

## Article

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# ***Broadening the Scope of Diversity Management***

## ***Strategic Implications in the Case of the Netherlands***

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*An analysis of theories and practices of diversity management, as illustrated in the case of the Netherlands, shows that they are too narrowly focused on redressing imbalances experienced by ethnic minorities and bridging cultural differences between majorities and ethnic minorities in the workplace. Agencies in the field of diversity management have fallen back on a limited and standardized stock of methods that ignore the specificity of organizational dynamics and largely operate in isolation from existing equity policies. The influence of diversity management has thus remained quite superficial. A contextual approach would broaden both the body of thought and the repertory of methods of diversity management, and strengthen its political and social relations. Such an approach would respond to its most challenging tasks: fostering social justice, enhancing productivity, and breaking the circle that equates cultural difference with social inequality.*

In an era of international networking and mobility, the social and cultural composition of communities in which people live and work is

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becoming increasingly diverse. The notion of diversity is predominantly used to refer to the variety of individuals and groups with whom work organizations are confronted in their labour markets, among their consumers and their employees. In the global economy, people use characteristics such as skin colour, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and religion to define — and often defend — their identities and their group affiliations (Cox 1993; Castells 1997). The blurring of traditional boundaries between social units such as nations and social classes in the process of globalization has given salience to questions of social identity, and, paradoxically, to the reinvention of boundaries between the self and others, and between 'us' and 'them'. The construction of a sense of identity and belonging cannot be achieved in isolation from others, but only in interaction with them. Discovering and crossing the boundaries with others can be a learning experience, but it can also lead to anxiety because of a loss of control or identity (Meerman 1999). There's always risk involved. In the global village, 'strangers' are even more inescapable than ever before and risk-taking cannot be avoided. This holds for individuals and (work) organizations alike. Also of importance is the uneven distribution of resources to deal with differences, i.e. to minimize the risks and to maximize the yields entailed in such crossing of borders. As Zygmunt Bauman (1998) has pointed out, mobility, the differential ability to move through time/space, is absolutely central in this respect. Cosmopolitan citizens and multinational corporations are in the best positions to reap the harvest and be gone when the soil runs dry. Small firms have to make do with what is left in the local labour market, and disadvantaged people of different colours and backgrounds are stuck together in centre cities.

In consultancy language, diversity is presented as a challenge that can bring competitive advantage to business. This promise will only come true, one is warned, if diversity is managed well. 'Managing diversity' has become big business in North America and it is gaining ground in the Netherlands too. It is, above all, aimed at helping managers and employees to deal with and value cultural differences in order to boost organizational and economic performance. It should also bring about 'inclusive organizations', that is work communities in which nobody is privileged or disadvantaged on account of characteristics such as skin colour or ethnicity, and where people can develop their talents and contribute to the realization of corporate goals (Thomas Jr. 1991). The advocates of diversity management define their mission in terms of a double challenge: enhancing social justice by stimulating the recognition and valuation of cultural differences and by a more equal distribution of chances of fulfilling participation in the labour force and increasing productivity and profitability through the cultural diversification of work organizations.

In this article, we will analyze the theoretical and practical tools of diversity management and consider how they relate to organizational performance and social justice. In order to make our analysis more concrete, we will refer to the case of the Netherlands, where managing diversity is, as yet, mainly understood to pertain to relations between people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds in work organizations and less to issues of gender and sexual orientation. We will first briefly introduce the case of the Netherlands, then present three theoretical approaches to diversity management in Dutch diversity discourse and then reconstruct its dominant practices in the light of existing research. On the basis of this analysis of the theoretical and practical problems of diversity management, we argue, in the second half of this article, that a contextual approach is called for. We then outline the theoretical basis, the methodological implications and the socio-political consequences of such an approach before concluding on the merits of the contextual approach to diversity management.

A short terminological clarification is required at the outset. According to population statistics, 16 million people are currently living in the Netherlands, of whom some 9% are officially labelled 'ethnic minorities' in view of their immigrant backgrounds in combination with their marginal position in Dutch society. The largest categories among them are: the Surinamese and Antilleans/Arubans from the former Dutch colonies, who immigrated in large numbers from 1980 onward; Turks and Moroccans, who were recruited to the Netherlands as 'guestworkers' in the 1960s in order to respond to labour shortages, and asylum seekers and refugees. We will use the terms 'ethnic minorities' and 'immigrants' interchangeably for these groups. We will refer to the mostly white Dutch population as the 'indigenous' population.

### *A MARKET SOLUTION IN A DUTCH CONTEXT*

Readers of the literature on diversity management find a host of promises about the achievement of its basic goals: a humane and decent working climate, fostering competitive advantage by the deployment of as yet unknown capacities and talents, and enhancing personal growth through the need for greater flexibility and creativity in the face of cultural differences. Diversity management urges employers to evaluate existing corporate cultures and to re-specify the 'common ground' of the organization (Handy 1994). Notwithstanding the fact that such overwhelming promises raise doubts and criticisms (Prasad and Mills 1997; Shadid 1998), diversity management must be taken seriously in the Dutch context. It is expected that ethnic minorities will make up 14% of the population of the

Netherlands by 2015 (SCP 1999). In the big cities in the western parts of the country, this percentage will rise to 45% even sooner. However, the situation of ethnic minorities is not to be envied. From 1985 onward, unemployment among ethnic groups has remained three to four times higher than among the indigenous labour population, even if some groups are doing better than others. In addition, the educational performance of ethnic minority youngsters has certainly improved over the last years, but so has that of their white contemporaries (Veenman 1994). Industries on which immigrants traditionally depended for their employment, such as metal working, shipbuilding and textiles, are disappearing very fast. In the knowledge and information economy that is taking their place, ever higher qualifications are required and the better educated oust the lesser educated (Van Hoof 1993). As a consequence, the risk of a society divided along ethnic lines is increasing (Gowricharn 1999).

The Dutch government has tried to avert this threat by means of a policy with regard to immigration, education, labour force participation and integration that introduces many obligations and restrictions on minority newcomers and by passing a Dutch employment equity act inspired by the Canadian Employment Equity Act. At the national level, employers and labour unions have also made some important efforts. In 1990 they signed an agreement to create 60,000 extra jobs for ethnic minorities and to make this an important issue for collective bargaining. Many of these measures have subsequently failed. Both government and employers have opted for a more decentralized approach in which diversity management is one of the cornerstones (Glastra, Schedler and Kats 1998). Diversity management must therefore be taken seriously, even though it is not yet clear whether it is an effective way to improve the labour force participation of ethnic minorities. Diversity management has thus found its way into many prominent corporations in the Netherlands where it is embraced as the 'soft' way out of the present stalemate in the debate about the soaring rate of unemployment among ethnic minorities. Moreover, in the current political conjuncture in the Netherlands, market solutions for public policy embarrassments are well received. The question remains, however, as regards how well diversity management is prepared to meet these difficult challenges?

### ***APPROACHES***

There are three basic approaches in the literature on diversity management in the Netherlands : a deficiency approach, which makes deficits in qualifications the central issue; a discrimination approach focusing on subordination; and a differentiation approach, which stresses cultural differences (WVC 1991; Glastra 1996).

For the *deficiency* approach, the unemployment of ethnic minorities is a result of their general lack of qualifications and their inability to adjust to organizational cultures in Dutch enterprises. Advocates of this approach speak of a 'mismatch'. The prevailing structure of qualifications and organizational traditions are taken as given. Ethnic minority employees should be given specific support to overcome lags in their command of the Dutch language, in job orientation and interview skills, and in acquiring work experience in Dutch work organizations. Education, training and guidance are regarded as compensatory measures. Intensive forms of individual guidance must lead immigrants to the labour market (Van den Berg, Denolf and Van der Veer 1997). In this approach, access to, promotion within and exit from firms are seen as depending on the relative contribution of the person involved in terms of qualifications and work experience. This meritocratic reasoning suggests that an individual possessing the required talents, or investing in them, will progress far in a system that has no fundamental barriers for individual achievement.

The deficiency approach is problematic in several ways. It attributes the responsibility and often the blame for a lack of progress with the individuals involved. In addition, the assumption that the economic process is characterized by a fixed structure of qualifications is quickly becoming obsolete. In a knowledge and service economy, the importance of rather vague social and communicative competencies is increasing relative to specific technical and material expertise, and professional requirements are being reformulated at an ever quicker pace (Kessels 1996). As a result, perceptions of what certain jobs require from employees, and of what different categories of candidates can be expected to supply, play crucial roles. The deficiency approach ignores the selective role that such perceptions play on both the demand and the supply side (Van Beek 1993) of the labour market (Gowricharn 1994). To summarize, the deficiency approach only has room for newcomers in so far as they leave their differences at home, speak the language and show themselves to be adaptable to the dominant business logic.

The *discrimination* approach concentrates on prejudice and ethnic exclusion in enterprises. Discrimination, rather than deficiencies in qualifications, is seen as the main explanation for the marginal position of ethnic minorities. As a solution, it offers 'racism awareness courses' for individuals (Oomkes 1993) and more general strategies directed at the institutional sources of inequality in organizational structures. The *prejudice* version involves the struggle against a mental enemy, which manifests itself in both individuals and groups. Confrontation with often-repressed racist feelings and unreflected discriminatory behaviour are central issues. Notions of tolerance for the other and the principle of equality are used in

order to argue for the right of equal treatment. It is not through training courses alone that the existence of prejudice is tackled. Work is also being done to ensure an institutional embeddedness in the forms of complaints procedures and anti-discrimination codes signed by employers and communicated to members of organizations (TWCM 1996).

While the prejudice version concentrates on the attitudes and behaviour of the indigenous population, the *systemic* version emphasizes the historical and institutional structure that reproduces unequal social relations between ethnic groups in enterprises. Vested interests, power differences and unreflected routines result in ethnic disadvantage and exclusion (Van Dijk 1993; Van Beek 1993). Here, subordination and exclusion principles are seen to be so deeply ingrained in organizational structures that only a fundamental democratization of labour relations can bring about change. Therefore, not much can be expected from the implementation of anti-discrimination codes or complaints procedures. Diversity management is only worth while in organizations that take the equality of employees seriously. Different forms of positive action, both at the company gate and within the organization itself, make for an adequate approach to the problems that are to be resolved. Among the well-known risks of this approach are a fixation on the 'numbers game', where the focus is on employment equity as a question of administrative statistics rather than organizational change, and backlash, where majority employees resist positive action for fear of losing their positions.

The *discrimination* approach is not only the most controversial strategy (Koevoets and Brekelmans 1994), but it also overlooks some serious problems. Research with regard to the relation between prejudice as an attitude and discrimination as behaviour of people or the working of organizational routines shows that influencing prejudice is not a necessary nor a sufficient condition for achieving behavioural change, let alone for the restructuring of organizational routines (Elich and Maso 1984). Conversely, behavioural and organizational change does not automatically lead to less prejudice. In this context, Cohen (1992) has formulated the 'relative autonomy rule' which states that battling structural forms of discrimination on the one hand and prejudice on the other demand different but well-coordinated approaches.

The *differentiation* approach to diversity management is very dominant in the Netherlands. The notion of cultural diversity points to the idea that groups and individuals belong to different cultural systems and that this circumstance pervades their interactions. Cultural traditions that bind people together can turn into practical handicaps once these people are in foreign company. Cultural difference can be perceived as an impediment that is hard to overcome, but it is also seen as a problem that one can easily

learn to live with, or even be a potential source of renewal. Sometimes the accent is on learning about the culture of the other, but reflection on one's own culture can also be considered as a necessary precondition for fruitful multicultural co-operation. Lastly, the differentiation approach can either involve only indigenous employees or all employees in the joint learning process. The differentiation approach can be subdivided into culturalizing and individualizing versions.

In the case of *culturalization*, learning about collective cultural differences is most important (Trompenaars 1993; Pinto 1994). The way people think and act is primarily explained and understood in terms of their original ethnic or national culture. Hofstede (1980, 1995) even speaks of 'mental programming'; people are, in a primordialistic sense, objectively defined by their cultural heritage. From this perspective, the intermingling of people from different cultures within territories or organizations leads to misunderstandings and frictions. It is therefore imperative that members of the indigenous population and immigrants learn about each other's cultures and develop intercultural communicative skills. Hofstede has thus developed a 'cultural assimilator', a programmed instruction that enables people to learn to interpret expressions of the other from the perspective of the culture that the other belongs to.

Culturalization runs the risk of turning learning about cultural differences into the institutionalization of stereotypes and the notion of cultural difference into a self-fulfilling prophecy (Human 1996; Weiner 1997). It entails a one-sided representation of people as cultural heirs who belong to a certain collective culture in an unequivocal and inescapable way. However, people are also always producers of culture. Moreover, culturalization fails to appreciate cultural ambiguity and the well-known phenomenon of changing identities and bi-culturality, for instance in alternations between leisure and work (Koot 1994; Berry and Sam 1997). Finally, the culture of the other is not just a grammar to be learned, but also a catalyst of emotions and an integrative framework for interests. Even if someone knows what the other means, political or religious distances or contradictions may prevent the emergence of workable situations (Triandis 1995).

*Individualization*, a version of managing diversity initially conceptualized by Roosevelt Thomas Jr., stresses the importance of learning about individual cultural differences and identifications. According to Thomas (1991), whose writings clearly influenced the Dutch discussion on diversity, managers should develop a different mindset that enhances the emergence of inclusive organizations. In such organizations, values and structures are induced that accord with the configuration of cultural identities, needs and competencies of the employees. Modern, individualistic



employees no longer want to exchange their unique cultural identities at the firm entrance for the straightjacket of a corporate identity in the colours of the majority. It is not so much cultural knowledge that is needed here, but a management that facilitates and empowers. For organizational policies, according to Van Kooten et al. (1994), managing diversity does not mean separate and incidental projects for or about ethnic minorities, but rather the incorporation of cultural diversification as a normal and integral part of the overall management and business strategy of companies.

The risk involved in this version of differentiation is the neglect of modern, collectivist tendencies of ethnification, which are engendered by conflicts about the distribution of scarce goods such as waged labour (Bader 1995). This is a significant blind spot in the Netherlands where chances of labour force participation and unemployment have hitherto been distributed unequally among the indigenous and minority populations. Furthermore, it overestimates the flexibility of organizational structures and cultures and the 'flexing powers' of managers. We may therefore conclude that both versions of differentiation are inclined to define culture only from the perspective of a capital that is, literally, incorporated in individuals or groups (Bourdieu 1992). This is an 'atomistic conception of culture'. In the differentiation approach, the importance and significance of this incorporated capital, in its collective and individual forms, is easily overestimated because it is lifted out of its social context where people have other sorts of capital at their disposal and where various forms of capital may be more or less valuable. Finally, the differentiation approach neglects the active involvement of work organizations themselves in the day-to-day cultural development of their employees, what might be viewed as a course in groupthink and distinctive prowess that is underpinned by normative images of the model worker and by remuneration systems.

We may conclude that the discourse of diversity management in the Netherlands shows several blind spots that are likely to hinder a broad perspective on problematic situations and social relations in concrete and complex organizational contexts. It calls for standard solutions instead of imaginative approaches and experiments. However, the practices of diversity management generally have a rather loose relation to what these theories prescribe since they are tied to particular organizational requirements and conditions. The next section therefore concerns the dominant form of these practices in the Netherlands.

### ***PRACTICES OF DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT***

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The literature on diversity management in the Netherlands still largely consists of general treatments, handbooks and case descriptions. Research

progress on the practice of diversity management, that is what is actually being done to create a diverse work force and the results of these different approaches, is much slower (De Vries 1992; Pettigrew and De Vries 1994; Van Twuyver 1995; Glastra, Dewkalie and Soons 1996; Abell, Havelaar and Dankoor 1997; Van Twuyver, Noorderhaven and Derveld 1997; De Vries, Houdijk and Van Viersen 1997; Glastra 1998; Meerman 1999; Glastra, Meerman and De Vries 1999; Bovenkerk, Van San and De Vries 1999). This body of work enables us to identify several crucial defining characteristics.

Elements of the approaches mentioned above are often mixed and fused in the practice of diversity management, but it is the emphasis on *cultural differences* that is the *distinctive trait* of the trade. This specific approach and its object, the *multi-ethnic composition of work organizations*, have become ingrained in a specific *institutionalization* of diversity management, i.e. *as the business of agencies in the field of training and consultancy*. The practice is premised on the idea that it makes sense to deal with problems concerning ethnicity in isolation from other aspects of social relations between employees, managers and employers. Moreover, it gives rise to the notion that dealing with diversity requires little more than a set of additional services, to be bought on the market for a quick fix of temporary problems. Diversity management should secure or restore business as usual and is essentially defensive. This limits its potential to develop into an integral and innovative corporate practice. In the Netherlands, the number of companies and institutions that make serious efforts to become multicultural organizations in that sense is still quite small. Research reports (Abell, Havelaar and Dankoor 1997; Van Twuyver, Noorderhaven and Derveld 1997) suggest that governmental and social sector organizations and the bigger, and especially service-oriented corporations are doing better than small- and middle-sized business.

A further implication pertains to the *range of issues* tackled in practice. It is well nigh impossible in the Netherlands to confront a firm or a department with discriminatory tendencies in its policies or in the interactions between colleagues. At the organizational level, procedures for handling complaints and initiating disciplinary action in case of harassment, which are quite common in Canada and the United States, are virtually non-existent. Open and direct discrimination is usually condemned, but is seldom perceived to happen in everyday work situations of the employees involved. Discrimination is elsewhere. At the other end of the spectrum, positive discrimination in favour of ethnic minorities stirs up bad feelings since it is seen to endanger vested positions. It also runs against the dominant view that getting a job is, and should be, an individual achievement of satisfying job requirements that hold equally for all applicants. In

the middle zone between these extremes, diversity agencies are expected to do the job in the more acceptable terms of equal opportunities and mutual acceptance (Meerman 1999). Stimulating a professional attitude, enhancing corporate communication, making up for deficiencies in qualifications of minority candidates and giving them a fair chance are the coalition goals on which the different parties involved are likely to agree. The question deemed crucial in this endeavour is how far people in various positions in the organization understand and accommodate cultural differences. Hence, training concentrates on questions of cultural awareness, diversity management and intercultural communication. In the actual practice of diversity management in the Netherlands, the influence of the discrimination approach is quite limited. Indeed, diversity agencies have been keen to dissociate themselves from governmental equity policies and legislation.

The main *targets* of the practice are improving recruitment and selection and the day-to-day functioning of interethnic relations in the work environment. Vertical or horizontal mobility is hardly an issue that is tackled as yet by diversity management, urgent as it may be (De Vries, Kwee and Waldring 1998). Until now, diversity management has remained a limited instrument of HRM policies in the Netherlands. Even though contributions are made to adapt professional tasks, especially in psychiatry and in health care (De Jong and Van den Berg 1996; TOPAZ 1996), diversity management is rarely used for the innovation of products, services, work processes and client relations (Glastra, Meerman and De Vries 1999).

Training and, to a lesser extent, organizational consultancy are the favourite *methods*. There is frequently not enough time for thorough observation and analysis of the situation in a work organization prior to an intervention. An extended interview with the customer must usually suffice in order to fill in 'cash-and-carry-training modules' with some local colour. Most corporations want quick solutions and have more than one reason to keep the room for in depth analysis as limited as possible. Most agencies and consultants in the field of diversity management bend to the discipline of the market. As a consequence of these restrictions, diversity management projects are generally not capable of penetrating either broadly or profoundly into organizations, nor are they, as a rule, allowed to organize follow-up activities (Abell, Havelaar and Dankoor 1997).

The specific *content and the intensity of the intervention* are geared to the positions that different groups occupy inside the organization. The top is usually too busy for hearing more than the business case for diversity. In actual practice, it turns out to be very difficult to reach and train the strategically positioned stratum of the middle managers. In their output-oriented business units, they are notoriously short of time. They have their business targets and are only concerned with such professional and

organizational requirements as will be helpful to realize those targets (Meerman 1999). The shop floor will receive a course in 'Dutch as a second language' and be engaged in cultural or racism awareness or intercultural communication training. In the Netherlands, the emphasis is on intercultural interaction attitudes and skills, on the significance of cultural differences for personal performance and everyday interactions on the job (Abell, Havelaar and Dankoor 1997). Organizational structures, work routines and corporate strategy are too often ignored. Hence, diversity training is characterized by a lack of embeddedness in the broader policies of work organizations.

The underdevelopment of diversity management practices in the Netherlands cannot be blamed exclusively on the conceptions, methods and goals of the agencies involved. First, diversity management practices must operate in a field with a history in which, time and again, strategies to change interethnic relations tended to end in disappointment and controversy (Bourdieu 1992). Therefore, quick results cannot be expected, even when there are promising developments in some sectors (TOPAZ 1996). The routines reproducing ethnic inequalities in the Netherlands are too deeply ingrained for that. Second, diversity agencies do not have a strong market position. They are rarely capable of controlling or even influencing the conditions in which their work is done. Moreover, in the companies and institutions in which they intervene they are confronted with deeply rooted routines, time pressures, conflicts of interest, tenacious resistance and the harsh realities of a short-term business orientation.

Together, the bias in the various approaches and the kinds of constraints encountered in the field make for a practice of diversity management that has scaled back its objectives, routinized and standardized its methods of intervention, and become subject to the illusion, indeed sells the illusion, that it can fulfil its promise to foster productivity and social justice. In our view, diversity management will surely fall short of such promises if it continues to ignore the organizational contexts in which it operates. In the following sections, we argue for a contextual approach to diversity management.

### ***TOWARDS A CONTEXTUAL APPROACH OF DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT***

Cultural and ethnic diversity is not an autonomous demographic development that work organizations have to come to terms with. It is, in all its enriching and disturbing aspects, a key manifestation of the global society that such organizations have helped to bring about. There are many thorny questions about the functioning of work organizations and political

communities as effective social units, the scope for different values and behaviour within such units and the inequities in opportunities and outcomes for their members. These questions of effectiveness, difference and equality impregnate the approaches to and practices of diversity management. As we have argued above, the prevailing answers leave much to be desired. A contextual approach to managing diversity is needed for several reasons. First, an organization is not a passive reflection of some broader society. It is an active social construction guided by the rules of organizational survival and constitutes a social and cultural lifeworld of its own (Tennekes 1995). Specific organizational contexts give varying meanings to differences in such general characteristics as qualifications and cultural and ethnic backgrounds and to forms of social inequality. If diversity management wants to advance adequate solutions to such problems in the workplace, it should have an informed idea of how the structural arrangements, the cultural patterns, the core business, the external relations and the strategic mission of a given organization shape such meanings and valuations. This calls for thorough and detailed organizational analysis. Standard solutions are no longer of much use; specific settings require tailor-made approaches. Second, a contextual approach may shift the attention from affirming the supposedly deviant status of ethnic minorities, who lack qualifications, do not belong to the mainstream and are treated unfairly, to highlighting problems that organizations have in recognizing and dealing with the reflexive character of their activity, of which diversity is a crucial example (Glastra and Meijers 2000). This will give diversity management the opportunity to change its focus from restoring or continuing business as usual to organizational innovation. Third, contextual analysis is inclusive and, as a consequence, this also applies to diversity management itself. Diversity management is not a *deus ex machina*. Both in its typical quick fix form, simultaneously produced and restricted by the very field in which it has to operate, and in its theoretical orientations, it is part and parcel of the problems that it seeks to solve. This enhances the awareness that an important part of the tenacity of diversification problems is rooted in the dependent position of diversity management in the field. Our assertion is that tackling such problems would be more effectively undertaken if the intellectual scope and the repertory of methods of diversity management were broadened and its political and social relations strengthened.

### ***BROADENING THE BODY OF THOUGHT***

If diversity management is to improve the labour force participation of ethnic minorities and improve the conditions for co-operation in a diverse work force, it is our view that only a *contextual approach* to diversity

management is likely to provide the broader intellectual scope required (Glastra 1996, 1999). The contextuality referred to here pertains, firstly, to the political, social and economic contexts in which both corporations and practices of diversity management operate. A focus on the significance of this multifarious environment helps to keep projects on a fruitful course (Schedler, Glastra and Kats 1998). For example, the public outcry for more police on the streets in inner cities and old neighbourhoods combined with a context of very tight labour market creates opportunities for launching diversity projects in policing. However, the involvement of some groups of ethnic minorities in criminal activities and the widespread linking of ethnicity and criminality in the public opinion turn such opportunities into a difficult challenge (Glastra, Meerman and De Vries 1999). A contextual approach analyzes organizations not as passive reflections of broader society, but as active constituents of fields in which risks and opportunities are divided unequally (Bourdieu 1992).

Secondly, interethnic relations should also be analyzed in the light of specific organizational dynamics. In cases of conflict or problems where majority and minority workers are involved, the point of departure should not be a search for explanations in terms of cultural difference or prejudice, even though such variables will often play a role. Immigrants and indigenous people do not work together in firms as autonomous individuals, acting according to some original or innate identity principles (Cox and Finley 1995: 84 ff.). They have to cooperate and compete on the basis of the structure, the rules, the ends and the means that the organization provides for them. Since organizational features vary widely, immigrants and indigenous employees will work and interact together under different rules and circumstances (Bader 1995). We argue that organizational features should be taken much more seriously. When frictions or conflicts arise, one should, first of all, look for a contextual logic. More often than not, the various problems, interests perspectives and expression of different social groups, institutional units or individuals are at stake at the same time. Their quite ordinary explanations of labour force circumstances, task structures, control over the arrangement of work processes and the quality of management should not be overlooked. A course with regard to ethnic and cultural differences can be quite wide of the mark, when a conflict between the shop floor and management dominates social relations in a work organization, as was found in an analysis of a conflict at the Amsterdam Municipal Transport Company (Glastra, Dewkalie and Soons 1996).

The analytical perspective must be richer and more varied. Diversity management should not merely be informed by theories about prejudice, cultural identities, and intercultural communication, but also by insights concerning the labour market, organizational cultures and structures,

leadership and management, and learning in organizations (Glastra 1999). In this way, various aspects of problematic and successful co-operation can be brought to the surface. In particular, this approach avoids the pit-fall of concentrating on attitude change and improving everyday interactions without recognizing that the intended results must be sustained by structural arrangements in the organization (Cohen 1992; Golembiewski 1995). An organization constitutes a goal-oriented practice of people living and working together. This practice is not acted out in a vacuum. An analysis of its internal and external dynamics makes it possible to locate mechanisms of change and sources of conservation. For example, the move of the Dutch police toward 'community policing' might do more to break through the traditionally inward-oriented and rather closed macho culture of the police shop floor than any diversity training course or mission statement could possibly accomplish. Not least because this new orientation requires close co-operation with both citizens and local institutions and gives the notion of ethnic mirroring between community and police force even greater importance (Van der Torre 1999). This may lead to better job opportunities for ethnic minority police officers in metropolitan areas and new ways of engaging their cultural capital in police work.

### ***BROADENING THE REPERTORY OF METHODS***

Cultural and ethnic diversity is not a temporary issue in the global network society. It will be continuously present, ever changing in its composition and manifestations. In order to learn from the risks and rewards that it brings with it, both for work organizations and the society at large, continuous and wide-ranging attention is required. Diversity management agencies, however, will usually provide training of short duration, which is what work organizations on the market have thus far asked for. The danger of this approach is that the central themes of cultural difference and prejudice and the training format itself are abstract and remain distant from the actual discourse, everyday practices and the social relationships of work organizations. For the employees involved in such training, it becomes very difficult to translate and practice what is learned — model knowledge in model circumstances — in their own work situations (Kessels 1996). The greater danger is that corporations are led to think of diversity as a temporary rather than as a structural feature.

The practice of managing diversity should therefore be developed into a structural and comprehensive approach. It should encompass measures and methods that tackle both organizational cultural order (values, attitudes, cognitions and behaviour) and organizational social order (systems of recruitment and selection, job descriptions and evaluations, rewards,

feedback, mobility, and interdependencies and conflicts of interests) in a coherent fashion. Developing and renewing competencies to work and live together within diverse work organizations is the starting point. This should mainly be done through on-the-job-training and learning, which requires the development of so-called 'powerful learning environments' (Lodewijks 1993). It is possible, for example, to turn regular work consultations of teams into occasions to take stock of and share different approaches to tasks and people relevant to the organization (Glastra, Meerman and De Vries 1999). Developments with regard to the ever more popular 'Dutch on the shop floor' language programs are an important, if limited, example. Such programs have the advantage over intercultural communication training and certified language courses, in that they can be kept much closer to everyday work practices and to the actual issue of a living community of employees. Witte (1995) and Verhallen (1995), among others, have stressed the importance of directly linking second language acquisition to everyday work situations, which makes illustrative learning possible. They therefore specify criteria for the description of tasks, the arrangement of the workplace and communication patterns in work organizations. Work environments deprived of language practice as a consequence of segregation, routine labour or paternalism will quickly lead to the loss of what has been learned in terms of language command.

Building a powerful learning environment requires a diverse composition of work teams, broad tasks, access to a broad array of information sources, delegation of responsibilities, facilitation by management, room for interaction and reflection, and tolerance for the making of mistakes (Golembiewsky 1995). External training can only be of relevance if it taps into, and is attuned to, the ongoing learning process. A powerful learning environment also requires that learning outcomes for men and women of different ethnic backgrounds be reflected in the social and cultural orders of organizations, so that a sense of efficacy and belonging can emerge. This entails no less than asking organizations to innovate in unusual and fundamental ways, to implement new production conceptions and to become learning organizations. Becoming a diversified organization in this sense is not an add-on. It should be stressed that not many corporations and institutions in the Netherlands have as yet embarked on the course of the learning organization, although a lot of lip service is paid to it (Van Hoof 1991; Onstenk 1992).

One of the risks of the practice of the learning organization is that it tends to reserve instructive work situations and assignments for highly trained knowledge workers and leaves routine jobs to the rank-and-file, thereby reproducing or even enhancing social inequality (Van Onna 1992). As a result of their low labour force participation and their educational



underqualification, ethnic minorities in the Netherlands are frequently regarded as 'weak labour' and are more likely to end up in dead-end jobs at the bottom of the 'learning organizations'. In order to ward off this danger and help newcomers enter and develop in the organizational core, two strategic methods or organizational devices should be put to use: mentoring and diversity councils.

Mentoring, a practice in which newcomers to an organization or a department are assigned a mentor, is important. A mentor familiarizes the employee involved with organizational rules and routines, and gives advice with regard to the social relationships and the work that is to be done (Ragins 1995; Lazon 1994). Of course, mentoring is not without dangers. It can contribute to the stigmatization of newcomers, it can lead to jealousy and backlash, and it can also be a powerful instrument for the conservation of the traditional organizational culture (Garvey 1994). Nevertheless, a mentor relation may eventually result in forms of mutual counselling and coaching between more or less equal professionals (Kram and Hall 1996). Since social networks, be they formal or informal, are of increasing importance for both getting jobs done and achieving horizontal or vertical mobility in organizations, they require much more attention than is currently the case in Dutch diversity management practices (Stephenson and Lewin 1996; Elias 1997). The acquisition of social capital can be advanced by mentoring.

The multiculturalization of organizations is a long-term process that entails simultaneous moves. Conflict is likely because of the different kinds of vested interests involved. Training will only be of limited help in this respect. Rather diversity management must be viewed as a long-term development project in which stakeholders bring conflicts to light, discuss them and negotiate joint courses of action (Agocs, Burr and Somerset 1992). Instead of constructing formal rules and procedures of complaint that can only deal with discrimination and harassment after the fact, or making one official responsible for minority issues, we suggest the creation of diversity councils composed of employees of different ethnic backgrounds and of different ranks from shop floor to management who are well-integrated in various networks within the organization. In her research on a municipal service, Meerman (1999) has shown how such councils provide a promising starting point for changing the organizational agenda. Its members can systematically monitor the progress and the problems of the diversification program at their different levels and sectors within the organization, and bridge the usual gaps between organizational units and levels by making links between their observations in discussions. However, such cross-functional and cross-level councils will themselves be subject to the organizational dynamics that they seek to change (Cox and Finley 1995:

71). Different and sometimes contradictory interests will always manifest themselves in their discussions, while the question as to whether the diversity council's policies will effectively be the corporation's practice cannot be decided without recourse to power. This is only a reminder that diversity management can never merely be a push in the right direction. It is always concerned with thoroughly political interventions and it is better to be aware of that reality. This brings us to the social and political context of diversity management.

### ***STRENGTHENING POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS***

Diversity management has set itself the double goal of fostering social justice and productivity. As far as it contributes to productivity, diversity is indeed a 'business issue'. And there are signs that, for instance, in retail, banking and insurance this awareness is growing fast and has created job opportunities for ethnic minorities. However, under the current conditions in the field, diversity management can only bring as much social justice as the corporate interest will allow. Work organizations do not have a natural or inherent stake in a more just distribution of labour. This is aptly illustrated by the plea of the employer organization representing small and medium-sized businesses in the Netherlands to alleviate the current labour-market shortage by lengthening the working week and recruiting in neighbouring EC countries. It is argued that the existing 'silent reserve' of unemployed does not match the demand. The practice of diversity management cannot hope to accomplish much in the way of an equal distribution of opportunities in the labour market, the valuation of cultural differences, or the fostering of inclusive organizations, if it cannot be based on adequate policies in the fields of education, labour market and the struggle against discrimination. Diversity management should therefore actively seek out partners in governmental and political institutions. Otherwise, diversity management will turn into a luxury commodity on show for the spending power of firms sensitive to their public relations, window dressing for persistent job ghettos at the bottom end of the labour market.

Embracing the merit-principle, as so many of the advocates of diversity management do, will not bring equity a step further. On the contrary, it ignores the increasing division in Dutch companies between a tenured core of employees and a periphery of flexible, part-time and temporary workers with little or no perspective of upward mobility (Van Hoof 1991). Moreover, it denies the fact that the allegedly 'level playing field' within 'colour blind' companies is obtained by excluding candidates from ethnic minorities on a disproportional scale. Those who do not work and those in the periphery of companies and institutions do not merit equal treatment.

Embracing the merit principle wholesale means the practical negation of the centrifugal powers of the post-industrial economic process (Bauman 1998). Approaches and practices of diversity management that do so defeat their own goals. They try to stimulate the valuation of cultural differences within the structures of a process that connects such differences continuously to social inequalities (Zizek 1998). The functioning of work organizations is co-responsible for the creation of this connection and for ensuing societal tensions. This is what authors such as Beck (1994) and Giddens (1994) mean by the notion of 'reflexivity'. Those who want to start the multiculturalization of work organizations should bear this kind of reflexivity in mind.

Diversity management must therefore intervene in the social and cultural order of work organizations. However, it can never make significant progress on the road to multiculturalization if it restricts itself to those organizations. This same observation holds true in order to break the vicious connection between cultural difference and social inequality and to alleviate some of the tension between social justice and productivity, the double goal of diversity management. In our view, developments in the demographic composition of labour and consumer markets and ensuing problems of human resources management and organizational development should not be isolated from the broader social and political make-up of a society. The socio-cultural diversification of a society impacts both on the competitive capabilities of work organizations and on the health of the nation state. Both domains influence each other profoundly. The (in)capacity of work organizations to make use of the available 'foreign capital' in meaningful ways has serious repercussions for the position of newcomers and minorities in a country, for their interaction with the established citizens and for their ties with or faith in the public institutions of that country. Conversely, the (in)capacity of a government to equip newcomers sufficiently for labour force participation and access to relevant social institutions, to prepare its citizens for a multicultural society, and to protect them from the harsher consequences of the globalizing economy impacts deeply on the health and the performance of work organizations operating from its territory.

### CONCLUSION

Diversity management is necessarily practised where business strategy and government policy, and where productivity and social justice meet and, more often than not, collide. We have argued that this is a challenge that can only be fruitfully faced by a practice with a broad scope and a keen awareness of its position in the field. With that in mind, we highlighted

some of the more serious theoretical and methodological shortcomings of managing diversity in the Netherlands. These shortcomings result in a rather standardized, peripheral, quick fix practice that is tailored to the demands of the market and does not address the overall make-up of organizations and their connections to society. Diversity management has concentrated exclusively on questions of cultural difference, qualifications and respectful attitudes with regard to ethnic minorities and isolated itself from organization theory. However, diversity is such a far-reaching and enduring phenomenon that it will eventually impact on the core of work organizations in a global society. Surely fighting prejudice and discrimination, learning about and valuing cultural differences and developing relevant work qualifications will all remain relevant in the future. However, such endeavours can only bear fruit if work organizations are seriously ready to face and work on the dehumanizing consequences of supposedly neutral organizational arrangements, routines and relations. They will only be of use when work organizations become responsive to and take co-responsibility for the changes, the risks and the inequities that they produce in society. In our view, the contextual approach to managing diversity can help them take some crucial steps in this direction.

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## **RÉSUMÉ**

### **Pour élargir la sphère de la gestion de la diversité : les implications stratégiques du cas des Pays-Bas**

Depuis 1985 à aujourd'hui, le chômage chez les groupes ethniques des Pays-Bas est demeuré trois ou quatre fois plus élevé que celui de la main-d'œuvre indigène. Récemment, le gouvernement et le monde des affaires ont adopté une stratégie cruciale de gestion de la diversité visant à changer cette situation. Cet article se veut une analyse des instruments tant théoriques que pratiques dans ce domaine. Pour une analyse plus concrète, nous avons retenu le cas des Pays-Bas, où la compréhension que l'on a de la gestion de la diversité concerne principalement les relations entre des gens de différents antécédents raciaux ou ethniques au sein des organisations de travail.

Aux Pays-Bas, trois approches dominent dans le discours de la gestion de la diversité. Une première, celle de l'insuffisance, cherche à expliquer le chômage chez les minorités ethniques en l'attribuant à un manque général de qualifications et à une inhabileté à s'adapter à la culture organisationnelle des entreprises hollandaises. Une deuxième, celle de la discrimination, porte sur le préjudice et sur l'exclusion ethnique systématique dans les entreprises. Enfin, une troisième approche, celle de la différenciation, fait ressortir l'idée que les groupes et les individus appartiennent à différents systèmes culturels qui imprègnent leurs interactions. En nous fondant sur une analyse critique de chacune de ces approches, nous en sommes venus à la conclusion que le discours hollandais sur la gestion de la diversité fait preuve de partialité, ce qui empêche d'aborder des situations problématiques dans une perspective plus large, des situations qui caractérisent des contextes organisationnels réels et complexes; ce qui fait appel également à des solutions standards au lieu d'approches inventives.

Au sein des pratiques de la gestion de la diversité aux Pays-Bas, l'accent principal est placé sur les différences culturelles. Cette approche spécifique et son objet, la composition ethnique des organisations de travail, se sont institutionnalisés tout comme les activités de conseil dans les domaines de la formation et de l'intervention. Le fait de gérer cette diversité prend la forme de services additionnels qu'on souhaite se procurer comme un remède miracle aux problèmes d'adhésion, de communication et de qualifications.

L'amélioration des processus de recrutement, de sélection et du fonctionnement quotidien des échanges multi-ethniques devient la cible à atteindre dans le milieu de travail. Tout compte fait, la gestion de la diversité demeure encore aujourd'hui un instrument limité parmi les politiques de

gestion des ressources humaines aux Pays-Bas : une manière de faire des affaires comme à l'accoutumé et très peu d'effort au plan de l'innovation organisationnelle. Une pratique étroitement spécialisée et défensive de la gestion de la diversité n'arrivera jamais à réaliser sa promesse d'une plus grande productivité et de justice sociale, si elle continue à faire fi des contextes organisationnels où elle est utilisée.

Ces motifs nous incitent à favoriser une approche contextuelle de la gestion de la diversité qui s'éloigne d'une conception de l'organisation comme un reflet passif de la société pour la considérer comme un acteur actif dans les mondes sociaux et comme un construit social autonome. Des milieux organisationnels spécifiques et des échanges sur le terrain confèrent des significations aux différences au plan des qualifications, au plan des cultures et des formes d'inégalité sociale. Pour que la gestion de la diversité puisse apporter des solutions adéquates aux problèmes sur les lieux de travail, elle doit se référer à une idée éclairée de la façon dont une organisation génère des significations et attribue des valeurs. Ceci fait appel à une analyse organisationnelle fine et à des approches sur mesure. Une approche contextuelle opère un glissement de perspective en évitant d'insister sur le statut sensément déviant des minorités ethniques pour mettre en évidence les problèmes auxquels les organisations font face au moment de transiger avec le caractère réflexif de leur activité, dont des exemples cruciaux sont la diversité et l'inégalité sociale. La gestion de la diversité peut devenir alors une source d'innovation organisationnelle plutôt qu'une stratégie défensive. L'introduction de théories traitant du marché du travail, du leadership, de la dynamique et de l'apprentissage organisationnels devient une étape nécessaire pour ce faire.

Quant aux pratiques, la référence au contexte englobe des mesures et des méthodes qui permettent de rendre compte d'une façon cohérente à la fois de l'ordre culturel (les valeurs, les attitudes, les connaissances, les comportements) et de l'ordre social (processus de recrutement et de sélection, description et évaluation des emplois, rémunération, feedback, mobilité, interdépendances et conflits d'intérêts) qui ont cours dans les organisations. Le point de départ de cette approche consiste à développer et à renouveler les habiletés à travailler et à vivre ensemble au sein des diverses organisations de travail. Ceci implique la création d'environnements d'apprentissage très puissants, qui invitent à leur tour à la mise sur pied d'équipes de travail diverses, de systèmes de mentors, de l'espace pour les échanges et la réflexion, etc. La formation à l'externe peut être utile dans ce cas seulement si elle est appariée aux processus d'apprentissage qui ont cours.

L'analyse contextuelle de la pratique de la gestion de la diversité révèle qu'elle peut certainement par elle-même apporter une contribution à

l'un de ses deux objectifs, à savoir le relèvement du niveau de productivité des entreprises dans des sociétés multi-ethniques, même si elle le fait par des moyens défensifs. Elle ne peut cependant espérer promouvoir la justice sociale, son second objectif, qui est de l'ordre d'une distribution égale des occasions sur le marché du travail, de la valorisation des différences culturelles ou des organisations protectrices, si elle n'est pas reliée à des politiques adéquates dans les domaines de l'éducation, du marché du travail et de la lutte contre la discrimination. De là, elle doit alors se mettre activement à la recherche de partenaires externes.

La gestion de la diversité fait nécessairement l'objet d'une pratique, lorsque des objectifs de productivité et de justice sociale vont de pair, mais plus souvent qu'autrement ces deux objectifs s'affrontent. Un défi alors se présente qui peut être relevé efficacement par une pratique d'envergure et une conscience aiguë de sa position sur le terrain. La diversité se présente comme un phénomène durable et envahissant à un point tel qu'elle a un impact sur la vie d'une organisation dans la société globale. La lutte contre la discrimination, la valorisation des différences culturelles et le développement de qualifications pertinentes au travail demeureront des activités significatives dans l'avenir. Cependant, de tels efforts porteront des fruits seulement si les organisations sont prêtes à faire face aux conséquences déshumanisantes des aménagements organisationnels, des routines de travail et des échanges soi-disant neutres.

Les organisations de travail doivent être en mesure de répondre des conséquences des changements, des risques et des iniquités qu'elles génèrent dans la société. L'approche contextuelle, selon notre point de vue, peut les aider à cheminer dans cette direction et à prendre les mesures nécessaires.