Tracing the Ambiguous Translation of Diversity Management in a Danish Context

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Tracing the ambiguous translation of diversity management in a Danish context

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1. Readers guide

This short paper forms part of a PhD study on workforce diversity and diversity management. In relation to the study, I wish to explore how diversity unfolds and work in the everyday practices among organizational members. The ambition is to develop a more complexity and context sensitive approach to studying diversity in order to explore, how workforce diversity management is being perceived, negotiated and enacted among the organizational members in two case organizations.

One of the implications of my approach is the belief that history of diversity management, the greater societal discourses on diversity and labor market policies influence and runs through the local translations and enactment of diversity in the individual organizations. Thus I wish to trace the source of interpretation and translation of diversity in line with Boxenbaum 2006. My argument is that the context sensitive approach partly can explain the ambiguous translation that diversity management faces in a Danish business environment as well as in the local practices guiding diversity in my two case organizations.

This paper serves as a preliminary outset for a more comprehensive research on how diversity management has been translated in my two case organizations. The purpose of this paper is to draw up the history of diversity management in a Danish context and end out with the current status as well as a discussion on where diversity management is heading.

2. Introduction

At the turn of the millennium Diversity management was introduced in Danish business context and was first time mentioned as a management concept in a Danish newspaper in 2000 (in Berlingske Tidende cf. Boxenbaum 2006). Since 2000 the term "diversity management" has appeared more frequently both in Danish newspapers and on the management scene (Risberg and Søderberg 2008).

When first introduced in a Danish setting it was seen as a relevant response to the several labor market problems at that time: Denmark has been going through a significant change in demography, from being a fairly homogeneous population Denmark has witnessed significant growth in number of citizens with ethnic minority background and later on from the mid-00s an increasing number of expatriates was introduced in the labor force[1]. More over an ageing population and a declining number of people within the labor force was fuelling the public debate on how to deal constructively with the integration of an increasingly diverse

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[1] According to the Expat Study 2010 the number of expatriates that live and work in Denmark has increased from 33.000 in 2008 to 41.000 in 2010.

labor force. In the late 00s a debate on the low number of women in top management positions and boards also served to fuel the debate of diversity management.

The quest for diversity management reached its peak in the 2007 – 08 when unemployment figures were historical low. Diversity management was perceived - by business as by politicians – as a managerial concept to recruit and make adequate use remains of the unemployed, marginalized groups on the labor market. Thus this was predominantly targeting ethnic minorities since this particular population group was characterized by relatively high unemployment rates compared to ethnic Danes and perceived to contain most "hidden" talent.

It is the argument in this article that diversity management has predominantly been a "surplus phenomenon" in Denmark: Diversity management was at its height in the mid-00s where the unemployment was close to zero and the right wing government needed "to do good" while pushing some of the toughest laws in Europe restricting the access and the family reunification of refugees and immigrants.

Today it is another story: The unemployment figures are racketing as new groups of "marginalized labor force" consisting of elderly, ethnic minorities and recent graduated youth have difficulties entering and being retained at the labor market. The government has been shifted and so has the agenda: The individualistic and voluntary virtues of diversity management on behalf of the corporations have been replaced with an agenda on corporate social responsibility and legal framework promoting the more moral impetus of CSR. Right now i t is predominantly globalized corporations and their lobby organizations that – on a national scale - promote diversity in the quest for recruiting global talents and staying competitive on a global scale.

My argument is, that diversity management is at a crossroad – will the concept wither away, be swallowed into the predominant concept of Corporate Social Responsibility or gain new significance as a solution to the challenges of the present labor market situation and global competitive challenges facing Danish business? Can diversity management be retranslated from a "surplus phenomenon" to a "survival requirement"?

3. Theory

Eva Boxenbaum argues in her article from 2006 that, when a managerial concept like the American concept of Diversity management diffuses across the globe, it becomes translated to fit the receiving society. Some might seem so foreign that they need a translation (Boxenbaum 2006: 936). It is the argument in this paper (as well as in several others cf. Boxenbaum 2007, Kamp and Holvino 2009, Risberg and Søderberg 2008, Kamp and Hagedorn 2006) that the concept of diversity management stems from a totally different historical frame (a post-colonial society) and draws on a business logic that not hitherto has been dominant in Denmark – a point I will return to below. Thus a translation has been taken place in Danish Corporations as to fit the logic of diversity management to a Danish labor market and business logic.

"The frame is an interpretive lens through which individuals perceive and interpret the work and occurrences in this world. Frames organize experience and guide action, thereby rendering life occurrences meaningful to individuals and collectives. All managerial practices rely on some kind of frame. A field frame

is the dominant and widely legitimate frame in a certain area of practice": (Boxenbaum 2007: 940 with reference to Goffman 1974).

The premise of the paper is that Danish corporations adopting the concept of diversity management will to some degree draw on the same frame or interpretative lens. A frame that is shaped by the history of Danish labor market policies and government regulations, the development in labor force demography and fluctuations as well as the business environment and its framing of diversity management in a Danish context – predominantly by means of "best practice examples" and explicit corporate policies on diversity management of the trendsetting large Danish corporations.

The popular, public and business driven debate on diversity can be seen as shaping and creating the reference background of the local diversity practices, that become meaningful when interpreted as a response to and reflection of the larger social discourses. Local diversity processes of organizing does not happen in a vacuum – but are situated in time and space. "No man is an island" – the same goes for organizations and their members.

It is the ambition of this paper is to trace some of the shared sources of the local translation of diversity management in Danish corporations. Though these must be of a very general and macro level in nature to apply to Danish corporations (in general): Thus individual histories of recruitment, line of business and stakeholder interests cannot be included in this study.

4. Methodology

The primary data material in this paper draws on research and newspaper articles on the issue of diversity and diversity related issues such as labor market policies, regulation, initiatives and analysis of the labor market situation as well as diversity within the cultural and popular field in a Danish context. The data analysis aims at identifying the frame - which can be seen as taken-for-granted repetitive themes on the issue of diversity management, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and labor market policies.

 Another source of data is my own experience as a practitioner in the diversity field for the past 10 years: As an employee in the former Ministry of Integration, as integration advisor in Copenhagen Municipality and most recently as a diversity consultant in a small NGO (The Association Newdanes) . Thus the paper draws on my experience with diversity consultancy in a little less than 100 Danish firms as well as an active engagement in the official as well as the popular debate on diversity in relation to labor market issues, and in the cultural and political field.

The empirical background also comprises of my field work in two case organizations[2]. The fieldwork is predominantly used to exemplify and supplement the more general data material in the present paper. On a later stage it is the ambition to include an in depth study of the local translations of diversity

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[2] The field work done in the two case organizations consists of in depth interviews, focus group interviews, participative observations and training in the task performance of the organizational members . The two case organizations are both within the service Industry and have an espoused intent to work with diversity management in order to unfold the potential of creativity and innovation perceived to by inherent in a diverse workforce. These diversity values have a written status as part of their fundamental values and strategic principle guiding the organization. One is a major multinational Burger chain (Quick Burger) while the other is a center under the department of Technique and Environment dealing with international entrepreneurs and international business strategy in Copenhagen Municipality (Copenhagen Consultants).

management in my to two case organizations by means of Eva Boxenbaums three stage model (individual preferences, strategic reframing and local grounding, Boxenbaum 2006).

5. The origin and history of diversity and diversity management

Diversity management originates from North America. It was launched in the 1980s where it was rooted in the anti-discrimination movement of the 1960s. Later on it was refocus on other drivers fuelled by the Workforce 2000 report on changing demography of US labor force[3] and the business case for diversity. Some would even argue that diversity management can be seen as a reaction to a post-colonial bad conscience (Jonsen et al 2011).

Diversity management entered the management discourse with a critical distance to its predecessor Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunities legal focus (the late 1960s and early 1970s cf. Holvino and Kamp 2009)[4]. As Jonsen et al argue while affirmative action and equal employment opportunities was perceived to reduce the negative effect of exclusion (from the labor market and the corporations) then diversity management (allegedly) paved the way for managing differences proactively by promoting the positive effects of inclusion within the organization (Jonsen et al 2011:37-39). While Affirmative Action represented a legal and moral imperative, Diversity Management employed the rationale of competitive advantage, human resource utilization and the 'business imperative' to enhance organizational productivity and profitability with a focus on discretion and voluntary action on behalf of the corporations (i.e. Cox 1995, Thomas and Ely 1995).

There are many available definition of diversity management but Risberg and Søderberg highlight Gilbert et al.'s definition: "*Diversity management is a voluntary organizational program designed to create greater inclusion of all individuals into informal social networks and formal company programs*" (Risberg et al 2008). Thus compared to affirmative action and equal opportunities, which often was based on legislation, diversity management was first and foremost a voluntary company initiative – a way for companies to be proactive and take control instead of reactively appliance to a legal framework (Loerbiecki and Jack 2000).

But first and foremost diversity management moved beyond discrimination and equality debate, and introduced the thinking, that diversity could be seen as a value to the firm – 'the value of difference'. It was perceived as a way to improve business - as a means to a competitive edge among others in response to globalization, diverse markets and customers – and as a way to develop the employees (Boxenbaum 2006, Kamp and Holvino 2009).

The minority groups are those who are often perceived as *different* from those representing the norm – thus valuing difference was equated with valuing the contribution of the minority groups. As Risberg and Søderberg argue, the term minority groups can be misleading 'epithet' since they need not be a minority in number but in relation to power positioning at the labor market and in the corporations. Often these

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[3] Lately USA has witnessed two elections in 2008 and 2012 illustrating how – for the first time - it is not enough to appeal for white voices to win the Presidency. Or at least this has been one of the prevalent interpretations in the popular debate cf. Information 19/12/12, 17/01/13 and 29/06/09.
[4] For decades the diversity debate in US has been focused on legislative issues such as affirmative action (AA) referring to hiring quotas designed to increase the proportion of employees from minority groups typically to make up for past discriminative hiring practices. Or equal employment opportunities (EEO) which are policies guaranteeing access to job interview and more broad development and qualifications initiatives.

minority groups have been categorized according to race, ethnicity, gender, age and to a lesser degree class, sexual preferences, education and disabilities (Risberg and Søderberg 2008: 427).

The difficulties of grappling with the issue of 'value of difference' and the tendency to combine 'difference' with otherwise marginalized groups on the labor market has led to a critique of diversity management as reinforcing stereotypes of especially ethnic minorities and women in a corporate frame (Özbilgin and Syed 2009, Tatli and Özbilgin 2012, Zanoni et al 2009, Loerbiecki and Jack 2009). Others again have criticized diversity management as a means to gloss over and "dissolve differences" in pursuit of corporate integration and profitability (Kamp and Holvino 2009).

6. The ambiguous diversity management discourse in a Danish Context: Framing the challenge - business case vs. moral imperative

When diversity management hit the Danish agenda at the turn at the millennium, it was initially welcomed by progressive stakeholders. Though the neoliberal thinking on individuality, voluntary action and discretional initiatives on behalf of the corporations was imbued in the American concept, in Denmark diversity management was initially reframed and reinterpreted into a more progressive or critical frame by researcher and practitioners who were "*Critical of the ethnocentric discourse in the country, and the attempts to construct a rather narrow concept of "Danishness" in opposition to ethnic minorities as a burden to society*" (Diken 2002 in Kamp and Holvino 2009). Thus the US agenda of minority groups were to a large degree translated into ethnic minority groups in a Danish context.

By the end of the old millennium approximately one third of the non-western residents in Denmark was unemployed, progressive forces within the society was alarmed and diversity management was seen as one of the means to integrate ethnic minorities in the labor market. With this agenda in mind a number of stakeholders adopted the concept for instance the Institute for Human Rights, CABI, SEBI and the Association new Danes[5].

While the issue of diversity as a business case was fundamental to the abovementioned stakeholders, this agenda was integrated with a strong discourse on the moral imperative to recruit ethnic minority candidates as part of the social responsibility of the firm. These two difficult to reconcile or fragmented goals of the business logic and moral imperative have ever since dominated the agenda on diversity management in Denmark and has to my mind led to the alleged ambiguous translation of the concept.

6.1. Business and labor market policies 2002 to 2008 – Ethnicity vs. Difference

Another strong stakeholder to promote diversity management as a means to integrate ethnic minorities at the labor market was the Ministry of Integration. It was founded in 2002 as a "child" of the newly elected right-wing government. This government had the issue of immigrants and refugees high on the agenda – partly due to their parliamentary support from populist "Danish People Party" – in relation to the high figures of unemployment among ethnic minorities and the allegedly pressure on 'Danish values and norms'

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[5] The Association was founded in 1998 by a group of firms to address the lack of integration on the labor market and has diversity management as a fundamental value (cf. www.foreningen-nydansker.dk). The Association in many ways invented the term "new Danes" that gained a foothold during the 00s. From being perceived as progressive and a change of agenda on the issue of immigrants and refugees, the term was taken over by the former right wing government and today "new Danes" is mostly associated with the former government and associated with that governments agenda on defining "Danishness" and ethnic minorities (especially of non-western origin) as a burden to the society.

represented by the increasing numbers of residents with ethnic minority background. Especially non-Western and Muslim residents were perceived as posing a threat to the Danish 'democratic' values (Diken 2002). Thus harsh laws restricting the entrance of refugees and immigrants were pushed creating a negative image of Denmark in international (business) society[6].

One possible interpretation of the preference for diversity management was the intent to counterbalance the negative impact of the 'Danish values' discourse and to alleviate the growing lack of labor force, that was the outcome of the unprecedented economic boom that Denmark witnesses the mid-00s. The government also initiated a range of active labor market policies as language training schemes, wage subsidy schemes, work experience schemes and so on which contributed to a remarkable increase of ethnic minorities introduced on the labor market. The hitherto large employment gap between ethic Danes and immigrants was remedied; while the employment rate among immigrants was 47 pct. in 1996, by 2006 it had risen by 17 pct. point (compared to a 4 pct. point rise among ethnic Danes in the same period cf. DI Indsigt, June 2009) and the number of immigrants holding a job rose with 135 pct. from 1998 to 2008 (Jyllandsposten June, 8 2010).

The government in the 00s combined the active labor market policy with demands on private and public organizations to incorporate people with ethnic minority background and retain elderly people. The private and public corporations were reminded of their social responsibility to help overcome the demographic and associated socio-economic concerns, that the economic boom gave rise to, combined with persuasive best practice examples and business cases. Ministerial funding schemes like "Diversity program I (2007-08) and "Diversity Program II" (2008-09) funded research on business cases promising a competitive advantage and innovative force of and the profitability of working with diversity management[7]. In promoting the business case consultancy firms, NGO's and State agencies engaged in disciplinary efforts to affect the corporate mindset – through research funding, knowledge creation and networking – to convince business in taking social responsive action to promote the active labor market policy of collaborative forces headed by the state (Vallentin and Murillo 2012, Matten and Moon 2008, Campbell 2007).

6.2. Institutional constraints - Collectivism vs. Individualism

Another source of the ambiguous translation of diversity management is the concepts foreignness to a Danish business environment as emphasized by several researchers (i.e. Boxenbaum 2006, Omamovic 2009, Campbell 2007, Vallentin and Murillo 2012): With a highly individualized approach encouraging difference and to treat employees differently while resting on a voluntary action of the corporation, diversity management in many ways clash with the corporative collective aspect of the Danish labor market with general sensitivity to equal (homogeneous) treatment and strong negotiated economy.

Thus Danish corporations - when employing diversity management - has to navigate between collectivistic and individualistic aspirations ; The Danish history of corporatism, collectivism and a predominant societal discourse on equality leaning on the universal welfare state model challenges and clashes with the more

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[6] I.e. the start aid, the restrictions on family reunification, the 24 years act, the claims of affiliation and the immigration test to gain residence permit. Most of these acts were abolished by the present social democratic led government in 2012.

[7] Fx ISS 2011 "Mangfoldighed giver millioner på bundlinjen" and Foreningen Nydansker 2010 "Vækst og mangfoldighed", 2010 "Mangfoldighed i Praksis – 14 virksomhedsportrætter" and 2012 "McDiversity" were all funded by the two Diversity Programs. Other ministeriers funded business case research fx Forsknings- og innovationsstyrelsen 2007 "Ny viden og erfaringer med medarbejderdreven innovation", Teknologisk Institut 2008 "Vidensintensive virksomheder ønsker at rekruttere mere mangfoldigt" and 2007 "De økonomiske fordele ved mangfoldighed".

individualistic contribution of diversity (from the US conceptualization and its post-colonial history emphasizing individualism and neo-liberalism).

6.3. The ambiguous translation of diversity management on corporate level

The paradoxes of the collectivistic/individualistic and the social responsible/business case driven approaches to diversity is echoed in an ambiguous local unfolding of diversity. According to Kamp and Hagedorn (2006) diversity management has predominantly been interpreted into three dominant discourses in a Danish context: 1) Anti-discrimination and justice; 2) to gain access to new market segments and to achieve legitimacy; and 3) To gain synergy and organizational learning. These three discourses seem to linger on and even coexist within the same organization. My experience from consulting corporations grappling with diversity management, is, that often two or three of these discourses coexist in the same organization without anybody questioning their compatibility.

Corporations working with strategic diversity are then faced with a paradox: On the one hand the intent to use diversity as a mean to further innovation and learning through qualifying and focusing on 'difference' as a competence in itself (the business case). This agenda is often framed by the top management. On the other hand, when diversity is being implemented through day-to-day organizational processes predominantly guided by middle management, it is based on the principle of representation, social responsibility, anti-discrimination and equal treatment. This ambition is guided through HRM practices that seek to blur or somewhat minimize the differences that 'minority' groups might contribute with in the name of anti-discrimination and equality of treatment (the moral imperative). The prevalence of divergent perceptions of diversity management and the associated ends and means, creates a gap between intention/strategic diversity and implications/diversity practices. Thus different pressures will be pushed top-down and bottom-up.

Hence the corporations are torn between policies of erasing differences and promoting assimilation on the one hand and underlining the unique attributions of the employees and inclusion on the other. This ambiguous ordering of diversity is pulling a strain on middle management. It is middle management that is the strategic link between the visionary diversity aims of top management and responsible for the day to day organizing of practical diversity. A middle management that has to negotiate between the quest to create an innovative and learning oriented organizational milieu on the one hand and one the other has to deal with the pressure of creating predictable results and effective solutions on a daily basis. Promotion of assimilation and the quest for predictable results go hand in hand: "*Everybody can work here … as long as they fit in*" frames the general perception among middle management that often is in charge of recruitment. The HRM tools available are often not adequate to promote diversity when recruiting, retaining and developing transversal cooperation. Thus middle management is torn between HR tools available and the strategic agenda of diversity.

The explicit focus on ethnic diversity and the ambition to use diversity to further innovation are in many ways conflicting and split the corporations between two different expected output of diversity: As the means to integrate marginalized ethnically defined employees by means of equal treatment AND to create growth and innovation utilizing the unique attributions of a diverse group of employees. This has in many ways – I would argue - inhibited a more dynamic and multiple category approach to diversity and presently the debate of diversity management is deadlocked in this limited perception of the dimensions of diversity.

The pre-categorization of diversity into a priori given categories on the basis of ethnicity, gender or age serves to stifle the organizations capability of utilizing diversity.

6.4. State of the art – Diversity management vs. CSR

So what is state of the art of diversity management today? In this paper I have argued that the relevance of diversity management was high during the 00s. The diversity agenda was pushed by the some of the trendsetting and dominant Danish corporations who applied and advocated explicitly for diversity management as a way to deal with the lack of (qualified) labor during the financial heydays in the mid-00s. Furthermore the agenda was backed by a government, which morally and financially persuaded private and public companies to take social responsibility by means of active labor market policies.

Today diversity management suffers a degree of neglect on behalf of the present Social Democratic led government. This government stresses the concept of CSR and the social responsibility of businesses, and in March 2012 an Action plan on Corporate Social Responsibility for 2012-2015 was launched with the following agenda: "*Corporate social responsibility makes it possible to combine innovation, productivity and growth with social responsibility, sustainability and respect for human rights… Corporate social responsibility is therefore also one of the competitive strengths and potentials of the Danish business community and should be regarded as an integral part of the work and development of Denmark's industrial policy.*" (The Government 2012:3). Thus the CSR agenda has taken over the growth and competitively agenda that diversity management was championing during the 00s.

On the one hand, the current emphasis on CSR is threatening to swallow up the diversity agenda.

On the other hand, new strong stakeholders have emerged pushing the agenda of diversity and the business case (diversity as a strategic means to further creativity, organizational learning and innovation): Lobbying organizations like Consortium of Global talent (initiated by 18 of the largest firms in Denmark) , Expat in Denmark (a network initiative organizing expatriates living in Denmark, hosted by DI and funded by Ministry of Business and Growth) and Worktrotter (a private run network for expats) together with national bodies like Danish Industry (DI), Danish Business (DE) and stakeholders from the universities, as well as regional initiatives like Welcome Center North Jutland, International Community Århus, and Copenhagen Talent Bridge – all of these bodies push the expat agenda demanding a focus on the attractiveness of Denmark as a county to live and work in for global talents and their families[8]. These bodies strongly advocate the business case imbued in diversity management while the social responsibility imperative is not consistent with their agenda: Recruiting and retaining talented expatriates working and studying in Denmark is a survival imperative advancing the competitive edge for Danish firms – not to be confused with marginalized (immigrant) labor.

The hitherto translation of diversity management in Denmark as the means to integrate marginalized labor with ethnic minority background /the moral imperative is thus slowly taken over by the CSR agenda. Tools of active labor market policies are translated into a CSR frame, partly due to the 2012 CSR Action Plan, which introduces transparency through requirement of annual CSR reports on human rights and climate by the largest 1.100 private companies as well as all state owned organizations.

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[8] The 26th September 2012Consortium of Global Talent held a conference on "Diversity and Growth" hosted by Danske Bank inviting the Minister of Economy, Margrethe Vestager, to debate the expat situation with stakeholder from business and NGOs .

This has left an open space for a retranslation of diversity management into a more timely version. But which version could this be?

7. Discussion: Diversity management – surplus or survival?

It is the argument of this paper that diversity management in a Danish context has fallen prey to an ambiguous translation. A translation that rest on a paradoxical foundation: First of all, diversity has hitherto been interpreted as active labor market policy in relation to integration of disadvantaged refugees and immigrants and synonymous with how to tackle ethnic diversity (Boxenbaum 2006, Kamp and Hagedorn 2004, Staunæs 2005). But the moral imperative has until now been paradoxically combined with diversity as business case promoting diversity as a mean to innovation and global competitiveness (business case vs. moral imperative). Secondly, the individualistic and voluntary imperative of diversity management originally imbued in the US context is conflicting with the tradition of collective bargaining institutionally restricting the actions of the corporations combined with the value of collectivism of the Danish welfare state system (collectivism vs. individualism). Thirdly the predetermination of diversity in relation to ethnicity has stifled the ability to make use of the full potential of diversity (difference vs. ethnicity).

Today the societal situation in many ways resembles the challenges that faced Denmark when diversity management first hit the agenda at the turn of the millennium: The unemployment figures are back at a pre-00s level. While in 2009 six out of ten non-western immigrants were holding a job, the bucket has turned and in 2010 one in six immigrant or descendant of immigrants from non-Western country was unemployed (A4 May, 25 2012).

While the societal situation is similar, the translation of the active labor market policies has shifted into a social responsibility agenda. Somehow this development disclose a sad 'truth': Many of the people with ethnic minority background, who got a job during the 00s, never gained a status as core employees – they were predominantly perceived as marginal labor that could be employed in periods of lack labor force. Diversity management was thus a 'surplus phenomenon' suited for political 'toasts', and difference in relation to ethnic diversity as newer truly valued as a business advantage. Translating diversity management into the agenda of social responsibility never led to valuing of diversity in itself[9].

What are the present potentials then? Can it be retranslated into a 'survival requirement'?

In opposition to the majority of Danish organizations my case organizations are both born multi-ethnic and multi-lingual, and diversity is an integrated part of their DNA for survival and success. In these organizations difference is thus perceived and interpreted in many ways by the organizational members: In Copenhagen Consultants difference is for instance perceived as being an introvert person in an organization dominated by extroverts, to behave as a 'municipal officer' or to hold a degree within human science in an organization dominated people with a social science degree. In Quick Burger, being older than 25 years old, to act 'rebellious' or non-conforming with the dominant corporate norms or having a university degree, are some of the perceptions of being a 'different kind of employee'. Thus the definitions of difference vary according to who you ask, when and where – they are fluid, dynamic and with no pre given essence. In both of the organizations the contribution of diversity is perceived as pivotal to delivering adequate products

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[9] This perception of diversity and the segregation on the labor market, cf Jyllandsposten 08/06/10, in many ways reflects the contemporary 'zeitgeist' with a growing segregation of residential areas, schools and in the cultural life along the lines of age, ethnicity and social class c.f. A4 16/01/13 and Information 19.-20/05/12, 18/05/12 and 26.-27/05/12.

and services to a highly diverse group of consumers, clients, customers and markets – and to add quality to the cooperation and relations among the organizational members.

Could organizations like my case organizations - where diversity is interpreted fluid and dynamic - show us a way forward? As argued by Tatli and Özbilgin, the prefixing of the meaning of identities as 'ethnic', gender specific or age related, neglects the role of organizational context shaping the meaning of identities and categories itself. The organization should be busy understanding how categories and the identities of the organizational members emerge, are being negotiated, changed and performed in the organizing processes with no majority or minority set in advance (Tatli and Özbilgin 2011).

For my case organizations it seems like - in their struggle to develop and maintain a diversity sensitive culture valuing differences - they have to navigate the ambivalence of diversity in practice: Namely balancing the need for sameness and uniqueness at the same time. And this might by the 'real' challenge of diversity management.

According to Shore et al. diversity management is about creating organizations that simultaneously embrace a sense of sameness or belonging of all its organizational members as well as nurture the sense of uniqueness that bring about feeling of acknowledgement and high self-esteem (Shore et al 2011, Nishii 2012). As Ralph Stacey underlines, "*The paradox is this. If members of an organization have nothing in common at all, then obviously any kind of joint action will be impossible. However if they conform too much then the emergence of new forms of behavior is blocked… diversity (is) a source of evolution, creativity and novelty. Without diversity there can be no new developments.* "(Stacey 2011 p.480, 194)

The quest for uniqueness implies creating inclusive organizations where a diverse group of employees can unfold their unique competences and contributions. On the one hand, the organizational members must feel valued for their unique contribution and not experience disclosure of what - in a more assimilative environment - can be experienced as stigmatized and 'undesirable' characteristics (Goffman 2010). On the other hand, being valued for your unique skills and attributes without social acceptance and inclusion in the larger membership of the organization (sense of belonging) will foster segregation.

Balancing ambivalence and constantly tracing requisite variety might be the way forward, as argued by Karl Weick:

"*Whether team members differ in occupational specialties, past experience, gender, conceptual skills, or personality may be less crucial than the fact that they do differ and look for different things when they size up at problem. If people look for different things, when their observations are pooled they collectively see more than any one of them alone would see. However, as team members become more alike; their pooled observations cannot be distinguished from their individual observations which means collectively they know little more about a problem than they know individually. And since individuals have severe limits on when they can comprehend, a homogeneous team does little to offset these limits. ..The issues with collective requisite variety are fascinating as well as complex… Trust is difficult when diversity increases, because as people become more diverse they also become harder to trust and it is harder to be trusted by them…Ambivalence is the optimal compromise.* " (Weick 2001, p. 335).

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