

Diverse by Default

Extending the Business Case of Migrant Workers at the Workplace

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Diverse by default: Extending the business case of migrant workers at the workplace

NFF Nordic Opportunities 2017, Track 2: Workplace diversity, gender (in)equality, and migration

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Abstract

This paper contributes to theoretical debates around migrant workers at the workplace, labour market inequality and the business case of diversity. Building on stories of overqualified migrant stuck in low-rank jobs due to their migration, this paper explores how migrant workers are simultaneously defined by precarization and high demand especially in the service industry. Drawing on the qualitative data from the case company, Service, I inquire how a diverse composition of employees happened by coincidence, has turned into an advantage of extending the conventional diversity business case: Employing highly-skilled, career-minded migrants in low-skilled positions, migrants are simultaneously casted as a disposable, replicable and temporary resource, the 'ideal worker', AND as a 'high potential' for first line management. This extended business case of diversity draws on multifaceted business arguments that arise from migrants' paradoxical situation. To improve their situation, the article discusses whether alternative conceptualization of talents, 'high potentials', and making the ambitions of diverse employees more prominent in strategic human resource management can be a relevant strategy – instead of targeted diversity management programs often losing sight of equality. Promoting socio-economic redistribution and general recognition of migrant workers through labor market affiliation might be the best way to protect these 'diverse workers'; just by fighting for better working conditions for them as workers (Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Zanoni and Janssens, 2014).

Introduction

During the last decade, Danish labor market and workplaces have witnessed an increasing internationalization with migrant workers¹ making up 12% of the laborforce. The number of migrant

¹ The term migrants' refers to people who travel internationally to gain a job on their own initiative including refugees and immigrants. This is different situation from 'expatriates' defined as individuals who are assigned an international post by their companies.

workers has increased with 45 pct. since 2008 and it is predicted how this number will only grow (Christensen, 2017). Like in any other advanced and high potential economy, there are reports of increasing need for skilled migrants (Al Ariss et al., 2012), pertinent labor and skill shortage make companies increasingly dependent on migrants and 82 pct. of Danish companies find that focus on development of talent can minimize the 'competence gap' (Copenhagen Capacity, 2016: 7). Paradoxically, however, even high-skilled migrants are predominantly employed in a few industries characterized by manual, low-skilled work in temporary and parttime positions like cleaning, hotel, food and construction (Denmark Statistics, 2015). Drawing on insights from Fraser (1998), migrant workers at the Danish labor market suffer from structural inequalities of misrecognition and maldistribution. In terms of misrecognition, migrants experience a lack of acknowledgement of their professional skills and abilities in the labor market, and they are often forced to take jobs characterized by little possibility of advancement, leading to downward career mobility and talent waste (status impairment i.e. Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Aten, 2015). This leads to maldistribution, as minorities fill low-paid or even unpaid (internship) jobs in the lowest echelons of the organizational hierarchy, at least when they first enter the labor market (class impairment). Compared to the ethnic majority, migrants are generally employed at a level below their qualifications, overrepresented in low-skilled work, underrepresented in management positions, and more often faced with unemployment (e.g. Ejrnæs, 2012; Holck, 2017; Romani et al, 2016).

Danish organizations are increasingly encouraged to include a diverse group of employees drawing on business case arguments from diversity management literature (Holvino and Kamp, 2009; Holck and Muhr, 2017). Two of the prevalent arguments for hiring diverse employees are linked to competences related to minority background driving *innovation and learning* or *legitimacy and access* (Holvino and Kamp, 2009; Thomas and Ely, 2001). In relation to the first mentioned, an ethnically diverse composition of (high-skilled) employees are advocated to increase return on equity by promoting problem solving, creativity, and innovation via individually different perspectives and approaches to job tasks drawing on insights from literature on learning and group processes (Berrey, 2014; Clausen, 2015; Zanoni and Janssens, 2015). In the latter mentioned, diverse employees grant access diverse customers and market as well as brand the company as social responsible by inviting allegedly disadvantaged groups into the workplace (Noon, 2007; Thomas and Ely, 2001). Another much less explicitly advocated business rationale that is none the less the most prominent reason to employ migrants – following critical diversity scholars – is the quest for low labor costs and a supposed 'right attitude to work' (Ortlieb and Sieben, 2013; Oswick and Noon, 2014). Accordingly, migrants are perceived as *mere labor*; a way to obtain loyal, compliant, hardworking and low cost labor. Often, migrants are hired under job conditions unattractive to the majority, including low wages, poor career prospects, and low reputation combined with ethnic

minorities' lower bargaining power, presumed high adaptability and flexibility due to their dependence on the job (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Holck and Muhr, 2017; Tomlinson et al., 2013).

One of the Danish companies that actively recruit migrants and refugees is Service, an award-winning diversity champion. Service is a major employer in Denmark with more than 7000 employees across Denmark out of which 48% have migrant background and 2% descendants of immigrants (internal statistics 2017). The number of employees with migrant background has increased dramatically in the last decade, not due to conscious recruitment strategy but rather due to lack of alternatives. Consequently, Service has strategically worked to value the different skills, work experiences and competences that the many diverse employees bring into the organization drawing on business case rationales of innovation and leaning together with access and legitimacy. Rather contradictory most migrants in Service work in the lowest echelons of the organization in low-skilled and temporary positions. But a new group of frontline managers with skilled migrant background are emerging offering new and unprecedentedly competences and ambitions to the organization.

It is exactly this group of skilled migrants and their potential impact on the organization that this article traces in relation to an extended business case of diversity which is this article's *first* contribution. While considerable research has noted the presence of contextual barriers to skilled migrants' occupational integration (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013; Al Ariss and Syed, 2011) little research exists on how their agency of coping with their paradoxical situation and the context strongly influence their position (and possible upward mobility) as well as the (unprecedented and unexpected) organizational gains of employing skilled migrants in low-skilled positions (Aten, 2015; Schmiz, 2013; Tatli et al., 2013). A multifaceted business case arises from the paradoxical situation that skilled migrants face in Service; on the one hand they are seen as disposable and replicable resources combined with the 'ideal worker' of loyalty, conformity and compliance; *and* on the other as 'high potentials' for first line management. This paradoxical position demonstrates how the business case of diversity might not be straightforward but lean on manifold, situational and contradictory perceptions and experiences recounted by migrants and managers daily leading frontline personnel.

The second contribution is to discuss how to improve migrants' situation. While much of the both mainstream and critical diversity research analyses contextual barriers to equality on the labor market and in organizations, few studies offer actual implications for practice to redress inequality. In an era of pervasive diversity, we face paradoxical outcomes of policies and initiatives targeting organizational diversity (Benschop *et al.*, 2015; Ghorashi and Sabelis, 2013). While practitioners and researchers seldom question the importance of organizational diversity, how to achieve the necessary change to ensure more equal workplaces is much less obvious (Janssens and Zanoni, 2014). This article goes some way to tease out how improving migrants' situation might not go through targeted diversity initiatives meant to boost

the recognition of diversity through targeted diversity management measures (Noon, 2007; Oswick and Noon, 2014; Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010).

On this background this article asks the following research question: *How are skilled migrants in low-skilled jobs perceived and casted by managers and migrants themselves, and how can organizations help to improve their situation and hereby extend the business case of diversity?*

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. First, we briefly review research on and present a conceptual framework combining literature on diversity management and critical diversity, organizational inequality and HRM literature on talents and high-potentials. Secondly, the case organisation and methods are explicated together with analytical strategy. The analysis falls into three sections each dealing with the manifold arguments of the extended business case namely that of 1) migrant as mere labor and hiring as a question of lack of manpower, 2) competences related to migrant's ethnic background, and 3) extending the business case to embrace diverse competences, talents and ambitions. Finally, we conclude by discussing implications of this research and whether mainstream HRM strategies of talent and high-potentials – not targeted diversity management programs – might prove to be the best way to promote equity and fairness on the labor market and at the workplaces.

Theoretical approach

Inequality and the precarious, marginalized position of migrants on the labor market and in workplaces dominated by the ethnic majority's norms and values are dominant themes among scholars of organizational inequality and diversity in organizations. More than four decades ago, organizational scholars began to acknowledge the central role of organizational practices and decision making in maintaining or changing broad societal patterns of stratification (Acker, 1994; Barker, 1993; Kanter, 1977). Since then many researchers have turned their attention to studying organizational processes - hiring, job assignment, training, performance evaluation, promotion, and compensation – from this vantage point.

Considerable sociological literature of organizational demographics has inquired how opportunity structures may curtail organizational diversity (e.g. Ahonen et al., 2014; Holck, 2016; McGinn and Milkman, 2013; Zanoni and Janssens, 2015). For instance, organizational-level analysis of organizations recruitment patterns and job segregation have long shown how women and ethnic minorities have been sorted out into less prestigious and low paid segments of the organization (e.g. Al Ariss et al., 2012; Acker, 2006; Ashcraft, 2012; Kanter, 1977; Ortlieb and Sieben, 2011; Tomlinson et al., 2013). In particular Kanter's (1977) seminal work on how inter-personal power arise and how male privilege is naturalized through processes of 'homosocial reproduction' that result in a gendered hierarchy to the detriment of women's careers possibilities is particularly insightful to this study.

Within literature on diversity management, research is dominated by a socio-psychological approach that stems from research on organizational behavior (Dobbin et al., 2011; Janssens and Zanon, 2014; Jonsen et al., 2011). This line of research assumes that negative in-group/out-group dynamics are the product of majority individuals' biased cognitive processes and stereotyping, which can be mitigated through formalized HRM practices such as objective procedures, sensitivity training, as well network and mentorship to prevent social isolation of minorities employees (Holck et al., 2016; Janssens and Zanon, 2014; Kalev et al., 2006; Noon, 2007). In contrast, critical diversity scholarship has deconstructed managerial discourses on diversity as reproductive of racial inequality and documented minorities' experiences with discrimination (e.g. Ahonen et al., 2014; Ariss et al., 2012; Dobbin et al., 2011; Jonsen et al., 2011; Śliwa and Johansson, 2014). However, an insistence on either extracting universal managerial instructions or a critical, abstract focus on macro context such as historical, cultural and societal differences has rendered the organizational level largely unexplored by diversity literature, 'leaving organizational structures and routines which reproduce inequalities and normalize the privileges of the dominant group (e.g. white and male employers) unchanged' (Janssens and Zanon, 2014: 2).

To redress this omission, this study offers two main contributions:

First it explores how micro-processes of organizational (in)equality emerge by tracing the casting of migrant workers in Service. Drawing on insights from resource dependency theory organizations strive to control critical resources predominantly made up by employees to survive (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003). In line with Ortlieb and Sieben (2013), I argue that organizations employ migrants to obtain critical resources. This basic argument allows me to define different organizational staffing strategies related to the kind of critical resources to be obtained. These decisions also depend on subjective perceptions and interpretations made by firstline managers in charge of recruitment and other personnel decisions (Ortlieb and Sieben, 2013). These interpretations and decisions result in chances for and barriers to the recruitment and internal mobility for migrant workers linking workplace (in)equality and diversity to strategic human resource management. Tracing the different reasons for employing migrant workers as recounted by frontline managers – among which several have migrant backgrounds – by migrants, and as experienced by the researcher, the paradoxical casting and positioning of migrant employees in Service emerge.

Second, the article has the ambition of inquiring into organizational processes and relations that redress workplace inequality. By doing so, this article heeds the call made by Janssens and Zanon (2014: 13) to study under which conditions alternative business models might emerge 'in capitalist organizations' that advance workplace equality by taking a 'tempered radical stance' as a researcher. Drawing up the paradoxical position of migrant workers in Service demonstrate how this might be turned into a position of potentiality: The situation of 'diversity by default' in Service gives way for the emergence of different

kind of resources and ambitions than usually expected among frontline personnel. As argued by Fraser (1998), equality and ability to participate on par might not only be a matter of ensuring recognition by only promoting the status of migrant employees in the organization (i.e. the valuing of diversity in terms of conventional diversity business case rationales). Equality is also a matter of compensating for the inequalities between the majority and minorities in the organizational hierarchy (Noon, 2010; Zanoni, 2011). Using Fraser's argument of equality through recognition and redistribution, protecting migrants might go through fighting for better working conditions for them as workers at their workplaces (Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Zanoni and Janssens, 2014). To improve the situation of migrant workers, mainstream HRM activities might prove more potent than targeted Diversity management measures. Hence workplace equality might better be promoted through ordinary HRM activities based on mainstream talent and 'high potential' strategies making the ambitions of diverse employees more prominent. This approach calls for a link between organizational equality, diversity and mainstream HRM literature on talent and high potential strategies.

Linking HRM strategies of talent and high potentials to diversity

During the last decade, the notion of talent management has been broadened to address the challenges management of talent at international, national and sectoral levels must deal with in the face of pressing demands of talent shortages and surpluses (Al Ariss et al., 2013; Tatli et al., 2012). One of the rationales offered for necessity of talent management is the changing demography; aging population, declining birth rates, increased economic migration and regional shortages of skilled and unskilled labour all render management of talent a source of global competitive advantage (Al Ariss et al., 2012). Organizations are encouraged to adjust their talent strategy to the labor market situation and what has been emphasized in talent management research is not the importance of difference per se (as within diversity management) but to gain access to human capital and attract the best talents (Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004).

Despite increased numbers of internationally mobile skilled migrants, research on talent strategies and international career mobility has primarily focused on organization-initiated and privileged expatriates from developed countries, moving between culturally similar developed countries (Al Ariss and Syed, 2011; Ates, 2015). Research is more sparse on skilled expatriates from less developed countries - mostly referred to as migrants in the management literature to distinguish on the basis of ethnic and racial lines the mobility of individuals from ethnicities with stronger stereotypes (Al Ariss et al., 2012; Tatli et al., 2011). In addition their company careers are a scant focus for research (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry, 2013). Yet, despite obstacles due to their migrant status, some are actually able to carve out worklife and careers that can be assessed as 'successful' (Al Ariss et al., 2012). Their ability to navigate their disadvantages

situation as well as *how* organizations utilize their skills despite (initial) low-skilled positions and offer them career alternatives different from – but benefitting from – their professional training, makes skilled migrants an interesting topic to study. This calls for a study of talent management of skilled migrants in organizations.

Talent management refers to a broad cluster of policies and practices connected to the management of human resources (Festing and Schäfer, 2014). The theories vary from approaches concentrating on the 'war for talent' attracting and retaining people with scarce skills to more collectivist and employee-focused approaches (Tatli et al., 2013). A broad definition of talent management forms part of the broader field of HRM and embraces an organization's ability to attract, select, develop, and retain key employees (Stahl et al., 2007). It involves a set of selected HRM practices focusing on attraction and retention for a smaller target group of particularly talented individuals identified by the company (Tarique and Schuler, 2010). Highly talented individuals can be characterized through a variety of characteristics, such as competencies, skills, abilities, experience, knowledge, intelligence, character, and drive, or the ability to learn and grow within an organization (Ulrich, 2008). Compared to other human resources, they are supposed to be key strategic resources because they have a most important impact on organizational performance and on creating competitive advantages for a firm: They are valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate – also referred to as 'pivotal talent' (Festing and Schäfer, 2014). Research investigating the impact of talent strategies on organizational outcomes, mostly demonstrate that talent development and retention practices have a positive impact on organizational performance as well as on employee commitment and contribution (e.g. Bethke-Langenegger et al., 2011; Chami Malaeb, 2012).

In pursuit of effective ways of managing talent, and to address the reported shortages of talent, various innovative practices have been developed, including changes in educational practices and migration policies (World Economic Forum, 2010). Nevertheless, according to Tatli et al. (2013: 3) '...such tools are blunt instruments that offer little appreciation of deeper dynamics of talent management, including the cultural and institutional contexts in which talent management decisions are made'. This article set out to explore the organizational and cultural context for career advancement of skilled migrants and concurrently tease out how 'diverse' talent strategies might improve the situation of this group of employees in the case of Service.

Method

The qualitative, inductive study reported here was instigated in the course of a broader research project on diversity in teams in Service. A reflexive approach was adopted to data collection and analysis, which allowed the research design to emerge and evolve throughout the analysis (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Silverman, 2006). An ethnographic approach is applied relying interviews, participant observation and

secondary data to give voice to different organizational members in Service around experiences of diversity, difference and skilled migrant workers. The study has a participatory bent as participants (i.e., managers and employees) and the researcher as a type of participant together construct the data. Consequently, this study is situated in an interpretive frame that acknowledges the constructed and relational nature of fieldwork and research (Ahonen et al., 2014).

Case description

Service is the Danish subsidiary of a worldwide concern that employ more than 500.000 employees in more than 72 countries. Service is an organization that covers all types of tasks in six departments: cleaning, property, catering, support, security and facility management. Service is a highly specialized and standardized production company with global uniform standards that apply locally in a formalized, centralized hierarchy and transparent personnel politics that spell out criteria for recruitment, promotion, and performance. However, alongside the formal hierarchy of line management and top-down decision-making structures, Service is locally organized in teams, which infuse the organization with indirect and more individualized forms of power and control by mutual adjustment (Diefenbach and Sillince, 2011).

Service is publicly recognized as a diversity champion in Denmark and has won numerous awards and prizes on this account. Service focus on bottom-line gains rests on a strong belief that staff diversity improves earnings by allowing staff to acquire the skills needed to service diverse customers and markets. The staff composition echoes this belief in relation to ethnicity and gender. For example, 48% of crew and 16% of managers have non-Danish background; 52% of crew and app. 50% of the managers are women, and about 2% of the employees are disabled. Service's diversity policy is a part of the overall CSR-policy that focusses on people, environment, business and partners. Service has a strong CSR policy of proactively employing otherwise disadvantaged groups on the labor market. Most of the employees with migrant or refugee background enter Service through an active labor-market scheme, which aims to move the unemployed into temporary, publicly funded training positions e.g. language training or internship schemes.

Data collection

The ethnographic fieldwork draws on a wide range of data-generation methods (van Maanen, 2011) to gain access to multiple both managerial as well as employee voices in Service. Fieldwork in Service was carried out over a period of two years. Below (table 1) is an overview in a timeline indicating the different time periods for our different methods in the field. The bulk of the empirical data was collected during a eleven-month period where the researchers worked together with more than 50 teams all over

Denmark (April 2016 to February 2017). Different situationally suitable data-generation techniques were applied to accommodate variations in the types of data. These techniques predominantly focused on participant observations, interviews and interventions. While interviews record first-person accounts of experience, participative observations capture the researcher's point of view of another's experience. Data collection includes on-record material gathered through semi-structured interviews with Service's employees, as well as off-record material. Off-record material includes both informal conversations before or after formal interview sessions as well as participant observations made on Service premises. All respondents and teams are kept anonymous.

Ethnographic participant observations were undertaken while working together with crew and supervisors/managers and participating in multiple, routine meeting forums, such team and management meetings. In 15 of the teams the researcher was trained as a 'new employee' both in cleaning and catering, which gave first hand impression on training, collaboration, team dynamics, and relationship between employee and managerial level. Additionally the researcher followed 30 frontline managers in their daily work. This gave firsthand recounts of daily work relations as well as reflections on life stories and careers of a diverse group of managers and employees. In addition, job interviews and ad-hoc social gatherings were observed. These daily observations were recorded in a fieldwork diary, which constitutes a significant part of the data.

Semi-structured individual and focal-group interviews were guided by the initial participant observations. The researcher undertook semi-structured interviews with 14 managers, each of which lasted from 30 to 120 minutes. Participants were asked to describe their career history, their daily work and relations to employees as well as Service as an organization. In addition, respondents were asked to describe the work culture, and teams and the cooperative environment in terms of information sharing, task distribution, distribution of privilege and and socializing patterns. Most interviews were recorded and transcribed, while a few were recorded through notes.

Interventions offered a possibility to test the reliability of the data and the researchers' presumptions through presentations, seminars, participation in debates, informal talks and two written reports; one interim with implications for practices and one final report reflecting both on the fieldwork findings as well as the activist part of implementing implications for practices made in the interim report. Intervention includes following and providing input on seminars, debates, workshop and conferences on diversity in teams in different external and internal fora, providing training on leading diverse teams drawing on internal leadership courses for managers, and frequent meetings with key organizational stakeholders collectively reflecting on interim findings and experiences from the field.

Table 1: Overview of data in Service

Elements	Data collected	Dates
	Ethnographic participant observations of 2-3 days with 30 managers in Cleaning and Catering departments. Two times intense case studies of teams on one location for 15 days Semi-structured interviews with 14 managers Daily fieldwork dairy/notes All interviews are transcribed and coded The data are analyzed	April 2016 to June 2017
Interventions	Content	Dates
	Presentations Seminars Participation in debates Informal talks One interim and one final international report Repeated meetings with key actors in the organization Training of management on different management courses Final conference	April 2016 to October 2018

Analytical strategy

An iterative method was applied that vacillated between fieldwork observation, interviews and interventions, reviews of extant theory, and data coding to condense meaning, and to generate new theoretical and empirical questions. When processing the data, the researcher translated the interviews into English. An abductive research approach (Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Van Maanen et al., 2007) implicated an iterative movement and intense interchange between empirical observations from case research and theoretical insights provided by academic literature (Dubois and Gadde, 2002). Thus, the analysis of the data has been ongoing throughout the duration to explore in further detail the situation of skilled migrant workers in Service and organizational activities that supported or hindered their advancement in the organization. This study is abductive in nature as it contained stages of both inductive and deductive analysis in various iterative steps (Järvensivu, & Törnroos, 2010).

Considering the big quantity and variety of the material at disposal it was decided to approach the data through grounded analysis (Charmaz, 2014). This method ‘...aims to derive structure (i.e. theory) from data in a process of comparing different data fragments with one another’ (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015: 191). As a constructionist research design, the grounded theory recognizes the subjectivity and variability of truth and reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2015). Following Easterby-Smith et al. (2015), grounded analysis consists of seven steps: *familiarization*, *reflection*, *open coding*, *conceptualization*, *focused re-coding*, *linking*, and *re-evaluation*. To thoroughly analyze the data, the researcher engaged in each of these steps in an iterative manner.

During the first phase of participant observation, data was accessed in a strongly inductive manner, without a theoretical framework nor a predefined hypothesis in mind. This was done to gain a holistic picture of the research field without being limited by preconceived ideas (Charmaz, 2014). Continuous examination of the material allowed us to delve deep into the topic and *familiarize* with the situation of skilled migrants in teams and management positions. Relevant material, including internal documents and handwritten-notes, were carefully examined and coded manually. Emerging topics included the perceptions of daily management of diverse teams and team members' perceptions of their work and difference among their colleagues in general. After this first round of *open coding*, the researcher immersed in the extant literature on topics such as migrant workers, workplace inequality, diversity and its management in organizations, resource dependency, and HRM literature on talent. This reading enabled to *reflect* upon the empirical data in view of previous academic research in an abductive manner in the second step of the grounded analysis.

In the second round of coding, codes without any relevant impact on our research were excluded or used for background information. Instead we searched for patterns among the remaining codes and organized them into second and first order codes in the fourth step of grounded analysis, *conceptualization*. Emerging first order codes were more specifically targeting perceptions of and self-reflection on (by managers with migrant background) skilled migrants in Service. Based on these higher-level codes, a *focused re-coding and linking of the data* was made to lead to the emergence of three important codes: Skilled migrants as 'mere labor', 'the ideal worker', in position of unique and relevant skills related to their background (i.e. competences attached to the ethnic background) as well as 'high potentials' disregarding their ethnic background. The third phase of interventions enabled the researcher to thoroughly *re-evaluate* the theoretical framework and gather even more specified and detailed information on the issue of skilled migrants, organizational inequality and HRM literature on talent management.

Findings

Mere labor

Drawing on insights from critical diversity literature, the most prominent reasons to employ migrants are low labor costs and supposed right 'attitude to work' (Orlieb and Sieben, 2014). Often ethnic minorities are hired under job conditions unattractive to majority workers, including low wages, poor career prospects, and low reputation (Rafferty, 2012; Schmiz, 2013). The 'good worker' argument also resonates with the case studies of Janssens and Zanoni (2005), where they reveal how firms prefer to staff low-wage routine jobs with low-skilled ethnic minority women because they are presumed highly adaptable and flexible.

Two managers explain in a focal group interview:

Oscar: 90% of our employees are from Poland, Rumania and so on... they work harder.

Kirsten: Yes, they really do. I am so impressed and deeply grateful for their effort.

Oscar: They come to Denmark to earn money. Many of them do not have any social security so they must work harder to keep an income. But they are used to work harder.

Kirsten: For them it is actually an 'easy job' compared to what they have been doing previously. Some from Rumania has worked ten hours more for half the pay with more dirty and hard work.

Oscar: They are much more motivated (than ethnical Danes) and try to work hard.

Kirsten: This is the reason why we have no Danes – the work is simply too time pressured. They (Danes) are used to other and more protected standards.

In the same vein Zanoni and Janssens (2005) point out that HR managers often praise ethnic staff diversity particularly referring to the availability and compliance of ethnic minority employees. Andrew explain how Danes are often not 'good at cleaning because it demands hard work and this Danes do not care for'. Another manager Karl explains: 'The company wants Service employees to speak Danish. But that is utopia, you can't get enough Danes willing to this kind of work. I had a lot of interns with refugee background and most of them were highly educated for instance a university teacher from Nepal.'

The willingness to take on work that nobody else wants to do seems valid in the case of Service is a strong premiss for employing migrants in Service. Hence migrants contribute both the the organization's low cost effectiveness through their higher flexibility (parttime work) and their presumed lower career aspirations. Jamal (a manager of 60 employees in cleaning) explains how he wants a mixture of full and parttime worker, especially the part-time workers more easily can function as replacement when full time staff is ill or on holiday. He prefers people on Green Card as they need the job to stay on in Denmark. It is this kind of employees that demonstrate most stability as especially on locations like a stockhouse where work is hard and dirty. That is why he has so many employees with different international background. Another manager, Piotr, explains:

We don't want full time workers but those that are real skilled they get full time. Full time makes it harder to find replacement and then there is economy; when they work at night then there is evening or night surcharge. 70-80% are partime workers. But it is not always that they want extra hours. Some have another job and this income is only supplementary. I have not employed that many fulltime workers. I use replacements and if they can do the job, then they can have it. This is how I test new employees and a way to gain control. If they are qualified, we keep them.

Another prevalent reason to employ migrants – especially with refugee background – is that they can be employed on state subsidized labormarket schemes to train Danish skills and get acquainted with 'Danish workplace culture'. As Ulf, a canteen manager explains:

I only pay for 15 hours and then the rest of the hours get reimbursed. It is really a help for the team. Substitutes are expensive and they can stand in for substitutes. Sometimes interns are real good. I had someone from Hungary and I saved a lot of substitute wages on his behalf. He was stable, he was always happy because he hoped he could stay here. But I had no place for him.

Another canteen manager, Bent, explains how interns can do some of the daily work and make it possible for the team member to take some rest:

Just what you have been doing now (referring to the researcher training in the kitchen, red.), to help where things are under pressure and go through a list of cleaning, where we haven't had time to do it. To take care of heavy things like garbage. Right now, we look for an intern, a strong person who can be part of the team, who is fresh and speaks a little Danish. Until now we had a 50 years old lady from Ghana with no prior knowledge of kitchen work and then a small Chinese man who only spoke Chinese. It is too cumbersome to integrate such persons in the team. Most of them have some challenges like illness or Danish school or the like. But there are lots of unemployed and we are so dependent on finding good interns to do the extra things.

Rolf explains how it is not possible to run the canteen without interns: 'For instance my baker is all alone the bakery. He can only make it with help from interns so we made sure that his Syrian refugee can stay three more months in training' Ulf, manager of a canteen, explains how some of the interns are cumbersome to integrate:

Especially the muslims. We had Mastalifa, she was about to die if there were pig on the menu. This doesn't work in a kitchen and uhhh she was tired and had to sit down constantly. It could have been a Dane, but unfortunately it is mostly muslim interns. We have one now, was it nine children she has? She is alone with all the kids and has never been on the labor market before. She can actually work but all her children are a disadvantage – they are often ill so we can't employ her.

Hence interns predominantly made up by unemployed refugees and immigrants grants an important resource to both cleaning and catering. Some of the interns have more labor market experience and speaks better Danish than the permanent staff like Shardi, who is a refugee from Syria working with a team consisting of mostly Polish women. He has worked in several industries in Syria among other construction and farming and is used to much harder work, he tells me. He has been granted the internship by the local jobcenter and would like to stay, but there is no vacant job for him.

Competences and stereotypical representations related to ethnic background

One of the most common business case argument for employing ethnically diverse employees is to increase problem solving, creativity and innovation via individually different perspectives and approaches to job tasks – which is high value for organizations that aim at organizational change and learning (Ely and Thomas, 2001). Another strong argument is related to diverse employees' different ethnic background which grant access and legitimacy to firms with foreign customer bases or related cultural knowledge and skills facilitate rapport with clients with similar background or deep understanding of how firms operate in their culture of origin (Thomas and Ely, 2001). However in Service the arguments related to employment of diverse personnel diverge from traditional business case arguments. Instead the particular 'ethnic stereotypes' attached to different ethnicities seems important in recruitment situations. Bijan muses:

It is different what kind of employee characteristics that the customer demand. At the construction sites, it is important that people show up in time following the constact but they do not care too much about personal appearance. Most of the construction workers are from all over Europe so they prefer that Service's employees speak English. It is quite different at the law firm. Here personal appearance is important and that you can communicate in Danish. You need to look neat and clean and presentable. So it all depends on where you work.

While Bijan mostly employed Polish women at the construction sites, the law firm was dominated by female cleaning assistants with either Thai or Vietnamese background. At another occation he brought in a substitute with African background at the law firm; he explicitly asked me to remind him to tell the contactperson at the law firm in advance. They were obviously not used to employees with African background. Other mangers like Andrew are more direct when it comes to matching particular taks with certain ethnicities:

In the cinema, you need big strong African men as employees. You need to have a strong bag not to get bag problems when cleaning under and between the seats. I encourage my employees to train because cleaning is hard work.

A manager tells me about the use of stereotypes in a recruitment situation where the need of a 'turbo asiaen' was mentioned to cover a big area without 'too much fuss' or to avoid 'lazy Africans'. At a site two managers discuss together:

Jens: how do you find a culture that is good for quality? It is not only a question of language but also culture. We have had people from the Balcans and they had high standards. But with Asians it is not as good....

Louise: well they tell you that Asians are those with the highest standard

Jens: but they do not understand systems. They do not understand what we say, we should have a manual – should we start drawing things?

There are many stories of extra loyal and hardworking migrant workers. One employee tells me a story about a manager of a small team:

I have experienced managers that really go too far, where they are pressued to their limits. For instance Naya – I was there one night when she kind of collapsed. She said she hadn't had dinner with her children for three years. And I do believe it has something to do with her cultural background – she was simply too proud to say that she needed help. She was taking on much too much responsibility.

Other managers reflect on different ethnicities being too authoritarian. Kristijan recounts:

Don't stand straight on a line like that when I arrive eventhough you are use to this in Romania. This is not Romania but Denmark, it is another culture and something different and let's start afresh. That is why I selfdom employ people from Hungary.

Extending the business case

Multifaceted business case for diversity - tensions: economic rationales for the use of low-paid labor and strategies of adding value through ethnic background, and learning, tension between mere labor and a particular form of critical labor

Extra resources and unprecedented skills....

- The skilled migrant in lo-skilled jobs – myth or reality?
- Talent, high potentials and career ambitions among frontline employees and managers with migrant background
- Access to new labour/employees through social network
- Add on sales
- Promotion of managers with migrant background (solidarity, sympathy and empathy)
- Ability to navigate a complex work with different cleaning and canteen standards, organizational cultural differences, working in teams and alone, independence/autonomy and team competences, repetitive and differentiated tasks
- Unprecedented and unpredicted competences come into play: Pause gym, new salads and authentic food by Syrian intern, reparation of machines by Indian engineers employed as dish washers, tourist guide from Morocco, business school and HRM graduates as managers – new approaches to service, leadership and organizational careers

Concluding discussion

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