

Theorizing Diversity in Management Studies: New Perspectives and Future Directions

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Abstract:

In this introductory article for the special issue of *Journal of Management Studies*, entitled 'Diversity perspective in management: Towards more complex conceptualizations of diversity in management studies', we highlight thematic research avenues that emerged out of the set of studies accepted for publication. Recognizing that even a set of articles as diverse as those in this special issue cannot realistically represent all new research directions in a field, we identify developing areas in diversity research and call out additional avenues for research. We hope our commentary inspires scholars to unveil new understandings of how diversity affects our organizational and work lives and can contribute to making the world a better place.

Keywords: diversity | societal shifts | inequality | intersectionality | context | mechanisms

Article:

Introduction

This special issue aims to further develop our knowledge about diversity in management studies. By bringing together new theoretical and empirical contributions, the special issue editors and contributors want to elucidate more comprehensively how diversity affects individuals, groups, networks, organizations, fields and the 'nested complexity of real organizational life' (Klein and Kozlowski, 2000), develop pertinent and highly applicable insights for practice, and set an agenda for a new wave of diversity research.

Diversity is particularly pertinent because of a combination of established long-term trends and disruptive political events. Organizations, their stakeholders, and communities face more forms and levels of diversity than before because of societal developments such as mass migration, aging populations, changing career patterns, same sex marriage legislation, and new generational lifestyles and preferences. There are many more ‘others’ to consider, and this affects organizational issues such as career structures, HR strategies, customer expectations, investor relations, and strategy formulation. At the same time, political events such as Brexit in the UK and the rise of populist parties and governments across the world, including those in the US, demonstrate that at least some part of the population favours cultural cohesiveness, celebrates ‘nativist’ and dominant identities, and seeks a more nationalistic rhetoric. As such, while diversity on the ground may be increasing, it is simultaneously confronted by new discourses of cohesiveness, coherence, nationalism, and integration that emphasize local interests, values, and identities.

For all these reasons, it is increasingly clear that diversity research requires more complex theorizing. The studies offered in this special issue provide insight into how we can expand the boundaries of diversity research. Collectively, they contribute to our understanding of the complex ways in which diversity operates at multiple organizational levels, as captured by a variety of research methodologies and research settings. To complement several excellent reviews of diversity research in recent years (e.g., Janssens and Zanoni, 2021; Roberson, 2019; Roberson and Ryan, 2017), we chose to highlight in this introduction a number of core thematic research avenues that emerged out of the set of studies accepted for publication in this special issue: (1) Addressing the interplay between diversity and inequality; (2) Bringing in diversity context and diversity-related ideologies; (3) Digging deeper into deep-level diversity; (4) Incorporating the role of large-scale demographic and technological shifts; and (5) Uncovering additional mechanisms and conditions through which diversity operates. In doing so, we hope to motivate scholars to engage in novel research on these important topics. We conclude our special issue introduction by offering additional promising directions for future research on diversity in management studies.

Five New Avenues for Diversity Research

Addressing the Interplay Between Diversity and Inequality

Management research on diversity has paid insufficient attention to the role of inequality, and more specifically, to the role of structural inequality (Amis and Mair, 2020; DiTomaso and Post, 2007; Joshi and Neely, 2018). Diversity research in management has tended to focus on compositional issues in groups and organizations (e.g., numerical majority vs. numerical minority group members; faultlines), the social significance of those groups in a given organization or context (e.g., token group member; more or less stigmatized groups) or their relevance for group and organizational performance (e.g., personality, cognition, functional or educational background), and the interpersonal (e.g., bias, discrimination, attraction, similarity) or group-level outcomes (e.g., conflict, cohesion, performance) that ensue. Some diversity research has examined the implications of distinctions within groups and organizations (e.g., gender, race, religion) that have social significance in a given context (DiTomaso et al., 2007a). This research has recognized that differences in how group members act and interact may stem

from their group's power and status relative to other social groups. Yet, even this research has failed to account fully for structural inequality; that is, for the relative power and status of different social groups within a given context and for how the advantages and disadvantages they confer cumulate across institutions and over time to produce systemic discrimination, reproduce inequality, and stymie organizational diversity management efforts (e.g., Cheryan and Markus, 2020; Reskin, 2012).

The limited attention to structural inequality experienced by social groups studied in management and diversity research is problematic because diversity cannot be sufficiently well understood and addressed without attention to structural inequality (Bunderson and Van der Vegt, 2018). Structural and institutional arrangements provide some groups with more resources and power over others, with a better understanding of how to use those resources and power to their benefit, and with a superior ability to create and shape institutions that maintain existing power and resource differentials (DiTomaso et al., 2007; Haack and Sieweke, 2018; Montgomery and Dacin, 2021). When diversity theories do not account for these structural and institutional arrangements, they are unlikely to fully explain how diversity operates in organizations; how inequality is created, maintained, and reproduced in organizations; and how it may be contested and disrupted. This may be why the solutions articulated until now in the diversity literature and practice (e.g., anti-bias training, recognition of individuals' unique capabilities, inclusion, organizational policies and practices) have often been ineffective at eliminating inequality in organizations (Kalev and Kelly, 2006).

Several articles in this special issue bring the issue of structural inequality to bear on diversity research. DiTomaso (2021) demonstrates how history, institutions, and structural arrangements among groups have, over time, combined to create and legitimize the diversity landscape that researchers, diversity practitioners, and policy makers today often take for granted, ignoring the link between inequality and diversity. DiTomaso's explanations of how intergroup relations are invariably contested and – in democratic systems – subjected to social change provide an intriguing avenue for thinking about how forces external to organizations and diversity training might affect intergroup relations at work. More broadly, DiTomaso makes a compelling case for diversity researchers to take more of an interdisciplinary and macro approach if they want to fully understand how we might all 'be able to get along'.

Bhardwaj and colleagues (2021) examine how status hierarchies affect friendship mechanisms in the Indian caste system, based on groups' relative access to and mutual dependence on resources and on the extent to which intergroup relationships are experienced as toxic. In doing so, they provide insights into how status hierarchies are reinforced and bridged that might extend to societies with less formalized or socially recognized social stratification. Bhardwaj et al.'s explanations of how the middle-status social groups are most likely to have ties with those both in higher- and lower-status groups points to another avenue for thinking about how intergroup relations might be addressed in work organizations.

Konrad and colleagues (2021) conceive of meritocracy as a tool serving the interests of advantaged groups and of diversity as a tool serving the interests of marginalized groups. Recognizing that 'ongoing societal-level conflicts between advantaged and marginalized identity groups exist and manifest themselves within organizations through struggles over status, power,

and resources' (p. x), they identify an avenue for reconciling the tensions between the instruments of meritocracy and of diversity that enables organizational leaders to develop structural solutions to help address societal inequality. Konrad and her colleagues explain how tensions created by disruptive diversity and inclusion events provide opportunities for organizational leaders to address the concerns of dominant and marginalized groups. In this way, Konrad et al.'s study provides yet another avenue for thinking about how inequality may be disrupted in organizations.

As these three special issue papers illustrate, bringing structural inequality theories into diversity research presents exciting opportunities to develop new theoretical insights. Calls to incorporate structural inequality in diversity research are not new (Bell et al., 2018; DiTomaso et al., 2007, 2007a); and more work in this area has emerged in recent years (e.g., Bell and Marquardt, 2014; Haack and Sieweke, 2018; Janssens and Steyaert, 2020). In addition, movements and demonstrations for social justice worldwide (e.g., Black Lives Matter and the #MeToo movement) have stimulated diversity scholars as well as management scholars more generally to re-examine their inattention to structural inequality (e.g., Bapuji et al., 2020; Wickert et al., 2021). Fortunately, rich theories of structural and societal inequality from multiple fields (e.g., institutional theory, sociology, and critical diversity scholarship) can be leveraged to account more fully for the role of structural inequality in diversity research.

Bringing in Diversity Context and Diversity-related Ideologies

Because diversity research is multidisciplinary and multilevel, diversity scholars have been called to pay more attention to the critical role of context in their theorizing. As Joshi and Roh (2007) observed, 'research evidence demonstrating a business case for diversity is by and large equivocal... (therefore) researchers need to reframe current approaches to diversity research by engaging in more comprehensive considerations of the context of diversity' (p. 2). Additional reviews further confirm the need of studying diversity context to better understand the effects of team diversity in organizations (Joshi and Neely, 2018; Joshi and Roh, 2007; Maloney et al., 2016). While some progress has been made in this area (Olsen et al., 2016; Zhao and Wry, 2016), diversity research must expand its definition of context to fully understand its implications for diversity.

Diversity context ranges from distal contexts such as national culture and industry, to proximal contexts such as to organizational culture, structure, and history and, eventually, to discrete contexts that include various team-related aspects such as team climate and leadership. This full range of diversity contexts should be given more comprehensive attention in diversity research (Nkomo et al., 2019). Only when context is unpacked and more carefully examined will we be able to comprehend *why* diversity produces given outcomes; to answer the pertinent *when*, *where*, and *how* questions in diversity research and practice; to resolve mixed research findings; and to help practitioners manage diversity more effectively.

The socio-political and technology contexts of diversity matter, given the rapid changes that characterize them. Theorizing and testing national contextual influences can be thorny because of the complexity of state government regulation and because of variations in regulatory enforcement. Even within a nation, the legal and political context matters, because state-level

regulations related to equal employment and the nation's political cultures may influence diversity in race or ethnicity; that is, to what extent ethnic minority occupy different levels of managerial positions in organizations. For example, in examining private workplaces, Skaggs and Kmec (2020) found that, in states with more expansive equal employment opportunity (EEO) job posting requirements, non-white managers are better represented at upper and lower managerial levels, whereas states with lower EEO compliance penalties have fewer non-white lower-level managers. They also found early adoption of fair employment practices agencies to be positively associated only with lower-level managerial diversity, whereas progressive state government ideology is negatively related to top managerial diversity. Several articles in this special issue illustrate how theorizing context yields rich insights into the workings and possibilities of diversity. These papers tackle the influence of contexts such as multinational corporations (MNCs) (Vaara and Tienari, 2021), organizational ideologies (Konrad et al., 2021), and organizational-level demographic faultlines (Leicht-Deobald et al., 2021).

Vaara et al. (2021) integrate cross-cultural management into diversity research in response to growing calls for studying 'global diversity management'. Drawing on the concept of identity politics, Vaara and his colleagues (2021) propose four different perspectives on the potential role of MNCs in national identity politics, providing a novel theoretical basis for studying diversity- and inclusion-related issues. Their work calls for additional research relating global mobility within MNCs to unique diversity-related issues.

Konrad et al. (2021) conceptual paper in this special issue engages with the issue of how organizations leverage the interrelatedness of diversity and meritocracy to achieve diversity, inclusion, and fairness among employees. Acknowledging that diversity and meritocracy are not only in conflict but are also interrelated, these authors suggest that the diversity–meritocracy paradox manifests through interactions as an identity validation–threat system; thus, events benefiting marginalized groups threaten advantaged groups and vice versa. This suggests that the adoption of balanced combinations of practices to fulfil diversity and meritocracy pressures could eventually enhance their perceived fairness, and – presumably – acceptance. Konrad and her colleagues' work open the door to investigate causes and implications of the interplay between organizational diversity and inclusion policies and practices and diversity-related ideologies for the effectiveness of diversity management in the organizations.

Leicht-Deobald et al. (2021) examine the role of organizational demographic fault lines in reducing or enhancing employees' collective organizational identification, whereby organizational demographic fault lines have detrimental or beneficial effects depending on the functional diversity within fault line-based demographic subgroups. Although organizational demographic fault lines have important consequences, functional diversity, acting as a 'trigger', changes whether these consequences are negative or positive. Such diversity activation issues are more easily observed in connection to organizational restructuring processes such as a merger and acquisition because these are often accompanied by the emergence of fault lines. Through their work, Leicht-Deobald and colleagues highlight the central role of 'activation' in understanding diversity and its implications.

Overall, the papers in this special issue showcase the theoretical promise and practical value of more carefully considering the critical role of context in theorizing diversity.

Digging Deeper into Deep-level Diversity

The literature has historically prioritized visible ‘surface-level’ forms of diversity, most notably gender and ethnicity. This is not surprising, given the importance of these as sources of social stratification and inequality as well as their relative ease of observation. Later, research began to consider less visible ‘deep-level’ forms of diversity such as religion, sexual orientation, class, and political orientation. Researchers have also studied how the two types of diversity (i.e., surface-level diversity and deep-level diversity) impact and even interact with each other to influence individual and groups outcomes, such as group members’ emotions and behaviours and, eventually, the effectiveness of their decision-making (e.g., Mohammed and Angell, 2004; Phillips and Lloyd, 2006; Spickermann and Zimmermann, 2014). Surprisingly, the interest in intersectionality (Browne and Misra, 2003; Holvino, 2010; McCall, 2005; Tomlinson et al., 2019), which seeks to understand the multiplicative effects of belonging to or identifying with multiple social groups along visible social identities (e.g., being a woman, being Black), has not crossed over to explore how various deep-level diversity characteristics intersect.

Further, some types of deep-level diversity are relatively understudied. Of pivotal importance here is a form of less visible diversity which has traditionally not received as much attention in the management literature as others: social class (Kish-Gephart and Campbell, 2015; Romani et al., 2021; Savage, 2015; Zanoni et al., 2010). While socio-political and even educational scholars have paid careful attention to class, the lesser attention in management research is perhaps unsurprising: diversity management as a discipline has been often criticized (Janssens and Zanoni, 2021; Kelly and Dobbin, 1998; Van Dijk et al., 2012) for its tendency to depoliticize diversity and inclusion by reframing it as a ‘business’ rather than as a normative or civil rights case. Indeed, one criticism of the diversity management literature is that it is blind to the structural advantages of class and to how class intersects with other individual characteristics within inequality regimes (Acker, 2006; Munir, 2020). Thus, even looking at the privileged work of white male professionals, Freidman et al. (2015, 2020) find that working-class males earn 17 per cent less than their middle-class peers. Importantly, in this context, forms of difference are not neutral identity markers but are often tied to uneven terms, conditions, and opportunities in what is an unequal system of social and economic relationships.

Among the papers in this special issue, Bhardwaj et al. (2021) picks up directly on the sub-theme of class through their study of caste relationships among Indian elites (MBA students). This study examines how social stratification is reproduced through the networking patterns (friendship relationships) of individuals with different caste backgrounds. Their study shows how both upper caste and lower caste members display a strong homophily in their networking patterns, which suggests entrenched social positions. Yet this reflects different experiences and motivations. Thus, for instance, lower caste members show more tenuous and unstable connection networks, especially when people in higher groups are concerned; it is likely that the toxicity of this perceived ostracism contributes to their homophily. For upper class members, homophily is likely to reflect traditional closure arguments (Parkin, 1979). Interestingly, middle caste members are much more heterophilous in their decisions and therefore potentially represent a mechanism for linking different groups and a conduit for more diversity within organizations.

A second sub-theme in deep-level diversity research concerns the strategies best used to manage less visible forms of diversity, considering their potential for stigmatization (Clair and Clair, 2005; Sabat et al., 2020). One key difference between deeper-level characteristics like religion, sexual orientation, or class and surface-level ones is that individuals have more of a choice to conceal or reveal the former. Research questions stemming from the reveal or not choice centre around the costs and benefits of revealing versus concealing and the conditions that alter those outcomes. Somewhat reassuringly, Ahmad et al. (2021), in their analysis of religious beliefs published in this issue, come out in favour of reveal strategies. The theoretical explanation is that authenticity elicits positive interpersonal reactions. Future longitudinal studies may shed even more light on the effectiveness of various (no) reveal strategies by observing their effects over time, adopting a temporal view that is especially, but not only, well-suited for studying deep-level diversity (e.g., Ling et al., 2015; Meister et al., 2020).

As a third sub-theme, our contributors also focus on deep forms of diversity, which are perhaps even less visible and include differences in personalities, attitudes, beliefs and values, and functional forms of expertise, with a particular focus on how these affect different team and organizational performance outcomes (Gupta et al., 2017, 2019). Triana et al. (2021), in what is an unprecedented meta-analysis (93 papers), found a negative relationship between deep-level diversity and positive team outcomes, especially in situations of task complexity. Their study differentiates between different forms of deep-level diversity, with values and culture being more problematic than diversity of personalities. Narayan and colleagues (2020) also take on this sub-theme by exploring the impact of cognitive (thought) and ideological (values) diversity within top management teams (TMTs) on a valuable organizational outcome: business model innovation. Here, cognitive diversity does not seem to favour the introduction of innovative business models, as differences in thought dictated by national or disciplinary backgrounds may compromise communication or follow-on action. Ideological diversity has a curvilinear relationship, at first supporting business model innovation before eventually hampering it, perhaps because too much difference in values engenders mistrust and animosity among members. Importantly and on a more optimistic note both relationships are positively moderated by longevity, given that the longer teams work together the likelier, they are to develop routines, shared understanding, and effective collaboration patterns (Ling et al., 2015; Mohammed and Angell, 2004; Phillips and Lloyd, 2006; Putnam et al., 1993; Spickermann et al., 2014), which allows them to overcome differences.

Incorporating the Role of Large-scale Demographic and Technological Shifts

Individuals and companies are embedded in increasingly volatile environments that are experiencing important demographic and technological shifts. Political and economic crises have triggered new immigration streams that are changing the supply of labour in multiple countries. At the same time, population aging is causing substantial labour shortages in several countries, triggering the need for additional migration inflows. Immigration and migration, however, do not only trigger opportunities and alleviate labour shortages: they also cause fear and anxiety among citizens, who sometimes perceive newcomers as a threat to their own labour position and cultural identity. In this way, demographic transitions can contribute to conflict and polarization in particular regions or countries (Johnston et al., 2015). Next to demographic shifts, we also see fundamental technological changes, which the global coronavirus pandemic has accelerated.

Digitalization is forcing companies to acquire an inherently different workforce (Gupta, 2018). Moreover, recent breakthroughs in robotics and artificial intelligence enable automating an increasing number of tasks, changing the bargaining power and status of numerous professions (Iansiti and Lakhani, 2020).

As the papers in this special issue demonstrate, these demographic and technological shifts increase the salience of various diversity dimensions within organizations. Vaara et al. (2021), for instance, highlights that, given the resurgence of nationalism around the world, national identities become an important source of demographic diversity in MNCs that can lead to the manifestation of identity politics. Demographic shifts and technological changes also imply increasing inequality. According to Vaara et al. (2021), this may produce new axes of meaningful differences within MNCs, where the distinction between elite and non-elite employees is likely to become more salient. These alternative sources of diversity have the potential to generate novel fault lines within organizations. As Leicht-Deobald et al. (2021) show, such fault lines may not only impede some teams' performance but may also alter the performance of an entire organization. These emerging diversity dimensions may require new methodological approaches to adequately quantify them. In this special issue, Narayan, Sidhu, and Volberda (2020), for instance, rely on publicly available data on individuals' donations to Republican and Democratic causes to operationalize the level of ideological diversity in U.S.-based TMTs.

Whereas demographic and technological transitions increase the salience of some diversity dimensions, they can also blur distinctions within organizations. Given the increased digitalization of work, the distinction between onsite and offsite employees might become fuzzier. It is conceivable that, as virtual labour migration increases, the need for physical migration diminishes. These changes can give an inherently different meaning to who is seen as the organizational 'insider' and 'outsider'. Fundamental technological developments can contribute to the blurring of additional boundaries. For instance, recent developments in natural language processing (e.g., gpt3, WuDao 2.0) make it increasingly difficult to recognize whether intellectual activities (e.g., writing an article, engaging in a conversation, creative thinking) are executed by humans or machines. Such blurring boundaries between human and machine-based decision-making are likely to have huge implications for the future of managing organizations, suggesting even more radical distinctions in diversity.

Demographic and technological shifts are also creating new challenges for organizations. Fundamental demographic shifts require companies to target novel customer segments for their existing business models. Moreover, technological breakthroughs imply that companies' existing value propositions and revenue streams risk disruption. These challenges are pushing companies to engage in significant transformation trajectories where they must implement more agile organizational structures, engage in complex partnerships with external partners to build resilient ecosystems, and experiment with alternative business models. The contribution of Narayan and Sidhu (2020) to this special issue indicates that workforce diversity can be an important asset to address these necessary organizational challenges. Based on a longitudinal analysis of firms in the U.S. printing and publishing industry, Narayan et al. (2020) provide evidence that cognitive and ideological diversity have a primarily positive influence on business model innovation. At the same time, this special issue strongly suggests that the extent to which organizations can

benefit from diversity to accelerate corporate transformation is likely to depend on how diversity and the associated identities are managed. Focusing on religious identities, Ahmad et al.'s (2021) experimental study shows the importance of fostering authenticity in revealing deep-level identities, as this can positively influence interpersonal interactions between individuals. In other words, diversity can be a constructive force in change management when employees are encouraged to openly reveal these differences.

Uncovering Additional Mechanisms and Conditions Through Which Diversity Operates

In management studies, a central question in diversity research has been the impact of diversity on team and organizational outcomes. Because research on the effects of diversity has produced contradictory findings, diversity has been described as a 'double-edged sword' that has potential for both positive and negative outcomes (Chrobot-Mason and Aramovich, 2013). As the literature on diversity has matured, researchers have increasingly begun to ask more complex research questions beyond the direct positive or negative effects of diversity (Roberson, 2019). A more nuanced understanding of diversity requires exploring further how, why, and when diversity results in various outcomes, which shifts the focus from the effect per se to understanding the specific impact mechanisms involved (e.g., Post et al., 2020; Tuggle et al., 2021). An important collective contribution of the articles in this special issue is that they advance our theoretical understanding of mechanisms through which diversity operates.

First, the type of diversity in question influences the impact mechanisms. Triana et al. (2021) show how the specific type of deep-level diversity moderates the effects of diversity in teams. For instance, value diversity most notably hinders positive team processes, whereas the effect of cultural diversity is the strongest in inflaming negative team processes. In addition, Narayan et al. (2020) show differences in the effects of TMT cognitive and ideological diversity. They find that TMT cognitive diversity increases the attention-scope of TMT's business model innovation, while both TMT cognitive diversity and TMT ideological diversity contribute to the intensity of business model innovation. The results of Narayan et al. (2020) also suggest that "too much" ideological diversity can negatively affect business model innovation intensity, pointing to the possibility of nonlinear effects of diversity. The challenge for theorizing on and around diversity is to understand the differences in the impact mechanisms depending on the type of diversity and how these mechanisms can or cannot be generalized to apply to another type of diversity. How can we learn from research on diversity at a more general level to avoid fragmentation while still acknowledging the unique impact mechanisms related to specific types of diversity that, in practice, translate to the unique opportunities and challenges that different types of minority groups may experience? For instance, challenges related to racial and cultural diversity have complex historical and institutional underpinnings (DiTomaso, 2021), which may well create unique influence mechanisms. Furthermore, the concept of 'diversity' by itself is dynamic as well as culturally and societally contingent and socially constructed (Roberson et al., 2017), which implies that the impact mechanisms may vary over time. To further complicate matters, different types of diversity can be linked to different aspects of identity (Kreiner et al., 2006), and detangling the effects of diversity may be difficult because they stem from identification processes at multiple levels. Accordingly, as DiTomaso (2021) notes, capturing the impact mechanisms of diversity over time calls for a multilevel analysis that accounts for the interrelationships between and mutual causality of effects.

Second, the effects of diversity are influenced by team- or subgroup-level and individual processes, as several studies in this special issue illustrate. The meta-analysis conducted by Triana et al. (2021) identifies important team-level mediators (positive emergent states, positive team processes, and team conflict) of the effect of diversity on team performance. Triana et al. (2021) also point to team-level characteristic, such as team task complexity and team type (executive vs. non-executive), as potentially important moderators of the impact of diversity. Narayan et al. (2020) establish a further team-level moderator of diversity – top management team longevity – in the context of business model innovations. The study of Leicht-Deobald et al. (2021), in turn, shows how the direction of the diversity effect may depend on subgroup characteristics: functional heterogeneity in the subgroup can alter the effect of organizational demographic fault lines (based on age and gender). With low functional heterogeneity, the impact of demographic fault lines on organizational outcomes (organizational identification, firm innovation, performance) is negative. However, with high functional heterogeneity, the impact is positive. Furthermore, status can play an important role. The study of Bhardwaj et al. (2021) extends status to include high, middle, and low levels. The role of the middle-level status is particularly important: middle-status group members are the most open to forming ties across status diversity – a mechanism that the authors call ‘middle-status ambivalence’. This points to the importance of status as a mechanism in diversity-related processes. In addition, based on research in identity work (Cox, 1994; Watson, 2008), the way an individual espouses and expresses a diverse identity may influence its effects. One of the most intriguing findings coming out of this special issue relates to the effect of religious identity management behaviours. The experimental study of Ahmad et al. (2021) demonstrates how a ‘revealing strategy’ in terms of ardently expressing a religious affiliation enhanced interpersonal reactions across religious groups through enhanced perceptions of authenticity. This relates to similar findings in prior research regarding freedom to express identity as a positive mediator of the effects of diversity (Chrobot-Mason and Aramovich, 2013).

Third, the institutional, industry, and organizational contexts, within which the above-mentioned team and individual processes take place, can play a major moderating or mediating role (Joshi and Roh, 2009). At the institutional level, external stakeholders (e.g., government and labour unions, professional associations, competitors) can influence the processes related to diversity through mechanisms such as legislation, industry standards, and sharing of best practices. At the organizational level, diversity management practices reduce the conflict potential of diversity while increasing the positive effects to create value from diversity (Yang and Konrad, 2011). However, a particularly challenging aspect for organizational practice is aligning diversity management practices with other important organizational values and practices. The conceptual paper by Konrad et al. (2021) presents a framework for developing an ambidextrous HRM system that supports the values of diversity and meritocracy – often viewed as paradoxical – in a balanced and complementary way. More broadly, this connects to a new way of theorizing around diversity that challenges simplistic conceptualizations of the effects of diversity and instead puts forwards mechanisms to align the tensions around diversity. For example, optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991; Thatcher and Patel, 2012) focuses on balancing diversity and uniqueness, whereas cross-categorization theory (Sawyer et al., 2006; Thatcher and Patel, 2012) shows how shared attributes between groups can bridge intergroup differences. Furthermore, systems theory (Schad and Bansal, 2018) could offer a way to theorize about the

various forms of diversity and their effects at multiple levels within a social system. Finally, beyond seeing organizations as ‘passive’ contexts, Vaara et al. (2021) present organizations – particularly large multinational corporations – as important actors that actively engage in national identity building and legitimation processes that shape the effect of diversity through social identification processes (Vaara et al., 2021), aligning with the sensemaking and social constructionist perspective on diversity (Roberson and Stevens, 2006).

It is this inherent complexity surrounding the influence mechanisms of diversity at different levels of analyses that makes the topic particularly challenging, yet exciting to explore in management studies.

Propelling Research on Diversity in Management Studies

Even a set of articles as diverse as those in this special issue cannot realistically represent all new research directions or calls for research in a given field. Therefore, in this next section, we identify some developing areas and call out additional avenues for research in management and organization studies. Some of these are questions from our call for special issue submissions that have yet to receive attention; others are new questions that have emerged in response to societal events and in self-reflection in the academy and among special issue editors over the last few years. Table I lists these questions by theme.

Table I. Propelling research on diversity in management studies

Research calls	Illustrative research questions
Theorize responses to diversity-related societal events and social movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How, when, and to what extent do individual behaviors at work vary as social events and social movements unfold and in response to those events? • What are the implications of diversity-related social events and movements for deepening or closing social, organizational, and team divides? • How do social events elevate diversity to a strategic decision-making level? • How and why does the way in which organizations position themselves and respond to powerful diversity-related societal debates vary? With what effects for which stakeholders?
Unveil further our understanding of inequality in diversity research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the multilevel effects of inequality in diversity research? • How does systemic inequality across a range of interconnected institutions affect disparities in career trajectories and in intra- and interorganizational and societal mobility? • What is the range of institutional barriers or privileges that must be considered in diversity research? • How can we theorize a wide range of institutional barriers and privileges into diversity research? • What interventions, at and across multiple levels of analysis, promote equality?
Conceive context more broadly to expand diversity research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do long-term trends and emerging developments relate to diversity and inequality? • How can coherent HR policies and consistent minimum standards be maintained across the different organizational, occupational, and national contexts involved in them?

Research calls	Illustrative research questions
Extend intersectionality hypotheses to deep forms of diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effective are diversity, inclusion, and equity practices in systems where work is done outside corporate boundaries? • When, by whom, and how might global value chains, which are presently (and often by design) unequal and exploitative structures, be democratized? • How do home-country–host-country power relations shape the transfer of diversity practices across multinational corporations? • How, when, and with what effect do different deep-level diversity dimensions interact with one another? • How does identity work enable the bridging of individuals’ different self- and social identities to obtain internal and external legitimacy? • How, when, and to what extent does deep-level diversity interact with surface-level diversity to affect group- and firm-level opportunities and outcomes? • How are ‘paradoxical’ tensions resolved, when networks built to support a single identity category marginalize members with other minority identities?

Theorize Responses to Diversity-related Societal Events and Social Movements

Societal events from the past few years have pushed diversity up on organizations’ agendas. In 2017, for instance, the Harvey Weinstein scandal elevated the #MeToo movement to a global phenomenon, triggering much discussion globally around workplace gender equality. More recently, the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other Black men and women at the hands of police officers in the United States galvanized racial justice activists and protest movements around the world, generating increased awareness of and intensifying demands for the removal of systemic barriers to racial equality in society. Even societal events that, at first glance appear to affect all equally, may have important diversity and equity implications. COVID-19, for example, appears to have caused disproportionately more death and hospitalizations of minorities and the poor, especially in countries with a more heterogenous population and with cultures characterized by a lower tolerance for ambiguity (Avery, 2020). COVID-19 also has had significant impact on women’s work, employment, work-family arrangements and networks (Milliken et al., 2020). Because organizations are not isolated entities, they are drawn into these powerful diversity-related societal debates. As societal events and movements expose issues of diversity and inequality, a wide range of stakeholders are calling organizations to act. Beaulieu (2020), for instance, argued that, as employees increasingly share their experiences of sexual harassment in the workplace, organizational leaders must be prepared to navigate such challenging conversations. In the wake of the killing of George Floyd, Kramer (2020) formulated ‘The 10 Commitments Companies Must Make to Advance Racial Justice’, highlighting the need for organizations to take a clear stance in this societal debate.

Individuals’ behaviours at work may vary as social events and social movements unfold. Events such as the murder of George Floyd are racially traumatic events that deplete social, psychological, and cognitive resources and shatter one’s sense of organizational safety, causing withdrawal and absenteeism (McCluney et al., 2017). Social events can also shape organizational identification processes and may propel positive organizational deviance (Leigh and Melwani, 2019). Despite the well-developed organizational scholarship on how personal and professional life events affect individuals at work, much more work must be done on the

consequences for individuals and groups of mega-events, larger-scale events that affect distant others (Tilcsik and Marquis, 2013).

Organizations too, vary in their responses to these societal events. Some take an activist approach, formulating a strong position in particular debates and taking drastic action. Since 2019, for example, FIFA, soccer's world governing body, has strengthened its disciplinary penalties for racism (Federation Internationale de Football Association, 2019). Also, many organizations have internally revised and revitalized their HR processes to recruit and retain a diverse workforce more effectively. For example, public universities are developing novel approaches to hiring underrepresented faculty, such as setting aside special hiring budgets for diverse faculty (Newman, 2020). Other organizations, however, are less outspoken and take a more passive approach in response to societal debates on diversity-related issues. In response to the lack of responsiveness of some corporations, non-profit organizations have emerged that are pushing firms to reconsider inequality-related issues. Listing equality as an indicator in its assessment for certification, the B Corp movement, for instance, has helped many businesses to become more inclusive (Marquis, 2020).

In sum, recent societal events have significantly influenced public debate and opinions about diversity-related issues, most notably around race and gender, which are requiring organizations to ask important questions: What is our position in relation to these societal debates? How must our practices (e.g., human resources, marketing, and corporate social responsibility) change to align with changing public opinion on diversity and inequality? Should we be a frontrunner or a follower in redefining our diversity policies in response to changing views on important societal debates?

These questions also trigger interesting opportunities for academic research. For instance, we think it would be valuable to map and categorize the broad spectrum of reactions that organizations formulate in the face of such novel diversity-driven societal debates and to explore why organizations' reactions diverge. We also expect complex relationships between employees, customers, and shareholders based on their differing natures, the strategies that organizations develop to respond to diversity-related societal events, and the reactions of their stakeholders to such strategies. Longitudinal case-based research (e.g., Pfefferman et al., 2021) disentangling these complex relationships and identifying the underlying mechanisms is likely to generate rich and important insights in this respect. Further, we observe a dramatic lack of attention to the topics of sexual assault in management and organizational studies, which contrasts sharply with what the #MeToo movement made exceedingly clear: such experiences derail careers and are embedded in organizational practices and cultures in ways that have not sufficiently been examined from a management and organizational studies perspective. Finally, expanding the range of diversity-related stakeholders (including, e.g., the media, regulatory bodies, labour unions, activists, shareholders, customers, employees, search firms, and communities) offers rich new angles for developing innovative research questions that are likely to have a wider impact (Wickert et al., 2021). While social movements may help give voice to previously 'silent' or 'omitted' stakeholders, the portrayal of and responses to social movements may still be influenced by the power positions and interests of different stakeholders.

Unveil Further Our Understanding of Inequality in Diversity Research

As we discussed extensively above, diversity research would have much to gain by considering the important work on inequality conducted in other fields and burgeoning research on these questions in management and organization studies. For example, preliminary work suggests that COVID-19 has had more severe impact in more ethnically diverse or high-inequality countries and that minorities and the poor were especially likely to have been harmed (Avery, 2020; Piekkari et al., 2021). Among the many avenues such cross-disciplinary work could open up, we see distinct possibilities for developing the research on careers and intra- and interorganizational and societal mobility by considering a much fuller range of institutional barriers and privileges that can help us understand and explain persisting disparities. Such research would seek to improve our understanding of how systematic societal inequalities within and across countries in such areas as housing, schooling, health care, criminal justice, and political voice shape work opportunities, career progression, and even migration patterns. Because inequality exists at so many levels (organizational, field or professional, regional, national, societal, international organizational) and can be exacerbated by demographic and technological shifts, we further encourage research that elaborates on the role of inequality at multiple levels of analysis and over time, as well as a result of external societal shocks and large-scale events.

Conceive Context More Broadly to Expand Diversity Research

Most of the papers in our collection are set at the organizational level. Yet, because of the combination of continuing long trends (e.g., globalization) and new emerging developments (e.g., platform economy), a growing share of economic activity takes place across and outside traditional organizational boundaries. Therefore, we call for organizational-level diversity research that develops and improves our understanding of how these increasingly important contexts (Janssens and Zanoni, 2021) relate to diversity and inequality.

For example, global value chains (GVCs), which stretch across different countries and occupational settings, each with their own regulatory frameworks and work practices, typically seek to exploit structural inequalities (e.g., wage costs, regulatory burdens) across countries. Indeed, GVCs are predicated on a highly unequal division of labour whereby certain participants (generally in the Global South) are exploited, silenced, and subjected to precarious terms and conditions and effectively are treated as a source of value for the benefit of other participants in the chain (Janssens and Zanoni, 2021; Zanoni et al., 2010). This can result in tragic events, such as the Rana Plaza disaster (Chowdhury, 2017; Reinecke and Donaghey, 2015, 2021) as well as in the everyday reproduction of patterns of gender, racial, and class discrimination. Consideration of these significant contexts raises a series of new research questions: How can coherent HR policies and consistent minimum standards be maintained across the different organizational, occupational, and national contexts involved? What would it look like to democratize what presently are (and often by design) unequal and exploitative structures in GVC? How can employees and other activists organize to improve working conditions across the GVC?

MNCs are another particularly interesting setting, as they operate across national boundaries and therefore bear institution- and market-based pressures in multiple countries. Whether and how MNCs adapt to host countries' labour market policies while maintaining effectiveness in

diversity management is a pressing topic for research. For example, we need much better understanding of how and why employees in an overseas subsidiary may accept or challenge the diversity practices transferred from their home company (e.g., Fernando, 2020). The dynamics of home–host power relations, as the mechanism shaping the global transfer of diversity practices across MNCs, also requires in-depth study. Further, proponents of CSR practices or transnational social movements tend to challenge MNCs more so than their host-country counterparts because MNCs are often more visible (Morgan, 2016). How this shapes the fine-tuning of MNCs’ (and eventually of local firms’) diversity policies and practices is another area ripe for investigation.

Another global trend altering the workplace context is the burgeoning of internet-related technologies, such as the emergence of the platform or sharing economy in which “users, asset providers, and multisided platforms that facilitate temporary access to – rather than ownership of – assets that are rivalrous in their use, and that are not owned by said platforms” (Markman et al., 2021, p. 930). What does diversity mean to these newly emerged platform-based firms? We anticipate that although these firms may benefit from the on-demand employment mode, they may also suffer from the potential of lower commitment and looser employment relations because control over employees and asset providers has decreased. Hence, traditional human resources management practices such as recruitment, appraisal, and training may not work, and this could extend to diversity management policies and practices. A case in point is Airbnb’s ‘Project Lighthouse’, which measures discrimination on its platform as a first step toward redress. In short, managing the diversity of a workforce consisting of many temporary workers and asset providers in platform companies might be even more complicated and dynamic than in traditional organizations, revealing a whole new diversity research domain. For example, how do platforms companies and their algorithms disadvantage certain groups compared with others? How are equal opportunities pursued and maintained in these contexts?

Extend Intersectionality Hypotheses to Deep Forms of Diversity

A group can be diverse on a multitude of features, referring to both the deep-level and surface-level traits of its members. A research question following the call for more studies on deep-level diversity is how and with what effect different deep-level diversity dimensions (e.g., religion, values, sexual orientation, political identity) interact with one another. An even more compelling research direction, given demographic shifts and migration patterns, is to explore how deep-level diversity may interact with surface-level diversity to affect group and firm-level opportunities and outcomes. For example, how does religious affiliation diversity interact with ethnicity or age diversity? How does diversity of political orientation interact with gender and racial diversity? Because we know far less about group mechanisms stemming from deep-level diversity (relative to those stemming from surface-level diversity), there is much room for exploration in this space. Extant research has investigated and found that the benefits of surface-level diversity for group behaviour and decision-making are conditioned on deep-level similarity (e.g., Phillips and Lloyd, 2006; Phillips and Northcraft, 2006).

Team-level boundary conditions, such as team orientation, have also been studied (e.g., Mohammed and Angell, 2004). Because tenure overlap among team members matters – that is, surface-level diversity will weaken while deep-level diversity will strengthen over time for team members working together (e.g., Harrison and Price, 1998; Harrison et al., 2002) – more research

on the temporal implication of this interaction is warranted. The layered complexity of this intersectionality among different deep-level or between certain deep- and surface-level diversities leaves much to be unpacked. For instance, how, when and to what extent do specific ideological orientations relate to specific demographic groups rather than others? If so, what are the consequences for those who do not fit with these expectations, and what are the implications for self- and social identities? An additional area of future contributions related to intersectionality lies in understanding how an individual's 'identity work' can bridge self- and social identities at different levels for that individual to obtain internal and external legitimacy (Brown and Toyoki, 2013; Kreiner et al., 2006; Watson, 2008). Finally, how can we avoid and solve 'paradoxical' situations where networks built to support a single identity category result in marginalization of members with different or multiple minority identities or hamper collaboration across different single-identity diversity networks? (Dennissen et al., 2020).

Conclusion

The articles accepted for publication in this special issue contribute new knowledge to the body of research on diversity in management and organization studies. They also give new impetus and further momentum to myriad ways in which a diversity perspective can and should inform our understanding of organizational life. They do so from a theoretical perspective, bringing new approaches to perennial problems and generating novel questions altogether. They also highlight the variety of methodological approaches that can be brought to bear in this field. They also leave us, as management scholars in general and diversity scholars specifically, inspired and stimulated by the fertile opportunities for research. Our hope is that our commentary can motivate others to keep unveiling new understandings of how diversity affects our organizational and work lives and contribute to making the world a better place.

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