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An account of the 2014 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Conference held at Technische Universitat Munchen, Munich

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PROFESSIONAL INSIGHTS
An account of the 2014 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Conference held at Technische Universitat Munchen, Munich

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to report on the 2014 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Conference held at Technische Universitat Munchen, Munich.
Design/methodology/approach – The report is based on delegate observations, notes and audience reactions to papers presented on research conducted.
Findings – The papers presented new boundaries on diversity research. This included research on the importance of cultural diversity in the outcomes in the hotel industry by being led by foreign managers in Cyprus; how skilled Romanians construct and understand their identities as skilled professionals and members of stigmatised European migrants and how a diverse workforce experiences power utilising a Foucauladian understanding of power.
Originality/value – This report integrates a number of themes from diversity research across the world, highlighting progress and the suggested direction for future diversity research.
Keywords Ethnic minorities, Cultural diversity, Equality, Conference, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Conference, Diversity research
Paper type Viewpoint

The purpose of this paper is to report on the Seventh Equality, Diversity and Inclusion International Conference that was held between 7 and 10 June 2014 at the Technische Universitat Munchen, Munich, Germany. The aim of the conference was to provide an international platform for the exchange of knowledge across all strands of equality, diversity and inclusion at work. About 80 delegates from around the world attended and research was presented across 21 streams. The wide range of topics in the streams investigated the complex relationship between equality, diversity and inclusion from different theoretical, empirical and methodological angles, as well as various trans/inter/national contexts. Stream themes incorporated diverse topics such as: Cultural diversity as a strategic advantage; Inclusion practices in social enterprises; Making diversity work; When theory won't do, action to the rescue; Academic cultures beyond privilege and discrimination; Bringing disability leadership to the forefront; Leadership theory: disrupting the "discourse"; Dealing with age discrimination and age stereotypes at the workplace and the Politics of privilege. In addition, there were two keynote speeches, a doctoral colloquium, three workshops and a panel discussion.

The conference started with a welcome address by Ludwig Kronthaler, Member of the Council of the Technische Universitat Munchen (TUM) and Secretary General of the Max Planck Society (DE); and Elizabeth Wacker, Chair of Sociology of Diversity, Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences, Technische Universitat Munchen (DE). They provided delegates with a brief background to TUM and how the university supports

and ascribes to the key themes of the conference with regards to the benefits of diversity for the university, noting that "variety protects from naivety" and that diversity is the "best recipe for creativity". Also reflective of the conference, the university's goals include being the most attractive to women in Germany and that cultural sensitivity and social competence is as important as academic excellence. A discussion of the TUM Diversity code (passed in May 2012) ensued, which included issues of inclusion and exclusion (disability), equal opportunities and rehabilitation. It was clear that the alignment of values and purpose between the conference and the university ensured that it was the ideal host venue that contributed to the inclusive atmosphere at the conference.

The first keynote address, by Patrizia Zanoni who is Professor of Organisational Studies at Hasselt University, Belgium, reviewed the diversity field from its evolution in the 1990s until the present and provided future reflection. Professor Zanoni noted the early 1990s' celebratory discourse of diversity provided a solution for Europe's labour shortages and war for talent. Research on diversity focussed on maintaining economic growth and the value of diversity in organisational outcomes. The latter 1990s focussed on the business value of diversity, providing a link between social identity, economic value and the context of the organisation for economic gain. She noted that presently, the diversity field is rich and growing. Research is growing and there is an increase in other social identities alongside gender, resulting in complex models. The literature on diversity is currently specific to the organisational context and intersectionality as a means of understanding the social positioning of multiple minority individuals is growing but limited. She also noted the "illusion of equal chances" and that inequality along social, economic and ethnic lines still persists. Thus, she ended by suggesting that diversity literature should reflect political and economic shifts in the following ways:

- Reconnect discourses of diversity with material practices and outcomes, e.g. the global economic crisis and the post-structural account of inequality. Post-structural discourses(power of language) affects wages, working conditions, etc.

- Embody diversity into changing organisational structures and employee relations (e.g. unit of analysis; looking at outsourcing practices and not just organisations).

- Placing historically subordinated subjects knowledge and agency at centre stage (looking at lower level individuals in the organisation).

- Envisioning alternative, equality-fostering organisational forms and subjectivities.

In sum, Professor Zanoni highlighted the need to connect diversity discourses with current global and economic challenges facing organisations today, making diversity research a relevant and pertinent contributor to the understanding of current organisational realities.

Research presented in the stream "Cultural diversity as a strategic advantage" emphasised the importance of diversity in the growth and outcomes of organisations. For instance, research (in process) by Sophie Quach on enhancing the acceptance of cultural diversity in a traditional German organisation utilised the Openness Model and expert interviews to analyse the actual state of openness in the organisation, analysing the societal, organisational, group and individual levels. By identifying reasons for levels of openness (or not), the research aims to develop measures to address identified issues. Turning to Cyprus, Chryso Lasonos and Andri Georgiadou emphasised the

importance of cultural diversity in the outcomes of the hotel industry. In this ongoing study, they sought to understand the commitment of employees to managers from diverse cultural backgrounds. Utilising survey data, they found initial support that the cultural diversity in the management sample resulted in the increased commitment of employees in the Cyprus hotel industry. This provided initial indications that people experience satisfaction differently when led by a foreign manager. Qualitative interviews are due to follow to understand employees' experiences. Looking at employees' attitudes in South Africa, social identity theory (SIT) was utilised by S.A. Nujjoo and Ines Meyer to understand the degree to which South African employees are willing to support preferential treatment of employees from demographic groups who were disadvantaged during the apartheid era. Consistent with SIT, it was expected that the high-status group (white and male) would be less likely to support preferential treatment as this would threaten their status, in contrast to the low-status group (black and female employees) who would be more likely to support preferential treatment as it would enhance their status. Results indicated that all but black male employees were opposed to preferential treatment, with white males being the most opposed. It was found that employees who perceived the status hierarchy (status hierarchy between race and/or gender groups) as illegitimate and unstable were more opposed to preferential treatment than employees who perceived the status hierarchy to be legitimate and stable, whilst in group identification was not related to attitudes towards preferential treatment. This has implications for South Africa with respect to the impact preferential treatment may have on employees in organisations. Appropriate management strategies may therefore be important.

The conference also featured an insightful and valuable panel discussion; the topic "Diversity management in practice – some lessons learnt, many challenges ahead". The panel participants included:

(1) Martin Davidson, Professor of Leadership and Organisational Behaviour, University of Virginia (USA);

(2) Heather Wishik, President, Heather Wishik Consulting, LLC (USA);

(3) Sonja Dudek, Berlin State Office for Equal Treatment Against Discrimination (DE);

(4) Guangya Su, Chief Diversity Officer, Siemens AG (DE); and

(5) Eva Voss, Diversity and Inclusiveness Manager, EY GmbH (DE).

Panel participants addressed the audience, after which audience members then posed questions to the panel. This insightful discussion gave audience members valued insights into how organisations implemented diversity strategies in practice in large organisations. Similar to the previous stream looking at "Cultural diversity as a strategic advantage", Guangya Su and Eva Voss explained the importance of diversity in their respective organisations, and the importance of embracing diversity as part of their global strategies. They also gave the audience examples of how they implement and ingrain diversity practices within their organisations. For instance, Guangya Su noted that diversity is utilised as a smart asset, and explained the 3c concept (composition, communication, connection). Also, he explained that amongst other strategies events, training, networks, the internet and social media are utilised at Siemens to promote and enforce a diverse culture. Eva Voss explained EY's "tone from the top" approach to diversity, and how leading inclusively, equal annual pay,

unconscious bias pay and recruiter diversity practices, amongst other strategies, are utilised. Much to the amusement of the audience, she explained an innovative "pizza party" diversity training event. Sonja Dudek provided a unique perspective on the culture of valuing diversity and fighting discrimination in the Berlin State Office in terms of the implementation of laws. She also explained that one of the main challenges of the administration was that the ethnic minority population within the administration is low (as the goal is for the administration to mirror the population). She explained that this is due to economic pressures, which impacts the hiring of new staff. Finally, Martin Davidson and Heather Wishik enlightened the audience with their work in organisations utilising their "Leveraging Difference" model. The model, in brief, encompasses recognising differences that are strategically relevant to the organisation, understanding these differences, engaging the differences by making strategic choices to create desired results from difference and finally leveraging this difference to achieve results. They discussed challenges to their work, which included resistance to diversity and expanding beyond what is traditionally thought of as diversity. They also emphasised the importance of including and engaging the majority in an organisation, particularly white men who have a variety of experiences in the organisation and must be included in diversity discussions. One way of doing this is emphasising what people have in common, i.e. shared value systems. In a discussion of why change may be difficult in organisations, they noted that in order to capture the engagement of a diverse group of people, it is important to utilise a "hearts and minds" frame, i.e. how an issue is connected to what they care about.

In a separate stream called "Sexuality and gender identities within organisations and their service provision" the focus was on topics related to sexuality and gender within organisations and countries. Research by Simon Roberts investigated the reasons for the disclosure or normalisation of gay identities in organisations. Reasons included a normalising approach whereby individuals felt they were just being themselves and the same as heterosexuals. They believed they were not different because they were gay (the assimilation approach). The study concluded that gay individuals who disclosed sought to normalise homosexuality rather than merely disclosing their sexuality. Looking at the Canadian context, David Rayside investigated what happens after a movement (LGBT) makes gains or succeeds (LGBT marriage has been legalised in Canada and has secured policy gains). It was concluded that after making gains, a movement "narrows and dries up at the grass-root level". Thus, although some elements are still active with regard to the LGBT movement, it is not prospering or making further gains.

In another stream entitled "Academic cultures beyond privileges and discrimination" research into academic careers and the demands thrust upon academics were investigated, which impacts academics work-life balance. Katherine Sang, Abigail Powell and Rebecca Finkel discussed the effects of reduced academic freedom due to work intensification, blurred work hours and performance measurement requirements (research, lecturing hours and student demands). They concluded that due to long work hours, academics are under stress and for the purposes of promotion and the ideal worker should: travel to conferences (neglect caring responsibilities), contend with bureaucracy (teaching scores, metrics, etc.) and produce quality research. Implications include not being able to meet other responsibilities. Continuing the theme of examining academic careers, Caroline Richer's developmental paper aims to explore trust and trustworthiness in the careers of young academics. The premise of the research is that trust and the trustworthiness

of the university from the perspective of young academics significantly influence their careers. Interview scripts and organisational documents are to be evaluated to understand the transparency of organisational structures and how this influences trust/distrust.

From looking at challenges faced by those in academia, research presented in the stream "Inclusive leadership from the center and periphery: social identity as context" showcased research by Regina Eckhart which aimed to enhance the quality and effectiveness of women leaders' development. Highlighting gender roles' impact on women's managerial careers, the research explored the perspective of others (women's co-workers) and highlights the differences between personal leader identity as perceived by women and public leader identity as seen by others. Thus, in developing women there is a need to take all perceptions into account. Utilising SYMLOG (systemic multi-level observation of groups) multi-rater assessment, one of the significant results found was that women leaders at the top level had a smaller gap between self-perception and "other" perception of their leader identity.

Moving to the Politics of privilege stream, Claudine Gaibrois and Julia Nentwich explored how a diverse workforce experiences power utilising a Foucauladian understanding of power. They explored how organisational members experienced the role of language skills for the establishment, re-enforcement and change of internal power relations. Findings indicate that a person's language skills have important consequences for his/her position in interpersonal relations within the organisation. Also, organisational members use different language competencies to creatively counterbalance priviliging effects. This research addresses an important point emphasised in Professor Zanoni's keynote address urging scholars to look at how language affects organisational processes. Another relevant study explored the professional experiences of highly skilled Romanians in the UK using an identity lens. Elena Doldor and Doyin Atewologun looked at how highly skilled Romanians construct and understand their identities as highly skilled and privileged professionals on the one hand, and as individuals belonging to a socially stigmatised group of European migrants on the other hand. Initial findings reveal a general consciousness of the social stigma related to being Romanian. A variety of identity-heightening episodes were discussed, occurring in job interviews, encounters with authorities for work permits, formal meetings in the workplace or informal conversations with co-workers. Several of the episodes discussed were not strictly related to professional situations, but appeared to occur at the boundary of work and non-work domains. As such, experiences of threat to their Romanian identities blurred the lines between their professional and non-professional lives. Significantly, this study addresses developments and consequences of the European post-election, thereby heeding the need for diversity research to reflect current social and organisational discourses.

Important themes of the conference included socio-economic organisational challenges to be reflected and addressed by diversity researchers going forward; the impact and importance of globalisation on the diverse workforce and how important it is not only for organisations to reflect this diversity in their organisations (reflect customer base), but to utilise diversity as a competitive advantage and the importance of including and engaging majority individuals in diversity interventions.

In closing, the conference was widely enjoyed by all who attended and it generated much discussion regarding prospective research ideas and possible collaborations of newly formed academic alliances. As a first time attendee, it was exciting not only to attend presentations wherein cutting-edge research and ideas regarding the future of

diversity was discussed, but the friendly and inclusive atmosphere was also a wonderful accompaniment to the conference. I look forward to attending next year's conference. I am certain that the expert knowledge and congenial atmosphere will again make for an exciting and informative conference!

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