Diversity 2.0: The truth about diversity science and why DEI usually fails

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About the authors

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About Seema

Seema is a consultancy company that specializes in leadership and organizational development – targeted at releasing diversity potential. We were founded in 2011 and convened the development of the world's first management systems standard for diversity. Seema works closely with organizations in the private and public sector in the Nordic and European market.

We use and develop advanced analytical tools to pinpoint precise areas for improvement directly connected to performance parameters of interest to the organization. Seema aims at giving organizations competence, confidence, tools, and leadership skills to harness diversity for value generation.

Introduction

Hardly anyone has made it to 2025 without in some way having heard of the many challenges surrounding the topic of diversity, oftentimes these days just heaped into the general term "diversity, equity and inclusion" (DEI). Not surprisingly, the field is also riddled with a lot of confusion and strong opinions. Every day the media around the world pushes out material from different factions in the field, and quite often the tone is pretty harsh and lacks nuance. Perhaps this attracts people to follow media outlets in a world where there is so much information available that one must use strong incentives to get attention. But this approach does little to create a constructive environment for positive change.

Working with measurement of and value creation from diversity on an everyday basis, we found it necessary to write a book to describe the science and reality of the field (in as simple words as possible). As with any serious undertaking, it is important to take a step back from the single narratives and opinions to look at what the data shows and how to systematically address the right actors to ensure progress. So, to be clear, this book is on how to successfully work with diversity in an organizational setting. Although a lot of the same principles work on a societal level, this sort of work is outside the scope of this book.

If you are working for some sort of organization, especially in business, you have likely heard about the work McKinsey has done with regards to promoting diversity (Hunt et al, 2015; Hunt et al, 2020). The reports are comprehensive, but the basic argument is simple: Bringing demographic diversity into an organization will more or less automatically result in more value being created, and thus also more money being earned. The fallacy in this line of thinking is an old one: mistaking correlation for causation. Sure, there are well-run businesses that also has diversity, but getting the various sought-after advantages is not as simple as just hiring various minorities to key teams and positions.

Whenever we are asked about the value of diversity in organizations, we prefer to be more cautious and realistic by saying "well, that depends". This is not to be vague or defensive – we will get back to what exactly success with value creation and diversity *depends on*. For the interested reader, Ely&Thomas (2020) explain the basic line of thinking pretty well (and are being much more truthful in light of existing research).

The goal of this book, then, is to give you an overview of sound thinking when wanting to do the right things when working with diversity with the goal of reaching whatever goals your organization is interested in. We will keep the tone as light-hearted as possible without sacrificing proper backing in science and data analysis. Hopefully you will end up enthusiastic about the topic and be able to reason about it with a cool head.

Diversity science as a scientific undertaking

The first thing to understand is that the proper way to think about anything connected to diversity these days is to consider it a field of research with real-world applications. Not surprisingly, this scientific endeavour takes in parts of a long list of other more traditional professional disciplines. Which is probably why so many struggle with approaching diversity science in a proper way in various organizations: Handling the complexity is taxing and requires a lot of diverse knowledge (pun somewhat intended).

1. Data analytics and statistics: If one is not familiar with the scientific method, how to gather data, doing descriptive analysis and inferential statistics, working with diversity is pretty much futile. Lack in this understanding makes it simply impossible to know what the real issues are or whether or not any actions to solve these actually work. The alternative to data driven work is likely a quarrel based on personal opinions.

2. Psychology: When it comes to understanding how we react to differences between people, social psychology has a many decades long tradition of empirical research into how we treat those we consider not part of our group, how we respond to hierarchies, biased thinking when faced with types of people we are not used to and so on. And in extension, neuro psychology can even bring this down to the level of detail where we see what parts of the brain is doing what under various relevant circumstances.

3. Law: Unsurprisingly, there are a lot of laws connected to how we are supposed to treat people both in society at large and in a work setting. Not being aware of these can very quickly get an organization in trouble.

4. Ethics: Very often there are debates about diversity that entail questions of "right" and "wrong". These are complex questions and central to anyone with a degree in philosophy. And, as anyone with such a degree can tell you, being able to reason about ethics means having knowledge from a set of philosophical paradigms and understanding how something can be considered right in one context and wrong in another. And what is good for one group or person can be of great negative consequence to another.

5. Economics: For anyone wishing to create value from diversity, it is obvious that one must be aware of how to turn ideas, understanding of one's organization and available knowledge into viable business cases. And, unfortunately perhaps, that which is not contributing to value for an organization, will quickly fade – especially in rough times. So anyone with a heart for diversity must also have an understanding of economics.

6. Social anthropology/anthropology: Whereas psychology as a science is mainly based on quantitative research methods, social anthropology and anthropology has at its core a method of participation and observation. This makes it possible to provide a qualitative understanding of what it is like to be part of a subculture, a tribe, a minority and so on.

7. Sociology: Sociology is the study of social life, social change, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior. Not surprisingly, there are quite a few sociologists involved in diversity science and they typically highlight how being diverse affects society in different ways. In many ways, sociology is psychology at a macro level.

8. History: Given that a lot of the discussions in society with regard to diversity have long and complex historical reasons for existing, one cannot really understand what is going on without a grasp of history. The roots of many problems go back hundreds of years and being ignorant to this will make working in the field very difficult.

The list shown above is just to illustrate some of what goes into diversity science and it is not by any means a complete list. We could also include leadership development, organizational development, gender studies, culture studies, political science and so on. Luckily, not everything is equally important simultaneously, but it is safe to say that strategic work in this field requires much more than just having an interest and wanting to do good things.

It is also unfortunate that many companies assign working with diversity to people that might have strong opinions on the matter (or perhaps simply represent a type of diversity) but lack the breadth and depth of knowledge and scientific background that is the norm when working on core business. No one would dream of hiring someone to do financial analysis, software engineering or medical experiments without an appropriate academic background and preferably relevant experience. But when working with diversity, organizations for some reason seem willing to hire people to develop strategies and make changes with far less rigorous standards.

The take home message from this short chapter is to treat diversity science and working with diversity as one would any other applied academic discipline.

Case example

Heather was the CEO of a large manufacturing company located in the outskirts of Brisbane, Australia. On the request of the HR department, they had invited a major consultancy company to talk about how diversity can be a competitive advantage in tomorrow's market. The message was clear: bringing more diversity into the company would give better chances of outperforming industry peers. Not only any type of diversity, but ethnic and gender diversity specifically. Heather looked around the room as the consultant was presenting and saw many heads nodding in agreement. The message had clearly struck a nerve with some members of the management team.

After the consultant had left, Heather looked over to the CFO who was scratching his head, as if he was saying "It sounds great, but I do not really know what to do with the information". She looked at the rest of her management team with the feeling of something being left unsaid. On one hand, of course, she wanted the company to be a place where everyone felt at home. On the other hand, should she now actively seek ethnic and gender diversity to increase shareholder value? One thing was certain, she was certainly not going to be that one CEO who second guessed diversity. The consequences of such a move would definitely be uncomfortable.

Heather felt compelled to include DEI into the strategy without really knowing how and what to do with it. It <u>sounded</u> great, at least. Something she could use in public relations and maybe even internally to boost morale. And what could go wrong? If anything, maybe something good would come out of it, by chance. She thought this would be the only time she had to spend a lot of energy on this anyway, because from here on out, the rest would be delegated to the HR Department.

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This is an example of what we find in many organizations. Many are unafraid to speak about the benefits of diversity but have done next to no work in making clear how it is going to bring additional value to the company. The HR departments are in the driver's seat of initiatives without budgets or knowledge on how to make the connection to business goals. Oftentimes, it ends up with compulsory training sessions to showcase actual measures being done, and passionate employees using their spare time to organize various events. A sharp contrast to the otherwise effect-oriented mindset in most organizations and far away from core business activities.

The result is that DEI-initiatives are the first thing to go when times get tough. Without proper anchoring and credibility on how it is supporting the company's core business, it is the most natural thing to do. Over time, seeing the discrepancies between what is being said and done (or not done), employees start losing faith in the topic altogether.

What is diversity, really?

Pretty much wherever we go to, there are multiple misconceptions about what diversity really means. So, in this chapter, we will go through everything you need to know to understand what we are talking about when we use the word "diversity" in an organizational context.

The iceberg metaphor

I was sitting in a bar one time and I saw a Jewish man walk in and sit down to have a drink. After a few drinks a Chinese man came in and sat next to him. The Jewish man immediately turned and punched the other man in the face.

The Chinese man shouted, "You fool! What was that for?" The Jewish man replied, "That is for Pearl Harbor." Chinese man said, "You idiot, I am Chinese not Japanese!" Jewish man replied, "Chinese, Japanese, what is the difference?"

The Chinese man proceeded to punch the Jewish man in the face.

The Jewish man clutched his jaw and said angrily, "Owww, why did you do that?!" The Chinese man replied, "That is for the Titanic." Jewish man said, "But an iceberg caused it to sink, not me!"

The Chinese man smiled and said, "Iceberg, Goldberg, what is the difference!"

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The joke above is a little test in cultural intelligence. And it is also to help you remember the iceberg metaphor you are about to learn shortly. Now it is kind of a cliché to use an iceberg metaphor whenever one wants to highlight that there is more to something than meets the eye. However, that is the honest truth when it comes to diversity.

Above the water, in plain sight, we find the kinds of differences between people that we can easily notice. This does not mean just seeing, such as when we see skin colour, age, height, clothing style and so on (which can all be direct or indirect indicators of diversity). It can also mean that you hear people speaking with a different dialect or an accent. In any case, the stuff "above water" are diversity indicators that people cannot help but show you. There is no available choice of hiding it.

Below the waterline we find what is not obvious to our perceptions, such as sexual orientation, work experience, educational background, religion/faith and neurological factors (although some of these can be observed from behaviour or indirect signals such as clothing).

A person might, after some time of building a relation with you, choose to reveal such hidden factors, but it is at his or her discretion. And quite often it is a question of trust and how the person in question assumes that you will handle whatever is revealed. No one wants to be judged, after all.

The aforementioned examples of noticeable and hidden diversity are all at the individual level. However, the same metaphor can be used both for organizations and larger societies, such as nations. An organization can have visible descriptions such as a logo, company values, public strategy, stock price et cetera. But beneath the surface we find all the stuff that maybe only its employees are privy to, such as company politics, what cliques exist, gossip about various managers, what projects one should take on to advance to the top and so on. And some of the hidden factors are more hidden than others, so to speak – certain types of hidden knowledge about an organization might only be available to a select subgroup of people. The same logic goes for larger societies, as mentioned. A nation has its obvious markers such as a flag, a government, a kind of national cuisine, a language and such. But as anyone having travelled anywhere outside the borders of one's country knows, it is a very different story once you are inside a foreign culture as opposed to looking at it from the outside or searching for information about it on the Internet.

You can sit down in a coffee shop and get the inside scoop on what people really think about the current government, end up dating someone local and find that flirting is very different compared to home, see that opinions on various subgroups in the country is a big deal and so on.
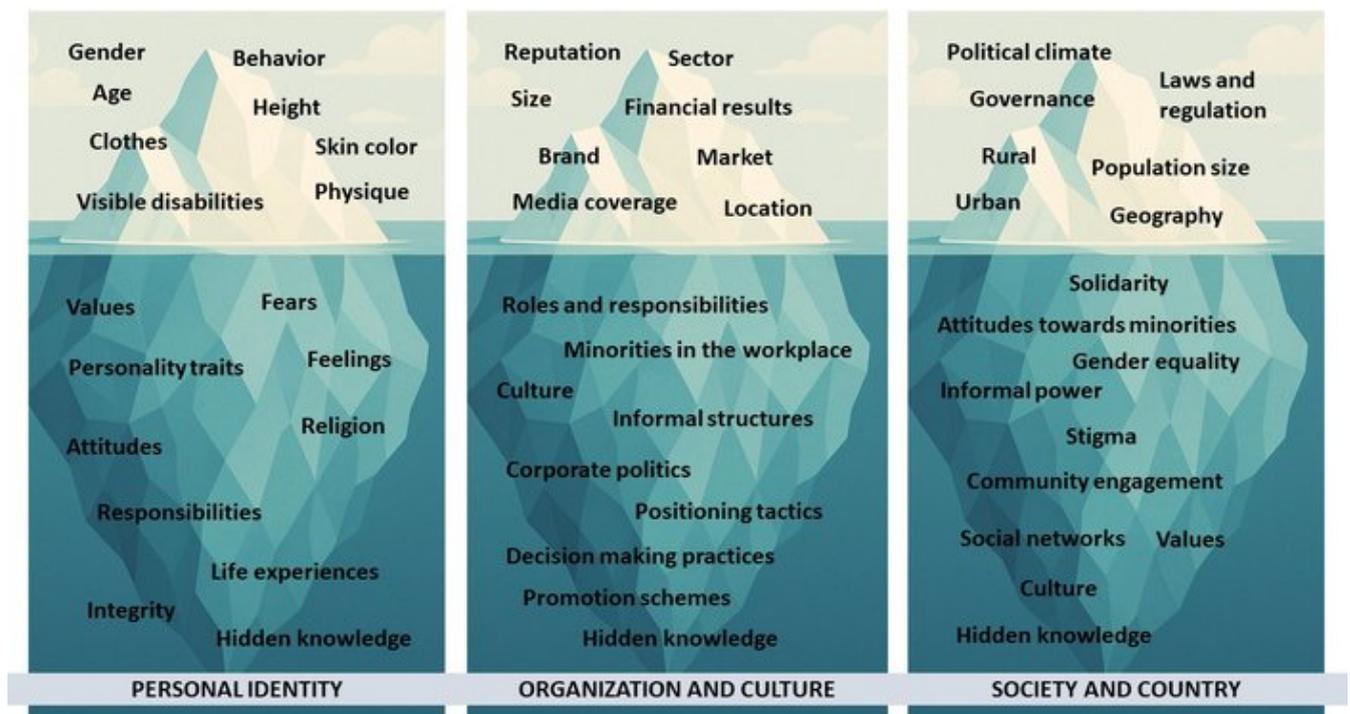
Figure 1 shows an illustration of the iceberg metaphor as related to diversity, with some keywords to get you to (hopefully) reflect a bit on what you've just read.

Reflection: Spend a few minutes thinking about, or even writing down, some obvious/easily noticeable things about you, your place of work and the country you live in. Then do the same thing for factors that are hidden until one gets to really know you, your organization and your country.

The demographic and the relative model

When showing people the iceberg, it is easy to have the response that "diversity can be anything". This is both true and untrue, and a surprisingly complex question given that people quite often talk about the topic in social media and elsewhere as if there is agreement.

The very first thing to understand here is the difference between the demographic view of diversity as opposed to the relative view. Because of perhaps obvious political and historical reasons, there has been a lot of focus on the demographic view. This means that the discussion often has to do with the rights and treatment of people from ethnic minorities and LGBTQ+, as well as women's rights (and more recently also other gender identities). From a
political and historical perspective this is not at all hard to understand. In light of various events, ranging from the Holocaust to the death of George Floyd or the raid on the Stonewall Inn, there have been reactions and movements to make changes. And many of these lines of thought have also penetrated into corporate culture and defined what is considered important in organizational settings. The underlying idea is that if you belong to a demographic group, there are numerous aspects of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination that must be considered in all contexts.

Although very understandable, the demographic view is a more limited model and hard to get to grips with in a scientific way, as well as make use of in an organizational setting. Sure, there are some aspects of demographic background that affects the way one functions in one's job (for example Murray, 2020), but mostly demographics are not that important as pretty much all demographic groups have a normal distribution with regard to the main predictive factors for how one performs both at work and in life in general (which mainly boils down to intelligence and personality; Plomin, 2018). There are a couple of exceptions, such as with age and neuro diversity, but the rule is normal distribution.

Also it is worth noting that defining groups in the demographic manner can be rather haphazard. What is considered an ethnic or religious minority in one location is obviously not the same elsewhere. In addition it is common to keep redefining the boundaries of groups, such as when LGBT changes to LGBTQ+ and several new configurations of the iconic rainbow flag surfaced. So, working from a demographic perspective is often overly complex, not very scientifically sound and has little real impact on how well the organization performs.

This brings us to the relative approach to working with diversity. The approach is mainly based on Social Identity Theory, an endeavour of psychological research started by Henri Tajfel (Tajfel, 1981), one of a host of Jewish psychologists and psychiatrists working in the aftermath of World War 2 to understand the psychological mechanisms of what had happened during the Nazi regime.

Although there are a lot of complex things to say about this approach, the basic premise is simple: When we talk about being different, the point is that we have to consider this relative to other people. If you are stranded alone on a deserted island, it does not matter (in our context) if you are young or old, gay or straight, born in Oslo or Shanghai – there is no basis of comparison. But if some more people swim ashore, one will quickly become aware of different groups. Perhaps there will be mostly heterosexual people in the group (unless everyone swam ashore from a gay cruise or the like) and thus the minority will be those of other sexual orientations. If so, that might become a point of interest and differentiation.

This led us to working with measurements purely from a relative perspective, drawing upon research in psychology dating back to the late 1950s with numerous books and scientific papers being generated over the decades since then.

Case example

Joyti was an American engineer with Indian heritage. She grew up in a remote area in Colorado and attended MIT where she majored in mechanical engineering. Although she was born and raised American, she always felt like she did not fit in completely. There was always something that made her feel different from the people she was around. At elementary school, she was the only Indian in class. Other kids, with their brutal honesty, were not afraid to make a point of this from time to time. Although she had plenty of friends, this tended to sting a bit. At MIT, there were plenty of Americans with Indian backgrounds, but very few people who grew up outside of rural areas. Her points of reference were completely different from her new friends. Even among her ethnic peers she was viewed as someone exotic and interesting with a different tale than the rest.

Later in life, Joyti landed a dream job at a multinational consultancy company with headquartes in Chicago. She proved to be a leadership talent and climbed the ranks faster than many other of her fellow graduates. The company noticed her talent and asked if she would be interested in taking on a position as the regional manager in Kerela, India. Kerela, a large city in the South of India, was completely unknown to her.

Her family were from Amritsar, a city in the North of India. Same country, but different language and culture. She accepted and moved with her husband and kids to take on a new challenge far away from American soil. Joyti enjoyed working with complex issues in a culture that was unknown, but somehow familiar. She soon realized that she and her family were being categorized as "the Americans", maybe even more so than she was categorized as Indian in the US. Joyti realized that wherever she went, she felt different to most others in some form or way. The only thing that varied was in what way she was feeling different and whether it was a positive feeling or not.

Joyti's experiences are more common than we think. When organizations work with diversity, they tend to work demographically. This means selecting one target group, such as ethnic minorities, women, or people with disabilities, and implementing measures that hopefully captures the entire group. The groups are often treated statically, meaning that they tend to be treated the same regardless of organization or location, instead of considering diversity as fluent and context-dependent – a relative approach.

Furthermore, measures aimed at an entire group might create unintended polarization. This does not mean outright conflicts, but a feeling of being generalized into a specific holiday, event or supportive program that does not represent who you are. When we feel we are being generalized, we tend to create distance towards the group that we are being generalized into. This leads to DEI-measures potentially having the opposite effect of what was intended. Joyti's story shows that true DEI-measures require
organizations to show interest in their employees, the diversity they represent, and how they feel about being different in the organization or society they are working in.

Reflection: Consider how you might differ relative to your colleagues, your friends and your family. Do you notice that whether or not you are different and how it affects you depending on the group you are comparing yourself to? If so, how? And how do you change your own behaviour to manage differences?

Categories/dimensions of diversity

As alluded to already, what is considered different, or potential out-groups, varies from context to context. The big movements from, for example, the US the last few decades have often felt somewhat strange to us living in Norway as they reflect a culture that is both well-known to us, but at the same time very different in many both subtle and obvious ways. Since a lot of the research on diversity has been done in the US, it is somewhat complicated to get it right elsewhere by following American logic, as social psychology, sociology, social anthropology etc. are scientific endeavours very much affected by culture. As we keep telling organizations to the point of fatigue: "Just because you have found a scientific study with significant results from the suburbs of Washington DC does not mean it is relevant at your IT-department in Lillehammer" (a small city about two hours by train from Oslo). It is indeed more than a little problematic that people have been getting used to cherry picking scientific studies in this field without checking for local relevance. This is in itself a lack of both cultural awareness and proper understanding of diversity science.

By all means, when beginning to work in this context, it is a good starting point to see what categories of diversity have been properly researched. For example, Blaine&Brenchley (2021) presently offers a good resource for beginning to understand empirically how different diversity categories (demographic, mind you), and combinations of these, affect people belonging to them. But then one must start looking at what is relevant in one's local culture and also update the categories as time goes by and what is considered diverse changes. An example is what is referred to as "neurodiversity", which is a term encompassing all deviations in neuro cognitive function. This can mean autism, ADHD/ADD, traumatic brain injury (TBI) and anything similar that changes how your hardware, your brain, works and processes information. Less obviously, it can also involve having an exceptionally high IQ[1] as this per definition means you think differently from the majority of people. In any case, no one was having conversations about this type of diversity (except specialized clinicians) just 10 years ago. These days, most recognize the (perhaps obvious) importance of understanding neuro diversity, especially in work settings.

Presently our setup for analysing diversity categories, updated the summer of 2023, can be seen in **figure 2**.

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[1] *«Intelligence quotient»: IQ is the most accepted and empirically researched measure of how well the brain processes information in terms of abstraction, speed, problem solving capability, memory, attention and similar factors.*
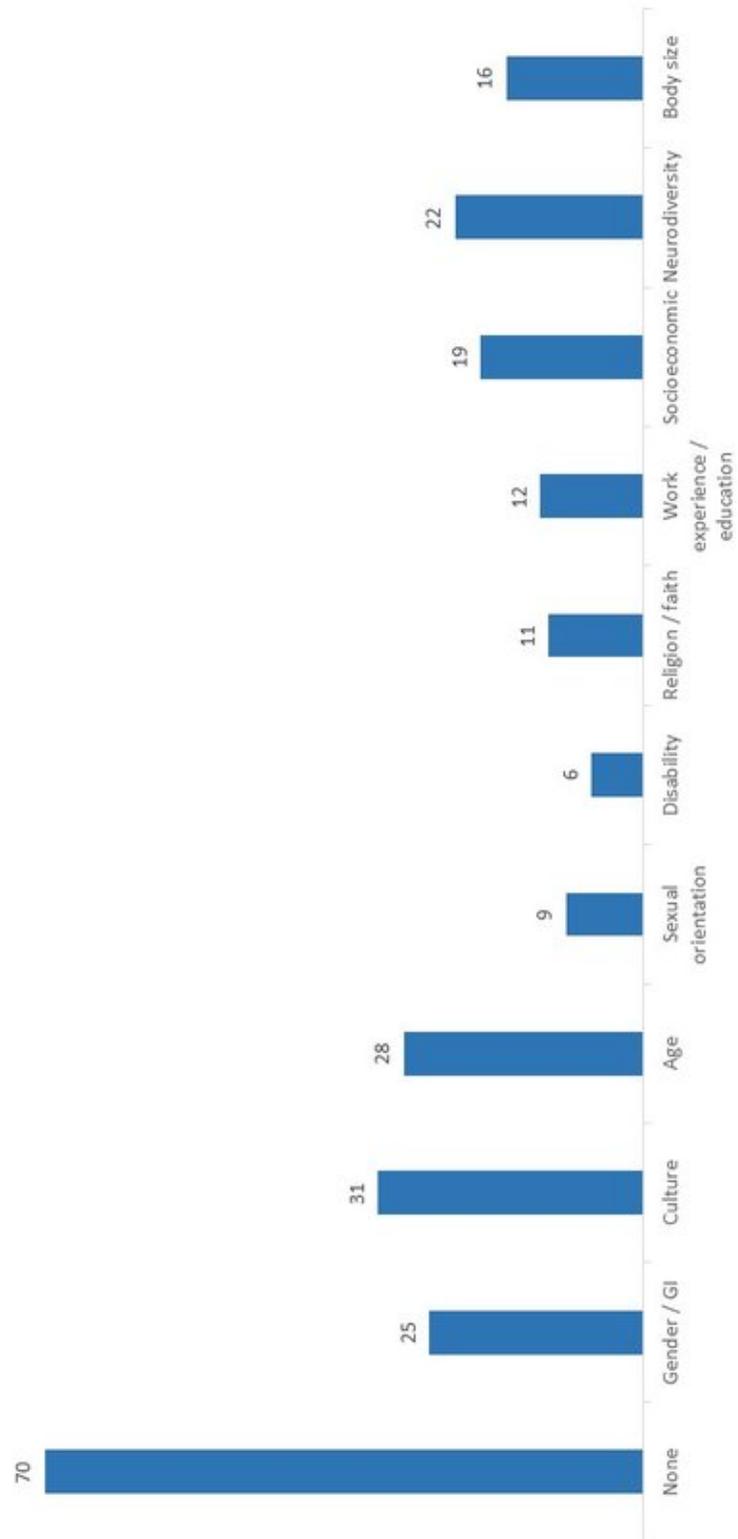
Figure 2: Diversity categories used for analysing organizations (updated the summer of 2023). The number represents "number of occurrences of feeling different to most colleagues". For example, the category "Gender / Gender Identity" captures number of occurrences of feeling like a man among women, woman among men, or similar. The graph is just an example and does not represent an actual organization.

As mentioned, the categories must be updated regularly to keep up with the times. Before our last update we had a category for *Language*, but this correlated so closely with *Culture* that we removed it (the logic being that those who speak another language almost always come from another culture). We also used to have *Work experience* and *Education* as two separate categories but found that these overlapped to the point that we merged them into one (the logic being that, at least in general, those with a different work experience also have a different educational background compared to the majority in the organisation). In this same update we also included *Body size, Neurodiversity* and *Socioeconomic (status)* based on newer research showing the importance of such factors both in society in general and in the workplace. In our approach, the question is how you experience yourself in all these categories *relative* to those around you. An interesting case example in Norway is an IT-company called Unicus that only hires professionals with autism for their software consultancy teams. This means that the neurotypical are the exception in that particular company (consisting mainly a small team of managers, for obvious reasons) while the majority are autistic. Within that context, the managers would flag themselves as neurodiverse instead of the other way around.

What you need to take away from this chapter is that diversity categories must be adjusted for context and updated continuously to take into account the cultural changes across time. And it is important to note that there are many diversity categories that probably are not well-known to most as they lack strong enough spokespeople doing the political work for them. This does not mean that they are not important. Socioeconomic status and neurodiversity, for example, have a larger influence on one's work life and career path than more well-known categories such as sexual orientation or cultural background (in general, of course – remember that there might be some locations where this does not hold up).

Reflection: What diversity categories do you think are primary to your culture in the present time? What categories do you think were relevant 10, 50 and 100 years ago?

A few words on visible and invisible categories of diversity

In extension of the iceberg metaphor, we usually divide the categories we measure into the visible and invisible. From time to time, people ask us to do statistical analysis on single categories to find out "what is the best and worst category to be part of in our organisation". This question is highly problematic, and we will get back to exactly why in the next chapter. But we do make the split into visible and invisible categories as research shows that this is important. More specifically, the research shows (Blain&Brenchley, 2021) that the invisible diversity in general leads to more stress, depression, anxiety and so on than visible diversity. The reason for this is that possessing invisible diversity adds a whole social "game" one must play in addition to the potential challenges of the diversity category itself.

A typical example is that being a person of colour can in some cultures be problematic with regards to getting a job, advancing one's career and so on. But at the same time, it is very visible – there is no simple way to hide one's skin colour. On the other hand, if you are gay you might have told some people at the office, but not others – depending on who you trust and who you assume (or know) to be judgmental. But when it is time for the office Christmas party, a problem can arise in that some know, and some do not – and you might find yourself in a situation of not knowing who is aware of your sexual orientation and how is not. Did someone tell someone else they shouldn't have? Is that odd look from your boss random or the result of judging you? And so on.

A perhaps less obvious example is with regards to disability (and also illustrates that this category can be both visible and invisible). Very often people assume that a disability means the lack of physical function, such as the loss of a limb or conditions that necessitate the use of a wheelchair, or perhaps having impaired hearing. What very few are aware of, is that one might also have acquired a TBI from a traffic accident, falling while skiing or something similar. This can impair attention, memory, motor function and so on. But this kind of disability is often completely hidden while being a huge problem for those afflicted. It is continuously embarrassing to have to explain why you once again forgot to buy a ticket for the train, why you cannot stay focused during a meeting, why you got lost on the way to work and the like. Many of those with a TBI say they'd much rather have lost a leg or an arm as this is at least very concrete, very visible and you get immediate understanding from most people around you.

When we measure diversity categories and show differences between the visible and invisible categories, we say that the visible ones are *Gender/Gender identity, Culture, Age, Disability* and *Body size*. This leaves *Socioeconomic status, Religion/faith, Work experience and education, Neurodiversity* and *Sexual orientation* as invisible categories. As explained, these categories can sometimes be both and we also used to say that some categories were "partly visible" or "both". However, this made analysis difficult, and it generated some problems when comparing our findings to research done by others where the either/or-split is the norm. Because of this, we have set things up in a binary manner. And it is good enough on at the group level when doing analysis for organizations. If we encounter exceptions, we handle them through qualitative methods when going from "looking at the numbers" to "looking at what is behind the numbers", so to speak.

Reflection: Do you have parts of yourself that you have to continually manage in terms of who knows about them and not? How does this affect you? If you do not feel you hide anything, perhaps you can try to take the perspective of someone who is diverse in visible and/or invisible ways and consider what that might be like at work, at a party, in public spaces etc.

Intersectionality

The very word "intersectionality" has often felt so confusing to people that we have even been asked by clients to not use it, or skip over what the word describes entirely, when holding lectures and presentations on diversity. This is somewhat understandable, but like in any field of expertise there are complex words describing complex phenomena that cannot be skipped over without losing significant knowledge. And it is somewhat weird as no one in their right mind would ask a physicist to skip over teaching the finer points of centripetal forces or thermodynamics just because those words are a bit of a mouthful and the knowledge they refer to is a real headache (even to, or perhaps especially to, the people working in the field).

So, if you have to scratch your head a bit and give it a think, then that is just life for you: Even "softer" science has its mental speed bumps. To begin at the deep end, the Routledge International Handbook of Diversity Studies (Vertovec, 2014) defines intersectionality in the following way:

[...] individuals can be classified (by themselves and by others) into a number of categories, each with a set of perspectives, interests, affiliations and social rankings. The concept of intersectionality represents the compound effects of categorization and concomitant mechanisms of stratification (especially oppression and discrimination). Following on from the development of this concept, it is important to examine what Thomas Faist describes as "de-intersectionalization"; that is, when the variety of possible relevant categories are ignored and people are treated by way of one, usually essentialized, category only.

Although the quote above covers a lot of ground with regard to defining intersectionality well, it is not very readable. What it basically means, is that an individual can be part of several categories, or dimensions, of diversity. Simply put: Just because you are elderly does not mean you cannot also be gay and have ADHD at the same time. But if your age, which is visible, is what people mainly define you as when they talk to you, they might well ascribe you the typical stereotypes, or sometimes even prejudicial assumptions, connected to that particular group and not bother with the other pieces of the puzzle that make up your identity and ongoing experience of the world. This is why we never do measurements or interventions in organizations aimed at single diversity categories – people are complex and quite often belong to several such categories at the same time. **Figure 3** shows an example of an analysis of intersectionality for a company, using our approach.
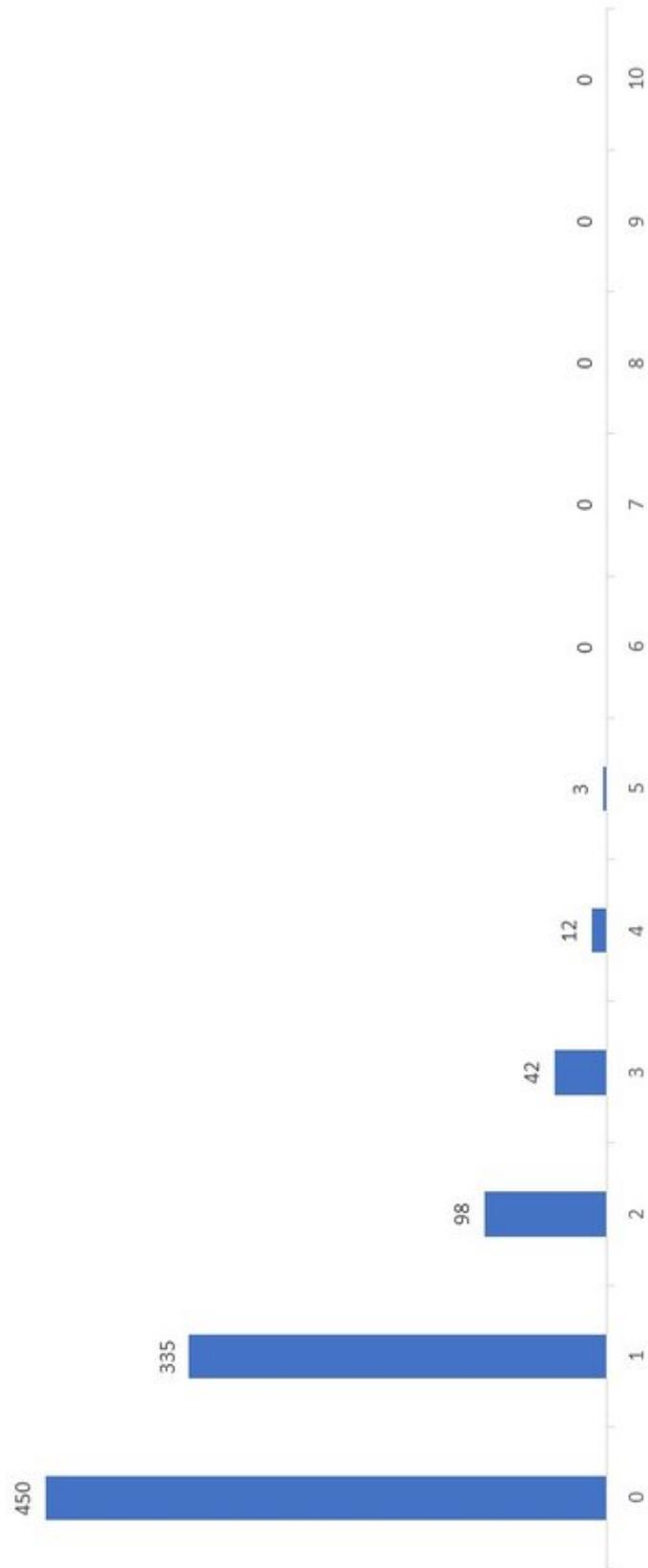
Figure 3: Example of an intersectionality graph for an organization. The x-axis represents number of diversity categories being activated simultaneously, and the y-axis represents the number of respondents.

What you see, is that the "None"-group (denoted by zero, 0) is the largest single group – hence the term "majority". This is the number of people who have not registered as feeling different than their colleagues in any of the 10 available categories. And then there is a group who have registered as having one, but only one, type of diversity. And then there is a "tail" where the number of people is steadily lower as the degree of intersectionality, that is number of simultaneous diversity categories, increases.

This graph is usually a good a discussion point for understanding that the organization at hand cannot keep working on only one category at a time. And we also provide a single number describing the *complexity* of the diversity in an organization, such as "the complexity of diversity in this organization is 144". This means that the measured intersectionality consists of 144 different combinations of diversity, such as one person being neurodiverse and also having a different gender compared to colleagues, another being different with regard to age, sexual orientation and culture – and so on until you get 144 different configurations (out of a possible 210 = 1024 combinations
given ten categories in our current setup). It should also be mentioned that there are unique stories even when having the same categories checked: Being a gay person from Sweden and being a gay person from Iran are most likely two vastly different experiences, even though the same boxes would likely be checked off in a Norwegian work context (*Culture* and *Sexual orientation*).

Understanding intersectionality is understanding that the people of any diversity category are just as heterogeneous as the majority and may belong to several categories at the same time. However, assuming homogeneity of out-groups in the way hinted at here is so normal that it even has its own name: The outgroup homogeneity effect (Rubin&Badea, 2012). The effect simply refers to the very human tendency of thinking of one's own group as very heterogeneous and complex while other groups are considered to be more of a gray homogeneous mass of non-individuals.

In addition to the measurements mentioned, we also show difference in intersectionality between managers and employees of an organization. This indicates whether or not it is easy for people who are different than the majority to advance up the
hierarchy. In practice we have seen organizations with very similar "tails" in the intersectionality graphs, indicating that there is equal opportunity to advance. And we have also seen organizations where it is very clear that there is an in-group majority, a kind of "ruling class", with diversity showing up almost exclusively among non-manager employees.

Lastly, we also provide a data clustering graph, a so-called *dendrogram* (see **figure 4**). This simply shows where the thresholds are for feeling different in an organization.

The larger the distance in "branches", the larger differences in experiences. In this particular graph, it is not that big of a deal if you happen to have one degree of intersectionality – the employees in question are pretty close to the experience of the majority (0). But once you have two degrees of intersectionality, you start feeling significantly different, and if you have three or four categories ticked off, you most likely have a *very* different work experience than the rest[2]. This phenomenon is often referred to as "fault lines" (Lau&Murnighan, 1998), meaning how different (and perhaps in what way) you have to be before it really affects your ongoing experience, your performance, your health and/or whatever else is measured.

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[2] *You might notice that those with five degrees of intersectionality are omitted as compared to previous figures. This is because there are so few in this category that it is not possible to generate meaningful statistics for them at the group level.*

Figure 4: Example of a dendrogram for an organization.

Reflection: Are you yourself a person with more than one degree of intersectionality? If so, consider how the ways in which you are different interact in different situations. If not, consider someone you know or know of who seems to be diverse in more ways than one and perform the same exercise.

Case example

Jean grew up in a liberal home in Paris and is openly gay. He does not feel different from most Parisians in other ways, except for his sexual orientation. In school, he did not feel afraid to accept his sexuality at an early age and had a close group of friends that supported him throughout his education. When he started working at a production company, he noticed that many of his colleagues were using foul language. Being secure in his sexuality, he confronted his colleagues and explained how their language affected him. This turned out to be a positive experience that brought him and his colleagues closer to one another.

Claude grew up in a Christian conservative home in the same city as Jean. His conservative upbringing taught him that homosexuality was a sin. He had spent his early years suppressing his attraction to the same sex and felt ashamed for the feelings he had. Without anyone to turn to, he felt lonely and depressed. It was not until he reached adulthood that he accepted his sexuality and came out to friends and colleagues, who were very supportive and showed understanding for the experiences he had gone through. Even though Claude now feels that he is gradually living a life in line with who he truly is, he has yet to break the news to his parents. He is dreading "the talk" and hopes that he will not be outed to them by someone else.

Remy grew up close to Claude and was part of the same Christian society. Remy has had the same upbringing as Claude and shared the same experiences as him when it comes to accepting his sexuality. In addition, Remy is on the autism spectrum. When Remy started his career, he often felt like he could reveal only one of his diverse traits, not both. He was afraid that revealing both traits would alienate him from his colleagues, but one was ok to be accepted. Remy continues to assess the social settings he is in to determine whether it is best to reveal his sexual orientation or autism. This has become a headache for him because he needs to manage the groups so that they do not encounter one another. He realizes that the best thing to do is being truly open to friends, family, and colleagues, but he is afraid to take the risk.

These are examples of intersectionality in practice, and how one diversity trait might affect another. We are complex human beings where different parts of the iceberg interact with one another, creating everything from internal conflict to aggrandized superpowers. Even though Jean, Claude and Remy are gay, they have very different experiences with being so. Jean spends little to no energy on the matter, while it is an energy-draining endeavour for Remy.

Organizations tend to disregard intersectionality when working with DEI. They rather magnify one specific diversity trait at the expense of how it interacts with others. It is simpler to design measures based on Jean's case than Remy's. Jean's case would require very little effort, and the organization might even put him in charge of implementing them. Remy, however, would most likely require his leader being able to identify and understand his unique intersectional experiences, and be attentive of how the organization's culture hinders the psychological safety he needs to perform at his best. The latter requires more work but is what is needed to ensure peak performance in the team.

When DEI-measures disregard intersectionality, they tend to only be relevant for a few in the target group. Not only might they miss the intended results, but they can also create polarization where some feel they are being seen while others feel the organization is overlooking their situation by addressing only singular identities. Regardless, building leaders' competence to navigate safely and with confidence in these topics is what true diversity leadership is all about. This means that there is no silver bullet or guideline on how to "master" a group in the workplace – in the same way that there is no way to "master" the majority in the workplace. Some will feel their diversity traits are irrelevant to the workplace, some will feel one identity dimension is a very important part of who they are, and some will have complex interactions of attitudes on the matter through intersectionality.

The goal is to ensure that employees spend little or no energy on managing their diversity, and instead direct their full focus on the work they are meant to do.

The challenges of being diverse

There are many potential advantages to having diversity in various teams at work. But before we get into all that positive stuff, we will first have a chapter outlining the more classic challenges seen in groups of all sizes when it comes to being considered different. After all, human history is filled with cases where "we" consider "them" a problem and thus demonstrate behaviour that is far from exemplary. Understanding some of the central underlying mechanisms governing this behaviour is important and so here comes some of the less charming psychology connected to diversity.

A bit of neuropsychology

Most readers probably did not pick up this book with an intent of learning about the biology and function of the brain. But if you really want to have a good idea of why there are problems connected to the topic of diversity, we have to start with how your (and everyone's) brain tackles anything it deems to be different.

The very first thing to understand is that the brain consists of different centres that are particularly good at processing certain kinds of information. Several years ago neuropsychological research pointed in the direction of the brain being extremely specific in this regard, to the point of there being a lot of hubbub about what was called "the Jennifer Aniston neuron" (Quian Quiroga&Kreiman, 2010). The logic here was that the brain could have single neurons firing in response to certain stimuli, that it learned by placing the perception of Jennifer Aniston in a single cell (or at least that was the tabloid impression). And in addition to Jennifer Aniston, one also found similar responses to other very recognizable images – such as the Eiffel tower, the Golden Gate bridge, various other famous actors, NBA-players and so on.

However, the current view (except, perhaps, among a few stragglers) is that the brain uses centres consisting of many neurons that are very good at certain tasks, processing certain types of information. So, when it comes to diversity, there is an interplay of different parts of the brain that deals with the unknown, the foreign. One part that is in play is the *amygdala* (Blaine&Brenchley, 2021), well-known to most people as the part of the brain dealing with fight or flight. This is simply because anything the human brain sees as unknown must be evaluated with regard to being dangerous or not. Humans (or any time of animal) way back when who did not have any reaction in the amygdala mostly did not live to bring about a new generation. Standing in the forest going "oh what an interesting person with a huge axe I see over there – he looks like he needs a hug" is not a super survival strategy. So, all animals around today know a thing or two about evaluating danger as an early response to the unfamiliar.

Luckily this is not all we do. If it was, we would have no civilization to speak of. What makes us human in the sense that we can do more advanced thinking and behaviour than other animals on planet Earth, is that we have a prefrontal cortex. It is in this part of the brain, all the way at the front of the head, that the peak of evolution is at play (this being the last part of the brain to evolve). Where the amygdala is part of what is commonly called "the warm network" (the source of all our feelings and what makes us "hot headed", so to speak), the prefrontal cortex is part of "the cold network" (the source of inhibition and rational thinking). This part of our brain enables us to take a step back and reason even when there is a lot going on at the more basic level.

This is also an important thing to remember when it comes to all our unconscious responses: We have innumerable thought biases inherent to the way our neurology is built, and these cannot be "cured" or "fixed". If you have a look at **figure 5**, you see an overview of most of the cognitive biases currently mapped. Even if there was some magical way to clear out biases, it would be an insurmountable task due to the sheer volume of what has to be manipulated. Remember that the brain, the seat of every thought, feeling and behaviour you have, is just a lump of fat, water and protein sitting in a box on top of your spine. It is too much to expect to get it to run smoothly in all these instances, but what we can do is become more aware of its flaws and take the time to reason when we notice that we might be making mistakes.

In addition, the very simple model of the warm and cold networks bouncing ideas off each other, Seger&Miller (2010) provides a bit more nuance to how categorization actually works. Naturally, the brain also needs its memory (hippocampus), its ability to perceive (occipital lobe, orbitofrontal cortex etc), its ability to categorize from experience (medial temporal lobe) and so on and so forth. The nerdy reader is encouraged to check out that particular article. For the rest, it is ok to just remember that you react unconsciously to what is foreign and then you could and should stop to think if your reactions are reasonable.

Figure 5: Overview of cognitive biases (Desjardins, 2019)

Reflection: Can you think of a few instances from your own life where you had a "gut reaction" that you then sat down and thought thoroughly about (perhaps even sought out new information), which then changed your mind about your initial reaction?
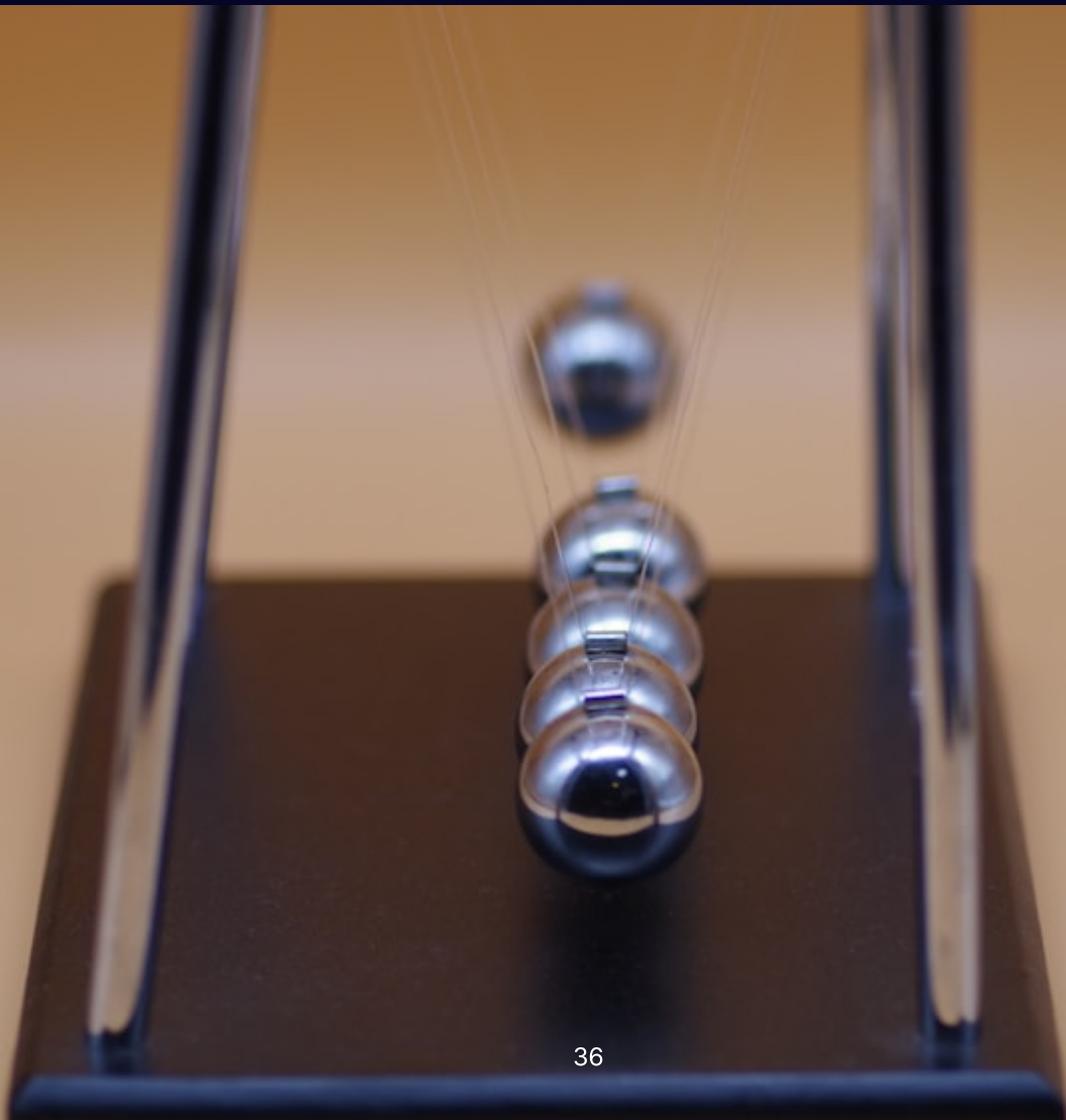
What is different enough to be considered different?

From the early days of the field of psychology there was a concept called "just noticeable difference" (JND; for example Judd, 1932). This is part of what is commonly called *psychophysics*, dealing mostly with how human perceptions deal with very physical phenomena, such as visual stimuli, auditory stimuli, temperature and so on. The question with regard to JND is simply how much difference there needs to be between two stimuli before you notice. For example, if you train weightlifting, you probably will not notice the difference between bench pressing 220 pounds and 222 pounds. However, if you first try 220 and then 240 pounds, chances are you will feel it. For clarification, the authors of this book are nowhere near bench pressing any of these numbers.

This same logic goes for anything you sense in the world. Your (and everyone's) system of perception is far from accurate and one has to cross certain thresholds to notice that one phenomenon is different from another. When it comes to diversity, whether or not your brain activates and goes "hey, that person is not like me" depends on whether or not you perceive sensory cues with enough intensity to be a JND.

The lazy human mind

Out of this, you hopefully understand that reactions to diversity most likely does not boil down to people being "evil" (whatever that means – it is not exactly an easily measurable psychological phenomenon). If you consider the material we just covered, you will understand that it is mostly simple reactions in the brain that, if not understood and reasoned about, can lead to unfortunate results. Granted, in all populations you will find a small amount of people, usually 0,6-3,6%, with what is known as "antisocial personality disorder" (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). As the name of the diagnosis suggests, these are individuals who are not super-interested in everyone else's well-being. But apart from these, it is more common to say that the reason for humans doing things in not-so-optimal ways has to do with us being so-called "cognitive misers" (Stanovich, 2009). The term refers to us being lazy with regard to sitting down and really thinking things through.

This has also been addressed in the now well-known book "Thinking, fast and slow" by the late Daniel Kahneman (Kahneman, 2011) where he talks at length about *system 1 (automatic responses) and system 2 (using more resources from the brain for proper analysis)*.

Although one can also argue that intelligence, personality, and a host of social psychological factors influence us in the question of how we treat those different from us, most of it can still be sorted out by taking the time to look at the available facts in the particular situation, reading scientific articles pertaining to the phenomenon, making a proper analysis and making choices in a coolheaded manner. It is just that such activities take time and energy, something we tend to not want to spend unless we deem it really important (or are forced to do so). This also makes sense evolutionarily: We conserve our energy unless we encounter situations that require us to solve problems in new ways. And even then, it is a question of assumed consequences that drive us, quite often.

Case example

Jill is the daughter of a diplomat family. She had been living abroad for the most part of her childhood and is familiar with the different norms and cultures that exist in the world. Although many of her expat friends in the same situation stuck together, Jill always found it intriguing to explore the local culture wherever she was. Jill has a little brother who is neurodivergent on the autism spectrum. She has always kept an extra eye on him to make sure he feels comfortable in situations that might trigger anxiety.

Jeremy on the other hand, is not the son of a diplomat. Quite the opposite, Jeremy's family have been living in the same part of Manchester since the 1800s and been unable to travel much because of their financial situation. Jeremy now works with Jill and shares the same enthusiasm as her when it comes to exploring new cultures and norms.

Jeremy and Jill are responsible for running the customer service operation which represents a wide range of diversity. Jill, having experienced many expressions of diversity across the globe, finds it very easy to connect with all employees in the workplace. She does not spend a lot of energy trying to figure out what to say and not to say to build good relationships to her workers, and she rarely says anything that can be deemed inappropriate or questionable. It seems like working with a diverse workforce comes easily to her.

Jeremy is having trouble navigating the customer service operation. He always feels like employees are leaving things unsaid, or that his feedback is not being taken seriously. He finds it easy to connect with people who are like him but struggles when the span of diversity increases. It does not even have to be cultural differences; socioeconomic differences are enough to make him at unease. It is not that Jeremy does not want to succeed with building relationships with all his employees, it just demands a lot of energy from him compared to the energy spent by Jill. This is frustrating for Jeremy. Jill has so much excess energy she can spend on performing at her best while he must spend most of his energy navigating the workforce. This in turn, is making him lag on key performance indicators.

💡

It is not so that one must be diverse to manage diversity. Far from it. But it helps having experiences and having been exposed to situations that enable you to identify, understand and connect across diversity categories.

This is what we usually refer to as *diversity competence*. When organizations recruit diversely, they rarely consider the diversity competence of the manager who is going to lead the workforce. Managing a diverse workforce is not the same as managing people who are just like yourself. Being left to figure out things for yourself is not a good feeling and does not benefit the manager nor the workers.

Organizations should aim at having managers spending little energy on how to manage a diverse workforce, just as workers should spend little energy on managing who they are. This can be achieved in two ways, either by recruiting people like Jill, or by including diversity competence as part of leadership training programs. It is possible to build diversity competence among managers without having to send them around the world and expose them to all kinds of diversity. Usually, it helps finding situations from your own life that can be generalized to understand "the other".

For example, using the experience of feeling left out from friend groups in school – and tapping into that feeling – as a gateway to understanding how it might feel being the only one from a lower socioeconomic background, or being gay in a culture where homophobic slurs are thrown around from time to time. Or in a more positive sense, how it felt like being the only one really engaged in astronomy, while everyone around you ignored or made fun of your new hobby – and tapping into that feeling – as a gateway to understand how it could feel like being the only organizational psychologist, or only neurodivergent person on the team. It is not perfect, and it is not the same as having walked in Jill's shoes, but over time, it will add empathy and curiosity to situations where span of diversity increases.

This usually requires some guidance, theoretical frameworks, and sometimes stepping outside one's comfort zone through intervention exercises. And it can be time consuming (a lot of "system 2 activity" before becoming competent). Most companies neither recruit nor invest time in developing their managers' diversity competence. Which might lead to managers being greatly discouraged by anything related to DEI.

The social psychology relevant to diversity science

How encounters with outgroups affect us can be explained in various ways. But in a psychological sense (for example Blaine&Brenchley, 2021) it is usually convenient to divide our responses into three levels: 1) stereotyping, 2) prejudice and 3) active discrimination (conscious behaviour). We will go through these three concepts in the following sections.

Stereotypes

"A stereotype is a set of beliefs about the members of a social group and usually consists of personality traits, behaviours, and motives" (Allport, 1954).

Stereotypes are the most benign of the three levels and they are really just associations we have about groups of people that can be positive, neutral or negative. It should also be noted that they are quite often correct at the group level (Jussim et al, 2016). For example, in Norway most Polish people working here are doing manual labour. So, the stereotype locally is that if you are from Poland, you most likely work in construction, farming or something similar. In the mind of Norwegians, Polish people are always carrying a paint brush and are ready to put up a dividing wall at the drop of a hat. And if you carry this stereotype around in Norway, you are statistically speaking more right than wrong. However, one of the authors of this book (Jakob) happens to be half Polish and is also the least handy person on the planet, having instead focused on getting two master's degrees in more abstract academic fields. This is because his mother, hailing from Warsaw, is a medical doctor who does not know a paint brush from a spatula – who came to Norway during the 1960s when a lot of academics fled from the Soviet Union. A different "wave" of immigrants if you will, compared to the later influx of manual labour from Poland.

One important mistake, naturally, with regard to stereotypes lies in assuming that they are correct at the individual level. And it is also possible to add on less accurate additional statements such as "most Polish people work in manual labour" (instead of understanding that a particular selection of the population came to Norway to work) or assuming that people from Poland in Norway are somehow inferior since they travel to work in a different country.

On the other hand, stereotypes can also be much more positive than the abovementioned. A study of Asian Americans (Lin et al, 2005) showed that they are, at least in the US, considered to be industrious, good at academic endeavours and successful in their careers. This can be to their advantage and most likely gives them a leg up in job interview settings and the like. At the same time, positive stereotypes can also increase the chance of choking (failing, that is), if you happen to be performing a domain where you do not match the stereotype of your group (Smith&Johnson, 2006). For example, if you are Asian American, but happen to be very uninterested in academic studies, it would be to your disadvantage to be reminded of how great people think your group is at such tasks.

In short: Positive, neutral and negative stereotypes can have complex consequences on a person belonging to one or more groups depending on the context and to what degree the person in question fulfils the stereotype (the degree of correctness). In addition, it should be mentioned that belonging to more than one type of diversity, that is being *intersectional*, can create some even more complex effects. For example, let us imagine an elderly person. The stereotype connected to the elderly is what one might call the "grandparent image": One often imagines a wrinkly smiling warm person who talks about the old days. At the same time one rarely thinks they are competent and have a lot to offer in terms of know-how and problem-solving skills (Cuddy et al, 2008a). But let us say that you learn that the elderly person in question is also
filthy rich.

Now, the stereotype of the rich is that one is typically not friendly, maybe even callous, but highly competent. Otherwise, how could one do all the tough tasks and decisions necessary to become wealthy? Now we have a problem: There is a conflict between the perceived stereotype connected to age and the perceived stereotype connected to high socioeconomic status. Next you might learn that this elderly rich person is a first generation immigrant who came your country fifty years ago and made a killing importing quality goods from his/her country of origin. Immigrants in a lot of countries are stereotyped as unfriendly and not very competent. So now there is a three-way conflict given the three degrees of intersectionality mentioned.

A person like that might end up sitting in a board of directors (because of wealth and competence), but then being assumed to be incompetent in a discussion (because "you are getting too old to know what business is like nowadays") and then being talked about negatively after a meeting (because "you know how those immigrants are"). So that is one positive thing and two negative in that particular context. Different types of intersectionality and/or a different context would play out in other, often quite unpredictable, ways.

Reflection: What gender did you assume the person in the paragraph above to be? Why do you think that is?

Stereotypes can also be both internalized and/or actively used by those being stereotyped. Internalization means simply buying into the stereotype about a group you are part of. There are a lot of interesting, studied effects in this domain, but the most well-known fall into what is called "stereotype threat" (Steele&Aronson, 1995) and its opposite: "stereotype boost" (Shih et al, 2011). The effects of both threat and boost are simply to modify performance on various tasks depending on whether your group is expected to do well or not. As mentioned above, you might fail because of high expectations from your group if you do not match well with the stereotype.

But if you do buy into what others think of a group you are part of, then you will perform more like the expectations. For example, if you are part of a group that is often portrayed in media as being athletically gifted, then you will probably try a little harder and perform a little better if you are reminded of your group identity before running the 100-meter dash. And the opposite is also true: If people typically see your group as lazy and not so good at sports, you will probably not perform as well when reminded of being in that group. Regarding internalization, it is also possible to have what is known as *self-fulfilling prophesies*, which is simply that people from a stereotyped group end up acting in ways that conform with social expectations (which is slightly different than the threat/boost-effect that has more to do with levels of performance).

The part about actively using one's stereotype is also interesting. After all, if you are aware of what people think about your group, you might be tempted to use that to your advantage if the context fits. For example, if we think back to the example with being Polish in Norway, it can be a smart to play the ethnic card when applying for a job in construction, but better to not mention one's origins if applying for an academic job.

Stereotype knowledge summarized and applied

What we have talked about on the topic of stereotypes is just a drop in the ocean considering the body of research done in social psychology on the matter. We simply had to choose a few concepts that are relevant. Still, what we have discussed can be complex enough to work with and understand, so it might be smart to simplify the stereotype paradigm a bit for your convenience. Research shows, luckily, that there is around 80% explained variance from stereotypes on status that are accounted for by just two dimensions: *Warmth* and *competence*.

For the less statistically enamoured this means that although there are any number of adjectives that can potentially be used to describe a group of people, stereotype effects can be explained almost completely by looking at the degree to which we find a group warm (that is how friendly, approachable, nice etc) and the degree to which we find the group competent (that is resourceful, smart, good at what they do etc).

This makes good sense in an evolutionary perspective. When we encounter someone, we generally need to know if the person is a serial killer or a new best friend. And, especially in a tribal setting with few people, it is important to know if this person brings something useful to the table. People in the distant past who made a lot of grave mistakes in these two types of assessment probably did not manage the old Darwinian premise of "surviving and getting laid" and thus did not manage to become our ancestors.

The so-called "Stereotype Content Model" described looks like **figure 6** (from Cuddy et al, 2008).

The model is very culture sensitive, of course. Different cultures have different perceptions of groups in their societies – and different group that are considered relevant. For example, a Norwegian replication (Bye, 2015) shows a difference in evaluation of the elderly (considered to be somewhat more competent in Norway) and women (considered to be both more competent and warm in Norway), just to mention two groups. We also have native groups like the Sami people, who probably are not even well-known enough in the US to even show up on anyone's radar there as a group.
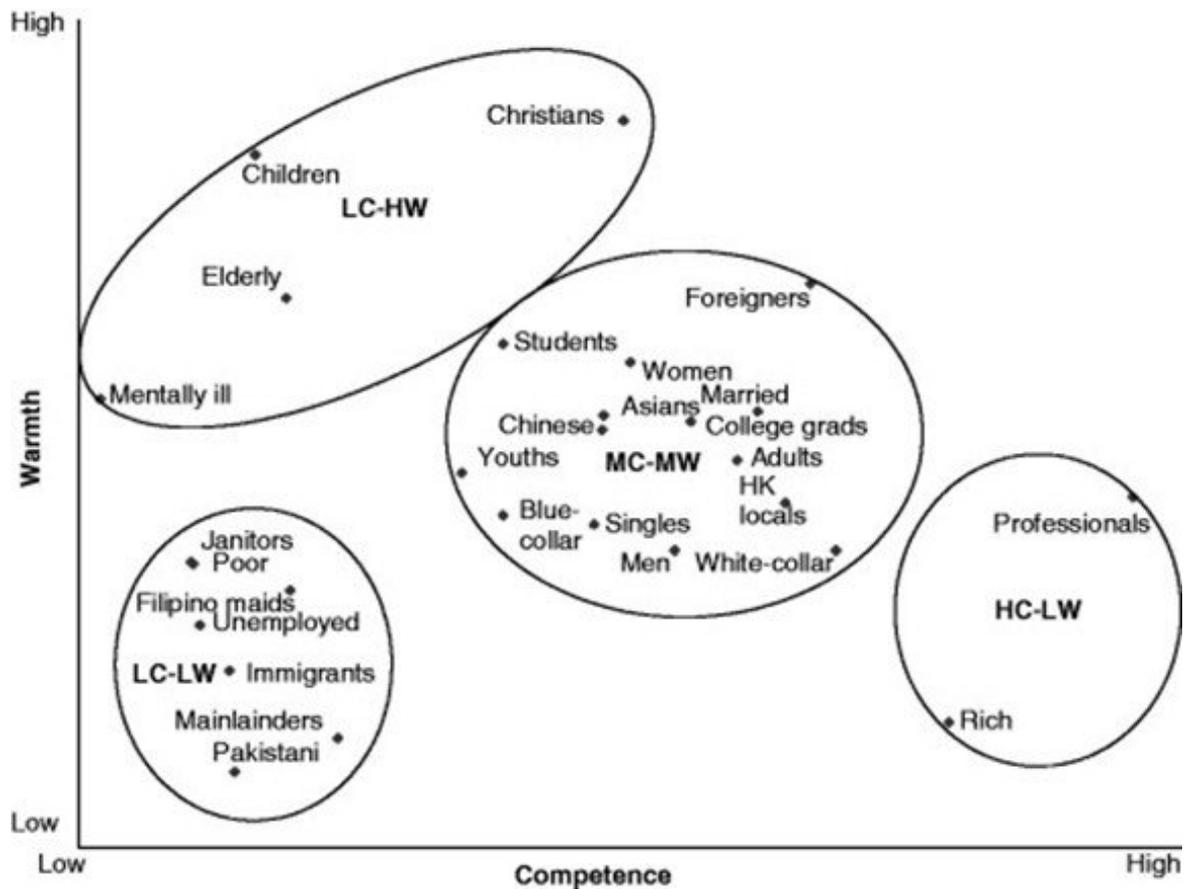
Figure 6: An illustration of the two dimensions of stereotyping (Cuddy et al, 2008).

The great thing about the model is that when you are responsible for a job interview, a promotion or some other kind of assessment process, you can stop the endless possible deluge of adjectives being thrown around when considering a candidate. Instead, you and your co-assessors can home in on your evaluation of the person along the two axis described here – and discuss (hopefully with some factual material on hand) to what extent the evaluation is correct or based on assumptions stemming from stereotyping (for which a replication of the model in **figure 6** relevant to your culture is good to have on hand for reference).

Lastly, remember that stereotypes are only relevant when you do not have in-depth information about someone. If you have known someone for a long time, your response style is dependent on your relationship, your history, your shared humour and whatever else has become the basis of your interactions. Stereotypes are superficial assessments, a way for the brain to manoeuvre where limited information is available.

Case example

Ibrahim works as a recruitment officer in a multinational bank. He is currently interviewing candidates for the position as Currency Trader with a Trade Manager at the national headquarters.

They are down to a couple of candidates and have recently completed the final interviews. When making the final assessment, Ibrahim asks the Trade Manager how she feels about the different candidates. She pauses and places her hands on her gut while explaining that she feels the first candidate gave mixed signals about his aptitudes, while the second candidate was a bit too arrogant for her.

*Ibrahim asked the Trade Manager if she could provide examples of concrete examples of mixed signals or arrogance to support her claims, but the Trade Manager said it was a feeling, more than having evidence for it. Ibrahim pulled out the illustration of stereotyping (**figure 6**) and explained the model to her.*

The first candidate had diversity traits that were spread out across the model, while the second candidate was from a wealthy family. Ibrahim and the Trade Manager had an interesting discussion based on this and spent some time separating the candidates' objective performance from the Trade Managers superficial assessments.

Reflection: Consider a situation in your life where you have assessed another person using a collection of adjectives. How do these ways of describing someone fit into the two axis in the model shown in figure 6? And do you believe in hindsight that you made a correct evaluation of that person?

Prejudice

"Prejudice is unjustified negative judgment of an individual based on his or her social group identity." (Allport, 1954)

While stereotypes can be all sorts of associations people have about a certain group in society, prejudice is consistently considered negative. That being said, the logic of prejudice is much the same as with stereotypes in that they tend to follow the model seen in figure 6. We can see this in figure 7 (Schwind et al, 2019) where the stereotype model is divided into four quadrants containing possible types of prejudice.

What we see in this model for prejudice is that all kinds of combinations of warmth and competence can be the object of prejudice. We often joke in lectures that even the most admired people can be thought of in negative ways.

		Competence	
		Low	**High**
Warmth	**High**	**Paternalistic prejudice** low status, not competetive pity, sympathy (e.g., elderly people, disabled people, housewives)	**Admiration** high status, not competetive pride, admiration (e.g., in-group, close allies)
	Low	**Contemptous prejudice** low status, competitive contempt, disgust, anger, resentment (e.g., welfare recipients, poor people)	**Envious prejudice** high status, competetive envy, jealousy (e.g., Asians, Jews, rich people, feminists)

Figure 7: Overview of possible prejudice along the warmth/competence-dimensions (Schwind et al, 2019).

An example we use from time to time in the high-warmth/high-competence quadrant is a couple of male friends who happen to be models and ridiculously handsome: Rugged with a broad jawline, sixpack abs, tall and symmetrical. With people like that it is common to say that "well, they look good, but they are probably not intelligent – or perhaps they are socially awkward or bad people".

But the guys in question (and they are real people that we know, not just fictional examples) happen to be very intelligent with tested IQ-scores in the upper 1%. They also do very well in business and are inclusive, friendly and warm people. The prejudice is that it is almost too much – we want there to be flaws. Even in our friend group, we sometimes joke that we wish something slightly bad would happen to them, like a broken foot or an embarrassing sexual encounter. We can often start looking for something to judge people by even when they are awesome in most ways – something anyone who has ever read a celebrity gossip magazine probably can attest to.

When it comes to the low-warmth/high-competence quadrant, we find people we consider to be resourceful, but assume to be "bad" people. A classic example is the rich who we, in general, believe to be not very nice people. Factually speaking there are a lot of people with money who are also super nice. Contrary to common belief, it is often necessary (at least if the fortune is earned, not inherited) to be socially adept and treat others well if you want to lead a big company, get clients interested, maintain alliances, avoid various knives to the back and so on. But the prejudicial line of thinking is based on envy: We want what they have and believe they are not the kind of people who should have that kind of status (which does not have to be money, of course – recognition for being resourceful can also be based on knowledge, craftiness, sociocultural factors, fame etc).

The high-warmth/low-competence quadrant is based on prejudice against people we see as "nice, but not offering resources". A classic example here is the elderly. Often, they are treated in a somewhat infantilizing way, like when a nurse perhaps comes over at a senior home and asks with a well-meaning smile "how are WE today?". It does not matter that the old person in question perhaps is a nuclear physicist – the salience of age firmly presses him or her into the category "old" and thus is not considered primarily as a source of great knowledge. We are often prepared to treat those in this category with a type of compassion, but it comes out somewhat demeaning if prejudice bubbles to the surface.

The least attractive quadrant to fall into as a group is the low-warmth/low-competence one. Here people can end up being considered both unfriendly and useless, to put it bluntly – which commonly leads to contempt. An important and easily recognized group in this category is *the poor*. As a diversity category, it is quite often overlooked, which is a shame as having low socioeconomic status is a predictor for a host of health problems, infant mortality, decreased life expectancy and so on (Ogden, 2012). It does not then help that the stereotype for this group is as it is – it most likely decreases both empathy with the group as well as inhibits helping its members get a better life.

This last quadrant and its member groups also bring up a very important additional research find: We tend to be more negative towards those we consider to be in control of their own challenges (Blaine&Brenchley, 2021). What that means is that we judge people to a lesser degree if they lack a limb, have a certain skin tone, a certain sexual orientation and so on – factors we assume to be outside a person's control. On the other hand, we judge people more harshly for being overweight, poor, uneducated and so on – the type of factors we assume to be under the control of the individual. In addition, we tend to add negative assessments to people from the latter type of groups, such as thinking that someone who is overweight is also lazy, undisciplined and so on (Schwartz et al, 2006). Now most people who have, for instance, worked in IT know that there are plenty of people with some extra weight who also are experts at computer science. But when it comes to prejudice against people from groups where we assume the defining characteristics to be easily changeable, we are often less than kind.

Reflection: Have you held, or currently hold, prejudicial opinions about some group in society? Try to find which of the four quadrants these opinions and associated feelings fit into. What do you think it would take to change your point of view?

Interesting boosters of prejudice

Since prejudice is linked to negative feelings, and often even fear (remember the amygdala-response we talked about earlier?), there are some interesting research areas in social psychology worth mentioning. These all contribute to boosting one's prejudice.

First out is Terror management theory (TMT; Pyszczynski et al, 2015), an area of psychological research that leans heavily on how human beings fundamentally deal with being the only mammal capable of reflecting on its own eventual demise. This capability has been shown to be a very ambivalent experience for us all, and what decades of experiments in TMT has shown is that even when being subconsciously triggered on the topic of *death*, we tend to be more favourable to our own perceived in-group and more hostile to those we consider "the others". Such triggers can be as simple as walking past a graveyard, seeing an obituary in passing when reading the newspaper, being shown words related to death etc. And the result is sometimes as extreme as people being more willing to engage in deployment of nuclear weapons when an existential threat is made (even mildly) apparent (Horschig, 2022). Can you imagine what news exposure of the 21st century is doing to our subconscious minds?

Another fascinating avenue of research is Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA). The origins of the research came in the wake of the very destructive authoritarian regimes of the 1900s (for example Adorno, 2001), but really came to empirical fruition with the work of Bob Altemeyer (Altemeyer, 2008). What the research shows is that there is a certain faction of people across cultures that adhere very strictly to social norms and traditions and have an inflated deference to authorities. These right-wing authoritarians (RWAs) tend to become very aggressive towards groups challenging their world view, which has a relatively obvious negative consequence in the context of prejudice.

The third and last relevant research endeavour worth mentioning here is called Social dominance theory (SDT; Sidanius&Pratto, 2000). SDT refers to a framework of understanding for a type of personality construct that strongly believes in hierarchies. Having a *social dominance orientation* (SDO) means that a person will believe in the necessity of dominating out-groups and preserve inequality between groups. The premise, very simplified, is that resources are limited in human society and one must make sure that one's own group is at the top of the food chain, so to speak.

What you believe is what you see

Before moving on to talk about the more behaviourally oriented topic of discrimination, it is important to say a couple of things about how both stereotypes and prejudice influence our attention, mental processing and memory – a bit of a throwback to the neuropsychological perspective from earlier. It actually goes back to the age-old question of whether we see what we believe or believe what we see. Unfortunately for our scientific ideal, it seems that we opt for the former rather than the latter.

There is a ton of relevant research on this particular topic, but to put it simply: We as humans tend to pay attention to and remember that which matches our view of other people (for example Lo et al, 2020, and Hilton&von Hippel, 1990). In short, if your view of, for example, Norwegians is that we are all Vikings that wade through the snow and sail ships with axes on our back, then information consistent with that view will be more salient to you. Let us say you read an essay about a given famous Norwegian, such as Fridtjof Nansen[3]

In the text there is information about his achievements – most of which are very stereotypically Norwegian by nature (braving cold climate, sailing long distances, being tough and stoic – that sort of thing). But in between all this very Viking'ish masculine stuff, you can imagine there also being details on his love life, his humanitarian work and things related to a softer side of his personae. According to research you will both pay less attention to these latter facts and you are also less likely to remember them in hindsight, compared to the information that conforms to the Norwegian stereotype. The same logic applies to prejudice.

This is also something that makes work with diversity challenging: People are somewhat resistant to information contradictory to existing beliefs. Taking the time to think things through, achieving more nuanced perspectives and perhaps even changing one's opinion at times... is a tough job for the human mind.

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[3] A well-known Norwegian polar explorer. Or perhaps not well-known enough if you're reading this foot note.

Reflection: Try for yourself to read a couple of pages on Wikipedia (or other readily available source of information) about a person belonging to a group you know you have a stereotypical view of.

Write down what you remember after a day or two and see how your own experience fits with the research on attention and memory regarding stereotypes.
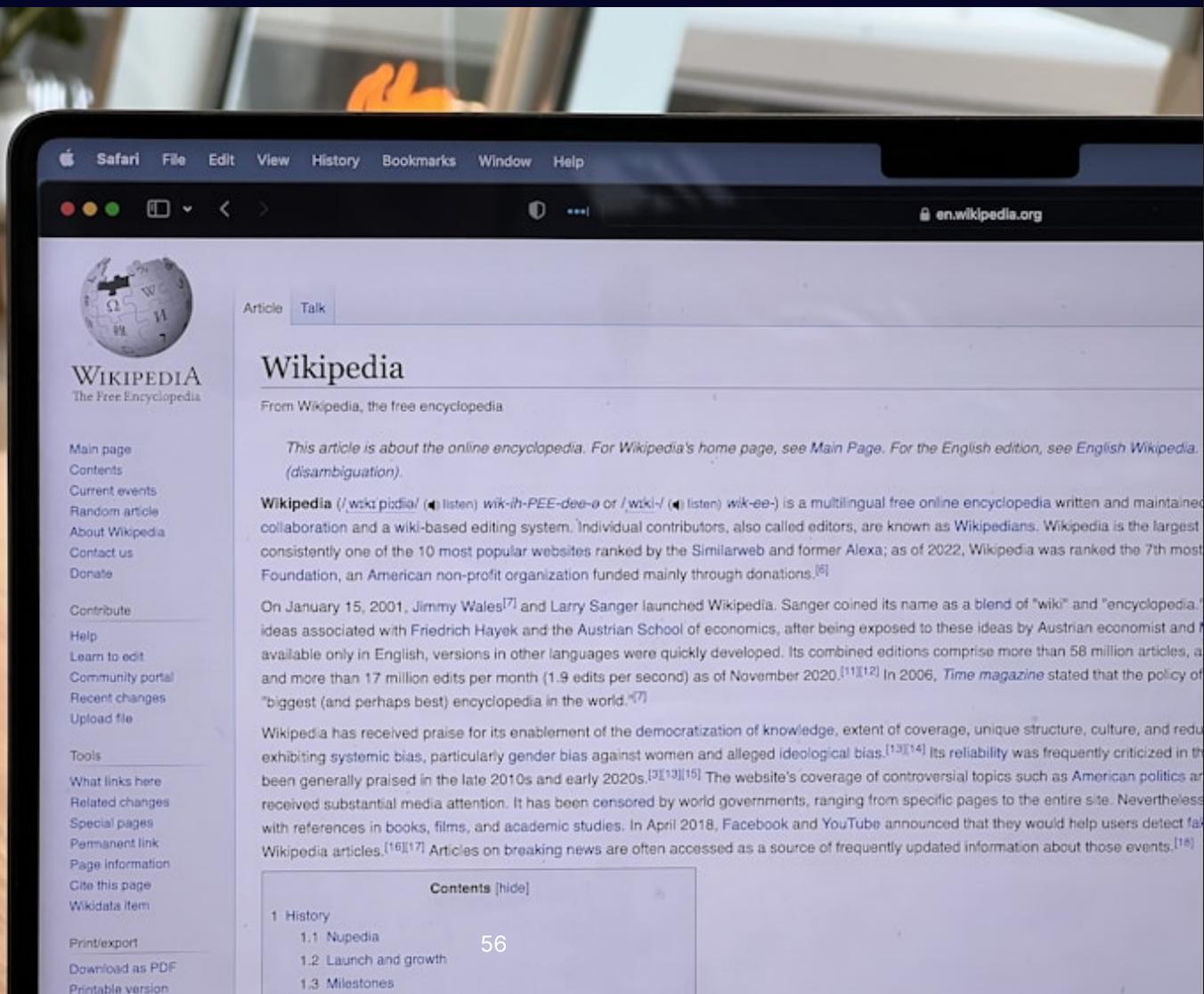
Discrimination, or active negative behaviour towards diversity

When we now transition from the world of attitudes and biases to the world of human behaviour, things become a little different and in some ways much more complicated. As pointed out by numerous studies across several decades in applied social psychology (for example Fishbein&Ajzen, 2009), the relationship between attitudes and behaviour is not much to speak of, ranging somewhere between 4-10% explained variance. This means that differences in attitudes only account for 4-10% of differences in behaviour, which in scientific terms would be deemed "interesting, but close to irrelevant" (unless a phenomenon influences a very large group of people where even small effects can be a big deal).

Thus, when people in popular culture, media and the like keep saying that the main source of destructive behaviours is attitudes, it is more about getting attention and trying to find easy explanations than actually aiming at understanding the relevant root causes. As we try to humorously point out when we hold lectures: If behaviour was all about attitude and just making up one's mind, then a lot of people would successfully start new and better lives the 1st of January each year as New Year's resolutions come into effect. Unsurprisingly, they do not.

Trying to explain human behaviour has been a main goal of psychology since the early days of the field. From Freud's doodles about the subconscious to the last century of endless empirical studies highlighting all kinds of things that push us in one direction or another, it takes years and years of reading to get a proper understanding of what makes us decide one thing or another. But one model that at least gives a sensible degree of holistic understanding in predicting and changing human behaviour, is the Reasoned Action Approach (RAA; Fishbein&Ajzen, 2009). One of several possible illustrations of the RAA is shown in **figure 8**.
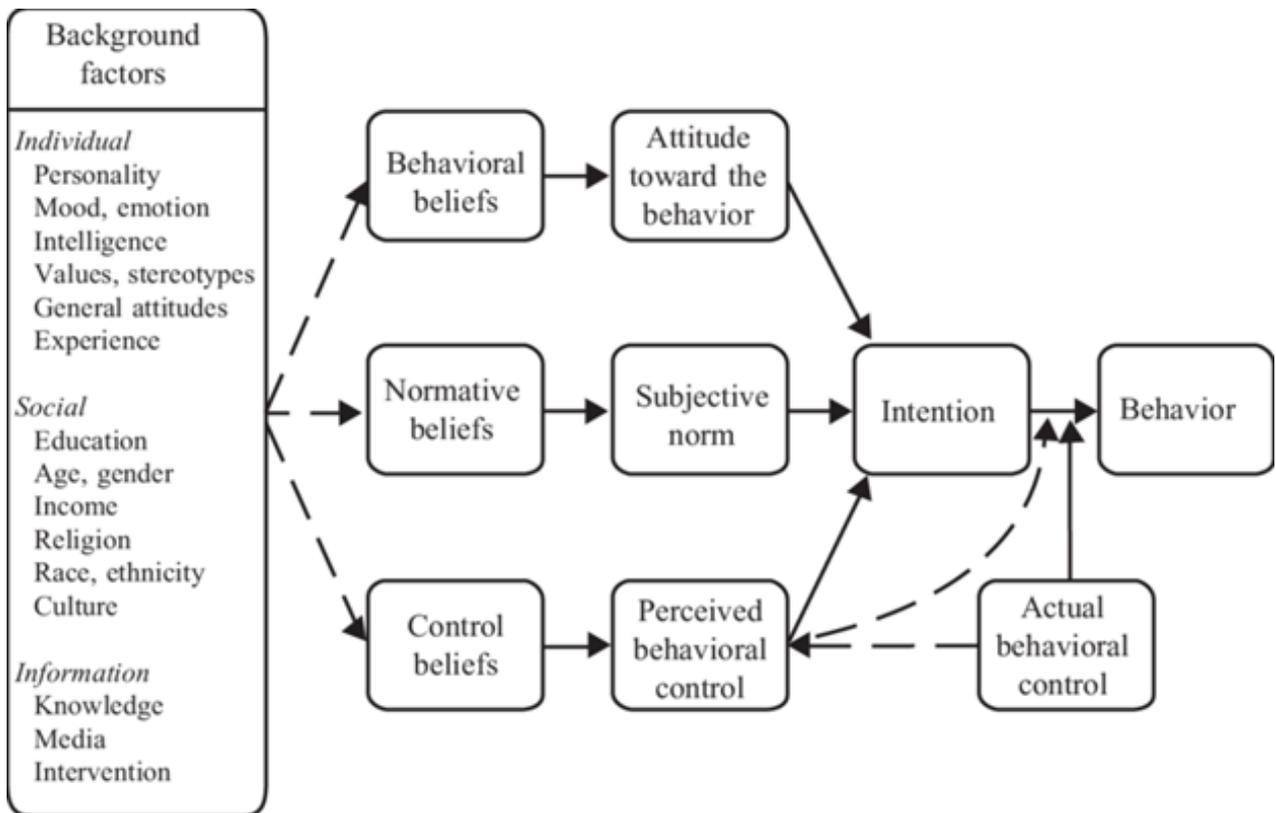
Figure 8: An illustration of the RAA (Ajzen&Fishbein, 2014).

The RAA is important for two reasons in our context: 1) it indicates how many factors contribute to human behaviour and so (hopefully) makes people aware that there is no one single reason for people being unkind to those different from themselves, and 2) it shows that changing problematic behaviours requires a multifactor approach, where many different sources of influence are looked at to achieve a new behavioural direction.

Without undermining any of the injustice or responsibility of the protagonist in this story, let us consider a fictive man named Edward who beats up a person for being overweight. The reason is probably not as simple as "he hates overweight people". Some relevant questions could be:

- How intelligent is Edward? Does he understand the consequences of his actions and is he able to reason and reflect on what he is doing?

- Does Edward have problems with inhibition for some reason (neurological reasons, drug abuse, personality disorders etc)?

- Is Edward from a subculture where problematic attitudes towards people who are overweight is common? Is he from a family where diet and exercise was a rigorous regime, for example?

- Does Edward have the educational background or knowledge to understand the situation for people who are overweight in his culture?

- Does Edward have a personality with a genetically very low *Agreeablesness* (McCrae&Costa, 2008) and thus is very callous/cold in interpersonal relations?

- Does Edward have a low degree of mentalization in general (for example Dimitrijević et al, 2017)?

- Does Edward have a type of psychopathology that contributes to aggression?

- Does TMT, RWA or SDT (social psychological factors) apply to Edward in some way? Or is he part of a hierarchy where he was told to do what he did by a superordinate (Burger, 2009)?

- ...and so on and so forth...

Unfortunately, the world, and especially the media/social media, tend to oversimplify just about everything to the point of stupidity when looking at causality. This is understandable in a way: Every day we are bombarded with information, and it is probably a huge relief to be told that "the incident A is because of this one thing B, so just fix B and all shall be well".

This mechanism of dumbing down is so common it has its own name: *the oversimplification fallacy*. But alas, if you look at the root causes or potential solutions to various behaviour in this way, you will never fathom why something happens and, as a consequence, not have the power to do anything about it. Knowledge and ability for both complex and complicated thinking is the name of the game here. And the ability to take all headlines or simplistic statements with about a metric tonne of salt.

If you take nothing else away from this short chapter on discrimination, at least take some scepticism with you. Do not drink the Kool-Aid. Go investigate when things happen that need addressing.

Reflection: Can you think of a situation from your own life where you made a very simplistic assumption about why someone did something? Try taking a bird's eye view of that situation and write down all the possible reasons for what was done that you can think of – upbringing, personality, culture, cognitive abilities, external factors in the situation, social status etc.

Case example

Sophie is a DEI officer in a large bank. She has recently been involved in a case of unacceptable behaviour from one employee. It turns out that she does not want to celebrate Pride by wearing the wristband with the company logo in Pride colours. The incident was reported by a manager who said it was completely unacceptable and that if she did not wear the wristband, it was the same as being against the entire Pride movement. The manager had filed a complaint and HR was obliged to process the case.

The DEI officer, together with HR, confronted the employee with her actions. She was reluctant to answer, and started by saying that she did not know why she did not want to wear it. It just did not feel right. This was not a sufficient answer to the DEI officer, who continued to ask whether she was against Pride, or something similar. The employee said no, it is not that, but that it just did not feel right to her.

After the conversation deepened, it turned out that the employee had a father who left her mother for another man. Even though she supported her dad and his choice, Pride reminded her of her family being broken up. Her mother was heartbroken for several months, while she and her siblings tried to keep her head up. She had put on the wristband at first but took it off after about 30 minutes. The HR officer continued to ask why she had not given this explanation to her manager. She responded that she did not feel there was any room for explaining and just hoped it would go unnoticed.

When organizations work with diversity, they are always running a risk of overexerting the initiatives. This does not mean that organizations should not strike down on cases of discrimination, but rather show curiosity about the responses for various celebrations and markings. Some tend to be reluctant and sceptical, while other show support with full excitement. In Sophie's case, the easy "solution" was to label her as being against Pride, while the true answer is more complex than that. If there is no room for expressing her feelings connected to the wristband, she would not be understood by her colleagues, and she would probably be left alone with her thoughts. In a worst-case scenario, the manager would have shared his thoughts on Sophie's behaviour with the team to set an example, and Sophie would have eventually left her job.

This topic is not about Pride specifically but rather being open to engaging in dialogue about what diversity and inclusion means in practice for each team member. In this case, Sophie was in danger of being excluded from her manager and probably the rest of her team.

Had the manager engaged in dialogue with Sophie, maybe her approach would have been different. When implementing DEI-initiatives, there is always a risk of polarization, meaning that you introduce an issue where employees must decide whether they are in or out, for or against. Managers who navigate these dilemmas, dialogues and complexities securely are the ones who succeed in creating true inclusiveness across differences. They are also more likely to be the ones who succeed in correctly addressing cases of discrimination.

The truth is that managers rarely feel secure in navigating these issues, especially in grey zones. When cases like the one described occur, unseasoned managers tend to "fire from the hip" instead of investigating.

Enter the Diversity Index – Making diversity tangible!

The previous chapter aimed at highlighting some of the problematic effects of how people in general treat those different from themselves. However, this type of research just gives us some pointers of how things *might be* in a given organization. All research on abstract stuff like "culture" and "society" form a good starting point, but we need the tools to find out what the situation is inside the organization in question.

Therefore, we created The Diversity Index, which is both an actual index, and a bunch of metrics and inferential statistics to do organizational research. It is more a method than a software tool with fun graphs (which is what most managers use to measure employee engagement in various organizations). Because of this, you might be getting a bit of a headache when we dive into the nuts and bolts in this chapter (unless you dig statistics as much as we do) – it is a bit more complex than the average employee survey.

First, remember that all diversity is measured using the *relative approach* described earlier. It is never about having a certain skin colour, belonging to a specific religion, having a certain work background and so on. It always depends on whether or not you feel different than your colleagues in the dimensions explained earlier. For example feeling like a Greek among Nigerians, Jewish among Muslims, philosopher among engineers, and so on.

Having mapped out the relative diversity profile in an organization, we move on to look at the general Diversity Index. This number is a statistical entity, and we will get back to how it is calculated. The index ranges from 1 to 5 with each level being described as shown in **table 1**.

Most organizations we have analysed in Norway, range from 1 to 2,5, with an average of 1,71 (per the spring of 2025). This involves companies from industries like tech, oil/gas/energy, media, consulting, banking, transport etc – and includes several thousand data points. This probably reflects Norway as a society: Most people know about challenges and concepts connected to diversity from media and want organizations to take care of their employees in the best way possible.

However, moving past fulfilling regulatory demands and being conscious (that is, surpassing levels 1 and 2) means intervening much more actively to use diversity for value generation – a leap most organizations simply do not have the competence to achieve. It takes actual effort and changes in behaviour, not just paying lip service to "the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI)". As we often say, it is succeeding with the transition from diversity being an HR-matter to making it an engaging topic for the CFO. It must become part of day-to-day business and value creation.

Level 1	Your organization is most likely working with diversity to satisfy regulatory demands and reduce risk. Employees that represent diversity have a lower sense of inclusion and competence utilization compared to the majority of employees.
Level 2	Your organization is most likely working towards increased diversity representation and awareness. Employees that represent diversity have a lower sense of inclusion and competence utilization compared to the majority of employees.
Level 3	Your organization succeeds in connecting diversity to value generation in some areas. There is little difference in the sense of inclusion and competence utilization between diverse and majority employees.
Level 4	Your organization utilizes diversity for value generation in many areas of the business. There is little difference in the sense of inclusion and competence utilization between diverse and majority employees, and both groups have very positive experiences of the workplace.
Level 5	Your organization places diversity in the centre for value generation. There is little to no difference in the sense of inclusion and competence utilization between diverse and majority employees. Both groups have excellent experiences of the workplace.

Table 1: The diversity maturity levels in organizations.
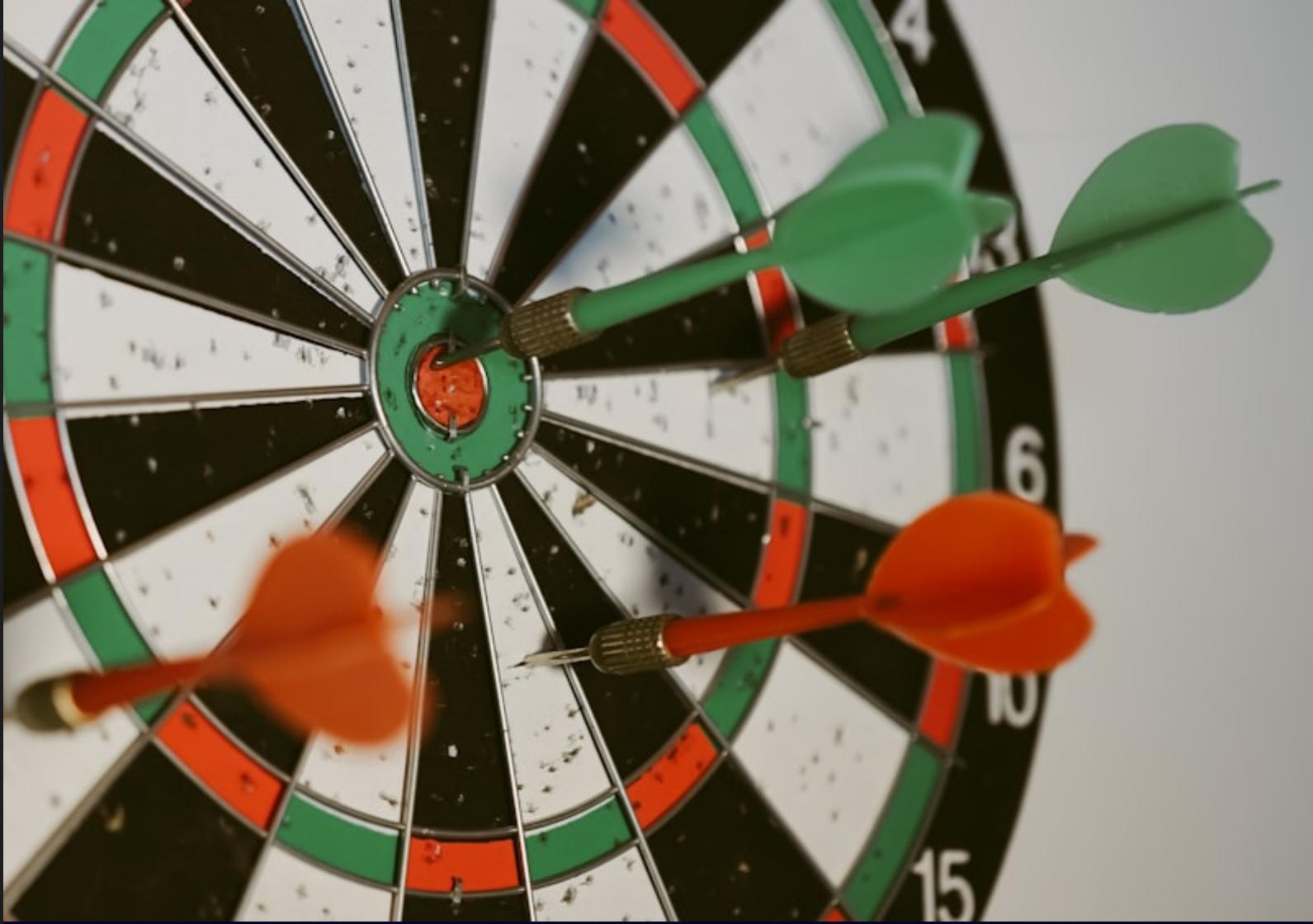
Reflection: Based on the description of the levels of maturity, how would you rate the organization you work for and why?

Organizational characteristics and their effect on maturity levels

Even though we treat every organization as a unique village with its own organizational culture and characteristics, we also find commonalities. These commonalities spread across industries, regardless of whether you are in for example tech, finance, or retail. We can use the commonalities to generalize about organizational cultures and how they affect diversity. These generalizations have been well-summarized by Ida Drange in her article on Diversity Management from 2014 (Drange, 2014). Using existing research, she identifies four characteristics about organizations that are relevant to diversity. Three of the characterizations tend to drag the maturity level downward, while one moves it upward.

It is almost impossible to place one organization into only one characteristic. Usually, all organizations have a degree of all characteristics, varying in intensity depending on for example, subculture, business domain, leadership styles, span of diversity, or resource availability.

Assimilating cultures

In assimilating cultures, organizations have a strict understanding of collective behaviours and how things are supposed to be done. Leaders and employees pay attention to details that deviate from social, organizational and procedural norms, and provide corrective measures to keep employees in line. Assimilating cultures are effective where there is only one way to do things, and all organizations should have some degree of assimilation to move coherently.

However, excessive assimilation means there is no room for new perspectives or that employees spend a lot of energy in adapting to established norms to achieve acceptance. Even though the organization might have diversity, it is not being expressed in the workplace. The slogan for assimilating cultures is: "Come as you are but become like us".

Segregating cultures

In segregating company cultures, the organization might have diversity but only in certain areas of the hierarchy. For example, there is a saying that the Nordics have the highest educated cleaners in the world. They also happen to represent ethnic diversity with (often) insufficient language skills. This indicates a segregating culture where you are placed in lower levels of the organization even though you have skills and competence to perform in higher levels, because of your ethnicity and language.

It could also mean that the organization has a gender balance on corporate level, but when you break down the numbers into departments, there could be large gender imbalances in for example HR and accounting.

The problem is not that there is no diversity represented in the organization. The issue is how difficult it is to move upwards or sideways. This has been discussed at lengths the last 20 years through metaphors such as glass ceilings and walls. Segregating cultures often have little or no intention of doing things differently to break down these glass barriers, by for example assessing the strictness of language requirements or seeing it as an area for development. Or asking questions about why gender imbalance increases every step up in the hierarchy. The slogan for segregating cultures is: "We appreciate diversity but only in certain roles".

Laissez-faire cultures

Laissez-faire is a French expression that roughly translates to letting things take their own course. In these cultures, leaders and employees in the organization disregard both the challenges and potential upsides connected to diversity and diversity science. They pursue a path of equal treatment that does not take into consideration the heterogeneity of human beings. For example, leaders may have employees with different religious backgrounds among employees; and instead of engaging in dialogue to understand how religion is practiced, and how it fits the organization's modus operandi, they pretend religion does not exist among staff.

Or, to take a different common example, the issue could be pretending that being the only female in a military platoon is irrelevant. Neglect leads to differences in employee experiences in a negative way, and in some cases leads to conflicts because of leaders' incompetence or lack of awareness to address issues of conflict at early stages.

The laissez-faire culture is usually well intended. It mostly stems from the idea that everyone should be regarded as homogeneous with equal worth – and that is assumed to be a good thing. However, when people are different, a one-size-fits-all treatment will only be suitable for some. The slogan for laissez-faire cultures is: "So glad that you are diverse, but from now on, let us pretend that you are not".

Inclusive cultures

Inclusive cultures do things that actively work against assimilation, segregation, and laissez-faire cultures. This means that inclusive cultures make room for differences and try to expand social, organizational and procedural norms so that they encompass a larger set of variations in behaviours and preferences among employees. They also ensure equitable opportunities to make way for diversity representation at all levels of the organization.

And they take action to mitigate friction andpotential conflicts that may arise from differences among employees.

Even though it is obvious that organizations would (probably) prefer inclusive cultures, the truth is that most organizations have a mix all culture types. When we ask participants in a workshop to describe the company culture, usually in the very beginning of our organizational development programs, they tend to say they are assimilating, segregating and laissez-faire, but moving towards inclusivity. In other words, not a very helpful configuration when wanting to implementeffective measures that tackle core challenges.

Admitting the state of things is, however, a way to start reflecting on organizational culture from a diversity perspective. But to move from gut-feeling statements to statistically reliable data requires more work and is key to real inclusiveness. Implementing effective measures to succeed with diversity is not about sitting around a campfire sharing thoughts and experiences. It is about getting to the root causes of how the organization's culture hinders or promotes differences in the workplace. And that requires us to navigate based on a more rational approach to diversity.

Maturity variables, the psychosocial factors of the index

The Diversity Index is calculated based on how well an organization performs on five psychosocial variables, listed in **table 2** with explanations. Note that when we measure these, as well as any other psychological phenomenon, there is a need to make sure the scales are reliable, that the questionnaire maps out what you think it does. Yet another critique of many tools used in industry[4]to produce statistics, is the lack of a scientific method in scale development (DeVellis, 2017). Without correctly constructed scales, all the fancy graphs and conclusions are irrelevant as you cannot rely on the data they are all based on.

The five factors are split into how they are perceived by the majority in the organization (those replying that they do not feel different in any of the diversity categories mentioned earlier in the book) and the minorities in the organization (those feeling part of one or more diversity categories). In addition, managers are given an extended questionnaire where they also reply what they think their employees will answer in all five factors – in effect creating a 360-degree review where we get an impression of how well managers are calibrated with the reality of the organization. This latter part is a source of some embarrassment when we present results, for reasons we will talk about shortly.

In the questionnaire we use, all responses are rated from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 6 ("Strongly agree"). When we calculate the maturity score for each of the five dimensions we subtract 3 from the mean score and divide by the standard deviation of the distribution of the data in question. This can sound a bit cryptic to people who do not enjoy numbers, but the logic is simple: We want to know how well the organization is doing compared to a neutral level (that is a score of 3). As we often joke about when we teach: The organization has some problems way beyond the topic of diversity if the average score from employees is on the negative side of the scale.

In that case, it is kind of a miracle people are working there at all. And the whole standard deviation-business is because you cannot say how good anything is, statistically speaking, without taking into consideration the spread of the data you are looking at. There, that is as simple as we can put it. So, either just remember that *"diversity maturity means how well the organization is doing on the five psychosocial factors as compared to a neutral score, taking into consideration the distribution of data"* or go pick up an introduction to statistics (Bordens&Abbott, 2021, does a pretty good job of explaining research methods and stats for beginners).

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[4] Not just with regard to DEI – it is an issue pertaining most of the employee surveys out there.

Inclusion and belonging	This factor is quite often central to anyone working with diversity. As indicated, this is about the degree to which an individual feels included, respected, understood, and accepted by colleagues. Do you feel like "one of the gang"?
Authenticity	Authenticity is the factor closest to what is most often referred to as "psychological safety" (Edmondson, 2018), which has seemingly been all the rage the last few years. In our model, we have been more specific in that we ask people about a) whether they can express their professional opinions/values (the "cold" part of the construct) and b) whether they can express their inner life and feelings (the "warm" part of the construct). Both parts are important, as we will come back to.
Competence utilisation	This factor is especially important in the spirit of wanting diversity to contribute to value. Here, we ask if the competence the employee possesses is in demand, requested, and utilized at work. Many people may walk around with knowledge and valuable perspectives that are never used, which is potentially detrimental to both the organization and the employee.
Relationship to manager	Everything we talk about in this book, and in our work in general, has to do with leadership in some way. But this construct is specifically geared towards two facets of leadership: a) the perceived quality of the employee-manager relationship and b) whether the employee feels that the manager wants what is best for him/her/them.
Development opportunities	This factor is quite often overlooked and is much more related to the organizational systems than interpersonal psychology. In short, we measure the degree to which the employee feels there is room to develop both horizontally (learning new things, becoming better at a field of expertise) and vertically (moving up the corporate ladder)[5]. Corrections here normally involve some very concrete changes in recruitment, promotion strategies, incentive models and portfolio of offered courses/conference attendance/training.

Table 2: A short explanation of the maturity variables used in The Diversity Index.

[5] This factor quite often shows up in our analyses as central to employees, both those representing diversity and majority. At the same time, it is one of the seemingly most demanding for organizations to address as it requires something very concrete that has to be agreed upon across the hierarchy in the company.

Moving along, we usually show diversity maturity in a spiderweb/radar diagram like the one in **figure 9**.

As you can see, the managers' line is outside the rest with a good margin, which is the reason there is a bit of embarrassed laughter every time we show this graph. It is the status quo that managers have inflated assumptions about how well things are going in the organization (and the standard deviation tends to be about half of that of the employee responses, meaning there is a lot more consensus). As we point out continuously when showing our analysis to one board of directors after another: There is a bit more of the typical "dark" personality traits (Machiavellianism, psychopathy and narcissism) in leadership positions (Furtner et al, 2017). Or as we more commonly and jokingly say: *"to become a leader, you kind of have to assume that what you think and want is a tad better than everyone else's opinion on the matter".*
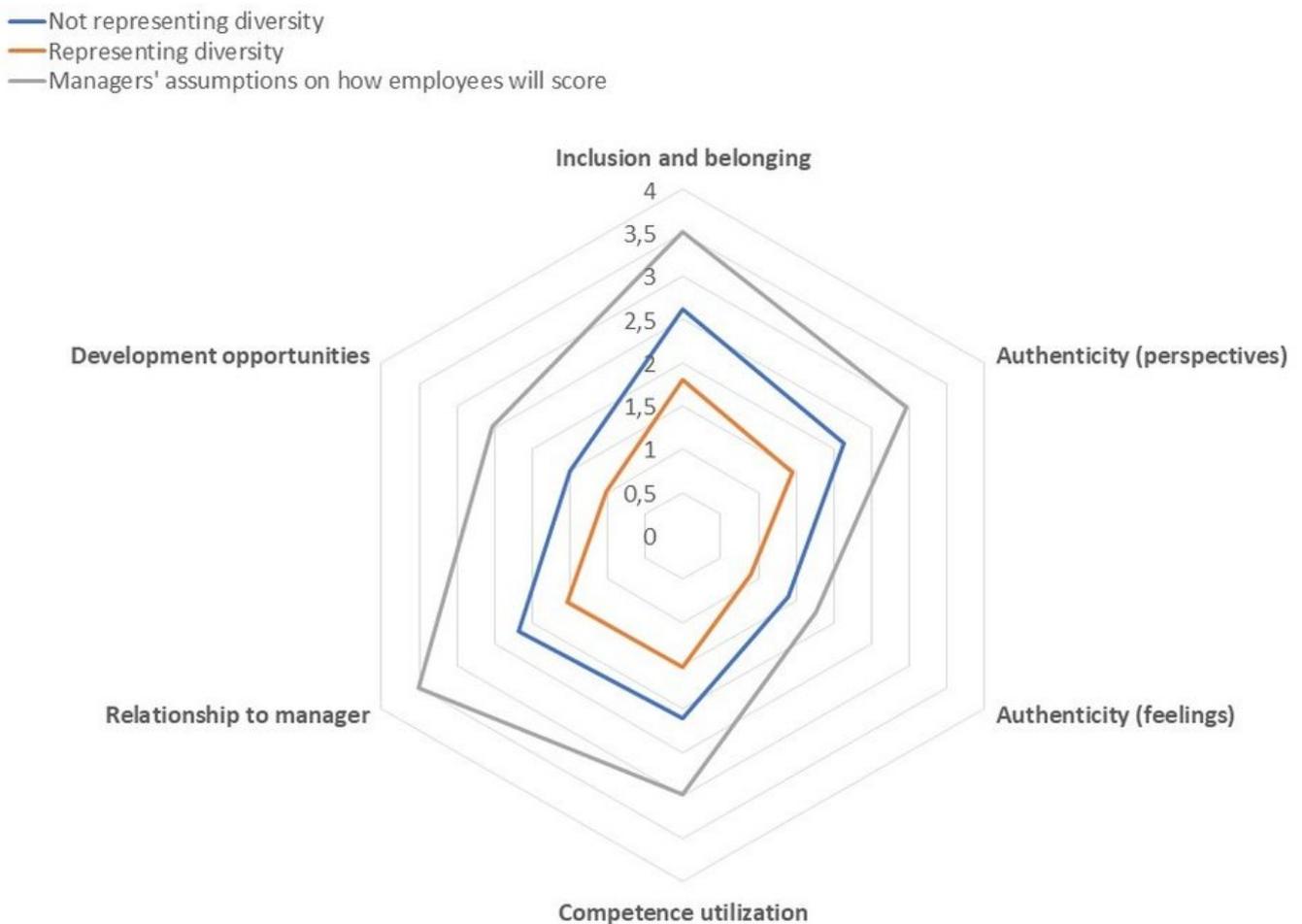

Figure 9: Typical diversity maturity graph for an organization. In this case the graph is based on aggregated data from numerous industrial sectors in Norway. But diagrams for individual organizations tend to look much the same. Note that we here have six dimensions at play because "Authenticity" is divided into its "cold" and "hot" factors, namely "perspectives" and "feelings".

This is not necessarily such a bad thing. Having a more positive outlook on oneself and the organization can be productive: In a lot of areas in life, be it business, dating, sports etc, it can be good to think "hey, I am pretty awesome and willing to go after what I want". Managers tend to be optimistic about their prioritized actions and believe in the intended results – usually (and stereotypically) what one wants from a leader. And being somewhat callous can be an advantage when having to make tough decisions that improve the company but is not always heartwarming to employees.

At the same time, being completely misaligned with the attitude of your employees, especially those in the out-group, the ones representing relative diversity, is not great.

It also often surprises leaders how long it takes to drive behavioural changes. We often hear: "We have worked on a lot of initiatives related to inclusion. I really thought we would be better by now". But this kind of work is not simple. Think about how long it takes to implement a new HR system and get people excited about it (or at least willing to use it).

If we look at the graph lines for majority and minority, the configuration in figure 9 is also typical in this regard. The majority is closer to the managers' assumptions and feel better in all dimensions, compared to the various minorities which score the lowest. In some organizations, the majority line and the manager line are so close together that it is reasonable to assume that when managers are asked about the status of diversity, they actually look to "people like themselves" and primarily evaluate the majority, the in-group. But then again, that is a bit of a swing-and-a-miss when the point is to be aware of the condition of intersectional employees (at least that is the point given the theme of this book).

To be fair regarding the last paragraph, it is very human to look to those like oneself when being asked about how things are going. As humans, we are attracted to, and generally like, those who think and feel like us (Morry, 2005). To start thinking about the perspectives of those unlike us, requires an effort and awareness that comes at an intellectual and emotional price. This is what is known as cognitive dissonance: When we are presented with ideas, perspectives and information that disturbs our world view (or even when we hold ambivalent/opposing perspectives within ourselves), we feel unease. It follows that it is then often easier to get entrenched in one's personal opinion than entertain one's potential mistaken view of reality. Tavris&Aronson (2020) illustrates this very well with relevant scientific and real-world examples.

To summarize: Managers will both have to overcome their own tendency for self-aggrandisement and playing organisational politics (the "Dark Triad"), and the general human tendency for wanting to be correct and coherent in one's own world view, to have a chance at mentalizing those representing diversity. Working in or with a diverse team thus does not make things easier, but doing it right may give better outcomes than just reverting to recruiting clones of oneself.

Differences sure, but how big are they really?

When looking at the spiderweb graph, we see people (specifically those without a background in statistics) often get a bit twitchy when there is a big gap between the lines in the different categories. But you have to remember that the maturity scores are simply mean values calibrated for standard deviations (much like "z-scores"). So, yes, they show how well the organization is doing in each category for the majority and minorities, and how well the leadership is calibrated to employee responses. But when it comes to the gap analysis, things are a tad more complicated. The reason for this is that looking at the differences between two sets of data require more than looking at the means. We also need to take into consideration the pooled standard deviations of the datasets (not just individual ones), as illustrated in **figure 10**.
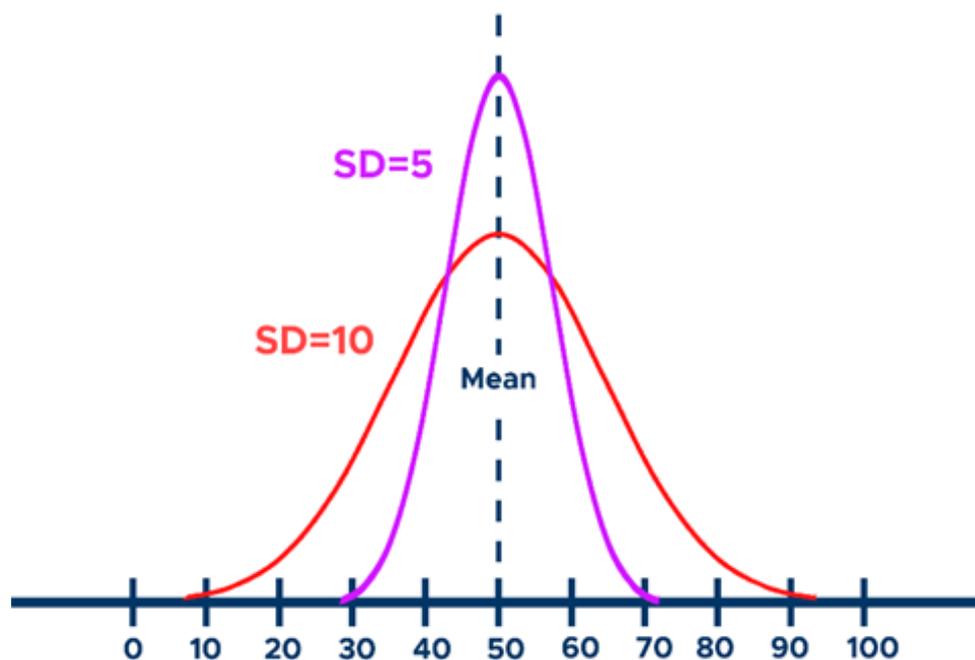

Figure 10: A simple illustration of different standard deviations (from Curvebreakers, 2022) and why taking into account both means and a pooled standard deviation for each dimension is necessary.

When the standard deviation is small, it means that there is a lot of consensus in the data, such as for example "pretty much everyone in the majority group in the organization agree that Development opportunities is rated around 4,8-5,2". When the standard deviation is large, there is more spread in the data, more disagreement on the scoring.

When we compare two lines in the spiderweb graph for a certain maturity variable, we have to do two things: a) check that there is not so much overlap that we cannot really separate the two data sets well (known as significance testing in statistics) and b) see how big the gap really is when taking into account the standard deviations (known as effect size). For the nerds out there, we do t-testing for the maturity variables to determine significance at $\alpha = 0,05$ and use Cohen's d for effect size calculations. For the less dorky, we will just refer you to the colour coding in **table 3 and 4**, which show significance tests and effect sizes.

Now the great thing about this gap analysis is that you get proper insight into where to put in the effort if the goal is to close gaps between groups. It goes without saying that addressing the large gaps should be prioritized higher than the very small. And, of course, low maturity scores from the spiderweb would be attended to more than the high ones (improving the situation in general in addition to closing gaps). Between the spiderweb and the effect size table, the organization gets a very clear view of its path to both improve maturity scores and close gaps. Also, it can to a larger extent avoid the noise that might come from single narratives among its employees. Normally, we let managers drill down the scores for different departments, so they can also get insight further down the hierarchy.

Significance test $\alpha = 0,05$	Employees (diversity) vs. employees (not diversity)	Leaders vs. employees (diversity)	Leaders vs. employees (not diversity)
Inclusion and belonging	0,183	0,750	0,126
Authenticity	0,002	0,001	0,868
Competence utilization	0,045	0,004	0,794
Leadership	0,840	0,015	0,601
Development opportunities	0,662	0,395	0,040

☐ Significant difference   ☐ Not significant difference

Table 3: Table for significance testing of diversity maturity gaps. Values (of p) below 0,05 are categorized as significant gaps.

Effect size	Employees (diversity) vs. employees (not diversity)	Leaders vs. employees (diversity)	Leaders vs. employees (not diversity)
Inclusion and belonging	Not significant	Not significant	Not significant
Authenticity	0,915	0,854	Not significant
Competence utilization	0,632	0,557	Not significant
Leadership	Not significant	0,354	Not significant
Development opportunities	Not significant	Not significant	0,150

Very small effect size   Medium effect size

Small effect size   Large effect size
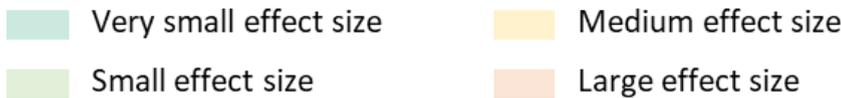
Table 4: Overview of effect sizes of diversity maturity gaps.

Note that these quantitative results do not tell us what is hiding behind the various labels. A problem in the category Development opportunities can be about various glass ceilings in the organization, but it can also be a lack of opportunity to develop expertise, or that the stress levels are so high that no one has time to go to conferences. An issue with Competence utilisation can be about managers simply having no idea of the skillsets available in the team, but it can also be about people feeling uncomfortable speaking up about their knowledge because of a very conform company culture. To find out what the truth is in this regard, we employ qualitative research methods – a topic we will get back to later in this book.

Case example

William is the CEO of an energy company. He has an employee, Cynthia, who is very eager about getting the organization to work on diversity and inclusion. William understands that the topic is important to attract and retain top talent in the future, so he puts Cynthia in charge of conducting some activities to get things moving. Cynthia connects with her network and browses the internet on ideas on how to start.

After a couple of weeks, she gets back to the CEO and tells him that she wishes to do an extended lunch session in the cantina where she invites external speakers. They will share strong personal stories about how it feels representing diversity in different ways. She believes that this will make people sympathize and understand and "ignite a flame for inclusion". This approach was also the "go-to" method for getting started with DEI-work when she browsed forums online. William sees this as a low-cost and low-effort activity, and gives Cynthia his blessings to proceed.

When the day comes, the cantina is full of employees eager to hear more about diversity and inclusion. Cynthia presents each speaker, who all have powerful stories to share about how it felt growing up or working as part of various out-groups. When Cynthia looks out across the cantina while the speakers are talking, she sees many nods and smiles. Some even has tears in their eyes. Employees applauds the speakers and many thanks Cynthia for arranging a very interesting session on diversity and inclusion. However, when she later speaks to employees who were part of the diversity groups that were addressed in the speeches, she gets inconsistent feedback.

Some say they recognize exactly what the speaker was talking about, while others say that it was interesting, but nothing they could relate to. Some are even provoked by how the speakers were trying to speak on behalf of an entire group. Cynthia is perplexed because she thought that, of all employees in the organization, the ones that have the same diversity as the speakers would be the ones to appreciate the talks the most. After reflecting a bit, she concludes that one person's story cannot be representative for all people in a group.

It becomes obvious the more she thinks about it. She rushes back to William to say that the initiative was a success but merely a starting point. To really succeed, she has to uncover the realities of the organization and how it feels being diverse at this workplace in particular. The CEO looked at Cynthia for some time before he responded: "Meh, I think we are good. Let me know if you can arrange another session like this in about a year".

Working with diversity, we see that many organizations have planned activities that barely scratch the surface. They also fail to address the realities of the organization and instead rely on external voices to inspire and promote diversity and inclusion - making DEI something that happens "over there". People who are truly engaged in the matter, such as Cynthia, often become discouraged and are forced into roles that look like event planners . Many organizations also have people like William, who can be called gatekeepers, that hinder any real change. Gatekeepers come in many forms and levels in the organization and is in no way restricted to the CEO (we have worked cases where the CEO is on board, but people at lower levels hinder progress).

From our point of view, we do not oppose strong personal stories, but we do oppose organizations that choose strong stories as their primary weapon of choice to succeed with DEI. If organizations fail to analyse and address the realities inside the organization, any DEI measure will end up being "something extra" – most likely not connected to the bottom or local culture. And thus it is likely to be cut when push comes to shove.

On calculating the Diversity Index

Since the Diversity Index calculation (the single index number) is based on the maturity variables, it might be good to just clearly say how it is done. The first thing we do is average all the maturity scores for both the majority and minorities (but not the managers, obviously).

This gives us a general score for the organization that takes into consideration all perspectives. Then we subtract the average significant effect size gap from table 4 as a large gap means that the organization has not really done a good job with giving diverse employees the same treatment as the majority group. So, the formula looks this this:

$$S_{Diversity\ Index} = (\sum x_{maturity\ scores})/n_{maturity\ scores} - (\sum y_{significant\ effect\ sizes})/n_{significant\ effect\ sizes}$$

, where

$S_{Diversity\ Index}$ is the Diversity Index total score,

$x_{maturity\ scores}$ is each maturity score for both the majority and minorities,

$n_{maturity\ scores}$ is the number of maturity scores (default is 5x2=10),

$y_{significant\ effect\ sizes}$ is the significant effect sizes (as exemplified in table 4),

$n_{significant\ effect\ sizes}$ is the number of significant effect sizes (varies from organization to organization)

The Diversity Index score works as an indicator for how well the majority and minorities experience the workplace and to what extent there are gaps between the groups. An organization can improve its score by both closing caps and increasing the maturity scores of each psychosocial subcategory, such as Inclusion and belonging or Relationship to leader. We are always wary of recommending pushing everyone to a level 5, trying to achieve the maximum possible score.

The most important thing to do is to establish a baseline (where are we now?) and decide on how much the organization wants to improve (what will be the best level for our business?). There could be natural barriers for exceeding certain maturity scores. For example, if you are a very labour-intensive organization with few managerial positions, there may be a limit to employees' sense of development opportunities or competence utilization. On the other hand, if you are a high-earning marketing company with a broad client list, maybe a level 4 score is not improbable.

In extension, we rarely encourage organizations to aim at scores too far above the industry benchmark (overextending), even though this is what most organizations are interested in. Our ambition is always to keep the organization engaged in becoming a better version of itself, regardless of whether that means going from level 1 to 2, or 3 to 4. Every move up the maturity level ladder will be beneficial for employees and hopefully lead to better performance, as we will address in the next chapter.

Inferential statistics: Connecting the dots

Everything we have talked about so far shows the current status in the organization with regard to diversity. Apart from the t-testing (to check for statistical significance) and effect sizes, it is very straightforward stuff. However, we have not said much about the consequences of the results. Knowing whether anything is good or bad is hard to tell except that you can say things like "we are at 1,5 on the Diversity Index, which is kind of low as compared to the maximum score of 5".

As you may be aware of, diversity has been linked to value generation in numerous articles and reports around the world. But most of them, if not all, fail to explain how diversity affects performance using valid research methods and inferential statistics. In this chapter, we will get into how the results from the Diversity Index affect important KPIs[7] that in turn influence performance. This is, after all, what science is really about:

- Seeing which phenomena affect each other,

- to what extent,

- and bonus points for explaining how and why

Leading KPIs for performance

An organization can have all kinds of KPIs. Billable hours, number of days sick leave, miles travelled, number of documents created, customer satisfaction – you name it. But we always include three important psychological factors when we do our analysis: subjective well-being (SWB), meaning and motivation.

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[7] *«Key Performance Indicators»: Commonly these are variables that an organization uses to measure to what degree it is achieving what it should.*

Decades of research has shown that these factors have a large impact on how well we perform at work. Lately, we have conducted more targeted analyses directly at harder KPIs such as retention and sick leave, but measuring SWB, meaning and motivation work well as leading KPIs. If you are unfamiliar with the term "leading KPI", it means that they provide early indications for success or improvement.

You might feel we are moving some steps away from diversity in the next paragraphs, but do not worry. We will get back to it after having explained these factors.

Subjective well-being at work

SWB can be a strange term to use, but it has become very popular in psychology because it is more precise than words like "happiness", "joy" or "satisfaction". SWB has a long tradition of empirical research dating back to the 1980s (Diener, 1984). A good thing about it, apart from decades of research, is that measuring how people are doing using this construct is relatively stable (Eid&Larsen, 2008). That is, what people reply when asked about their SWB does not change from day to day depending on, say, if they spilled coffee on their pants or happened to get lucky the previous night. Whereas constructs like happiness or joy would likely be more volatile and subject to such random factors.

In Diversity Index, we use a version of what is known as The Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener, 1985) adapted to the context of work. Our adaptation is shown in **table 5**. People score each statement on a Likert scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 6 (Strongly agree).

1	In most ways my work life is close to ideal.
2	The conditions of my work life are excellent.
3	I am satisfied with my work life.
4	So far, I have gotten the important things I want in my work life.
5	I am satisfied with how my career has turned out.

Table 5: "The Satisfaction With Life Scale" (Diener, 1985) adapted to the workplace.

As Eid&Larson (2008) highlights, SWB is not only the result of doing things well, but also a source of better health, better relationships, higher performance (Salgado et al, 2019) in whatever one is trying to achieve. This is an important point, especially in our approach. The traditional way of thinking is that we become upbeat as a result, instead of understanding that it is a starting point for doing well in a lot of cases. Organizations should be interested in having a workforce with as much SWB as possible, no matter the state of affairs.

Reflection: Feel free to score yourself on the questions in table 5 and consider the reasons for your rating of your SWB at work.
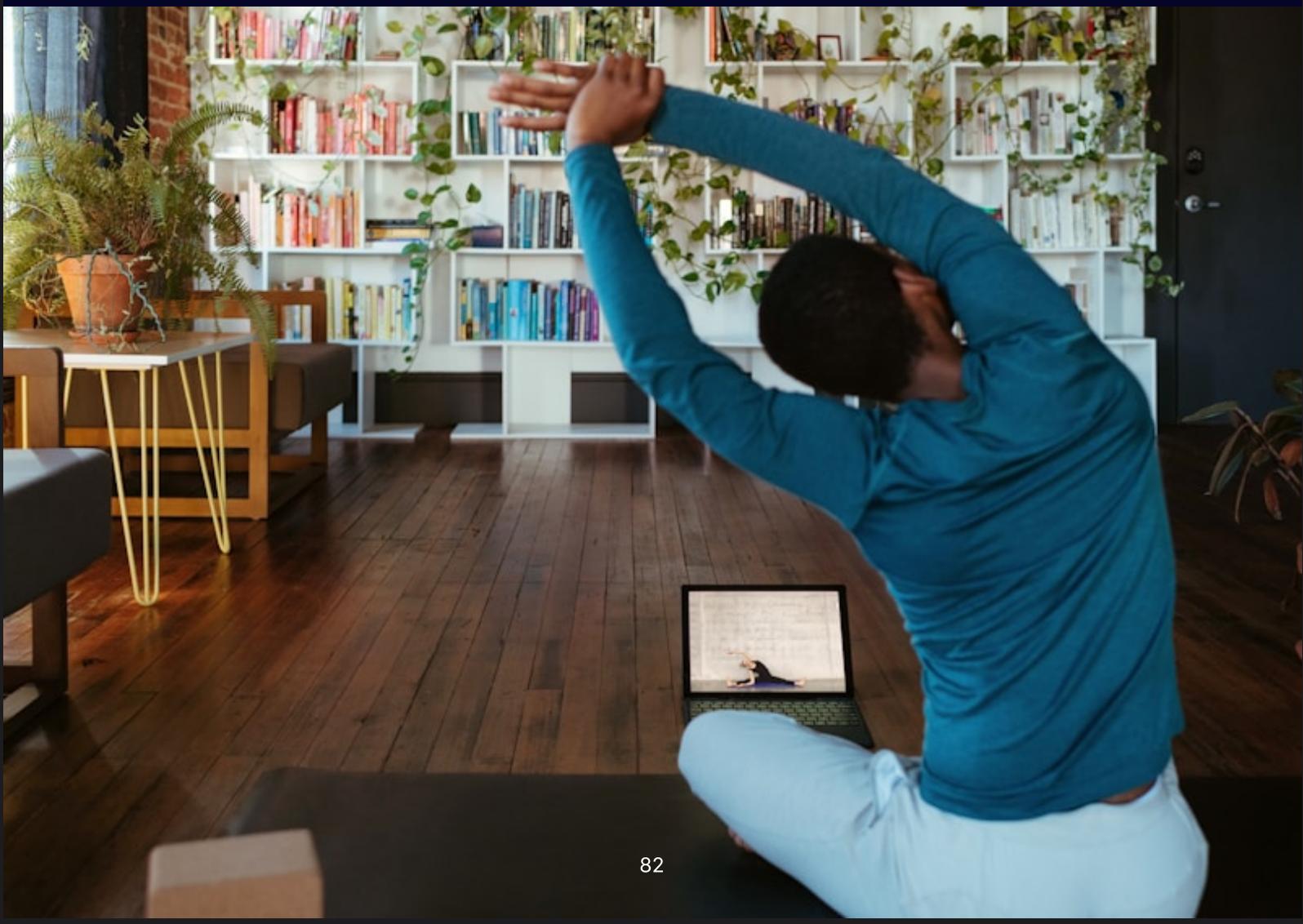
Meaning at work

Meaning is one of the central existential constructs in psychology and can be talked about for days just to cover the basics. For a few existentially oriented clinicians and researchers, the discussion lasts a whole lifetime. Most people have probably read "Man's Search for Meaning" (Frankl, 1946) which highlights the human need for meaning to keep going in the face of dire circumstances (Frankl's work describes how Holocaust survivors were able to keep going despite being in concentration camps during WW2). Furthermore, Irvin Yalom has highlighted the need to realize life's inherent lack of meaning to become psychologically mature (Yalom, 1980). Meaning can also be said to simply be the brain's tendency to create patterns out of pretty much anything, a view that was first popularized in Gestalt psychology (Wertheimer, 2017).

Luckily, we can narrow our own scope of meaning down to the context of work. Although that does not really enable us to ignore the wider understanding of the construct, it does make it a bit easier to talk about at the surface level. The measurement tool we use is called The Work and Meaning Inventory (Steger et al, 2012; WAMI), and is shown in its entirety in table 6 (it is scored on a 6-point Likert scale, same as with SWB).

Factor	Question
Positive meaning	1. I have found a meaningful career.
	4. I understand how my work contributes to my life's meaning.
	5. I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful.
	8. I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose.
Meaning-Making through Work	2. I view my work as contributing to my personal growth.
	7. My work helps me better understand myself.
	9. My work helps me make sense of the world around me.
Greater Good Motivations	3. My work really makes no difference to the world (reversed).
	6. I know my work makes a positive difference in the world.
	10. The work I do serves a greater purpose.

Table 6: The "Work and Meaning Inventory" (Steger et al, 2012). Note that question #3 is reversed, meaning that it is scored the opposite of the rest of the questions.

As you can see, the WAMI has three separate parts reflecting different types of meaning at work, and for your convenience, we have sorted the questions accordingly. Through Diversity Index, we have seen that Positive meaning and Meaning-Making through Work are both correlated with diversity variables (Løvstad&Kumar, 2024a). This is probably not a huge surprise: The degree to which you are included, respected, can express yourself and the rest of the maturity variables, will influence how meaningful your work is and how much it contributes to your personal growth.

As for Greater Good Motivations, we find that this has very little to do with diversity. As you can see from the questions, this is more about the degree to which you consider your work as important in the grand scheme of things. Likely, you will score much higher in this part if you work for an idealistic organization or do research in a field you feel is important to society – or something else that elevates your daily effort to a bigger deal than what most people experience. But it has less to do with typical psychosocial factors mapped in Diversity Index. Organizations trying to drive execution by explaining the greater "WHY" is a swing and a miss to most employees. It is more important to focus on making sense of the job itself and how it contributes to an overall meaningful experience in employees' lives.

What we also like to point out regarding meaning at work, is that it can serve as a protective factor (Schnell, 2021), in line with Frankl's original work. If things are tough at work, a sense of meaning can keep you going and protect you from a number of both psychological and physical stressors. But eventually people will experience attrition in meaning if SWB is low over time. A very high degree of meaning paired with a very low SWB can lead to people overextending and burning out or quitting or both (Schnell, 2021). One can perhaps consider meaning at work as a backup generator or spare tire: You can use it for a while to handle a rough patch, but the goal should be to get back to a normal positive work environment with satisfactory SWB scores as quickly as possible.

Reflection: Feel free to score yourself on the questions in table 6 and reflect on the reasons for your rating of your meaning at work.

Motivation at work

It is hard to go anywhere these days without someone talking about motivation in one way or another. From proper psychological research to social media, the construct is always prevalent in our daily lives. And it seems (if you believe the hype) that employers, athletes and average Joes are all very interested in always being close to manically motivated. The reason for this, perhaps, is that motivation as a psychological construct is very closely tied to behaviour: It is basically what you want to do, why and to what degree. And although motivation can stem from basic hedonistic needs, traumatic events, existential ponderings or pretty much anything else, both positive and negative (Diseth, 2019), it inherently leads to things getting done. Which is probably why it is a priority in many contexts.

We use the Work Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale when measuring motivation at work (WEIMS; Tremblay et al, 2010). But since it is a rather long questionnaire that our clients would get grumpy about replying to in its entirety, we have created a short version of it, shown in **table 7** (which is even a bit shorter than the Short Work Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale; SWEIMS; Kotera et al, 2022).

	I do my work...
Internal motivation	8 ...for the satisfaction I experience from taking on interesting challenges
	5 ...because it has become a fundamental part of who I am.
	11 ...because I want to be very good at this work, otherwise I would be very disappointed.
External motivation	1 ...because this is the type of work I chose to do to attain a certain lifestyle.
	2 ...for the income it provides me.
Lack of motivation	17 ...I do not know, too much is expected of us (reversed).

Table 7: A short version of the Work Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation Scale (Tremblay et al, 2010).

As you can see, we get a general impression of external motivation, internal motivation, and lack of motivation (which is reverse scored) from this scale. This is fine for our needs. Using a complete scale would offer nuances if our focus was to take apart and analyse this particular construct.

When it comes to our measurements, we see that maturity variables, intersectionality, and all other things measured, do not have any effect on external motivation. This is not so strange because external motivation boils down to rewards for doing tasks. And this in turn has mostly to do with pay and similar very concrete factors (Diseth, 2019). It should be mentioned that older research on monetary reward (Kahneman&Deaton, 2010) claimed that happiness from money stopped when reaching a certain level, but newer research (Killingsworth et al, 2023) shows that there is no limit. You keep getting more motivated and happier the more cash flows into your bank account into infinity. So, one should keep asking for raises if external motivation is of interest. Internal motivation, however, is influenced by the psychosocial factors we measure.

Reflection: Feel free to score yourself on the questions in table 7 and consider the reasons for your rating of your motivation at work.

Case example

Mukhtar is the HR Director for a large public organization. He recently received the results from the employee engagement survey which shows that overall well-being had plummeted from 75% to 55%. The downfall was prevalent in all departments, so there was no single department or manager that could be blamed. The organization had recently gone through a restructuring to meet severe cost reductions in their budgets, and apparently, the process has taken its toll on morale. Mukhtar's manager was stressed out about the results and asked him if he could come up with three things to boost well-being.

Mukthar looked at the survey results and struggled to make sense of them. Mukthar was decent at interpreting statistics but could not find any systemic reasons for why well-being was down. It was puzzling. Of course, the cost reductions were an obvious contributor, but refunding each department to boost well-being was out of the question. Mukthar returned to his manager and said that he could not find any obvious drivers that explain well-being in the organization. Consequently, he could not say, for example, which three things would boost the results. To answer the question, he would need better data.

Mukthar's manager was mildly frustrated and said that the last thing the organization was not doing another survey for a while. He told Mukthar to return with three things, to the best of his knowledge, that would boost well-being. Mukthar reluctantly accepted and returned with some measures that looked great on paper, and in line with what he had seen and heard elsewhere. He suggested a focus on the overall vision of the organization to provide a higher meaning in the employees' work. Mukthar had read that a sense of meaning can drive people to do the most amazing things.

In the following year, Mukthar's manager had monthly sessions where he explained to the entire organization how important their work was for the greater good. And it paid off. After one-year, overall well-being was up to 70 %. The manager praised the advice from Mukthar, but Mukthar himself scratched his head. It seemed like the turnover rate had increased dramatically in the same period. Was the boost in well-being because of his manager's focus on the greater good, or had the dissatisfied employees left the company? Did focusing on the greater good cause people to leave faster (a kind of provocation to already disgruntled employees)? Are the ones left in the organization the ones who felt a good sense of well-being and meaning all along?

💡

When working with job satisfaction, many organizations are flying blind. They look at the output, which is an overall job-satisfaction or well-being score and implement measures out of thin air or leave it up to the departments themselves to figure out what to do. Organizations often look to cases and examples of what has been successful elsewhere as guiding stars of what to do in their own organization. But every organization is different with its own context and constellation of people. Understanding what job satisfaction means in practice is not a matter of looking outside the organization but picking up the mirror and investigating local context.

Furthermore, understanding how job-satisfaction works is important to implement accurate measures. Focusing on a higher meaning when well-being is down comes with a risk of losing people on the lower end of the well-being scale. And as discussed, "Greater Good Motivations" is the least relevant facet of meaning, although often popular among managers when addressing the topic.

The pitfalls are many for those uninformed on the psychological basis of the leading KPIs.

To avoid being stuck with a headache like Mukthar's or being in denial like his manager, it is important to collect high quality data on job satisfaction with scientifically validated scales – and understand the nuances of them.
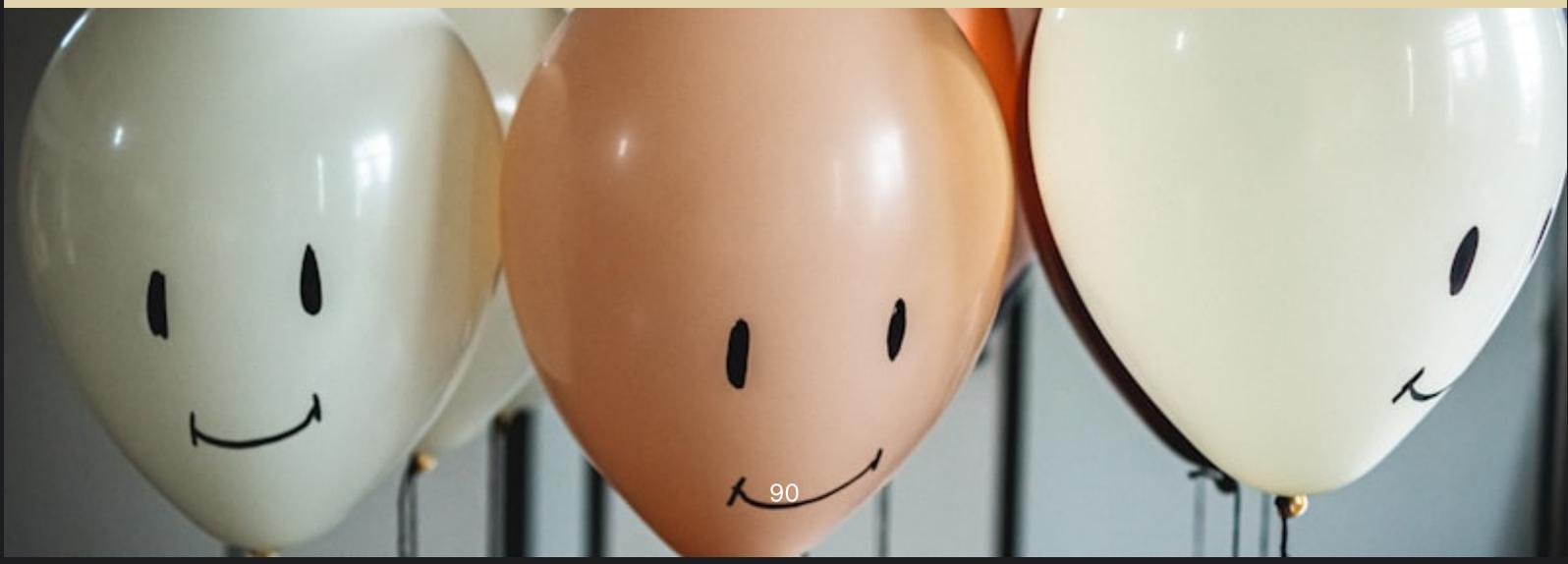
Regression analysis of the leading KPIs (well-being, motivation and meaning)

The first type of inferential statistics we do are simple regression analyses connecting our diversity maturity variables to the KPIs. The maturity variables can be connected to just about anything relevant to the organization (given a reasonable hypothesis on why they relate to each other), but we always provide an analysis on the leading KPIs: SWB, motivation and meaning.

Note that these regression analyses looks at how everyone in the organization is affected by its maturity. Since the variables in question obviously pertain to both the majority and the minorities, it is a good place to start. It also highlights that the things we investigate is relevant to all employees and we want everyone on board. This is a very important point: Diversity is not only about the people who are or think differently, but about everyone and how they work together. It is just that that being diverse relative to the majority in the company creates different experiences reflected in the maturity variables – which we have already seen in the spiderweb and will get back to soon in more detail.

A typical regression analysis is presented in **figure 11**.
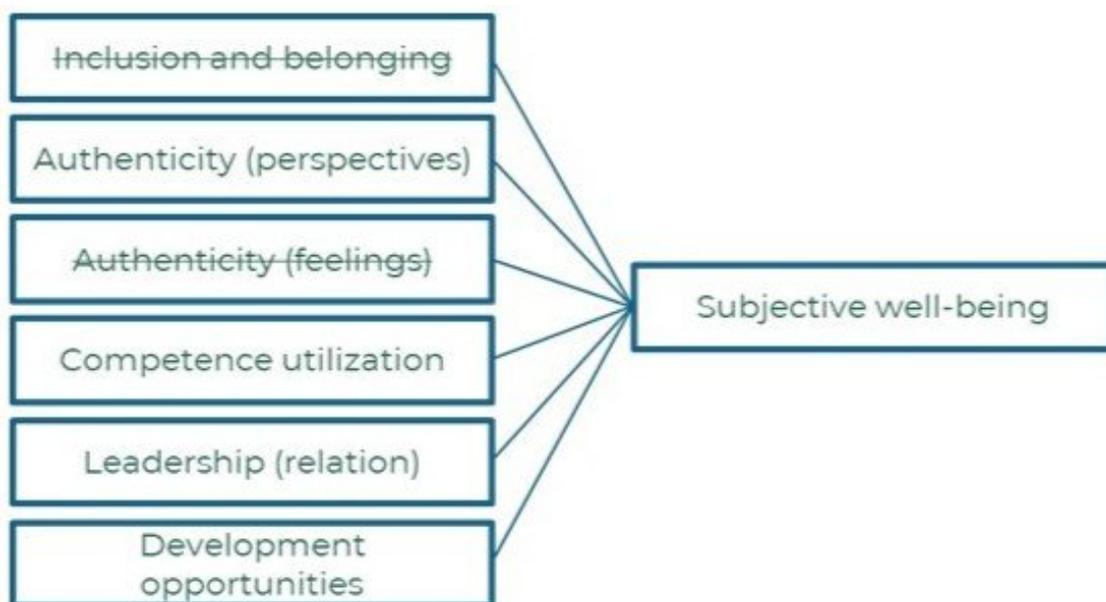
Figure 11: Example of a regression analysis showing the effect of maturity variables on SWB in an example organization.

The first thing to note is that when we do inferential statistics, we divide Authenticity into two factors: Authenticity (perspectives) and Authenticity (feelings). This is to increase granularity on this important factor. Authenticity (perspectives) describes the "cold" part of the construct – how well employees feel they can express their professional opinions.

Authenticity (feelings), the "hot" facet, is geared towards being able to express one's inner life and is the foundation for building proper relations to one's colleagues. Both types of authenticity are central to performance and handling difficult situations at work but contribute differently.

What we see in the example analysis in figure 11 is that Inclusion and belonging and Authenticity (feelings) are indicated to not influence SWB in this organization (not statistically significant). Thus, if this particular organization wants to increase SWB for employees in general, it does not need to focus on these factors for the time being. They might become relevant later as the organization matures and internal dynamics change, but right now, the four other factors are the priority.

The same thing is done for motivation and meaning as well (not shown, but it looks roughly the same). By looking at the regression analyses, top management can make decisions on which of the relevant factors they want to improve. In figure 11, this is Authenticity (perspectives), Competence utilization, Relationship to leader, and Development opportunities. Voila. Decision making just became a bit easier. To help decision making even more, it is possible to say how much each factor influences SWB, motivation or meaning. For example, it may be that Authenticity (perspectives) influences SWB twice as much as Competence utilization.

Regarding SWB, meaning and motivation we have done analysis on many organizations now and know the range of explained variance we get for each of those KPIs (which is a measure of how much the differences in scores on KPIs are influenced by the maturity variables). For SWB we typically get 50-60% explained variance, which is a large effect size. It means that more than half of the experienced SWB at work can be explained by some combination of our maturity variables. If you think about it, that is pretty awesome. If you, in your personal life, knew about a handful of things you could do that would change more than half of how good you felt about your overall well-being, then you would be somewhat insane not to address these.

For meaning, the explained variance is 32-36% and for motivation we get 22-26% across the board. These are moderate effect sizes, but more than enough to justify working with the maturity variables in these contexts as well. Lastly, remember that regression is always a two-way street in that it only points to a relationship between variables, not what causes what. In this regard, one has to use a bit of logic and common sense to claim that, for example, Inclusion and belonging contributes to higher SWB and not the other way around. This sort of thing must be done individual to every organization.

We have had cases where Leadership was correlated negatively with meaning. This could mean that those who did not see much meaning in their work also got more follow-up from their leader for guidance. An employee who deems their work to be meaningless would get their leader's attention, in most cases. The other way around, it might be less logical to think that good leadership made people feel less meaning in their work.

As mentioned earlier, this is why qualitative investigations are important after having done the quantitative analysis. We will talk more in-depth about qualitative work later.

Multiple mediation analysis

One of the true unsung heroes in diversity science is a Canadian professor of psychology named Andrew Hayes. So far, he does not even know he is important to the field, but we will be sure to tell him one day (maybe even send him this book). Hayes' contribution is the development of an algorithm/macro called PROCESS (Hayes, 2012). This awesome piece of code enables doing a type of statistical modelling called the multiple mediation analysis. To start simple: A mediation analysis is a statistical method for looking at how one variable can affect another variable through a third variable. This is illustrated in **figure 12**.
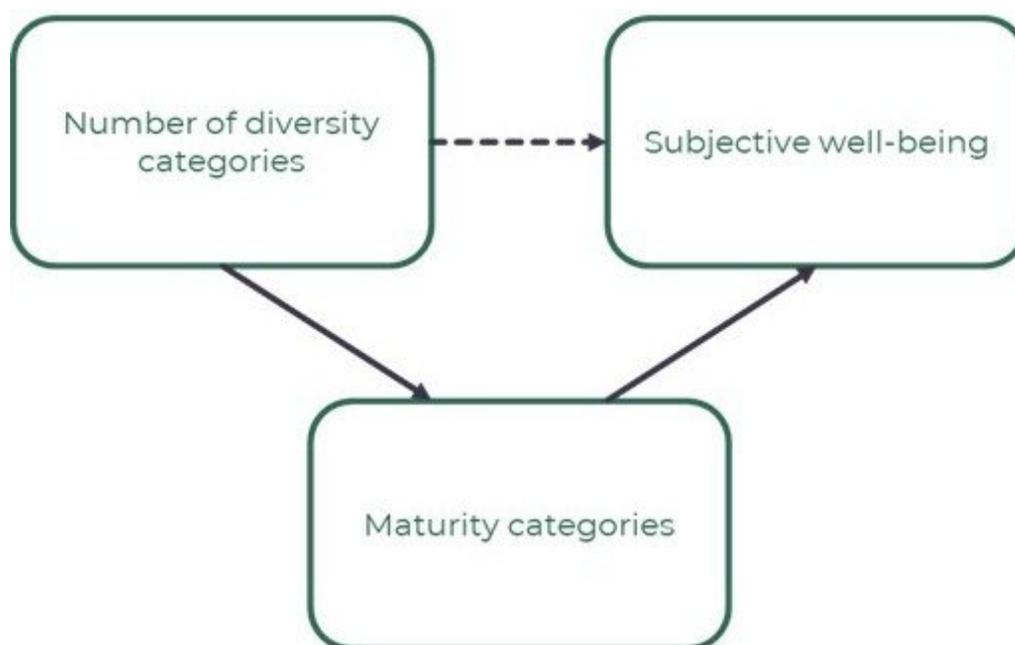
Figure 12: A relevant example of what a mediation analysis can look like.

This is a common phenomenon: Whenever we claim that A does something to B, but depends on C, C is considered a mediating variable. In such a model we say that there can be a direct effect from A to B co-existing with an indirect effect from A to C to B. However, we see that for all our analyses with our particular diversity model (at least so far), we only get indirect effects. This is why we claim that the famous (and at times infamous) McKinsey-reports (Hunt et al, 2015; Hunt et al, 2020) are incorrect through oversimplification: Diversity has negligible direct effects on KPIs. The effect always depends on mediating variables [8].

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[8] This is also common sense in that the question "does diversity improve business?" can be assumed to depend on how that diversity is treated.

Now, the really cool thing about Hayes' PROCESS-module is that it enables looking at any number of mediating variables existing in parallel. So instead of saying that the effect of A on B depends on C, we can say the effect depends on C1, C2, C3, ..., Cn. That is, we can have any number of mediating variables. This is handy as we have several diversity maturity variables (six so far, as you have seen) that mediate our effects. And so, we have built some heavy inhouse algorithms that takes PROCESS to the next level and almost kills our computer hardware. But it gets us a proper analysis of how, for example, degree of intersectionality influences SWB and through which diversity maturity variables. On that note, a typical multi-mediation analysis can look something like **figure 13**.

Figure 13: A typical multi-mediation analysis we produce for client organizations. In this case we see degrees of visible diversity (degree of intersectionality in visible categories) on the left influencing SWB at work on the right, through the maturity variables Authenticity (feelings), Competence utilisation and Development opportunities.

This example organization shows a connection between Visible diversity (degree of intersectionality, but only in the visible categories) and SWB at work. The effect is mediated by Authenticity (feelings), Competence utilization and Development opportunities. For every degree of visible intersectionality (to a maximum of five), SWB decreases by 1,8-5,5% as annotated on the right side of the graph.

If this organization wanted to increase the SWB of people with visible diversity, it would have to start working on the three maturity variables that show up as significant mediators here. Otherwise, they likely lose performance in their visibly diverse employees (Salgado et al, 2019) and might also struggle not to lose these to competitors at some point (Sears et al, 2013). Stopping organizations from "bleeding" through lack of diversity management is an important goal of the work described in this book, and the inferential statistics shown in this chapter is an essential starting point for beginning to do the right things.

Reflection: What factors do you think most strongly influences people from various diverse groups when it comes to "soft KPIs" where you work?

Case example

Yutaka is an HR Business Partner in a company that delivers financial consultancy services to other businesses. He had received messages that something was "off" when it came to diverse representation in higher levels of the organization. As a whole, the organization had a high degree of diversity representation, but they were all employed at lower levels. The HR Director had recently purchased an unconscious bias training program to help the situation. However, Yutaka believed that the program would fail terribly and provide no solution to an unknown underlying problem. He explained his concerns to the HR Director who gave him permission to conduct a multi-mediation analysis for his department.

The results were striking. It showed that intersectionality affected SWB with 11-13 % per degree of diversity, and that the mediating variables were Authenticity (perspectives) and Competence utilization. He returned to his HR Director and said that he would like to exchange the unconscious bias training with a workshop among leaders and employees where they could discuss the findings. He believed that this would be more of a contribution to creating a relevant solution.

Three weeks later, Yutaka hosted a workshop where he explained the findings and sat leaders and employees down to discuss how these results affect the work environment. It turned out that both leaders and employees felt that the organization had a very strict and implicit rule of corporate behaviour that might have gone too far. Leaders were quick to disregard inputs that did not fit the norm of the organization, and employees tried their best to adapt their behaviours to fit what they thought managers expected. Through dialogue, they found out that employees spent a lot of energy adapting to expectations from managers (at least what they thought were the expectations), and managers were afraid to allow anything that deviated from the way things had been done.

We often see that organizations try to create standardized approaches for dealing with diversity. And often, it leads to measures that "tick the boxes" but provide no real change in behaviours whatsoever. We tend to regard diversity as a regulatory task rather than something that is tightly linked to leadership and organizational development. When it comes to human interaction, solutions require (not surprisingly) actual human interaction. Unfortunately, we see that oft used one-size-fits-all approaches create more reluctance to working with the topic. In many cases, both managers and employees become afraid of talking about diversity in a constructive and strategic way, creating a negative (fear based) environment instead of the open and positive path originally wished for.

Organizations that use Yutaka's approach usually manage to have real discussions about real issues concerning their department. When diversity is made relevant to the organization's performance and success, it invites dialogue and curiosity. If you think about it, it makes a lot of sense. If the goal is to engage in dialogue to achieve greatness together, it is more appealing than say, talking about how certain groups in society are oppressed on a general basis.

Various other measurements of interest

In addition to the variables we have shown you, which comprise the crux of our quantitative method, we also have a couple of other important metrics which we will mention, just to dot the I's. Firstly: For all managers we measure something we call Strategy and measurement, which is basically "manager buy-in" colloquially. This is a six-item questionnaire mapping out to what degree managers know, have faith in and are measured on their work on the organization's diversity strategy. The scale is shown in **table 8**.

1	I am measured on diversity in my department
2	I am held accountable by management for succeeding with diversity in my department
3	I am familiar with the diversity strategy in the organisation I work for
4	I believe my organisation focuses on the right things when it comes to diversity
5	I believe the organisation I work for knows what it wants to achieve with diversity
6	I am asked about diversity by management

Table 8: The Strategy and measurement scale for managers.

On a somewhat funny note, we have observed several organizations with a very high buy-in, even though they do not have an actual diversity strategy, nor have a score above 2 on the Diversity Index. If you think back on the research on the Dark Triad and managers, it is a kind of interesting detail.

Another, and more important measurement we do, is a scale that simply maps to what degree employees feel different than their colleagues regardless of the diversity categories we use for intersectionality. The point of this is twofold: 1) people can feel different in many ways that are not included in the diversity categories mapped out in the social sciences (these "other" facets can be political views, personality factors, relational style etc – might even be taste in music or the like), and 2) we get a measure of how much potential for friction there is. By "friction" we simply mean how many different perspectives are present in the pool of employees, which can both become a source of interesting productive ideas or internal bickering – depending on how it is handled. You can see the so-called Feeling different scale in table 9 (as usual, people rate their agreement to the statements on a Likert scale from 1 to 6).

1	I feel my perspectives differ from those of my colleagues.
2	I often have different opinions compared to my colleagues.
3	I tend to think in the same way as those I work with (reversed).
4	I have an ongoing experience of being different from my colleagues.
5	I feel that I am in general much like those I work with (reversed).
6	I would do things in a different way than my colleagues if given the choice.

Table 9: The Feeling different scale which measures whether employees are mostly conform or if there is a potential for friction in the organization.

The Feeling different scale is also used in the multiple mediation analysis to see how friction influences KPIs, often by us referred to as "the price of thinking differently" in the organization. Again and again, we see that the results of this scale have a big negative effect on SWB, meaning and motivation (SWB more than the other two) for organizations in the bottom half of the Diversity Index range. Which means that friction is costly, and conformity is preferred when the organization is immature. In such an environment it is relatively unreasonable to demand a lot of innovation and new ideas in general as it is most likely punished or ignored (which has also been the feedback when we have done interviews in the organizations in question).

Reflection: In various organisations you have been part of, how much room was there for differing opinions and perspectives?

Qualitative research: Following up on the quantitative analysis

Discussing qualitative research conceptually is far outside the scope of this book. The interested reader is encouraged to check out Merriam&Tisdell (2009) and/or Willig (2001). However, a few words need to be said on the topic to be able to work effectively in the field. First and foremost, remember that qualitative data and its analysis can never be generalized. That is the job of quantitative analysis and tools for inferential statistics (it is right there in the word: We "infer" from it). However, qualitative research can give us insight into the situation of given communities. That is: If you gather adequate data from a given community, you can say something about that particular community. So, after doing the types of analyses described so far in this book, it is natural and scientifically solid to follow up with data gathered in the form of interviews, workshops where people can offer insight, opportunities for staff to comment in writing on how diversity is handled, participatory observations and the like. Given that one gets access to a representative group of sources from the organization, one should end up with a good understanding of what lies behind the lower granularity findings from the quantitative work.

As for choosing a qualitative research approach, there is a plethora of choices available. But we find that Grounded Theory (Birks&Mills, 2022, for example) is usually the most appropriate as it enables building an understanding of the organization with a "blank slate"/unassuming mindset. Several of the other qualitative research methods have different preconceptions that shape the path of investigation, which is not usually what organizations want (in our experience so far). Doing qualitative organizational analysis through the lens of power relations, psychoanalytic theory or whatnot is not usually what is required/wanted by our clients.

We also take a non-constructivist view, which means that we assume that the sum of knowledge gained from the organizational research represents how things really are rather than just a constructed understanding stemming from the interaction between us and the various members of the client organization. A constructivist approach means assuming everything found is just emergent from the interaction and not connected to concrete reality, and such an approach would make the whole analysis pointless for the goal of further developing the organization.

In short: What we do is gather qualitative data, look at common denominators between the sources and find out which topics emerge across the sources. And the whole exercise is done with focus on the prioritized factors mapped out in the quantitative analysis (all the stuff you have seen so far in the Diversity Index analyses).

To illustrate, imagine a company where Authenticity (feelings), Competence utilization and Development opportunities are central to the SWB of diverse employees, such as shown in figure 13. And the top executives agree that SWB at work is an important KPI to improve. In this case it would be smart to set up an interview guide homing in on the relevant maturity variables (usually we do structured or semi-structured interviews). Since we get to know the organization during the workshops both leading up to and after the quantitative analysis, it is relatively easy to create decent questions. As with all qualitative research, more than a bit of social intelligence is important to get anywhere (just saying).

The results can, from experience, show things like "Development opportunities is problematic as the company only has a career path for engineers – getting to the C-suite as an economist is plain impossible as they are not ascribed authority on the core business". Or "Competence utilization is difficult because the in-group/majority in the company has such a strong tribal language that those possessing non-majority backgrounds do not feel relevant". Or "Authenticity (feelings) is very difficult if you are diverse in one or more ways. People just do not want to know you except for the superficial stuff. Nobody cares if you have relatives living in a war zone, or if you struggle a bit towards the end of the day during Ramadan". Those are just super simplified executive summary style headlines, of course. The actual reports stemming from qualitative analysis are more comprehensive tomes containing enough detailed information to start creating action plans to solve the issues at hand.

It should be mentioned that sometimes, when we do all these careful and precise analyses, it goes way beyond the information normally provided to businesses in the context of diversity (which is the whole point, as you might have guessed). We have, as a result, at times gotten into odd situations where we give a comprehensive presentation highlighting all the good and bad sides of the organization when it comes to diversity management, and people in the room are not what you might call "grateful". It seems that they were hoping that it would either be a simple stamp of approval, or perhaps some advice along the lines of "remember to celebrate Pride and Diwali". Getting a full run-down of all quantitative metrics with honest feedback from employees and managers on the inhouse culture seems to be quite tough on a lot of egos and suddenly brings even more work to the executive table. As we near the end of the part dealing with research and analysis, it should be mentioned that the old saying "be careful what you wish for, you just might get it" holds true in our experience so far: If you want a proper investigation of the status of your organization, it is not always going to be pretty, and it will create an expectation among staff that things will change for the better. Which requires quite a bit from managers at all levels.

Do not start playing this game if you do not intend to put in an effort. At the same time, we believe that the most attractive and resilient organizations in the future will be the ones that dare to "go there" with intent and purpose.

Reflection: What do you think should be included in an interview guide for a selection of co-workers in your own organisation? What would be important to find out to facilitate improving the conditions of work for various diverse groups?

Getting it done: From analysis to action

So far, it is all been about understanding concepts of diversity and how to do proper analysis. But as we have been reminded of repeatedly by numerous managers and executives: People in general have no idea how to do anything about the situation. In general, if people had solved the problem of getting along with those different than themselves and using differences for value creation instead of creating conflict, both world peace and corporate harmony would be within reach. Alas, that is far from the case and history has not exactly shown promising results either.

A paradigm model for working with diversity

Before getting into principles for working with diversity, it is a good idea to have a look first at the paradigm model we often use to categorize interventions. The reason for this is that there always comes great confusion whenever we start talking about change work and people are not clear on which paradigm we are addressing. Hopefully you will see why in just a second. The model is based on Thomas&Ely (2016), originally written up in Harvard Business Review in 1996. But we have created a visualization to simplify things a bit, as shown in **figure 14**. A newer article from the same authors is also available for the interested reader (Thomas&Ely, 2022).

The point of the model is to illustrate the different ways people talk about and work with diversity. Very often, perhaps almost always in our experience, the discourse on diversity is very immature and riddled with sympathy. The point is to highlight the groups we can consider to be very vulnerable and make sure we help them. This is the first paradigm, called "Anti-discrimination and justice paradigm" in the model in figure 14. It can be an important way to work with diversity if the point is to get people to donate money to refugees, make sure the homeless get shelter, ensure healthcare to people in need and so on. Anyone who has ever seen a commercial for a charity organization can probably relate to what we are talking about here: The imagery and tone of voice is often solemn and meant to trigger a feeling of wanting to help, make us feel that someone is in need and get us to help in some way – most often through monetary donations.

Figure 14: An illustration of the paradigms used when working with diversity, based on Thomas&Ely (2016).

If you think back to the chapter on stereotypes, this is in practice labelling groups as a "high warmth, low resource" (leftmost upper quadrant in the model in figure 7). The group in question is shown as people we should like and help but is implied to lack resources/competence/strength. This is a good strategy as long as the point is to provide aid but will get in the way of individuals from the group in question when they want to get jobs and promotions (for example). Those you feel sorry for are generally not easy to re-categorize as someone who should be fast-tracked to C-suite positions. Having worked in the field for some time, it always strikes us how few DEI officers/consultants that have seen this pitfall. Their entire model and approach seems to be based on generating sympathy in order to provide "ladders" for various groups of people without realizing that sympathy works against the idea of resourcefulness.

Furthermore, a country, for example, can be positive about helping a group of people from a sympathetic point of view, but going from aid to providing work and a path to thriving and becoming autonomous is often hard because of the psychological backlash of the sympathy-oriented paradigm 1. This is where, at least in a Scandinavian setting, one speaks about refugees entering the workforce but only on the lowest levels of the organization, regardless of their academic or work experience.

A possible solution to the issues connected to paradigm 1, is to at least balance the sympathy-driven narratives connected to various groups with success stories and positive acclaim. If we look back to, say, the Syrian war and the refugee crisis stemming from it, the media would have done everyone a big favour by also bringing attention to Syrian literature and poetry, interviewing competent and resourceful refugees, doing documentaries on Syrian culture, food and ways of life etc. This would offset the narrative of Syrians solely being a group of people in dire need (and would, paradoxically, likely have made aid more interesting to a lot of people – we will get back to this in paradigm 3).

Paradigm 2, called "Access and legitimacy paradigm", is focused on representation and equality. It shares a lot of the same problems, psychologically speaking, with the first paradigm. But in this paradigm the driver is to create equal opportunities for various diverse groups. As an example, a law passed in Norway in 2023 obligates all state-owned companies to have a board of directors with at least 40% gender balance. This obviously pushes representation of genders in a concrete way. At the same time, such initiatives can create an in-group/out-group-dynamic in that some feel they have worked for and deserved their prominent positions on the board, while others are considered to have been given the same type of positions without having earned them ("hired to fill quotas"). Again, the risk is to have the groups included through representation initiatives fall into one of the low-competence categories shown in **figure 7**. And also, we can end up creating various degrees of hostility which often arises when a clear divide is created between two groups in perceived competition (Jackson, 1993).

Another issue with paradigm 2 that has been brought to our attention throughout our work in the field, is the idea of a "glass mountain" (as opposed to "glass ceiling"). The idea is that people of diverse groups are given positions that they are not ready to be in and are given inadequate support to succeed. If they then fail, as is likely, the prevailing majority can then say, "I told you so, they are not fit for doing this kind of job" and use it to prevent diversity from attaining positions of importance in the future.

The most realistic and useful solution offered to the paradigm 2 problems is to not just "put people into positions", but instead make sure that people from various degrees of intersectional diversity get the same opportunities on flagship projects, and support to succeed.

Most who have worked for any large organization know that there are some projects that offer important experience and to a larger degree enable rising through the ranks, either in terms of leadership or competence specialization, or both. By making sure there are equal opportunities to be part of these, we will eventually get leaders from all kinds of groups/combinations of groups into important positions – and they will have the necessary respect from colleagues and relevant knowledge to hold these.

Paradigm 3, the "Learning and effectiveness paradigm", is where we try to bring most organizations in terms of way of thinking. The point of this paradigm is to use diversity actively as a driver for value creation. This boils down to a) not losing productivity because of how one treats diverse groups and b) managing to utilize diversity for added value to projects where it is relevant. We will get back to the details of this, but for now it can be good to just understand that working in this paradigm, if done properly, solves most of the issues of the two other paradigms. In practice this means that when members of diverse groups show up as important resources to an organization (and society as a whole), stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes change in positive ways. Simply put, if you had some hesitation about your gay Muslim co-worker with very different approaches to solving problems, this will most likely change if you see him make some awesome upgrades to the company database system. We see this all the time in general society as well: When we start thinking about various groups of people in terms of their more charming and intelligent role-models, it is hard to stay negative about them (the groups, that is). Research also confirms this mechanism, which is often referred to as "stereotype substitution" in the psych lingo (for example Dasgupta&Greenwald, 2001; Rudman et al, 2001).

To summarize: All the paradigms can be useful, but one has to be very aware of their different effects, both positive and negative. And when discussing diversity, it is incredibly important, in our experience, to be precise about which paradigm we currently have as our context of discussion. Otherwise, it is super easy to get into some very frustrating debates with no meaningful solutions (yes, we have been there many times, and it has not been fun).

Lastly, you can also see in the model in figure 14 that there is a "Resistance against diversity" part at the bottom. This is not as much a paradigm as a reminder that there will also be people who oppose the idea of working with diversity in organizations. It is easy to think that this has to do with discrimination. And, of course, it could perhaps be the case at times. But most often we find that working with diversity meets the same kind of resistance as when an organization wants to get a new IT-system in place, change their office layout or the like. It is simply that most human beings like their daily routines and find changes they have not specifically asked for to be kind of a hassle. So, it is just essential to properly explain why the work is being done and create motivation and enthusiasm for the process and end results. Which is also why we always make a big point out of pushing paradigm 3 where the point is to accomplish something positive for everyone involved, both majority and minorities.

Reflection: In what paradigm is your organisation doing most of its work? How about the society you live in? What would be, in your opinion, the most constructive paradigm for your place of work?

Where to stop the bleeding and where to leverage value

When it comes to value creation with diversity, we tend to explain the principles of the matter using a model based on Page (2017) shown in figure 15.

	Repetitive	Non-repetitive
Complex	Homogeneity	Heterogeneity
Simple	Homogeneity	Heterogeneity

Figure 15: Task type and diversity relevance (Page, 2017).

The point of this simplistic model is to highlight that how to work with and think about diversity in organizations is defined by the tasks you wish to perform. When doing repetitive tasks, be they simple ("conveyor belt" type tasks) or complex (heart surgery or the like), you want homogeneity in how people think. You do not really want your workers to start doing defined routine tasks in completely new ways and you definitely do not want your doctor to become super creative in the middle of open-heart surgery. In these cases, the point is to ensure that things are always done in the same way and handling diversity primarily means making sure that everyone is taken care of in a good way so that no one is underperforming or get sick/leave the job from feeling miserable.

On the other hand, there are many tasks in an organization, especially in modern times, that are non-repetitive. Coding a piece of software, innovation in new markets, handling security issues and a multitude of other very normal tasks for a lot of workers out there, relies on various degrees of thinking about problems from a plethora of perspectives. In these tasks, be they simple or complex, diversity can be of great use.

This, of course, relies on the type of diversity in question being relevant, meaning that the diversity in the group is translated to relevant knowledge that can be utilized for problem solving in the current context (Dipboye&Colella, 2005).

One might get the idea that repetitive tasks require people who look alike, and non-repetitive tasks rely on people who look different. This is not the case. You can get the most like-minded people in a diverse wrapping, and you can get the most different-thinking people who all look alike. However, the most likely case is that you end up with some form of diversity regardless of whether you are working with repetitive or non-repetitive tasks

With this understanding in mind, companies working with diversity need to make some strategic decisions regarding where focus is on eliminating negative effects (repetitive) and where one can make profitable leaps using diversity as a driver (non-repetitive). This latter endeavour will require a mapping of where the non-repetitive activities are taking place (as in what teams), what their current visible and invisible diversity dimensions really are and, perhaps, if there is need for additional personnel that bring something important to the table.

In any case, the haphazard approach of just "adding some diversity" without knowing what it is for, is a blunder. We have numerous examples of companies boldly stating that diversity is important for value generation, but when we ask them what value generation they are talking about they say: "You know, decision making generally, nothing specific". This is much like just adding random parts to a car because "it could always use an extra carburetor or two" instead of listening to the advice of a good engineer or mechanic (or both) who can tell you what makes sense in terms of performance and function.

Reflection: In what teams at your workplace would diversity bring a potential upside in terms of problem solving and increased performance?

General principles for working with diversity

The paradigm model and the understanding of homogenous/heterogeneous tasks create a foundation for strategy when working with diversity. But in addition there has been plenty of research in social psychology that help us with general principles for the work at hand. These principles need to be in play no matter what the strategy is or what one tries to achieve. It is an a priori set of concepts that need to be brought to bear to any challenge in the field [9].

Contact between in-groups and out-groups

Traditionally, the thought in psychology has been that simply being in contact with someone over time increases how much you like that person, and even how much you feel attracted. This is the so-called mere exposure effect (Pohl, 2022) and seems to work not only with people, but with inanimate objects and phenomena as well (paintings, photographs, music and so on). What we are in contact with becomes more acceptable, so to speak.

However, with regard to diversity and getting different groups of people to get along better, there are some extra elements that increase the chance of success. After all, if all it took was heaping people of various types into a room together, this book would be somewhat superfluous.

So here is a list of some things to keep in mind when diverse groups are joining an organization and need to get along:

1. People from different groups can get along easier if they have the same status in the organisation (Brown, 1984). Improving interactions might be less effective if the boss is from a majority group while all the minorities are at the bottom of the corporate ladder (something we map with the Diversity Index tools, if you remember), or vice versa (although less commonly seen).

2. Members of different groups need to not only have sustained contact but also work together towards the same goals (Sherif, 1958; Dechamps&Brown, 1983) and have the support of authority figures (Cook, 1984). In short, if a team consisting of various different groups has a clear common direction and goal, and the manager facilitates internal cooperation well, then things should be moving in the right direction.

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[9] This chapter is inspired by Blaine&Brenchley (2021) and Jones et al (2013), which we recommend buying for reference when it comes to interventions at individual and organisational levels.

3. Members of different groups need to be in contact over time (Zhou et al, 2019). Just meeting on occasion will have little effect. For example, bringing in someone to talk about a particular type of diversity might be interesting enough, but it is not something that changes one's perspective that much. It is of more importance that people from various backgrounds get to work and hang out together over time.

4. When it comes to reducing stereotypes in general for a group, there is an extra snag: The people in the team working together might establish good working relationships, but if they are seen as exceptions of the group they represent, then the positive effects will not generalize well (Desforges et al, 1997; Ensary&Miller, 2002). This is typical in many organizations where they pick out the "usual suspects" when working cross-divisionally. For example, there is tension between the operational and administrative part of the organization, but Joe and Carrie are always selected because of their neutrality. Joe represents operations and Carrie administration, but even if the collaboration is successful, the stereotypes between the groups have not changed. After all, Joe and Carrie are deemed as exceptions, not representatives of their groups.

Working correctly with establishing constructive contact between various groups tend to produce small to moderate positive effects for stereotypes and prejudice (Pettigrew&Tropp, 2006).

Perhaps one might hope for stronger results by using a combination of the various approaches explained so far in this book as it is very rare to go about the topic of diversity in such a structured and holistic way (and might likely achieve a better cumulative effect).

Reflection: How would you implement the abovementioned principles when working with diversity in your organisation?

Workplace dynamics

A lot of what can be done to help organisations with their diversity boils down to what it is like being part of the social dynamics every day at work. In this we need to look at a few mechanisms that can be of use.

Firstly, if people who have a set of values centred on being non-prejudicial in thought and action, are made aware of when they are insensitive, it can trigger negative emotions such as shame, regret, guilt and the like (Devine et al, 1991), and this in turn might motivate personal change for the better (Monteith, 1993). Something as simple as creating an environment where it is ok to tell one's co-workers when one feels badly treated because of diversity-related issues can have a good effect. This is something we largely map out in the Diversity Index when we talk about the factor "Authenticity", especially the warm/emotional part of that construct.

Furthermore, research indicates (Dasgupta&Greenwald, 2001) that when people are shown widely liked representatives from prejudiced groups, they tend to change their opinions about the group for the better. To make use of this mechanism in the workplace, the best bet is to support workers from diverse groups to succeed and become role models. When employees see their Hispanic co-worker become a programming guru, or their old gay co-worker become salesperson of the month, it is hard to cling to negative opinions about these groups. You might remember the maturity factors "Development opportunities" and "Competence utilisation" from Diversity Index – these are key in this context.

Yet another important mechanism that can be actively used, is called cross-categorization (Brown, 1995). This simply means being made aware that one has commonalities with stigmatized out-groups. You might encounter a person from a country that is often scowled at in your own country, but then suddenly become aware that you are both of the same age and that you are both parents. This can reduce negative feelings about a given out-group and inspire a degree of kinship. As you talk to this person, you might realize you are more alike than not. Making this work in a company setting means having good ambassadors that point out such commonalities and work towards seeing more how employees are alike than different (preferably ambassadors should have actual pull in the organisation). Unfortunately, the focus in today's society seems to be on pointing out what separates us, and often you feel like you have to choose sides. This (obviously) does not help the situation and is in part measured in the maturity category called "Leadership".

Empathy

The importance of empathy in any part of human life cannot be emphasized enough. Without an ability to understand the feelings and perspectives of others, homo sapiens becomes ineffective to the point of self-destruction.

So-called "Theory of Mind" is the part of developmental psychology dedicated to seeing how children gradually learn how to separate themselves from others (understanding that they are a "someone") and furthermore becoming skilled at reasoning about the perspectives and emotions of other individuals (Slater&Bremner, 2017).

This is naturally a big part of becoming able to work with diversity. As anyone can probably attest, and which science has shown extensively, it is a lot easier to be empathic with those we see as "just like us" compared to "the others". And, unfortunately, modern work life tends to be detrimental to some of the prerequisites of showing empathy. First and foremost is the simple fact that increased stress reduces our tendency to perform empathic behaviors in general (Darley&Batson, 1973, is a classic study in this regard). You have probably encountered this problem if you have had a rough week at work and then been less than charming to your friends and/or family. A lot of the problems in the field of diversity science seem to stem from people being stressed rather than inherently sceptical or hostile towards people with foreign backgrounds. With a low heart rate and a comfortable situation, most people can figure out how to communicate. Perhaps you have noticed this if you have gone on vacation and stumbled upon new friendship with someone you consider quite different from yourself.

Apart from stress, one can also encourage employees to practice taking other perspectives in the workplace when (or perhaps preferably before) conflicted situations arise. Good leaders should know this skill well as it is largely the basis of being a leader at all, and thus inspiring others in doing the same should be entirely possible. It may also help that there is room for being vulnerable at work, in terms of it being ok to explain what is really going on in life and one's background if relevant (again, remember the Authenticity (feelings) part of the Diversity Index). Understanding is, after all, a central part of enabling empathy as we need information to access the right set of thoughts and feelings about another person. You have probably experienced several times in life being frustrated with someone until you understood why the situation arose – such as when someone is delayed, but you later find out that it was because of that person's child having had an accident.

Reflection: Can you think of a few situations in your own life where stress has made you less empathic and capable of understanding others? What can be done to reduce stress and increase empathy in your organisation?

Standardisation and systematic work in diversity

Numerous organizations, consultancy companies, NGOs and the like, have claimed to have figured out how to succeed with workplace diversity. In an effort to share their recipe with others, they often lean on step-by-step lists of how to go about it. However, we have yet to see anyone applying the fundamental aspects of diversity science, as described in this book. It is more tempting (and selling) to say: "Here are three simple things that will make diversity a gold mine for your company". If that was true, everyone would be doing it and everyone would be succeeding.

We hope that we have been able to convey the message that diversity is something relative and contextual. Therefore, every organization must figure out for itself how diversity is relevant to core business, and what it should do to change culture, systems and structures to ensure that diversity among employees is included and expressed. However, getting some guidance from established frameworks might be a good idea.

Many nations have their legislations with political agendas that in various degrees require organizations to work systematically with the subject, usually to achieve some sort of representation of selected groups. It can be difficult at times for organizations to lean on established science, because the political agenda is not science-based. One might even claim politics to be at times anti-scientific. Therefore, we acknowledge that most organizations, to some extent, have to work with diversity for compliance reasons, at least at first. If so, we encourage you to make the most of it.

National and international standardization bodies have developed many standards to help organizations with structuring their diversity work. National standards seek to give solutions to local political, societal or organizational issues, while international standards seek to provide guidance that can be applied everywhere. Many of the existing standards are category-focused and aim at creating equitable opportunities for selected groups. We hope that future standards and frameworks will apply the theoretical foundation of this book with value generation in mind. Solving societal issues does not necessarily lead to better bottom-line results, and frameworks should keep the organizations' interests at heart.

Concluding remarks

If you have made it this far, you have gained more knowledge about how to work with diversity than most people in the industry. You might be thinking: "Geez. There is just too much to take in! How will I ever convince anyone to do any of this"? Do not worry. Diversity work is the same as any behavioural or cultural endeavour. It is usually comprised of small steps taken over a long period of time. Here are some concluding tips for how to go forward:

Define diversity in a way that captures everyone

When organizations work with diversity, they usually select one or two groups on whom they want to focus efforts. For example, gender and race. As a result, diversity becomes about a selected few instead of being a unifying project across differences, whatever they may be. When diversity is approached in this way it fortifies in-group and out-group thinking – the biggest problem in diversity science (and one of the biggest challenges generally in social psychology).

When we examine diversity in organizations, we see that around 35-45% of employees feel that they are in a minority position in one or more ways. For example, being the one economist among engineers, having a lower socioeconomic background than colleagues, or being a Christian among other religions or no religion. The point is not to dilute the term, but to show that "feeling different" is universal and something that everyone can relate to, depending on context. This creates a deeper understanding of the term and a platform for dialogue. Furthermore, it sparks curiosity about who one's colleagues really are, and which parts of themselves they believe come with privileges and which may come with liabilities.

The most effective way to break in-group versus out-group thinking is through exposure to nuances and emotional connection. Seeing yourself in the other through empathy (not sympathy) is a good starting point.

Get the diversity paradigms right

We often hear that organizations want to be diverse because it is good for value generation. However, we seldom see that there is a clear link between what the organization says and what it does to harvest this value. Repeating the paradigm model from before, diversity can be approached in three ways:

1) The discrimination and fairness paradigm

2) The access and legitimacy paradigm

3) The learning and efficiency paradigm

The first paradigm is about taking social responsibility through a more diverse staff and avoiding discriminatory systems and behaviors. The second paradigm focuses on reflecting society inside the organization in hope of becoming more accessible for the market and its people. The third paradigm targets utilizing diversity of people and their perspectives for achieving strategic aims and business goals.

Even though one can argue that all paradigms have their pros and cons, paradigm 1 and 2-thinking come with a multitude of adverse effects. To name a few, we tend to regard people as less resourceful if we feel sympathy for them. We also tend to look down on people that have been given "special treatment" to achieve representation at various levels of the organization. It does not even have to be true – the mere presence of such a narrative is sufficient for the adverse effects to occur. Confusing equitable opportunities with equal outcomes is also a slippery slope for most.

The problem is exacerbated when organizations say they are working with diversity to get a competitive advantage (paradigm 3), but all performed actions are based on paradigm 1 and 2-thinking. This creates dissonance and overall reluctance to buying into the narrative. As the authors of the HBR article bluntly state: "The staff, one might say, gets diversified, but the work does not" (Thomas&Ely, 2016).

Many authors have voiced that it is time to scrap the business case for diversity. We do not believe that is a good approach. More will argue that one paradigm builds on another. That is rarely correct: Societal issues seldom translate into an organization, even less represent the recipe for business success of any organization. Getting the paradigms right is crucial to succeed with diversity. There must be a credible link between what the organization says and does according to a paradigm 3 logic.

How to move forward?

Diversity is not going away. Even though political tides are shifting, we live in the world we live in – with its multitude of interpersonal differences. Organizations will continue to depend on attracting and retaining talent from diverse pools of candidates, and the need for diverse perspectives, innovation and market competitiveness is never-ending. Perhaps the DEI approach up until now has been flawed and easy to discredit at the stroke of a pen. But as this book implies, it is time to take two steps back and reset the DEI approach to its original intention: Tearing down walls and building bridges across differences to achieve greatness together. Based on our experiences, we see that the following three steps resonate well with organizations.

Separate categorical diversity from diversity of perspectives

We are not ideological about diversity. This means we believe organizations' primary goal should be to thrive and stay profitable. Some organizations are better off with conformity because the tasks they perform are repetitive and seldom change significantly. Other organizations need diversity of perspectives to stay competitive in a complicated market.

However, in both scenarios, you end up with categorical diversity (gender, ethnicity, neurodiversity, religion and so on). The best people who think alike come in all shapes and sizes, and the same goes for people who think differently.

In fact, based on 5063 datapoints, we find only a 9,4% explained variance between being categorically different from colleagues, and thinking differently from colleagues. This does not mean categorical diversity is not a source of thinking differently, but the effect is not very big.

Organizations that manage to separate the two have a better chance navigating the paradigms listed above.

Connect diversity to the strategy and focus on diversity competence

Any organization will protect its core business when facing challenging circumstances. If DEI initiatives exist external to core business, they will be removed as soon as the organization needs to change its priorities – especially in tougher economic times.

We often say that diversity should be regarded as a resource factor alongside finance, infrastructure, technology, and so on. In almost every organization, there is a link between diversity and achieving business goals. But it requires some extra effort and understanding to figure out. And it demands a pivot from focusing on diversity representation to focusing on diversity competence.

For an organization in the public sector, it could be about designing and delivering services that are relevant to the population. For an organization in the private sector, it could be about understanding and capturing new markets through product development and targeted marketing. Once an organization explicitly states how diversity is going to support the business it becomes easier to define as a competence and support its goal-oriented progress.

Not for the sake of diversity itself, but because of what it does to improve business.

Identify matters relevant to the organization and train on mastering them

Much too often, we see that research from the other side of the globe (US-based research, that is) is used as hard facts when designing DEI measures for the organizations here in Europe. And standardized training on unconscious bias is considered the most cost-effective way to improve matters. But every organization is unique with its own diversity composition, culture, context, ambitions, systems, procedures and so on. Many organizations end up with a well-intended but uninformed focus on the wrong things as a consequence.

If an organization clearly states what it wants to accomplish with diversity, it becomes easier to identify barriers in the organization's culture for getting there. Many rely on employee engagement surveys when trying to figure out what to do. But they (most often) fail because the test battery is not specifically designed to capture blind spots in the organization, viewed through a diversity lens.

We always encourage using reliable data and statistically sound methods to uncover the realities of the organization and design DEI measures based on that. Some organizations may struggle with categorical diversity and creating acceptance across cultural differences. Others may find that the cost of thinking differently is too high – and that people are excluded if they deviate from social norms local to the company. In a different organization, the organization could be struggling with inclusion regardless of diversity (a conflicted culture in general).

Consequently, DEI training should address the specific pain points in the organization – based on data from the organization.

Best of luck with your work on Diversity 2.0.

Jakob and Manav

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