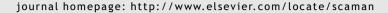# RESEARCH NOTE

Diversity management: Are we moving in the *right* direction? Reflections from both sides of the North Atlantic

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''*For successful businesses, diversity is much more than a buzzword or the 'right thing to do.' In thriving companies throughout the world, diversity is an essential tool that creates a competitive edge in today's marketplace.*'' (www.DiversityInc.com, January 2001, USA)

Such is the core of the diversity management argument today on both sides of the Atlantic. What used to be a USA initiative, exported by multinationals to their subsidiaries around the world, in 2009 is a global phenomenon. How has a managerial practice that originated in the USA become global and where is it today? What Prasad and Mills called ''a significantly under-researched and under-theorized phenomenon in the management literature'' in 1997 (p. 5), can

hardly be said to be so today (Prasad, Pringle, & Konrad, 2006).

We start this review with two stories representing trajectories of diversity management in the United States and Europe in order to contextualize its meanings in time and place. Next we draw from important critiques in diversity management (DM) research to highlight key dilemmas and contradictions of the DM enterprise. We suggest that deconstructing these dilemmas and contradictions points us in new directions for theorizing, researching and practicing diversity management: practices that might help us realize some of its potential.

Because one of our main contentions is that bodies, location, identity, and intentions matter, we say something about us. One of us is based in the USA as an organization consultant with a portfolio of diversity work in the USA and 'overseas.' Born and raised in Puerto Rico, her work is at the boundary of scholarly practice, combining consulting with research and writing on the simultaneity of race, gender, and class using qualitative and discourse analysis frameworks. I speak as an interested, involved and committed subject to social justice in organizations.

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The other is a researcher who has been a pioneer in studying DM in Denmark. She has a long-standing interest in identity, meaning and power in organizations, and has been studying how new concepts or ideas travel through contexts and produce change. My work is based on a continuous commitment to improving working life and work place democracy.

Two stories of diversity management

The USA story

In the USA, diversity management (DM) entered the organization and management discourse in the late 1980s. The Workforce 2000 report (Johnston & Packer, 1987) provided a foundational citation for DM, which according to Litvin (2000) defined itself as about demographic groups; corporate self-interest; training; and organizational psychology with an individual and interpersonal focus. DM tried to replace words like pluralism, cultural diversity, intercultural education, and multiculturalism, many times distancing itself from the affirmative action (AA) and equal employment opportunity's (EEO) legal and programmatic focus of the late 1960s and early 1970s (Agocs & Burr, 1996; Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Thomas, 1990). Instead, DM was presented as an alternative to its prior AA and EEO legal and moral predecessors, steeped in rationales of competitive advantage, human resource utilization, and the "business imperative" to enhance global productivity and profitability (Cox, 1993; Kossek & Lobel, 1996; Thomas, 1991). For many of its critics, DM has served to eliminate discussions of power and systemic oppression, along with associated concepts such as hierarchy, privilege, equity, discrimination, and organizational justice (Prasad & Mills, 1997).

But, it is important to highlight that this discursive shift responded to a particular socio-historical moment in the USA. Briefly, gains of the civil rights movement of the 1960s were reflected in executive orders and legislation in the early 1970s. Strong enforcement and increased legal actions led many employers to seek help from professionals to facilitate the enactment of EEO and AA directives. Interventions to redress the exclusion and discriminatory practices towards employees identified as belonging to the protected classes, particularly racial minorities and women, were initiated. But with the turn to Reaganism in the 1980s the political and economic landscape changed dramatically. AA and EEO enforcement waned, resources to implement changes disappeared, and judicial decisions were overturned.

Many reasons are cited as contributing to the emergence of DM. Demographic changes in the labor force, white male backlash, a turn to social conservatism, globalization and restructuring of work are the ones most often mentioned (Haq, 2004; Hays-Thomas, 2004; Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Lynch, 1997). The new discourse of DM was different and new: "inclusive, forward looking, business oriented," and non-confrontational, as opposed to political, "exclusionary, reactive, equity-oriented, and unpopular," like affirmative action (Litvin, 2000, pp. 330—331).

The Bush and Clinton administrations did not reverse Reagan's conservative politics and instead continued to undermine legislation, enforcement and judicial support for AA and EEO. As an alternative or compromise, human resource managers, EEO/AA professionals, and management consultants converged in coining, rationalizing, and advocating managing diversity (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). By the end of the 1990s, what Edelman, Fuller, and Mara-Drita (2001) describe as 'the managerialization' of EEO/AAs laws had been accomplished: DM had been reconceptualized "as a managerial as opposed to a legal issue... progressively infused with managerial values" (p. 1592) and institutionalized through professional networks, management consultants, conferences, publications, and a full-fledged 'diversity industry' (Chesler & Moldenhauer-Salazar, 1998; Edelman et al., 2001; Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Lynch, 1997).

But, all was not well. While the move from affirmative action to DM provided a revised form in which to pursue the equality goals envisioned in the civil rights movements, new difficulties, tensions, and strong critiques surfaced. In an effort to make the discourse possible and palatable in this social context, the complexity of diversity issues, both in theory and practice became fraught with dilemmas, contradictions and delicate balancing acts.

From USA to Europe

Diversity management hit Europe almost ten years later. Here as well as in the USA the introduction of DM was related to the upcoming neo-liberalism, where market is promoted as a means of regulation rather than rights and legislation. DM was first taken up in the UK and the Netherlands, former colonial states with relatively large percentages of populations of ethnic minority background (Wrench, 2007). It arrived to Scandinavia and other countries just around the millennium (Boxenbaum, 2006; Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004).

In the Scandinavian context, DM was primarily conceived of as a means to integrate ethnic minorities in the labor market. It was taken up in a particular socio-historical moment, when countries that had very little experience of immigration suddenly faced the prospect of becoming multicultural societies (Berg & Håpnes, 2001; de los Reyes, 2000b; Widell, 2000). In Denmark, DM was embraced by researchers and practitioners who were critical of the ethnocentric discourse in the country, and the attempts to construct a rather narrow conception of 'Danishness' in opposition to ethnic minorities as a burden to society (Diken, 2002; Sampson, 1995). In this way, DM was used as a platform to discuss plural identities and to bring forth discourses on multiculturalism. Practitioners in the field of gender equality also entered the debate, arguing that DM should address multiple differences (Jacobs et al., 2001). The concept of DM was adopted by a number of influential players: the Ministry for Immigration, the Institute for Human Rights and 'New Danes,' a conglomerate of firms addressing the integration of ethnic minorities in Danish workplaces. Consequently, the variant of DM that eventually emerged focused primarily on difference in terms of ethnicity, but was integrated with the strong discourse on 'the social responsibility of the firm' (Boxenbaum, 2006; Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004; Risberg & Søderberg, 2008). Several studies point out how DM with its focus on difference is difficult to translate to a context which is strongly permeated by equality as a norm connected to

the rise of the Danish welfare-state, particularly when equality is equated with sameness (Boxenbaum, 2006; Lundgren, 2004). Social responsibility in Denmark is conceived of as the firms' moral obligation to include 'weak groups' in the labor market; people with limited capabilities to fit the demands of the workplace. While the discourse on social responsibility also influences the interpretation of DM in other European countries, the focus on moral obligations to care about vulnerable groups is a particularly Danish (Risberg & Søderberg, 2008). This discourse has equality, sameness and solidarity as its cornerstones, and provided a possibility to reframe DM. But, as a consequence, the variant of DM practiced in Denmark tends to position ethnic minorities as a weak group, a group in need of development in order to fit a job in a Danish firm (Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004).

Travelling to Scandinavia transforms the DM discourse in ways that weaken the business rationale and maintains moral arguments. However, what happens is that the stress on individual differences, which is new in this context, also tends to disappear. Nevertheless, DM offers a new arena where organizational routines and structures, identities, and equality can be discussed.

There is good reason to suspect that DM has been differently shaped in other European countries. Space constraints do not permit going into these developments here, except to give some attention to the UK, one of the European countries with a longer story of DM. In this country, legislation around equal opportunity and race discrimination has played an important role. Thus, DM is perceived as a successor (or competitor) of equal opportunity, but not a benign one. The UK literature on DM is mainly critical of the concept, of its top-management orientation, individualism and lack of morality (Noon, 2007; Wrench, 2005). DM is perceived as strongly connected to the neoliberal turn in UK, and its fatal consequences for the public sector. This adds to the sharpness of the critique (Creegan, Colgan, Charlesworth, & Robinson, 2003). Though not much is known about specific variants of DM practised in the UK; researchers and practitioners in the field struggle to establish an approach that maintains elements of the old EO and anti-discrimination strategies (Kandola & Fullerton, 1998; Kirton & Greene, 2000).

Critical voices: dilemmas and contradictions in DM

Following the introduction of DM, there have been extensive discussions on the basic arguments for promoting it, the emphasis on voluntary and deregulated solutions to inequality, its claims to a business case and its capacity to improve the position of minorities. Lorbiecki and Jack (2000) identify four overlapping turns to describe the literature on DM: the demographic, political, economic, and critical turns (p. 17). In this review we restrict ourselves and focus on critiques of DM, which today are numerous and substantial. But, we re-articulate these critiques as dilemmas and contradictions, which surface from specific social, economic, political and organizational contexts. It is from the contextual analysis of dilemmas, rather than from universal pronouncements about what diversity is or is not, that we can understand its limitations as well as its future possibilities. For example,

in the USA, the pervasive influence of the concepts of *individualism* and *meritocracy*, key elements of its social fabric, create dilemmas that do not travel in the same way to countries with strong indigenous groups rights movements like New Zealand (Jones, 2004; Jones, Pringle, & Shepherd, 2000), or in Scandinavian countries with a strong focus on welfare built on notions of equality as sameness (Boxenbaum, 2006; Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004; Lundgren, 2004).

Our review of representative DM literature in the USA, UK, Scandinavia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, points to three dilemmas which permeate the discourse and practice of DM, regardless of its travels: what differences and how differences; a business case or a social justice rationale; and does DM sustain the status quo or does it catalyze change?

Dilemma 1: What differences and how differences?

The question of difference is central to DM (Liff & Wajcman, 1996; Nkomo & Cox, 1996; Plummer, 2003). For instance, Lorbiecki and Jack (2000, p. 22) call attention to 'the motif of difference' that permeates the literature. But there is little agreement on what are the understandings of differences on which DM is based. As a heuristic to organize contradictory critiques about the meaning of differences and how differences 'work' in DM we identify three questions or dilemmas which define these debates. Each of these questions has implications for theorizing, researching, and practicing DM, but they are seldom discussed in a differentiated way in the literature we reviewed.

Question 1: Does DM refer to individual or group-based differences?

Two popular definitions demonstrate the instability of the meaning of 'differences' in DM. For Thomas (1990), diversity refers to all the similarities and differences among organizational members, whereas for Nkomo and others, diversity refers to identities based on membership in social groups and their power relations in organizations (Konrad, 2003; Nkomo & Cox, 1996; Nkomo & Stewart, 2006). Critics point to how the focus on individual differences dilutes DM by including all types of differences, treating cultural, cognitive and social-power differences as if they were the same; how it obviates the problem of unequal power relations and structural inequality and confuses individual prejudice with systemic and institutional disadvantages; how it helps evade the difficult subject of historically based inequities and discrimination and how it individualizes inequality, placing an added burden on individuals to prove they have been discriminated against (Gordon, 1995; Holvino, Ferdman, & Merrill-Sands, 2004; Kirton & Greene, 2000; Liff & Wajcman, 1996; Linnehan & Konrad, 1999; Noon, 2007).

The individual-group-based differences dilemma has other consequences. For example, a focus on individual differences leads to change strategies that ensure access and legitimacy for all, while a focus on group-based differences leads to the "discrimination and fairness paradigm," where the goal is to redress and/or eliminate systemic

advantages and inequality for members of historically disadvantaged groups (Liff & Wajcman, 1996; Thomas & Ely, 1996). Strategies consistent with the individual differences approach focus on developing individual competencies through training and mentoring, while group-based strategies focus on increasing the representation and empowerment of members of historically disadvantaged groups via targeted recruitment and the creation of alliances across differences (Foldy, 2002; Kirton & Greene, 2000; Scully & Segal, 2002). In academia, a focus on individual differences leads to research topics like prejudice reduction, cross cultural competencies, and access to networks, while group-based differences leads to research topics on intergroup relations and macro and micro-inequities in the workplace (Alderfer, Alderfer, Tucker, & Tucker, 1980; Fletcher, 1999; Mills & Tancred, 1992; Proudford & Smith, 2003; Smith, 2002).

Questions 2: Does DM stress sameness or differences and what are the consequences of these different emphases?

DM is criticized on both sides of this debate. On the one hand, DM's focus on 'valuing differences' is recognized as an alternative to the liberal and meritocratic strains of AA/EO that sustain that people are the same and thus, should be treated the same. From this perspective, DM's stress on differences helps address some of the negative consequences of EO's stress on sameness, such as the implicit assumption that those who are different should assimilate (Essed, 2002; Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004) and the unaccounted for impact of informal systems and criteria when relying on EO rules and procedures to achieve fairness (Webb, 1997).

But, this stress on differences is accomplished by a categorization of collective differences, which positions women and minorities as devalued and undifferentiated 'others,' creating and reinforcing social stereotypes and erasing individual and intra-group differences. Implicitly, the 'white male' is the norm against which all 'others' are compared to and found lacking (Alvesson & Billing, 1999; de los Reyes, 2000a). Others argue that DM's stress on differences actually 'dissolves differences' or 'smoothes them over' in pursuit of the goals of corporate integration and profitability (Liff, 1999; Prasad & Elmes, 1997).

Most importantly, the sameness—difference dilemma leads to the 'equality—differences' conundrum; if organizational members are truly different, then equality is not possible, but if people are universally the same, then differences are not important and the whole DM argument falls on its head (Liff and Wajcman, 1996; Lynch, 1997; Scott, 1988).

Question 3: Are differences essential, one-dimensional, and fixed or are they socially constructed, historical, and simultaneous?

In the USA, the conceptualization of differences as primary and secondary was a key contribution to the reification of differences as essential categories: some differences are supposedly core, inborn, biological, inescapable and immutable — age, ethnicity, gender, physical abilities, race, and sexual orientation — and others are secondary, meaning mutable, less salient, and voluntarily discarded, acquired, or changed, such as education, geographic location, income, marital status, and religion (Loden & Rosener, 1991, p. 19). In an effort to include those dimensions of diversity most often managed for organizational effectiveness, other differences were added to the list such as organizational role, cognitive styles, nationality, skills, and so on (Plummer, 2003). At its most inclusive, DM refers to a mélange of differences which include anything and everything (de los Reyes, 2000a). Feminists, poststructuralists, postcolonial, and queer theory scholars have reframed differences as relational, socially constructed, constitutive of one's subjective identity, signifying relations of power, multiple, contradictory, contextual and fluid (Bendl & Fleischmann, 2008; Holvino, 2003, 2010), but, nonetheless, essentialized, fixed and a-historical notions of identity dominate DM practice and seep through the research.

Feminists and poststructuralists have already successfully deconstructed some of these questions and dilemmas on differences. For example, by demonstrating that recognizing differences does not exclude equal treatment and that equal treatment does not mean sameness, Scott (1988) offers us a way out of the differences—sameness debate. Similarly, the dichotomy individual—group-based differences can be deconstructed by studying multiple levels of system: individual, group, organizational, and societal, and how each of these is embedded in its larger context from which they derive its meaning (Bond & Pyle, 1998; Proudford & Smith, 2003; Ragins, 1995). In all, a more productive approach to addressing the dilemma of differences in DM may be to explore the following questions: who is constructed as different, for what purposes, with what consequences, how are differences simultaneously interacting in specific contexts and what are the connections between identities and material inequalities (Holvino, 2010; Jones, 2004; Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Webb, 1997)? But these are not easy questions to answer in the search for corporate quick solutions and fixes (Noon, 2007).

Dilemma 2: The business case and profitability or affirmative action and social justice?

The business case for DM aims to articulate the bottom-line reasons for diversity and recasts its objective as economic and organizational performance gains (Litvin, 2006). In the USA, Thomas (1990, 1991) popularized the business driven rationale in opposition to redressing inequality: profitability and productivity substitute 'softer' moral arguments like social justice and shift the language of diversity to one that managers supposedly understand. The business case focuses on "making use and leveraging human differences toward organizational effectiveness" (Plummer, 2003, p. 13) by including others and their unique perspectives (Davidson, 1999).

A considerable amount of research and writing in the USA focuses on "proving the business case" for diversity with logical, rhetorical and empirical arguments. DM is a business, a human resource, and a marketing strategy; it ensures wining the talent war; increases market share and social complexity at the level of the firm; encourages innovation and creativity in teams, decreases costs of employee turnover and discrimination suits; and improves ROI and overall financial performance, among other

benefits (Dass & Parker, 1999; Herring, 2009; Kirby & Harter, 2003; Thomas, 2004),

But, critics point to important fault lines in the business case. For example, findings on the increased performance of diverse teams are inconclusive or contradictory (Kochan et al., 2003). Assessing DM outcomes has proven elusive. In spite of the many guidelines offered (Hubbard, 2003; Kirby & Harter, 2003), in one of the most ambitious research projects to "find evidence to support the business case argument", Kochan et al. decry how few organizations seem interested, willing and prepared to study their diversity efforts (2003, p. 5). Other researchers comment on the scant attention to evaluation, cynical about the possibility that managers may not really want to know (Comer & Soliman, 1996). While there is lack of data to support DM, what is common are organizational case studies sanctioned by the firm that prove a business case, sell an approach, sell the organization and showcase DM successes (Prasad & Mills, 1997).

Other critics note that the business case positions people's differences for instrumental gains (Jones et al., 2000); that minorities and women may be ghettoized into segregated industries and units to serve segmented markets with little opportunity for advancement (Lorbiecki, 2001); that managers do not always act rationally as it relates to hiring, promoting or making other business decisions (Noon, 2007); and that while business arguments are furthered, other arguments in support of diversity, including the business case for equality and social justice in organizations, recede into the background (Berg & Håpnes, 2001; Cavanaugh, 1997; Jones et al., 2000; Litvin, 2006).

In practice, the business case rationale leads to the pursuit of 'best practices,' but nowhere is the gap between research and practice wider than when comparing research findings and critical analyses of DM with DM industry lists of best practices and claims to the business case for diversity. In the USA, identifying diversity best practices," …techniques or methodologies that, through experience and research, have reliably led to desired or optimum results" (Kreitz, 2008, p. 103) has become an industry in itself. But, results of research on successful DM strategies (Dobbin & Kalev, 2007; Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006; Sturm, 2006), contradict corporate and government published compilations of DM best practices (Kreitz, 2008). While researchers confirm the importance of context and of the impact that other factors such as organizational culture have in mediating DM outcomes, the quest for best practices through benchmarking continues without success, for as Walgenbach and Hegele (2001) point out, 'what can an apple learn from an orange?"

Dilemma 3: Reproducing the status quo or catalysing change in inequalities and power relations?

This question has permeated much of the debate on DM since its beginning. One line of argument highlights how elements of control are integrated in the DM discourse: diversity is regarded as a resource, but — it is emphasized — it has some problematic sides, which managers must attend to, and manage in order to secure business success (Cox, 1991). Thus, the discourse installs managers as the privileged subject with the power to define, what exactly the problematic

sides are, implying that some elements of diversity will be welcomed and others not (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Marsden, 1997).

Another line of argument highlights how meritocracy is at the very heart of DM. In the language of DM 'the quest for talents', where every organization should ensure the access of talented people of whatever color, religion, gender, etc, is pervasive. But, the social construction of what counts as merits, one of the cornerstones in the institutionalization of privilege in organizations, is left unchallenged. Phrased another way, DM implies that 'the other' is invited to the organization, but is only tolerated and accepted in as far as he or she enriches the center. So, the asymmetric positions of power are maintained (Cavanaugh, 1997; Webb, 1997).

This leads to concluding that DM is likely to maintain and reproduce existing privileges and power relations (Sinclair, 2006). However, if we take the points made in our historical section seriously, our conclusions may be more ambiguous. In some variants of DM, arguments based on morality and social justice co-exist along with arguments for the business case. This implies that principles of meritocracy are not incontestable but could be open for reinterpretation, depending on the context.

Future directions in the theory, research and practice of DM

When a critical review of the literature on diversity management points to inconsistencies in its meanings, its effects, its discourses and strategies, we are not surprised. After all, the ideas that DM conveys are the result of constructions in social and historical contexts. Instead of looking at these inconsistencies as weaknesses, we look for the opportunities they provide. The critique is valuable in making us aware of how we balance this difficult path; it also makes us aware of the possibilities of working in different directions within the frame of DM by opening up, rather than closing "diversity management" as a signifier (Cox, 1994; Jones et al., 2000). We suggest three directions to open up or reconstruct DM even more.

Learning from specific contexts

Context is important. For example, what happens, when the discourse of diversity meets other dominant discourses in specific contexts? In what ways may DM act as a catalyst for change in different contexts? Very few studies address these questions. Most studies focus on the discourse of DM as represented in textbooks and official documents. And studies that look upon local practices focus almost exclusively at the managerial level. However, interesting observations may be extracted from such studies. For example, Zanoni and Janssens (2003) contrast the rhetoric used by HR/diversity managers in policy terms and the discourses used when discussing and arguing for specific practices. The findings show quite a difference between how differences were understood and talked about. Moreover, these managers' discourses did not position otherness in a consistent way. Sometimes differences were referred to as added-value, but understandings of differences as lack were dominant. Strongly institutionalized stereotypes of the 'the other' prevalent in the societal

context were brought into these discourses (Zanoni & Janssens, 2003). This study points out that the organization is not an island; discourses on the other as institutionalized in society are not easily deconstructed. In the same vein that points to the difference between discourse and practice, the findings of Kirton and Greene (2006) suggest that the shift from equal opportunity to diversity management may not have a significant impact on initiatives at the company level: while talking the language of DM, work on 'old' equality issues like discrimination and harassment continued. This reminds us of the danger of simplifying our analysis and of jumping too quickly to conclusions when discussing DM.

Including others: bringing-in the devalued, the hidden and ''the others'' in DM

In a discourse that claims to be about inclusion, it is ironical that DM excludes so many topics, research methodologies, and interdisciplinary collaborations. Examples of understudied topics likely to bring new insights are class as a social difference, DM organization change and strategies, the role of DM change agents, multiple identities and the queering of identity (Bendl & Fleischmann, 2008; Dhingra, 2007). We can also benefit from more research on the relationship between formal and informal structures and processes and macro and micro-inequities in organizations (Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004; Zanoni & Janssens, 2003).

Collaborations between researchers and practitioners to bridge the gulf between the ''critical'' and the ''benefits'' discourses, so that mutual learning and change can take place seem crucial. While we have moved from practice development to discourse analysis, we now need to move to a dialogue between those two that leads to new action. But, new partnerships across a wider range of sectors and actors will be needed to accomplish such a move (de los Reyes, 2000a). In the USA, likely partners are feminists (Acker, 2006a, 2006b), sociologists (Smith, 2002), and critical legal scholars (Sturm, 2006). Unfortunately, these boundaries seem many times impermeable and the flow between them infrequent, but the gains could be many. For example, theorizing race, gender, and class as interacting processes of identity, Acker (2006a, 2006b) suggests studying regimes of inequality: organizing processes that produce patterns of complex inequalities. These patterns can be studied by looking at various dimensions of the inequality regime such as its basis, the organizational practices that support it, and its visibility and legitimacy, among other dimensions. This research approach addresses dilemmas discussed earlier by incorporating complex notions of differences, studying inequality head on, and identifying processes and structures which produce and sustain inequality as they occur and change in organizations. But such an approach requires new ways of doing organizational research and practice, including partnering with those who are usually not considered knowledgeable or authoritative, such as union members and the 'rank and file.'

In addition, such partnerships call for less popular ways of creating management knowledge, such as participatory action research and other unimagined ways of interacting given the structures, rewards and the labor divisions between researchers, practitioners, and organizational members.

Moving from deconstruction as critique to deconstruction as the creation of alternatives

Deconstruction and critical discourse analysis as research methodologies have gained ground in DM scholarship, contributing to a welcomed critical edge. But, it is time to expand their application. For example, if the dilemmas we have identified are seen as dichotomies in search of deconstruction, not just critique, there is an opportunity to create new meanings and alternative practices.

In deconstructing the business case for diversity in order to ''make space for a better case'', Litvin (2006) provides an excellent example. Beyond identifying the limitations of the business case as currently framed, she suggests moving away from the profitability/productivity rationale and envisioning instead, alternative organizational purposes such as learning, contributing, and human and social development. In Scandinavia, re-defining the business case could draw on existing discourses on ''sustainable work'' and democratic workplaces (Hvid & Lund, 2002; Nielsen, Nielsen, & Olsen, 2001). In the USA, with a workplace democracy tradition that has lost its edge, a connection with corporate social responsibility may be an alternative.

Final reflections

This review raises a crucial big question: should we maintain DM as a platform for discussing identity, power and in(equality); should we reconstruct it; or should we simply abandon it?

One voice

Judging from its apparent success and staying power, DM was an ''idea'' whose time had come. McNeill (2007) defines ''ideas'' as concepts powerful enough to influence policy, with some reputable intellectual basis, and vulnerable on analytical or empirical grounds (p. 8). Ideas are more than fads, slogans and buzzwords and less than fields of study or disciplines. While I do not claim that DM is as powerful an idea as 'human development' or 'sustainability,' I believe that DM, like other ideas, has become blurred and blunted, distorted through inappropriate quantification, and taken over by academic researchers making it increasingly unsuited for practical purposes (McNeill, 2007, p. 13). In the USA, DM has provided an opportunity to discuss differences, identity, power, and equity in organizations like no other management idea has done before, but its 'success' as a managerial discourse has hindered its power as an idea that can make more of a positive difference in the world.

In the end, I am left with a slightly depressing feeling: the 'managerialization' of DM witnessed in the USA may very well be its future in Europe and other countries where diversity continues to travel. While important differences in how DM is resisted in Australia, New Zealand, and the UK; adapted in Denmark, Sweden, and Canada; and barely questioned in the USA, suggest that important learnings can occur from exchanges and collaborations across contexts, it will take much boundary crossing among disciplinary, stakeholder and national boundaries to realize that potential and get back to the basics: finding new ways of ensuring social justice in organizations. There lies the hope.

Another voice

DM may be conceived of as a management concept: a package carrying new ideas or old ideas repackaged (Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004; Kamp, Koch, Buhl, & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2005). This package typically includes a diagnosis of the problem and how it can be solved, implicit theories on organizations and human behavior, tools and methods to be used, and descriptions of best exemplars (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996; Huczynskij, 1993).

Such management concepts are well-suited to create arenas for change; in fact their novelty works to their advantage, together with their ability to reduce complexity. The question is what to do when the mesmerizing novelty fades, the coherence is seriously questioned, and academia loses interest. That, I think, depends on the context. DM has indeed been institutionalized in the USA context: it is accepted as part of Human Resource Management, appearing in textbooks and on curriculums in business school courses; an important element of many corporate strategies and programs. Considering this accomplishment, DM cannot be thrown into the dustbin, whereas reconstruction might be considered. One could hardly claim the same in Europe. The history of DM is shorter, and it is not institutionalized in the same way as it is in the USA. Thus, DM might be replaced by other concepts. But reconstruction may also be a promising road. The link to the business case apparently provides an easy entry into organizations; but also other discourses than the economical may be useful and viable, like learning and development in work. Linking diversity to discourses on learning is actually attempted in Denmark (Forsknings- og Innovationsstyrelsen, 2007) under the headline 'diversity and employee-driven innovation'; though still attaching diversity to the business case rationale, and primarily facilitating a travel to knowledge-intensive companies. If more radical reconstructions, like a marriage between diversity and moral and humanistic discourses are to be successful, a strengthening of these lines of thought has to be accomplished at a societal level, pointing at a more fundamental break with neoliberal ideology.

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