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# Editorial: Re-orienting diversity and inclusion: pursuing the political, historical, relational, ethical and technological dimensions of theory and practice

Editorial

2549

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The starting call for this collection of articles was to move from boxed-in research to box-breaking research, which emphasised openness to radical, transformative ideas about how to understand and respond to difference in a complex social world, while eschewing the dominant tendency of contemporary business and management research towards incrementalism ([Alvesson and Sandberg, 2014](#)). The thought-provoking articles in this collection pose an imaginative challenge to the current limitations of diversity management scholarship and practice. Although they form an eclectic and varied mix, the articles posit an overarching concern with the ossification of diversity and inclusion. Aware of the unfulfilled promise of equality for all in organisations, they breathe new life into a mature field of study that encompass not only important ideas but also a plethora of blind spots and status-quo tendencies ([Oswick and Noon, 2014](#)). Thus, despite exhibiting different sensitivities, these articles express convergences in reconsidering what (we think) we know about diversity and inclusion to pursue change that truly advances the equality agenda.

Diversity and inclusion theory and practice stand to benefit significantly from expanding multi-dimensionally. As this special collection signals, there is fruitful new ground to explore along the political, historical, relational, ethical and technological dimensions of analysis, if we are to overcome the impasses in our thinking and practice. The political dimension suggests that unequal power relations that privilege some groups over others constitute a core feature of the workplace inequalities problematic today, and significant positive change is not possible without re-politicising the struggle for equality. Yet, at present, power disparities are so fully normalised that they operate invisibly and unchecked in both policy and practice ([Ahonen \*et al.\*, 2014](#)), and re-orienting the field requires a stronger awareness of the political nature of diversity and inclusion processes. Equally, the literature on diversity and inclusion is not fully alert to the presence of historical effects on diversity policies and practices ([Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014](#)). There is a need for diversity and inclusion research to explore temporally contingent nature of difference, which requires accounting for the reflections of historical (dis)-advantages in current diversity policy and practice. Additionally, the extant scholarship still suffers from a neglect of relational accounts that connect social processes to diversity and inclusion ([Ozbilgin and Tatli, 2008](#)). Yet, pursuing a relational dimension can highlight how workers operate within complex webs of social relations that embed their constructions of and responses to diversity and inclusion. Furthermore, diversity and inclusion must expand along the dimension of ethics because ethics is the foundation of how people and organisations address difference. Accounting for ethics in diversity management can help the literature move past the rigid and increasingly less productive binary of business vs social justice models (see [Rhodes, 2017](#)). Finally, diversity scholarship needs to pay sharper attention to rapid and significant advancements in technology and their impact on equality. Technological changes promise to reconfigure fundamentally the existing job types and careers with considerable equality implications ([Colin and Palier, 2015](#)), which requires a shift in diversity and inclusion thinking and practice.



Management Decision  
Vol. 59 No. 11, 2021  
pp. 2549-2552  
© Emerald Publishing Limited  
0025-1747  
DOI 10.1108/MD-11-2021-149

The first article in this collection is “Radical politics, intersectionality and leadership for diversity” by Alison Pullen, Carl Rhodes, Celina McEwen and Helena Liu. Pullen *et al.* examine the complex interplay between leadership and difference, as informed by intersectionality and transversal politics. The authors argue that a de-politicised approach to diversity has resulted in the pursuit of a limited agenda for change, reproducing organisational inequalities instead of dismantling them. Pullen *et al.* regard the conventional coding of leadership as elite white men’s practice as a key problem. Currently, leadership connotes an individualistic endeavour that is heroic and masculine, and restrictions about who can be a leader and how they should lead contract the discursive and practical scope of leadership for diversity. Yet, as Pullen *et al.* show, channelling the radical politics of intersectionality, which is a project of emancipation, can help unbound leadership from its current limitations, demolishing structures of privilege and disadvantage. However, they suggest leadership for diversity requires a non-hierarchical, transversal politics rooted in advocacy and solidarity to generate alliance-based praxis. The authors reveal that politics must be at the heart of diversity to dislodge power disparities and ensure equality across all differences in organisations.

In their article “Intersectionality as a matter of time”, Kerry Hendricks, Nick Deal, Albert Mills and Jean Helms Mills also work with intersectionality by incorporating a historical dimension into the concept as they conduct a case study of British Airways. They argue that intersectional discrimination is not only a reflection of the current structural inequalities pertaining to individuals’ multiple identities, but it also has a historically constructed specificity. Kendricks *et al.* introduce the notion of “nexus of meaning” to highlight that discrimination connects to past meanings that still cast a shadow on privilege and disadvantage today. Additionally, using an ANTi-history approach, which is a technique to delineate and disrupt historical reality to diversify its representation, the authors’ analysis of British Airways archival documents underlines the complexity of intersectionality by showcasing its temporal construction. In this way, they build useful insights about the historical contingency and context specificity of diversity management knowledge and practices. Tracing the evolution of meanings attached to difference, Hendricks *et al.* establish that the discriminatory historical accounts provide a contextual backdrop to contemporary understandings of difference.

In their article “Exploring the influence of CEO and chief diversity officers’ relational demography on organisational diversity management: An identity-based perspective”, Eddy Ng, Greg Sears, and Kara Arnold emphasise the need for a relational turn in analysing the possible efficacy of diversity practices. In particular, the authors consider the demographic characteristics of chief executive officers and chief diversity officers to theorise the effects of majority or minority status held by these leaders on the eventual diversity outcomes for their companies. Using relational demography and leader–member exchange perspectives, they signal that better numerical representation of minorities in key leadership positions in organisations may strengthen diversity policy-making and practice. The diversity and inclusion literature is often a process rather than people-driven, and it tends to consider the promise of specific diversity management initiatives according to their policy content. By contrast, the authors point to the significance of leader identities as a likely signifier of the power and influence of diversity practices, thereby incorporating relational processes involving key actors in organisations into diversity and inclusion studies.

In “Defining inclusionary intelligence: a conceptual framework with a constructivist perspective”, Aykut Berber offers a social constructionist view of individuals’ subjective psychological experiences in order to conceptualise a novel notion of inclusion, inclusionary intelligence. This concept denotes an emergent social-psychological reality starting from a non-hierarchical dyadic relationship, which has a processual nature and a contextually situated specificity. The author argues that while the literature usefully focuses on belongingness and uniqueness as the building blocks of a generic concept of inclusion, the co-constructions individuals formulate with co-workers significantly influence how these two dimensions are

experienced, which can have a bearing on both wellbeing and job satisfaction. While individuals' subjective perspectives partly shape their sense of inclusion, this is in constant flux in relation to specific co-workers with whom feelings of inclusion are negotiated and realised. Accordingly, the author signals the centrality of relational dynamics to inclusion in organisations.

In their paper "Diversity and firm performance: role of corporate ethics", Yves-Rose Porcena, Praveen Parboteeah and Neal Mero consider the interaction between diversity management and firm performance. Despite numerous studies exploring the presumed positive relationship between these two variables, the extant state of knowledge is still equivocal. Porcena *et al.* construct a sample of 109 firms out of Fortune 500 companies to investigate how ethics mediates the impact of diversity on performance outcomes. Using information collected through a review of company websites, they examine the role of diverse recruitment and staffing as well as valuing diversity in conjunction with internal and external ethics to see what effect they have on company performance. They reveal that diversity management has a strong positive relationship with both internal and external ethics, and it enhances business outcomes by way of external ethics. Thus, the authors argue that even the purest business case for diversity cannot be separate from ethics, alerting the need for diversity management to incorporate ethics and justice considerations.

In the penultimate article of this collection, "Diversity and future of work: inequality abound or opportunities for all?", Banu Ozkazanc-Pan explores the equality implications of an imminent technological revolution in artificial intelligence and automation for work, workers and organisations and investigates the possible emergence of new and significant digital inequalities. Currently, while techno-optimists suggest that technology can unleash a new era of improved rights for all, techno-pessimists have a much bleaker view of the future of work, with advantages of technological progress appropriated by the privileged and the downsides absorbed by the disadvantaged. Ozkazanc-Pan asks whether the replacement of some jobs may disproportionately affect specific groups more than others, calling for diversity scholarship to be alert to emerging dangers of enhanced inequalities due to technological shifts. Additionally, expanding the range of current subjects of interest in the literature, Ozkazanc-Pan envisions an overhaul of the very concept of diversity in view of the likely emergence of non-human subjects capable of sophisticated decision-making. Accounting for the ramifications of technological changes for the future of work and a post-humanist diversity, Ozkazanc-Pan makes a thought-provoking call for management scholarship to question its categories of knowledge in a world becoming fundamentally different from the one for which our current theories and practices were developed.

The articles summarised above represent divergent ontological positions and epistemological choices. Yet, in variously expanding diversity and inclusion along the political, historical, relational, ethical and technological dimensions, they represent a common focus on engaged scholarship that show sensitivity to the complexity of people and organisations. To be sure, re-orienting diversity and inclusion is a monumental task, which cannot end here. More work needs to be done in topic areas that the field implicitly views as marginal, such as gender identity (e.g. [Ozturk and Tatli, 2016](#); [Ozturk and Tatli, 2018](#)). Additionally, future research aiming to re-orient diversity and inclusion must empower minority voices that organisations still do not fully hear and understand ([Ozturk and Rumens, 2015](#)). Furthermore, there is a need to pay attention to cross-cultural instantiations of diversity and inclusion in global organisations with high cultural and linguistic diversity ([Groutsis et al., 2014](#)). Finally, this collection is coming out during the Covid-19 pandemic, and it would be remiss not to note that diversity and inclusion must be alert to deepening and broadening inequalities that system-level shocks exert.

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