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Attitudes towards diversity

Evidence from business school students from Norway, India and the Czech Republic

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to investigate diversity attitudes of business school students across three national contexts Norway; India and the Czech Republic. These three countries are dissimilar from one another in terms of values, such as individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 2001) self-expression and secular-rationalism (Inglehart and Welzel, 2010) and inequality. The authors wanted to explore similarities and differences in diversity attitudes of respondents from these countries.

Design/methodology/approach – Using the diversity attitude scale developed by De Meuse and Hostager (2001) the authors conducted comparative research and collected data from 234 business school graduate students.

Findings – The authors found that all groups were positive towards diversity, however, there were significant differences in diversity attitudes between the countries. The Czech Republic had the most positive diversity scores and India the least positive.

Research limitations/implications – This study used convenient samples of business students which might not be representative of the future management in these countries. However, the findings do suggest that attitudes towards diversity are generally positive across these very different national contexts.

Practical implications – The findings suggest that in today's international context people are becoming more positive towards diversity – at least on the conceptual level and a bottom up approach from MNC to diversity management might be easier to implement than previously thought. The preliminary evidence from the study suggests that this first step of introducing diversity policies across national borders might not meet as much resistance as previously anticipated.

Social implications – The movement towards seeing and accepting different others is moving in the right direction.

Originality/value – To use this established diversity attitudes measure across three very different national cultures. In the literature there is a call for more comparative research on diversity management.

Keywords India, Norway, Czech Republic, Diversity attitudes

Paper type Research paper

For modern international organizations the diversity of the labour force is a fact, yet knowledge about attitudes towards diversity in different national contexts is limited. The shape and form of the diversity varies from country to country and region to region but diversity in itself is ever present and organizations are increasingly under pressure to manage it successfully. The growing number of women entering the work force, the escalation of migration from the developing to industrialized countries, and the importance of international career mobility all contribute to the diversity of the work force (Mor Barak, 2014). Coinciding with this development are global ethical, regulatory and economic forces which seek to end discrimination and ensure equality at work. Philosophers, such as Nussbaum, argue effectively for global and universal constitutional principles, to guarantee that individuals, regardless of their background, have a right to live their life as an end in itself rather than as a tool for the ends of others

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(Nussbaum, 2001). International institutions are pushing organizations to focus on managing diversity effectively (UNHDP, 2013; EU, 2013; ILO, 2013) and scholars are arguing for the economic necessity of utilizing all the talent in the labour pool (Mor Barak, 2014). It is apparent from practice and research that managing global diversity is becoming a strategic imperative for many multinational companies (Nishii and Özbilgin, 2007; Özbilgin *et al.*, 2013) yet we have limited knowledge about diversity attitudes in different countries.

Every national context determines which features of diversity are salient, which groups have faced differential treatment in the workplace, and influences how diversity and different others are perceived in society (Özbilgin *et al.*, 2013). There is no one agreed upon definition of diversity (Harrison and Klein, 2007; Lambert and Bell, 2013; McGrath *et al.*, 1995; Mor Barak, 2014; van Ewijk, 2011; Van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007). Definitions of diversity have spanned from narrow category based (e.g. demographics) to broad category based (demographics plus ability, religion lifestyle, etc.) to conceptual (based on a group's minority status and limited access to the job market and equal treatment) (Mor Barak, 2014). Although differences in definitions persist, we can argue that the general concept of diversity is similar – it refers to the differences among members of some particular group, organization or nation (McGrath *et al.*, 1995) and that this concept is going global (Mor Barak, 2014; Özbilgin *et al.*, 2013). However, in different national contexts diversity may trigger associations ranging from positive to negative.

For multinational companies, whose strategic goals are to implement diversity policies throughout their organization, it is critical that they are able to anticipate general attitudes towards diversity in different national contexts before implementing specific policies that define the relevant workplace diversity (Nishii and Özbilgin, 2007; Sippola and Smale, 2007; Syed and Özbilgin, 2009). There is also a call from researchers for more comparative approaches to diversity management (Özbilgin *et al.*, 2013) and the inclusion of diversity attitudes (Linnehan *et al.*, 2006).

General attitudes towards diversity can provide the baseline on which companies build their HR practices and can influence the implementation of policies and training requirements. Diversity attitudes include global attitudes towards diversity as well as the importance and value of diversity (Kulik and Roberson, 2008). Research demonstrates that positive beliefs about diversity, and openness to differences, lead to better performance in diverse groups (Homan *et al.*, 2007). Studies also show that differences in attitudes towards diversity policies and diversity vary systematically based on individual characteristics and the perceiver's background (Harrison *et al.*, 2006; Kossek and Zonia, 1993; Strauss *et al.*, 2008). In order to implement diversity policies organizations need to pay attention to the valence and patterns of attitudes at the national, group and individual level.

Only a limited number of studies have investigated diversity management across national contexts (cf. Klarsfeld *et al.*, 2012; Özbilgin *et al.*, 2013; Sippola and Smale, 2007; Özbilgin *et al.*, 2013) and very few have examined attitudes towards diversity (Alserhan *et al.*, 2010). Traditionally studies examining diversity issues have used an Anglo-western setting (cf. Ferner *et al.*, 2005) and have not taken a comparative approach. In recent years there has been an increasing interest in understanding diversity in non-western contexts (cf. Alserhan *et al.*, 2010; Haq, 2012) and across national borders (Klarsfeld *et al.*, 2012; Sippola and Smale, 2007). However, there is still a call for more comparative diversity research (Özbilgin *et al.*, 2013), and this study seeks to answer this call by investigating diversity attitudes across three dissimilar

countries (Norway, Czech Republic and India). These three national contexts are unique and differ in terms of national-level values, such as individualism and collectivism (Hofstede, 2001), self-expression and secular-rationalism (Inglehart and Welzel, 2010) and history with diversity and inequality. Based on these national differences, we hypothesize that general attitudes towards diversity, at the individual level, will systematically vary across these three contexts. We also argue that these findings about diversity attitudes can offer valuable information to international organizations before they implement their diversity policies in different national contexts. In this paper we first describe what we know about diversity attitudes across national contexts, and then we present a cross-cultural framework that can guide us in predicting the differences between national contexts. Hypotheses are derived and then tested.

What do we know about diversity attitudes?

Attitudes towards diversity can have a significant impact on the ability of groups to reach high-quality outcomes (Homan *et al.*, 2007; Lauring and Selmer, 2013) and can contribute to the successful implementation of diversity policies (Harrison *et al.*, 2006; Strauss *et al.*, 2008). Even though there is much discussion about how to define an attitude there is a general consensus that attitudes are "[…] a categorization of a stimulus along an evaluative dimension, based on cognitive, affective and behavioural information" (Fiske and Taylor, 1991, p. 463) based on Zanna and Rempel (1988). Attitudinal measures have been extensively used in evaluating diversity training (De Meuse *et al.*, 2007; Kalinoski *et al.*, 2013; Kulik and Roberson, 2008), however, there are few established measures for general diversity attitudes (Chrobot-Mason *et al.*, 2006). In this section we first review the studies investigating diversity attitudes both as an antecedent to behaviour and as an outcome of training. This research establishes the importance of diversity attitudes for organizational processes and outcomes. We then present the research specifically investigating diversity attitudes in different national contexts and lastly, other factors that can affect an individual's diversity attitude.

Decades of research has shown that the link between attitudes and behaviour is complicated, (Ajzen, 2001; Glasman and Albarracín, 2006) and that specific conditions need to be met in order for attitudes to predict behaviour. Evidence from the diversity literature is that beliefs and evaluations about diversity do influence perceptions and behaviour (Bell *et al.*, 2009; Linnehan *et al.*, 2006; Mor Barak, 2014) and a positive approach to diversity leads to better outcomes (Homan *et al.*, 2007; Lauring and Selmer, 2013). In the USA, Linnehan *et al.* (2006) with a sample of 852 public service employees, examined attitudes to specific types of diversity behaviours and mapped how attitudes were more or less positive dependent on the type of behaviour presented. Respondents had the most positive attitudes towards more passive diversity behaviours (understanding others and treating people with respect) and had the least positive attitudes towards the more active behaviours (inclusion and confronting bias) (Linnehan *et al.*, 2006). This study demonstrated the importance of diversity attitudes for behavioural intentions. In a recent study using multicultural academic staff in Denmark, Lauring and Selmer (2013) found the link between diversity attitudes and behaviour. In this study, positive diversity attitudes (measured as openness to diversity) were linked to increases in group knowledge (Lauring and Selmer, 2013). Homan *et al.* (2007) using an experimental design also found openness to diversity increased the positive effects of diversity on group outcomes. Results from both field and experimental studies clearly show the influence diversity attitudes can have on behaviour and lend support to the notion that diversity attitudes are potentially important.

Diversity attitudes are also considered central when evaluating organizational practices. The effectiveness of diversity interventions has been investigated and assessed by changes in diversity attitudes (Kulik and Roberson, 2008; De Meuse *et al.*, 2007; Harrison *et al.*, 2006). In a summary of over 30 studies on training and attitudes (Kulik and Roberson, 2008) and a recent meta-analysis by Kalinoski *et al.* (2013), diversity training was associated with more positive attitudes towards diversity. This research linking interventions and attitudes supports the centrality of attitudes for diversity management and points to the importance of attitudinal measures to assess effective diversity policy implementation.

Although diversity attitudes are significant for policy implementation research examining diversity attitudes in different national contexts is quite limited. Alserhan *et al.* (2010) studied employees' diversity attitudes and perceptions in a non-western setting, the banking sector in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Their measure of attitudes was developed by asking employees about how much they agreed or disagreed with specific diversity outcomes, such as increased customer loyalty. Alserhan *et al.*'s (2010) measures concentrate on beliefs about outcomes rather than general attitudes. These authors found that even though workplace diversity was present in all the banks, attitudes towards diversity were close to neutral. Alserhan *et al.* (2010) discuss that diversity is a fact in UAE and therefore diversity as an attitude object might not foster either positive or negative evaluations. This research examines a unique national context and argues that in this context perceptions towards diversity are neutral.

In addition to national context it appears that value orientation, individual differences and group norms also affect attitudes towards diversity. Strauss *et al.* (2008) argue that diversity attitudes are essential for implementing diversity policies and found that diversity attitudes were more positive among women and non-whites and among people who were high on transcendence and openness, and low on conservation and self-enhancement. Kossek and Zonia (1993) in their seminal work on diversity climate found that women and racial minorities held more favourable attitudes. Similar results were found in the USA where individual differences (minority status) were linked to positive attitudes towards affirmative action programmes (Harrison *et al.*, 2006). Age has also been shown to be correlated with diversity attitudes (Ng and Sears, 2012; Sawyerr *et al.*, 2005). Older respondents with higher self-transcendence recognized and valued diversity more than the younger respondents (Sawyerr *et al.*, 2005) and older leaders with a transactional approach and higher social values were more willing and more successful in implementing diversity policies than those who were younger. Lastly, group-level norms and attitudes that favour diversity (cf. Ely and Thomas, 2001; Homan *et al.*, 2007) affect diversity attitudes and behaviours in groups.

In summary, from the literature we find that attitudes are important for diversity management since they can impact on behaviour (intentions, information sharing and group processes) and are considered important outcomes in measuring effectiveness of diversity interventions. Findings also indicate that individual characteristics (e.g. gender and age) value orientations and group norms affect diversity attitudes. However, from the review of the research it appears that there is still a paucity of research examining attitudes across national contexts and to what degree this context can affect diversity attitudes.

Linking diversity attitudes and national contexts

The very concept of diversity can evoke feelings, judgements and beliefs. People are brought up in different cultures with dissimilar value orientations which in turn

can lead to variations in attitudes towards diversity (cf. Bloom, 2002; Risberg and Søderberg, 2008). For example, some national cultures might emphasize individual differences while other focus on similarities within groups (Hofstede, 2001). These differences could influence whether negative or positive reactions occur when diversity policies are introduced and directed towards either one's own group or another group. The concept of diversity can also activate thinking about specific different others and depending on an individual's history with these groups different feelings can be aroused (Allport, 1954). The national context and history influences the way that individuals perceive and think about differences (Syed and Özbilgin, 2009). In a theoretical paper Syed and Özbilgin (2009) argue that diversity practices cannot be realized without a multi-layered understanding of the national context and its effect on defining and managing diversity. Below we present some examples of how diversity is understood in different national contexts and then argue for the importance of a comparative approach to study diversity attitudes.

The diversity concept that is used in many organizations today has its roots in the USA where the emphasis traditionally has been on race (Nishii and Özbilgin, 2007; Ashkanasy *et al.*, 2002). Over the years managing diversity has been adopted outside of North America (Klarsfeld, 2010) and the notion of diversity has become part of the vocabulary of many organizations in industrialized countries (Ashkanasy *et al.*, 2002). US multinationals, however, continue to have a strong influence on diversity management practices. For example, Süß and Kleiner (2008) found in their research of German companies that 70 per cent of the US originating companies had diversity policies compared to 26 per cent of the native German companies. The origin of the diversity concept could have differential effects in different national contexts.

The diversity concept has also been met with very dissimilar interpretations even within the European context (cf. Bloom, 2002; Risberg and Søderberg, 2008; Point and Singh, 2003; Zanoni and Janssens, 2004). Point and Singh (2003) found that companies in Europe had different diversity definitions and emphasis ranging from gender to age to culture to disability. Ferner *et al.* (2005) found in their research on American multinationals in the UK that gender was universal when discussing diversity across subsidiaries although differences on other dimensions and groups emerged. As mentioned previously, Alserhan *et al.* (2010) found that in the UAE diversity attitudes were near to neutral and did not elicit strong reactions. Haq's (2012) research on diversity mind set in India showed differences between private and public sector and that gender was the dominant dimension of interest in the private sector. It is evident that diversity definitions and emphasis on different groups vary from national context to national context (Özbilgin *et al.*, 2013) and within national contexts (Haq, 2012). However, the question remains whether there are general attitudes towards diversity that vary from one national context to another.

Research by Ferner *et al.* (2005) revealed the problems of implementing an American approach to diversity in the UK and stated that "top down senior management driven rationalistic models of transfer are inadequate […]" (Ferner *et al.*, 2005, p. 318). There is a substantial need for understanding bottom up influences – and one of these is elements is the individual's attitude towards diversity. Bogaert and Vloeberghs (2005) after investigating Belgium personnel managers approaches to diversity and mapping what they do and why, called for more research on diversity attitudes and linking these to policy choices. It appears there is a need to investigate attitudes towards diversity in different national contexts.

The studies above have tended to be single country focused and although they have helped us recognize important differences between countries the knowledge they generate is inadequate to deal with the complexities of understanding the implementation of diversity management across national borders. There is a need for more comparative diversity research (Özbilgin *et al.*, 2013) and a closer examination of general attitudes.

Given the importance of global diversity management for international organizations and the limited amount of research on comparative diversity attitudes, we investigate diversity attitudes of business school students in three national contexts: India, Norway and Czech Republic. These countries differ in terms of values and history with diversity. Below we briefly present an overview.

The national contexts

In this section we briefly-describe three national contexts and use both national-level information about diversity and cultural value orientations. We combine this information in order to predict the effect of these contexts on respondents' general attitude towards diversity. Previous research has combined multiple cultural dimensions and historical descriptions in order to make meaningful groupings of nations (House *et al.*, 2004; Inglehart and Baker, 2000) and to make predictions about country-level effects on individual behaviour (Lunnan and Traavik, 2009).

India

India is an important country to investigate due to its size, economic growth and history with a diverse population. The country is the largest democracy in the world and diversity is represented on several dimensions such linguistic, caste, religion and region (Haq, 2012). India's linguistic heritage includes more than 18 officially recognized languages (NIC, 2013) and caste may be seen as the primary differentiator and source of diversity within the country (Economist, 1998). At the national level India has been active in its approach to diversity with policies and affirmative action initiative for the underrepresented and discriminated against groups. The government of India has instituted a method for redressing past social wrongs meted out to these marginalized groups (based on caste and gender) in the form of reservation policies (NIC, 2013).

In 2012, India placed 101st on WEFs Gender Gap analysis (Hausmann *et al.*, 2012) and ranked 91 on country-level inequality the UN Human Development Report (UNHDP, 2013). We can conclude that at the national level India has had a history where diversity is omnipresent, inequality continues and the government has been active in affirmative action policies (Haq, 2014a). Given that there continues to be high inequality we could predict that the national context does not provide an environment conducive for positive diversity attitudes.

To examine India's values we turn to Hofstede (2001) and find that India is leans towards collectivism (focus on the in-group not the individual), and is high on power distance (acceptance in society that power is distributed unequally) and leans towards masculinity (emphasis on agency and more strict gender roles in society). Given that diversity practices focus on different social categories (not just the in-group) and seek to promote a sense of equality between groups we could postulate that countries higher on these dimensions might have less positive attitudes towards diversity than countries lower on these values. The World Values Survey (2013) also provides us with important information about national values. Based on longitudinal data collected from a representative sample of the population the World Value Survey (WVS) maps countries' values and changes in values along two bipolar dimensions. These dimensions

vary from, (1) traditional to secular-rational and (2) survival to self-expression values explain the most variance in their factor analysis and correlate highly with other relevant measures (Inglehart and Welzel, 2010). The traditional/secular-rational values dimension represents differences between societies where religion and tradition is very important and those in which it is not. Countries high on the traditional values highlight the status of the parent-child ties and promote respect for authority whereas societies high on secular-rational support individual choices (abortion) and show greater acceptance towards minority groups such as gay people. Survival values stress economic and physical security whereas self-expression values emphasize on subjective well-being, self-expression and quality of life (Inglehart and Baker, 2000). India scores towards both the traditional and survival poles on these dimensions indicating less openness to self-expression and a conservative approach to differences.

Norway

Norway is a relatively small country with a population of just over 50,000,000. It has a strong economy, low unemployment, ranks number one on the 2012 Human Development Index (UNHDP, 2013) and achieves third place globally for the smallest gender gap (Hausmann *et al.*, 2012). Government initiatives emphasize integration and inclusion in work life focusing on people of different ages, ethnic backgrounds and degree of disabilities (Ministry of Labour, Norway, 2013). Norway does not have an extensive history with different others, however, indigenous minorities such as the Sami, Roma and Kverns have existed in Norway for hundreds of years (UNHDP, 2013). Ethnic diversity in Norway is on the increase with 13.1 per cent of the national population, and 24 per cent in the capital of Oslo, having an immigrant background.

Norway has a tradition of high-participation rates for women in the workforce (Statistics Norway, 2013) and in 2006 implemented a quota system for women on boards in publically limited companies. Given the demographic realities and the political initiatives we can argue that there is an increasing focus on diversity in the workplace in Norway and levels of equality are high. With the increasing salience of diversity and the high levels of societal equality we would predict that the national context creates an environment that supports positive diversity attitudes.

Using Hofstede (2001) and the WVS, Norwegian values can be categorized as low on collectivism, low on power distance and low on masculinity. Norway scores the highest on the WVS dimension of self-expression and very low on Traditionalism. The national values from Hofstede and WVS indicate that Norwegian context would foster an acceptance and openness to difference.

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic received its independence in 1993, has a history of multiculturalism and is described as one of the most religiously tolerant countries in Europe. The country has a multi-ethnic work force with people of Moravian, Polish, German and Vietnamese background. The country has for a long period of time recruited contract workers from countries like Mongolia and Vietnam (Drbohlav, 2005). About 40 per cent of the new jobs created in Czech Republic were taken up by immigrants from Slovakia, Ukraine, Vietnam, Poland and Mongolia in that order (Drbohlav, 2005). The Czech republic places 83rd on the World Gender Gap analysis and is ranked 14th on the UN Human Development Index (UNHDP, 2013). Overall diversity is present in the Czech Republic, however, gender inequality is still present. The influence of the national context therefore appears mixed where positive attitudes towards some groups are encouraged.

Examining the Czech Republic's values, the country scores low on collectivism and medium high on power distance and masculinity (Hofstede, 2001). On the dimensions of self-expression and traditionalism the Czech Republic scores are very close to the secular rational pole and lean slightly towards self-expression (Inglehart and Welzel, 2010). Based on the national value scores the Czech Republic appears to provide a context that is quite open to differences.

Below is a summary of the country values for the three national contexts and comments on gender equality and general inequality. Consistent with previous studies (Lunnan and Traavik, 2009), we use these values and descriptions of the countries to categorize them relative to one another (Table I).

Hypotheses

Given the differences in values and the national context we propose that attitudes towards diversity will be more positive in countries high on the values of self-expression, and lower on collectivism, masculinity, power distance and traditionalism and who are higher on gender equality and lower on overall inequality. The value dimensions could be argued to be related to openness and equality which have been associated with positive attitudes towards diversity (Strauss *et al.*, 2008). With the existence of high levels of inequality in India along with the strong history of differences between subgroups we propose that diversity attitudes will be less positive in India then in Norway and the Czech Republic:

H1. Respondents from Norway and the Czech Republic, (where scores on self-expression and equality are higher and scores on traditionalism, collectivism, power distance and masculinity are lower than in India), will have more positive diversity attitude scores than Indian respondents.

Norway, with the highest level of equality and highest score on self-expression, and the lowest scores on the masculinity dimension, is predicted to have respondents with the most positive diversity scores:

H2. Norway with the lowest score on traditionalism and masculinity and the highest equality rankings will have respondents who have the most positive diversity attitude scores.

Previous research indicates that women are more positive towards diversity and diversity practices than men (Harrison *et al.*, 2006; Kossek and Zonia, 1993; Strauss *et al.*, 2008) we therefore predict:

H3. Women will have higher positive diversity attitude scores than men across national contexts.

	India	Norway	Czech Republic
Collectivism	Medium high (48)	Low (69 IND)	Medium low (58 IND)
Power distance	High (77)	Low (31)	Medium high (57)
Masculinity	Medium high (56)	Very low (8)	Medium high (57)
Self-expression	Low	High	Medium
Traditionalism	Medium high	Very low	Low
Gender equality ranking	101	3	28
Inequality ranking	91	1	14

Table I. Country ranking on value dimensions, gender equality and presence of government initiated diversity polices

Lastly, given the findings from several studies (De Meuse *et al.*, 2007; Kalinoski *et al.*, 2013; Kulik and Roberson, 2008) that training can improve diversity attitudes we control for and explore whether respondents who have taken a diversity course have more positive diversity attitudes:

H4. Respondents who have taken a diversity course will have more positive attitudes towards diversity than those respondents who have not taken a course.

In the next section we present our methodology.

Method

Sample and procedure

A convenience sample of 234 business students from leading business schools in three national contexts: Oslo Norway, Visakhapatnam India, and Prague Czech Republic was obtained. Oslo and Prague are the capital cities of their respective countries with populations of over 6,000,000 in Oslo and 1.3 million in Prague. Visakhapatnam is a southern city in India and one of the largest coastal cities with a population of two million. Visakhapatnam is not the capital city in India, although the size of the city is comparable to Prague and Oslo. The samples we use in this study are not meant to be representative of the three countries but instead are meant to illustrate possible influences that the national context might have on individual diversity attitudes. Respondents were recruited for the survey by using personal networks either directly through e-mail, social media or direct contact. The data were collected in two waves: April and June, 2012. The language in all the surveys was English, the same language used in courses at the three schools. Business students were approached for the survey with the rationale that they would become future managers and leaders. Using a student sample is similar to the research of Strauss *et al.* (2008) and Bell *et al.* (2009) who both emphasize the importance of business school students for managing diversity in the future.

Research design and measure

The aim of the research is to investigate and compare attitudes of business students towards diversity across three national contexts and therefore a cross-sectional design is used. The level of measurement and analysis is at the individual level.

The Workplace Diversity Survey (WDS) developed by De Meuse and Hostager (2001) was used in our study to measure diversity attitudes. It is a validated instrument that measures the underlying attitudes and perceptions to diversity at the workplace (De Meuse and Hostager, 2001, Hostager and De Meuse, 2002). This measure was chosen because of its coverage of the domain of diversity and its general orientation. Other attitude measures have been used for specific diversity behaviours (Linnehan *et al.*, 2006) or specific groups (e.g. race, Choney and Behrens, 1996; or overweight people, Crandall, 1994) but not general attitudes. Below we describe the measure.

WDS consists of 20 items, ten positive and ten negative statements about diversity. The WDS has five subscales for diversity attitudes: emotional reactions, judgments, behavioural intentions, personal consequences and organizational outcomes. Using a five point Likert scale ranging "1 = strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly agree" respondents indicate their agreement or disagreement with each statement. Positive items are scored positively (+1 to +5) depending on the degree of agreement) and negative statements are scored as negative (−1 to −5). An overall score is calculated by adding all scores on both the positive (minimum score of 10 and a maximum score of 50) and negative statements (minimum score of −10 and a maximum score of −50).

The individual summary scores on the WDS range from +40 to −40, based on the extent to which the respondent agreed with the positive and negative statements on the instrument (De Meuse and Hostager, 2001, p. 43). De Meuse and Hostager (2001) classify respondents who have a score between +35 and +11 as optimists, respondents scoring in between +10 and −10 are classified realists and those with a score between −11 and −35 are classified as pessimists. This measure has shown significant criterion validity (De Meuse and Hostager, 2001) and other studies have shown the usefulness of WDS in measuring diversity attitudes (De Meuse *et al.*, 2007).

Results

The samples were similar in terms of educational background (business) and full time student status, however, there were also some differences. As seen in Table II, few respondents in the Indian sample had taken a diversity course, the Czech sample had more female respondents and the Norwegian sample was older. Also 73 per cent of the Czech respondents were members of AIESEC the international student organization. We investigated the impact of these differences on our findings. In the Czech Republic sample those who were members of AIESEC did not score significantly higher on diversity attitudes than those who were not members of AIESEC and women did not score higher than men within the sample. The age of the respondents and taking a diversity course were related to attitudes towards diversity and we therefore conducted additional analysis to investigate the impact on our findings. In the next section we present our results.

To test *H1* and *H2* we ran an ANOVA. Although our sample sizes differed across national contexts the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated as shown by the Levene homogeneity of variances test. *H1* stated that there would be differences in diversity scores across national contexts was supported ($F(2, 231) = 43.39$, $p < 0.00$, $\eta^2 = 0.273$). The respondents from the Czech Republic had the most positive attitudes towards diversity ($M = 20.78$, SD = 8.88), then Norway ($M = 16.04$, SD = 9.88) and lastly the Indian sample had the least positive attitudes ($M = 5.27$, SD = 11.66). We ran a Dunnett T3 *post hoc* analysis and all three means were significantly different from one another.

Based on scoring from (De Meuse and Hostager, 2001) Indian respondents would be classified as realists (+10 to −10) and both Norwegian and Czech respondents would be categorized as optimists (11+). *H1* was supported but not *H2* (predicting that Norway would have the most positive diversity attitudes). There were no significant gender differences across national contexts, however, a within country analysis found that in Norway women had more positive attitudes ($M = 18.67$, SD = 8.00) towards diversity than men ($M = 13.40$, SD = 10.99); ($F(1, 53) = 6.24$, $p = 0.016$, $\eta^2 = 0.11$). *H3*, predicting gender differences, was partially supported.

We found that across national contexts those taking a diversity course had more positive diversity attitudes ($M = 18.53$, SD = 11.83) than those respondents who had

	India	Norway	Czech Republic
n	135	54	45
Female	41%	50%	64%
Modal Age	21-25	25+	21-25
Diversity course	13%	44%	53%

Table II. Sample descriptive statistics

not taken a course ($M = 8.34$, SD = 11.86); ($F(1, 232) = 31.08$, $p = 0.00$, $\eta^2 = 0.12$) supporting *H4* and the recent meta-analyses and summaries by Kalinoski *et al.* (2013) and Kulik and Roberson (2008). When we examined within country scores, India had large differences in diversity scores between those who had taken a course ($M = 17.34$, SD = 14.38) and those that had not ($M = 3.56$, SD = 10.20), however, due to the small number of those taking a course no inferential statistics were performed. The largest difference in positive attitudes towards diversity was between Indian women who had taken a diversity course ($M = 23.33$, SD = 14.77) and those who had not ($M = 2.7$, SD = 9.5). In the Czech Republic and Norway scores for diversity attitudes were higher for those who had taken a course, however, these differences were not statistically significant.

Due to the dissimilarities in our samples on the two categorical variables, diversity course and age, we ran additional analysis to see whether sample differences rather than national differences could explain the diversity attitude scores. We controlled for diversity course and age by splitting our sample into those who had taken a diversity course and those that had not, and age groups. In all subgroups nationality continued to be significant except for one group, those who were 25+ and had taken a diversity course. This subgroup contained only 18 respondents and although the hypothesized relationship was in the expected direction it was not significant. Overall, after examining age and whether a diversity course was taken, national cultural context still had an effect on diversity attitudes.

Discussion

In this study we investigated diversity attitudes of business school students in three different national contexts which varied in terms of national values and inequality. We found that respondents from all three very dissimilar countries had positive attitudes towards diversity although there were differences in degree. Our study was not designed to uncover which specific characteristics accounted for the differences in diversity attitudes among the countries, nor to describe diversity attitudes at the country level. Instead, our study is meant to provide important initial information about how context might or might not influence general diversity attitudes. Businesses and institutions can use this data to as a starting point to help them build effective diversity management practices.

In line with the *H1* respondents from India (which had low scores on self-expression and higher scores on collectivism, power difference, masculinity, traditionalism and high inequality) had the lowest positive attitudes towards diversity, however, it should be noted that their diversity attitudes were still positive. This finding lends support to both those (Mor Barak, 2014; Özbilgin *et al.*, 2013) who contend that the diversity concept is becoming increasing international and those who argue national approaches to diversity vary (Syed and Özbilgin, 2009; van Ewijk, 2011).

Norway which had the highest national values promoting diversity and level of equality was predicted to have the respondents with the most positive attitude towards diversity, yet we found Czech Republic respondents to have the highest scores. *H2* was not supported. There could be several possible explanations for this finding. First of all it might be that our convenience samples were differentially affected by the national context. Another possible explanation is that the focus on equality in Norway rather than difference, leads to less support for diversity.

We found only partial support for gender differences in diversity attitudes which is counter to the previous research showing that women were more positive to diversity

policies and diversity (Harrison *et al.*, 2006; Kossek and Zonia, 1993; Strauss *et al.*, 2008). Norway was the only country where women demonstrated more positive attitudes towards diversity than men. Possible reasons for our lack of findings could be that although gender equality is lower India and the Czech Republic women do not perceive themselves as potential beneficiaries of diversity practices. Previous research explaining why minorities and women are positive towards diversity has been explained by self-interest (Harrison *et al.* 2006). In Norway the affirmative action programmes that receive the most media coverage and arguments for diversity and gender are abundant.

Although only a minor part of our research question we did investigate the impact of taking a diversity courses on diversity attitudes. Commensurate with the current research (Kalinoski *et al.*, 2013; Kulik and Roberson, 2008), taking a diversity course was associated with more positive attitudes towards diversity in the whole sample, however, only in India were differences significant. In Norway and the Czech Republic, positive attitudes were higher for those having taken a course but these differences were not significant. Possible explanations might be linked to the type of course taken, the sample or the fact that students before starting the course were positive towards diversity. We did not collect details on the diversity course itself and more research is required on the impact of different diversity courses.

What is perhaps most interesting in our results is that we did not find any overall negative attitude towards diversity across three very different national contexts. This finding is promising for international companies wanting to implement diversity polices across national contexts. It is also indicative that universal approaches to diversity are taking root (Nussbaum, 2001).

At the same time it is also important to recognize that national contexts are associated with different attitudes and not all countries will be equally positive. The social situation in India has traditionally been influenced by the caste system, and regional and linguistic differences which is reflected not only in the history of diversity but also with the WVS value dimensions. Understanding both the history and the changing dynamic of attitudes towards diversity is critical. We cannot point to one dimension or historical fact that can explain these differences and similarities but comparing country contexts gives us the opportunity to identify universal attitudes that can be a stepping stone for building more unique diversity polices (Özbilgin *et al.*, 2013).

The current study can offer some advice to international and multinational organizations. As emphasized earlier, national context plays an important role in shaping general attitudes towards diversity (Syed and Özbilgin, 2009) even if this not the most important force. Our findings suggest that in today's international context people from very dissimilar countries might be positive towards diversity. As with Sippola and Smale (2007) who found that a general idea of diversity and diversity management can be transferred internationally, perhaps understanding general attitudes in different national contexts can be the first step for multinational organizations to introduce diversity policies. The preliminary evidence from our study suggests that this first step might not meet as much resistance as previously anticipated (Bloom, 2002; Point and Singh, 2003). International organizations must recognize that although people might be becoming more positive towards diversity there are still differences in how positive people are. Using the WVS, Hofstede and equality measures might assist organizations in understanding how people in different national contexts might differ in their attitudes towards diversity. It remains critical,

however, that organizations uncover the variation within these national contexts and investigate more closely local understandings of diversity.

This study offers initial evidence from non-Anglo and non-western countries about general attitudes towards diversity. Our findings suggest that in today's international context business schools students might be becoming more positive towards diversity – at least on the conceptual level, and a bottom up approach from MNCs to diversity management could be easier to implement than previously thought. The preliminary evidence from our study suggests that this first step of introducing diversity policies across national borders might not meet as much resistance as previously anticipated. Our paper argues for the importance of general diversity attitudes as the first step in introducing diversity policies across national contexts. We recommend that future research continues to take a comparative approach looking not only at differences but similarities as well.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. Convenience samples have been used in all three national settings and the questionnaire was given in English. Our findings are neither generalizable nor representative of the national contexts but merely illustrative of how context might impact attitudes in systematic ways. Finally, the comprehension of the concept of diversity is amenable to an open and subjective interpretation which might have varied between samples. Future research should therefore focus on addressing these limitations and also investigate more closely the link between diversity attitudes and implementation of diversity policies.

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