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Diversity at the Danish workplace – strength or burden?
Annette Kamp & Peter Hagedorn-Rasmussen

Diversity Management (DM) is a management concept that encourages organizations to approach human differences as strengths. DM has been embraced from many perspectives as a much needed new voice in the debate about equality. In this article we focus on the degree to which DM in practice provides a new positioning of ethnic minorities at the labor market. Based on an inquiry of ‘company frontrunners’ in Denmark, we suggest that DM may provide some changes; however these primarily will lead to assimilation and not mutual integration like the rhetoric of DM suggests. One of the explanations is that DM is confronted with strong institutions and thus is ‘translated’ to local variants. The discourse on corporate social responsibility plays a particular important role in the translation. In this discourse there is a tendency to see ethnic minorities as a burden.

Job interviews – the ritualised access to the labour market
Iben Jensen

Many Danish employers claim that they are more than willing to employ applicants with ethnic minority background if they are as qualified as the ethnic Danish applicants. But does the job interview give all applicants the same possibility to present themselves as qualified? Do the interviewers have sufficient intercultural competence to give all applicants an equal position to speak from? Do all applicants get the same guidance?

The article investigates job interviews from two different theoretical perspectives. The first perspective is inspired by Pierre Bourdieu and discusses the labour market as a social field. It is argued that the job interview is a central ritual – a kind of gatekeeping – that can give access to the social field. The second perspective is inspired by researchers as Dorte Marie Søndergaard, Bronwyn Davies and Ron Harré, who define themselves as social constructionists. From this perspective it is asked: How are ethnicity, gender and qualifications negotiated in job interviews in multicultural societies?

The negotiation is shown in an analysis of one case. It is argued that more equality could be achieved if the interviewers: 1) were more aware of their own participation in the communication process, 2) gave the same guidance (feed back) to all applicants, 3) avoided ethnic positioning not relevant to the job, (as it takes time from the applicants’ professional performance), 4) were more aware of the ritualisation of job interviews, and 5) were more aware of intercultural communication.

Equality – An obstacle to positive action?
Buffy Lundgren

Positive action is a timely issue because it is encouraged in the European Union’s Anti-discrimination package that recently was fully adopted into Danish legislation. The article uses a Bakhtinian discourse analytic approach to understand the implications of
the Danish commonsense understanding of equality for positive action measures – both for their implementation and content-planning. The study builds on the recent work of anthropologists like Hervik, Fadel and Gopal and adds to their insights through qualitative research carried out at a large socially-engaged corporation with headquarters in Denmark. It is found that the authoritative discourse on equality is both positive and negative for the implementation of positive action projects.

Dilemmas in times of change – Three companies working towards diversity

Kirsten Slots

The integration of ethnic minorities on the labour marked continues to be a problem.

In this article we discuss the use of both integration policies and diversity management by three Danish companies: Coop Denmark, ISS and IKEA. Our discussion is based on discourse analysis.

We focus here upon problems and dilemmas in company policy and upon strategies for improving job opportunities for ethnic minorities. How do the companies cope with barriers facing ethnic minorities and what is the outcome of their policies?

A discourse analysis of both company staff policy and interviews with management reveals that equal opportunity strategies, legal equalities and de facto equalities are central issues of conflict in these companies. There is a clear dilemma between two interests: on the one hand the rights of the individual regarding integrity and diversity, and on the other hand the principle that all employees should be treated equally.

Placing employees in categories can lead to stigmatizing of certain groups. This has in one company resulted in an attempt to change discursive practice by avoiding the use of language associated with ethnicity in its daily communication. The analysis underlines a dilemma inherent in this strategy, as it may be necessary to favour groups whose skills and qualifications fail to match the majority.

Ethnic minorities and labour market segregation – a comparative study of integration barriers within three sectors in three countries

Mikkel Mailand

Based on findings from a comparative study of labour market segregation and integration barriers for women and ethnic minorities, the article analyses horizontal labour market segregation for ethnic minorities in Denmark, the Netherlands and the UK. The article focuses on three sectors (construction, health and IT-software). Special attention is given to one occupation within each sector (carpenter, software engineer and nurse, respectively).

Ethnic minorities are under-represented in the construction sector in all three countries as well among the nurses in Denmark and the Netherlands, but they are over-represented among the nurses and the software engineers in the UK. The share of ethnic minorities among the Danish and Dutch software engineers are equal to their average representation among the employees in the overall labour market.

It is argued that norms and values among the ethnic minorities, as well as different features of school-based and apprenticeship-based education are parts of the explanation for their under-representation among graduates in some of the occupations in focus. Informal/network-based recruitment strategies of the firms also help to explain the under-representation of the ethnic minorities found in some sectors. Also other features, such as direct and indirect
discrimination and language skills, have an impact, but these were studied in details in the research project.

There are only a few indications that the type of wage system has any significant effect on the integration of ethnic minorities. Further, it is in the article not confirmed that the degree of employment protection effects the integration of the ethnic minorities. Finally, use of active labour programmes and firm-based equal opportunity initiatives are not widespread in the sectors in focus and do not seem to have more than a marginal effect.