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From Managing Equality to Managing Diversity

A Critical Scandinavian Perspective on Gender and Workplace Diversity

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Gender is a relevant and important aspect of organizational diversity and consequently also of diversity in society. For obvious reasons gender is the most extensive diversity dimension from both time and space perspectives. It has, therefore, historically probably occupied a privileged position which, however, can be challenged by other dimensions in some contexts.

The concept of diversity emerged in the European debate in the 1990s. As with many other organizational concepts and theories, it was imported from the United States. The debate sounded like something we had heard before in gender-related discussions. Also, the way the problems were presented and the solutions seemed very familiar. Although gender was often implicit in the concept of diversity, like other individual characteristics such as handicap and sexual preference, it was, however, race, or rather ethnicity,[1] which was the most important dimension.[2] The other aspects were more or less loosely attached. Likewise, ethnicity was not often mentioned when gender was in focus. However, in gender research an ethnic dimension can be included and in ethnicity a gender dimension. Which of these is the most important seems to have been an ongoing discussion which reminds us of

discussions which belonged to earlier decades – only these debates were about whether a class perspective or a gender perspective should be prioritized.

Although both concepts, gender and ethnicity in theory and practice, often have global similarities, there are always local interpretations, and we try to take notice of this in this chapter where we discuss gender in a diversity perspective and what that implies. What are the differences and similarities between a gender and other, especially ethnic, diversity perspectives? How does gender power operate in different ethnic groups? This last question is an issue which is important in itself, and we should be aware of the differences between the situation of families and that of communities. However, here we will deal only with the workplace perspective, which is a restriction, but nonetheless an important starting point as workplaces, that is organizations, *are* the labour market.

In the next section pioneer research on how to organize is presented. In some ways it seems very out of date and in others it is of great relevance even nowadays. What these different perspectives have in common is that they neglected gender (and/or diversity) dimensions which eventually triggered the sex and gender research that is introduced in the following section. Both areas, organizing and sex/gender, have great political relevance. Politics and research are connected. This is true also for the ethnicity/diversity area. We have written a special section on this theme before going into the 'diversity on the workplace' part of the chapter. Different themes are handled under that heading: gender versus diversity, arguments for diversity in the workplace, including gender, and how to manage diversity in the workplace. The last topic appear at the top of management literature lists and is an example of the political nature of diversity. We end the chapter with a discussion of the state of the art and what could be expected in the future, especially in relation to the gender dimensions of diversity.

This chapter adopts a Scandinavian perspective which will surface in different ways in various parts of the chapter. Under the present headings the Scandinavian touch will hardly be noticed as the strongest research influencing theory and practice within this region is international. Later on, the distinctive Scandinavian character is more pronounced. It will be explained why – as it seems to be a contradiction to the internationalization and globalization so often emphasized. In the last section we return to a more global perspective – although we are convinced that organizational practice is always local.

THE EARLY WORK/LIFE AND ORGANIZATION RESEARCH

In comparison with gender perspectives on studies of work and workplaces, the research on work/life and organization theory has a much longer history. This will be commented on as it is a necessary background for both theory and practice in the diversity field.

Among the classics within organization and workplace research we include the well-known Hawthorne studies (from the 1930s). The Hawthorne studies are

important because their results eventually implied a paradigm shift from a Tayloristic way of 'seeing' the organization (scientific management) to much more emphasis on the human being in the organization (human relations school). The Hawthorne effect refers to the way people responded positively to being 'seen' as humans in the organization. These studies can be mentioned as examples of how the question of gender is treated in the early studies: in fact, it was not treated at all, as noticed by Acker and Van Houten (1972). Their re-examination showed that: (1) the treatment of men and women was different; and (2) women and men were recruited differently. These two factors together may have resulted in different outcomes. Acker and Van Houten accused the Hawthorne studies of being biased because the researchers did not notice the presence of gender dimensions – that is there was no awareness that there were work groups consisting only of men and others only of women, and that this might have led to some different reflections and results. The conclusion reached by Acker and Van Houten is that we may find that organizational processes are related to sex-based power differentials. Later, in the 1950s, Landsberger (1958) noticed that many of the female subjects in the study were also immigrants, a fact that was ignored in the first study. Even Landsberger, however, just mentions this and does not discuss it further. However, these immigrant identity locations clearly had implications for the women's relationship to work and the organization.

Top-down and Bottom-up Perspectives

After the Second World War the research and theory at the organizational level developed in different directions. To put it simply, many sociologists, who were more or less inspired by Marx, described and analysed workplaces from a bottom-up perspective while many management researchers and organization theorists were describing and analysing workplaces from a top-down perspective. The gap between these two approaches has widened and although empirical work is sometimes done in the same organization, the perspective and theories used could be very different. In both approaches, however, a gender perspective was missing, even though the theories and narratives were clearly gendered. It was the hard-working white (working-class) man, whom we were told about in various studies, which were mainly about industries (e.g. Hearn, 1992). The car industry was especially popular as an object of study (see e.g. Freyssenet, 1998). Braverman (1974) was one of the early influential writers and so were Burawoy (1982), Crozier (1964) and many others from different language areas. These classical theorists also tended to marginalize or ignore ethnicity along with gender.

RESEARCH ON SEX, GENDER AND ORGANIZATIONS

Along with the development of workplace research, research on women developed, partly because women in great numbers (in the Western world) became students at

universities and some of them eventually researchers. Some of these women were aware that the history of workplaces (and organization theory) was actually *his* story. Eventually research developed which, to begin with, was mainly concerned with adding women where they were missed out – for example, in history, in literature and in art – and after some delay they were also studied and recognized in descriptions of the labour market and organizations (Alvesson & Billing, 1997). The research developed and passed the add-on-women stage towards a position where a woman's standpoint was emphasized. The latest post-feminist position has also been very influential and we return to this in the final section.

Within the gender research that focuses on the labour market and organizations a division of the kind mentioned earlier developed. The labour market perspective dominated, however, and many important questions were raised. What are the connections between women in the labour market and their roles in the family? Is capitalism or patriarchy to blame for women's situation or are they strengthening or opposing each other?[3] The feminist inclusion of domestic work changed the theoretical premises and challenged the basic conceptual definitions within neoclassical economics (Aaltio & Kovalainen, 2003, Ferber & Nelson, 2003). Even though economists often treat organizations as a black box, some realized that an understanding of gender segregation and gender biases in the labour market had to be looked for inside organizations. In particular, the question of wages was studied by many economists (Gonäs & Lehto, 1997; Maier, 1997).

Studies with a clear bottom-up perspective were conducted in most European countries, often published in national languages (see Rubery, 1997). Among the wide spread and important studies is 'Brothers' by Cockburn (1983), published in the early 1980s. Description and analyses of how new technology was implemented in the English printing industry were done from both a class and a gender perspective. Interesting studies in the Cockburn tradition have been conducted and presented in other parts of Europe too, such as Scandinavia. As examples we will mention the studies of women entering male-dominated organizations in Scandinavia by Kvande and Rasmussen (1994, Norway), Sundin (1995, Sweden), Pettersson (1996, Sweden) and Rantalaiho and Heiskanen (1997, Finland). These studies can also be classified as organization research, where the focus is mainly on barriers encountered by women. The top-down perspective, studies on women and management, is represented by some pioneers as well (e.g. Hennig & Jardim, 1977; Kanter, 1977). Before these classics, there was some sporadic early research on women in management (e.g. Gordon & Strober, 1975; Loring & Wells, 1972).

The origins of 'gender in organizations', 'gendered organizations' and now finally postmodern thinking on gender and organizations can be traced to both bottom-up and top-down perspectives. The culture perspective which was developed in the 1980s included paying attention to how the values of different groups influenced the way they acted within the organization. Finally, in the 1990s many researchers realized that organizations are not gender neutral but characterized by practices and processes which can be related to power differences, different values, etc. Gender was considered a significant dimension in research on organizations and the field expanded to become an important part in the organizational

and gender areas (Martin & Collinsson, 2002). One of the early contributions to a critique of organizational practices was Ferguson's book (1984) *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy*, which made some connections between patriarchy and organizational structures. Later, Martin (1990; 1992) (among others) also made important contributions to the feminist critique about the taken-for-granted nature of gendered organizational practices. In line with other postmodern fields, what was earlier taken for granted on sex, gender and organizations has now begun to be questioned. From a post-structural perspective, gender is a cultural performance and work is seen as a place for the construction of gender. The construction of identity is emphasized as being an important element in the gendering of organizations.

We prefer to use the concept of gender in feminist studies, thus acknowledging that gender studies include studies on masculinity, an expanding area, which also focuses on men 'being men' (mainly being 'white men'), and on men's integration into women's workplaces. A field of special relevance in this organizational context is men and management. The title *Men as Managers – Managers as Men* (Collinson & Hearn, 1996) is illustrative of this new field, which seems to be far from the early studies on women in management not only in its empirical focus but with regard to the theoretical frames as well. Empirical findings and theoretical contributions made from feminist perspectives are otherwise surprisingly often neglected. Part of the field has been criticized by researchers – active in gender and feminist studies – for being too fashionable. There are also concerns over a switch in the political interest from gender and equality to men and masculinity (Aaltio & Kovalainen, 2003).

It is likely then that new themes will emerge and eventually become integrated, and in time further expand our understanding of work organizations and the people who act within them: 'The field of gendered organizations needs to expand beyond gender to embrace all forms of inequality which lack legitimacy in organizations that claim to use merit and performance as their evaluative standards' (Martin & Collinson, 2002: 257). One of these new themes is the concept of diversity, an even newer dimension than gender and one which is still under-researched in Europe. For example, 'ethnicity' is a heading with rather limited space in some of the articles in the state-of-the-art volume from the EU Commission published in 1997. Martin and Collinson (2002) state further that they expect the race/ethnicity trend to accelerate.

RESEARCH AND POLITICS

This chapter is written from a Scandinavian perspective. In Scandinavia there has been, and is, a strong connection between feminist research and politics, mainly around the question of equality between women and men often triggered by the shortage of labour as mentioned below (Aaltio & Kovalainen, 2003; Gonäs & Lehto, 1997). This 'political tradition' seems to be followed also for research in

ethnicity and race. A political tradition implies that politicians support, and ask for, research on different topics.

Typically, the political concept has been used in a narrow way to imply decisions and actions taken by politicians. But 'politics' can also have a wider meaning referring to researchers' ambitions to give advice and support to groups of actors such as governmental decision-makers. In this meaning of the concept, research on organizations has from the very beginning been of a political nature. The normative ambitions are often stated by the researchers themselves. One of Taylor's famous books (1911) has the expression 'scientific management' in its title, underlining that the author's ambition was to help managers do their job in a good scientific way.

Shortage of Labour and Welfare Regimes

As mentioned above, research and analyses on women and the labour market have proceeded along different lines. Researchers' intellectual positions and focus are often influenced by the context in which research is done. Women's relations to the labour market vary between countries with regard to participation and working conditions, including working hours and salaries. The early research on gender and the labour market was connected to politics from different perspectives. Although working-class women have always worked, in many countries there have been marriage bars, meaning that women had to stop working when they married (Frangeur, 1998; Kessler-Harris, 1982; and many others). However, because of the labour shortage in many countries, (married) women eventually were regarded as a potential resource. Especially with regard to the labour market, the research was somewhat supported by the fact that there was a shortage of labour which led to an increased interest in expanding the workforce, among both politicians and managers.

Women and the labour market cannot be isolated from other parts of life, like the family and the welfare system (Esping-Anderssen, 1996; Sainsbury, 1996). These systems are of great importance for individuals' lives. One key element in the Nordic model has been the normalization of women's participation in gainful employment and a weak male breadwinner role, in contrast to Western and Southern European welfare models (Aaltio & Kovalainen, 2003). In Denmark and Sweden there was a labour shortage in the 1960's and there was a need to look for other 'unused' resources, married women being one big group[4] which joined the workplace in large numbers in the 1960s and 1970s. This became possible because of the expansion of daycare centres for children. In other Western countries there were (are) not the same 'generous' offers for mothers, and the bread winner ideology differs from state to state. It is important to note that welfare regimes were established differently and the accompanying discourse on families meant (means) a great deal for women's, not only mothers', work possibilities and the conditions under which they were, and are, on the labour market (Haas, Hwang & Russel, 2000).

The political background for the great interest in research on women and the labour market resembles the present interest in diversity. Earlier immigrant workers were invited (often as an alternative to women) when there was a shortage of labour. The present situation in many European countries, including Scandinavian ones, has been of the opposite kind with great problems for immigrants (including refugees) to find a job. In the near future, however, there seems to be a need for more labour power, and immigrants can again be looked upon as a potential resource.[5] What has until now been looked upon as personal and individual problems for immigrants (of not getting work) has eventually transcended the 'personal' and become important societal issues which must be taken seriously and dealt with accordingly (see also Wright Mills, 1959).

Politics, Research Methods and Conclusions

As the empirical objects of social sciences are parts of these systems and regimes we can find significant differences also in the problems studied and the theories and interpretations used. In their article 'Over the pond and across the water', Martin and Collinson (2002) emphasise and exemplify the differences between US and European research on organizations. The differences concern both theories and methods and, of course, make comparisons and analyses tricky. Critical perspectives are hard to establish as 'North American "normal science" is globally dominant in management and organizational research, thereby blocking critical work on both sides of the pond' (p. 250).

Explanations and theories with the ambition of global relevance have to be looked upon with some suspicion. This standpoint has been taken by many Scandinavian researchers for more than two decades. The Americanization of the social sciences has been criticized as being not sufficiently appropriate to the local Scandinavian context. Local cultures have to be acknowledged as they are important in both theory and practice. This also goes for a lot of research with an American origin: 'even organization research stemming from North America might be less universalistic and more bound to a local way of working, organizing, and thinking than its proponents would have their readers believe' (Czarniawska & Sevón, 2003: 9). It must be mentioned that this privileged position of US research sometimes is maintained by Europeans themselves and that there is a vast critique of the positivistic mainstream research also in the US research community. There is also a strong tradition of research in the United States dealing with issues of race, gender and ethnicity at work in fields such as the sociology of work and corporate anthropology which European management researchers systematically overlook. It might be interesting to speculate as to why Europeans prefer to direct their critiques towards mainstream US research while ignoring the rich outpouring of non-positivist research that has been routinely produced in the United States over the last few decades.

The warning for over-generalization has to be sounded for the diversity field as well. As Wrench (2002) states in his overview of literature on diversity management,

the differences in the US and European contexts are important. These differences concern plain facts like the size of the minority population and different ways of solving problems like the American readiness to resort to the courts[5]. Even inside Europe the differences can be great. In some countries there has been great resistance to both the diversity concept and its practice. As an example we will borrow Wrench's (2002: 88, 89) presentation of a French position: 'For some people in France the very word "diversity" has unacceptable overtones … Bourdieu and Wasquant, for example, criticise the "cultural imperialism" inherent in the assumptions that American academic ideas can be imposed on non-American environments.'[6]

Under the political heading we will also note that the literature on gender and organizations and on diversity and organizations tends to be overwhelmingly positive. There seems to be a 'political correctness' also among researchers and/or perhaps research in line with the historical tradition among researchers on organizations to help and give advice to managers and other organizational actors. This tendency is more obvious in the mainstream management diversity literature than in gender literature, which Wrench (2002) explains by diversity being a positive concept signalling efficiency and profits while equality and affirmative actions associate with fairness and costs.

THE WORKPLACE AND DIVERSITY

Sex, Gender and Diversity

In line with what was mentioned above, there are also specific European, and possibly also Scandinavian, traditions and practices for dealing with diversity. Like other characteristics such as disability and sexual preference, age, ethnicity and race (which are often described and classified as individual characteristics although they (also) are attached to social identity groups), gender was, and is, often implicit in the concept of diversity. However, it seemed to be race or rather ethnicity which was the most important dimension from the introduction of the concept in Scandinavia (de los Reyes, 2001). Our way of restricting ourselves to gender and ethnicity/race and neglecting other dimensions and characteristics, under the diversity heading, therefore reflects the broader Scandinavian discourse of diversity.

There are different perspectives on diversity and different definitions. From Thomas and Ely (1996) we learn that 'Diversity should be understood as the varied perspectives and approaches to work that members of different identity groups bring' (p. 80) and Osman (1999) states that 'Cultural diversity is a term generally used to signify the presence of different groups of people with different races, systems of belief (religion), languages, etc. in a geographical arena.' Consequently a variety of cultural diversity models has been devised. These models attempt to

come up with a delineation of pluralism according to the following main descriptors: race, religion, gender, and language (p. 10).

We believe that in considering diversity at work, it is important to avoid what is known as the Wollstonecraft dilemma – which is either to be like the majority (often 'men') (white) and give up one's own values/perspectives, or stick to these and perhaps stay marginalized. This indicates the problem of acknowledging differences, in all the dimensions mentioned, and the right to equal opportunity, and parallels the multicultural discourse: that is, how to balance the right to be equal and the right to be different, and equal on whose conditions? Garcia (1995) presents another useful definition: 'The term multicultural diversity competence refers to the ability to demonstrate respect and understanding, to communicate effectively and to work collaboratively with people from different cultural backgrounds.' Even when individuals make efforts to integrate and give up their identities, they can still face exclusion. This is equally true for both women and minorities.

Differences and Similarities Between Gender and Diversity

What are the differences and similarities between a gender and a diversity perspective? Answers to these questions seem to be very complex as was illustrated above. In some studies, like Fine's from 1995, gender is treated as one dimension among others in cultural descriptions and analyses of organizations; that is, of the labour market. In others, like Wise and Tschirhart (2000: 33), it is emphasized that 'one dimension of workplace diversity can not be assumed to apply to other dimensions … effects of sex diversity on performance ratings are not generalizable to racial diversity'. We will reflect on this statement below but start with an obvious similarity between all diversity dimensions – diverse means not being male, heterosexual, disabled and/or white. Gender is just 'one part of a complicated web of socially constructed elements of identity' and so are race and class. 'Each part may be manifested in its own peculiar and distinct way', Nkomo writes (1992: 507), and continues, 'the common factor is domination based on notions of inferiority and superiority'. The explicit or implicit norm (for these feelings) is the white male. Non-white and non-male represents diversity. But there are also some interesting differences between the diversity phenomena concerning gender and ethnicity that are worth mentioning:

* Early mainstream research did not provide a fair or just picture of the labour market. Women were often excluded although they were part of the labour market. The same cannot be said about ethnic groups. Although they are also partly there but hidden on the black market, their share of jobs seems constantly to be much lower than that of the natives. In this part of the world their

share seems somehow to be dependent upon (1) how much they resemble the existing workforce[7] and (2) the need for more persons in the labour market. In the last mentioned perspective the similarities to the entrance of women on the labour market at a large scale are striking.

- Generally, women and men seem to be in different jobs, at different levels, etc. It is not easy to find a man and a woman who carry out the same work at the same time. And if they do, the tasks may have different labels. This seems to be a global, or at least an all-European, phenomenon (Rubery, 1997). We could add that the same might be said about ethnic groups. Segregation is then not just about women but also about ethnicity.

- With regard to gender segregation, it is interesting that the present segregation is always described as the most 'natural', whereas with regard to ethnic 'others' the employers' explanation for leaving them out/not hiring them is most often a matter of the 'others' not having the right qualifications and/or not being able to speak the language etc. In short, they lack skills, especially social skills. This theme repeatedly surfaces in the newspaper discourse in Scandinavia and among researchers (e.g. Osman, 1999). In the same way that labelling women as especially good at care-taking traps them into some specific work areas, there seems to be a corresponding danger that ethnic 'others' might be acknowledged as primarily good at cleaning, caring, serving and servicing (taxi-driving), whereas they are believed not quite to have what it takes to become a manager (or other jobs at higher levels). These lines of argument are illustrated further below under the alternative values and special contribution perspective.

- Women's position in the family is often an important and integrated part of the 'natural' argument referred to above, reminding us that the gender system works in all organizations, including the family. That means that members of different gender categories are living, eating and sleeping together. Some radical feminists would even argue that this is a case of sleeping with the enemy. At work, however, the other 'power' system often includes a separating spatial dimension. Let us give some examples. In the 'empirical world' women and men share daily lives, and are living under the same roof, while working-class people often live far away from upper-class people, do not send their children to the same schools, do not meet during their times off, etc. Different ethnic groups often marry inside their groups and have ethnic networks also in other dimensions. Ethnic separation along diversity lines is sometimes described as a problem, for example when it comes to housing and living.

- The relations between men and women on the labour market and in organizations are also characterized by a hierarchical dimension where what men do and is thought of as masculine is often valued higher and has higher prestige than what women do. How gender and ethnicity are related to each other from a hierarchical perspective is, however, not clear. There are several discussions about intersectionality, the topic of the intersection between race and gender that has interested both debaters and researchers (Acker, 2000; Andersen & Collins, 2000; hooks, 1989).

Models Supporting the Case for Organizational Diversity

The focus in this chapter is on organizations, gender and other diversity dimensions, mainly ethnicity. There is no single way of looking at organizational diversity. Billing and Alvesson (1989) developed a 'model' of how to understand the major reasons and rationales for the theoretical and practical interest in investigating and facilitating women's opportunities for attaining managerial positions. We adapt this model and expand it for our purpose to show the variety of differing views and underlying assumptions that are also present within the area of diversity. It should be noted that these positions should be seen as lines of argumentations, 'ideal types', and therefore not necessarily 'truths' about the different world views, and they may overlap. The four positions dealt with are the equal opportunities perspective, the meritocratic perspective, the special contribution perspective and finally the alternative values perspective. We will address each one of these.

The equal opportunities perspective

This perspective centres around the justice argument. It is based on a moral imperative that there should be equal opportunity with regard to work irrespective of one's biological or cultural background. There is no focus on profit maximization through diversity. It is mainly a 'political' approach, by which we mean that it is initiated by political parties and governments in power. It is perhaps most common within the diversity literature. The goal is anti-discrimination, which is in keeping with the ideals of the democratic nation state. The goal here would be to identify and remove all barriers to fair employment practices. Of course, at the same time, it is also important to get organizations to realize that they do in fact discriminate.

Many employers would argue that there is no discrimination, and that the reason there are few employees from different ethnic backgrounds (or old age etc.) is due to the applicants' lack of qualifications. This power to define 'the other' is essential to organizational control, as is the power to decide what is the standard (the qualifications) which we should be equal to. Likewise, there are fixed ideas about how the worker should look. Conflicts and problems often arise because the majority (in this case represented by the employers) have some 'natural' ideas about how things should be. In this instance, the question of lack of qualifications could be seen as clearly rooted in institutionalized discrimination in Scandinavia (compare the discussions of Osman referring especially to language). Even when minorities have attained greater access to organizations, this stereotyping can prevail, as when employers believe that women's working capacities are limited because of domestic and care-taking responsibilities, regardless of whether the women have children or not. One could imagine the same group-stereotyping about other minorities, but this would be based on myths of cultural differences instead of gender-based myths.

Within this perspective, the structures of the organization are believed to be of utmost importance to the advancement of minorities. Kanter (1977) has described the impact of the structural determinants of behaviour in organizations. She mentions the structure of opportunity, the structure of power and finally the proportional distribution of people of different categories. She argues that it is decisive for one's career progress to be centrally placed in the opportunity structure, to be on a career track and not to be in a dead-end job. For Kanter structure is believed to be more vital than the actor for the chances of getting ahead. With regard to numbers, she claims that when the minority is close to 15% there will be resistance against hiring more individuals from the same minority group. It is not until the minority comes close to one-third (critical mass) that it will be able to influence the workplace. When there are only a few members of a social identity group in an organization, they are likely to be regarded and treated as tokens. Tokenism is a response to these people being unique in the organization, who will, according to this 'theory', have to deal with stereotypes and other caricatures. People with different ethnic backgrounds in organizations are often, just like women, in lower positions, which according to Kanter's theory means that they are low in organizational power, and also in opportunity. There may be cultural circumstances which generate stereotypes that lead to prejudice and discrimination. The division of labour and the lack of network contacts (low in power structure) make it difficult for the different others to advance in the organization.

When individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds are perceived as different, without adequate qualifications there is slim chance for equal opportunity actually to work. The equal opportunities perspective has clear political conclusions: the structural and cultural conditions lead to a bias in favour of white males, and it is thus necessary to have more regulations that ensure genuine equal opportunity. In some countries there are already regulations and requirements that minorities should be hired in organizations (see Lobel, 1997). Action may be needed for campaigns to affect attitudes or even a quota system. Others would claim that if discrimination were stopped, things would change; we just need a fairer approach. The difference between these two versions is marginal and more a matter of emphasis. The first version also views the removal of biases as significant, but complements this with measures aiming to 'empower', train or support women/ ethnic others, while the other exclusively emphasizes external constraints and goes beyond the level of the subject in accomplishing change.

In modern societies (especially in Scandinavia) there is a strong conviction that everybody should be treated fairly, irrespective of race, ethnicity, gender, and such. It is simply unfair and immoral to prefer (white) men just because of their colour and sex; while this is often the case there is ample reason for examining the barriers to equal opportunities, including access to leadership positions. While subscribing to this normative position in theory, in actual practice the equal employment position finds little public support in Scandinavia (especially with respect to ethnic minorities) since most of the population is convinced of the intrinsic fairness of the overall social system.

The Meritocratic perspective

The problem of conservatism, prejudice and stereotyping resulting in obstacles to competent persons being recruited or achieving higher-level positions can also be looked at from a meritocratic perspective. This perspective is interested in trying to get rid of obstacles that prevent maximum utilization of the resource potential in society. The argument is that a larger reservoir with bright and motivated people will make society/organizations function better (e.g. Adler, 1986/87). The primary goal is not equal opportunity but the organizations' possibility of using diversity in relation to how it markets itself and its service.

Here the argument is that the organization should mirror its surroundings in order to get access to different markets. An important assumption of this perspective is the organization's need for legitimacy in the media and the wider society, requiring that customers should be able to recognize themselves. To recruit more broadly is good for image reasons. Diverse resources can then be used to get more of the market share (see discussion in Thomas & Ely, 1996). Unlike the equal employment perspective which centres around justice, the meritocratic perspective is driven by a profits and efficiency motive. While this perspective encourages pluralism, it remains monocultural in its orientation rather than multicultural, with the white monoculture dominating the values of the organization. This argument (which is the prevalent one at the moment) argues that we should disregard gender, class, background, race, religion and other characteristics irrelevant to career patterns in modern society. Recruiting more diverse groups could be seen as a smart business practice fact because of the changing composition of people in post-industrial societies where the majority soon will be older people, and where there are more and more immigrants. On competitive grounds, labour shortages causes organizations to look in new directions for resources.

From this perspective it is not so much justice and fairness which are the focus since meritocrats are more concerned with the maximum efficiency of social systems. Ethics do not matter here. It is the full utilization of human resources, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, age, etc., which are important and not so much discrimination as such. Therefore, this perspective seeks to counteract irrational and old-fashioned cultural patterns. With its belief in market competition as the primary incentive, the question becomes one of attracting the best personnel irrespective of differences in race, age, gender, etc. This perspective therefore does not rely on legislation to take care of patterns of discrimination, but assumes instead that organizations have much to gain by recruiting competent individuals irrespective if race, age, gender, etc.

Both these perspectives seem to emphasize the commonality of people arguing that cultural differences are minor. Even when there are minor cultural differences, it is possible to see them as assets. This shows a total unawareness for example of how culture and underlying assumptions, about women, and about minorities, may effectively be a barrier for even recruiting minorities. Acker (1992) mentions the gendered substructure as a potential blockage for women

entrants, and Wilson (1998) shows how a collusion between underlying assumptions and espoused values will have an effect with regard to whether minorities (like women) are 'seen' as career potential. This is certainly the case in Scandinavia where many ethnic minorities are not perceived as being 'qualified', even when they are highly educated and have considerable managerial experience but their credentials are from Eastern European and non-western countries.

The next two perspectives are much more interested in differences, the first in slight differences, while the second one makes a strong case for differences.

The special contribution perspective

This position holds that different 'others' (women, people from different ethnicities, older employees, the disabled, etc.) might be able to contribute to organizations with their different values, experiences, ways of thinking, etc. (Grant, 1988; Helgesen, 1990). There has been (and still is) a belief that women, because of different socialisation, experiences, etc., have complementary qualifications and thus the potential of making important contributions to the workplace, and there have been many suggestions about women's abilities and skills (Gilligan, 1982) and what they could add. Billing and Alvesson (1989) suggest that there might be an exploitative dimension to this since women could very easily become the necessary oil to make the organization function better. In other words, they could be exploited and used as a potential tool for carrying out rationalizations more smoothly. This argument could be extended to other groups, like immigrants, ethnic minorities, older people, etc. Changes in society in the composition of people and demographic changes are forcing us to think differently about these potential resources for the labour market. These changes may also lead to necessary vital changes in the workplace.

A lot of different 'others' at the workplace could mean that formerly accepted norms might be questioned. These significant differences and the call for special contributions also make it impossible to recruit persons on the basis of some 'neutral' standards. We cannot use a single scale for recruitment. Instead it is perhaps reasonable to accept that people have different skills and therefore are suited for different jobs. The strategy is then not that we all compete on the same terms, but rather that we acknowledge our differences and see these as the vehicles for getting the job/position. Then the variety of perspectives can be seen as 'a knowledge asset that organizations are increasingly trying to optimize' (Thomas & Ely, 1996: 80).

We anticipate that when people are hired and 'used' specifically in relation to the unique difference they have, then there will easily be a culturalization of differences, where workers are identified with their cultural differences and therefore easily put in certain positions. The hierarchical and horizontal division of labour may then be reproduced. While categorizations might be reproduced, however, looking at resources contained in the differences will mean that the negative content might be reformulated as something positive, which then again could mean that even more persons with ethnically different backgrounds might be hired.

Also this perspective, like the others, has political implications. Problems are not over when persons with different ethnic backgrounds have been recruited. As we know from the feminist literature, there can be confrontations at the workplace, which must be dealt with before we can talk about successful integration. Similarly, Prasad and Mills (1997) assert that many organizations do not deal with these problems and managing diversity might easily become a showcase where there is only a focus on the positive side and where cultural differences are not acknowledged (Prasad, 1997). Further, Prasad (1997) observes that the fundamental structuring of many organizational practices is imprinted by cultural myths favouring Euro-male cultural traits and characteristics. This makes it very difficult for organizations even to recognize the so-called contributions of women and minorities. A number of Scandinavian organizations also suffer from this problem. While they are more frequently able to appreciate some of the special contributions of Scandinavian women, they are relatively unable to do the same with many ethnic minorities, especially those from the Middle East and Islamic countries (Prasad, 2005).

The Alternative values perspective

The point made here is that there is a substantial difference between women and men. The key assumption is that in general women and men do not share the same interests, priorities and basic attitudes to life. This approach has some similarities with the special contribution view discussed above, but the alternative values position stresses the differences between typical 'male' and 'female' values more strongly, and also emphasizes conflicts between the two. This approach is basically critical of male-dominated institutions.

According to this position, traditionally women have been socialized to live by the values of the private sphere, to be nurturing, to serve others, to be emotional, etc., while men have been socialized to live by the values of the public sphere, to deny vulnerability, to compete, to take risks, wanting to control nature, etc. It could be claimed that the cultural norms and values characterizing the socialization of women and men belong to two different and more or less polarized worlds. An important stream here is psycho-analytic feminism. Other authors ground a distinct feminine orientation less in early socialization and psychology than in shared female experiences associated with the historical position as subordinated or an orientation developed as a consequence of the experiences of mothering (Cockburn, 1991). While special contribution advocates typically view female early socialization as crucial for the gender difference, alternative values advocates more clearly invoke social conditions, including political positioning. It is the marginal position of women which brings about a specific set of orientations.

These differences are believed to be much greater than in the former position and believed to influence how individuals look at competition (see Gilligan, 1982) and how they develop rationalities. This can certainly be extended to the advancement of minority social groups in work organizations. They will bring

with them some very different characteristics and value orientations to the organizations (Thomas & Ely, 1996), a discussion which is also in Prasad (1997).

With regard to women, they are believed always to be marginalized in a capitalist society which is based on masculine values. If different ethnic groups are constructed (stereotypically) as being culturally different and this alternative culture is also seen as in opposition to the dominant masculinity, they will 'suffer' the same exclusion problems as women. This way of constructing diverse staff as being dependent on and behaving according to some other cultural norms (see e.g. Hofstede, 1990) will demand that more fundamental changes are needed if more than a minority of people are to fit into the organization positions and if all the different priorities/values and interests are to be taken seriously. Later we briefly go into a discussion of whose values to respect and the difficulties even in coming to an answer to this question.

Summary

The difference between the four positions is that within the equality strand, anti-discrimination and justice are the central pillars. This position urges that we fight against discrimination to increase the number of people with a different ethnic background and to achieve a balance between women and men. All are expected to adjust to the values and norms of the organization. Assimilation is the expected result.

The meritocratic perspective is a way of responding to the market, arguing that the organization's legitimacy is enhanced when it mirrors the diverse social composition that is found in its environment. Cultural differences are valued because they can be advantageous for competitive reasons, for the sake of efficient utilization of human resources, but there is a tendency to encourage segregation between the different member groups as they will be associated with their cultural backgrounds. Here again assimilation is the goal, but it takes place as a result of voluntary corporate action rather than governmental intervention or legislation.

The special contribution perspective suggests that organizations should value and use the resources of its diverse staff to develop itself. There is no demand that diverse employees should fit to the organization. Instead, innovation and new ways of thinking are valued. This way of thinking is usually framed as essentialist and is sometimes also referred to as celebrating diversity. To celebrate special alternative values would mean more 'female' ways of managing or, and better, organizing, that are mainly in the interest of women and preferably alternative organizations.

People with different ethnic backgrounds, and women (with different values), may then develop their own small (work) cultures and perhaps not be integrated in society. This last option seems to be most prevalent among immigrants at the moment in Scandinavia. But whereas (white) women may have the choice to enter the existing organizations and choose to create their own alternative organizations, minorities may not have this choice of entrance and may remain in separate subcultures as a reaction to this.

The four positions presented here indicate the variety of ways in which the topic of diversity may be considered. Equal opportunity expresses a liberal justice-based view, while special contribution and alternative values are weak and strong applications respectively of the feminist standpoint. Meritocrats may not be feminists at all, but if they are, the liberal–justice view is closest. The questioning and playing out of all approaches without advocating any 'best one' would be in line with postmodernist thinking.

The equal opportunity approach would rely on struggles within and outside organizations, legislation and, in the United States at least, bringing cases into court. Meritocrats would argue that effectiveness considerations and competition would provide sufficient incentives for change. Improved human resource management would be the major vehicle. Special contribution advocates would also rely on competition-induced pressure for effectiveness as well as the demands of particular female (but also male) subordinates. For alternative values advocates, the suggested route would be to develop alternative institutions, rather than try social engineering in the existing capitalist organizations.

There are problems with all perspectives. One general critique is that mainly the positive features of diversity management are emphasized, largely ignoring power relations and complex group dynamics. For example, while organizational assimilation may well be a desirable goal, none of the perspectives seriously address the question of culturalization of differences. A culturalization of differences takes place when the employed with different backgrounds are kept in specific job positions because they are supposed to have a specific group identity. It becomes a problem if competences are culturalized, meaning that the values and norms of the majority are implicitly the basis for the assessment of competences. This bias has been shown in gender research. At the same time one cannot deny that there might be a lack of competences (in some ethnic groups) which seem relevant in many cases, for example a lack of knowledge of the language, inadequate training, etc., which should be taken care of before we can expect any integration. However, one should also note that many employers in Scandinavia use the alleged lack of qualifications of immigrants as an excuse to not even consider them for employment (Prasad, 2005).

MANAGING DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

When we talk about diversity we talk about differences between social groups, but when we talk about managing diversity what does this actually mean? Who and what benefit from it? Some researchers and debaters state that 'management' indicates an owner/manager perspective where power dimensions are hidden behind the diversity concept. Prasad and Mills (1997) ask the relevant question about whether managing diversity is a way to hide that there are in fact discrimination patterns, as diversity management focuses on individuals and pays no

attention to discrimination on the basis of ethnic back ground. Like all other concepts, diversity is not a neutral concept and the importance of this concept will probably last as long as it means something to be different. The concept of diversity is now an established (although a contested) paradigm and it will probably be an important issue as long as organizations do not pursue cultural heterogeneity and/or direct other diversity issues. Or, to use a well-known phrase, as long as it is possible to talk about 'them' and 'us' there will be a need to discuss diversity. Cox (1991) thinks that the multicultural organization is best in relation to integration and the possibility of benefiting from diversity in the organization (see also Fine, 1995). There is also research which shows that heterogeneous teams are more creative and innovative than homogeneous ones. This often presented 'fact' is challenged by others emphasizing that diversity, on both race and gender, has negative effects on group processes and performance (Wrench, 2002). The questionable support for diversity should not, from our point of view, be referred to as an argument against diversity. There could be, and probably are, very positive consequences above the organizational level of diversity including the ones mentioned by the meritocratic perspective.

As stated above, an ethnic dimension can be included in gender research, and in race a gender dimension. Which is the most important seems to have been an ongoing discussion, which reminds us of discussions that belonged to earlier decades, but then about whether a class perspective or a gender perspective should be prioritized. The discussion now sometimes seems to be very antagonistic. In a Swedish book on gender, class and ethnicity in the post-colonial society (de los Reyes et al., 2002), the authors firmly state that although knowledge from studies on gender and women can be of value for analyses on ethnicity, ethnicity and gender are different principles in the power systems. Traditional feminist researchers (Swedish)[8] are severely criticized for neglecting race and ethnicity and through taking part in the construction of immigrant women as a category of 'not-women'. Many Swedish scholars are obviously somewhat disturbed by des los Reyes et al.'s tone, which they describe as too antagonistic. At some level, this is not surprising, because Sweden is only now confronting the turbulent contests over civic space that multicultural countries like Canada and the United States have been facing for a long time. Scandinavians, however, are for the first time having to confront accusations about ignoring the realities of race and ethnicity, and learning to negotiate interactions with people from different ethnicities who have very different intellectual and cultural styles as well.

An Example – Gender Harder than Ethnicity

In the Scandinavian countries the diversity perspective has been thought of by many as imposed from above. For example, Berggren (2002) claims that the Swedish Defence Ministry was told by politicians in the 1980s to work hard for

equal opportunity. This meant allowing women to have access to the army and being seen as potential officers. The presence of the female sex in the army increased the awareness of discrimination and also highlighted the small numbers of women in the army. That women might voluntarily not have wanted to join the army was not discussed at all. The chosen strategy was built upon an idea that women and men are different, the last two alternatives mentioned above. This was called the 'creative difference' – an essentialist perspective. When the concept of diversity entered the vocabulary in the army, it offered an opportunity to keep the taken-for-granted assumptions about women and men but to avoid the equal opportunity discussion. The diversity concept was acknowledged along with other diversity characteristics (some of them in fact automatically exclude certain individuals from the army – the disabled, people with extreme political convictions – and only Swedish citizens have to do national service in the army). Diversity turned out to be an excuse for taking the gender perspective out of the organizational agendas.

The above organizational reaction indicates that gender sometimes seems to be a stronger threat to organizational culture than ethnicity and race. This conclusion is probably not universal but at least relevant for some Scandinavian organizations where a gender 'order' is the prime order (see e.g. Abrahamsson, 2003; Sundin, 2002). This is sometimes hard to explain as the Scandinavian countries as a rule are near the top of equality lists. But 'Nordic countries are not a paradise of equality between women and men; gender regimes and gender contracts within worklife exist as they do in other countries' (Aaltio & Kovalainen, 2003: 197). Our conclusion is that ethnic diversity can be accepted as long as it is in line with established 'gender orders'. It should also be noted that in most private and public organizations in Scandinavia, women have made considerable inroads, while minorities remain highly under-represented.

GENDER AND ETHNICITY IN THE FUTURE WORKPLACE – THEORY AND PRACTICE

Practice, research and theory are connected. Both the present and the signs for the future are diverse. In our part of the world, Scandinavia, it is likely that demographic changes (as in many Western countries) will 'force' societies to look out for new labour power. In many Western countries, in a few decades there will be more retired people than people who work. The lack of people ready to be recruited supports the 'competitive strategy' emphasized both by researchers and diversity activists. It can be thought of as a solution to the lack of resources that will add competences, and promote legitimacy. This could be another narrative than thinking of ethnic immigrants as a burden (Thisted, 2003). Employers might be interested in recruiting persons with different

ethnic backgrounds, because of the competitive advantage and because it increases the ability to compete.

As we know from the organizational literature, even without gender and ethnicity dimensions/perspectives there can be many confrontations at the workplace which must be dealt with. When the workplace has become more heterogeneous, how do we deal with these differences in the workforce? Problems are not over when people with different ethnic backgrounds have been hired. This will be more obvious when we confuse the picture by bringing in gender as an important diversity dimension. We can learn from postfeminist and postcolonial critiques that, first, not all women have the same experiences, and there are many standpoints and voices. There are also entire histories of neocolonial subjugation that have left a legacy of mutual hostility and suspicion between many ethnic minority groups and the dominant Scandinavian groups. Postfeminism and postcolonialism have also provided useful correctives to what is seen as a distorted Western view. This said, we should also recognize that diversity concerns more than gender and ethnicity. There is a growing recognition that age can intersect with gender and or ethnicity in interesting ways (Aaltio & Kovalainen, 2003). We should be sensitive to differences and not believe that it is possible to be culturally neutral. On the other hand, we should also be aware that too much focus on diversity could pose a problem of even articulating a 'we': inequalities might be seen as 'natural' and we therefore lose the possibility of seeing them.

Diversity management might be a tool with which prejudice and discrimination can be dealt so that ethnic minorities can be integrated in the labour market. Its point of departure is that the individual has resources and differences which are regarded as a force rather than a problem. In this sense it provides a positive narrative about people with different ethnic backgrounds. How can it then be used as a tool for integrating these people in organizations? What are the potentials and which problems can we expect? Taking all this into consideration is perhaps problematic, which the four presented alternatives showed. Promoting equal opportunity, acknowledging cultural differences and at the same time actively attempting to challenge the organization's way of doing things – if the workers with a different ethnic background are able to contribute in their culturally different ways – are not easy. The point of departure is an idea about cultural identity which forms how people experience, see and know the world. According to Ely and Thomas (2001), the best way to get integration is to use the diverse members' resources. It is of course a condition that the persons hired wish to keep whatever distinctions they have due to their cultural background. This on the other hand might pose a problem for individual free will and freedom to act, and then the power inequalities will still remain. While some people want to adapt, others may have a more fragmented or diverse identity[9]. Focusing on the differences and cultural competences which persons with a different ethnic background have can then keep them in a subjugated position. The ideal could be an organization where a multiplicity of complex constructed identities can flourish. Diversity in organizations should be cared for in order to

create a 'healthy' work climate where people's potential is acknowledged and supported.

Globalization has had some contradictory effects in relation to these issues: on the one hand it has eroded some national identities. On the other hand, it has strengthened some local identities and also provided space for hybrid identities. Acknowledging that there are other standpoints is a starting point for changing organizations so there is more mutual respect and integration. By integration we mean that persons with diverse backgrounds get a stronger connection. In other words, they need the same possibilities that the hired already have. But how should the minority and majority adapt to each other's norms and values? Does integration mean changing the organizational culture and power structures? And what sort of competences should be looked for – are the 'local national' cultural norms seen as most important, and why? All this can only be answered through an empirical investigation.

Pluralistic integration demands that potential conflicts and power structures are dealt with (Cox, 1991). A few points are worth considering here that are pertinent to the Scandinavian situation. There is currently a strong feeling in Scandinavia that some (ethnic) men do not respect the women who work at the workplace and that these individuals are from ethnic groups which are still patriarchal and stick to a belief-system which denigrates women. There is also a strong feeling that such groups need to change their attitudes towards women. However, the Scandinavian discourse systematically ignores the fact that men from the same so-called patriarchal ethnic groups work alongside women in a number of multicultural countries including Canada and the United States. Second, this discourse systematically displaces patriarchal tendencies on a non-Western 'other' while conveniently ignoring mounting evidence of violence against women among European men themselves (Naravane, 2004). What this discourse inevitably produces is an invariant picture of non-Western immigrants (e.g. men as tyrannical, women as passive, etc.) that is not very helpful in the creation of a pluralistic society (Mohanty, 1987). It is hoped that with the forces of globalization, intellectuals in Scandinavia will also become more conversant with the kinds of discussions around postcolonialism and otherness that have been taking place in large sections of the world for a number of decades. Only with the changing of this discourse can there be genuine hope for a more pluralistic society in Northern Europe.

NOTES

1 Ethnicity is understood as a concept denoting 'collectivity and belongingness' while race is a way of constructing differences (Anthia & Yuval-Davis, 1992). Race has been looked upon more as an ideological construct, 'on the basis of an immutable biological or

physiognomic difference which may or may not be seen to be expressed mainly in culture and lifestyle but is always grounded on the separation of human populations by some notion of stock or collective heredity of traits' (Anthia & Yuval-Davis, 1992) and there has been a heated discussion on whether this term should be rejected or if it could perhaps be useful as the effects of this construct are important to note.

2 Parekh (2003) differentiates between different forms of diversity: subcultural, perspectival and communal. His concern and discussion is mainly about the last mentioned, which he believes is 'both easier and more difficult to accommodate depending on its depth and demands'. Communal diversity refers to 'several self-conscious and more or less well-organized communities entertaining and living by their own systems of beliefs and practices'.

3 There is a vast international literature on these topics. Among the many important contributions we will mention Hartmann (1979) and Walby (1986), and from Scandinavia, Ellingsaeter (1996). See also the bibliography in Rubery (1997).

4 In Denmark another large group comprised Turkish men who were 'invited' to work in the country in the beginning of the 1970s. The same could be said about people from Finland coming to Sweden after the Second World War (Häggström, 1990).

5 We are not thinking about well-educated and highly-credentioled people (who are said not to have quite the same problems of getting jobs) but rather those immigrants/refugees with hardly any education and many of whom do not speak the language. A big problem for countries with welfare systems which are paid for mainly by the tax payer is that it is difficult to attract 'Green Card' people and even to keep those who have come to the country. High taxes and a cold climate are claimed to be two main reasons for highly educated people leaving or not wanting a job in the country (Denmark) (*Berlingske Tidende*, 9 December 2004). However, this explanation seems to be reductionistic as, for example, Canada has the same characteristics but another immigrant policy influencing the number of immigrants. The well-educated also have problems in Scandinavia as they continue to face more difficulties on the labour market than the 'natives'. The somewhat smaller minority populations in Europe compared to the United States are sometimes seen as a result of protectionist European policies – an issue which in itself is a 'diversity' problem – but this is a much bigger discussion which we cannot go into here.

6 This critique in its turn has, however, been critized for being a smokescreen for the continuing European neglect of internal diversity. See for example Grossberg (1996).

7 In Denmark in 1996 the unemployment rate among Danes was 7%, EU citizens 13%, Turks 41%, Africans 37%, Americans 16%, Pakistanis 40%, the rest (e.g. Arabs, Palestinians) 38% (Larsen, 1999). In Sweden the unemployment rates among persons born outside Europe was three times as high as among immigrants born in the Scandinavian countries in the same year (Statistics Sweden, AKU table 52).

8 Just 20–25 years ago Sweden and the other Scandinavian countries were rather homogeneous societies.

9 Hall (1994) made the point that cultural identity is a matter of becoming as well as of being. The concept of diaspora consciousness (Gilroy, 1999) shows that cultural identity is much more fluid and complex than politicians and employers seem to realize. Based on her study of Brazilians living in Australia, Duarte (2004) concludes that diasporic beings live 'in the betweens', 'in a condition of transnational liminality'.

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