DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

A potential difference in organisational culture discrimination

Master's programme in
Culture, Communication & Globalization
(CCG-8)

Christian Villum
Individual project
Aalborg University 2007

Master's programme Culture, Communication and Globalization (English)

8. semester individual project

Written by:

_____
Christian Villum

Supervisor: **Julia Z. Klausen**

Deadline: 11. June 2007
Pages: 15 (35.830 keystrokes)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

One of the main features induced by globalisation is that of trans-national flow of capitol and labour. More precisely, business has transcended national borders and more than ever before around the world a large number of national companies and MNCs now see the entire globe as their arena.

This development has also had its impact on business management and human resource management in general – more particularly through what can be referred to as the conceptualizing of workforces. In an increasingly competitive world, finding and fine-tuning qualified labour is as important as ever, and across the globe we see an increasing emphasis being put on new ways of assembling the optimal work force and work environment. New ideas are constantly gaining ground from the more conservative types of leadership and to draft among the international labour force has long been a sought path to improve results and competitiveness.

Diversity management and organizational culture

One of the central notions in this sphere is that of diversity management as a concept within the sphere of organizational culture. The concept implies that having a diverse workforce (in terms of culture, including dimensions such as gender, race, social background, age etc.) creates productive and creative synergies that surpass the potential of a homogeneous workforce – while also carrying a certain philanthropic or benevolent value.

In general, organizational culture suffer from the some of the same prejudicial malaises as the society of which it is part – racism, sexism etc. - but often in working context, even though indirect and subtle, discrimination is accentuated, since the tension takes place in a fixed arena, the workplace.

So what can be done about these problems? Diversity management in practice, although seemingly a magnificent idea, is far from flawless and carries many contradictions and difficulties – but despite this, it does appear to have some sort of striking power. What is its potential in remedying the challenges of discrimination seen in organizational culture?

The focus

Diversity management versus the problems in organizational management will be the focal point of this project. I wish to investigate and discuss the problems and benefits of utilizing diversity management in trying to counter the inherent patterns of discrimination that is argued to exist in any workplace hierarchy.

The intention is to discuss this predicament in general terms by looking at established theory on the two fields and juxtaposing these with tendencies mapped from case studies and scholarly papers.

Problem statement

The abovementioned focus has led me to develop the following problem formulation:

Looking at the problem of discrimination in organizational culture, how can diversity management make a difference?

STRUCTURE, METHODOLOGY & DELIMITATIONS

I will now give a brief outline of the project contents and structure, as well as my methodological considerations and the delimitations I have deemed necessary. The project will be discussion based with a theoretical locus and draw its empirical foundation mainly from scholarly accounts and case studies.

Project structure

I have divided the project into 5 parts, starting with

(1) an *introduction*, as presented earlier herein, followed by

(2) this *project structure, methodology & delimitation section* that gives an overview of how exactly I plan to proceed in order to be able to reach a well-argued conclusion on the chosen topic. Then follows

(3) the *theory section* in which I will account for the main bodies of the two theoretical areas of the *discrimination in organizational culture* on one hand, and *diversity management* on the other. In this section I will draw upon the work of famed scholars in these fields, lead by Pushkala Prasad, Willem Koot, Taylor Cox, Molefi Asante & William Gudykunst and Nancy J. Adler.

(4) Then, in the subsequent *discussion section* I will conduct a nuanced discussion in which I will juxtapose the two theoretical fields mentioned before, including perspectives from a wide range of scholarly sources, before reaching

(5) the *conclusion*, I which I establish my findings.

Methodology

This project will be discussion-based and thus not utilize or rely on any tools in the sense of tangible instruments of analysis such as models or the like. Rather, I will rely on constructing a deductive hypothetical discussion in which I will collocate and juxtapose the opposing dimensions of the theoretical fields presented in the theory

section and add narratives from case studies and expert sources. These sources will be derived from scholarly papers, literature on the topic and case studies and business sector diversity management and human resource management records. Last, but not least, I will throughout append my own perspectives.

Delimitations

Due to the allowed extent of this assignment, I have chosen to setup a few delimitations. The main reasons for this is that dealing with a topic as broad and complicated as this one, any full discussion of such scope as the one I will conduct herein, would normally exceed the volume allowed, as it would be relevant to include much more elaborate theoretical framework including dimensions such as identity, historical perspectives and accounts of political/societal context. However, to fit the project into the given frame, I have chosen not to delve into these matters, but rather briefly draw upon them when applicable and most often in general terms only.

Further, my arena of research will be primarily that of the Western World (Europe and the US). Since I am approaching the discussion in a generic approach, I have chosen not to distinguish between where accounts are taken from in the Western World, but to see this arena as a whole.

THEORY SECTION

Organisational culture and discrimination

In this part I will first briefly account for the theoretical basics of organisational culture and then delve into the field of the alleged discrimination that many scholars argue exist in organisational culture context.

What is organisational culture?

In its most basic definition, organizational culture is the "shared symbols, language, practices and deeply embedded beliefs and values" (Newman *in* Kirton & Green 2001: 73) of a group in an organisation. Groups in this context consist of members that share a configuration of the abovementioned traits that forms the identity of the members. Kirton & Greene distinguishes social groups by looking at five characteristics: gender, race, disability, age and sexual orientation. Further, they add, groups – regardless of composition – are also all permeated by distinction of class (Kirton & Green 2001: 8). As such, social group memberships are usually conceptualized in juxtaposition to "the dominant majority group, which in the UK employment context, is usually white, non-disabled, heterosexual, male." (Kirton & Green 2001: 8). I find it safe to say that this dominance stretches outside the UK and apply for most of Europe as well as the United States.

In organisation context "social group membership is salient in the sense that a group's relationship with social institutions influences the individual members' interaction with, and experiences and perceptions of, those institutions, which in turn impact upon the choices and opportunities individuals are faced with. We are gendered, racialized, aged, sexualized beings and are viewed, and often judged, as such by social actors." (Kirton & Green 2001: 7)

Dealing with culture of any kind is always complex and organisational culture is no different. Pushkala Prasad et. al., famous for publishing ao. the well-argued take on intercultural management *Managing the Organisational Melting Pot* makes clear that "managing diversity at the workplace presents as many dilemmas as triumphs, and is constantly fraught with innumerable tensions, conflicts, and contradictions." (1997:5).

Some of these tensions and conflicts, I will argue, come in the shape of discrimination in the workplace, which I will now look into.

Discrimination

Inequality and discrimination against the groupings mentioned earlier can be argued to be a social construction - with roots that dates back several centuries: "The UK, as example somewhat representative of at least a range of European countries still suffer from the remnants of colonial times societal structure, in which gender and race were the principal determinants of a person's structural position – today resulting in the prevalence of sexism and racism." (Kirton & Green 2001: 8)
Gill Kirton & Anne-Marie Greene, British scholars in Human Resource Management and Business, continue by saying that the disadvantage for the minority groups arise from "the embeddedness in the fabric of society of prejudice and discrimination against those groups (…) reflected in employment and in organizational life. Therefore, certain categories of people enter employment and organizations already disadvantaged by social inequalities as reflected in, for example, the education system and by their social group membership(s)." (Kirton & Green 2001: 8-9)

They continue by making clear that it is a "widespread myth that employment inequalities have been eradicated and that any status or earnings differentials that exist among the workforce, simply reflect individual merit or choice. (…) In the employment context, members of dominant social groups or members of those groups already privileged by their disproportionate representation in high-status positions, are likely to be favoured by those making decisions within organizations." (Kirton & Green 2001: 7-8)
In this context, Willem Koot, whose article *The Strategic Utilization of Ethnicity in Contemporary Organizations* I will draw upon throughout both this theoretical account as well as the discussion, brings forward the idea that tolerance is the central notion in determining the relation between dominant and minority groups: "To tolerate literally means 'to bear'. It implies putting up with something that one disapproves of at the same time. (…) Being tolerated is the fate of the weak. (…) The language of tolerance is one of good will, but it practice means that ethnic groups are

being examined, categorized, pigeon-holed and judged by the standards of the dominant group." (Koot 1997: 332)

Molefi Asante & William Gudykunst, famed for authoring *Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication*, somewhat shares this view by saying that one must always "take into consideration the hierarchy created by the social, political, economic, and cultural factors. (…) Evidence of this programmed hierarchy often appears in the real expressions of power such as choosing workers, promoting workers, and providing merit to workers. (…) What usually happens with the interaction is that Whites [in this example constituting the dominant group] define the interaction within their own structural system. Thus, because of what we call the power variable in communicative relationships, black people [in this context constituting the minority group] are often accepted but not on intercultural terms. The terms are dictated by the White value system that is itself already constrained by the principles inherent in the denial of pluralism." (Asante & Gudykunst 2002: 379). This denial, however, is a two-edged sword, since reluctance also lies on "the other side", the minority group: "Creating distance and accentuating one's ethnic origin tend to be (very strong) weapons in the struggle against the dominant party. These weapons will not be easily surrendered." (Koot 1997:333). It is my impression that although Koot uses only the ethnic dimension here, this can be said about the other grouping characteristics as well.

Having accounted for basic of organisational culture and its argued inherent discrimination, I will now move on to the second part of the theory section, dealing with diversity management.

Diversity management

Let me start out by defining the term in its basic sense using add a couple of different approaches: One view states that "broadly, the term *managing diversity* refers to the systematic and planned commitment on the part of organizations to recruit and retain employees from diverse demographic backgrounds." (Thomas *in* Prasad et. al. 1997: 4). In Pushkala Prasad et. al.'s book, the well-acknowledge diversity management scholar Taylor Cox add a globalization perspective to the notion by highlighting that that "managing diversity also implies an active recognition and appreciation of the increasingly *multicultural* nature of contemporary organizations." (Cox in Prasad et. al. 1997: 4).

A great deal of positivism has been surrounding the idea when discussed and described in both media, literature and scholarly circles. As such, there has been a tendency towards celebrating diversity management "with the help of evocative metaphors such as the melting pot, the patchwork quilts, cultural sensitivity seminars, diversity audits, and so on." (Allen 1991 in Prasad et. al. 1997:4). Prasad et. al. explains that "all of these metaphors invoke enormously affirmative connotations of diversity, associating it with images of cultural hybridity, harmonious coexistence, and colourful heterogeneity." (Prasad et. al. 1997:4)

Diversity in this context

But what exactly is meant by diversity in this context? In a globalized view it would be obvious to mention dimensions such as ethnicity, gender, age, race, social status – and even identity. It can be argued that all of these dimensions apply when discussing diversity among groups, and I agree with that. But since I, as mentioned earlier, will be approaching the matter from a much more generic point of view, I will once again rather rely on an interpretation made by Prasad et. al. who in this case boils it all down to one thing: culture. In more elaborative terms they say that "embedded within the philosophy of managing diversity is the notion that traditional mono-cultural organizations cannot function effectively in the context of today's and tomorrow's workforce. Thus, the main focus of managing diversity is cultural." (Prasad et. al. 1997:8)

They continue by pointing out how the dominant culture tends to permeate the environment – the venue – of workplaces and well as the society in which the workplace is located: "The premises undergirding organizational functioning are largely mono-cultural, composing a generic set of norms, values, and cultural preferences." (Prasad et. al. 1997:15)

Since culture is such a complex and abstract matter, measuring exactly which view is the most accurate is hard, if not almost impossible, they argue: "The cultural nature of the diversity movement has meant that evaluating organizational attempts to manage diversity is difficult, because the desired outcomes are neither concrete nor easily measurable." (Prasad 1997:8). Regardless of this, I will now delve into how diversity management functions in practice.

Diversity management in practice

In functional terms, what is diversity management? There are, of course, different philosophies: "To some, diversity may be little more than proportional representation of various demographic and social groups in the workplace. To others, it may involve overcoming cultural prejudice and instilling new values about difference in the organization. To still others, it may connote changing the very fabric of work practices in keeping with the cultural influences of different social groups." (Prasad et. al. 1997:13). Taylor Cox proposes taking an even more active role in embracing diversity. He talks about *creating pluralism* through a range of initiatives in a workplace and mentions for instance training and orientation programs, or making effort to ensure that minority groups gets room to give input and gain acceptance or perhaps establish support/advisory groups – just to mention a few examples (Cox 1994: 244-247).

In the arena of diversity management in practice, on manager level, how is the notion implemented? Again, this is a vast scholarly field, in which I have chosen the accounts of Nancy J. Adler, professor of international management at McGill University in Montreal, who has defined six guidelines for managers describing the implementation of the term (Adler 2001: 116-118):

- *Task-related selection*

  Managers should select team-members for their abilities rather than their ethnicity, in order to ensure that the team is homogeneous in ability levels and heterogeneous in attitudes.

- *Recognize difference*

  "Team members should become aware of their own stereotypes" (2001: 117) as well as that of the others. Next step is to attempt to understand why the others think, feel, and act the way they do.

- *Superordinate goals*

  The manager must help the group agree on a broadly defined superordinate goal; a goal that they can all share.

- *Equal power*

  Managers should distribute power "according to each member's ability to contribute to the task, not according to some preconceived gradient of relative cultural superiority." (2001: 117)

- *Mutual respect*

  Negating prejudice is of utmost importance and managers should ensure this through inducing "equal status, close contact, and cooperative efforts towards a common goal." (2001: 117-118)

- *Feedback*

  Managers should also remember the value of positive feedback, especially in the early stages of a team's cooperation process. "External feedback helps the group see itself as a team, and serves the function of teaching the team to value its diversity, recognize contributions made by each of its members, and trust its collective judgement." (2001: 118)

But how is it that diversity in workforces becomes an advantage?

Comparing diverse and homogeneous groups

Adler claims that "culturally diverse groups also have the potential to work more productively than homogeneous groups, because their wide range of human resources allows them to function more creatively. (…) To function effectively, the input into the group's process should include many alternatives (the result of divergence) while resulting in consensus decisions (the result of convergence). Managers in any organization constantly balance divergence with convergence, gathering new ideas and gaining agreement on particular decisions and actions." (2001: 109)

This however is not an easy task, for managers nor employees. Adler conducted a survey to investigate this matter and came to some rather interesting findings: "Multicultural teams have the potential to become the most effective and productive teams in an organization. Unfortunately, they frequently become the least productive. (…) Culturally diverse teams tended to be the most or least effective, whereas the homogenous teams tended to be average." (2001: 111)

What differentiates the most from the least effective teams, she asked – and came to the conclusion that "highly productive and less productive teams differ in how they manage their diversity, not, as is commonly believe, in the presence or absence of diversity. When well managed, diversity becomes a productive resource to the team. When ignored, diversity causes process problems that diminish the team's productivity." (2001: 111)

So now we have learned that diversity management is a delicate matter with a considerable risk of failure if conducted wrong in a given workplace context.
This context can be of local scale, but also, as Prasad et. al. argues, on national scale:
In their 1997-publication, they put focus on Northern America and found that the U.S. and Canada share "a number of problems relating to workplace diversity. These include a growing hostility to preferential minority hiring, the persistent exclusion of non-white immigrants from managerial and professional positions, and an intensifying polarization between ethnic and racial groups within organizations and the broader society." (Prasad et. al. 1997:7).

DISCUSSION

In this discussion I will juxtapose the argued problem of discrimination present in organisational culture with the characteristics of diversity management to find out how diversity management can make a difference in lessening these inequalities.

First, I will discuss the overall frame for diversity management today, giving perspective to its role in a broad societal view. Next I will consider the challenges of diversity management in organizational culture today, including a debate on the perhaps most well-known diversity employment project, the US-based affirmative action initiative, in order to gain perspective on how forced diversity management has had its effect – for better and for worse.

Then I will look at the areas of pre-requisites that are needed for diversity management to optimally remedy the problems of discrimination in organizational culture – before presenting argumentation of what businesses need to contemplate in order to implement efficient diversity management.

Societal and overall perspectives

The recent years have seen a trend in developing new, dynamic leadership styles, and as a result, mentioned also in the theory section, diversity management has been vastly celebrated around the globe in very positive phrasing. While this may very well be appropriate, not everything appears equally bright when it comes to implementation.

Pushkala Prasad has, since the publication of the book I have used extensively in producing this project, engaged in a series of field studies – one of which was a "five-year ethnographic study of the diversity management programs that have become trendy in corporate culture. Looking at the Canadian oil industry and the U.S. and Canadian insurance industry, Prasad and her research team observed cultural-sensitivity training programs and interviewed participants, managers, and the consultants running the programs. They found the programs to be largely cosmetic—feel-good programs that don't effect fundamental change. Among employees, white males and most minorities viewed the efforts with scepticism and cynicism, while (in perhaps the most surprising result of the study) white females endorsed the programs,

which, the researchers suggest, may help answer their needs for organizational inclusion." (Skidmore Scope 2000). While this study reports poor implementation and leadership skills, showing us how managers must engage in diversity management full-hearted for it to work, it also – in my opinion – shows the legitimacy of diversity initiatives in general, seeing that many women has used this implementation as a lever to counter sexual discrimination.

Other scholars also report seeing that "the celebration of diversity is part and parcel of a process of individualism" (Richard Marsden *in* Pushkala 1997: 21) thereby seizing one of the argued most profound tendencies in the digitalized network society, in which citizens become increasing aware of the individuality and choice to go *upstream* – meaning embracing their individuality. Willem Koot puts this into a daring perspective by saying that the dominant group's unwillingness to engage in diversity initiatives could be considered a symbol of reluctance on a much larger scale. He identifies the "current Western post modernistic society, which is fragmentizing, in danger of losing its political and economic supremacy. (…) Fear of loss of global supremacy lies at the root of the rhetoric of synergy and interdependence." (Koot 1997: 332) – the synergy that is argued to be the effect of diversity management.

Challenges to diversity management

Koot's argument draws of course on views rooted in historical perspectives – which lead me to the next part of the discussion in which I will look at the most significant challenges to diversity management. In other words, the most noticeable obstacles present for diversity management in order for it to make a difference in organisational culture.

As mentioned in the theory section, minorities – in the Western World – are categorized and grouped in a sort of opposition towards the dominant culture group member stereotype, being typically – in this context - a white, non-disabled, heterosexual male. Asante & Gudykunst acknowledges this historically rooted notion in their work in which they focus on racial tension and says that "inescapably the relationship of blacks and Whites in the workplace historically linked to the fact that

Africans were brought to the United States as chattel. This is the principal difference in communication between Whites and other racial or ethnic groups. (…) Much communication between people in the workplace will continue to be clouded by ethnocentric prejudices until communicators learn to overcome the structural constraints imposed by history." (Asante & Gudykunst 2002: 380). This is also in the same vein of a range of the views put forward by scholars in the theory section in which it was determined that we are dealing with a social construction with grave historical roots that has caused this structure to be embedded in the fabric of society – thereby allegedly representing disadvantage to minority groups already from the beginning. A disadvantage caused by a hierarchy created by social, political, economic and cultural factors in the dominant group's mono-cultural tradition – and a disadvantage and inequality that, as described in the theory section, in no way has been eradicated to the present day. Pessimists claim that this power relationship is unchangeable, as "individuals can never entirely escape their socially constructed positioning." (Cockburn *in* Kirton & Green 2001: 8). I disagree with that, however, but with a view that is rooted in a more naïve positive worldview, rather than scientific proof.

Affirmative action

It is not as if these challenges have not been addressed at all. On the contrary, several measures have been taken over the years to negate it; the most prominent perhaps being that of affirmative action legislation in the United States. Affirmative action in practice fundamentally means "the explicit use of a person's group identity as a criterion in making selection decisions. Usually this means that among candidates who are qualified on other criteria, candidates of underrepresented groups are selected in preference to those from overrepresented groups." (Cox 1994: 250). This may sound somewhat similar to diversity management, Cox argues, in the sense that "it is possible to view affirmative action as a method to address the disadvantages that members of outgroups have due to a combination of ethnocentrism and unequal power distribution. To this extent, its use might be supported as a way to compensate for the existing discrimination." (Cox 1994: 249). Still, however, there are at least two very distinct differences, as noted by Prasad et. al., who point out that managing diversity is "not directly connected to the various employment laws that regulate different forms of discrimination at the workplace. In fact, the philosophy of

managing diversity is entirely *voluntaristic*. (…) Thus, managing diversity stands in contrast to anti-discriminationtory legislation in the United States" (Prasad et. al.1997:8). Secondly, the issue of drafting based on grouping *rather* than skill is a direct contradiction, as described by Nancy Adler in the theory section.

Pre-requisites

Namely the voluntaristic dimension is crucial in both implementing diversity management – but also in the context of having to determine its ability to make a difference in organisational culture. Asante & Gudykunst suggest that there needs to be "a law of understanding that says that when persons of different racial or cultural backgrounds interact they will be able to produce the appropriate linguistic and symbolic codes necessary for interpretation once they have achieved affective understanding. Affective understanding is an attitude toward the culturally different communicator that demonstrates the willingness to communicate; humility before the other's culture, which says 'I do not know all I need to know but am willing to learn about this person's culture'; and the ability to speak a language intelligible to the other." (2002: 380). This idea goes for both the dominant and minority groups – not least the latter that – as described in the theory section – tends to deny cultural pluralism as well, by accentuating their ethnicity.

Also, both groups need to be aware of the potential of forming groups of diversity as motivation. Nancy Adler explains that "regrettably, culturally diverse groups rarely actualize their full potential. Process loses due to mistrust, misunderstanding, miscommunication, stress, and a lack of cohesion often negate the potential benefits of diversity to the group. Only if well managed can culturally diverse groups hope to achieve their potential productively." (2001: 118)

Managerial contemplation

Many nuances are to be contemplated by managers when wanting to implement effective diversity management in junction with traditional approaches, such as for instance the six guidelines advocated by Nancy J. Adler, as presented in the theory section.

First and foremost, business leaders should refrain from always looking for fixed formulas in their attempt to map the perfect approach towards diversity management. This is a wrong step – given the complexity of culture, each diversity management initiative should be customized to fit the exact given context. (Koot 1997: 331)

Secondly, managers should focus on the environment they act in. Cox advocates the idea that "a more complex, but I believe potentially powerful, tool for promoting change toward pluralism is the development of flexible, highly tolerant climates that encourage diverse approaches to problems among all employees. Such an environment is useful to workers regardless of group identity but is especially beneficial to people from non-traditional cultural backgrounds, because their approaches to problems are more likely to be different due to past norms. A company often cited for such a work environment is Hewlett Packard. Among the operating norms of the company that promote pluralism are (1) encouragement of informality and unstructured work; (2) flexible work schedules and loose supervision; (3) setting objectives in broad terms, with lots of individual employee discretion over how they are achieved; and (4) a policy that researchers should spend at least 10 percent of company time exploring personal ideas." (Cox 1994: 247)

Also thinking outside the box could be a rewarding way of customizing diversity management to fit special organisational contexts. Sometimes it would be advisable to make efforts to eliminate differences and bridge the gaps of tension, but in other case, however, "it may be advisable to leave the rivalry intact or even stimulate it. Adler, Cox, and others want us to believe that it is better to start from differences, to accept these, and thus end up in harmonious collaboration. In my opinion, this point of view is rather idealistic, patronizing, and at times counterproductive. (…) If one wants to reduce cultural distance, paradoxically one should not focus mainly on the differences in culture but also concentrate on differences in power and conflicting interests." (Koot 1997:333-334). I am quite aware of the contradictory nature of this approach compared to the statements earlier, in which I argued that diversity management had a pre-requisite in needing affective understanding. However, thinking out of the box in this context must be thought of a somewhat a valid anomaly – or alternative - and as

established in the theory section, contradictions are inherent when dealing with cultural diversity and thus creative solutions should always be considered.

Anyway, Koot continues down this road, adding further societal perspective to his views: "Organizing and managing ethnic rivalries as a form of management strategy in our globalizing world is not just more realistic than aspiring to cultural synergy, it may even release a large amount of energy. (…) Growing ethnic segmentation in the world calls for a vision in which recognition and appreciation of differences and contrasts are central notions. This implies starting from a number of perspectives without singling out any one organizational solution as final. Contradictions should not be seen as problematic, but as starting points for a learning process. Overall, confrontations are more productive than harmony. In our globalising world, (ethnic) differentiation, fragmentation, and segmentation are bound to increase rather than decrease. In a large organization with varied interests, customs, preferences, and contrasting definitions of reality, a pluralistic vision of management tends to be more realistic than an integrative approach." (Koot 1997: 334-336)

Also, taking the integrative path makes it hard to maintain cultural differences in their original form – it quickly turns from creating harmony to a process of assimilation. As mentioned in the theory section, forcing through to constantly meet the other groups on your own turf is not to be considered an environment of intercultural terms.

CONCLUSION

Diversity management today has the potential to play a significant role in today's globalized world. From juxtaposing the theoretical accounts of diversity management, organisational culture and its inherent discrimination a range of findings became clear to me:

Pushkala Prasad's survey showed how women in many US businesses, despite poor diversity management, had seized the opportunity to gain influence. As such, diversity management was argued to be a proliferation of the individualistic tendency we see in general in the digital network society today – a tendency that arguably reflects the period of transition that we world is facing these years, seeing the diminishing of national borders and ability and opportunity for instant world-wide individual peer-to-peer communication etc.

In this light, reluctance against diversity management is a symbol of how the old world is afraid of loosing its supremacy – both economically, but perhaps more significantly in terms of culture and influence.

The individual tendency of diversity management is a natural next step away from the discrimination and inequality rooted in history; a history of slavery, colonialism, imperialism on the part of the West, and whose remnants still permeates society today – in social, political, economic and cultural areas of society, where structure is still drawn in the dominant group's mono-cultural tradition.

But times are changing and the transition has begun by far. We have seen effort in the shape of affirmative action that undoubtedly have balanced things a little, although perhaps more crudely than most people – employers as well as employees, dominant groups and well as minority groups – would have liked if they were to take charge in a perfect world. Thus, frustration with this legislation has lead train spotters to seek new ideas, and although diversity management is not to be considered new any more, I find it obvious that diversity management at some level is the leadership style that

fully realizes the embracing of the new world and the ability to take it to the next step.

So how can diversity management make a difference in the discrimination in organizational culture that we see today? I will argue that diversity management needs to be seen as a much more flexible notion than has been the case so far. Each diversity management initiative should be customized to fit exactly into the actual situation, implementing highly tolerant environments - that stimulate both proponents and opponents into embracing or accepting the diversity that is increasing in all areas across the globe. And even if proponents do not accept this diversity, managers taking this approach should be able to cope – through out-of-the-box thinking. The idea, as presented in the discussion is to stimulate rivalry rather than trying to negate it, thereby seizing the energy inherent in any conflict and turning it to be an advantage. Businesses and managers should remember, however, that they need 100% dedication in order to succeed. Only then will diversity management have its full impact; more productive and creative outputs – and only through such radical changes is it possible to tamper with those historically biased and discriminative structures that permeate the very fabric of organisational culture today.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adler, Nancy J. (2001): International Dimensions of Organizational Behaviour. South-Western College Publishing, Phoenix

Asante, Molefi Kete & Gudykunst, William B. (2002): Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication. Sage, London

Cox, Taylor (1994): Cultural Diversity in Organizations. Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco

Kirton, Gill & Greene, Anne-Marie (2001): The Dynamics of Managing Diversity – A Critical Approach. Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford

Koot, Willem C. J. (1997): The Strategic Utilization of Ethnicity in Contemporary Organizations *published in* Sackmann, Sonja A. (1997): Cultural Complexity in Organisations. Sage, Thousand Oaks

Mead, Richard (2000): Cases and Projects in International Management – Cross-Cultural Dimensions. Blackwell, Oxford

Prasad, Pushkala et. al. (1997): Managing the Organizational Melting Pot – Dilemmas of Workplace Diversity. Sage, Thousand Oaks

Trompenaars, Fons & Hampden-Turner, Charles (2004): Managing People Across Culture. Capstone, Chichester

Simons, George F. (2002): Patchwork: The Diversities of Europeans and Their Business Impact. Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford

Skidmore Scope (2000): Zankel Professor integrates business and humanities. Skidmore College, online
http://www.skidmore.edu/scope/fall2000/oncampus/zankel.html