

## Managing Diversity

This paper is not about research already done, nor is it a research design; rather it is an exploration of what kinds of themes, issues and questions that might be interesting to include in a research design for an empirical investigation into diversity management in Denmark.

### *Background*

Diversity management was initially conceptualised in the late 1980's/early 90's in the US as a corporate or managerial response to Affirmative action legislation. The inventors<sup>1</sup> and their followers within the fields of both business and research claim that this is a progressive historical development. Thus Affirmative action was a necessary step on the road to a more appreciative and business oriented assessment (or 'recognition') of diversity.<sup>2</sup> Critics<sup>3</sup>, however, see the introduction of Diversity management as circumvention of the affirmative action ethos of equality and remedial action towards historical inequalities to the benefit of a focus on individual differences and the alleged innovative and creative business potentials attached to these.

Judith Squires separates the origins of the policy concern with diversity into two strands: One strand contains a focus on *valuing* diversity and may be seen as the result of the demands made by marginalised cultural groups, social movements, and differences theorists; and another strand which contains a "managerial policy and modality of governance, devised as a means to pursue economic productivity with greater efficiency."<sup>4</sup> In this paper, I am mainly concerned with the rationalisation of diversity in the context of the managerial field. It should, however, be kept in mind that the managerial discourse lends credibility from the value-discourse, and that even if it belongs to a complex of hegemonic neo-liberal discourses, it may be (partly or locally) interrupted by or articulated with the concerns of the 'value-front'.

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<sup>1</sup> Usually Thomas is credited for being the first to use the concept in the management literature. See Thomas, R.R. (1991): *Beyond Race and Gender: Unleashing the Power of Your Total Workforce by Managing Diversity*. New York: AMACOM.

<sup>2</sup> Likewise the development of Diversity management is divided into different stages (Thomas, D.A. & R.J. Ely (1996): Making differences matter: a new paradigm for diversity management. *Harvard Business Review*, September-October). This development model is adopted in a slightly modified version by one of the first research projects on Diversity management in Denmark (Hagedorn-Rasmussen, P. & A. Kamp (2003): *Mangfoldighedsledelse. Mellem vision og praksis*. København: Socialforskningsinstituttet 03:03)

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Wellman, D. (1997): *Minstrel Shows, Affirmative Action Talk and Angry White Men: Marking Racial Otherness in the 1990s*. I: Frankenberg, R., ed.: *Displacing Whiteness. Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*. Durham & London: Duke University Press

<sup>4</sup> Judith Squires (2006): *Equality and Diversity Policy Frames: Intersectionality and Diversity Management*. Paper presented at the Conference "Revisiting Governance from Feminist and Queer Perspectives", 29 June 2006 at the AHRC Research Centre for Law, Gender and Sexuality, University of Kent, p 6.

Diversity management has since its birth in the US two decades ago travelled the globe. While the ‘original’ version of Diversity management fore-fronted ‘the business case for diversity’, the discourse has been translated on its travel to other locations and it has affected the policy and practice of employment and management in various ways in different settings.<sup>5</sup> In the Danish context the business case has been toned – and perhaps even back-grounded – by another neo-liberal discourse: that of Corporate Social Responsibility.<sup>6</sup> Peculiar to Denmark (compared to for instance the UK<sup>7</sup>) is also an overall consensus between the State, trade unions, NGOs and employers that Diversity management is a strategy to be pursued.

### *Rationalities and technologies*

This paper explores discourses on Diversity management in Denmark using a widely read book published by Børsens Forlag as a point of departure: Søren Brandt & Steen Hildebrandt (2003): *Mangfoldighedsledelse – om mangfoldighed i virksomheds- og samfundsperspektiv*.<sup>8</sup>

Initially for the purposes of research, I construct Diversity management within a Foucault-inspired governmentality-framework. Governmentality is associated with Foucault’s conception of a productive (disciplinary or bio-) power as opposed to the negative deducing power of sovereignty. Speaking in very broad terms, what, according to Foucault, is produced is both the freedom of the subject and the governability of (free) subjects as well as populations. Studies within the governmentality tradition are mostly concerned with the rationalities and technologies through which the subject is given to itself as well as rendered governable. Foucault describes this modality of government as a conduct of conduct. He does not, however, see modalities of power as successive historical phases; sovereign or deductive power, hence, does not disappear with the emergence of disciplinary power – even if it is affected by it. Disciplinary power, in turn, is not replaced by biopower either.<sup>9</sup> As pointed out by Marianna Valverde, the neo-liberal rationalities and technologies are more uneven and fuzzy than can be grasped by unilaterally diagnosing specific modes of ‘conduct of conduct’. Pedagogic as well as coercive (despotic) modes of conducting the conduct of the self as well as others go along in the liberal arts of government.<sup>10</sup> Following this

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<sup>5</sup> For an interesting discussion on the translation of Diversity management in New Zealand see: Jones, D., J. Pringle & D. Shepherd (2000): “Managing diversity” meets Aotearoa/New Zealand. *Personal Review*, Vol. 29, No.3.

<sup>6</sup> Hagedorn-Rasmussen & Kamp op cit.; Boxenbaum, E. (2006): Lost in Translation. The Making of Danish Diversity Management. *American Behavioural Scientist*. 49,7.

<sup>7</sup> See Wrench, J.(2005): *Mangfoldighedsledelse og fagforeninger i Europa – en sammenligning mellem Storbritannien og Danmark*. I: Nour, S. & Thisted L.N.: *Mangfoldighed i arbejdslivet. Når vi er lige, men ikke ens*. København: Børsens Forlag.

<sup>8</sup> Diversity management – a corporate and societal perspective on diversity.

<sup>9</sup> Foucault, M. (1977): *Discipline and Punish*. London: Allen Lane; (1990): *The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1*. London: Penguin Books; (1991): *Governmentality*. In: Burchell, G., Gordon, C. & Miller, P, eds: *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. (2004): *Society must be Defended*. London: Penguin Books.

<sup>10</sup> Valverde, M. (1996): ‘Despotism’ and ethical liberal governance. *Economy and Society* Vol. 25 No 3.

lead, my interest is in the non-fits or paradoxes of the government of self and others involved in Diversity management as it is put forward in the book by Brandi & Hildebrandt.

The imaginary readers of this book are managers. The book is, however, widely used in teaching at universities and other educational institutions, and one of its authors (Steen Hildebrandt) is positioned both in the academic world and in the world of management consultants. He is the author of a number of books on different strands of management. Since the imaginary or preferred reader is a manager, the book is dominated by a kind of strategic communication which aims at making these managers interested in Diversity management (DM). As such the book presents one or perhaps rather several rationalities that constitute what might be a theory of DM. Here I follow Valverde's distinction between technologies and rationalities:

The relation between technologies and rationalities could easily be misinterpreted as equivalent to that between material practices vs. paradigms or discourses; but it is quite different, in that technologies do not *express* or *implement* a previously constituted arrangement of knowledge/power but rather help to constitute both the theory of the power and the power of the theory. Particular technologies can be used for different purposes and can have quite different meanings depending on their articulations with specific rationalities.<sup>11</sup>

I am interested in how both management and diversity emerge in paradoxical ways (or: what are the conditions of these emergences?) through the rationalities presented, and how these stand in relation to technologies, that are most often not specifically tied to DM.

#### *The business case vs. (corporate) social responsibility*

In Brandi & Hildebrandt's book, the general consensus among different actors in the field is reproduced: Diversity management should form a bridge between 'the business-case' and (corporate) social responsibility.

The business case contains a comparatively stable number of ingredients:

- Diversity management is an answer to the development of the market  
That is: the market forces have developed in such a way that the resources of the employees have become an essential competitive factor
- In addition, the demographical development call for a broader recruitment of labour – as does the increased diversity of the consumers.

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<sup>11</sup> Op cit, p.358

- Finally, the optimal use of a diverse labour force will result in innovation and creativity, which will enhance the surplus value of the company. (synergy and learning, as this is termed by some).

Basically, then, there is surplus value to be gained from diversity. This development is backed by societal diagnoses like: consumer society, knowledge economy or –society which all imply that industrial society is a thing of the past.

Diversity, according to the business case, has to do with all kinds of differences, that is both categories like gender, ethnicity, disabilities, and sexuality – and distinctions like education and prior employment. Brandi & Hildebrandt operate with primary and secondary differences, where the primary differences are described as inborn, whereas the secondary are acquired.

(Corporate) social responsibility, on the other hand, is constituted by the following ingredients:

- Private as well as public companies should contribute to the solution of a number of societal problems (unemployment, marginalisation etc.)
- In the Danish context, diversity management is especially associated with integration (of refugees and immigrants), human rights, and ‘the inclusive labour market’ (‘Det rummelige arbejdsmarked’).

In connection with social responsibility, a group or category oriented view on diversity appears. This view has to be somehow articulated to the individual inclusivity associated with the business case for diversity. This articulation appears only through an overwhelming focus on ethnicity in the Danish discourses on DM – Brandi & Hildebrandt is no exception. Gender does appear to some extent, but the tendency is that when diversity has to do with ethnicity it is about recruitment, while gender-related diversity is about leadership. The shift of emphasis between diversity as individual unique resource profiles and diversity as group-related and partly associated with differences in achievement is not explicitly ‘explained’. Usually the focus on ethnicity is put forward as a choice that could have been otherwise (“diversity concerns other factors than ethnicity, but in this book or article I choose this as my focus”, is a common framing). In Brandi & Hildebrandt’s book the focus on ethnicity also appears from their diagnosis of Denmark as a country which during the last decades has gone from homogeneity to diversity (p 37).

While the focus on individual and unique resource profiles moves the diversity of DM away from identity political strategies, this move is partly interrupted by it’s, in this sense, paradoxical attachment to specific categorical distinctions. I should add that even in the inclusive and individual

version of DM, diversity is something which clings to otherness. The urgency of management or the fact of diversity is hence seen from the point of view of a centre<sup>12</sup> which appears to be outside or above all distinctions. In Brandi & Hildebrandt's book this becomes apparent with the positioning of the manager as will be elaborated below.

I point to the twin arguments of the business case and social responsibility as basic and partly contradictory rationalities associated with the rather untidy discursive field of DM, because any definition of what DM is, or should be, by Danish actors is somehow juxtaposed between these two poles. One fairly recent example is an anthology published by the Institute on Human Rights. The anthology is divided in two main sections, where the first deals with social responsibility (which in this case is synonymous with adherence to human rights), and the second deals with business or management. The connection between these sections is at best unclear.

Brandi & Hildebrandt on the one hand places the business argument up front:

In this book, the minimal definition of Diversity management is: a consciously chosen strategy by the management, and a strategy which aims at enhancing the competitive advantage of the company, that is: a business oriented strategy. (B&H: 29)<sup>13</sup>

– this is the rationality ordering the discursive representation; on the other hand, their arguments are sometimes colonised by articulations belonging to the CSR-pole.

#### *From anarchy to creativity*

In Brandi & Hildebrandt's book a tension between diversity and oneness appears – this tension is worth zooming in on.

The authors point out that it has unattractive consequences if companies choose not to deal with diversity, among these not least inefficiency. In this context, it is the pure demographical fact of diversity, which is fore-grounded: it is there already *in* the company or *around* it (share- or stakeholders). But additionally it is claimed that diversity without management/government is chaos:

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<sup>12</sup> “the pale stale male” as Jacques puts it in his: The unbearable whiteness of being: reflections of a pale stale male. In: A Mills, A Prasad, P. Prasad and M Elmes, eds.(1997): *Managing the Organizational Melting Pot: Dilemmas of Workplace Diversity*. London: Sage. See also Staunæs, D. (2006): Mangfoldighedens zombier og kloner. *Psyke & Logos* nr. 2.

<sup>13</sup> ”I denne bogs forståelse er mangfoldighedsledelse som minimum: en bevidst ledelsesindsats, dels en indsats, der er forbundet med en forbedret eller en tilstræbt forbedret konkurrencekraft, dvs. er forretningsmæssigt motiveret.”

Diversity without management is chaos, anarchy, and inefficiency – and perhaps chance. (B&H:28-9) <sup>14</sup>

The aim of DM, according to the authors, is not order – this is an orientation which has been left behind with industrial society:

Order, hierarchy, predictability, and discipline were important notions in industrial society [...] This is about to be replaced by something which we may not see quite clearly yet, but emphasis is placed on the creative potentials of messiness rather than on order; on partnership rather than hierarchy; on trust rather than discipline, on flexible organisational structures and fluidity, on assignments that emerges and changes along the way. (B&H:117) <sup>15</sup>

There is, however, apparently still a need to avoid chaos, anarchy and inefficiency. There will, according to Brandi & Hildebrandt, be conflict, but it is vital that ‘the corporate system is not brought out of balance’. Neither the corporate system nor its balance is further explained, but ‘balance’ (which might be read as a bookkeeping metaphor) is hence an alternative to order, but still opposed to chaos etc.

Taking this one step further, what appears is that diversity in itself is not good or valuable – it is rather potentially dangerous to corporate viability. Only through management or government may the resources hidden in a diverse workforce be teased out and canalised in a viable direction. Diversity will not do as a raw material or resource; it needs mastering in order to be valuable, and in addition it needs management from the outside. Diversity seems to be wild or savage and in need of appropriate taming. Following this line of thought, Brandi & Hildebrandt’s book is about the taming of diversity, and more specifically about how managers (as opposed to (self)-management), especially on CEO-level, need to create the organisation and mould diversity into, if not sameness, then at least some kind of oneness. A oneness which is grounded in values. ‘Corporate balance’ as it is secured by the managers is the point of enunciation.

A contradiction appears: On the one hand a kind of unity is necessary among the employees, carried for instance through corporate values; on the other hand, the idea is to free or mould the creative

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<sup>14</sup> ”Mangfoldighed uden ledelse er kaos, anarki og ineffektivitet – og måske tilfældighed.”

<sup>15</sup> ”Orden, hierarki, forudsigelighed og disciplin var vigtige begreber i industrisamfundet [...] Dette er ved at bliver erstattet af noget, som vi vel endnu ikke ser klart, men som bl.a. lægger vægt på det kreative potentiale i uorden frem for orden, på partnerskab frem for hierarki, på tillid frem for disciplin, på fleksible organisationsstrukturer og mere flydende grænser, på opgaver, som bliver til undervejs, og som stadig ændrer sig.”

potential of diversity. And just as the manager(s) become the balancing factor, they equally emerge as the vital mediators between diversity and oneness.

How, then, is this more precisely secured? This ultimately remains a secret, because, according to Brandi & Hildebrandt, management is something for which you cannot make prescriptions:

The book may seem abstract, impractical – even naive. There are only few tools and numbers; no recommendations, phase models and check lists. No calculations of the usual kind. You should not let yourself be distracted by this. Our intention with the book can be seen as one big calculation, that is: we can do it much better, if we want to. There is something for which it is not possible to set up formula. Management in a broad sense and diversity management is such a field. (B&H: 234-35)<sup>16</sup>

In this way, it seems to me that managers/management at one and the same time become almighty - sovereign - and a vanishing point. Could it be that what the manager needs to perform is ‘magic’?

Even if it might be good strategic communication to tell your preferred reader that he (more likely than she) is almighty, I still find it intriguing that it is also seen as meaningful communication. The magical flavour is not unusual in management literature (or training), which is in itself interesting; it seems that a manager can enhance his or her capabilities in any other way than through rational reasoning (spirituality, bodily experience, emotions etc.).

#### *Manageriality – management without formula*

Despite the possible almightiness of the managers, they are not pictured in Brandi & Hildebrandt’s book as the top in the structure of a pyramid. Rather, they form the centre of a solar system. The authors write about the disciplines of Diversity management and about the management as the living centre of a true community:

Martin Buber talks about a living centre, and points out that human beings are in a living relation to each other. In a firm or an organisation the living centre is the living

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<sup>16</sup> ”Den [bogen] kan godt forekomme ukonkret, upraktisk – ja, måske naiv. Der er kun få værktøjer og tal; ingen anvisninger, fasemodeller og tjeklister. Ingen beregninger og kalkulationer – af de sædvanlige. Det skal man ikke lade sig distrahere af. Fra vores side er bogen i virkeligheden udtryk for én stor kalkulation, der hedder: Vi kan gøre det meget bedre, hvis vi vil. Der er noget, for hvilket der ikke gives og ikke skal gives formler. Ledelse i bred forstand og ledelse af mangfoldighed er et sådant område.”

management in the centre. It is the management and the corporate vision and main narrative. (B&H:129)<sup>17</sup>

From the descriptions, it further appears that management is outside the distinctions which constitute diversity as well as outside the community, which must be created in order to make diversity profitable. Women should, according to the authors, be represented in a group of managers, but the Man-ager with a capital M is without colour, gender or body.

In that sense, one might say that in these rationalities of management, the place of sovereignty is there as the place of creation, which both incarnates community by being in front or in the centre, and at the same time works on and moulds the human resources of the company. At the same time, the centre of power has no character. This emptiness or shapelessness is not there in practice, of course; management *is* marked by gender, colour etc. Order (or creative disorder, which is not chaos) can only exist through the intervention of the manager, who is positioned in a constitutive outside. The manager, then, becomes the transcendent point of departure as well as a vanishing point in the creation of company and community.

### *Speculations and questions*

Brandi & Hildebrandt's book is not a good source for discussing the technologies through which the (diversity) Manager is produced or the devices through which diversity emerges as fittingly tamed without being 'ordered'. Looking into the more general field of managerial discourses, they all seem to be associated with technologies of the self. Management, hence, is first and foremost an enterprise of self-government. Management in that sense becomes distributed and infolded in the everyday routines of worklife for everybody. Everybody is a subject as well as an object of management. The human being of Human Resource Management is at the same time *resource* in the sense of raw-material and *resourceful* in the sense of a master of his/her own resources. Brandi & Hildebrandt associates DM with 'value-based management' as well as with HRM, but also states that:

The HR [Human Resource] function and the field of HR, for instance questions relating to integration, gender equality, respect for seniors and other themes of the

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<sup>17</sup> "Martin Buber taler om en levende midte og om, at mennesker står i et levende gensidigt forhold til hinanden. I en virksomhed eller organisation er den levende midte den levende ledelse i midten. Det er ledelsen og virksomhedens vision og hovedfortælling."

diversity field, is probably a management field where we most often meet a discrepancy between what is said and what is done. (B&H:86)<sup>18</sup>

This statement is backed by other observations about the practical life with DM in companies and organisations.<sup>19</sup> I am, however, curious about what kinds of effects the sayings might have – with or without the doings<sup>20</sup>. How does diversity emerge in companies and organisations, if it does? What are the effects of diversity-talk? In what way may the subject recognize him- or herself as diverse in everyday worklife. How may (or may not) diversity be worked on by the subject in his or her relation to himself and others?

Secondly, leadership – the Manager – paradoxically seems to be casted as ever more central. I find it interesting that a rationality of self-management runs along with an almost desperate search for the magic that makes the leader, as it appears in the management literature and in leader-training: Spiritual guidance from any kind of Guru,<sup>21</sup> emotional guidance from horses, bodily and emotionally invested pilgrimages and what not.<sup>22</sup> But what does diversity do in this context? In what way does it emerge as something that affects or forms the magic of the managing hand? What should the manager do in order to become properly invested in the field of diversity? Does DM ‘do’ the manager rather than diversity?

The manager is of-course also a subject of or through self-government, but the ultimate purpose of working him/herself is the management of others. In addition the means for becoming/being a good manager is multiplying: Through interaction with some kind of other (creature, spirit, body), the Manager perhaps becomes the shepherd of the flock (‘the living management in the centre) – and sometimes even the sovereign ruler. Different forms of power seem to be intersecting here and there is a certain flavour of despair associated with the ever shifting companion species of the Manager. In a perhaps more theoretical vein, I am curious about the forms, distributions and intersections of power, that emerge in companies and organisations. What kinds of figures or metaphors can we use to grasp these emergences? What kinds of genealogies can we establish in order to understand them?

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<sup>18</sup> ”HR-funktionen og HR-området, herunder spørgsmål om integration, ligestilling mellem kønnene, respekt for seniorer og lignende temaer fra mangfoldighedsområdet, er nok et af de ledelsesområder, hvor vi oftest og stærkest møder denne forskel på, hvad der siges, og hvad der praktiseres.”

<sup>19</sup> See for instance the examples in Hagedorn & Kamp up cit.

<sup>20</sup> For an interesting analysis on Diversity management in Universities, see Ahmad, S. (2007): ‘You end up doing the document rather than doing the doing’: Diversity, race equality and the politics of documentation. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Vol. 30 No. 4

<sup>21</sup> Salamon, K.L.S. (2002): *Beåndet ledelse : en antropologisk analyse af managementkonsulenters nyåndelige diskurs og netværker*. Ph.D-serie 11, Frederiksberg : Handelshøjskolen i København; Bovbjerg, K.M. (2001): *Følsomhedens Etik. Tilpasning af personligheden i New Age og moderne management*. Forlaget Hovedland; Haviv, J., red (2007): *Medarbejder eller modarbejder – religion i moderne arbejdsliv*. Århus: Klim.

<sup>22</sup> Dorthe Staunæs, unpublished paper.

Finally, I find the Danish consensus among different actors about the appropriateness of DM interesting. DM deals with a contentious question (difference/diversity) both for the State (in its partly eroded Danish welfare apparition) and the trade unions. While it may be explained through the specificity of 'the Danish employment market model', it is perhaps more interesting what it does: That is: What does a managerially toned discourse on diversity do in the context of the trade unions? How does it intersect with other discourses about work, about class, and about the contradiction of interests between employers and employees?