a local department and becomes a question of 'giving them a chance' and 'exerting tolerance'. It is argued that this version of diversity management – which is developed in a context characterized by collectivism and neo-Taylorism – primarily leads to assimilation, emphasizing the sameness of people. However, the focus on social responsibility also tends to position 'the others' in an inferior position in relation to 'the normal' Danish workers.

Critical Voices on Diversity Management

Obviously, the idea of a multicultural organization welcoming difference implies that naturalized privileged positions must be challenged, and that relations of power are changed (Cavanagh, 1997; Marsden, 1997). The question is, however, to what extent the rhetoric of diversity management enables these changes. Diversity management provides a new language: by highlighting ‘difference’ the rhetoric relates to the ongoing construction and reproduction of identity within organizations and may create new arenas where issues of identity are negotiated. However, several authors are rather pessimistic in relation to the potential of diversity management to catalyse change in favour of currently underprivileged groups. On the contrary, they predict that reproduction of power relations and stereotypes will be the outcome. The critical voices divide into two lines of discussion: the management control discussion and the equality strategies debate.

The Management Control Discussion

This line of discussion highlights how elements of control are integrated in the diversity management discourse: in this discourse diversity is regarded as a resource, but – it is emphasized – it has some problematic aspects, and these are what managers must attend to, and manage, in order to secure business success (see, for example, Cox, 1991). So, the discourse installs managers as the privileged subject who have the power to define what exactly are the problematic areas, implying that some elements of diversity will be cherished while others are not welcomed (Marsden, 1997; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000). Similarly it could be argued that diversity management with its managerial prerogative implies an instrumental use of people’s differences, instrumental in the sense that people are perceived as human capital that should be utilized most effectively, and that the objective of diversity is the economic bottom-line. The following quote from an analysis of diversity management in New Zealand illustrates this point very well.

Maori cultural values matter only to the extent that they add value to the organization: ‘Things like consensus decision making, being a team player; those sort of things’ as one Maori practitioner put it. Maori culture is offered

within a managing diversity model as a commodity to employers, rather than a cultural resource that Maori people themselves as Tangata Whenua (indigenous people) have a right to create in their workplaces. (Jones et al., 2000: 369)

Consequently, while business arguments are furthered, moral arguments, for instance on equality, human rights and social justice, recede into the background. In fact, it could be argued that diversity management actually erases such themes exactly in a situation where underprivileged groups swell in numbers (Cavanagh, 1997; Berg and Håpnes, 2001b; Jones et al., 2000).

Eventually, it can be argued that diversity management is most likely to maintain and reproduce existing privileges and power relations. One line of argument highlights how meritocracy is at the very heart of diversity management. Looking at the language of diversity management, 'the quest for talents', where every organization should ensure the access of talented people of whatever colour, religion, gender, etc, is persevering. But, actually the social construction of what counts as merits, one of the cornerstones in the institutionalization of privilege in organizations, is left unchallenged. Phrased another way, diversity management implies that 'the other' is invited to the organization, but is only tolerated and accepted insofar as he or she enriches the centre. So, the asymmetric positions of power are maintained (Webb, 1997; Cavanaugh, 1997).

The Equality Strategies Debate

At the core of this debate are the different strategies to achieve equality that have been applied during recent history and their inherent problems. One issue of concern is that traditional strategies for equality tend to stereotype some people as belonging to certain underprivileged groups. In an attempt to establish equal opportunities in the labour market for groups that are discriminated against, one core argument has been that people are the same and therefore should be treated the same way. But in this way people are referred to in terms of their collective identity, while their individual differences are erased. Moreover, it has been argued that by stressing the sameness of all human beings, the male white man as a norm is implicitly reified as a point of reference (see, for example, Alvesson and Billing, 1999). Diversity management asks organizations to consider people as individuals and to cherish their individual difference

as a resource, and the discourse may consequently contribute to the dismantling of stereotypes.

However, one line of argument in this debate highlights how this discourse of diversity devalues group identity, and may individualize a group's problems, and encourage blindness to how conceptions of difference, regarding, for example, gender and ethnicity, are deeply rooted in societal institutions (Liff and Wajcman, 1996; Kirton and Greene, 2000). Diversity implies that everybody is different and that programmes on diversity management are for everyone, including white men in privileged positions. As Foldy ironically remarks: 'From this perspective the isolation of African-Americans within a work team is no different from marginalizing someone with a moustache' (Foldy, 2002: 104).

This focus on individual differences may imply that attention is removed from the discriminated groups, implicating that the burden of being discriminated is even harder because it is an individual problem; moreover, the collective consciousness, which might strengthen the power position of unprivileged groups, is undermined (Liff and Wajcman, 1996; Kirton and Greene, 2000; Foldy, 2002).

Still others, however, point out that the problem is rather that diversity management draws attention to differences, and consequently tends to reify the stereotyping of groups. Diversity management may imply that a lot of differences are named and categorized: gender, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, etc. (de los Reyes, 2000b). One example is that ethnic minorities may be employed in order to improve the access to specific market segments. In this way, expectations of these employees' performance are linked to their ethnic backgrounds, and they are not offered other relevant career opportunities (Lorbiecki, 2001).

In general, we find that these critical voices contribute highly valuable insights into the potentials, problems and pitfalls connected with diversity management. However, we maintain that when diversity management is discussed at this general level, the authors tend to overestimate the stability of the discourse, and its implications for social practices are drawn directly. In this way sensitivity to the dynamics of change that interaction with other local discourses may bring is lacking. The specific organizational and societal context might indeed also be important in the process where actors apply the language and mobilize the discourses in order to make sense of diversity management.

Theoretical Approach

In this section we show how diversity management may bring about processes in organizations that lead to change in the positions of underprivileged groups. Special attention is given to the role of the specific organizational context.

Language use concerning 'us' and 'them' is important in shaping social relations and social identities in organizations. It reflects social institutions and processes and is an important means of social reproduction. Accordingly, discourse analysis was chosen as our approach to study our empirical data. Our primary source of inspiration is critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995), which conveys a rather dynamic view on discourse, highlighting the production and transformation of discourses. Also Fairclough includes social practices as a distinct part of the analytical field. Other schools of discourse analysis tend to focus only on the semiotic analysis. Fairclough uses the concept of intertextuality to describe how texts are constituted, but at the same time 'co-authored' from already produced texts. He points out how discourses may be changed, when the actors use different discourses as a resource, and combine them in a creative process. Moreover, he draws our attention to the heterogeneity of texts as a sensitive indicator of the contradictions and conflicts that are sources of change in contemporary society. In order to conceive of the structured properties of change processes, the concept of the 'discourse order' in a specific field is introduced. The discourse order outlines the conditions of possibility of certain discourses to become prominent, but may also be subject to change.

However, we have also drawn upon insights from organization studies. The Scandinavian neoinstitutionalists,¹ e.g. Czarniawska and Joerges (1996), Sahlin-Andersson (1996), and Røvik (1998), have specifically dealt with the travel of managerial concepts and ideas through contexts as part of their study of the formation and change of institutions. They point out how the organizational context – seen as multiple *institutions* – plays an important role in shaping the management concept. Management concepts, they argue, are reinterpreted as they are taken up in different contexts. In these processes of reinterpretation, both organizations and concepts are actually changed.

Consequently, in this study we scrutinize the discourse of diversity management more closely. We explore the heterogeneity of the prescriptive texts, as well as the distinct and maybe contradictory

conceptions of sameness and otherness embedded therein. Next, we examine how the actors – within specific institutional contexts – appropriate the discourse of diversity management, creating combinations or hybrids. At that point, we give special attention to the role of institutions, such as the standardization of work processes or corporate social responsibility, forming the backbone of the specific organizational field.

Finally, we include the broader social practices which the communication is part of, in order to understand the dynamics of social change. In our case, this requires us to consider the history and current practice of the organization regarding the management of human resources, and describe the initiatives that are developed along with the diversity management programme, even if our main focus is on the way it is accounted for and discussed.

Diversity Management – Mixing Four Different Discourses

Within the literature on gender and minorities in organizations, the development of diversity management has in general been conceived of as a shift in the discourse; a shift where market discourses of the business case *replaced* moral discourses of justice and tolerance (Lorbiecki, 2001; Kirton and Greene, 2000; Liff, 1996; Webb, 1997). Diversity management was introduced after a long period where anti-discrimination, equal opportunity and affirmative action had been the dominating approaches to promoting equality in workplaces in the US. Most readers identify major changes in demography as the main argument supporting the business case (Litvin, 2002; Cavanagh, 1997; Kelly and Dobbin, 1998).

However, looking more deeply into the prescriptive literature on diversity management that has evolved over the last 10–15 years (Kamp and Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2002), it can be argued that diversity management draws on several discourses, most of them related to globalization, but focusing on different aspects. But, also, discourses of justice survive within the diversity management discourse. Diversity management, unlike other management concepts, does not only prescribe the way to business success. As a result of its historical roots, it delivers a story of how to obtain both equality and business success; it depicts a win-win situation where these two perspectives are united.

In this section we distinguish between four different discourses that run through the texts on diversity management: human capital, cultural capital, learning and synergy and social justice.² These discourses differ in their approach to human resources, and they are conducive to different conceptions of difference and otherness.

Using Human Capital – The Perfection of Meritocracy

A very important line of argument for diversity management is the demographic development in western societies. In the US, it has been argued, our societies are ageing and the pool of workforce is shrinking while migration increases. On the basis of demographic analysis, it is predicted that the workforce, with its ‘normal’ white male breadwinners between 20–59 years, will shrink dramatically, while ‘minorities’ (women, people of colour, aged people, etc.) will rise proportionally (Johnston and Packer, 1987; Johnston, 1994; Roosevelt Thomas, 1990). So, speaking of these groups as the minorities will soon become absurd. Consequently, in order to gain access to human capital, companies have to recruit more widely and combat discrimination, which distorts the process of recruiting the right persons. This kind of argumentation applies in most European contexts as well, including Denmark (Rasmussen, 2000; Kjeldgård, 2001), where a predicted lack of labour is on the top of the agenda in discussions on economic growth.

The discourse is one of improving organizational effectiveness by adjusting to a changing labour market. Discrimination and differential treatment are simply seen as inducing failures in the functioning of meritocracy, whereas the norms of what the right merits are remain unchallenged. So human resources have to be utilized effectively and a rather hard version of HRM is implied.³ Moreover, looking at the distinctions implied, this discourse has a tendency to emphasize that the individuals are the same. What is at the core is to judge the merits of different people, disregarding other differences between them. Consequently, the value of differences is not a theme; talents are.

Using Cultural Capital – Adapting to the Globalized Market

Another argument that runs through the managing diversity literature draws more directly from the debate on globalization. Globalization – among other things – implies that geographical distances are shrinking and that the fixation of cultures to national or geographic entities is dissolving. Consequently, globalization demands of companies that they adapt their products, their marketing and their relations to suppliers to the multicultural markets. Employees with transnational competencies are seen as a key to competitive advantage through the use of their knowledge. They can facilitate the access to new markets through their experiences in handling cultural differences (e.g. Leung et al., 2000). Along the same line of thought, a workplace's (cultural) diversity might be used as a brand that forms part of the product that stakeholders associate with the company.

As already mentioned, the emphasis is on the companies' capability to adapt effectively to new market conditions. It is a discourse on efficiency and how to achieve it. But the view on human resources is different. Here people with a transcultural background are expected to give a special contribution: the focus is on their difference and how they contribute positively to the overall organizational aims. So, HRM should actually develop differentiation of what merits are needed. In other words, differences are valued, but also fixed. People with a transcultural background tend to be positioned in ways that mirror cultural segments of the market; a woman with Japanese lineage is seen as relevant for a job dealing with marketing in Japan, a man with Turkish roots gets a job dealing with Turkish customers. Moreover, people with transcultural background are actually classified accordingly, and in this way this discourse supports divisions grounded on ethnicity/cultural background in organizations, thus possibly engendering culturalism and stereotyping.

Learning and Synergy – Organizations in Flux

The third important line of argumentation also draws on a major societal trait, namely the increasing individualization and the constant quest for change and self-reflection. This is reflected in newer trends in HRM and has much in common with the concept of the

learning organization (Senge, 1990). Diversity – the differences of every single individual – implies that people constantly challenge each other. This is seen as a resource for creating the dynamic learning organization. The individual's uniqueness is emphasized, but these unique individuals should be brought together so that potentials for synergy, innovation and creativity are released. In this way this rhetoric differs from the one on cultural capital, where differentiation is the ideal (Morrison, 1992; Crockett, 1999; Jacobs et al., 2001). Another consequence of individualization is the increasing focus on corporate brands and image. Organizations must be attractive to future employees and through their personnel policies take into account that work is increasingly becoming an individual life project rather than a means for subsistence (Jacobs et al., 2001; Ely and Thomas, 1996).

This discourse implies a rather soft version of HRM, perceiving people as unique and valued assets, and allowing for the development of people's individual resources. In particular, individual differences are highlighted and valued, while stereotypes of group identity step into the background. So, the exact content of differences becomes blurred, rendering all differences of equal importance. This implies that merits are not so easily specified. Managing creativity must allow for experiments and improvisations.

Social Justice – Ethics and Fairness

Although diversity management emphasizes the business perspective, some of the texts acknowledge 'past in present discrimination', namely that procedures and structures institutionalized in organizations have led to a particular normalized reference point which has produced inequality. This acknowledgement leads to developing initiatives to counter inequality or discrimination while practising diversity management. Probably the best known textbook on diversity management in the UK (Kandola and Fullerton, 1998) argues that group-based actions must be continued within the frame of diversity management in order to 'level the playing ground', so that everyone can participate and have the opportunity to develop their talents and be successful in terms of economy and career.

Also, Roosevelt Thomas's (1990) influential article on diversity management proposes arguments for maintaining the focus on discrimination. He puts forth 10 guidelines for learning to manage

diversity and calls it 'The Affirmative Action Cycle'. Affirmative action is the starting point for the process, and it is also the point to which you should return to assure that you still practise affirmative action. Diversity management only makes sense if discrimination, both structural and individual, is abolished. So, arguments of social justice and fairness are the backbone of this discourse.

This last voice, that mingles with the rest, actually adds an ethical dimension to HRM. Human resource management is also about paying attention to structural inequalities that prevent people from being successful in the organization. This discourse implies a focus on group identities, especially on minorities who have formerly been discriminated against. So in this way an approach to HRM which is based on negotiation of collective rights, like more traditional industrial relations (IR), is implied. The strength of this discourse is that it allows for the construction of collective identities around these groups, while it could of course also be in danger of reinforcing stereotypes on ethnicity, gender, age, disability, sexual preference, etc. This discourse only indirectly points out a way to business success by stressing certain expectations from society or from employees, and their importance for obtaining legitimacy in contemporary society.

This analysis illustrates the tensions and contradictions in the discourse of diversity management, tensions which – according to Fairclough (1995) – indicate that equality and diversity are contested concepts in contemporary society. The four discourses that we have described differ in how hard they sustain the meritocracy and which openings they may offer to challenge it. They are compatible with different perspectives on human resources; the first two mainly point towards hard versions of HRM, the third at a softer version, while the last introduces moral aspects in terms of equality and justice. Second, they differ in the way diversity is conceived of: is it based on group belonging or on individuality? While the learning and synergy discourse in particular is based on individualism and tends to dilute the discussion on discrimination, both the cultural capital and social justice arguments seem to point in the direction of group-based identity. So, this analysis may also contribute to the equality strategies debate, pointing to the fact that while the critiques of the inherent individualism in diversity management might be relevant in some cases, the danger of reinforcing stereotypes is of more importance in others. Eventually, it should be noted that only two of the discourses actually imply positive valuing

of difference, namely cultural capital and learning and synergy. The other two in fact emphasize sameness, i.e. take as their point of departure that all people – irrespective of gender, ethnicity, and so on – might offer the organization the same resources.

We suggest that when diversity management is taken up in a specific context, it is reinterpreted under the influence of established institutions. This may imply that certain of the four discourses are pushed to the forefront or modified, while others are suppressed. In some organizations discourses on ‘the knowledge-intensive company’ and ‘the need to recruit the most talented people’ are institutionalized, in others relations to multicultural customers and suppliers tend to be paramount. In some organizations, ‘innovative potential’ may be discussed as the cutting edge concept; in others responsibility and trustworthiness in society is at the heart of the matter, so displaying ethical concern and social justice are the main issues. In the next section we present a case study which illustrates how the discourses of diversity management are appropriated in a specific organizational context, and how that affects the way ethnic minorities are positioned.

Case Study Methodology

The case was selected on the basis of a telephone survey of 48 human resources managers in companies considered front-runners with regard to diversity management in Denmark. In more than half of the companies, corporate social responsibility was the main argument for engaging in diversity management. This tendency was strongest in companies dominated by unskilled employees (Hagedorn-Rasmussen and Kamp, 2003). In order to investigate this phenomenon, a company representing this profile was selected for the case study.⁴ The selected company was a ‘best case’, a large municipality, which was widely known as sincere and open in its efforts to implement diversity management.

In the case study we looked at how diversity management as rhetoric on difference and sameness was reinterpreted when it was appropriated in two different organizational fields (Sahlin-Andersson, 1996). We took the strategic level (the HR department) and the local parks department in a large Danish municipality as two such fields.

In the strategic field, the written texts regarding diversity such as the change programme 'Room for Difference', personnel policies, policies on gender ethnicity, and so on, and reports and analysis for the city council, internal documents, and so on comprised the main data for our analysis. This was supplemented by a qualitative interview with the HR director. In the parks department we studied the discourses on ethnic minorities, which were already established. Also, we analysed how the rhetoric of diversity management was translated to local initiatives and the meaning ascribed to those. Interviews with local managers, supervisors, shop stewards and employees (having both Danish and non-Danish backgrounds) formed the backbone of the analysis, but also written documents on local initiatives – such as the programmes for job training and for tutor education – were included. In total, we carried out 13 semi-structured interviews. Each person was interviewed for 60–90 minutes. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

In our analysis of the texts we focused on the accounts and narrative strategies in constituting difference (Czarniawska, 1998). We explored the intertextuality of the texts (how the text was composed of other texts). Here we looked at how the four discourses of diversity management, which we have identified, were selectively appropriated, and how they were combined with other narratives on normality and difference. Moreover, we analysed how these local discourses on difference and sameness positioned different members of the organization differently. The main emphasis in this analysis was on the use of metaphors (see, for example, Prasad, 1997) and the narrative structures of the texts – the plot, sequentiality and causality (Bruner, 1990).

Seatown – The Context of Change

Seatown municipality has 32,000 employees, who are working within different fields, primarily: public schools, institutions for children and young people, elderly care, maintenance of roads, parks and sewage, the fire department, public transport and services administration.

This organization is characterized by strong unionization, and cooperation between the management and union representatives takes place at all levels in the organization, including the political

level. As the organization comprises many different areas, HR management is decentralized. While general politics are developed at the central level, the procedures for recruitment, retention, education, incentives, etc. are developed at local level in the departments.

Shop stewards play an important role as social partners, and one could say that the traditional IR model based on collectivism prevails as a mode of thinking rather than the individualism which much newer HRM entails. This is particularly true in the departments dominated by semi- and unskilled trades, such as the parks department, which is our particular case.

In the beginning of the 1990s, equality at the workplace was targeted as an issue for personnel policy. At that time this issue primarily addressed inequality due to gender and difference in position in the hierarchy. This resulted in a prolonged debate on 'the A and the B team' in the organization. As a result of this debate, monitoring of gender differences in positions and wages was initiated. As still more ethnic minorities have settled in Seatown, the integration of this group into the labour market has been of increasing concern. Today, 10 percent of the population between 16 and 64 is registered as being of 'other ethnic background than Danish'. In 1996, a policy on employment of ethnic minorities was issued and in 1999 the city council launched the programme 'Room for Difference', which was a local version of diversity management.

Diversity Management in Seatown Municipality: 'Room for Difference'

The written programme of 'Room for Difference' more or less directly repeats the rhetoric of diversity management. The programme starts by stating:

Today management internationally agrees that it is necessary to aim at diversity among the employees – both in public and private organizations. Therefore we must more consciously develop our management and organization cultures so that they allow room for differences. ('Room for Difference', p. 4)

Several arguments are put forth to support this diagnosis of the future: there will be a shortage of labour in the near future; the younger generations increasingly demand to be treated as unique individuals, and the citizens are becoming more diverse and ever more demanding of quality in the services they receive. So in order

to attract and retain talented people in the future and to secure innovation and quality in the services the municipality provides, it is necessary to utilize the diversity of the workforce. The argument that is most energetically asserted is the positive value of diversity for job satisfaction and efficiency:

Different employees with different ideas and experience will make up a more enjoyable, more engaging and fascinating workplace. A group of employees of different backgrounds, age, gender and education will take different approaches to solving a problem and will provide much more resources in this process of problem-solving. ('Room for Difference', p. 5)

But the programme emphasizes that this strategy of developing an organization that values and utilizes differences is also motivated by the aim of giving all groups of the population a chance on the labour market, and that discrimination of any kind should be abolished. So the theme of equality, which is part of the historical baggage, is maintained and expressed in the personnel policy:

It is an independent goal that all employees in Seatown Municipality should have equal conditions for work, development and well-being irrespective of gender, age, disability, profession, race, colour, political orientation, sexual orientation or national, social or ethnic origin. (City council document, 2000)

Looking at the text of the programme, it seems that the policies of diversity management in Seatown municipality encompassed all kinds of arguments for valuing diversity positively. In that way it truly reflects the broad discourse on diversity management. However, according to the HR director, the arguments that played a role when the decision on launching the programme was taken among decision-makers at policy and management level, were the demographic and the moral obligations. It is convincingly argued that demographic development will make it increasingly difficult to recruit people to the kind of jobs that Seatown offers. Today, public service jobs are associated with low status: they are considered old-fashioned, bureaucratic, with no possibilities for development and career advancement, and not well paid. The solution is twofold: making the organization more dynamic and attractive, and recruiting much more broadly from the diverse population in local society.

But also moral arguments weigh heavily in the municipality, due to the role that this organization is supposed to play in securing social integration.

Actually, as a municipality we have the task of promoting the integration of local society. That's the case in a broader sense, where we have a lot of initiatives directed at local society. But also as a workplace. In fact, we are one of the biggest workplace in this community, so you see we have a responsibility to integrate, for example, refugees and immigrants⁵ in our organization. (HR director)

This conception of diversity management primarily draws on the human capital and the social justice discourses. But the social justice discourse is actually reinterpreted, so that it highlights the social integration in the particular local community. The ideas of social justice and fairness are in fact mixed with the discourse on (social) responsibility of the municipality towards ethnic minorities, and other groups who are considered 'weak' on the labour market – a discourse which has been very influential in Danish labour market policy since the mid-1990s (Socialministeriet, 1994; Fridberg, 1997, LO, 2001).

Looking at the implementation of the diversity management programme, the main focus is on numbers. Consequently, the municipality has a policy of reflecting the diversity of the local community, and, for example, a concrete goal (10 percent) for the representation of ethnic minorities in the workplace has been agreed upon. Success is measured by counting, for example, the number of employees with a non-Danish ethnic background. Each department is requested to report how well they are doing in relation to their percentage of refugees/immigrants and what they are doing to improve their performance.

This implies that utilizing differences between individuals is not the focus. No attempts are being made to facilitate the synergy and innovation that differences could bring, e.g. by creating 'good examples'. Focus is on different 'weak' groups and their opportunities to access jobs. Seen from the position of the HR director, the problem is to convince employees and managers in the different departments that they should and could make an effort to recruit and retain ethnic minorities, even in situations where other problems, such as the constant pressure for rationalization, seem more salient.

When budgets are restricted, and structural changes such as outsourcing and internal contracts are imposed, then people react negatively when asked to do a little extra. They stress that they have no time, no time to integrate immigrants and refugees or people with disabilities, etc. We had a meeting with all the unions in the city council, and here the head of the office workers' union in

Seatown actually initiated the argument that if they could not get more resources, then it was not possible to get this task off the ground. (HR director)

In summary, the politics of diversity management as expressed in the programme 'Room for Difference' stresses intentions of valuing differences, and also delivers a happy picture of the engaging and jolly work environment that will result. However, the interpretation of diversity management that obtains legitimacy among decision-makers at the top of the organization is mainly built on two discourses of diversity management, namely human capital and social justice; the latter modified by bringing in social responsibility. They form the basis of a strong and coherent narrative, as they can easily be incorporated into existing discourses of the organization's problems and challenges. It should be noted that these discourses emphasize sameness rather than difference.

Seemingly, the discourses on 'Room for Difference' that dominate in the local departments are even narrower than the one that works at central level. Shortly after the programme was launched, a survey among managers and employees was conducted. Interestingly, when asked about which arguments for making room for difference the respondent actually agreed with, the great majority found that 'giving everybody a chance on the labour market' was the most valid argument. On the contrary, other arguments – that diversity meant increasing efficiency, innovation and creativity, or that diversity improved the ability to match the needs of citizens or clients – found very little support. This was true for both managers and employee representatives. So the win-win situation where diversity implies an attractive and stimulating work environment and results in a more efficient organization does not seem to have much resonance.

In the next section we take a closer look at how diversity management is taken up and reinterpreted in the parks department, and how it affects discursive and social practices. 'Giving everybody a chance' captures the essence of this reinterpretation.

Cultural Stereotyping in the Parks Department

The parks department could be regarded as presenting an ideal workplace for integrating the large proportion of the immigrant population, who have very limited formal skills. However, in spite

of the efforts made, very few ethnic minorities actually are employed and retained in the department.

When accounting for why the department has not succeeded in recruiting more ethnic minorities, cultural differences is the main issue according to managers.

We have actually for many years tried to increase the number of refugees and immigrants in the parks department. Well originally, in say 1997 we created 12 jobs that were specifically meant for refugees or immigrants, but they were never filled. We asked the Department for Employment what the problem could be, and their response was that our job description simply scared these people. You know cleaning up litter in parks, cleaning public toilets, etc. The message came through that this was actually against their culture. . . . I don't know really, something about litter, etc. . . . We tried to change the job description, but it did not work, so now these jobs are open to a broader group of people who are unemployed, both with Danish and ethnic backgrounds. (Director, parks department)

In this narrative 'culture' is an explanation which covers everyone who is a refugee or immigrant, disregarding differences among them. 'They' are one group. Moreover, the story has an exotic flavour. In the quote the director suggests that their reactions are so strange that he could not really understand them, and moreover it has an undertone indicating that 'they' are rather superstitious and primitive.

This kind of narrative, where culture is used as a simple explanation, is retrieved in different versions. In the quote below, the exotic and primitive traits are not emphasized, rather it is the gendering of work organization in certain cultures.

Talking about the parks department, it has been a little difficult. It has to do with culture. You know, in the parks department your work is outside, doing maintenance on the green areas, etc. In some of the societies, where a lot of the refugees come from, e.g. Somalia, working with soil is women's work, so it is hard to persuade the men to do this. (HR manager, parks department)

Also narratives of behaviour at work that were incompatible with 'the Danish culture' are used to explain the barriers and difficulties. Stories of these kind were told and retold both among managers and gardeners.

Well, they just didn't show up, or they came late. Not at seven, but later at the day, when it suited them. One of them even brought his family with him to work; it's a funny story. . . . But that's not the way we do it up here. So,

there have been a quite strong sentiments against [among the workers, employing ethnic minorities], I have to admit that. Why should we make that effort, taking all this trouble when nothing comes of it. (Vice HR manager, parks department)

However, in all versions, the problem of recruiting ethnic minorities is actually a problem that cannot be easily solved, as it has deep roots in 'their culture'. This implies that other, more mundane reasons are not considered. The narrative that is constructed stresses that problems of recruiting or retaining ethnic minorities has to do with 'their' values and behaviour. 'They' do not want to work in the parks and 'they' do not comply with the most basic rule of work, such as turning up at a fixed time. Stories developed on the basis of experiences with individuals are extended to cover the whole rather heterogeneous group of refugees and immigrants. Moreover, the stories are used to create stereotypes that reinforce the conception of 'them' as being strangers; very strange to us, who display a 'normal' western attitude towards work.

Interviews with employees with a Danish background and employees with an ethnic minority background reveal how these stereotypes affect the work practices of the ethnic minorities. Generally, ethnic minorities do a lot to prove that they are not a part of these stereotypes. For example, they often work harder and more efficiently without pausing, in order to distance themselves from this picture portrayed of them – the 'others' who do not really want to work – and in order to get recognition and status. For example Hossein (pseudonym) said that he always worked hard.

I am never ill, and I do not take any breaks. *I like to work* [his emphasis]. There is no reason to take breaks when you like your work. I am not lazy, and I want to work. Generally men from Turkey like to gamble and to sleep much of the day. I don't want to do that.

It was clear that Hossein had a particular standard for working and living, and put a clear distance between his own standards and how other people from Turkey were expected to work and live. He had aligned his own interpretations of how people from Turkey lived and worked with negative narratives of 'the others'. Hossein enacted the negation of these, in his own 'ethics of work'.

The Local Interpretation – ‘Giving Them a Chance’

The parks department’s programme on ‘Room for Difference’ reflects the local discourses (described earlier) on the problems surrounding the employment of ethnic minorities in the department. Both managers and shop stewards distance themselves from the rhetoric of the value of difference, and the dynamics and synergy that it will promote. Utilizing differences, it is emphasized, seems largely contradicted by the recent developments in the department, where work is increasingly standardized, in order to improve possibilities for outsourcing.

Room for difference! (*in ironic tone*) I don’t think it really has reached us yet. . . . Well, as long as we are tied to follow the contracts so strictly in the work that we are doing, I simply don’t get it. I mean where the diversity comes in. It’s difficult to see how I can use different possibilities to solve a task. You just have to do what’s in the contract. (Shop steward, gardeners)

Room for difference is depicted as one of the ideas that travel from the very centre of the organization out to this department – ideas that often make no sense in relation to ‘the practical reality’. The gardeners complain that the work is being standardized down to the smallest detail, in a way that often conflicts with their knowledge of how to solve the task most effectively.

However, the discourse on social justice, which ‘Room for Difference’ also conveys, has a bearing. The idea that the municipality, down to the local departments, has a task of integrating ethnic minorities is well established, and local programmes that offer opportunities and resources to ‘weak’ groups have been used before. These programmes on social responsibility are supported by the local trade union. Accordingly, the coalition which furthers this approach to diversity management consists mainly of shop stewards and part of management. In 2001, it was decided to launch a new two-part programme in order to increase the number of ethnic minorities in the department. It consists of a job-training programme, and a tutoring programme. The target group is people who have been out of employment for a fairly long period, both those with a Danish and those with other ethnic backgrounds. In this way people with very different problems (and resources) when entering the labour market are grouped together.

The proponents acknowledge that there will be battles to win, as the acceptance of employees who are introduced through this kind

of special programme has generally been poor among co-workers and middle management alike. They refer to stories that circulate about the poor work ethics of ethnic minorities.

You know you come across stories about a man [with an ethnic minority background] who phones the foreman and tells him he can't come to work, because his wife is going to the hospital. And then the foreman meets him down at the drugstore. But then again . . . What it's really about is that *they* have to follow all the rules, while *we*, we can play tricks, shirking sometimes. It's considered human. (Shop steward, gardeners; his emphasis)

So, the shop stewards point out how the behaviour of one individual from an ethnic minority is used to characterize the whole group, to create stereotypes of 'them', whereas the same does not happen with regard to 'the normal' colleagues. But as a strategy to counteract this stereotyping he draws the attention to the fact that *all* workers are the same, they are all human, and can all be lazy, behave foolishly, etc.

One of the aims of the job-training programme is to ensure that the participants have a better understanding of 'the workplace culture'; that they know the formal and informal rules of the work and the workplace. After the participants have gone through the job-training course, it is assessed whether they are suitable for a certain kind of job or not. This assessment is not formalized but relies on the trainers' judgement, the right person for the right job.

The manager of the job-training programme is very enthusiastic about integrating 'these people' – the weak in the labour market – into the workplace.

I think these people should have a chance. We have to look at their resources, and to tell them that we need their resources and appreciate what they do. If we just succeed in channelling the right people to the right jobs, we actually are going to build up success, success that will form the basis for new stories, good stories. And that goes for the R/Is [refugees and immigrants, see Note 5] and for Danes as well. (Manager of job training programme)

The philosophy is that they should be given a chance; that they might learn to adjust their behaviour to the work culture. Or at least some of them might. According to the manager of the job-training programme there are already good examples of employees with an immigrant or refugee background who do a good job and are accepted. His point is that these stories should be told and become dominant.

Actually, this could be seen as an attempt to break down some of the stereotypes regarding ethnic minorities: By focusing on the individual and his or her resources it will become clear that some may be impossible to integrate, but others can certainly be as good as anybody else. But at the same time it tends to highlight the deficiency of the 'others'. They have to undergo a process of socialization in order to learn 'the way we do things' in this Danish workplace.

The second element is a tutor programme. This programme is initiated by the local union of semi-skilled workers in consensus with the municipality. The union has a policy of supporting the integration of ethnic minorities and 'the weak on the labour market' into the work place. In this programme shop stewards are themselves trained to be tutors. Their task is to introduce the newcomers to the workplace culture and help them if there are problems. But they should also influence the attitude of colleagues. They are supposed to prime the work teams to welcome the new worker, to be more tolerant and patient and not to harass newcomers. As the programme states in its literature: 'The tutor shall be aware of how to speak at the work place' (document on the tutor's function, November 2001). So actually, this part of the programme not only addresses the minority but also the majority and asks them to look at ethnic minorities as simply newcomers, who will gradually become experienced members of the collective.

Consequently, the shop stewards see themselves as vanguards in developing a workplace that is more inclusive, inclusive in the sense that they have a moral obligation to receive and support people who are 'weak'.

We as workers in a public workplace are kind of raised to accept and support that we should receive all kinds of people, you know people that have run into trouble of a kind . . . and that is fine, very fine indeed. You have to make room for everybody; we have to have that kind of tolerance. If it didn't exist in the public sector, then where would you find it? (Shop steward, gardeners)

Even if these ideals seem noble, it should be noted that by underlining the importance of tolerance and patience, an inferior position of the newcomers is also implied. The newcomers are seen as deficient in qualities that the 'native inhabitants' of the organization possess, so they should be tolerated and assisted by the 'native inhabitants', who set the standards and hold a position where they can help the others.

In summary, this study of the parks department highlights how the introduction of diversity management conveys new social and discursive practices, practices that imply a focus on sameness. In the reinterpretation of diversity management, the local narratives on ethnic minorities play an important role. They are the focus for the change process, as they are conceived of as posing a barrier for ethnic minorities' employment in the department. Discourses on social justice and corporate social responsibility are selectively drawn on when a coalition of actors endeavours to bring about change, whereas the positive valuing of difference expressed in 'Room for Difference' is rejected, as seeming directly contradictory to the institutional logic of standardization of work. The coalition builds a new narrative on diversity that contradicts the old story about 'the others', who do not fit into a Danish workplace, or who do not want to work. Shop stewards play an important role in this coalition, as their conception of solidarity is mobilized and forms the basis of the moral arguments.

Concluding Debate

Diversity management introduces a new rhetoric on the value of difference among people in the organization, a rhetoric that might challenge existing lines around which distinctions between 'us and them' are constructed. Consequently, this concept has received considerable interest in contexts like Scandinavia, where ethnic minorities have difficulties accessing the labour market, and its potential to better the position of ethnic minorities and to break down existing stereotypes is widely debated.

This article highlights the dynamic properties of the discourse of diversity management and argues that the specific organizational and societal context plays an important role in the translation of diversity management. An important point that contributes to the understanding of these dynamics is that diversity management is not a coherent discourse, but is highly ambiguous in the conception of difference and sameness it conveys. We find that actually four different discourses are interwoven, discourses that differ in the way they position the minority in relation to the majority. When diversity management is appropriated in a specific context, actors may selectively prioritize and modify one or other of the four discourses, while others are suppressed.

The case study shows how the context plays a role in the interpretation of diversity management in different ways. First, it illustrates how the discourses of diversity and diversity management differ in the various fields of the organization. In the strategic field, the long-term prospects of the organization dominated the discourse, the future access to human capital and the obligation of the municipality to employ (and thus integrate) all kinds of citizens. In the local department, challenges to do with the local work culture, work norms and solidarity were at the core. Consequently, this points to the limitations of only studying diversity management at the policy level.

Second, the study illustrates the process whereby actors reinterpret diversity management and combine it with other discourses. In the local department, the established discourse on ethnic minorities is characterized by negative cultural stereotypes and forms the obvious focus for the change process. They offer ethnic minorities very vulnerable positions, and pose a barrier for ethnic minorities' entrance into the department. When the actors try to build a new discourse, they primarily draw on the social justice discourse, but modify it by drawing on well-institutionalized discourses on social responsibility and solidarity. Both discourses essentially emphasize sameness. The discourse on social responsibility, which is strongly supported by Danish institutions, enables the actors to talk about ethnic minorities as weak, weaker than Danes, but basically of the same kind. The discourse on solidarity emphasizes that ethnic minorities primarily are colleagues, and as such should be integrated into the group and encompassed by the solidarity of the group. So, the local version of diversity management has the potential to break down the stereotypes of 'the others', to being of 'our kind' rather than of 'another kind'.

In summary, in the case study the introduction of diversity management primarily led to discourses that emphasized sameness, and not to the focus on individual differences which diversity management is generally assumed to convey. The outcome was not the plural multicultural organization, rather assimilation was the dominating form of integration; the minority had to adapt to the majorities' norms, their ways of thinking and working. However, it should be noted that the discourse of diversity management, which materialized through the local programme, did have the potential for catalysing change in the position of ethnic minorities, as new arenas for reflecting on identity were established.

This conclusion could not of course be generalized to all Danish organizations. This case represents a context where it is collectivism in particular which guides the worldview, and where the discourse on neo-Taylorism, which is currently widespread in the manual service sector, prevails. Both seem difficult to combine with the focus on individual differences found in the learning and synergy approach to diversity management.

In our case, the union plays an important role in constructing the narrative on sameness, and their conception of solidarity is mobilized. Also, their identity as workers in public organizations plays a role in their moral-based arguments for the inclusiveness and tolerance they demand of the organization and their colleagues. Trade unions are not assigned a role in the concept of diversity management as developed in the US. As in most management concepts a top-down approach is implied, and managements assume a privileged position. In Scandinavia, other groups may play a role, assuming a model where cooperation between management and employees in processes of organizational change is important. Some studies indicate that a Scandinavian model for diversity management is emerging (Berg and Håpnes, 2001b; Hagedorn-Rasmussen and Kamp, 2003). Unions may constitute a progressive actor group in countries with more tradition for unionization, pushing for a social justice approach (see, for example, Kirton and Greene, 2002). One possible problem associated with their participation might be that their egalitarian approach often implies that they feel uneasy about recognizing the heterogeneity of the group. This may lead to intolerant and ethnocentric attitudes (Larsen, 2000). Consequently, diversity management and in particular its positive visions of mutual integration also challenge the trade unions in their future development.

Notes

1. We argue that discourse analysis is compatible with neoinstitutional theory since institutions are the backbone of discourses, and institutional logics are important in establishing the order of discourse.

2. The distinction is inspired by the work of Ely and Thomas (1996, 2001), who empirically derived three ideal types of diversity management, conceiving them as a kind of stage model towards the ideal of diversity management.

3. Hard Human Resource Management implies an instrumental approach to people, regarding them as a resource that should be used most effectively. In Soft

Human Resource Management people are seen as valuable assets that should be nourished (Storey, 1992).

4. Two case studies were conducted. As well as the one presented in this article, we conducted a case study of diversity management in a knowledge-intensive, globalized company, reflecting dynamics of change in the segment of companies who (mainly) saw diversity as a means to compete with the international stakeholders.

5. The term 'refugees and immigrants' or R/I is used in all official documents of Seatown and is also normally applied in local discussions of formal policy and initiatives. They are administrative terms that primarily refer to these people's way of entering Denmark. In this article we only use this terminology in citations, while in other parts of the text we use the term 'ethnic minorities', which is used in social science in the studies of ethnicity and racialization.

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