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book review:

Mustafa F. Özbilgin (Ed.)

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at Work – A research companion, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar

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## Book review

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Mustafa F. Özbilgin (Ed.) 2009  
*Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at Work –  
A research companion*  
Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar

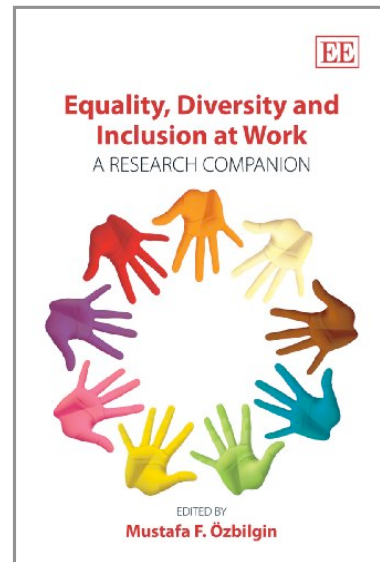
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In an unusual effort to provide a comprehensive overview of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) at work, these debated umbrella concepts are brought together in this single volume. Editor Mustafa F. Özbilgin explains that, though the three terms are interrelated, the framing of the volume demanded a finer-grained perspective. While the term “equality” hints at the possibility of comparison, “diversity” opens ground for a multiplicity of differences and intersections between them; finally, “inclusion” seeks to draw attention beyond descriptions and comparisons to strategic interventions inside organizations.

Beyond the acknowledgement of the three terms’ interrelatedness in theory and practice, the importance of time and place are relevantly discussed in the introduction. Indeed, the lack of historical (or structural) perspective in many articles in which gender or ethnicity are used as variables fails to show how positions are shaped by shifting power relations and do not follow a linear pattern of change for the better as many an advocate of voluntarism would like us to believe. Some forms of inequality are resolved over time, others are resilient, and yet some new ones develop. A wide range of contexts is also covered in the volume, along with a variety of ways of dealing with them. This variety leads us back to the difficult question which Özbilgin poses in the introduction: how particular, or, at the other end of the spectrum, how universalist shall approaches be? While the contextual approach (where attention is given to culturally or nationally specific issues and priorities) develops EDI scholarship outside of the dominant North American and British globalizing vision, this is at the risk of paying no



heed to the international dynamics of ideas, and of reifying and naturalizing existing power relations. Özbilgin attempts to reconcile these two “tyrannies” by stating that “context is framed as a possibility rather than a destiny; [...] as dynamically forming rather than fixed in time” (p.5). While attention to specific contexts is a rich means of expanding one’s perspective, opportunity to compare and question them should not be left aside. Another important observation is made: scholars in the field are often disqualified as lacking the dispassion and instrumental logics which supposedly lead to relevant managerial research. According to Özbilgin, researchers and practitioners alike can overcome the dichotomies that pervade EDI research by adopting multilayered and multilevel frameworks. To complement this very insightful introduction, a final wrap-up would have been a welcome addition; not necessarily in the form of a conclusion, but more like an afterword synthesizing the variety of paths that can be trodden, as well as an integrative summary of future directions, as the reader can feel somewhat puzzled about what to make of the many questions and propositions with which he or she is left.

## CONTENT OVERVIEW

As is acknowledged by the editor, this volume is an ambitious project. The 31 contributions are divided up into 7 parts and cover a very wide array of approaches, both quantitative and qualitative. Contributors hail from diverse fields, starting with management and human resources but also coming from psychology and the social sciences in general. Most contributions are from researchers based in the UK or North America, remaining contributions being from Western European countries as well as Israel and New Zealand. Some parts are dedicated to a specific type of organization (Part I: academia, Part V: trade unions); others, to specific approaches (Part III: sociology, Part IV: psychology). Remaining parts include both theoretical and empirical chapters (in Parts II, VI and VII). One of the rare previous attempts, *The Handbook of Workplace Diversity* (Konrad, Prasad, & Pringle, 2006), is divided up into 3 parts: theory, methods and dimensions of diversity. *The Dynamics of Managing Diversity: a Critical Approach* (Kirton & Greene, 2000, who also contributed to the presently reviewed book), adopts a more classical division between theory and practice. Such clear-cut divisions may be difficult to apply to the current volume; nevertheless, the arrangement of parts and chapters is sometimes difficult to follow. This difficulty with reconciling the ambition of the volume with a more ‘straightforward’ organization may be further proof of the difficulty of bringing so many subject matters and approaches under the same roof. We will, however, go through the different parts in the order of the book so that the reader can form his or her own opinion on the matter.

The decision to begin with a part devoted to “Scholars, scholarship and inequality” may seem like a surprising one, as academia is seldom the focus of EDI studies. However, the four contributions in this part

clearly illustrate how discrimination and gender inequity are present in researchers' and teachers' work environments. While differences are found between different national contexts (Woodward), general ways of improvement can be drawn from this comparative study of Japan and the UK. The subtlety (and complexity) of inequity reproduction highlighted by Roos is also exemplified by Bell's testimony of a lifelong experience of discrimination at the intersection of gender and ethnicity. Fotaki's contribution, mainly drawing on Irigaray's feminist psychoanalytic approach, is a clear transition to the rather theory-oriented second part of the book. Indeed, "Reframing equality, diversity and inclusion" consists of 6 chapters revolving around intersectionality and the necessity of unfolding the dichotomous and static view of EDI problematics. Except for the chapter on women entrepreneurs (Lerner, Pines & Schwartz), which could have been integrated into a different part of the book, remaining contributions are oriented towards developing future research directions in the field of EDI, drawing attention to the importance of context (Pringle; Healy; Syed) and to the potentially fruitful consequences of confronting paradoxes in diversity management (Koll & Bruchhagen) and seeing gender as 'doing' (Kelan & Nentwich). The third part, "Sociology of equality, diversity and inclusion", similarly proposes multilevel perspectives and points out research issues that need more attention, such as the depoliticization of gender (Meuser; Fleischmann) and further paradoxes in diversity management (Hunter); it also features a very interesting chapter on critical sensemaking in the exploration of organizational inequalities and identity formation (Mills & Mills). The fourth part of the volume is centered on psychological approaches to EDI. Future directions for research – both qualitative and quantitative – in that approach are developed by Rank. Next, the question of the multiplicity of identities is developed in a number of ways: first by April & April, who show how an increase in diversity also increases the diversity of discrimination and exclusion mechanisms, then also in the rather succinct chapter by Kravitz who highlights how attitudes towards affirmative action can vary according to the identity and perceived identity of others. The first quantitative study in the book (Beauregard) looks at sex differences in coping with work-home interference, interestingly examining interference in both directions. Finally, for Garcia, Meyle & Provins, the pervasiveness and complexity of discriminatory processes in the allocation of rewards and opportunities are not circumscribed to salient characteristics such as sex, age or ethnicity, but also to "a wide range of mundane social category lines" (p.254) and group memberships. Similarly to the very first part, the fifth one has a narrower focus on a specific type of organization: trade unions. It consists of only two contributions. The question of EDI inside unions is dealt with by Ledwith, while Greene & Kirton map the existing perspectives of trade unions on organizational practices regarding diversity management. Turning to a more practice-oriented perspective, part VI, entitled "Equality and diversity interventions and change", is very varied in terms of approaches and focuses. Da Rocha deals with the pitfalls of cultural relativism

and claims that adding the cultural level of analysis to the personal and structural ones will allow for a better understanding of others' systems and facilitate negotiations. Next, Gatta looks into academic-practitioner collaborations in policy development. The variety of discourses and reasons for organizations to engage in diversity issues are at the core of two complementary and insightful chapters, one theoretical (Swan) and one empirical (Klarsfeld). The two final chapters of this part use quantitative methodologies to look at barriers in career development for female managers and multiple-jeopardy at the intersection of sex and ethnicity (Martin).

The concluding part is principally a plea for a wider inclusion of masculinities in EDI research. Prominently absent from most volumes dealing with diversity in organizations and even gender relations in general (see e.g. Radtke & Stam, 1994), the debate is very rich, especially in its dissection of power relations within the male group. It thus avoids the pitfall of erecting a stiff barrier between a presumably uniform super-dominant group and a jumble of super-dominated groups. Kimmel gives a general overview of this almost untrodden path, pointing out the possible benefits of the women's movement for men, while Hearn and Collinson explore the implicit and unspoken relationship between male employees and diversity management, a debate continued next in Hearn's single-authored chapter. Finally, Gregory focuses on the American context and on the construction of masculinities through talking about sports at work, again bringing up the issue of how gender permeates several of the sedimented selection rules beyond the extra-organizational one (Clegg, 1981), prominently the social regulative and reproductive rules, which are brought into the gendered spaces of organizations (Hearn, 1989).

## **FURTHER COMMENTS**

Overall, this is a very inspiring volume that aims at taking EDI research a step further, and is relevantly subtitled as a *Research companion*. It is quite uncommon to see research volumes bringing together equality and diversity issues, especially in relation to organizations and the workplace in general, with contributions looking into a rich number of future directions from a variety of viewpoints and intersections. While the introduction explains that the volume reflects "the heterogeneity of approaches taken when studying and writing about EDI" (p.7), we clearly sense a distancing from narrow cross-sectional studies mistaking, for example, gender for sex, and neglecting organizational features (Ely & Padavic, 2007), and many a contribution is clearly versed toward critical approaches and continental feminism. Likewise, the issues of time and history brought up in the introduction are explicitly dealt with in several contributions throughout the volume.

All the same, Özbilgin's endeavor succeeds in conveying the value of interdisciplinarity and the importance of acknowledging intersectionality, even when one's own research focuses on a specific aspect of

EDI. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at Work – A research companion is certainly a recommended read for EDI scholars interested in both established and novel perspectives on the field, but we would also encourage researchers from other fields at least to visit the chapters discussing masculinities and the assumed gender-neutrality/scientific nature of other approaches and areas of study. Practitioners, whether directly involved with diversity management or not, can also use this volume to gain significant insight into the variety of perspectives on diversity management and training.

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