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PROFESSIONAL INSIGHTS
Reporting on the gender and diversity, standing working group at the European group of organizational studies colloquium

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the Gender and Diversity Stream, Standing Working Group (SWG) at the recent European Group of Organisational Studies (EGOS) Colloquium, which was hosted in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The paper provides an overview of the SWG before turning to the scope of the papers and a brief synopsis of three of the best papers within the context of the stream.
Design/methodology/approach – Approach is report style following submission of a paper and participation in the three-day colloquium.
Findings – Evidently, the Gender and Diversity Stream has secured its position within the EGOS colloquium. The stream provides an environment forum in which to present works where participants engage in critical reviews of participant's work. The success of this growing stream is found not only in the scholarly and practical importance of the subject terrain but also in the organisation of the stream which is thematically organised to ensure participants were engaged and actively took part in the discussion.
Originality/value – This paper presents insights on the EGOS SWG on "Gender and Diversity" and traces the topic of "critical approaches to organising and managing diversity" which was the SWG's main theme of the stream at the EGOS Colloquium in Rotterdam 2014.
Keywords Gender, Equal opportunities, Ethnic minorities
Paper type Viewpoint

European Group of Organisational Studies: Gender and Diversity, Standing Working Group
Introduction
This paper reports on the Gender and Diversity Stream at the 2014 Conference of the European Group of Organisational Studies (EGOS), hosted in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. It sets out a brief overview of the Standing Working Group (SWG) on Gender and Diversity before turning to the main proceedings of the EGOS 2014 gathering. While the paper aims to capture the essence of the three-day event, it reflects and focuses on the three papers that received Best Paper nominations within the context of the overall stream. These papers engage the reader with questions around "critical approaches to organizing and managing diversity", the central theme of the stream. We conclude by reflecting on the final session where stream participants were invited to discuss and debate key questions.

Overview: SWG on gender and diversity
The SWG on Gender and Diversity was established in 2009 and since then has secured its place within EGOS as an important site for the discussion and debate of all aspects of research related to diversity, equality and inclusion, garnering solid and growing

interest from scholars globally. Evidence of its popularity is reflected in the increasing rate of submissions to the stream. For instance in 2011, 30 papers were submitted, while in the subsequent two years, the stream attracted some 50 submissions. Similarly, in 2014 almost 50 papers were submitted to the Gender and Diversity stream, 30 of which were accepted for discussion in the three parallel sessions (Bendl *et al.*, 2014).

The Gender and Diversity stream is explicitly designed as a broad and inclusive space, comprised of scholars from a myriad of disciplinary backgrounds, including: organisational studies, sociology, management, political economy, economics, human resource management, gender studies, culture studies and labour history to name but a few; and, draws on veterans in the field of diversity as well as PhD students, early and mid-career researchers. The stream provides an environment in which to present developed research and work-in-progress before an audience of scholars who are invited to respond with constructive and critical feedback. The approach to feedback is in part due to the fact that participants are requested to read the papers prior to the conference. Indeed, the stream is based on a tradition of participants reading each other's papers and presenting a fellow stream member's paper.

Scope of the papers/sessions at EGOS 2014
This year's stream theme was Critical Approaches to Organising and Managing Diversity and submissions covered a broad span of interests and focus points around this theme. The research presented provided the participants with international insights from a range of country contexts including Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, Denmark, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Brazil and the USA.

The spread of papers also included a diversity of theoretical, methodological and empirical entry points. While disparate in approach, conceptual framework, context and focus, what bound these papers together was the critical nature of the presentation of research findings and the breadth, depth and innovation of the contributions. The stream convenors, Regine Bendl, Elina Henttonen and Frances Tomlinson, arranged the 30 papers into thematic clusters, ensuring coherent discussion in each of the sessions. Themes covered included: cultural diversity and multiculturalism; discourses of diversity and diversity management; the gendered organisation; experiences of transnationalism and migration; practice and implementation studies; intersecting work-related and social identities; organisational resistance and diversity and transforming organisations. The Convenors were also joined by, Patrizia Zanoni, Maddy Janssens and Marieke van den Brink as Chairs of the respective sessions with each Chair facilitating discussion and ensuring assigned presenters, respondents (the authors) and stream participants adhered to the session brief and of course to the time limits.

While the stream was comprised of too many papers to provide a synopsis of each, for the particular benefit of those who are not members of the EGOS and therefore do not have access to full papers we turn to three, which were voted "best paper" in three specific categories. In providing a brief review of these papers we also draw on key quotes and "moments" in the papers, which we believe poignantly capture the arguments presented.

The first paper by Anna-Liisa Kaasila-Pakanen, Rethinking Multiculturalism through Cultural Difference, was nominated for Best Student Paper. This paper offers a theoretical alternative to the oversimplified, fixed and static presentation of culture, cultural diversity and multiculturalism in organisations by drawing on Said's (1978) Orientalism and Bhabha's perspective on culture (Bhabha, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2007). Through this entry point, the author challenges the strict confines of essentialist constructs of culture and cultural diversity, going beyond "neat" categories and as such inviting the reader to

discover and rediscover how and why essentialist notions of cultural diversity and multiculturalism become instruments of control in organisations. Accordingly, the author takes a post-colonial approach arguing that (Kaasila-Pakanen, 2014, p. 15):

At the core of diversity discourse are the questions of sameness and difference, identity and otherness, inclusion and exclusion – questions demonstrating the political nature of diversity and their apparent connection to the dynamics of dominant and marginal group relations. As noted by critical diversity literature, issues of diversity are never disinterested, but contingent on accounts of power. Adapting a postcolonial perspective to diversity and multiculturalism necessarily guides the attention to borders and border-construction that has been crucial to the Western colonial project of constructing and signaling the European, and separating the Other out (Carter, 2006) through the hierarchical force of binary representations that have ensured the intactness of Western identities.

Through the development of the paper the author highlights the heterogeneity of culture, and the fluid and uncertain nature of (cultural) authority. Kaasila-Pakanen notes that meanings and the negotiation of culture take shape in the hybrid Third Space. The third space is described as an ambiguous area where individuals interact and it is by interpreting the discursive enunciation of the interaction that the homogenising process of culture is challenged. In doing so, culture is seen as dynamic and constantly changing, negotiated in the liminal, ambivalent third space, which allows for the deconstruction of the"[…] fixities and binary systems from within the spatial boundary itself" (Kaasila-Pakanen, 2014, p. 15). In short, the "unknown present" in the production of cultural meanings is placed centre stage. It is through the indeterminacy of hybrid and ambivalent cultures that Kaasila-Pakanen launches her attack on the multicultural paradigm of diversity management.

In summary, by examining how cultural difference and otherness is produced through the concept of multiculturalism, this complex and insightful paper provides a unique contribution to theorising in critical diversity studies.

The second paper by Annette Risberg and Sine Norholm Just, Ambiguities of Diversity Management – Employees' Ambiguous Perceptions of Diversity, was nominated for Best Paper. This paper examines the practical and scholarly field of diversity management and teases out the ambiguities shaping diversity management. Accordingly, the authors draw on the concept of ambiguity to inform explanations of diversity management practices. As Risberg and Norholm Just (2014, p. 1):

Contrary to dominant tendencies, in this paper we begin from the idea that ambiguity is an unavoidable and constitutive condition of organizational practices generally, and practices of diversity, specifically. While ambiguity in this constitutive sense does not have an inherent value, it may be experienced negatively, positively or indifferently by the involved actors. Likewise, the effects of the ambiguity may be positive, negative or neutral.

The paper critiques the concept (and practice) of diversity management extending on fixed, binary categories, which therefore enables the authors to explore and present "new, diversified practices" (Risberg and Norholm Just, 2014, p. 3). To pull apart dominant constructs of diversity management practices they establish the importance of the performativity of identity. In doing so they capture the paradoxical (and simultaneous) fluidity and fixity of the context of examination, arguing that (p. 4):

The successful expression of an individual identity is contingent upon the social acceptability and acceptance of that expression of identity. And while it may be true that the more limited or restrictive the norms of a given context, the smaller the room for recognizable identity performances and the less diversity, it would not be possible to imagine a completely open or unrestricted context either.

It is within such a context that the authors embrace the notion of ambiguity and proceed to tease it out as a way in which to explain and understand diversity management practices. As such they invite the reader to consider ambiguity in a different and importantly productive way and therefore to go beyond what they see as the "common-sense and usually negative connotations of equivocation and misunderstanding" on which ambiguity is founded (Risberg and Norholm Just, 2014, p. 5).

The authors employ three categories of ambiguity to analyse diversity in organisations: strategic ambiguity, contradiction and ambivalence. To interpret and analyse the expressions of these three dimensions of ambiguity in diversity practices Risberg and Norholm Just use a case study approach, which draws on a Swedish Municipality. The paper explains the various expressions and practices of ambiguity within this case study by presenting a number of vignettes. In doing so, they employ and therefore build on the three aforementioned "varieties" of ambiguity used to examine diversity management practices. The paper concludes that "ambivalence" is the ambiguity type with the most potential for creating positive outcomes in diversity management. By drawing on Meyerson and Scully (1995), the authors see ambivalent ambiguity in diversity management practice as neither top-down nor bottom up. It is a condition whereby "tempered radicals" identify with the organisation and simultaneously with groups, positions and causes that are fundamentally different to the position they take within the organisation (and to that which the organisation takes). This double stance has a potentially emancipatory role for organisational members where, the "agent" of change be they the diversity manager, the employee or the human resource manager is not cast within an insider/outsider binary. As the authors note: individuals "enter organizational settings on their own terms, but also […] diversify organisations from within." Within the ambivalent ambiguity category then, there is a clear dynamic and fluid process to how diversity management is practiced. The authors go on to note that in allowing "organizational members to negotiate their identities in and through practice […] When organizational members act as tempered radicals they turn the ambiguous diversity into something productive which enables more diversity and allows for more benefits of diversity" (Risberg and Norholm Just, 2014, pp. 19-20). This paper offers both conceptual and practical insights on how diversity management is perceived and shaped, with lessons beyond the Swedish context.

The third paper was written by Marta B. Calás, Seray Ergene and Linda Smircich. The paper titled: Re-imagining "Inequality" and "Diversity" as Postcapitalist Practices, certainly conforms to the "That's Interesting Paper" category. This paper challenges the way we think about capitalist organisations. By way of introduction the authors note that:

[…] no matter how one observes practices, the observations will always be mediated by the observer's theoretical frame be those functionalist, critical, or of any other persuasion. Considering this, we further follow Latour (e.g. 2005, p. 39) and position theories as *mediators* that allow us to examine how they *translate* "the elements they are supposed to carry".

In addition to drawing on Latour's (2005, 2013) work, the paper is also informed by, Gibson-Graham (1996a, b, 2006) and Gibson-Graham *et al.* (2013). In doing so, the authors aim to extend the boundaries of theory-practice associations, noting the "possibilities for re-shaping what we collectively *already do* as practice/practicing and theory/theorizing in our field" (Calás *et al.*, 2014, p. 3).

The paper is driven by two central points: how to understand contemporary modes of existence represented as "diversity", "inequality" and "capitalism"; and, how to facilitate

going past them. From this latter position they ask, what would that mean? And, what difference would it make? To address these considerations, the paper embarks on a series of "tasks" which take the reader from theoretical considerations through to case study/ practice considerations. By tracing sustainability practices in a "fashion company" from seed to product the authors are able to illustrate the practices of what they call "theorizing affirmative possibilities" (Calás *et al.*, 2014, p. 7).

The story presented: incorporating the case study in sustainability, illustrates potential avenues for dismantling the capitalism-diversity-inequality nexus in what is a nature-culture continuum of action. Furthermore and simultaneously, the authors overturn the dominance of human centred arguments, portraying the importance and advantages of a posthuman hybrid assemblage, which they argue:

> […] might in time help appreciating how we all are moving hybrid entities. This notion, potentially defeating any identifiable *purity* among and between *humanity*, would facilitate enacting our common relations as transversal rather than hierarchical (Calás *et al.*, 2014, p. 19).

The authors draw on Latour (2005) whose work de-privileges the focus on science over nature and it is within such a frame that the posthuman hybrid assemblage emerges. The posthuman hybrid assemblage transcends the strict ontological division between humans and non-human (or inanimate objects), highlighting the hybridity and interconnectedness between human and non-human. Thus it invites us to reimagine ourselves in relation to others, the non-human domain and with ourselves.

Power relations are also reinterpreted and as a corollary the reader is presented with a new lens through which to consider inequality. Accordingly, the authors suggest that: "Rather than thinking of eliminating 'inequality' once and for all, only observing it as happening in a congealed structural form and only regarding 'human rights', re-thinking inequality as processes of materialization allows for a more modest understanding of human control against what goes bad and more appreciation for the moments when more social justice (including human and nonhumans) becomes possible." In short, the paper highlights the diverse, ever expanding and complex frames through by which diversity can be analysed.

Reflections on the closing session

In the closing session the Convenors coordinated an interesting discussion around two key considerations: what is critical about our critical approach? And, what is the diversity of diversity studies? Breaking up into small groups the noise levels reflected some robust discussions and questions about whether diversity scholars can in fact not be critical, but at the same time, what in fact does it mean to be critical? We reflected on the point that diversity management can in fact be positioned as uncritical: theoretically and empirically. For instance, the dominant business and policy position; and, some areas of scholarship espouse the virtues of a business case approach for diversity management, which: neglects the temporal and spatial context (from multiple levels) of analysis; focuses on measurable outcomes and the "deliverables" of diversity management policies; and, largely draws on and reinforces fixed, essential categories of analysis. The aforementioned papers provide important and useful examples of how the session "disturbed" the status quo and engaged us with critical insights into a variety of different aspects of diversity management theorising and practice.

Discussion also raised questions about the point at which the diversity in diversity studies ceases to create useful, new and intersecting dimensions, and instead results in dangerous (scholarly and practical) divisions as scholars stay within (and become

advocates for) their chosen diversity boundaries: their theoretical and practical patch. For instance, we discussed the importance of embracing and advocating for issues around social, political and economic inequality which continue to inform but are sometimes neglected in the diversity management space given our focus on the organisational level and (individual) identity. Ultimately, at the close of the stream participants noted the importance of examining identity issues and the workplace level by also continuing to forge a broader (institutionally embedded) political voice.

Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of the Gender and Diversity Stream at the EGOS colloquium in 2014 by presenting key "moments" of a selection of papers. These papers were a true reflection of the central theme of the stream: critical approaches to organising and managing diversity. In the context of the session many new and insightful ideas were presented, brought to life with presentations from different geographical spaces, a myriad of theoretical approaches and, the use of varied methods of analysis. For those engaged with research into the varied dimensions of diversity and inclusion, immersion in the three-day event hosted by the Gender and Diversity stream is a must. The dialogue on the controversies and debates shaping diversity and inclusion will continue in Athens in 2015, with the central theme Paradigms and Methods of Diversity Scholarship. We look forward to reporting back to you on this event.

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