



Unequal solidarity? Towards a norm-critical approach to welfare logics



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ABSTRACT

Due to the fact that immigration in Denmark is a more recent phenomenon, diversity management has had a much shorter history in politics as well as in business, and has not yet been institutionalized to the same degree as in for example North America, from where the concept originates. When crossing the Atlantic, the concept of diversity management merged with Danish universal welfare logics that offer a particular view on equality as sameness together with solidarity through corporate social responsibility. Drawing on 94 employee narratives about difference in a Danish workplace renowned for its diversity work, this article argues that a translation of the original American concept has taken place that turns diversity management into an ambiguous corporate activity when practised through Danish welfare logics. Paradoxically, corporate practices of social responsibility aimed at fostering equal opportunities obstruct successful labour-market integration, as differences are assimilated and marginalized rather than valued and respected. Economic redistribution is thus at the cost of recognition of difference contained in the business case of diversity. In this article we explore how difference can be reintroduced into the Danish welfare logics to balance the simultaneous need for redistribution and recognition of difference, which goes through aligning diversity management with critical scholarship by means of a norm-critical approach.

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1. Introduction

Ethnic diversity in the Danish labour market is increasing. However, despite several decades of active labour-market policies aimed at integrating ethnic-minority citizens, minorities are overrepresented in low-skilled and temporary jobs, underrepresented in management positions, and more likely than members of the majority ethnic group to face unemployment (Andersen, Andersen, Olsen, Ploug, & Sabiers, 2015; Ejrnæs, 2012; Rennison, 2009; Romani, Holck, Holgersson, & Muhr, 2016; see also Ortlieb & Sieben, 2014; Siim, 2013 for international comparison). These macro trends are also reflected in the micro situation in organizations, as unequal opportunity structures, and the inequality that accompanies them, often endure, even in organizations committed to diversity and equality (Acker, 2006; Holck, 2016a, 2016b; Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Risberg & Sørderberg, 2008; Larsen, 2011; Marfelt & Muhr, 2016). In this way, Danish (as well as international) organizations spend a lot of resources on diversity

management initiatives, which seem to have little effect in creating a fertile ground for equal opportunities (Al Ariss, Vassilopoulou, Özbilgin, & Game, 2013; Dobbin, Soohan, & Kalev, 2011; Dover et al., 2016; Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013; Holck, Muhr, & Villesèche, 2016; Jonsen, Tatli, Özbilgin, & Bell, 2013; Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006). This paper investigates the question of why – despite good intentions and inclusive labour-market schemes – Danish organizations still struggle with integrating ethnic-minority employees in the workforce.

A critical body of diversity literature has successfully demonstrated how diversity management as a managerial practice is shaped and interpreted through social power hierarchies and by essentializing otherness in favour of majority employees (e.g. Ahonen et al., 2014; Boogaard & Roggeband, 2010; Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013; Omanović, 2013; Schwabenland & Tomlinson, 2015; Zanon & Janssens, 2015). This paper departs from this critical argument and focuses on the historical-political aspect of these power dynamics. More specifically, we show how the precarious minority position in the Danish labour market as well as in Danish organizations is reproduced and sustained by two distinct and entwined logics behind the Danish welfare model: 1) *equality as sameness*, which fosters assimilation and a preference for

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similarity; and 2) *solidarity as social responsibility*, which encourages companies to act responsibly by taking in allegedly marginalized minorities on state-subsidized schemes. By critically analysing how these two welfare logics play out and influence the way minorities are perceived – and thereby constructed as employees – at the organizational level, we demonstrate how this combination of welfare logics invalidates minority skills and competences brought to the labour market to the detriment of the recognition of difference contained in the otherwise popular business case of diversity management, which dominates the international diversity literature (Bendick, Egan, & Lanier, 2010; Dobbin et al., 2011; Kalev et al., 2006; Noon, 2007; Oswick & Noon, 2014; Zanoni et al., 2010). Thus, although the critique of the business case argument has raised important awareness about the fact that diversity management is never neutral and that there is always a pre-imposed hierarchical relationship between races, ethnicities, sexes, sexual orientations, etc., which makes a so-called meritocracy impossible, it seems that the critical stand has also missed out on what we can learn from the business case argument about recognition of difference.

As such, a central dilemma addressed in this article is the trade-off between recognition and redistribution, so eloquently discussed by the American author Nancy Fraser (e.g. Fraser, 1998; Fraser & Honneth, 2003). By drawing on Fraser, we uncover how diversity is a matter of balancing redistribution with recognition. Here, we diagnose the current maladies of diversity in a Danish context to be a matter of redistribution without (or even at the cost of) recognition, which is equally as devastating as recognition without redistribution (which is at the centre of Fraser's analyses in the North American context). Recognition of difference and hence social justice by means of both redistribution and recognition introduces the omission of critical diversity scholars predominantly framing difference as a matter of recognition (and status), while not paying sufficient attention to how to develop adequate means to rectify matters of redistribution and class (e.g. Acker, 2006; Kalev, 2009; Kalev et al., 2006). By analysing data of diversity and its management in a Danish organization within a theoretical framework combining social theory on (Danish) welfare logics and Fraser's conceptualization of social justice as a matter of recognition and redistribution, we are able to contribute to critical diversity literature in two respects: 1) by showing how certain logics of the welfare state (that have otherwise been highly praised in e.g. the North American context) limit the possibility for diversity and equality in a Danish workforce, and 2) by re-inscribing diversity management rationales (drawing on business case arguments) into the critical organizational commitment to social justice (drawing on a moral critical rationale).

To reach these contributions, the article is structured as follows. First we discuss the historical, cultural encounter between the North American diversity management concept, with its neo-liberal values of individualism and voluntarism, and the Danish welfare model, with its values of equality and solidarity. To create a better understanding of this complex relationship, we place it in the context of Fraser's work (1998) (Fraser & Honneth, 2003), showing how social justice can be pursued through both recognition and redistribution. Drawing on 94 employee stories on difference from "Fastfood" – a Danish workplace renowned for its diversity work – we then empirically analyse how redistributive welfare practices are practised in the organization at the cost of recognition. We use this finding to explain the lack of progress and the continued low standing of minorities in Danish organizations. We conclude by suggesting how organizations, through norm-critical methods, can reintroduce difference in a different – and less categorical – way compared to the traditional business case logic, in order to come closer to the delicate balance of recognition

and redistribution. In this way, we integrate arguments of 1) the business case's focus on difference, 2) the welfare state logics of equality and solidarity, and 3) a norm-critical practice that constantly challenges the categorical approach to the first two principles.

2. Diversity and its management in a Danish context

It is generally acknowledged that ethnic-minority employees are excluded or marginalized as low-skilled labour in the workplace (e.g. Acker, 2006; Ortlieb & Sieben, 2014; Qin et al., 2014; Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop & Nkomo, 2010). The traditional way to explain this exclusion and marginalization departs from the human resource management literature and employs the rationale of competitive advantage and human resource utilization to enhance organizational productivity and profitability through valuing difference as a way to redress this marginalization. This view is recognized as the *business case* for diversity (Herring & Henderson, 2012; Kalev, 2009; Noon, 2007; Oswick & Noon, 2014; Thomas & Ely, 1996). The business case is based on the idea that a diverse workforce can be a valuable asset for organizations if correctly managed, presenting diversity management as a way to value the unique competences of a diverse workforce and to create a win-win situation for employer and employees (Thomas & Ely, 1996; Zanoni, 2011). This has however been heavily criticized by a body of literature that aims to uncover power dynamics by illustrating how diversity management as a managerial practice functions as a form of managerial control, with majority employees setting the standard up against which minority employees are measured (Boogaard and Roggeband, 2010; Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013; Kalev et al., 2006; Muhr & Salem, 2013; Ortlieb & Sieben, 2014; Schwabenland & Tomlinson, 2015; Zanoni & Janssens, 2015). The critical line of diversity literature has in particular focused on deconstructing and de-essentializing the notion of diversity to demonstrate how demographic categories and identities are to be seen not as static and fixed, but as social constructs under constant redefinition, influenced by competing discourses and existing structures of power, and varying according to the national/societal setting (Holck et al., 2016; Kalev, 2009; Knoppers, Claringbould & Dortants, 2014; Lorbiecki & Jack, 2009; Zanoni & Janssens, 2004, 2015). Here, research centres on generalized societal discourses on immigration, with a focus on deconstructing the different elements of those discourses (e.g. Ahonen et al., 2013; Bendick et al., 2010; Boogaard & Roggeband, 2009; Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Muhr & Salem, 2013; Samaluk, 2014; Tomlinson & Schwabenland, 2010) and on empirically studying how minorities experience such discrimination (e.g. Al Ariss et al., 2013; Klarsfeld, Ng & Tatli, 2012; Ostendorp & Steyaert, 2009; Oswick & Noon, 2014; Siebers, 2009; Van Laer & Janssens, 2014).

To understand such underlying obstacles for social justice, critical scholars like Acker (2006) view the organization as a power-scape consisting of both formalized, explicit structures of equality (e.g. a formalized diversity policy and the predominant welfare logic of equality) and more informal, subtle substructures of inequality. Substructures of inequality are often tacitly practised in the ordinary life of organizations, in which e.g. "ethnified" assumptions about minority/majority are embedded and reproduced, and inequality is perpetuated (Acker, 2006). The argument is that despite officially supported equality policies, tacit and more subtle practices of discrimination overrule and make many of such formal policies obsolete (Dover et al., 2016; Kalev et al., 2006; Van Laer & Janssens, 2014).

By zooming in on practices accounted for in leaders' and employees' accounts of difference, we trace how welfare logics of equality and solidarity entwine with and disrupt diversity practices in a Danish organization that is officially renowned as

a diversity champion. Understanding these logics – and both their Danish roots and their international importance – necessitates a historical review of diversity management in a Danish context and its relation to particular aspects of the welfare and labour-market system.

2.1. Diversity management to put ethnic minorities to work

Once a fairly homogenous population, with only a small minority group of Germans in Southern Denmark, the demography of Denmark has significantly changed since the first Turkish “foreign workers” arrived due to labour shortages in the period of booming post-war economic growth during the 1960s (Andersen et al., 2015; Ejrnæs, 2012). From the 1980s onwards, there has been an influx of immigrants and refugees from the world’s hotspots. Denmark, then, with very limited historical experience of immigration, was suddenly faced with the fact of becoming an increasingly multi-ethnic society. Today, the largest minority groups are people stemming from Turkey, Poland, and Germany, and the population of citizens with a different ethnic background than Danish is estimated at 10%.

As in many other countries, in Denmark it has been difficult to get ethnic minorities integrated into the workforce. Approximately one third of ethnic minorities in Denmark are still unemployed, and business organizations as well as political forces are alarmed.¹ Diversity management – as a managerial tool and concept – was therefore adopted around the end of the last millennium as a solution to the “diversity problem”. The term was adopted from an American context and implemented in this particular socio-historical moment in Denmark (Boxenbaum, 2006; Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Rennison, 2009; Risberg & Söderberg, 2008). The definition of the concept of diversity management, however, tends to adjust to the local context within which it is used (Boxenbaum, 2006; Romani et al., 2016; Tatli, Vassilopoulou, Ariss, & Özbilgin, 2012). Accordingly, diversity management in Denmark picked up a specific negative connotation due to it being adopted as a response to a sudden wave of immigration and the challenges that arose with this. For this reason, diversity management (in Danish: mangfoldighedsledelse) has been used to describe the tools needed to help ethnic minorities integrate into the labour market (as opposed to, for example, gender diversity, which is more likely to be associated with women’s access to top-management positions) (Romani et al., 2016). The “objects” of diversity management, then, are also mainly perceived to be people with non-Western backgrounds, i.e. “non-whites” (Boxenbaum, 2006; Holck, 2016a, 2016b; Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004; Risberg & Söderberg, 2008). Because of its context-dependent definition, in this paper we perceive ethnic minorities to be socially constructed as “non-whites”, but defined around the marker “white” that claims universality, objectivity, and neutrality. It is around this measure that ethnic minorities become different, and this is why immigrants from Western countries, i.e. immigrants that can “pass” as white, are not constructed as problematic. In particular, this is because low- or high-skilled immigrants from Western countries are not perceived or constructed as “problematic”, and thus not perceived as “objects” of diversity management, whereas educated labour from non-Western countries are often perceived as belonging to the “problematic category”, despite their educational background (Andersen et al., 2015; Boxenbaum, 2006; Holvino and Kamp, 2009; Muhr and Salem, 2013; Rennison, 2009). Because of this, we have chosen in this paper to use the label “ethnic minority”, because this captures the constructed

“problematic” group better than immigrant or migrant would. Still, we acknowledge that this category contains migrants, immigrants, and refugees, and includes second and third generations of all of them.

The combination of high unemployment among ethnic minorities and the translation of diversity management into a Danish context was highly influenced by two distinct and entwined logics behind the development of the universal welfare model that the Danish political system is built on: *equality as sameness*, which fosters assimilation and sameness preference; and *solidarity as social responsibility*, which persuades companies to act responsibly by taking in allegedly marginalized minorities on particular state-subsidized schemes. Diversity management is thus seen as a corporate activity to “put minorities to work” (Boxenbaum, 2006; Holck, 2016a, 2016b; Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004; Risberg & Söderberg, 2008). We will look at these two logics in more detail below.

2.2. The universal welfare model of equality and solidarity

The Danish (and more generally the Nordic)² welfare model is broadly associated with an active state, a large public sector, and a perceived public responsibility for the social welfare of citizens, all within the framework of a market economy (Kautto, 2010: 587). This welfare model is based on the principle of universalism, as all citizens are covered by welfare provisions related to matters of *equality* and *solidarity* between classes and generations. Key words are equality; social cohesion; solidarity universalism; and social security (Vad Jønsson, 2011).

The centrality of *equality* relates to the early development of the welfare model, which has been promoted since the late 1940s on the basis of an imagined community of a national culturally homogeneous population, while strongly downplaying differences to ensure commitment to the universal principles of redistribution (Romani et al., 2016). This leads to our first assumption, namely that the welfare model is built on the logic of *equality as sameness* (Jöhncke, 2007). Some scholars argue that ethnic homogeneity, favouring mutual identification between citizens, is a necessary precondition for social solidarity, trust, and electoral support for vertical redistribution. They therefore argue that growing levels of multicultural diversity reduce the scope of ethnic homogeneity, weakening the preconditions for the universal, vertically distributing welfare model (Banting, 2010; Jonsen et al., 2013; Larsen, 2011; Siim, 2013).

Equality as sameness, which is ingrained in the Danish welfare model, has gross implications for the second welfare logic that we highlight: *solidarity as social responsibility*. As the welfare model is historically built on the presumption of an ethnically homogenous population, solidarity through mutual identification (to ensure support for high levels of redistribution) has hitherto been extended to citizens with an ethnic Danish background. This focus on ethnic heritage that follows the historical development of the Danish welfare model makes it difficult to embrace and value differences related to ethnic background; from very early on, ethnic minorities have been seen as a population with special problems and difficulties in housing, nutrition, health, education, and employment (see e.g. the report by the Elkær-Hansen commission in 1971). Initiatives to include ethnic minorities in the welfare state politically and socially have repeatedly taken place in Denmark from the 1970s to the present day. Indeed, in Denmark ethnic minorities are generally positioned as a weak

¹ Statistics mentions that the employment rate of this part of the population is 50%, compared to about 73% for Danes who do not have a migration background.

² We specifically discuss the Danish welfare model, as this is where our data is from, but acknowledge the fact that the other Nordic welfare models are very similar.

group – a group that is in need of help in order to fit labour-market requirements, and hence a group lacking adequate skills (Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Risberg & Söderberg, 2008).³ The neo-liberal thinking of voluntary action implied by the North American concept of diversity management has thus been reframed and reinterpreted within the ongoing political discourse on the moral imperative to recruit ethnic-minority candidates as part of the firm's social responsibility. Therefore, a Danish variant of diversity management has been created, which, since the late 1990s, has integrated diversity with an inclusive labour-market ideology supported by labour-market schemes, manifesting in a wide variety of state-subsidized labour-market schemes focused on language and training, flexible and light jobs, and protected employment, all of which have been launched to target ethnic minorities (Rennison, 2009; Romani et al., 2016; Risberg & Söderberg, 2008). These schemes reflect the belief that it is possible to tackle differences by being inclusive and tolerant, and by securing labour-market access for marginalized groups. From this perspective, ethnic minorities are recruited mainly because corporations feel morally committed to demonstrate their good citizenship, not because corporations wish to access valuable – and different – competencies and skills held by minority candidates, or because they're simply looking in an unbiased way for the best candidate. The result of these inclusive labour-market schemes is ambiguous: on the one hand, they proactively promote a corporate social responsibility mindset that benefits the labour-market integration of ethnic minorities; on the other, they also rest on flawed ethics, as minorities are portrayed as a burden to society and deficient in terms of relevant skills (see also Al Ariss et al., 2013). The welfare model insinuates that in order for potential employees from ethnic minorities to be turned into productive citizens who can contribute to the common good, they (somewhat ironically put) must be upgraded and trained by charitable corporations that take on their societal responsibility of labour-market integration.

2.3. Aligning redistribution and recognition with social justice and valuing difference

The North American concept of diversity management has in this way been translated to fit the Danish labour-market situation, which is characterized by a high unemployment rate among ethnic minorities, and by the historical welfare logics of equality as sameness and solidarity as social responsibility (Anttonen & Sipilä, 2012; Boxenbaum, 2006; Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004; Risberg & Söderberg, 2008). From this perspective, the welfare logic of equality as sameness results in cultural domination and the disrespect of ethnicities other than Danish, while solidarity as social responsibility gives minorities a precarious organizational position characterized by misrecognition of their skills and competencies.

According to Fraser (1998), in order to ensure equal opportunities and hence social justice, the two dimensions of recognition and redistribution have to be balanced. Redistribution is aimed at ameliorating socioeconomic injustice or maldistribution in such forms as economic marginalization, confinement to undesirable or poorly paid work, deprivation, and denial of an adequate standard of living. Recognition is aimed at tackling cultural or symbolic injustices – which Fraser terms “misrecognition” – such as cultural domination, subjection to patterns of interpretation and communication that are associated with another culture that are alien

and/or hostile to one's own, disrespect, and routine disparagement in stereotypical public cultural representations and/or in everyday interactions (Fraser, 1998). Some groups, such as ethnic minorities, are inherently a hybrid category subjected to two-dimensional subordination. They suffer both from maldistribution as an “underclass” of low-paid menial labourers, and from misrecognition, which results in a lower perceived cultural status. However, neither of these injustices is a direct effect of the other. Rather, they are entwined (Fraser & Honneth, 2003, p. 14).

Fraser's critique takes its starting point in a North American neo-liberal market economy with large problems of poverty and economic inequality. Translating Fraser into a Danish context, progressive taxes and high social compensations of the universal welfare state serve to alleviate acute poverty through a high degree of redistribution. However, Fraser's critique is relevant in understanding the Danish context by highlighting how the logics of equality and solidarity are intricately cross-affiliated with those of recognition and redistribution. In Denmark, the remedy for one evil – maldistribution – has unintended consequences of further misrecognition. High degrees of social compensation and corporate social responsibility help minorities to access the labour market with the redistributive goal of economic self-reliance. But minority employees tend to be introduced into the workplace through active labour-market schemes, such as precarious, temporary, and publicly funded positions, which assign them a lower status than the majority members holding permanent positions (Lauring, 2009). Therefore, a status hierarchy emerges between the contributing majority, who define the “adequate standard”, and the receiving minority, who are in need of training to reach the adequate cultural and professional skills level and, hence, are constructed as a burden to the organization, as they are to society.

Introducing the concepts of recognition and redistribution into the Danish variant of diversity management, it becomes evident that the perception of equality as sameness and the practice of solidarity as corporate social responsibility (and economic redistribution) are presently counterproductive to appreciating difference (recognition). As argued by scholars who are critical of diversity management (e.g., Ahonen et al., 2014; Zanoni et al., 2010; Boogaard & Roggeband, 2010; Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013; Kaley et al., 2006; Ortlieb & Sieben, 2014; Schwabenland & Tomlinson, 2015; Tatli & Özbilgin, 2012; Zanoni & Janssens, 2015), this leads to stereotypical perceptions of minority employees that, when adding social responsibility, are associated with lack and deficiency. The quest for social justice through redistribution then hampers the business case of valuing difference and hence recognition. Drawing on Fraser's argument, social justice rests not only on (economic) redistributive practices (economic self-reliance), but also on recognition (valuing difference). Following her argument, in a Danish context, redistribution through solidarity as social responsibility has to be fitted into the logic of recognizing differences as part of the business case of diversity – other than minorities as cheap state-subsidized labour.

After a section on methodology, we will analyse 94 personal accounts of difference to trace and discuss how the welfare logics hamper diversity at the Danish workplace Fastfood. Subsequently, we will discuss ways to integrate recognition (valuing difference) into the welfare model.

3. Method

3.1. Research site

This study forms part of a longitudinal ethnographic study of the Danish subsidiary of the international restaurant chain Fastfood (an alias). Fastfood is a highly specialized and

³ This is combined with a perception of non-Western ethnic minorities as coming from a less developed culture in relation to gender issues, religion, politics, etc. (Jöhncke, 2007; Rytter, 2007).

standardized production company with uniform global standards that are applied locally. Most employees perform repetitive and standardized low-skill tasks that typically require no prior training. The organization is formalized in a central hierarchy, with a transparent personnel policy that details the criteria for recruitment, promotion, and performance, all of which are central to its diversity policy.

In Denmark, Fastfood is a prizewinning prototype of a business guided by diversity values. Its focus on bottom-line gains rests on a strong belief that staff diversity improves earnings by allowing staff to acquire the qualities and skills needed to service a wide range of customers. The staff composition echoes this belief in relation to ethnicity and gender: 16% of crew members and 13% of managers have an ethnic-minority background. Moreover, 52% of crew members and 49% of managers are women, and 2% of all employees are disabled. The exception in terms of diversity is age, with 90% between 15 and 23 years old. Many of the employees with ethnic-minority backgrounds are refugees or immigrants, who use the organization to gain access to the mainstream labour market. In the organization, this is officially recognized as serving a “rebound to society” function. Many of the minority employees are employed through various public subsidized labour schemes aimed at improving their language skills, helping them become accustomed with typical Danish workplace culture, or upgrading their professional skills.

3.2. Data collection

This article is based on 94 anonymous stories recounted by employees from different restaurants. Over a period of nine weeks in spring 2012, employees from all restaurants were encouraged to write up a story about how they had experienced and tackled differences in their workplace. The stories were given anonymously during working hours at a local computer. It was an option to write in either Danish or English. Employees submitted 94 stories of varying lengths. Of these, 50 were written by men and 44 by women. 52 of the narrators were between 15 and 19 years old, 26 were between 20 and 24, and 13 were between 25 and 35. Only 3 narrators were older than 40 years old. In terms of positions, 33 of the narrators were managers (i.e., restaurant manager, shift manager, or first or second assistant manager) and 61 were crew members. Of the latter, 49 were in part-time positions, and, of these, 27 were under 18 years old. When asked about their ethnic background, 82 of the respondents wrote ethnic Danish and 12 ethnic-minority background. The respondents were asked to write about the following:

Think about a collaborative situation that you or your colleague have been in where a diverse team of colleagues functioned well, or about a situation where collaboration was a challenge. This can e.g. be a conflict, where you experienced that difference played a role. Talk about the actual experience of handling diversity and difference in your work environment.

The stories were predominantly written in Danish. The narrators were encouraged to give their story a title, which is mentioned in the analysis. All respondents participated on a voluntary basis and they were informed that their responses would be kept anonymous. All the names and nationalities mentioned are fictitious, but are closely related to the names and nationalities mentioned in the original stories.

3.3. Analytical strategy

The choice to use the narrative material as the primary data source for this analysis reflects the fact that the narratives

offered unique insights into employee perceptions and constructions of specific diversity encounters. The stories were spontaneous, self-selected, and non-restrained by an interview situation, which can be affected by personal chemistry, leading questions, and/or the respondents trying to provide “satisfying” answers. In addition, the stories take their starting point in everyday work situations. Therefore, they are not abstract, but serve to make diversity perceptions and experiences more concrete.

To analyse employee stories, the coding procedure developed by [Strauss and Corbin \(1990\)](#) has been applied. This procedure is based on reducing and abstracting the empirical data through open, axial, and selective coding. Initially, we examined the data in order to identify key themes and categories (open codes). The axial coding involved identifying the relationships between the open codes. Finally, through selective coding, we conceptualized these relationships by identifying the themes around which conclusions about the field of diversity management in a Danish organization could be generated.

Initially, to identify the relevant fragments on difference and diversity in the 94 narratives, each author read and reread the texts separately, selecting the excerpts concerning equality as sameness and solidarity as social responsibility in the narrators’ texts. We then jointly discussed the fragments. In the second round of coding, we read the stories again, with a view to reducing the empirical data through selective coding. In this process we paid particular attention to producing adequate themes by inductively coding the fragments based on the content of the argumentations on difference and diversity. We went through the individual stories looking for important patterns and key themes aligned with the two welfare logics to detect whether they informed perceptions on differences and how they did so. All our excerpts could be subsumed under one of these two main categories, although in a few instances we had initially coded them differently, as some fragments mixed elements of two types.

After assigning open codes to the two categories, the first descriptive coding revealed common patterns and themes relating to the analytical categories associated with the implication of infusing diversity management with corporate social responsibility. Related to 1) “equality as sameness”, we paid particular attention to whether the stories supported a stereotypical perception of difference as either an asset or disturbance to the smooth running of collaboration and organizational performance. These narratives were furthermore subdivided into crew and manager stories. Relating to the other main category, 2) “solidarity as social responsibility”, managers’ narratives in particular were pivotal in exploring how minority employees were on-boarded and socialized into the organization, with consequences for their chances of gaining permanent positions and promotion. Finally, we found that some common themes in relation to diversity and difference crisscrossed and ran through the two main categories. The transgressive themes related to: 1) if and how the stories reflected similar and divergent perceptions; 2) whether the stories reflected themes associated with diversity as ethnic differences or a wider conceptualization of difference, which might include personalities, educational backgrounds, interests, or age; and, finally, 3) if the stories presented a predominantly positive or negative view on difference.

Through the data analysis, we worked in the original language of the interviews to stay close to the rhetorical strategies of the speaker. When the findings were fully written, we translated the selected excerpts into English as closely as possible, in order to maintain as far as possible the original rhetorical schemes.

4. Findings

4.1. Difference and “equality as sameness”

In our analysis of the stories on difference in Fastfood, a clear pattern emerges around perceptions of difference. More than half of the stories (44 stories) include generalizations about specific ethnic characteristics that are overtly positive (23 manager and 11 crew stories) or negative (10 crew stories). 10 manager and 31 crew stories link differences to more broadly defined characteristics, such as differences in personalities and interests, or physical/mental handicaps. These stories demonstrate how the bulk of managers associate difference with ethnic differences, while most of the crew members have a broader perception of “difference”.

4.1.1. Difference as the exotic other

The equality as sameness logic emerges in the positive managerial stories, which often describe minority employees as picture-perfect and link their efforts to their assumed struggle to become “just like us”. An example is a manager’s story entitled “Smiling sunbeam”, which is about a Vietnamese employee. The manager compliments the employee because he eventually adopts “a Danish way of life and is the perfect employee”. A similar manager story is “The happy Somalian”, in which the focal employee is eventually appreciated by his colleagues as he manages to learn “Danish workplace values, like arriving on time. He has become part of the social community and participates in spare-time activities, such as playing soccer and Facebook – just like the other colleagues”.

When it comes to stories written by crew members, roughly half (28) link differences to non-ethnic characteristics. Typical examples are stories like “We help each other”, “We are all different”, and “Customer complaints and our different reactions”. They all include a discussion of how crew members’ different personalities benefit collaboration and socializing. The other half (22 stories) explicitly link differences to stories of ethnic-minority colleagues. Of this latter group, 11 stories are positive. Like the managers’ stories, they attach certain assumed “ethnic” characteristics to minority colleagues. These include being exceptionally happy and entertaining, which is a characteristic found in stories like “Singing and dancing in the kitchen” and “The Thai dance”:

I was carrying trays to the backroom. There, I met Dang, who was beating two red clamps while dancing in a funny way. He said: “This is how we dance in Thailand.” Things like this give a lot of positive energy and make me laugh.

These stories attribute “ethnic” characteristics to minorities, classifying them as exceptionally exotic and happy colleagues. In this way, ethnic-minority employees are positioned as “exotic others” in contrast to the “ordinary” majority, who are defined as “we” and as those with whom to identify and be on a par, echoing the *equality as sameness* logic.

4.1.2. Difference as a means to personal growth

Another predominant theme is constructed in how the majority relate to personal development and growth when confronted with ethnic differences at work. One example is found in the story “Making friends with second-generation immigrants”, in which the narrator discusses making friends at work with local ethnic-minority youths that he “would usually avoid”. In “People with another background”, the narrator reflects on how he learned that things can be “perceived as racist in another culture” by working in a multicultural setting. The story “Archetype Ahmed” follows a similar theme:

The first time I met Ahmed, he was a real “Ahmed type” – a well-built Lebanese with a black BMW, greasy hair, a heavy Lebanese

accent, and TV dishes directed towards Mecca. “Oh no,” I thought. However, Ahmed turned out to be one of the friendliest, well-meaning, and dedicated colleagues that I have ever met. My discussions with Ahmed during the quiet closing hours give me a chance to get a glimpse into a different world that exists under the surface of what I thought was my own world. I learn just about as much about myself as I do about Ahmed.

These stories all share a plot in which the narrator learns and grows as a person, becoming more tolerant and inclusive because of his or her work in a multi-ethnic environment. These stories again take their starting point in stereotypical perceptions of ethnic minorities as being the “other” in contrast to the majority-defined “we” – a stereotypical perception that the narrators claim to challenge, while upholding yet another stereotype about ethnic minorities as exceptional colleagues. As with the managers’ stories, these “developmental tales” draw on and make manifest ethnic-minority colleagues as characterized by group features – not as unique persons with individual qualities, interests, and personalities. And the value of difference is not related to professionalization in the form of better service or enhanced performance (the business case); the narrators relate differences to personal development and their own enlarged sense of community.

4.1.3. Difference as disruption to the homogenous “we”

The last group of crew stories (10) views difference as being problematic, and as having a negative impact on performance and social relations. These stories relate to a lack of communication caused by language difficulties and/or cultural barriers. They have titles like “My silent team”, “Noise on the line”, “Conflict problem”, and “Cultural differences”:

I was working with a new Indian employee. I asked him several times if he needed help, but he only replied “no”. Then my boss pulled me aside and explained that, in the employee’s culture, it is shameful to ask for help – doing so is perceived as a failure. Therefore, part of the job is to understand and accept other cultures.

Remarkably, the narrator of this story does not consider the possibility that the Indian employee did not need any help. As the employee is Indian, the narrator seems to assume that he is in need of help from an employee from the majority ethnic group and that he needs to adjust to Danish workplace norms. Similarly, another narrator tells a story of “The man who would not touch bacon” because he was a Muslim. In the story, a Muslim employee would not touch the “bacon” button when serving customers at the counter. Accordingly, colleagues had to do this task, which slowed the work process. However, the Muslim employee eventually learned that touching the bacon button was not the same as touching pork. Other stories from majority crew members define different cultures as inherently patriarchal, as the story “Professional and personal respect” suggests:

In our restaurant, we employ people with other language backgrounds in order to strengthen their Danish skills. Due to their other language background, their religion is also different and rubs off on their perceptions of the women working here. They have no respect for women, and this influences their professional respect for female colleagues.

In the negative stories the “ethnic other” is presumed to be deficient when measured against the majority-defined superior standard; the deficient minority obstructs the possibility of equality (as it is based on sameness), as difference is related to a foreign culture resting on flawed perceptions of honour, religious prescriptions, gender relations, etc. that are disruptive to the possibility of interacting on a par. Like the positive stories, these

negative stories share two significant features. First, they demonstrate the widespread perception that ethnic-minority colleagues need to conform to the ethnic majority's workplace norms in order to perform – and not disrupt collaborative interaction. This confirms the “equality as sameness” logic. Second, they show how difference keeps creeping in, as all of the stories encompass certain stereotypical group characteristics that differentiate ethnic minorities from the majority and maintain an “us versus them” mentality. Even when it comes to the positive stories, minority colleagues are considered not as peers, but as inherently stereotypically different, reaffirming the majority “we” as more tolerant and better people. The minority will never become part of the “we” (even though their attempts to assimilate are generally appreciated) – they are perceived as inherently different. To be accepted or tolerated, minorities have to do something extra – work extra hard, be exceptionally loyal, etc. – while majority employees are tacitly accepted just by being part of the “we”. The two groups of stories differ, however, in terms of whether they have happy endings: the positive story of the exceptional minority employee, or the negative story about the problematic cultural differences, in which the language and cultural differences linger on.

4.1.4. *Summing up: stereotypical difference and the majority “we”*

Our findings suggest that the local translation of diversity management as “equality as sameness” in Fastfood is constantly interrupted by an underlying notion of difference that makes equality impossible. Employees tend to distinguish “us” from “them” on the basis of minority/majority differences and a perception of the majority culture as superior. This is especially significant when considering that many (23) of the managers' stories explicitly link differences to ethnic-minority employees, whom they characterized as having exaggerated positive qualities. Minority members are therefore recognized as having more overtly positive characteristics than the average majority member – they are viewed as exceptionally devoted, hard-working, and loyal. At the same time, managers confirm their views of the majority norms as superior when describing successful integration as occurring when minorities become “just like us”. Hence, diversity management is translated into a “panopticon” practice of disciplining, re-socializing, and monitoring minority employees in their assimilation of Danish workplace culture and in terms of socially acceptable minority behaviour.

This picture is somewhat echoed in crew members' perceptions on difference. Roughly half of the crew members explicitly link difference with either positive or negative implications. In the positive stories, minority colleagues are tolerated and included as exotic “others”, mostly due to their enthusiastic behaviour, or they are included as an exotic element that “spices up” the workplace. In the other stories, they are viewed as problematic due to their lack of adequate Danish skills or their different cultural backgrounds. The other half of majority crew members (and managers) link difference to more varied aspects, including personality traits. This might be explained, in part, by a lack of local exposure to ethnic diversity. While some restaurants located in the big cities in Denmark employ a large number of employees with ethnic-minority backgrounds, those in more rural areas are characterized by ethnic homogeneity. This reflects the restaurants' attempt to mirror the composition of local communities among their employees.

4.2. *Difference and “solidarity as social responsibility”*

Most of the stories on differences written by managers are essentially stories about corporate social responsibility initiatives in the workplace (26 of 33). These managers' stories basically

repeat the same story plot, which describes how the manager takes on the risk of recruiting disadvantaged people, predominantly those with refugee and immigrant backgrounds. These employees initially lack Danish skills and adequate knowledge about Danish workplace culture. After intensive training and “parenting” by the manager, all of the stories have a happy ending in which the minority employees eventually adjust to the demands of the workplace, as their language skills are upgraded together with their professional competences. This is presented as offering mutual benefits – the minority employee might eventually gain a permanent position, while the workplace builds a more inclusive and tolerant culture. These stories have titles like “Under the wings of Fastfood”, “Room for everyone”, “Fastfood becomes your family”, “Everybody can be part of the team”, “It is worth it”, “Patience pays off”, “A new beginning in Denmark”, “Integration in a strange country”, and “Make a difference”. This kind of win-win situation is summed up in the managerial tale entitled “This gives work life content”:

Years ago, I recruited a girl from Morocco for my restaurant. She did not know a word of Danish. I took the chance and employed her. It turned out to be a fantastic experience for her and for me. The kind of gratitude she shows me I cannot describe. Every day, she gives me a big hug. This experience tells me that in Fastfood we not only make a difference in people's professional lives but also in their personal lives.

This is an example of an archetypal developmental tale based on the everyday experiences of restaurant managers, as many of the minority crew members enter the organizations through an active labour-market scheme for the unemployed, as part of a language training programme, or in order to become accustomed with “Danish workplace culture”. This is also the plot in a manager's story about the recruitment of a trainee from Cuba entitled “From alcohol to work”. In this story, the narrator indicates that the Cuban used to be an alcoholic. Through intensive training, nurturing, and personal back-up from the manager, he is eventually integrated into the workplace community, quits drinking, and becomes a highly motivated employee.

4.2.1. *Social responsibility as paternalism*

The managers' stories all share a common theme. The managers describe minorities in positive ways, but they view them as inferior – they are often viewed as in need of help from patient managers from the majority ethnic group, who have the empathy and resources needed to take on the responsibility of professional and personal “upgrading”. Another archetypal story is “Smiling sunbeam”, which covers the recruitment of an employee from Vietnam:

He impresses me enormously. He started in a trainee position with no Danish skills at all. Later, he was employed through a wage-subsidy scheme. When he first started, it was difficult to communicate with him due to his poor Danish, and his difficult childhood left him rather introverted. However, we were keen on teaching him Danish and helping him to open up. Now he works more consistently than most of the employees and he fights every minute to ensure top performance. Last year, he was named employee of the year and he is now a certified trainer. Everyone loves him because of his big smile and positive attitude. He is adopting a Danish way of life and is the perfect employee.

The managerial stories often have a paternalistic twist of “keeping them [the minorities] in place”, as stated by the narrator in the story entitled “Diversity and development of individuals”. This story describes members of minorities as unruly, uncivilized

kids who have to be cultivated and disciplined by a parental managerial authority, which is beneficial for them. This managerial perception of on-boarding as a kind of “raising” of new employees might also be applicable for most newly recruited majority employees, who are predominantly youths with no prior training in the field or labour-market experiences. However, most of the minority newcomers with refugee or immigrant backgrounds are older and have prior training in certain fields, as well as labour-market experience from other countries. Therefore, the paternalistic attitude seems odd and somewhat skewed.

4.2.2. Social responsibility as upgrading

As diversity management in Denmark is fused with the principle of social responsibility, members of ethnic minorities are hired for provisional positions that are publicly funded. As a result, they are assigned a lower status than majority members in permanent positions. This is an inherently unequal power relation, as minorities find themselves in a relatively weak position, where they require help from tolerant and benevolent majority managers or supervisors who can help them develop their potential. Moreover, an unequal hierarchy is established, which disadvantages minority employees by assigning little value to their unique competences. Hence, the thinking behind corporate social responsibility fosters the perception and treatment of minority employees as inferior. This is also illustrated in a manager’s story about his experiences with minority crew members in training positions:

They start in the kitchen, where they get to know Danes. They have a tendency to use their spare time with others from their home country. We offer them a Danish community, which means a lot to them . . . We have plenty of these stories that illustrate what we are able to do in Fastfood. We do not judge people in advance, but we leave room for everybody. Our talented managers and employees can turn the most miserable fates into success stories.

In this story, the minority employees embody the “miserable fates”, turned into successes by well-meaning and talented majority managers and crew. Professionalism and resources are linked to the majority “we”, which helps out the unaccomplished minority “them”. In a similar story, entitled “Make a difference”, a manager describes how it is “a good feeling to help people that need a friendly ‘push’ in the right direction” when employing minorities in training positions. In addition, these stories tell a moral story about how Fastfood aims for inclusive labour policies, acts as a good corporate citizen, and does the “dirty work” in terms of minority integration for other Danish firms. Hence, diversity is portrayed as an imperative. One example is found in the story “Diversity – not a choice, but a necessity for the team”:

Diversity is a responsibility that we must accept. Through our Fastfood upbringing, we have been trained to give back to the local community. In Fastfood, we do a lot to help people enter the labour market, regardless of their background or age. Some eventually get a permanent position, while others are prepared for the labour market outside Fastfood.

Therefore, Fastfood and the (majority) managers are characterized as morally and ethically correct, as they believe in the empowerment and potential of every human. Accordingly, differences are not valued for the benefits they might offer in terms of professionalism and business performance, but for the sake of the majority’s sense of morality, charity, and compassion. This focus leads to the restoration of the internal and external image, as echoed in how a restaurant manager portrays “his” restaurant:

It makes me proud that my managers and employees can help people. It is so easy to say, “No, I do not want to engage with

these people because doing so is too cumbersome.” My employees are so patient, indulgent, and prepared to help different people, which I find very touching.

4.2.3. Summing up: social responsibility as paternalism, benevolent majority, and upgrading

Our findings suggest that diversity management is translated into “paternalism”, in which majority managers and trainers serve as surrogate parents by invoking the family metaphor behind the welfare logic of social responsibility. Therefore, this logic marginalizes minorities, who find themselves in a weak position of dependency and in need of help to be integrated. This, in turn, delegitimizes their professional competences. Furthermore, social responsibility logics conflict with the reasoning behind the business case for diversity, which is to value difference and realise that each employee’s unique set of interests and competencies can enhance the firm’s competitive advantage. Moreover, voluntary corporate action in promoting diversity as a potential advantage for business becomes an appropriate and compulsive corporate behaviour through the institutionalizing efforts of policymakers and labour-market stakeholders. Instead of attributing value to differences, the stories from Fastfood demonstrate how diversity management fused with social responsibility reinforces group differences by highlighting the distinction between the “benevolent and skilled” majority and the “deficient” minority. The differences that minority employees bring into the organization are either problematized or stereotyped into group qualities (the picture-perfect or exotic other). The potential professional qualities of difference are disregarded. As a result, minority employees cannot achieve equality, as they are inherently different and, simultaneously, expected to assimilate majority norms in order to demonstrate their willingness to integrate. Practices of corporate social responsibility – and hence redistributive intentions – thus actively undermine recognition of difference, which is central to the mainstream proponents of the business case for diversity.

5. Concluding discussion: reintroducing difference differently through a norm-critical approach

A growing number of critical diversity studies have by now successfully and importantly exposed how underlying (mainly gendered and raced) discourses of business case diversity initiatives construct minorities in condescending ways, which paradoxically obstruct the effect of these initiatives (e.g. Ahonen, Tienari, Meriläinen, & Pullen, 2014; Zanoni and Janssens, 2004). However, despite having had an important impact on the diversity debate, these studies are first of all predominantly decontextualized and abstract, and secondly they pursue a goal of social justice through deconstructing the managerial conceptions of difference imbued within the mainstream business case for diversity (Ahonen et al., 2014; Ghorashi & Sabelis, 2013; Jack & Lorbiecki, 2007; Jonsen et al., 2013; Klarsfeld et al., 2012; Mamman, Kamoche & Bakuwa, 2012; Tatli, 2011). We have therefore lately witnessed a call for more contextualized as well as more practical critical studies (Boogaard & Roggeband, 2010; Holck, 2016a; Özbilgin & Tatli, 2011; Janssens & Zanoni, 2014; Ostendorp & Steyart, 2009; Schwabenland & Tomlinson, 2015; Siebers, 2009). This article has responded to this call and contributes to the debate in two distinct ways:

First of all, the article has demonstrated how the particular historical development of the Danish welfare model and its logics of equality as sameness and solidarity as social responsibility can help to explain the continued low standing of minorities in Danish organizations. In this way, our analysis highlights how the welfare logics of equality as sameness and solidarity as social responsibility

paradoxically obstruct successful integration of minorities in the workforce because minorities – through these logics – are constructed as deviant, as deficient, and as less valuable labour. Our analysis thus illustrates how diversity management initiatives can only be meaningfully “disassembled” by a *historical-contemporary ideological contextualization*. This allows us to understand the relevant fallacies and to translate them into meaningful changes. Contextualizing diversity management in a Danish setting brings about an understanding of how the current translation of diversity management in a Danish organization like Fastfood becomes an ambiguous, contradictory programme, by drawing on a complex combination of a sameness preference implied by the welfare logic of equality as sameness and inclusive labour-market schemes of solidarity through corporate social responsibility. As we have shown, these logics don’t cultivate respect and appreciation, but, rather, cultivate assimilation and further marginalization of difference. The logic of equality as sameness actively excludes minorities and views them as stereotypical others set apart from the Danish “family”. Simultaneously, solidarity as social responsibility serves to devalue and neglect minority skills and competences brought to organizations. This leads to a situation where difference is problematized, as you can only be “equal” by assimilating into Danish “majority standards”, and solidarity is only offered based on a perception of minorities being “inferior”. As such, minority employees are left in an inclusion dilemma, as they are supposed to suppress their “difference” in cultural values and labour-market experience to become accepted, but they are bound to fail, as they never become “the same” (a “white Dane”). In the current situation, therefore, the translation of diversity management into a Danish context has led to a situation where redistributive practices seem to be at the cost of recognition. Regardless of the intentions, the Danish practice of diversity management fused with social responsibility does not redress the structural injustices of a majority-biased labour market. Instead, it only extends the division between the contributing majority and the receiving minority, thereby supporting patterns of misrecognition (Fraser, 1998). As a result, solidarity is sectarian, and valuing differences serves as a means of further misrecognition. Consequently, diversity management initiatives in a Danish setting most often do not even disturb the logic of equality as sameness. Rather, diversity management is disturbed and distorted by the underlying welfare logics, by fixing Danes and immigrants into a hierarchical relationship of superiority and inferiority that obstructs most diversity efforts to ensure equal opportunities in the workplace.

This brings us to this article’s *second contribution*, which is related to translating the above-mentioned critical findings into meaningful organizational changes. In other words, how do we circumvent the current interpretation of difference as problematic and deficient without relapsing to a fixed, essentializing approach to difference as introduced by the business case of diversity management? Diversity management has been said to be “a story of how to obtain both equality and business success; it depicts a win-win situation where these two perspectives are united” (Kamp and Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004, p. 532). However, this might, in fact, be a fairy tale that is far from corporate reality. This situation is alleviated neither by means of “colour-blind diversity policies” aimed at overcoming stereotypical group relations nor by “identity conscious” activities that promote social justice and the articulation of historically based structural and power-related inequalities (Holck et al., 2016).

To redress the current maladies of Danish diversity management practices, a reinterpretation of the value of difference based on non-stereotypical perceptions of difference is needed, as proposed by critical scholars. Currently, difference is interpreted as an unfruitful distinction between an assumed contributing/

benevolent majority and an assumed needy/lacking minority, leading to a belief that it is possible to tackle differences by being tolerant and inclusive. From an inclusive point of view, focus is on the “deviant” minority and how the majority comes to form a tacitly enacted appropriate standard against which everything else is measured and thus labelled “different” (Muhr & Sullivan, 2013). This is exactly what is overlooked in the inclusion approach ingrained in the corporate social responsibility approach to diversity, which characterizes the particular Danish variant of diversity management (Risberg & Söderberg, 2008; Romani et al., 2016): a situation arises where majority employees have the inclination to judge whether minority employees behave in appropriate ways, and set the boundaries of who will be included and excluded. This perception is reproduced in the many stories portraying minority employees either as excessively hard-working, loyal, or culturally exotic “others” spicing up the workplace, or as problematic due to their lack of adequate Danish skills or their different cultural backgrounds. And paradoxically, the repetition of the stories creates an ideology so strong that the majority stops reflecting on themselves and their norms.

To foster equal opportunities within organizations, not only should unequal power relations between the majority and the minority be addressed, but also the relationship between employer and employee. The case of Fastfood reveals how managers in particular hold a paternalistic managerial approach that positions minorities in a weak position and in need of help to have their skills raised to the adequate (majority-manager-defined) level by the benevolent manager. Paternalistic managerial practices of social responsibility draw on and copy societal understandings of immigrants both as workers and as ethnic minorities. Managers in particular can confront and contest these stereotypes, which are kept alive through stories about excessively hard-working or exotic minorities and practised through expectations of, and prejudices about, immigrant employees’ skills. Managers can use their position in the organization to lead and sense-give about valuing different competences and skills while allowing room for multiple identities beyond stereotypic categorizations. This refocuses attention to their *approach* to difference, as opposed to difference in itself. Managers can, following this method, enact a critical awareness of how norms about the minority employee, produced by language schemes and discourses on “us/them” and “benevolent/needy” binaries, enact a certain organizational reality. Words are not “innocent”, but produce particular normative organizational understandings, which form social relations in the workplace. To give an example, in the story “This gives work life content”, a manager recounts a narrative about a successful on-boarding of a Moroccan employee. The manager stresses how *he* decided to give her a chance, despite the bad odds (her lack of Danish skills), and then emphasizes her gratitude when the on-boarding succeeded. Rather than focus on his benevolence and her gratitude, a critical, self-reflexive manager would concentrate on how her skills and competencies enrich the workplace, thus shifting from social responsibility/moral compassion to a vocabulary of competences, learning, and skills. This would broaden the norms of competences and skills, while enabling the opportunity to value the multiple competences of a diverse group of employees and to contest and reinterpret the principles of meritocracy. The relationship can also be constructed as an exchange system of mutual benefits; the employee is after all providing the labour that the employer needed when hiring them, which would also give the employer a reason to be grateful.

Managers can, furthermore, play a leading role in the attempt to avoid reproducing mono-cultural norms and open the organizational space for multiple identities. This is illustrated in the story of “cultural differences”, where an employee insists on helping a new Indian employee. In this situation the manager could – instead of

confirming cultural stereotypes – give attention to and progressively disrupt the surfacing of implicit and “taken-for-granted” norms and prejudices about minority/majority distinctions, not necessarily by correcting the employee, but by reflexively going through the incident, challenging the question of the impact of being Indian or Danish, and looking at what could have been done differently in the situation. Managers can thus try to enhance the possibility for all employees to bring their entire set of identities to work – whether based on sameness or difference – according to their own wishes (Janssens & Zanoni, 2014).

These are examples of what we label a *norm-critical, respectful, and reflexive* approach to matters of both difference and sameness. A norm-critical approach seeks to move beyond and transcend both diversity management praise of differences and the critical stance advocating the pre-imposed hierarchical relationship between ethnicities, sexes, etc. This is done by promoting a critical awareness of the latent danger of fixing difference to the detriment of the skills and experiences a diverse group of employees brings to the organization, while keeping in mind the value of recognizing differences. Inspired by Muhr & Sullivan's (2013) term “queering leadership”, which was designed to challenge masculine norms tacitly enacted within leadership, a norm-critical practitioner questions majority–minority distinctions by creatively transgressing the binaries. By broadening the norms of competencies and allowing multiple identities to counter societal understandings of ethnic minorities, the majority norm of the ideal worker in the organization can be confronted and destabilized. A concrete example could be to stop talking about “ethnic minorities” and instead have a conversation with people with minority-ethnic backgrounds. As such, “minority” would go ahead of “ethnicity”. This, as Christensen (forthcoming: 6) argues, is “a deliberate norm critical choice, as it is the minority position that is problematic and not people's ethnic backgrounds per se. It is not one's ethnic background but how one is minorised with reference to ethnicity that is the focus.” A norm-critical approach can thus help to identify the current limitations of the business case as it is currently framed with a focus on profitability. And it can help to move it in the direction of learning and social development in a democratic, empowerment-oriented organization that promotes the spirit of autonomy – that is, that the “other” has the ability to manage and influence decisions affecting that otherness him or herself. As Muhr and Sullivan (2013) emphasize, thinking outside binaries is difficult. It is a constant challenge, which cannot be completed, but remains a continuous act of norm-critical resistance.

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