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MANAGING DIVERSITY, FIGHTING RACISM OR COMBATING
DISCRIMINATION? A CRITICAL EXPLORATION

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Managing diversity, fighting racism or combating discrimination?

A critical exploration

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European employers are showing increasing interest in “good practice” in combating racial and ethnic discrimination in the employment sphere. This follows growing evidence of widespread discrimination across EU Member States during the 1990s and a general increase in campaigns and awareness raising in Europe, including the initiatives associated with the 1997 European Year Against Racism. Whereas it used to be assumed that the problem of labour market exclusion was one which affected primarily “first generation” immigrants, it is now clear that ethnic minority young people, even when they born and educated in a European Member State and are legal citizens of that state, are still unjustifiably excluded from employment opportunities. Research has shown that this cannot simply be explained by poorer language ability or lower educational attainment. Well qualified and fluent young people are still disproportionately excluded from the employment opportunities they deserve because of straightforward racism, prejudice and discrimination related to the colour of their skin, their ethnic or religious background, or a different sounding name (Zegers de Beijl 2000). Research has also shown that ethnic minority workers regularly experience problems once they have a job, such as less access to opportunities for promotion, training or higher pay, or verbal or physical harassment (Wrench et al. 1999).

In recent years there have been a number of exercises both at Member State and European level to highlight examples of organisational case studies which can serve as models of good practice for others in combating racism and discrimination in employment. In 2003 there was an added stimulus to this interest in the form of the two new European Union Equality Directives. Council Directives 2000/43/EC¹ (“Racial Equality” Directive) and 2000/78/EC² (Employment Equality Directive) which had to be transposed into national arrangements by 19 July and 2 December 2003 respectively. The Directives place a duty on all Member States to improve existing legislation against employment discrimination and create bodies to advise and assist victims of discrimination. Recently, a large number of projects and initiatives aimed at combating discrimination and inequalities in the labour market have been implemented across Europe within the scope of the European Social Fund (ESF) EQUAL Initiative. EQUAL projects focus on a range of different areas- for example, providing language or vocational training courses to vulnerable groups among migrants and minorities, involving social partners and other labour market actors in projects fighting and preventing racism at the workplace, improving codes of conduct in anti-discrimination, or stimulating job creation for specific minority groups.

1 Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin.

2 Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.

In this context of a heightened awareness of issues of employment discrimination across EU Member States, the recent spread of ideas of diversity management from the US and Canada to Europe is of great interest. Diversity management seems to offer the possibility of mainstreaming anti-discrimination and equality practices into European companies in a business friendly manner (Thomas 1990, Kandola and Fullerton 1998). Diversity management is said to be characteristically different from previous employment equity approaches directed at under-represented minority ethnic groups, such as equal opportunity and affirmative action approaches, in a number of ways. For one thing, its rationale is primarily one of improving organisational competitiveness and efficiency, driven by business purpose and market advantage. In relation to this it stresses the necessity of recognising cultural differences between groups of employees, and making practical allowances for such differences in organisational policies. The idea is that encouraging an environment of cultural diversity where peoples' differences are valued enables people to work to their full potential in a richer, more creative and more productive work environment. An advantage of diversity management is said to be its more positive approach, rather than the negative one of simply avoiding transgressions of anti-discrimination laws. It is said to avoid some of the 'backlash' problems associated with affirmative action, as unlike previous equality strategies, diversity management is not seen as a policy solely directed towards the interests of excluded or under-represented minorities. Rather it is seen as an inclusive policy, one which therefore encompasses the interests of all employees, including white males.

There are a number of questions raised by the recent generation of European examples of organisational "good practice" in combating discrimination, and in the heightening profile of diversity management. For one thing, it seems that across different Member States, the things that are defined as examples of employers' good practice in combating racism and discrimination are often wildly different, and some seem to stretch the definition of 'anti-racism' or 'combating discrimination' to a surprising extent. Another is the noticeable change in terminology over the years. For example, if we take two collections of case studies that have emerged from EU institutions themselves, the one which was published in 1997 came out under the programme heading "Preventing Racism at the Workplace" whereas the latest collection, planned for release by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) later this year, is called "Cultural Diversity and Mainstreaming in Employment". Yet within these two collections some of the case studies are almost identical. Is this just a fashionable change in title? Or does it reflect a genuine shift to a recognition of the business advantages of diversity, and the incorporation of more ambitious equality policies? Is diversity management a logical extension of other employment equity approaches, or a replacement of them? Does diversity management encompass anti-racism, or sidestep it?

Bearing these questions in mind I decided to attempt a clarification of European organisational practices against racism and discrimination and create a typology with which to order and classify the very different activities which have been labelled as organisational measures to promote ethnic equality. This was done initially by drawing on two collections of case studies which came out at the end of the 1990s, stimulated by the European Year Against Racism. One was the European Compendium of Good Practice for the Prevention of Racism at the Workplace, which consisted of case studies from the 15 countries of the European Union (Wrench 1997).

The second was the report 'Gaining from Diversity', initiated by the European Business Network for Social Cohesion to promote the exchange of experience across Europe on the practical experiences of business in addressing the opportunities and challenges presented by Europe's ethnic diversity (Stewart and Lindburgh 1997).

After looking at these collections of case studies, I would like to suggest that, at the risk of some over-simplification, there might be six different levels or groups of activity in measures to combat discrimination and improve the employment inclusion of immigrants and ethnic minorities, the final of the six being diversity management. This classification aims to serve as a device to help make sense of current and future developments in the area and help us compare the variety of organisational responses in this field.

The six categories are as follows:

1. Training the immigrants
2. Making cultural allowances
3. Challenging racist attitudes
4. Combating discrimination
5. Equal opportunities policies with positive action
6. Diversity management

Training the immigrants. This consists of measures directed at immigrants and ethnic minorities themselves to assist in their integration into society. Formal training might be provided for newly arrived immigrants to improve their education and skills, and to help them learn the language, culture and customs of the new society. Training might also cover finding work and how to operate in the labour market. A case which appeared in both the "Gaining from Diversity" and the Compendium reports was that of the Swedish telecommunications company Telia, with its special training for unemployed white collar immigrants, in cooperation with the Stockholm County Labour Market Board. Amongst those taking part were unemployed systems analysts, computer engineers and economists, and the training corresponded to future employment requirements at the company. One of the aims was to increase the proportion of immigrants employed at the company, and in this it succeeded.

Making cultural allowances. Here, allowances are made for specific religious or cultural needs of minority groups within the organisation. These measures might encompass the recognition of religious restrictions on diet in company canteens, allowing workers to celebrate religious holidays other than Christian ones, or allowing the wearing of certain items of clothing, such as the headscarf or trousers for women. Similarly, service providers such as social workers, teachers, doctors and nurses come to realise that they must be informed about immigrant or ethnic minority cultures, and that minorities may have 'special needs' related to their ethnic background. An example in this category is the Belgian electrocoating company which took a number of initiatives for the benefit of workers of Maghrebian origin wishing to observe certain religious practices - for example, those who wish to pray can withdraw to the changing rooms to do so during breaks. A similar example quoted in 'Gaining from Diversity' is that of the McDonalds restaurants in France, which take the religious

practices of their employees into consideration, such as adjusting the hours of Muslim employees during Ramadam. Also, in the Belgian company immigrant workers can take a longer leave period in the summer months in order to give them a chance to return to their countries of origin and spend some time there³.

Challenging racist attitudes. Policies at this level work from the assumption that the main barriers to change are the attitudes and prejudices of people, and so publicity and information campaigns or training to change peoples' attitudes are introduced. Under this heading comes some of the activities of Stockholm City Council, which provided a course "Racism and Xenophobia at Work" for work supervisors and teachers from the health-care college, addressing prejudices and hostile attitudes and providing the opportunity to discuss xenophobia and racism. In Germany, a "Living with Foreigners" campaign was started jointly by the German trade union and employers federations, the DGB and the BDA. This was targeted at around one million apprentices in German industry, using training packages and media materials aimed at countering attitudes of intolerance and xenophobia.

Combating discrimination. Policies at the next level focus on trying to produce changes in people's behaviour rather than trying to change people's attitudes. Measures could include the introduction of fair recruitment and selection procedures, and training on how to operate these, and how to comply with anti-discrimination legislation. It could also cover anti-harassment policies and training, and the introduction of disciplinary measures against racism and discrimination within the organisation. Addressing discriminatory behaviour in these ways is seen to be important in creating a 'level playing field' by removing unfair barriers to opportunity.

The Belgian anti-discrimination code of conduct for the temporary employment agency sector falls under this heading. This was signed by employers and trade unions in that sector after a survey of agency staff had revealed that most received discriminatory requests from employers. The training aimed to make staff aware of the problem of racial discrimination, and instructed them how to respond to employers who made either coded or explicit requests not to be sent any foreigners, and how to ensure that only functionally relevant requirements are taken into account when selecting temporary staff. Other examples were the cases of a major British High Street retailer and a Dutch public sector organisation, both of which introduced training courses for staff who sit on recruitment and selection panels to help them avoid ethnic discrimination and bias in their procedures. KLM in the Netherlands appointed eight employees as *confidantes* for complaints regarding racial discrimination. Any employee who wishes to discuss discrimination or make a complaint may contact one of these, and there is a 24 hour telephone number which explains the procedure and gives the telephone numbers of the *confidantes*. In London, Barclays Bank provides an information booklet for dealing with racial harassers, including informal methods – how to reply, how to document incidents - and formal methods, such as filing a formal grievance procedure.

Equal opportunities policies with positive action. The next level is to use a combination of the above approaches in a general equal opportunities package. There

³ Strictly speaking this is not making cultural allowances but making allowances for migrant origin, but is still best categorised under this heading.

might be an equal opportunities statement for the organisation, a handbook for employees setting out the policy's intentions and procedures, and a target, such as the long-term aim of reflecting the ethnic mix of the local population in the workforce. Often there will be monitoring of the ethnic background of the workforce. The positive action initiatives are those over and above the simple provision of equal treatment and the production of a 'level playing field' through removing discriminatory barriers. There is an argument that such measures are not enough if members of under-represented minority groups are starting from very different and disadvantaged positions, sometimes because of the operation of racism and discrimination in the past. Positive action, like the stronger American version, affirmative action, recognises the existence of a sort of structural discrimination known as 'past-in-present discrimination' (Williams 2000) whereby the exclusion experienced historically by certain groups means that inequality of opportunity will continue even when current discrimination processes are removed. Positive action goes further than equal treatment. Whereas equal treatment would mean treating people who apply for jobs without discrimination, positive action means, for example, making an extra effort to encourage groups who might not normally apply. Therefore, positive action is in fact doing something extra for previously excluded minorities, something you are not doing for the national majority.

An example under this heading is the Dutch department of public works responsible for flood defences and water management, traffic, transport and communications. The department is located within a highly multi-ethnic part of the Netherlands, and the head of personnel believed that this should be reflected in the workforce. Extra wording was added to recruitment advertisements to the effect that, all other things being equal, priority would be given to ethnic minorities, as well as to women and disabled people. To stimulate applications, contacts were then initiated with migrant organisations, and agreements were concluded with local temporary employment agencies that requests for temporary staff would be met in the first instance by candidates from one of the ethnic minorities. Preliminary interviews were given to applicants of minority ethnic origin where information was given about the organisation and the procedure, and how to improve letters of application and CVs. During selection, personnel officers were careful to see that the correct procedures were followed in the case of applicants of minority ethnic origin and that no improper arguments were used to reject them, and line managers underwent training in selection skills to avoid bias in selection interviews. This organisation monitored the ethnic composition of its workforce over time, and this allowed managers to review their progress and make appropriate policy changes. Indeed, the monitoring was able to demonstrate that they had progressed significantly towards their long term targets of greater representation of ethnic minorities amongst their employees.

Diversity management The most ambitious level is that of diversity management, which can include many of the elements of the other approaches and adds diversity philosophy and practice to this in a whole-organisation approach. Following the distinction made by Thomas (1990) we can divide this level into two stages. The first is the stage of *valuing diversity*, where there is a positive desire to work towards an ethnically mixed workforce and a recognition of the positive benefits that a diverse workforce can bring to the organisation. The second stage is that of *managing diversity* which goes further than this by actively managing the diverse mix of

employees in ways to contribute to organisational goals and develop a heterogeneous organisational culture.

The only case of an openly embraced organisational diversity management philosophy in the two 1997 case study collections is AB Volvo in Göteborg, Sweden. The company responded to a series of racist incidents by putting out an advertisement entitled “What would Volvo be without immigrants?” This pointed out that Volvo owed much of its success to the 70 different nations represented in 30 – 40 per cent of its current workforce. There was a policy of instituting diversity management throughout the various Volvo corporations. One programme includes multicultural training for employees, efforts to include more work opportunities in the firm for immigrants, and adding diversity as part of the criteria for evaluating the quality of operations. The diversity commitment is set out in Volvo’s corporate philosophy:

Volvo is a global organisation with different cultures from all parts of the world. Involving people from other parts of the Group is an excellent way to gain strength, build confidence and develop networks. We will seek new paths by working in groups with co-workers who have different backgrounds and skills, across national borders. Internal mobility will be developed in order to broaden competence, to the benefit of both the Group and the individuals in it (Stewart and Lindburgh 1997: 26).

Chronological stages?

The next question is whether the typology consists of more than a list of categories but actually constitutes a sequence of chronological stages, which are likely to be passed through over time. There is a logic which suggests that this could be so. For example, level 1, training the immigrants, seems to be the first ‘common sense’ reaction in an immigrant receiving society when ethnic inequalities are perceived. When a ‘supply side conscious’ gives way to the idea that perhaps the majority institutions themselves should adapt, then level 2, ‘making cultural allowances’ comes relatively easily to mind. ‘Culture’ is something which is reasonably visible and some organisational responses to it can be made relatively painlessly. Then at some stage a ‘multi-cultural’ awareness transforms into an ‘anti-racism’ awareness, level 3, with the recognition that racism exists in societies, and probably in the organisation, and that multicultural approach does not address this source of exclusion. Thus training programmes are provided for what is probably assumed to be the minority of workers with racist attitudes or ethnic prejudices. A more ambitious leap of imagination is called for to get to the anti-discrimination stage, partly because this entails the more uncomfortable recognition that racial discrimination can exist ‘normally’ in organisations and can be perpetrated by ordinary people who are not conventionally classifiable as having racist attitudes or prejudices. Another reason why this level might take longer to be accepted is that it entails some changes in organisational routines and practices, rather than the more superficial approach in the preceding level, such as simply running training courses or educational campaigns against racism. The level of equal opportunity policies with positive action calls for an even more ambitious development of consciousness, not only because it is a more ambitious policy in terms of the range of activities, but also because the acceptance of positive action implies the recognition of the existence of forces of structural or historical discrimination, and the corresponding recognition that simply providing a level playing field through the removal of barriers of discrimination will not be

enough. Finally the diversity management level is the most ambitious of all because by definition it addresses the whole organisation itself, implies major changes in organisations practices and culture, and is adopted first at the senior management level.

Criticisms of diversity management

Diversity management, as the latest, most ambitious and most sophisticated employment equality strategy in this typology, would seem to be a positive development. Its emergence suggests that at last activists for racial equality have seen their struggle move from the fringes of the organisation to the mainstream, aided by the fact that their moral case for equality is now backed up and reinforced by good business arguments, such as enabling organisations to recruit and retain labour more successfully, or to benefit from the creativity of a diverse workforce. In the past few years interest in diversity management has noticeably increased in EU countries. Surely this is a development to be welcomed? Yet not everyone thinks so. At the same time that ideas and practices of diversity management have been spreading into the arena of European human resource management, there has followed a body of arguments and literature questioning or criticising this development. Some of these criticisms are described next.

1. The misuse of the term ‘diversity management’

One criticism which has followed on from the spread of diversity management discourse is that it lends itself to be adopted by those who are attracted to its business-friendly and fashionable overtones, yet who are doing very little in reality to combat ethnic inequality. The earlier six-fold typology enables us clarify whether some activities are mis-classified as diversity management, when according to the typology they are more appropriately classified as something else. We can illustrate this from one example which came to notice in 2000, at an international workshop on diversity management, where a Norwegian company set out its “experiences of managing diversity”. This was an organisation of 500 employees with about 20 per cent of its production and warehouse workers coming from a minority ethnic background. The ‘Managing for Diversity’ initiative it described consisted of the following practices. Firstly, the company provided courses in the Norwegian language, tailored to issues in the working environment, and 50 per cent of which were allowed to take place in working hours. The second element was the recognition that the food provided on company training programmes and union courses should not, for example, include pork if Muslim or Jewish workers were to attend. A third initiative was to allow non-European workers to take extra unpaid leave for certain holiday periods so as to give them more time to spend on visits to their countries of origin. Finally, the company reported that it had been suggested that an activity for the future should be to hold some sort of meeting with Norwegian workers who have expressed negative attitudes to ethnic minorities, in order to try to neutralise these phenomena.

The company describes itself as having been ‘working with diversity’ for many years, and categorises its experiences as ‘managing diversity’. However, if we use the typology to classify this company, we can say that it is not at the level 6 ‘diversity management’ stage, properly defined. The policies it describes cover levels 1 and 2 in the typology, and show the first signs of awareness of a need to move into level 3. This example illustrates a relatively loose use of the term diversity management, a usage which is becoming increasingly common in Europe, particularly in contexts

where little similar in terms of organisational policies has been experienced beforehand.

2. Diversity management as a soft option

Some equal opportunities activists have specific criticisms of diversity management. Trade union activists, for example, might believe that activities to combat racial inequality are better coming from them, rather than from a diversity initiative from management. They are suspicious of the way that diversity approaches are wrapped in the discourse of human resource management - for them, racism and discrimination are things which should be combated, not managed. In 1997 at the UK Trade Union Congress (TUC) Black Workers' Conference a motion was passed which noted "with concern" the increasing trend amongst personnel and human resource management practitioners to seek to replace existing equal opportunities policies and procedures with those titled managing diversity or mainstreaming, calling on the TUC to support initiatives which expose the inadequacies of these developments.

There might be several aspects of diversity management that the British trade unionist and other equality activists could be concerned about. One is that diversity management might be used to prioritise the 'soft' rather than the 'hard' equal opportunities practices. It can be used to give the impression that an organisation is doing something for excluded groups whilst avoiding many of those aspects of equal opportunities activities which are likely to be unpopular with employers. For example, employers might be more receptive to the provision of "inter-cultural awareness" training and less receptive to stronger measures such as targets to produce a workforce which reflects the ethnic make-up of the locality, anti-discrimination training to modify the behaviour of white managers and employees, or the introduction of an anti-harassment policy. If a diversity management approach consists of little more than celebrating cultural diversity, it will sidestep many of the stronger elements which have existed within a broader equal opportunities and affirmative action approach.

Consistent with this is the fear that diversity management might be complicating or undermining battles for stronger legal measures against racism and discrimination in employment. These suspicions might be reinforced by the example of New Zealand, where the embracing of a diversity management approach by employers' interests was interpreted as a conscious strategy to avoid the imposition of tougher measures. In the early 1990s a new equal employment opportunities trust was set up in New Zealand with the aim of educating the private sector into "making the most of a diverse workforce". In the eyes of many equal employment opportunity practitioners the trust was established in order to enable a back-down from the introduction of potentially tough equal opportunities legislation at a national level. Thus the concept of managing diversity was seen as the acceptable "soft option" (Jones et al. 2000).

3. Diversity management dilutes the focus on racism

A third criticism is that diversity management dilutes policies against racism and ethnic discrimination by mixing them with policies relating to other groups. For advocates of diversity management, its advantage is that it broadens the appeal of equal opportunities by moving it away from policies for racial and ethnic minorities to the inclusion of other groups. But a strength from one perspective is a weakness from another. Critics say this does not allow for the fact that some groups have suffered

historically from much greater prejudice and exclusion than others. Some have been marginalised for generations with strong and negative social meaning attached to the traits they possess as a group, and this will not necessarily be the same for all those groups considered to fall into the diversity calculus. This criticism is not peculiar to Europe - for example, in America, a member of the Society for Human Resource Management was quoted in its journal as saying "Race was a sacrificial lamb to launch diversity and make it palliative to corporate America. And who is corporate America? White males. And they don't want to hear about race" (Grossman 2000).

4. The replacement of the moral by the business case

There are a number of advantages which are said to make diversity management attractive for employers. One is that it will make it easier to attract and retain workers at a time of labour shortage. Currently, the labour shortage argument seems to be the main stimulus for employers to turn to diversity management in Europe. However, labour shortages are things which vary with time, sector and geography, and it is quite possible to envisage circumstances when there is no labour shortage. In this case there will be no reason for employers to adopt employment equity policies. Another alleged business advantage of diversity management is the enhanced creativity that is said to stem from a diverse workforce, as well as other positive effects on organisational culture. If this is true, then legal pressure or moral arguments for employers to combat ethnic discrimination are unnecessary. However, an American review of the literature (Williams and O'Reilly 1998) concludes that the "diversity is good for organisations" mantra has been overstated. For example, most of the research which supports the claim that diversity is beneficial for groups has been conducted in a laboratory or classroom setting. Laboratory studies neglect the variable of time, and research in short-lived groups is not a strong foundation for judging the effects of diversity in a real organisation. The smaller number of studies which have looked at groups in an organisational context show a less optimistic view, with evidence of stereotyping and conflicts within groups. Some field studies have shown that race and gender diversity can have negative effects on group processes and performance. After reviewing the literature, the authors conclude that, under ideal conditions, increased diversity may have a positive impact through, for example, the increase in skill and knowledge that diversity brings. However, they argue that empirical evidence is just as likely to suggest that diversity will impede group functioning, and conclude that simply having more diversity in a group is no guarantee that the group will make better decisions or function effectively. Diversity, they argue, is a "mixed blessing" and requires careful and sustained attention to be a positive force in enhancing performance. Similarly, a later literature review by two American scholars (Wise and Tschirhart 2000) found that many of the promises and claims of diversity management for improving group and organisational performance could not be said to have been rooted in the findings of empirical research. They concluded that "Given the weaknesses in the body of research on diversity, we can draw no firm conclusions for public administrators. We cannot claim that diversity has any clear positive or negative effects on individual, group or organizational outcomes".

If some of the stated advantages of diversity management are at best debatable, and others are dependent on fluctuating market conditions, then this raises serious questions about leaving issues of employment equity in the hands of managers in organisations. This point constitutes perhaps the most fundamental criticism of

diversity management, namely that it removes the moral imperative from equal opportunities actions. Arguments for the introduction of equal opportunities and affirmative action policies relate to equality, fairness and social justice. Critics argue that diversity management has moved equal opportunities away from a moral and ethical issue and turned it into a business strategy. Whilst this development is seen as an advantage by many people, in that it increases the likelihood of the policies adoption by employers, others see it as a long term weakness. The problem is that fighting racism and discrimination will now only be seen to be important if there is seen to be a business reason for doing it. With a diversity management approach, racism is indeed argued to be unacceptable, but only when it is recognised that the outcome of such racism leads to inefficiency in the utilisation of human resources. If, for example, a change in market conditions means that racism and discrimination do not lead to inefficiency, then there will be no longer any imperative to combat it. In the American context, Kelly and Dobbin warn:

Perhaps diversity management will succeed in winning over middle managers because it embraces an economic, rather than political, rationale. But precisely because it is founded on cost-benefit analysis rather than on legal compliance, perhaps diversity management will come under the ax of budget-cutters when America faces its next recession (Kelly and Dobbin 1998: 981).

The context of the move to diversity management in the US was the New Right discourse of laissez-faire in relation to government activity, and a complete faith in market principles, so that external non-business constraints promoting equal opportunities are seen as illegitimate. Some diversity theorists such as Thomas (1990) argue that previous equal employment opportunity and affirmative action policies which have focused on group membership are 'unnatural'. In response, Grice and Humphries (1993: 17) argue:

To Thomas, affirmative action is referred to as 'unnatural' because it interferes with the 'natural' functioning of a market comprised of competitive individuals aspiring for upward mobility. What Thomas doesn't say is that the categories natural and unnatural are equally the products of discourse. Anything can be defined natural or unnatural if you are in control of the parameters by which that categorising is based. The market is held up as the ultimate natural while things like intervention based on an ethical argument is held up as decidedly unnatural.

Thus, although some see the use of diversity management as an acceptable substitute for more 'political' interventions such as affirmative action, others see this as a more worrying development which reflects a broader trend at a societal level, namely, the intrusion of the market into areas where previously there was action by democratically elected government. As Hobsbawm writes:

Market sovereignty is not a complement to liberal democracy: it is an alternative to it. Indeed, it is an alternative to any kind of politics, as it denies the need for *political* decisions, which are precisely decisions about common or group interests as distinct from the sum of choices, rational or otherwise, of individuals pursuing private preferences (Hobsbawm 2001).

For some critics, serious questions must be raised about whether individuals within organisations pursuing private preferences constrained by the market can be left to be the custodians of employment equity practice.

Conclusion

In this paper I have raised some questions relating to the spread of diversity management in Europe. In the process I have suggested a classification of organisational policies which is intended to help us clarify some of the conceptual confusions around the terms diversity management and other organisational practices. One use of the categorisation might be to illustrate how the term ‘diversity management’ can be wrongly applied. Diversity management should have certain minimum components and is not simply a term which covers any policy relating to the employment of immigrants and minorities. Having said this, there clearly is still significant variety in the content and balance of practices which can legitimately fall under the heading of diversity management. This is something that causes concern to some observers. For example, it is possible to have a diversity management policy which ignores, or is rather weak on, any element of anti-racism and anti-discrimination, and which sidesteps some of the stronger elements of equal opportunities policies, including positive action elements. There is a danger that the lack of previous experience of anti-discrimination policies in some European countries will mean that forms of diversity management which develop there will be restricted to the feel-good ‘celebrating cultural diversity’ type. In the eyes of some people, a policy which, in terms of the classification, consists only of a combination of level 1, level 2 and the ‘celebrating cultural diversity’ aspects of level 6 is an unsatisfactory and incomplete type of organisational measure, if the aim is to achieve the equal integration of under-represented minorities into employment.

It is possible that the spread of managing diversity could prove to be an invaluable development for getting employment equity issues on to the agenda in Europe in places where more traditional approaches would not have been successful. However, a ‘celebrating diversity’ approach alone is not going to do anything to bring about fairer recruitment practices and increase the representation in employment of second generation immigrants and ethnic minority young people in Europe, and organisations that do not have a diverse workforce cannot begin to manage diversity. In many countries of Europe there is a strong tradition of social engineering and redistributive policies by government, and diversity management can operate in the context of these. Diversity management policies are not a substitute for strong and properly enforced legislation on access to employment and numerical representation. This is why the new EU ‘Race’ and ‘Equality’ Directives are important as a constant stimulus to anti-discrimination awareness and practice. Diversity management should be a way of mainstreaming anti-discrimination activities, not a substitute for them.

John Wrench is a researcher at the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. The views expressed in this paper are the views of the author and not of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia.

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