

## Diversity and Shared Leadership in intra-organizational project teams

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Today many organizations pursue intra-organizational exploration and innovative activities to respond to uncertainty, rapid environmental changes and increasing complexity in their work tasks (Bakker, DeFillippi, Schwab, & Sydow, 2016 ; Sydow & Windeler, 2020). In doing so, organizations use intra-organizational project teams that can be defined as temporary organizations (TO) with a predetermined termination point that occur in the context of a permanent organization (PO) and 'borrow' their functionally diverse members from the functional units of the PO (Bakker *et al.*, 2016). They are characterized by temporality, uniqueness of their tasks, high cross-functionality, and high autonomy (Arvidsson, 2009 ; Lundin *et al.*, 2015). The rationale underlying the use of these project teams is that, bringing together experts from different areas and different hierarchical roles outside the temporary project respectively ensures the inclusion of diverse perspectives in the decision making and less transparent hierarchical lines of authority and consequently more autonomy (He, von Krogh, & Sirén, 2022 ; Vegt & Bunderson, 2005).

While establishing this type of teams has been widely considered as a promising approach to improve innovation, this diversity of knowledge and hierarchical power can create difficulties in managing these projects and lead to high failure rate (Imam & Zaheer, 2021). Under this condition, how to manage the functional and hierarchical diversity within these projects is of great importance. The existing literature argues that on those special characteristics requires team members to come forward and proactively provide leadership support to their peers , i.e. shared leadership (Cox *et al.*, 2003). Some research also suggest that shared leadership rather than simply relying on the vertical influence of a designated project manager is a more effective leadership style and can provide a solution to the challenges that vertical project management is not capable of (Imam & Zaheer, 2021).

In order to metrically examine the effect of functional and hierarchal diversity within intra-organizational project teams on shared leadership, we draw upon status characteristic theory (Berger et al 1980) and leadership identity construction (Derue & Ashford, 2010). Specifically, the current study proposes that functional diversity has a positive impact on shared leadership only when the transactive memory system is high. Furthermore, we suggest that hierarchical diversity has a negative effect on shared leadership. However, the destructive effects of hierarchical diversity can be mitigated when the team members perceive high levels of empowering leadership from their leaders in the PO. Using a sample of 185 members working in 27 project teams in a large Danish company in technology industry and analyzing the conditional process model through PROCESS, the hypotheses were largely supported. Theoretical contributions, practical implications and future research directions are discussed.

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# **Response-able leadership:**

## **Towards equality and social justice in the workplace**

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### **Introduction**

Sexist and racist harassment and discrimination remain a critical organizational issue and leadership challenge. Although equality policies and formal procedures for dealing with and reporting harassment and discrimination at the workplace are by now common in many organizational settings, problems of harassment prevail. As such, studies find consistent underreporting as well as erratic handling of reported cases about harassment (Latcheva, 2017; Welsh et al. 2006; Whitley and Page, 2015). In addition, global social movements against

sexism and racism such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter inspire growing numbers of employees to demand, rather than ask for, equality and social justice in their workplaces (Leigh and Melwani 2019).

The established organizational approaches to dealing with harassment through formal reporting and investigation of individual cases have failed to end harassment so far, and thus demand that new organizational responses are developed. Lawrence (2020), among others, suggests that leaders must, first, recognize the structural character of harassment and, second, accept their responsibility in seeking to end it (see also McEwans, Pullen, and Rhodes 2021). However, a heroic leadership figure is not enough; the leadership challenge regarding harassment and discrimination is double, as it involves changing cultural patterns and collective practices through ongoing relational efforts. This demands that leaders – themselves – dare to enter uncomfortable spaces of high emotional volatility, are willing to learn to analyze the affective circulations of such a space, understand the relational aspects of it, as well as dare to facilitate and engage other organizational members in likewise ambiguous processes with no predetermined outcome or easy fixes. In sum, changing organizational norms that reproduce harassment and discrimination demands a new understanding and praxis of affective leadership, one that is relational, responds ethically with care for insecurity and vulnerability, and is able to ‘stay with the trouble’ (Haraway, 2016) in addressing harassment and its ambiguities.

This demands that leaders learn to resist old habits of fight, flight or freeze that is often observed in reactions to cases of harassment at work (Guschke, 2023) and begin to listen and learn to respond ethically to the unpleasantness they witness. Such a response should therefore not be built on an attempt to pretend that they know what it is like, as a notion of empathetic would dictate. However, the response should be ethical – with an acceptance of the fact that it will never be possible to truly understand how the other feels as a consequence of harassment. Research on harassment shows, that the experience is individual and therefore per definition not accessible for the leader trying to help. One way to understand such impossibility of comprehending others’ experiences is through Emmanuel Levinas’ concept of the radicalness of the Others’ otherness and the ethicality in respecting this otherness.

**With the aim of understanding leader responsibility in cases of harassment ethically, we therefore ask the question: *How can leaders become ‘response-able’ in organizational work against sexist and racist harassment and discrimination?***

Here, ‘response-ability’ denotes the capacity for enduring discomfort and tension as much as the ability to recognize and question the normative judgements and belief systems that underly complex emotions (such as shame, anger, hope, or hate) (Ahmed, 2014; Nussbaum, 2016). ‘Response-ability’ is daring to address what cannot be controlled, tailored, or managed but still is central in human relationality. Therefore, ‘response-ability’ is an ethical response of continued openness to the unknown and unknowable (Derrida, 1993; Levinas, 1969; 1981; 2003); it is a constant practice of moving towards responsibility, of becoming ‘response-able’. By proposing the concept of ‘response-ability’, we move from reflexivity to praxis and posit anti-harassment and anti-discrimination as an ongoing, relational leadership process rather than a goal. Recognizing that harassment and discrimination are both systemic and situational means paying attention to the specifics and dynamics of each instance as well as the conditions of possibility emerging across time. Further, it demands constant awareness of the emotions that an organization is willing and unwilling to acknowledge. By developing the concept, we add to critical leadership studies by focusing on the relational aspects of organizational actors, bodies, and feelings that manifest this new ‘response-able’ leadership praxis.

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## Exploring a Case of Norm-Critical Diversity Management

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The growing interest in creating alternative organizations defined by more socially diverse and economic responsibility in both public and private sectors has resulted in varied diversity management policies and practices of, for example, talent-development, mentoring, skills enhancement programs, and gendered quotas. Thus, pointing to emerging systems change in management and leadership scholarship and practice as a way to cultivate new responses to some of challenges of, predominantly, white, and masculinist ideologies and discourses of leadership and management (Ashcraft, 2022).

On the one hand, this implies democratic ideals of organizing more equal opportunities and rights for all despite gender, ethnicity, social class, etc. On the other hand, it also involves more strategic concerns about mobilizing a diverse workforce as a business case; profitable in terms of innovation, performance, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Tomlinson & Schwabenland, 2010).

However, critical studies point to the pitfalls of this business case; it may just showcase and instrumentalize diversity as a politically correct discourse without manifesting fundamental organizational changes (Benschop et al., 2015; Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013; Janssens & Zanoni, 2014).

One problem is that diversity discourses may remain little more than strategic documents on a policy level portraying social responsibility without materializing more diverse or equal organizational realities. Another is the risk of legitimizing diversity discourses that categorize groups of people with a certain identity marker (e.g., being ‘female’, ‘ethnic’, ‘disabled’), who need skills-enhancement, thereby positioning them as ‘under-qualified’ and in need of positive discrimination, which may increase counter-productive effects for them (Holck & Muhr, 2017).

Hence, the business case can legitimize strategic and political discourses without cementing more socially diverse and economically responsible organizational changes, or it can tokenize and even stigmatize certain minority groups further. So, tensions remain between diversity management theory and practice that pursue socially responsible, yet profitable alternatives (Herring, 2009; Robinson & Dechant, 1997) on the one side, and on the other critical approaches to and studies of this apparent ‘win-win’ situation (Perriton, 2009; Tomlinson & Schwabenland, 2010).

Recently, these tensions spurred debates of theorizing and organizing more radically diverse and inclusive work lives amongst feminist organization studies and critical diversity studies (Plotnikof et al, 2021; Pullen, Harding, & Phillips, 2017). These studies question how organizations perform diversity and inclusivity in counterproductive ways, and how more radically feminist organizing

may rupture and disorganise the order of the day and fundamentally change those work realms (Just et al., 2017; Parker, Cheney et al., 2014; Pullen et al., 2017; Staunaes, 2016).

This paper explores how such debates across feminist organization studies influence and materialize in practices - more specifically in a diversity management initiative in a Danish education context. The empirical case organizations included 17 preschool and after school activity centers with children from 0-12 years old. Data was collected over 1 year (2017-2018) by organizational ethnographic methods (Dille & Plotnikof, 2020; Plotnikof & Zandee, 2016).

In the paper, we investigate the dis/organizing diversity practices and identity work of local managers and educators when initiating norm-critical changes that destabilize, ruptures and disorganize dominant norms of difference. Inspired by Butler's performative view of gendered subjectivity, we theorize identity work as struggling subjectification processes (Butler 1990; 2004; Davies, 2006; Plotnikof, 2016; Staunaes, 2010) challenging existing gendered norms of difference at work (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004) to organize alternatives to popularized theories of leadership and management, as well as alternatives of practice amongst education managers, educators, and children. Furthermore, inspired by Ahmed (2017) and related studies, we understand norm-critical diversity practices as efforts to dis/reorganize existing norms of difference that may engender work conditions, structures and processes in unequal, gender stereotypical and oppressive ways (Holck & Muhr, 2017; Plotnikof et al. 2021; Pullen et al. 2017). This interest in diversity work and identity struggles emerging during the discursive and material constructions of difference (Dille, 2020) dislocate analytical focus from the diversity of certain individuals or groups to the ways in which meanings and matters (Barad, 2003) of diversity or difference intersect in subjectification processes and dis/organize work practices and conditions for action (Guschke & Sløk-Andersen, 2022; Plotnikof et al. 2022).

The preliminary findings unpack how the diversity work functions in dis/organizing by "banging heads against a brick wall" (Ahmed, 2017), hence gaining meaning and matter in tension with dominant norms of differences, thus at once disorganizing and reorganizing the walls that they are seeking to diminish. Furthermore, this diversity work involves (dis)comforting identity work that both creates unease and struggle as well as new self-conceptions amongst professionals as the norms of difference are dis/organized.

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## **Caring for the voices of disabled employees:**

### **How pluralistic organizational ideals resolve employee voice dilemmas and counter (dis-)ableism**

#### **Abstract**

Disability studies scholars and disabled people call out how their voices are lacking in the general public and working life (e.g., Nario-Redmond, 2020). Interestingly, the perspectives and experiences of disabled employees are also absent in theorizing and research on employee voice. Employee voice or speaking out refers to employees voluntarily expressing work-related issues to improve how organizations function (Morrison, 2011). Although speaking out is about challenging the status quo in organizations (e.g., Mackenzie et al., 2011), systematic inequalities persist (Amis et al., 2020).

We argue that ideals in organizations are a key mechanism for constraining employee voice and perpetuating the status quo. Ideals are collectively rationalized, taken for granted, and largely unchallenged beliefs (Amis et al., 2020). They influence organizational structures, decisions, and practices and, thereby, can reinforce power structures. We propose a *theory of enabling disabled employee voices to foster plurality and inclusion in organizations*. We illustrate how (dis-)ableism and organizational caring operate as dual processes across the organizational and individual levels. (Dis-)ableism informs organizational ideals that disabled employees often face. Ableism is the societal preference and favoritism for people with taken-for-granted normative bodies and minds (Campbell, 2009). Disableism refers to the devaluation and discrimination of disabled people. Organizations idealize employees to be able-bodied and –minded, productive, rational, autonomous, and unconstrained by their environments (Foster & Wass, 2013; Goodley,

2014; Jammaers et al., 2021). When this ideal informs organizational structures, processes, and practices for an *ableized employee voice*, disabled employees will be hindered from speaking out.

To combat this disadvantageous status quo for disabled employees and to fulfill the potential of employee voice to be a pivot for inclusive organizing, we introduce an alternative organizational ideal. Given that alternative organizational futures must be desirable and plausible (Amis et al., 2021), we draw from the ethics of care. Ethics of care builds on the inherent human necessity for care, relations, and connectedness to derive moral obligations, decisions, and practices (Gilligan, 1993; Held, 2006; Noddings, 2003). Not only was the ethics of care born out of the desire to allow for ‘a different voice’ (Gilligan, 1993), but it also seems to be a promising logic to enable more inclusive organizing (Jammaers, 2023; Lawrence & Maitlis, 2012). Given that organizational caring allows organizations to fulfill the moral obligation for care (Vijayasingham et al., 2018), we extend Tronto’s (2010) arguments for good care in an institutional context to introduce the image of a *pluralistic employee* and a *pluralistic employee voice*.

We incorporate these two opposing ideals of ableized versus pluralistic employees and employee voice into our theory. Organizational ideals and employees’ individual voice experiences interact across levels to perpetuate or disrupt the organizational status quo. We contrast two imaginary scenarios to prototypically illustrate these dual processes: on the one hand, how (dis-)ableism limits the voices of disabled employees, and on the other hand, how organizational caring can expand their voices.

At the organizational level, the ideal of ableized employees reinforces the excluding tendencies of ableized employee voice and disables substantial changes in the ableist status quo. Whereas, the pluralistic ideal of employees allows for embracing tendencies of

pluralistic employee voice and enables disruptive changes for more inclusion. Across levels, disabled employees will experience tension or fusion depending on the perceived fit of their identities and experiences with the ableized vs. pluralistic organizational ideals. At the individual level, we theorize how this tension or fusion evokes or resolves core voice dilemmas for disabled employees. Voice dilemmas illustrate challenging choices between speaking out versus not speaking out (of line) because both options may result in negative consequences for the concerned employee (Brown & Coupland, 2005; Cortina & Magley, 2003). When disabled employees speak out, they may face unfavorable reactions and evaluations. When they do not speak out, they may need to endure the ableist status quo and suffer in silence.

Finally, we exemplify caring organizational practices that expand the voice experiences of disabled employees to permit improvements, counter (dis-)ableism, and foster inclusion in their organizations. We propose to adopt ideals of pluralistic employees and employee voice as guiding principles so that practices are oriented toward and can facilitate caring within organizations. Organizational caring helps to resolve voice dilemmas of disabled employees by expanding their voice experiences. In particular, we illustrate how organizations can overcome established organizational hierarchies, enable more extensive exchange, and create better connections and deeper relations among organizational members. In conclusion, our theorizing reveals the hidden mechanisms in employee voice maintaining or thwarting organizational inequalities.

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