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(Mis)managing diversity: exploring the dangers of diversity management orthodoxy

Exploring the
dangers of DM
orthodoxy

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to challenge the dominance of the mainstream discourse and practice of diversity management (DM) by identifying and problematizing three distinct but related issues that it encompasses: first, its tendency to displace all alternative approaches; second, its general neglect of the social-historical context and third, its almost exclusive focus on the business case rationale for supporting diversity.

Design/methodology/approach – Employing ethnographic research methods, the empirical material was collected in an international manufacturing corporation based in Sweden. It consists of three different, but interconnected approaches: archival research, interviews and observations.

Findings – The paper shows that in neglecting power, identity, intersectionality and the changing socio-historical context of diversity, a well-meaning corporate diversity programme tended to obscure ethnic and age-related disadvantages at work.

Research limitations/implications – The limitations of this research relate largely to its dependence on a single case study and the limited focus on diversity as it affected able-bodied, white male immigrant workers. A broader study of the multiplicity of types of discrimination and ways in which diversity is managed in a range of countries and organizations could facilitate a more in-depth exploration of these issues and arguments.

Originality/value – Although not entirely new, the three arguments that have been drawn upon to discuss, analyse and illustrate DM through our data have rarely been brought together in one theoretical and empirical study.

Keywords Discrimination, Context, Power, Intersectionality, Mismanaging diversity, Orthodoxy

Paper type Research paper

Since the 1990s a single approach known as diversity management (DM) or managing diversity has come to present itself as the orthodoxy within studies of inequality or discrimination at work (Thomas, 1990; Özbilgin, 2009; Kirton and Greene, 2009; Klarsfeld, 2010). In one sense, this was to be welcomed in providing a newfound legitimacy for those seeking to transform organizations in the direction of greater equality and justice (Ashley, 2010) but there has been considerable ambivalence (Liff, 1999) if not outright scepticism of DM displacing any concern with universal human rights (Noon, 2007). The price of this DM orthodoxy is that linking programmes directly to the financial/efficiency benefits of a diverse workforce, the business case tends to chase out values of human rights, justice and equality that are traditionally associated with the anti-discrimination movement. Although this has stimulated some debate (Bleijenbergh *et al.*, 2010), where managers are sceptical of business case benefits, they may choose to abandon support for diversity programmes altogether



(Noon, 2007, p. 778). Thus from an anti-discrimination viewpoint, the business case is problematic (Noon, 2007, p. 778) and risky (Bleijenbergh *et al.*, 2010) not only in undermining other reforms but also because when failing to deliver on its commercial promise, DM is likely to be discredited (Litvin, 2006).

In addition, in both theory and practice, DM is so narrowly focused on its subject matter as to become myopic regarding the changing contexts and practices of diversity (Calás *et al.*, 2009). In this sense we wonder, as in our title, whether diversity is being mismanaged. Apart from such myopia leaving the theory and practice of DM comparatively undeveloped, it may also undermine the very anti-discriminatory objectives such as social justice and sustainable employment relations (Bleijenbergh *et al.*, 2010, p. 414) with which diversity discourses have traditionally been associated.

The paper is then concerned to challenge the current DM orthodoxy and especially its elevation of the business case for diversity. We provide three arguments to support this challenge: First, the DM orthodoxy focuses too narrowly on the business case thus displacing other perspectives and their grounding in the values of human rights, justice, equality and sustainability. Second, there is a tendency for DM to ignore the socio-historical and political context that are, as it will be shown later, of crucial importance to questions of diversity. Third, and finally, given increasing evidence that DM does not often deliver the commercial benefits it claims, we question whether its wholesale adoption by practitioners might result in their interest in matters of diversity declining or disappearing. Each of these challenges to the DM orthodoxy is significant for the problems they raise have devastating implications for disadvantaged and minority employment relations.

While all three of our arguments are present throughout the paper, we concentrate on each of them consecutively. So the first section deals primarily with the displacement argument in relation to the managerialist approach to diversity by examining the issue of intersectionality that is in danger of displacement when the business case takes priority. This is selected largely because it has relevance in relation to our empirical material. In the second section, we focus on the tendency for practitioners to ignore context as they pursue the business case. Here we present some empirical case study material that indicates how the changing historical and managerial context is all but ignored in the development and practice of the diversity programme because “diversity” is treated universally and a historically (Knights and Omanović, 2015). Context is not entirely ignored insofar as management pay attention to at least one context – the changing market conditions of the corporation’s operations – suggesting that the business case has begun to reign supreme. A third section seeks to examine the empirical material again in the light of issues of intersectionality but specifically, the interaction between age and ethnicity. Only in a summary and conclusion, do we re-introduce our third argument to indicate how DM is problematic also because of its commitment to the business case of commercial benefit that it cannot guarantee to deliver. Ultimately this could lead to the death knell of practitioners’ interests in diversity.

Discourses of DM

Discursive studies offer an alternative to DM orthodoxy that is effective in articulating discrepancies between the latter and actual practices (Litvin, 2006; Noon, 2007). They reveal the importance of socio-historical and political context(s) as well problematize the privileging of the business case in the mainstream DM literature. The mainstream is often selective in terms of its perception of what constitutes diversity and this can leave

some diversities marginalized. Despite this, HR managers tend to treat individuals of a disadvantaged group as if they were all the same and this “obscures” individuality and “eliminates” “agency” (Zanoni and Janssens, 2004, p. 62). One example that is paralleled in our own empirical research concerned the universal adoption of teamworking practices where non-nationals were disadvantaged because of their comparatively limited language and cultural skills.

Radical demands for DM to extend beyond the business case tend to be ignored but studies of intersectionality have shown clearly that disadvantage on one dimension (e.g. ethnicity) has multiple and not just incremental effects on the life chances of someone also disadvantaged on other dimensions such as age or gender. Rather than seeing disadvantage just in terms of simple additions of different inequalities, intersectionality is more sophisticated in recognizing the “variability of the interlacing of disadvantages at different times” (Bagilhole, 2009, p. 267). It can be argued that whereas diversity is concerned with discriminations that occur only between groups such as men and women or indigenous and ethnic minorities, intersectionality focuses on disadvantages within groups but on a range of material and symbolic dimensions (e.g. age, ethnicity, gender, nationality, class, ability and sexual orientation) that are not just incremental but compound one another.

Parallel criticisms of the managerial DM view indicate how a neglect of power and decontextualized understandings have the capacity to provide moral support at a distance without addressing “some of the more contentious and uncomfortable aspects of workforce diversity” (Dick and Cassell, 2002, p. 973). Whether an intended or unintended consequence, managing diversity can reproduce and sustain the very inequalities it ostensibly seeks to remove.

In sum, we suggest that the dominance of the business case results in the neglect of other perspectives, “uncomfortable” issues, and power and context, which leaves DM bereft of any real concern for the disadvantages of diversity.

After discussing our methodology, we turn to a case study to explore first how DM programmes divert practitioners away from issues other than those relating to the business case. Second, we seek to show how this was doubly disadvantageous to the corporation’s ethnic minority employees because of their increasing age and their comparatively limited adaptability to changes in working practices.

Methodology and methods

The underlying assumption in mainstream diversity studies is that diversity is an “objective” phenomenon independent of managers’ and researchers’ own interests in managing or promoting it as an object to be managed. Ethnicity, gender and age are treated as independent, ahistorical variables with no symbiotic relationships between them or the human beings to which they refer (Knights and Omanović, 2015).

This ontology reinforces dominant positivist epistemological approaches to research where complexities are reduced to linear causal, quantitative variables that bypass the meaning and significance of power and knowledge. The success of DM is then viewed from the narrow perspective of only considering that which can be measured such that research and practice is often restricted to linking DM to organizational performance and profitability (e.g. Roberson and Park, 2007). Critical of this narrow focus and its reductionist implications, our own case study of an international manufacturing unit based in Sweden (with the pseudonym Manufacturing Universal or ManU for short) took place over a period of eight months, drawing on ethnographic qualitative research methods.

ManU is a large manufacturer that employs several thousand employees worldwide but with the majority in Sweden where the company's headquarters and corporate functions are located. During this study, the company developed a strategic plan aimed at becoming one of the top three premium brand names in its industry. ManU's target was to sell 30 per cent more products than previously and to achieve a 6 per cent profit growth. Because "diversity" was identified as facilitating these plans, various diversity initiatives were incorporated linked to the Swedish Government's interest in promoting workforce diversity. Despite much activity, ManU's principal attention revolved around promoting a certain positive image of itself and its diversity work.

Data were collected through multiple methods comprising three interconnected foci. The first involved archival research of the company's diversity programme documents, including presentations and minutes from meetings/workshops, as well as consulting socio-historical, political and legal documents.

The second consisted of 23 interviews evenly balanced between the sexes and broad ranging in terms of nationality. Most interviews were conducted with managers (several interviews with the Diversity Director and the number interviews with the others) – because the initiative for the development of the company's diversity programme just came from the managerial level. However, to partially avoid the overrepresentation of managers among our interviewees, we interviewed four people in non-managerial positions: two factory workers, a salesman and a consultant. We also interviewed a former ManU employee, now working elsewhere. In making these interviewee selections, we believed our study could present a more multifaceted picture of the company's diversity work and bring to the fore a variety of company voices (voices that to a certain extent might otherwise be marginalized or silenced). All except one interview were recorded and transcribed so that quotations deployed are verbatim.

The third focus comprised detailed observations of 19 meetings/workshops within ManU, in the early twenty-first century where diversity was on the agenda. A major objective of these events was to improve employee's understanding of ideas, interests and actions relating to diversity. In addition, 11 conferences, workshops, seminars were attended that were held outside the company but organized by different institutions and advocates of diversity in Sweden (in the period from late 1990s to early twenty-first century). The observations of these events, combined with the archive research facilitated an understanding of how "diversity" was linked to the social-historical context of Sweden.

DM in practice: the context of power

We have reviewed how the discourse literature criticises DM because it displaces other perspectives on diversity and marginalizes power and changing contexts. We now turn to our case study to illustrate elements of this displacement and the way that senior management take account of context only in terms of its direct relevance for the business case in DM. A senior project manager (pseudonyms have been used throughout) indicates how recruiting a diverse workforce is less about complying with government legislation than facilitating an exploitation of a sector of the market where women and minorities are under-represented as consumers. The business case for DM is continually emphasized, as in the following quotes:

We try to systematically get more women in our projects. But it is difficult to recruit women and they may not thrive in such a male-dominated environment, technology, fixed environment that we have here. Most men consume our products, but women and minorities do not – and there is a potential for growth (Svante, senior project manager).

This concern is clearly connected to a potential market:

In other words, we need to prepare our products to fit into the environment (women /minorities as customers, the authors' clarification), because there is a growth potential for us as a company' (Svante, senior project manager).

[We need to] think outside of just the law and really understand what diversity is about [...] "but we also have to look at it from a business perspective and from our customers standpoint as well" (Barbara, Vice President of Recruitment Career Planning and Diversity (VPRD)).

These interview responses reflected and reproduced the business case approach. An interview with an ex-manager provided further confirmation that DM is more focused on PR than improving the conditions for disadvantaged groups. While recognizing the culture of Sweden as egalitarian, she felt that companies perhaps only paid lip service to it:

[...] there is a Swedish dream to create justice that is both a weakness (that Sweden will never be a great country) but it is also a very beautiful dream to create justice. And that dream – all who are born in Sweden – carry that dream in itself [...] [It is summed up by the phrase: "Jantelagen" (the Law of Jante) – it is nicer to be a simple human being than to try to be better than other people (Lena, former senior manager).

However, she was sceptical that it worked in practice, especially in ManU but, in particular, was ambivalent about the "forced" nature of the programme of recruiting equal numbers of men and women. The results were also disappointing in that women did not stay as they moved up the hierarchy presumably because of the male dominated culture, as conveyed by the senior project manager above. Expressing her scepticism she concluded:

I do wonder whether the goals of diversity are real or are they playing to the gallery? (Lena, former senior manager).

Clearly as an ex-employee, she was free to express a more directly critical view but interviews with the current senior manager indicates how diversity is channelled largely to benefit the organization commercially. In terms of the business case, she argues:

[...] the broader workforce that we have then the better we are going to be able to understand the needs of our customers. [...] We need to be in compliance with the law, but what you want to be careful of is that you don't let that be the only focus (Barbara, VPRD).

Because there are two other reasons for promoting diversity: first is the business case of promoting diversity to help the company be responsive to its wide range of customers because:

[...] if we don't have a mind towards our customers and really understand their needs then they will go somewhere else because we won't be providing the products that they want (Barbara, VPRD).

And second, is to be a "corporate citizenship perspective" where the company has:

[...] a responsibility in the community to be a good citizen (Barbara, VPRD).

While eschewing any concern with how a changed economic and socio-political context might work against some of the more elderly ethnic minorities in the company, as we

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report below, there is a focus on the changing market context:

ManU is somewhat unique in that many companies globally focus on diversity in terms of its work force and they don't focus on diversity in terms of the market place and the importance and the role it can play in terms of your business opportunities (Barbara, VPRD).

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Reinforcing this business case view, she was also focused on getting everyone to understand that:

[...] diversity is not just about hiring more women or hiring more, you know, international employees, those certainly are aspects of it, but it's [...] this whole broader picture and it's not just about the work force it's also about the market place (Barbara, VPRD).

Also this business case had to be rolled out as is expressed in the following quote about deploying diversity champions:

The first step really is for the champions to understand the corporate strategy and then for them to go out into their business units with the support of the Diversity Director and the rest of our group really to take a look at their business unit, what their business needs are, what their business issues are and then to develop some specific objectives, support their business pertaining to diversity and to create action plans, create objectives and action plans for the following year (Barbara, VPRD).

However, she felt that ManU was in advance of many companies in subscribing to a business case view of DM:

I think ManU is taking the more holistic integrated approach looking at both the market side and at the workforce side and most companies globally that I know of aren't, they are focusing very much on the work force side and only that (Barbara, VPRD).

Given this case study was conducted in Sweden, a country that has a reputation for supporting equality policies in relation to gender and minorities (e.g. Statens Offentliga Utredningar (SOU), 1995:55, p. 55), it might have been expected that we would find management promoting diversity policies that extended well beyond the confines of the business case. Although rhetorically, the management shows openness to different interests in diversity, in its operationalization, only the business interest seems to prevail, thus "chasing out" other (possible) interests. One exception was the ex-manager who at least expressed some regrets that the promotion of egalitarian values around diversity was no more than business or PR.

We now turn to a discussion of the impact of DM on ethnic minority employees in conditions of a changing socio-economic context.

The impact of DM: the power of context

Phase 1: influx of immigrants

We illustrate our argument through engaging with the lived experiences of two workers at the company's plant. Momo was born in the former (SFR) Yugoslavia and in 1965 moved to Sweden as a guest worker employed by ManU. He relates how when he first came to Sweden jobs were easy to come by even for foreigners who spoke little or no Swedish. He describes his first years in Sweden, as well as at ManU, very positively even though his life was not always easy. He worked in a noisy factory on "unclean" jobs and the housing conditions for (guest) workers were poor. Still, according to Momo, these first years of living in Sweden and working at ManU were probably the

best period in Sweden for him and for many Swedish immigrants of that time. Momo describes that time as follows:

At that time it was very easy to find a job in Sweden. Representatives for Swedish companies, together with Swedish employment services, used to go to the former Yugoslavia where they interviewed, medically checked, and recruited people. I remember that the recruited workers were welcomed by ManU's representatives in Sweden at the airport [...], which was decorated with a red carpet. [...] If I remember correctly, in the year 1970, there were almost 1,300 workers from different parts of Yugoslavia who were working at ManU.

His comments indicate a welcoming approach of the Swedish government, as well as for ManU, to employ people with foreign backgrounds who would underpin the growth of companies and the national economy. Labour shortages at ManU and at other Swedish companies with such production systems developed in that period. This labour shortage, combined with the official Swedish "open door" policy to foreign labour and the availability of labour from other countries, partly explains the significant increase in the numbers of guest workers at ManU.

The main guest worker groups employed by ManU throughout the 1960s were also the largest immigrant groups in Swedish society. The majority of them (mostly men) came from Finland, SFR Yugoslavia, Italy and Greece. While the government had encouraged this development of labour migration, there was no diversity programme in the company at that time. Such intervention in managing diverse and disadvantaged groups only began to develop in the 1990s in the USA and even later in Europe (Omanović, 2009). It would seem that employees, speaking broken Swedish, and of diverse nationalities were employed by ManU largely because of economic circumstances where labour was in short supply in an expanding economy. This demonstrates the power of context although narrowly conceived as related to economic circumstances.

Phase 2: modernization

Later ManU modernized largely to improve the efficiency of production as well as the work environment for employees. It has steadily transformed and improved the factory floors introducing modern machinery and robots, and thus a less noisy, cleaner and safer workplace. Both Momo and another former Yugoslavian Kiro worker witnessed such changes in the 1980s and particularly in the late 1990s after the international corporation acquired ManU.

As Kiro who began working as a labourer at the company at the beginning of the 1970s describes his workplace:

Now our factory looks like a pharmacy or like a university. It is that clean!

However, during recent decades, this modernization of the production process and the working environment in combination with the changed rhythm of the work routines – for increased efficiency in production – has caused a dramatic reduction in the number of factory workers. According to Kiro, at one time there were 4,500 workers at the ManU plant where he works while a few years later, he says, there are only 2,380 workers. The workforce reduction has, in particular, negatively affected opportunities for immigrants even though the company was still expressing openness to diversity (Corporate Citizenship Report, 2001). However, within the business reasons for promoting "diversity" there was no mention of the importance of "diversity" in creating a more equal society/company (Corporate Citizenship Report, 2001). For instance, at one of their sites there were about 700 Yugoslavian workers in the 1970s, but today,

Kiro believes, there are no more than 30 workers from different parts of the former Yugoslavia. While the overall reduction in labour has been of the order of 50 per cent, the former Yugoslavian workforce on one site at least appears to have fallen by over 95 per cent. Given the continuing unstable political and economic climate in the Balkans, it would be difficult to attribute this change to employee choice.

Paralleling the work of Zanoni and Janssens (2004), some of these reductions in the numbers of diverse minorities are the result of changing work practices in where teamworking has become the norm. In their study the HR manager argued that it is difficult when workers have “no basic knowledge of Dutch”, because in “teamwork, the interdependence of employees, and necessary communication” (Zanoni and Janssens, 2004, p. 64) are dependent on this common language. In relation to Sweden, this is confirmed by Augustsson’s (1996) study of ManU’s factory where work changes have forced skilled workers to organize in complementary groups in work environments that call for integrated mechanization. This increased the necessity for common cultural and social skills within groups. Consequently, certain immigrants (in particular southern Europeans) have not been hired into such groups to the same extent as Swedes thus resulting in a degree of indirect discrimination, despite the company’s positive images, as produced in the Swedish media and in various reports.

Impact on diversity

Not surprisingly both Momo and Kiro are critical of the new efficiency wave that especially has impacted the factory workers since an international corporation purchased ManU. This is how Kiro interprets the present and past management philosophy:

Fewer workers – more products! Before it was different – more workers – better quality!

Groups of workers have, however, been affected differentially by this change in production strategy at ManU. According to Kiro, while many Swedes do not make factory work a long career, immigrants, in particular older immigrants, are in a different position. Kiro says:

We (immigrants) cannot go anywhere. If I should, for instance, be forced to leave ManU, I do not know where I should go! I do not have many choices; I am 54 years old [...] It is not so easy today as a foreigner to make one’s way in Sweden. So I must watch over my job here.

Kiro is doubtful he can find a better job because he is certain his immigrant status and age work against him in the Swedish labour market. In this way, Kiro is involved in a self-regulating process as he recognizes a changing attitude to foreigners in Sweden. However, his passivity is a response to experience and a broader “reading” of the specific socio-historical context of Sweden where the labour market has shifted against him.

Consequently despite the existence of a well-publicized formal DM programme, it is the weakened labour market created by the recession combined with new workplace practices such as teamworking that has seriously damaged ManU’s immigrant employees by limiting their occupational choices. There is, thus, a mutually reinforcing relation between the immigrant’s employment status, age and her/his positions/opportunities in the Swedish labour market. Many Swedish immigrants, cannot get jobs equivalent to their education levels, or cannot get jobs at all. Various minority groups are, however, positioned differently on the labour market, and characteristics such as gender, ethnicity and age interact within this specific historical context to place significant constraints on their life chances.

Ultimately the ethnic minority employees in Sweden found their conditions of work deteriorating to the point at which many of them felt forced to take early retirement.

As Momo said:

[...] people were planning to stay in Sweden a very short time and then go back to former Yugoslavia. They were working here double shifts and they paid an incredibly high price and some became sick and therefore had to take early retirement.

This perhaps explains the decline in the numbers of ethnic minorities working for ManU. It also demonstrates the power of context that is ignored by the company's diversity programme and its management. When they were recruited, ethnic minority employees benefited from the context of "tight labour markets" in Sweden but presently, they suffer disadvantages because of higher levels of unemployment in Sweden, but also because of the managerial decisions to establish new workplace practices such as teamworking, where their more limited language and cultural skills put them at a disadvantage compared with indigenous Swedes.

It has been argued that if we are to fully understand DM we need "a theoretical framework capable of recognizing the multidimensionality of social life and the intersection of registers of power and knowledge"; intersectionality can serve this purpose (Styhre and Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2008, p. 578).

Intersectionality focuses on the multiplicity of disadvantages surrounding different aspects of diversity that are not just incremental but are greater than the sum of their parts in constituting identity and discrimination. Because DM is prevailing focused so closely on the commercial potential of a diverse workforce, it tends to see the disadvantaged as homogenous groups independently of historical and socio-economic context whereas, as we have seen from intersectionality perspectives, there is a great deal of variability depending on the interlacing of different disadvantages in relation to changing contexts. These were illustrated in our empirical material in relation to age and ethnicity against the background of changing labour markets and workplace practices. However, the business case adopted by these companies deflected attention and understanding from the subtlety of heterogeneous elements that are combined in complex ways (Boogaard and Roggeband, 2010). This creates a vacuum around a number of tensions, which despite being core to resolving disadvantage are suppressed by prioritizing the business case (de los Reyes, 2001). DM discourses and practices could clearly benefit from developing an understanding of intersectionality so that it can be deployed as a policy-making tool for generating social justice (Bagilhole, 2009). Our case study revealed how some workers were disadvantaged not just because their ethnicity but also as a result of the interaction of ethnicity and their ageing. This was especially so in the context of innovations such as teamworking that privileged indigenous Swedish employees but this was obscured due to the narrow focus on the business case.

The academic and practitioner focus on "bottom line" (Kirby and Harter, 2002) effects of managing diversity would be difficult to justify ethically but then might well be excused if the evidence supported the expected causal relations. Yet, so far, the empirical results are quite ambivalent generally reporting conflicting findings (Christian *et al.*, 2006) and suggesting no strong evidence to support the view that well-managed diversity results in increased organizational profitability (e.g. Kochan *et al.*, 2003; Shoobridge, 2006), nor necessarily improved creativity and innovation (Muhr, 2008). For often DM "neutralises the very differences it had set out to promote" (Muhr, 2008, p. 187). This is largely because once it is seen as something to be managed, the difference that constitutes diversity is categorized and objectified so as to remove its potential to surprise, shock or

challenge what is taken for granted. An ethical approach to diversity that embraced and engaged with difference, rather than pigeon-holing it for purposes of control, could probably benefit the company in facilitating creative and innovative change. By relying exclusively on the business case in DM, these longer term and less quantitative benefits are lost.

However, from the point of view of practicing managers this may be less of a concern than how DM offers an acceptable response to governmental pressures while not challenging the prevailing relations of power and panoptic-like control in the organization of working life (Dick and Cassell, 2002; Jack and Lorbiecki, 2007). Public relations of building a reputation and complying with government demands were important but increasingly, it would seem that the business case of using diversity to further exploit the market was gaining impetus in managing diversity at ManU. This simply reflected a growing orthodoxy of DM within the field of both theoretical and empirical discourse.

Conclusion

We are aware that the three arguments that have been drawn upon to discuss DM and that we have sought to illustrate through our empirical material are not entirely new since, as we indicated at the outset of this paper, context, displacement and the danger of the business case have been discussed in the literature. However, only infrequently have they been brought together in one analysis and illustrated through empirical research (cf. Dick and Cassells, 2002).

In this paper we have sought to challenge the dominance of the discourse and practice of DM in twenty-first century western economies. Our argument has been that the dangers of mainstream DM reside in three distinct but related areas. First, it has tended to displace all alternative approaches to the discourse of diversity and its management and thus cannot benefit from critiques of, and challenges to, its narrow set of beliefs. We provided a summary of these perspectives to show how they differ from, but also could contribute to, the discourse of DM.

Second, it generally neglects the historical, political and cultural context of its own prescriptions and practices. In this regard our brief empirical examples illustrate some dangers in refusing to take into account changing contexts. Not only are issues dangerous to the promotion of diversity and its management but equally it can ignore diversity practices that occur as an unintended consequence of other concerns.

Finally we see some danger in the business case that has preoccupied DM discourse and practice. ManU and other companies were, for instance identified in a number of reports and in the media as a positive example of a company that actively worked on the issues of diversity, integration and social responsibility especially towards immigrants and ethnic minorities. However, the media focused mainly on the financial advantages of increased diversity in workforces, reflecting the growing orthodoxy around DM (Omanović, 2009). We acknowledge the benefits of DM in providing a more positive and productive orientation to the cause, and lending it legitimacy that legislation alone could rarely secure. Consequently we believe that DM is on the side of the angels and it would be foolish to deny it a place in both theory and practice. However, we have concerns that its tendency to focus almost exclusively on the business case is extremely dangerous because if it should prove not to deliver what it promises, diversity issues could be dropped like a "lead balloon". Also there is some evidence that this anxiety is not perverse because, as we indicated earlier, studies of the business benefits of DM remain ambiguous so that the jury is still out with respect to its economic effectiveness. Of course we would also be critical methodologically of the positivist attempts to isolate diversity from all other aspects of an

organization in order to prove that it delivers what it promises because, business performance is generally more closely aligned to the growth or decline of the economy as a whole rather than specific employment policies. For all these reasons we raise the question of whether diversity is being mismanaged through DM. Much more research is needed to examine critically and more closely the theories and practices of DM for we have merely put the cat amongst the pigeons in raising these critical concerns.

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Further reading

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David Knights is a Professor of Organization Studies at the Lancaster University and the Open University. His research interests can be divided into several areas each of which have various degrees of overlap – organization studies, management control, power, identity and resistance; gender and diversity studies; financial services consumption, education and regulation; information communication technology; organizational change and innovation; theory, knowledge, epistemology and methodology. His current research has been on academics and business schools, the global financial crisis, the body and embodiment and most recently, on veterinary surgeons. He jointly created and continues to edit *Gender, Work, and Organization* and is on the boards of several other journals.

Assistant Professor Vedran Omanović's research interests are focused on organizational change, transformation and the notion of diversity in organizations. More specifically, Vedran Omanović seeks to understand how the ideas of different organizational phenomena are socially produced and why they are produced in particular ways. Vedran Omanović is also interested in understanding the ideas of different organizational phenomena through the lenses of alternative theoretical and methodological approaches. His recent publications are published in *Scandinavian Journal of Management* (2013) and *The Handbook of Gender Work and Organization* (2011). Assistant Professor Vedran Omanović is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: vedran.omanovic@handels.gu.se

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