Jonna Louvrier

Diversity, Difference and Diversity Management
A Contextual and Interview Study of Managers and Ethnic Minority Employees in Finland and France

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Diversity, Difference and Diversity Management: A Contextual and Interview Study of Managers and Ethnic Minority Employees in Finland and France

Key words: diversity, difference, diversity management, ethnic minorities, discrimination, discourse, postructuralism, Finland, France

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1 INTRODUCTION

A rainy autumn afternoon I was sitting in the hall of an indoor swimming pool in Helsinki. My four-year-old daughter had one of her first swimming classes, and I was sitting somewhat nervously behind a big window looking at how she managed as a Swedish-speaking Finn to follow the instructions in Finnish, and at the same time to keep her head over the water. In Finland a minority of the population speak Swedish as their mother tongue. My daughter belongs to this minority and had not yet good Finnish skills at the age of four. While I didn't look away from the swimming class, two blond boys, about 10-years-old, came and sat next to me and I could not avoid listening to their conversation. They talked about where one of the boys belonged. As the discussion went on it became clear that the boy whose belonging, or non-belonging, was being talked about had a Swedish-speaking father. For one of the boys this was clear evidence that his friend could not really be a Finn. As to strengthen his claim he asked “What is your father’s name then”? “Jens”, answered the other boy, to which the first boy replied: “No, that isn't really a Finnish name”. “Well yes”, said the other boy quietly, “but it is rather beautiful anyway”.

In the hall of the indoor swimming pool the boys discursively gave meaning to differences and positioned themselves and each other in different ways. In their discussion speaking Swedish was constructed as un-Finnish, and so positioned one of the boys as not really belonging here in Finland. He did not resist this knowledge, but instead constructed knowledge about the beauty of his father’s name.

Similar discussions about differences, which also position people in different ways, are ongoing in society. In the sphere of work differences are today often treated, constructed and given meaning in diversity management initiatives. Diversity management programmes are mostly planned, designed and executed by management, and the people the programmes aim to affect often have a similar role as the Swedish-speaking boy – they are not in the position to define how differences are to be approached within the formal diversity management initiatives. Instead they position themselves vis-à-vis the knowledges constructed by management, and by drawing on different discourses take on different subject positions.

The focus of this book is on the meanings of diversity, differences and diversity management. The hall of the indoor swimming pool will now be left behind: in the remainder of this book I will take the reader to work organisations in Finland and France and closer to the realities of diversity managers and ethnic minority employees.

* * *

In the late 1980's when Louis Harris & Associates asked Fortune 500 chief executive officers to name black female leaders in the United States, none of the participants were able to name a black female corporate leader. They named politicians, or leading figures within the entertainment sector, but no business leaders. And almost a third were unable to name any black female leader at all (Louis Harris & Associates, 1986, cited in Bell & Nkomo 2001). This inability to name black minority women leaders reflects the fact that the corporate world was, and still is, predominantly white and masculine. There simply were not many black female corporate leaders in the United States of the 1980’s. Today, the number of ethnic minority women and men in the top
management of corporations has risen in many countries, but still women and ethnic minorities remain in a clear minority compared to white male leaders.

The white masculine norm has not only been dominant in practice. Organisational scholars for long paid little or no attention to questions of race, ethnicity and gender, and assumed that managerial theories were applicable to all organisational members regardless of differences (Mills & Tancred, 1992). The early organisational theorists rather neglected differences, as the aim of their work was to find universal laws on the functioning of organisational members. For instance, the Hawthorn studies did collect data on gender, age and ethnicity, but the information was never used in forming the results of the study (Nkomo & Stewart, 2006). Employees in the first half of the 20th century were predominantly seen without any social identity dimensions.

While some single studies did look into race and ethnicity at work (see e.g. Wallman, 1979), the first more consistent development of studies looking into difference in the organisational context formed around feminist organisation studies from the late 1970’s onwards. The seminal work of Rosabeth Moss Kanter ‘Men and Women of the Corporation’, came out in 1977 and showed how gender shapes the opportunities of individuals and the experiences they have of work. Even though gender studies within management and organisation studies has been identified as a field of study on its own for many years now (Hearn & Parkin, 1983), in mainstream approaches gender questions still often remain without attention.

In addition to gender as a dimension of difference that has been addressed, class (Scully & Blake-Beard, 2006) and race and ethnicity (Nkomo, 1992, Alderfer, 1990, Proudford & Thomas, 1999) have also received attention. Class and occupation have been the focus of for instance Marxist approaches, especially within labour process theory. Further, race has been increasingly acknowledged as a relevant organisational question since the 1990’s. What all the early approaches to differences in organisation studies have shared is a focus on one dimension of difference at a time, and a critical approach towards management theorising. The aim of early approaches to differences in organisations has been to write a difference into existing organisational theorising.

Since the 1990’s, differences within organisations have been studied from a new approach, through the concept of diversity management. What distinguishes diversity management from previous approaches to differences in organisations is that many differences may be treated at the same time. Diversity can stand for a variety of differences, such as gender and ethnicity, but also for more invisible differences that have not been the focus before, such as personality or working style. Another difference between diversity management and earlier approaches is that diversity management emerged within management practice and had at the outset a non-critical stance towards management. Therefore, the aim was not to inscribe difference into existing theories, but to propose new ways of managing differences from a managerial point of view.

Since the late 1990’s, critical perspectives on diversity management have raised important concerns about the diversity management field. In 1997, the field was described as underresearched and undertheorised. Most importantly, it was pointed out that the meanings of diversity had not been adequately addressed (Prasad & Mills, 1997). What then does diversity and its management mean? This is one of the central themes of this book. Today there are contributions elucidating the meanings of diversity management (see, e.g., Prasad et al. 2006), but there is still no straightforward answer to what diversity management is. Rather, the increased
research on diversity management has shown the complexity of the diversity management phenomena, and the variety of diversity management meanings. Diversity management means different things in different contexts (Klarsfeld, 2010a). What diversity and diversity management will come to stand for also depends on several underlying assumptions. To start with, these underlying assumptions will be examined.

1.1. The underlying assumptions shaping the meanings of diversity management

1.1.1. Difference

Diversity management has been said to be all about differences and identities (Nkomo & Stewart 2006). The first assumption that shapes the way diversity management will be understood is therefore related to the nature of difference and identity. Is difference something that we have prior to the interaction with our environment? And where does our identity, or should we say ‘identities’, come from? There are numerous answers to these questions but in general it is possible to distinguish between two main approaches: the essentialist and the constructionist.

The essentialist perspective sees differences as inner characteristics of individuals. Differences and identities are rather stable and fixed, and stem from biology or from socialisation into a group. Thereby, the identity of a person may consist of several dimensions of difference, but these are all coherent. The individual is expected to be unified and consistent in his or her differences. As differences here are seen as internal to the person, differences precede action. Therefore, the difference of a person can be used as a prediction of his or her behaviour or at least as an explanation for it. Being a woman is, for instance, related to an expectation of being caring, and the act of taking care of an elderly person is seen as stemming from the gender identity of a woman, rather than a process where the gender identity is performed (Burr, 1995).

From a constructionist position, differences look quite different. Differences are not seen as internal to the individual but as constructed in interaction with the environment. Difference is produced, rather than existing by itself. The production of difference takes place in the social context, where discourses shape the way that people are categorised as different and/or similar. Where the essentialist approach sees differences as somehow neutral matters of fact, the constructionist approach sees differences as intimately related to the power relationships existing in society. Differences are not innocent, but reflect and perpetuate, or on the contrary, resist and challenge, the given social order. From this latter perspective, an individual does not have a unified identity. Instead, each individual has plural and fragmented identities, and may change identity from one situation to another. There often are numerous ways in which individuals can identify. However, not all positions are always available to

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1 Framing reality as there being two separate and opposing ontological approaches is simplifying, but done here with the aim to exemplify larger lines in ontological trends. Rather than uniquely seeing these two approaches as opposing poles, ontological positions should be seen as on a continuum, where essentialism and constructionism are opposing positions, but where different versions of both essentialism and constructionism exist between the two extremes.
Discourses of class, gender or ethnicity may reserve some identities to specific groups.

The constructionist approach does not deny that there may exist real differences between people. A Finn may speak better Finnish than a non-Finn, or the other way around. But the meaning of language skills, and the way that the language skill positions people, is not pre-given and obvious. Other differences could rather be focused on, and other patterns of similarity and difference could be put forward. There are always competing discourses that produce different types of knowledge, and provide different positions to individuals (Weedon, 1987).

How does the choice between the essentialist and the constructionist approach affect the way diversity management will be understood? If one follows the essentialist reasoning, differences exist prior to the organisation, and are unrelated to it. From a constructionist perspective, differences are (also) constructed in the organisation, for instance in the organising of the work. These starting points give quite different bases for diversity management. Where the essentialist approach to diversity management manages fixed, stable and pre-existing differences, the constructionist approach acknowledges that diversity management is also a site where differences are produced.

1.1.2. Differences in relation to each other

The relationship between different differences is another aspect that differentiates between the essentialist and the constructionist approaches. The essentialist approach to differences highlights differences between groups, but has a tendency to treat groups as internally homogeneous. The constructionist approach enables one to also see the variation within groups. Not all women are alike, not all ethnic minorities are alike. There are always several dimensions of difference that interact simultaneously and position people in different ways (Holvino, 2010). A person may, for instance, be a woman, but at the same time she may be white, educated and heterosexual. These could be dimensions of difference that are of relevance in a certain professional context, while in the domestic context other dimensions would be more relevant. However, also there several dimensions would intersect and position her in a particular way. She could, for instance, be a mother, single and be active in the local church.

The result of a diversity management programme based on the underlying assumption that differences are discrete and groups are internally homogeneous will be very different from a programme taking an intersectional approach. Diversity management has been criticised for treating differences as add-on categories, where individuals have a hard time fitting into specific groups, or can belong to all of the groups at the same time (Litvin, 1997). An intersectional approach to diversity management would build around the simultaneity of differences, and avoid constructing generalisations about groups such as women or ethnic minorities (Holvino, 2010).

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2 As will be seen later in the section on agency, not all constructionists share this view.

3 Acknowledging the variation within groups and the intersecting of different differences in positioning people is a theoretical approach called intersectionality. Intersectionality will be further discussed in chapter 2.
1.1.3. Differences, language and context

As seen before, the essentialist and the constructionist approaches give different importance to context in relation to the meanings of difference. The role of language can be seen as one aspect of context, but is also an important question of its own.

As the essentialist view sees differences as existing within the individual, the related assumption is that we do not need language in order for the difference to exist. Differences pre-exist language, and language is only seen as a medium we use to express the differences with. The constructionist perspective radically differs from this point. According to the constructionist view, differences are produced through language. Language provides individuals with a way to structure their reality, and as there are a variety of languages available, reality can be structured in many different ways.

From the constructionist point of view, as different languages have different repertoires of words, different languages also allow for different constructions of reality. Not all languages have exactly corresponding words for 'diversity'. What in English is called diversity, is in Finnish expressed by the word 'monimuotoisuus' which literally refers to 'something that has many forms and sides'. According to a strong version of linguistic relativism, translation between languages is indeed not totally possible. It has been suggested that a new word in Finnish 'diversiteetti' should be used when the diversity between people in a group is referred to (Sintonen, presentation at Aalto Business School's (Helsinki, Finland) diversity seminar, 2010).

However, it is not only the existence or non-existence of a particular word that shapes the way reality is perceived in a given language. Languages cannot be detached from their cultural contexts, and words within languages carry different social and historical baggage. The word 'Race' is a good example of this. The word exists in English, in French the equivalent is 'Race' and in Finnish 'Rotu'. Even though the words are similar etymologically, the connotations of these words are highly different in each linguistic context. In the United States, race is a named social category used in public policies. In the census, people are asked to provide information on their race. The term race is there closely related to the history of racial relations: racial segregation, the civil rights movement, Affirmative Action and so on. Where race in the United States is a named category used in the combat against racial inequalities, in France the term 'Race' is hardly ever seen used in public discussions. The dominant position in France is that race should not be named, as by naming something there is the risk of creating the thing one names. Therefore, the combat against inequalities between different racial groups is centred around different words, such as immigration or deprived urban areas, which of course structure reality in quite a different way. Both English and French thus do have the word ‘race’ in their repertoire, but the assumptions, histories and politics around the word are highly different. In Finland, the term also exists, but has for long been seen as a term that does not speak about the Finnish reality, as Finland has been considered to be racially so homogeneous. Also, the tendency in research and public discussions has been to rather speak about ethnic minorities, as a way of avoiding reproducing the idea of racial differences (Rastas, 2005).

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Even though different languages structure reality in different ways, this is not to say that specific words carry a fixed and determined meaning in a given language. Meaning is always produced in discourses, and as there always exist multiple and competing discourses which will construct different knowledges about reality, the meanings attached to specific words are changing. In France, for instance, associations have recently been founded around a common racial origin, and are being headed by the 'Conseil Representatif des Associations Noires', the representative council of Black Associations. These associations lift up race as a relevant category for their reality, and challenge the dominant meaning of race as non-existent while unnamed.

As Weedon (1987) says:

"Different languages and different discourses within the same language divide up the world and give it meaning in different ways which cannot be reduced to one another through translation or by appeal to universally shared concepts reflecting a fixed reality"

How does all this relate to the meanings of diversity management? The view on language and context can have far-reaching consequences for how diversity management work will be seen. In a company where the underlying assumption is that language is transparent and fully translatable, a diversity management programme will probably be implemented in different linguistic and cultural contexts without any attention to language and context. The company can design a global diversity plan and diffuse it to all parts of the world as a universally functioning tool. In contrast, the diversity manager taking a constructionist approach will stress that diversity management should be understood in the specific cultural and linguistic context where the company is operating. Also, the manager with a constructionist approach will remember that the meanings of diversity will differ between different organisational members and that there will be competing meanings of diversity.

### 1.1.4. The individual and his or her difference(s)

At the beginning of this chapter, diversity management was said to be all about differences and identities. However, diversity management can also, depending on how one sees the relationship between identities and groups, be about groups and individuals. Therefore, the underlying assumptions one holds about an individual and his or her opportunities to freely choose the direction of his or her life will shape the way diversity management will be understood.

It was earlier pointed out that the constructionists hold that not all positions are free and open to everyone. There are, however, different versions of constructionism. According to some constructionist approaches, individuals are rather free to choose the discourses that best suit them, and individuals can be regarded as strategic users of discourses. Other constructionists, such as the poststructural approach, holds that discourses define the ways in which individuals can come to understand themselves, and also delimit the range of positions that are available at a given moment. Individuals are never totally free from discourses, but always produced by them. Many researchers will position somewhere between the two, and believe that individuals will understand themselves in ways that stem from the interaction between their agency and existing discourses (see e.g. Bergström & Knights, 2006). The tension between the free choice of individuals and the force of structures has a long history within the social sciences and has been called the agency-structure debate.
Why and how does the agency-structure debate affect the way diversity management can be understood? A clear response to this would be that a manager who holds that his or her employees have considerable agency vis-à-vis their identities may consider that it is up to the individual to perform the identities that are most suitable to the organisation. Therefore, if a woman, for instance, exposes a gender identity which is in conflict with the ideal career, it is her free choice to do so knowing that it will lead to negative career outcomes. When agency is stressed, the responsibility of the destiny of an individual falls on his or her shoulders. A diversity management programme does not need to transform structures, as the structures are more or less the result of the agentic activity of individuals. On the contrary, a manager that sees that structures shape the opportunities and choices of individuals will pay much more attention to the way the organisation reinforces or challenges existing societal structures. The focus will be on creating an organisation where individuals with different differences will be able to contribute to their full potential, not needing to hide their differences or perform identities they otherwise would not perform.

1.1.5. Difference and Equality

Equality between different organisational members is often said to be a central concern of diversity management initiatives. Even though many diversity management programmes declare that the equality of organisational members is a concern they care about, there are important differences in the approaches to the relationship between differences and equality. The question that divides these programmes is: should everyone be treated the same, or should differences be taken into account and be accommodated?

This is a question that has been long debated within feminist work, and has been called the similarity-difference debate (see e.g. Bacchi, 1990, Barrett, 1987, Scott, 1988). At the heart of the debate is the question of “which way is the best way to achieve equality?” According to the tenants of similarity, the best way forward for women is to avoid being defined as different from men. There should be no special treatment for women, pregnancy for instance should be treated with sick-leaves, not with specific maternity provisions. According to the group privileging difference, however, women are different from men. When organisations are structured around the male model and this model is considered to be neutral, women will remain in a disadvantageous position (Rutherford, 2011).

Underlying the debate is the question of whether current organising, be it societal or organisational, is gendered and racialised. Is the current norm better suited for certain groups of people than for others? Or is the system neutral, thus allowing any individual with any differences to succeed within the norm as well as any other? Is equal treatment all that is needed, or should some groups receive special treatment in order for equality to be possible in the first place?

These questions inevitably shape the way diversity management gains meaning. From a perspective where similarity is all that counts, and the system is a neutral one where anyone should be able to perform equally well, the role of diversity management work is to guarantee that everyone is treated the same and that prejudices within recruiting personnel, for instance, do not exclude some groups. From a perspective where the organising is seen to be gendered or racialised and favours some specific group against some other, diversity management also comes to mean providing special treatment for
underprivileged groups and creating an inclusive environment where differences can co-exist.

1.2. Underlying assumptions and research philosophy

Even though the underlying assumptions that I have gone through here as shaping the meanings of diversity management are mostly not questions that are clarified at the outset of a company’s diversity management programme, these do shape the way the world is seen and how the company’s diversity work will develop. In business life, underlying assumptions are seldom given a lot of time and space, but for researchers elucidating one’s own assumptions is a central part of the research process. The assumptions one holds about ontology and epistemology affect the methodology one employs and the theoretical approach one will work from.

Many of the underlying assumptions discussed in relation to diversity management can be linked to different research traditions. Burrell and Morgan (1979), for instance, used the debates on whether there is an objective reality independent of our minds, and whether individuals are free agents or determined by structures together with questions related to epistemology and methodology – do we need to experience reality in order to understand it, and is the scientific method or direct experience better to achieve understanding – to create four paradigms of sociological research. The paradigms differ in the assumptions made about stability versus conflict within a society, and the extent to which reality is assumed to be objective or subjective, that is, dependent on our minds.

The four paradigms are: the functionalist, the interpretative, the radical structuralist and the radical humanist. The functionalist and the radical structuralist paradigms, as explained for instance by Hassard (1991), share an assumption about reality as existing out there, as independent of any social construction. The interpretative and the radical humanist paradigms, however, are based on assumptions about social reality as constructed. Where interpretativists and the radical humanist depart from each other are their conceptions about the individual and the nature of social relations. The interpretativist is interested in shared realities, and even though social reality is being socially constructed, sustained and reconstructed all the time, it is characterised by order and regulation. For the radical humanist, social realities are not seen as shared in a similar way. Social reality is characterised by conflict. It is constructed, but by individuals who also are imprisoned by these social constructions and delimited by them. The four paradigms are not to be seen as being as clearly distinct as the authors themselves point out, and do have shortcomings (Hearn & Parkin, 1983), but they are still today widely referred to.

1.2.1. Theoretical approach

As a novice Ph.D student, the realist approach and positivist method was all that I knew of, and of Burrell and Morgan’s paradigms I would probably have identified myself as a functionalist. Therefore, as I today position myself within the radical humanist paradigm, my position towards research has experienced an important change. This change did not happen overnight though, and it is probably not a fixed and stabilised change.
What does it mean that I today see research and social reality in ways that comes close to the radical humanist paradigm? Firstly, I do not believe in a value-free and objective science. As researchers, we are always working from some perspective, with specific personal and cultural backgrounds that shape the way we see the world. We cannot have a raw experience of reality as our perceptions of reality are always called into question by some warring force (Brown, 2000). Therefore, on the one hand we should not pretend that our work is objective, and on the other hand, we should try to be aware of the position from where we undertake our research. Secondly, I do believe that societies and organisations are traversed by conflict. There are a number of organisational groups, each with different and internally diverging interests. Management studies should take this variation and diversity of perspectives and needs into account. In broad terms, I thus identify the agendas of Critical Management Studies as highly relevant. That is, I do see that 'understanding that management is a political, cultural and ideological phenomenon', and the underlining of the need to 'give voice to managers not only as managers but as persons, and also to other social groups whose lives are more or less directly affected by the activities and ideologies of management' are important objectives for management research (Alvesson & Willmott, 1999).

As I see reality as being socially constructed, my ontological position is constructionist. But as was mentioned above, there are several versions of constructionism and within the area of organisation studies a range of different discursive approaches have been drawn on (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). What I have been most inspired by is the version of constructionism called poststructuralism. While there are important similarities between different constructionist approaches, such as the subjective view on science, many aspects also differ between different approaches: 'What is a discourse?', 'What is the relationship between discourse and reality?' and 'What is the relationship between discourses and individuals?' are questions that are seen somewhat differently from different perspectives.

One aspect that differentiates the poststructuralist view on discourses from other discursive approaches is the relationship between discourses and meaning (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). While some discursive approaches see meaning and discourses as rather unrelated, in a poststructuralist approach discourses are seen to be inseparable from meaning. Meaning can only exist within discourses, as it is the discourses that constitute meaning. However, the term ‘discursive’ does not here refer solely to speech and text. Instead, with a poststructuralist approach, texts and oral speeches, as well as social practices and institutional arrangements are discursive (Hall, 2001). It is thus both in saying and in doing that knowledge is constructed, and the knowledge a discourse produces is all that we can know about reality at a given point of time. Discourses are thus historically variable ways of specifying knowledges and truths, and can be thought of as 'sets of socially and historically constructed rules designating “what is” and “what is not”' (Carabine, 2001).

Another distinction between different discursive approaches concerns the type of context in which discourses should be seen. Some discursive approaches look at texts as rather independent from the larger context they are operating in, and the researcher will, for instance, focus on the language use in a specific interaction. Poststructuralism holds that discourses cannot be separated from the larger social context. Discourses produce knowledge in power relationships, and knowledge always entails power.

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5 There is no single unified version of poststructuralism, but positions on the issues treated here vary also among poststructuralist writers.
Discourses thus have to be seen in the social context and social relations within which power and knowledge occur and are distributed (Carabine, 2001). Further, discourses are not free-floating and independent, but exist in discursive fields. A discursive field is an assembly of competing discourses that give meaning to some phenomena (Weedon, 1987). The discursive field of diversity in work, for instance, would consist of competing discourses, each giving different meanings to diversity, but also being interrelated to each other.

Compared to other approaches, power is a highly central theme in the poststructuralist understanding of discourses. However, power is not seen as something someone possesses over someone else, but power is inbuilt in knowledge. Knowledge is a version of truth, and what knowledge is taken to be at a certain period of time will shape the way we understand ourselves and the way that social practices will be organised. By constituting something as something, such as, for instance, constituting ethnicity as a non-issue in the sphere of work, discourses have power effects, lead to certain practices and portray them as self-evident and legitimate. Power and knowledge are thus inseparable.

From the interdependence between discourses and meaning stems another important difference between the poststructuralist approach and other approaches. That is the way in which individuals are seen in relation to discourses. In the poststructuralist approach, discourses constitute not only objects but also subjects, whereas in some other approaches individuals remain more detached from discourses, they are, for instance, merely seen as discourse users in the performative approach (Burr, 1995). The fact that discourses in the poststructuralist approach constitute subjectivities has important power consequences. As discourses shape the way individuals understand themselves, they become governed by discourses. However, the relationship between individuals and discourses is mutually dependent. Discourses provide individuals with subject positions, a position from where to speak. Taking on a subject position is necessary for the individual, but discourses also need individuals to take on the subject positions proposed. It is only through the subjectification of the individual, the individual's becoming the active subject of the discourse, that the discourse can operate. As Weedon says:

“The fixing of meaning in society and the realization of the implications of particular versions of meaning in forms of social organization and the distribution of social power rely on the discursive constitution of subject positions from which individuals actively interpret the world and by which they are themselves governed.” (Weedon, 1987)

Poststructuralist approaches to individuals’ subjectivity have been criticised for not allowing for agency (Hardy & Clegg, 2006). As individuals, we are not totally free agents. Discourses influence the way we see ourselves, how we think and act. Nevertheless, discourses are not totally omnipotent. There are conflicting discourses, alternative ways of seeing and being. Discourses are always contested and challenged. Even though a subject is always dependent on discourses, she or he has the possibility to resist, reflect upon the discursive relations that form him or her, and choose among the different discourses available at a given moment. Even though the subject thus can be seen as governed by discourses, the plurality of discourses enables agency (Weedon, 1987).

On the basis of these assumptions about reality, discourses, and the relationship between different discourses and discourses and individuals, I work from what Alvesson and Karreman (2000) in their typology of discursive work call the long-range/determination position. My focus is not the language use, but the meanings that
discourses in different contexts produce. Further, I see that discourses have to be seen in the wider societal context in which they operate. Even though I do not believe that the close range context, such as the interview setting, has no implications on how people speak, I see that the interview situation more importantly is a site where more widely existing discourses are reproduced and reformulated. In the interview setting, we are not free from the discourses that exist outside the interview, and in organisations people are not totally free from the discourses circulating in society about diversity and difference.

From this perspective, it is in the way people talk about diversity and difference in work that diversity and diversity management gain meaning. The way diversity and difference are talked about structure and delimit the way we see different aspects of reality, and the way reality comes to be seen has important power consequences in terms of legitimising certain practices and silencing alternative versions of truth. It also has important consequences for the way individuals come to understand themselves in the sphere of work, both those individuals that are seemingly non-different as well as those that are designated as different in some respect. Both the managers that design the diversity management work and those individuals that are the target of the diversity programme are governed by the discourses they draw on when talking about diversity and difference. The way people talk should also not be seen as their totally free choice. The way they speak about diversity and difference depends on the discourses that are available to them at a certain moment, which again depends both upon the discursive fields and also on the other discourses that they are subjected to at that moment. As a top manager, one is governed by a different set of discourses than a worker with a precarious work contract. That is, from different constellations of positions, diversity and difference in work will probably be talked about in different ways, and thus ‘truth’ looks different from different positions.

The choice of theoretical perspective affects many aspects of a research process: the way research questions are formulated, the way data is collected and analysed, the results and the evaluation of the research. It is clear that my aim is not to find a universal meaning for diversity management, as such would be impossible from this perspective. Instead, my aim is to look at the different ways diversity management gains meaning in different contexts. From my perspective, none of the truths about diversity management can be seen as more valid than another. The truths should rather be seen as revealing something about the existing power relationships at the given moment.

I will now turn to the specific research questions. The data collection and analysis, and also the criteria for evaluating research with a discursive approach, will be discussed in Chapter 3.

1.3. Research questions

The meanings of diversity management are discursively constructed in a variety of discourses that need not to be discourses on diversity primarily. Previous discursive studies on diversity management have, however, singled out specific diversity discourses and often related diversity to the business discourse or to the equality discourse. Different discourses produce different types of knowledges, and it is the relations to these different knowledges that diversity gains meaning in a given setting. Therefore, the first research question is:
1a: What knowledges are produced in the discourses that give meaning to diversity management?

What probably most diversity management programmes share is a notion of difference as valuable, but the underlying assumptions of what the nature of these valuable differences are, are rarely addressed. Critical scholars have pointed to the risks of basing diversity management work on essentialised understandings of difference (Litvin, 1997) and the need to see differences as socially constructed and intersecting (Holvino, 2010). However, there are extremely few or even, to my best knowledge, no empirical studies looking into the way diversity managers conceive of differences. Therefore, the aim is to answer the following question:

1b: What are the underlying assumptions managers responsible for diversity management hold about difference when they talk about diversity and diversity management?

The discourses constructing knowledge about diversity management provide subject positions to different individuals. Diversity management can indeed be seen as a site where differences are constructed, and individuals identified with these differences positioned in different ways in the sphere of work. To date, we know very little about how minority employees understand themselves in diversity-promoting organisations. Therefore, research question number two is:

2: What kinds of subject positions do ethnic minority employees take on in the diversity promoting work context?

Today, the idea of diversity management has spread almost worldwide. However, the meanings of diversity management cannot be transferred from one place to another, rather the meanings need to be seen in their respective socio-cultural context. Many diversity studies treat context as background information, that is, the societal context is used as an explanation and as a way to legitimise why diversity turns out as it does in the studied context. The societal context is then treated as a given. However, much of what we know about societal contexts is also discursively constructed. Therefore, rather than looking at the meanings of diversity in different contexts with the societal background as an explanation, my aim is to look at how knowledges about context are intertwined with the construction of diversity. Therefore, the third research question is:

3: How do knowledges about the societal context shape the meanings of diversity management?

1.4. Empirical contexts

Finland and France constitute the two large empirical contexts in which I will look at these questions. In each country, I have studied several organisations, and met people working in quite different positions within the organisations. Empirical contexts could thus be seen at different levels, for instance along the lines of the country, the organisation and the organisational hierarchical level. The study was conducted in different languages as interviews were carried out in Finnish, French, English and Swedish. Each of these languages, as well as the cultural background that the language use made us share, or not share, could also be seen to shape the empirical context. As I see discourses to be best contextualised in the wider societal context, my primary focus is, however, on the country or societal level.
Why did I choose to look at diversity and difference in Finland and France? There is certainly no one answer to this question. In the anthology “Why France” (Downs & Gerson, 2007) – a book describing mostly North American historians’ interest in studying France, prominent scholars explain that their choice to specialise in France was often based on a number of converging reasons, not all of them related to research and theory. This was also the case for me. My reasons were at the same time theoretical, practical, as well as related to my personal background.

At the outset of this project, I wanted to take a European comparative approach to diversity management. I identified three countries with different immigration histories and policy making traditions (Esping-Anderssen, 1990) in which I had the language skills to conduct research in the official language of the country. I chose Finland, France and Italy. Theoretically, the comparison between these countries made sense. They were all members of the European Union, and the European Union was an important promoter of diversity management. Also, they were different in many respects. Finland representing the Social-Democratic welfare state regime, and being a small country with a very short history of immigration. France and Italy were both representatives of the Christian-Democratic regime, but the role of the church had very different roles in society. Further, the immigration histories between Italy and France are different: whereas Italy had long been a country of emigration (also towards France), France had been, and still is, one of the world’s most important countries of immigration.

As my theoretical perspective on research became more qualitative, and my research interests moved away from policy-making to meanings, it started to seem more sensible to focus on two of the countries only. At the same time, I had the chance to live in France for three years. These were the years during which I planned to make my data collection. Therefore, because of practical reasons it made most sense to focus only on France and Finland.

French-Finnish comparative work has a longer history within other social science disciplines than within management studies. Notably, Finnish sociologists have contributed with insightful French-Finnish comparisons on equality (Raevaara, 2005), participative democracy (Luhtakallio, 2010; 2012) and social networks (Alapuro, 1996). In addition, Finnish historians have a long tradition of investigating relationships between Finland and France, or Finns in France (see e.g. Clerc & Ranki, 2008). Within management studies, Finnish-French comparisons are still rare however. I am not aware of studies taking an in-depth contextualised perspective on a management practice looking at both Finland and France. However, within management studies, the research conducted by Fougère (2005) on French coopérateurs in Finnish work communities has to be mentioned as an example of Franco-Finnish encounters.

Finland and France as contexts will be discussed in detail in Chapters Four and Seven. For the time being, however, it should be mentioned that the contexts will not be examined from a traditional comparative perspective. I will not seek to identify reasons for similarities and differences, but treat each context as telling us something about diversity and difference in work in that specific context.
1.5. Structure

The book is composed of 10 chapters.

In Chapter 2 the focus is on diversity management research. The emergence of diversity management as a new approach to differences is described, and it will be seen how diversity management has been taking form as different from equality approaches. Then, the previous discursive research and the knowledges these studies have identified are presented. In addition, studies contextualising diversity management are discussed, before looking into different ways of studying minority ethnic employees’ experiences of work. Chapter 3 presents the methodology, the data the study is based on and the methods used to collect and analyse the data. After these three chapters, the focus will shift from theory and literature to the analysis of context and data.

Chapter 4 introduces the Finnish part of the study. Chapter 4 focuses on Finland as a context. Based on previous research, the aim is to describe how Finland and Finns have been understood, and how differences have been approached in the Finnish context. Thereafter, the question of ethnic differences in work is focused on, and the state of diversity practices in Finnish work organisations is discussed. Chapter 5 focuses on the data produced with Finnish diversity managers. Chapter 6 presents the results from the interviews with ethnic minority workers in Finland.

In Chapter 7, the focus shifts to France. The French context is described, the notions of Frenchness and the republican ideal of universalism is discussed. Thereafter, diversity management as a new approach to improve minorities’ work life opportunities is described. Chapter 8 focuses on the data produced with diversity managers in France. In Chapter 9, the focus is on the ways in which ethnic minority employees position themselves in French diversity promoting organisations.

The different empirical chapters relate in different ways to the research questions. Not all chapters answer all the questions, and some chapters highlight some aspects of the research questions more than others. Research questions 1a and 1b will be mainly treated by chapters 5 and 8, the chapters discussing diversity managers’ accounts in Finland and France. Research question 2 will be addressed by chapters 6 and 9, where the findings from interviews with ethnic minority employees in Finland and France are in focus. Research question 3 will be addressed by all the empirical chapters.

It was mentioned earlier that my aim is not to conduct a traditional comparative research. The different findings, the similarities and the differences between different contexts and between the managerial perspective and the ethnic minority perspective, will, however, be discussed in a summary fashion in the concluding chapter. Chapter 10 thus consists of a summary of the results and a reflection over the linkages between the findings from the different empirical research settings chapters. Chapter 1 then presents the theoretical contributions of the study, suggests some practical implications stemming from the findings, discusses the limitations of the study and presents some propositions for future research.
2 DIVERSITY AND DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT: CONTEXTS, DISCOURSES, AND SUBJECT POSITIONS

The aim of this chapter is to present existing research on diversity management. The presentation unfolds as follows: first the field of diversity research is described, and the origins of the “diversity trend” depicted, as well as the way in which diversity has been constructed through differentiation to equality in organisational spheres. Diversity and its meanings in different contexts follow. Once this background is sketched, the focus turns to discourses of diversity and the experiences of minorities in relation to diversity management. Throughout the presentation, the objective is to highlight critical points in the literature and delineate the specific focus of this study.

2.1. The origins and meanings of diversity management

2.1.1. The diversity field

The term ‘diversity’ has been around in management literature for more than twenty years now. For long, the academic interest in the topic was timid and atheoretical (Prasad & Mills, 1997), but today diversity attracts numerous scholars’ interest who study the phenomena from a variety of theoretical perspectives. There is an annual conference, Equality, Diversity and Inclusiveness, as well as a dedicated journal with the same name, and several academic titles on diversity have been published in the last few years. Diversity has also entered academic institutions as diversity chairs have been created in business schools and universities (see, for example, Bendl et al. 2010).

Defining the field of diversity is, however, still no easy task (Nkomo & Stewart, 2006). While I do not share the worries of Cox that an agreed upon concept of diversity is needed to further the field, it is true that the field is characterised by ambiguities, contradictions and unclarities (Cox, 1994). These unclarities stem on the one hand from the term diversity itself, which lacks a binary opposition, and as does any object, it achieves meaning only in context. On the other hand, although diversity research has become much more theoretically rigorous, fuzziness around usages of terms such as discourses, rhetorics and practices in relation to diversity management remain.

Different categorisations of the diversity field have brought to the fore its richness and variety. Nkomo and Stewart (2006) suggest a rough categorisation into dominant and critical perspectives, where the difference between the two relies on the way social identities are understood – as essential properties of individuals or as socially constructed, and in the belief versus scepticism regarding whether diversity management will lead to any changes in organisations. Bairoh (2007) suggests a three-fold categorisation into practitioner/consultant literature, mainstream and critical literature. The inclusion of the consultant literature in her overview is a strength as practitioner focused diversity material is abundant to the point of having been described as an industry (Prasad & Mills, 1997), and even though the consultant and academic literatures do not significantly influence each other, the practitioner literature has an important role in the forming of diversity practices in a given context.

The most complete categorisation has been suggested by Prasad and her colleagues (2006). Their classification builds on Burrell and Morgan’s (1979) paradigms, and distinguish between positivist and non-positivist work. Within these two groups, they
further distinguish between work with a low versus high power awareness. In non-positivist work, a distinction is further made between work that considers identities as fixed versus fluid. In positivist work, they distinguish work on three different levels of analysis. This is a useful and detailed classification which, in contrast to Nkomo and Stewart’s and Bairoh’s classifications, sheds light on the great variety within the dominant and critical streams.

What none of the categorisations take into account is the empirical part of diversity research. In a situation where diversity studies are based on highly varied data material, it would be useful to make a distinction between studies focusing on organisations with diversity management initiatives, and studies focusing on any diverse organisation. Janssens and Zanoni (2005), for instance, theorise concerning diversity management in service organisations, basing their empirical findings on four organisations. However, only two of the organisations had some kind of diversity initiatives in place, two had none. If diversity is largely defined as any differences between individuals, all organisations are diverse, but if diversity management is expected to be a phenomena of interest, studies should be explicit about the underlying material. Janssens and Zanoni hint at the possibility that their material does not speak about diversity management by putting diversity in brackets – (diversity) management. The study by Janssens and Zanoni is only one example where the empirical material and theoretical arguments about diversity management do not necessarily fully meet. To some degree, the incongruence between empirical work and theorisation is understandable in the first years of diversity practice in organisations. However, now that diversity management has become common practice, the field would, in my opinion, benefit from clearer distinctions between studies on diversity management and studies on organisations managing a diverse workforce without particularly taking the diversity into account.

2.1.2. Diversity origins

According to Kelly & Dobbin (1998), the term ’diversity management’ was coined by R.R. Thomas, a US-based business consultant, in 1983. However, many researchers (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000; Kandola & Fullerton, 1994) trace the origins of diversity management, or even the ’birth’ of diversity management, to a North-American lobby organisation report called Workforce 2000 (Johnston & Packer, 1987). This report presented a forecast of the US economy and labour market for the year 2000. The report predicted changes on two fronts. Firstly, the sectors of activity would change as the proportion of jobs in the manufacturing industry would decrease, while the service sector employments would considerably increase. Secondly, fewer native white males would enter the labour market between then and 2000. While 47% of the new entrants were native white males in 1987, they were estimated to amount only to 15% in 2000. These two trends were seen as creating a problem for the US economy. The labour market, shifting more to the service sector, would in the future require more skilled and highly skilled employees than in 1987. With the decrease of new native white male entrants to the labour market, skills and competence were assumed to decrease correspondingly as black and Hispanic minorities were described as having the wrong attitude and insufficient skills to meet the demands of future work. Organisations were, however, obliged to learn to function with this more diverse workforce. So, from this report’s perspective, diversity emerges as a term to address the demographic problem for achieving economic success.
But diversity was not exclusively a matter for the business world. Michaels (2006) suggests that the term diversity represents a turn in the anti-racism struggle. He traces the origins of diversity to 1978, when the US Supreme Court ruled that taking the race of an applicant to the University of California into consideration was acceptable if doing so was in the “interest of diversity”. According to Michaels, this ruling is a shift in societal objectives: the aim of creating a colour-blind society based on equal opportunities was turned into an aim of creating a diverse and colour-conscious society valuing differences.

Diversity management also developed as a response to political changes in the US (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). As the future of Affirmative Action (AA) and Equal Employment Opportunities (EEO) legislation seemed uncertain in the 1980’s, HR managers, EEO and AA Officers developed programmes under the name of diversity, which even though they were related to previous forms of initiatives that ran under the labels of Affirmative Action and/or Equal Opportunities, were presented as distinct from these. In this manner, EEO and AA officers were proponents of diversity as an economic business advantage and a rational HRM practice. EEO and AA officers found support for their agenda from the Workforce 2000 report.

Therefore, the discursive shift to diversity in the US has to be seen in a larger socio-historical context: weakening AA and EEO legislation, the advancement of causes of the civil rights movement, demographic changes and globalisation. However, as researchers have predominantly focused on the Workforce 2000 report, the effect has been that of shadowing both previous uses of the term and diminishing the importance of the other underlying conditions that contributed to diversity to becoming a widely used concept, and simultaneously presenting the concept as appearing out of nowhere (Nkomo & Stewart, 2006).

However, diversity has been around in discourses of difference before. Prasad (2001) has studied the discourses of difference in the US working life since the 1930’s onwards, and concludes that diversity was used in the post-WWII era to debate social class differences. The term was put forward by the Conant Committee Report published in 1945 and ordered by the president of Harvard University. The concern for the members of the committee was that existing diversity in terms of class differences was a threat to the stability of the United States of America. Diversity was thus solely about class differences and ignored race, ethnicity and gender. While class differences were seen as a potentially serious problem for the cohesion of the population, the authors did not suggest any radical changes to reduce differences, but aimed to increase assimilation through conveying a sense of US cultural commonality through education. So the meaning of diversity differed from the meanings it has come to hold in the trend after the 1980’s, in as much as differences were seen as a problem, not something that should be valued, promoted and cherished.

### 2.1.3. Diversity management in organisations

In the organisational context, diversity management has been defined as representing a shift in paradigm. In countries where established policies on equality promotion existed before the turn to diversity management, diversity management has been constructed and defined against these policies – against affirmative action in the US context.

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6 Regents of the University of California vs. Bakke.  
(Gilbert et al. 1999), and against Equal Opportunities in the UK (Kandola & Fuellerton, 1994; Liff, 1996). Differences between the approaches can be found on several levels: in the institutional context regulating them, in the underlying motivations, in the objectives, and in the focuses.

2.1.3.1. Diversity management is not regulated by the law

Where equality approaches are framed by institutionalised macro-level arrangements, such as anti-discrimination legislation, diversity is a micro-level, voluntary initiative on the part of the business organisations to include people with differences (Kersten, 2000). Especially in the US, diversity management has been seen as a top-down managerial initiative. Even though the managerial origin of diversity work is not challenged by dominant European actors, diversity work in Europe has also taken collaborative forms between different labour market actors (de los Reyes, 2000; Glastra et al, 2000).

No direct legislation on diversity in organisations exists. Existing anti-discrimination legislation, regulating equality work, may, however, function as pressure upon organisations to show proactivity in the area (Özbilgin & Tatli, 2008; Barmes & Ashtiany, 2003). Further, diversity has been highlighted in negotiations about new laws, as in France in Summer 2004 in relation to a law on social cohesion. While preparing the law, the authorities stated that they give companies two years to show results of their diversity work before imposing more restrictive legislation. Therefore, even though not directly regulated, diversity work can be motivated by potential changes in the legislative sphere.

However, in studying the compliance between diversity perspectives and anti-discrimination law, Barmes and Ashtiany (2003) also find that existing legislation may restrict diversity initiatives. Even though at the EU level the Race Directive stipulates that “with the view of ensuring full equality in practice, the principle of equal treatment shall not prevent any Member State from maintaining or adopting specific measures to prevent or compensate for disadvantages linked to racial or ethnic origin” the unlawfulness of positive action in many contexts (Klarsfeld, 2010b, p.9) may slow down some aspects of diversity initiatives.

2.1.3.2. Diversity management is motivated by business

Where equality work is justified by moral arguments, the rationale for engaging in diversity management initiatives is first and foremost seen to being based on business reasons (Thomas, 1990). Diversity management is seen as an imperative as the labour force becomes increasingly diverse. Therefore, companies need to get used to “using” different types of workers for attaining their business goals. Hence, markets are becoming both more global, and the number of culturally defined market niches increase locally. In responding to these “new” market demands, a diverse workforce is seen to represent a real advantage.

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In addition to these imperatives imposed by the development outside the organisations, a well-managed diverse workforce has been suggested as being more productive, innovative and flexible than a homogeneous one (Cox & Blake, 1991). Even though considerable research effort has been invested in finding proof of the relationship between a diverse workforce and bottom line results, the results do not allow the drawing of any consistent conclusions (see e.g. Kochan et al., 2003; Jackson et al., 2003; Kossek et al. 2006).

2.1.3.3. Diversity management is about more than providing access

Proponents of diversity management also claim that Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunities are achieving too little, and that diversity management can do more. The main argument is that equal opportunity policies allow minorities to enter an organisation, but that as organisational members they are assumed to assimilate to the existing culture. Equal opportunity policies are not enabling career advancement to minority employees, and lead instead to high turnover and low performance of minorities (Thomas, 1990). The aim of diversity management initiatives is not only to increase recruitment of populations previously discriminated against, but to retain them and create an atmosphere where all individuals feel empowered and can perform to their best potential.

The scope of diversity management initiatives is both large and vague. Diversity initiatives range from focusing recruitment on underprivileged groups, to diversity training, mentoring, diversity councils, minority networks, affinity groups and leadership for fostering cultural change. Achieving a cultural and organisational change is not easy, and many diversity programmes fail to do so. Studying three service firms, Ely & Thomas (2001, see also Thomas & Ely, 1996) identified three different perspectives on diversity, whereof only one, the integration-and-learning-perspective, enabled some degree of change in work processes. With this perspective, cultural identities are assumed to shape the way people experience and understand the world, and these different experiences should be integrated into the way people work. In the other two perspectives, access-and-legitimacy, and discrimination-and-fairness, differences were either ignored, just as in equality approaches, or merely seen as valuable in relation to a specific cultural market, thus enclaving ethnic minority employees in tasks related to their cultural background.

The need for a culture change is underlined by both mainstream and critical scholars. Difference needs to be integrated and power structures need to be challenged (Lorbiecki, 2001). Critical commentators have however shown scepticism over the chances of diversity management resulting in any improvement in the organisation, and suspicions about the real motivations behind engaging in diversity management initiatives. Cavanaugh (1997), for instance, claims that diversity management is a way to solidify social divisions in order to better maintain control among the dominant group, that is, the white male. In a similar vein, Prasad A. (2006) suggests that the real motivation to invest in diversity initiatives could be the preserving of privilege in a situation where the colonial system of binaries is becoming weaker. According to him, diversity management could be a way to sustain the binaries by controlling identities and ensuring the failure of the formal objectives of diversity initiatives.
2.1.3.4. Diversity management provides new solutions to the similarities versus differences-debates

Within equality research, long debates about how to best achieve equality have centred around the ‘similarity versus difference’ question. Diversity management has been suggested as presenting a new and different approach to this debate which has occupied feminist researchers about the best way to achieve equality: by asserting a difference or by stressing similarity (Liff & Wajcman, 1996). Even though differences between different equality approaches exist, equality approaches have tended to privilege similarity, treating everyone as the same despite differences. The aim has been to ignore an applicant’s gender or race as a means to ensure that the same chances are given regardless of identity differences. Diversity management presents a change to this focus. Differences should not be ignored, but, on the contrary, they should be recognised, they should be drawn on and they should be effectively managed (Liff, 1996).

2.1.3.5. Diversity management focuses on individuals rather than groups

A final difference to mark diversity management from previous approaches is that diversity management has been seen to equally concern white males as black minority women, disabled persons or homosexuals.

“Diversity includes everyone: it is not something that is defined by race or gender. It extends to age, personal and corporate background, education, function and personality. It includes lifestyle, sexual preference, geographic origin, tenure within the organisation ... and management and non-management.” (Thomas, 1990).

On the one hand, this focus on all individuals and no specific groups has been seen as a strength. By involving everyone, the backlash of white males is reduced, the acceptance of, and commitment to, diversity programmes in the entire organisation is easier to achieve, and the risk of reinforcing stereotypes is avoided (Liff, 1996). However, for equality objectives this has been seen as untenable and as risky for the organisation (Linnehan & Konrad, 1999). Including everyone drives diversity initiatives to meaninglessness as diversity management becomes tautological with management. The real problem, though, is that including all types of differences into diversity initiatives makes them equivalent and ignores the power related to different differences. It becomes equally important to include the person with strange shoes as it does the person who has been educationally disadvantaged (Barmes & Ashtiany, 2003).

2.1.3.6. Two opposite models or many different?

The construction of diversity management against equality approaches has in part been necessary for diversity management to emerge as an independent approach (see Litvin, 2002). What this leads to, however, is a presentation of the approaches as distinct and opposite, and as internally homogeneous. Internal differences within diversity management approaches, which have been pointed to by, for instance, Ely & Thomas (2001), Dass & Parker (1999), Liff (1996) are side-lined and marginalised. It is still not uncommon in the literature on diversity management to distinguish between two main models of diversity: the business case and the social justice case (Tomilinson & Schwabenland, 2010), or in other terms, the management control discussion versus the equality strategies debate (Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004) or the diversity approach against the equality approach (Liff, 1996).
Are social justice and business case arguments then contradictory? One position is to claim that the business case undermines the legitimacy of social justice arguments, and thus they are contradictory. For Noon (2007, p. 781) “equal opportunity is a human right based in moral legitimacy (social justice) rather than economic circumstances”, and so equality should not be dependent on economic value. According to him then, diversity should be first and foremost concerned with social justice, and pursued regardless of the potential business benefits accruing from it. But social justice and economic value cannot be totally separated.

However, more recently, these two discourses have been found together, intertwining, and diversity specialists have been found to draw interchangeably on one or the other, depending on the audience (Ahmed, 2007). The effects of the business case type of diversity management have also been found to be positive on equality in some contexts (Boogaard & Roggeband 2010).

Presenting diversity management as being equivalent to the business case is thus too narrow. Framing diversity initiatives as these two approaches only has become so dominant that alternative framings have not been given room. Diversity management is not a unitary model or discourse and diversity management should not be totally distinguished or separated from equality approaches. Just as equality policies are not unitary, but many models exist such as the liberal and radical approaches (Jewson & Mason, 1986) or the long and short agenda (Cockburn, 1989), the diversity approaches, too, are certainly more complex than the literature would like to suggest.

2.2. Diversity in Context

As the concept of diversity management has become a global trend and has 'travelled' or has been 'translated' from the US to other parts of the Western world (Calás et al., 2009; Boxenbaum, 2006) the importance of context for understanding diversity management has been underlined (Pringle, 2009; Prasad et al., 2006). In recent years, considerable progress has been made in the area, for instance in the form of an edited book on country perspectives on diversity management which shed light on diversity and equality work in 16 different countries (Klarsfeld, 2010a).

Empirical studies acknowledging the importance of national context have looked at several different aspects of context. However, most studies have focused on the demographics and often the changing demography of the country (Bendl et al. 2010; Risberg & Søderberg, 2008; Jones et al. 2000; Glastra et al. 2000; Omanovic, 2009), the institutional context of legislation and policies related to equality and anti-discrimination (Bender et al. 2010; Klarsfeld, 2009), on labour market structures related to minority groups (Cornet & Zanoni, 2010; Omanovic, 2009; de los Reyes, 2000; Glastra et al. 2000) and minority groups’ histories (Booysen & Kromo, 2010; Jones et al. 2000), as well as public policies at the time that diversity enters a specific national context (Glastra et al. 2000; Omanovic, 2009).

Both similarities and differences can be found between different contexts. Studies have shown that diversity management is related to different dimensions of difference in different countries. In some contexts, diversity is mostly attached to ethnicity and immigrant status, such as in Sweden and the Netherlands (de los Reyes 2000; Glastra et al. 2000), in others age is specifically focused on, such as in Austria (along with ethnicity) (Bendl, et al, 2010), or gender, such as in Italy (Murgia & Poggio, 2010). Studies have also shown the ways in which diversity initiatives have been implemented
locally, and that there are differences in the extent to which diversity has attracted organisational and public authorities’ attention in different countries (see contributions in Klarsfeld 2010a). Differences between diversity dimensions, approaches to diversity and implementation of initiatives are, however, also dependent on differences between organisations (Janssens & Zanoni, 2005) and also units within organisations (Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004) and have been found to differ between different parts of a country (Cornet & Zanoni, 2010).

Despite differences between contexts, diversity management has entered, albeit to varying degrees, managerial and public debates of difference and work in most countries. Even though studies looking at diversity in context show differences in the degrees of importance accorded to business versus moral reasons for implementing diversity, the business rationale for diversity is without exception present and drawn on to some extent. The prevalence of business arguments and advancement of managerial interests in most studies can be understood since all Western countries to some degree share neo-liberal ideals of the efficient market with which business-related diversity thinking fits well. The meanings of diversity management can also no longer, as neo-institutionalist theory suggests (Litvin, 2002; Di Maggio & Powell, 1983), be constructed in isolation from diversity meanings internationally.

Even though diversity studies taking context into account have greatly developed and increased in recent years, some limitations have to be mentioned. The way diversity is conceptualised in studies acknowledging the socially constructed nature of diversity meanings in the studied context, sometimes fails to see diversity management in general as a socially constructed phenomena. The underlying assumption in these accounts is that diversity management has a unitary fixed meaning in the US, from where the idea is transferred to a new context. The result is that diversity is found to be reinterpreted, reshaped or hybridized (Omanovic, 2009), as if diversity meanings somewhere else were not interpreted and reinterpreted.

Another weakness in many studies taking context into account is the tendency to limit the attention to a description of different aspects of the national context. Context is then taken as an objective given, not problematised, and not taken into account in the analysis of discourses of diversity. Uncritically taking prevailing structures and institutional arrangements as a background story for diversity fails to recognise how structures and institutional arrangements participate in constructing knowledge about us and them, and perpetuate power relations. This unattentiveness to the socially constructed nature of context, leads to what has come to be called methodological nationalism (Wimmer & Schiller, 1998), and leads to naturalising discourses.

Studies on diversity in context have shown how diversity dimensions, initiatives and arguments differ from and resemble one another between different contexts. However, the focus on this set of aspects, such as the arguments for diversity, the opposition between the business case and the moral case, leaves aside other functions of the discourses on diversity. Kaloniaityte (2006), for instance, has shown that by taking the historical context of postcoloniality as a backcloth for analysis, discourses on diversity illuminate the construction of Swedishness and non-Swedishness. Her study shows how analysing a discourse on diversity can go further than looking at differences and arguments. Diversity studies should in her opinion take the background discourse into the analysis and look at how discourses of diversity construct knowledge about more than difference and business.
2.3. Discourses of diversity

2.3.1. Discursive approaches to diversity

The discursive approaches to diversity management have brought forth important issues regarding the assumptions diversity management practices build upon, but also have weaknesses that may increase confusion within the field. Namely, what is the relationship between diversity management and discourse? Is diversity management a discourse? Or is diversity best seen as rhetoric, a metaphor or a theory (Zanoni & Janssens, 2003; Kirby & Harter, 2003; Kersten, 2000)? Does there exist a discourse of diversity management, or several discourses (Sinclair, 2006; Tomlinson & Schabenland, 2010)? Is there a managerial discourse of diversity, contrasting with some other type of discourse of diversity (Litvin 1997)? Or is diversity a model (Barmes & Ashtiany, 2003) or a platform for debating identity (Holvino & Kamp, 2009)?

All the above-mentioned approaches are defensible and have contributed to critically examining the functioning of diversity in different contexts – and frequently the findings are very similar, regardless of the defining of diversity as a discourse or as a metaphor, or as something else. The field of critical diversity research would, however, benefit from more rigorous usage of these terms in general, and consistent usage within specific studies. It is true that developing the meanings of discourse in a journal article is challenging and often beyond the scope of articles (de los Reyes, 2000), but being consistent in whether diversity is a discourse or about rhetoric, and whether diversity is a discourse or whether several discourses of diversity exist within one piece of work (Kamp & Hagedorn Rasmussen, 2004) would decrease the fuzziness around these terms.

What can be considered more problematic is if and when diversity is used as the defining element of a discourse. When studies focus on diversity discourses and take them for granted, the term diversity in itself is given an established and essentialised status, marginalising other themes that co-exist with and challenge diversity as a concept (see Chia, 2000).

A way out of this is to follow de los Reyes (2000), who looks at diversity as a concept that is used in different discourses. Even though the title of her journal article suggests there is a Swedish discourse on diversity, she shows how diversity frames reality in different ways in different discourses of difference in the Swedish context. Jones (2004) even more clearly describes her choice to see diversity, rather than as a discourse, as a shared vocabulary of difference. In line with these authors, I see diversity as a vocabulary, a concept circulating in different discourses that form the discursive field of diversity management.

The most common diversity discourses discussed in literature are the business discourse and the equality discourse. These discourses have long been seen as separate oppositional discourses, and identified through their different underlying arguments for diversity. Recently, the separation of these two discourses has however been questioned, and it has been suggested that they may intertwine (Tomlinson & Schabenland, 2010). In addition, a diversity discourse should be looked at more broadly than just through the arguments for or against diversity. Discursive studies should be open to identifying the many knowledges a diversity discourse produces, which certainly go beyond the business versus equality arguments for diversity.
2.3.2. The reality through discourses of diversity

Studies looking at discourses of diversity have focused on organisational behaviour texts, practitioner texts, academic texts and interview material with managers and activists. These studies have shown both the commonality of certain features of reality, and the variety of discourses where diversity can be found, each discourse give shape to different realities. Here, the common findings about what diversity discourses produce as knowledge will be looked at.

2.3.2.1. Business results behind everything, and it is in everyone’s interests

The recasting of extremely challenging issues of racism, discrimination, sexism and xenophobia in organisations into the positive jargon of diversity is perhaps one of the most troubling features of the discourses of diversity. This recasting is built on the shift of focus from moral to economic arguments. The threats of changing employee demographics is turned into an 'engine of economic, competitive benefits to the organization' (Litvin, 2006). Discourses of diversity depict economic success as the driving force for virtually everything – even for who we should be – and de-legitimise other rationales for diversity action. Business reasons for advancing diversity have been found to be the only legitimate motive. Business leaders are depicted as insensitive to moral arguments and uninterested in legal compliance, portraying economic results as being naturally the only interest of leaders (Kirby & Harter, 2003).

The organisation is thus seen as an entity which should advance economic interests, but whose interests should be privileged is not specified. Rather, discourses of diversity allude suggest that through the valuing of differences everyone is united in the quest for economic good. An individual's interest is to contribute to the limits of his/her capability to the performance of the organisation. The fact that the objectives of an organisation, the type of performance an organisation is seeking for, is not problematised, but assumed to be universally shared among all its members. Power and persistent inequalities both in organisations and the surrounding society are masked (Kersten, 2000)

2.3.2.2. Managers and the others 'different'

Discourses of diversity provide subject positions to the managers and to the others. Managers are the privileged speakers whereas the others are left without a voice (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). Managers are however often 'hidden', through agency deletion. When managers are not hidden, the identity they are given is that of white male managing women and ethnic minorities (Kirby & Harter, 2003).

As an organisation's economic success is the driving force, the way differences are positioned within an organisational hierarchy depends on the way in which these differences are assumed to contribute to the organisation's success. Those defined as different are treated as objects to be used for the economic success of the organisation. Individuals are categorisable into specific categories of difference, one category at a time, and are seen as representatives of their minority group, not as individuals (Zanoni & Janssens, 2003).

The subject positions of those defined as different depends on the construction of their difference in the discourse drawn on. In empirical material, the picture of differences is
not as clear as mainstream articles and textbooks seem to suggest. Differences are not always portrayed as resources. While some differences do place individuals favourably in the organisational hierarchy, other differences are seen as deficits, also positioning people in the same way in specific positions in the organisation (de los Reyes, 2000; Zanoni & Janssens, 2003). Diversity management then becomes not only the valuing of differences, but avoiding or handling of such differences that do not contribute to, or potentially even hamper organisational performance (Janssens & Zanoni, 2005).

2.3.2.3. Differences

Differences in discursive studies have been found to be discrete and easily separable from each other. One is either a man or a woman, either European or non-European, a Finn or a non-Finn, heterosexual or homosexual. And these differences, even though in everyday life it is extremely difficult to delimit their borders, are seen as to be obvious, natural and objective. Many differences are in addition perceived to be innate essences: unchangeable and providing the carrier of a difference with specific characteristics affecting his or her behaviour and capabilities or skills. What these constructions lead to is the homogenising of group differences. The focus being on differences between groups, differences within groups are ignored. The belonging to several groups at a time is not recognised, nor is the socially constructed nature of differences. This fixing of differences, and focusing on one difference only, is a way of controlling and delimiting differences more than actually valuing differences. (Litvin 1997)

Discursive studies on diversity have not always either managed to grasp the socially constructed nature of differences however. Janssens & Zanoni (2005) deconstruct the notion of diversity in four organisations in Belgium, and show how diversity is understood in relation to the way in which socio-demographic differences affect the organisational functioning. But the socio-demographic differences the companies focus on are taken as given in the study: cultural differences, being overweight, disability and immigrant status. All these differences are, however, also discursively constructed in society and by organisations in their diversity work. Taking the differences as given, unproblematically existing prior to the organisation, also avoids seeing the power relations that are related to these differences in the surrounding society. Ignoring these power relations allows, for instance, one to present the recruitment of overweight persons in a call centre as socially responsible and intelligent business-wise since as these persons have a hard time finding a job they will be committed to the job. Acknowledging that being overweight is socially constructed as a deficiency, illness or proof of personal failure, recasts the socially responsible action of recruiting overweight persons out of sight of customers as reproducing the knowledge related to overweight as a deficiency. It is participating in the construction of knowledge where overweight people are duly discriminated against.

2.4. Diversity management and ethnic minority subject positions

Literature on minorities’ experiences of diversity management is still rare as even critical research has focused on corporate discourses and the experiences of managers working with diversity. In consequence, the need for studies focusing on the experiences of historically disadvantaged groups in diversity-promoting organisations has recently been underlined (Zanoni et al., 2010).
Different streams of literature, however, are entangled with issues related to minority experiences in diverse work organisation. A first block of literature looks at the experiences of ethnic and racial minorities in work life contexts in general. The second stream looks at intersections of identities and inequality-producing structures. The third stream looks at subjectivities in work, and at the ways in which individuals position themselves in organisational settings and how individuals adopt and/or resist subject positions available in the discursive fields in their working lives.

These different streams of literature are neither coherent entities (but internally fragmented) nor clearly distinct. Poststructuralist studies on identity, for instance, can be attentive to intersectionality. The distinguishing characteristic may be found in the understanding of identity. The first stream sees identity as relatively unproblematically given, whereas studies on intersectionality see differences as constructed and interacting with organisational and social practices and processes. In the third stream, differences are seen as discursively constructed in relations of power. Going into the specificities of the differences between different approaches to intersectionality (see Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006; Holvino, 2010) or identity (see Alvesson et al. 2008) is, however, beyond the scope of this work. Instead, the focus will be on how these existing literatures can advance the topic of minorities and diversity management.

2.4.1. Experiences of minorities in work life

That ethnicity and race have an impact on organisations and the individual’s employment, employment opportunities and progression has been established by many studies (see e.g. Proudford & Nkomo, 2006, pp.330-33; Royster, 2003; Bell & Nkomo, 2001). The impact of race and ethnicity has been seen to be mainly negative and minorities’ working life experiences as challenging in many respects.

Ethnic and racial discrimination, as well as the threat of discrimination, is probably the most important factor structuring minorities’ experiences of working life. Ethnic minority female respondents are often reported to perceive ethnicity as the most salient difference in their work context. Ethnic minority employees, for instance, explain that their employers and co-workers have negative stereotypical understandings of them, that they are not trusted, and not seen for whom they are. Minority members may be treated as tokens, contributing to the organisation’s equal opportunity or diversity policies. It is also often reported that cultural backgrounds are totally disregarded. Minority members may also feel that their legitimacy as professionals and managers is put into question because of their minority status.

Conducting bicultural, parallel lives, is one way that minorities have managed the demanding challenges of work life. By compartmentalising life into the private and the public, black female managers have managed to balance between the requirements of the work setting while preserving their minority identity (Bell, 1990). In a similar vein, minorities’ behaviour in organisations can be characterised as going in two directions – on the one hand, minorities report making efforts to being included, while at the same time distancing themselves from the organisation.

One way to improve the chances of being included is to overperform (Siebers, 2009). It is seen as a way to make up for a difference and challenge the negative stereotype the surrounding co-workers may have about one’s ethnic group. Minorities are said to need to undertake impression management, and to “make people comfortable with us” (Atewologun & Singh, 2010). In order to ‘fit in’, minority employees may try to act as
they believe their co-workers do, talk about topics they believe co-workers are interested in, even invent stories about oneself that correspond to the dominant way. For instance, Hite describes how one of her research participants makes details up about the dinner she had prepared the evening before when talking with her co-workers, in order not to reveal the fact that she eats traditional ethnic food at home (Hite, 2007).

In the perspectives of these studies where identities are taken as a given, the flip side of making efforts of fitting in is the masking one’s ‘true self’. This can lead to not being spontaneous, controlling one's own behaviour, and avoiding communication or being extra careful during conversations at work (Bell, 1990; April & April, 2009). This corresponds to what Ely and Thomas (2001) called the ‘discrimination and fairness paradigm’ of diversity. Minorities are allowed into organisations, but they are expected to hide their difference, conform and adapt to existing practices.

Studies on racio-ethnicity and work show how ethnicity is experienced as a troubling identity category in the sphere of work. Minority members feel difficulties in positioning as a professional and as a minority member simultaneously. A discourse of diversity stressing one's ethnic difference could be experienced as increasing these challenges. The difference that one tries to overcome by overperforming is in a discourse on diversity probably seen as being formalised and made visible. Minorities recruited under a diversity management programme have however been found to be more positively evaluated than minorities recruited under Affirmative Action (Gilbert & Stead, 1999). In contexts where minorities have been included by quotas, and where minority status is attached to evaluations of deficiency, diversity management could be experienced in a more positive manner by minorities, if discourses of diversity challenge the stereotyped knowledge related to minorites.

### 2.4.2. Intersectional approach

Since the 1990’s, studying experiences along just one dimension of difference, as in the studies looking at race and ethnicity at work, has been approached with scepticism. The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe the way black women’s experience could not be understood other than through both ethnicity/race and gender. Intersectionality thus first emerged as a critique against mainstream feminism. The critique addressed feminist claims to be advancing the conditions of all women, while according to black feminists, mainstream feminism could not address the specific situation of black women. Holvino (2010) summarises the ways in which the claims of white women could not be similar to those of black women, and how white and black women were not oppressed by the same groups. She, for instance, shows that the demands of white women to gain access to employment in the public sphere cannot be shared by black women who always have had to work, albeit in low-skilled jobs at the bottom of organisational hierarchies. While white women can experience being confined to the home to perform domestic work as an oppression, the same can from a black woman's perspective be experienced as an inaccessible luxury.

Intersectionality theory maintains that the experience of oppression is not one of additive layers of oppression, a double-jeopardy or triple-jeopardy, but that gender, race, sexuality and class, among others, interact in the production of inequality (Ward, 2004). Thereon Holvino (2010) suggests that race, gender and class should be seen as simultaneous processes of both identity, social and institutional practices. By
‘institutional practice’ Holvino means “the ways in which race, gender and class relations and stratification are built into organizational structures, processes and ways of working, which seem normal at the same time that they produce and reproduce particular relations of inequality and privilege” (2010, p.15). In order to understand minorities’ experiences of work organisations it is thus necessary to see their positions as the result of a constant interplay and production of organisational structures and work practices, simultaneous identifications along different identity axes, as well as societal structures and values. In organisation studies, Acker (2006) has introduced the concept of inequality regimes to describe these interlocked practices and processes that “result in maintaining class, gender and racial inequalities within particular organisations”.

Even though the relevance of studying inequalities and differences from an intersectional approach has been well acknowledged in many fields, the possibilities of intersectional studies have still not been widely drawn on in organisation studies (Acker, 2006). Among the first, Adib & Guerrier (2003) studied the interlocking of gender with class, race, ethnicity and nationality in hotel work in the UK. They show how identities in work situations cannot be understood as separate, and differences as independent from each other. In their study, minority employees, women with British or foreign nationalities, with different ethnic backgrounds, were shown to strategically use their differences in different manners in different situations. By emphasising or downplaying a specific identity axis, the respondents were shown to resist discrimination and to position oneself favourably within the organisational hierarchy.

Adib and Guerrier's study emphasised individual narratives. Empirical studies on intersectionality have, like their study, tended to focus on agency, whereas theoretical studies have focused on structures. Boogaard and Roggeband (2010) combined both agency and structure in their study of inequality in the Dutch police force. In a similar manner to Adib & Guerrier, they show how individuals downplay and emphasise different differences in different situations, in an attempt to position themselves more favourably in the organisational hierarchy. Combining agency with structure, they, however, also show how organisational members' deployment of different identity axes in order to position themselves positively in the organisation, which could be seen as resistance to oppression/inequality, may actually reinforce the discourse producing the same inequality.

Boogaard & Roggeband's (2010) study on the Dutch police force is also among the first theorising about intersectionality in an organisation having diversity initiatives (see also Tomlinson, 2010; Siebers, 2009). They show how the discourse of potential contribution related to differences opens up new spaces where inequality can be challenged by drawing on differences as an additional competence. The business case type of discourse of diversity can thus have positive effects for equality, but as they show, the risk always remains that minority members be compartmentalised by their differences and understood in stereotypical ways.

Overall, however, diversity management studies have not drawn on ideas of intersectionality. This lack of attention to the intersections of different differences has been described as outstanding silence (Holvino, 2010). Being attentive to how differences intersect would, however, be especially important in a study of diversity management where the central theme is identities and inequality. Turning to an intersectionality frame has also been suggested as a way to broaden the scope of looking at minorities’ positions (Styhre & Eriksson-Zetterquist, 2008).
Both Boogaard & Roggeband (2010) and Tomlinson (2010) contribute to the critical diversity management literature, and their studies are forerunners in drawing on intersectionality. They show that in certain situations related to certain differences, minority employees can draw on ideas central to diversity management in positioning themselves more favourably. However, neither of the studies clearly describes the diversity initiatives of the studied organisations, nor do they relate the identity work of the interviewees to discourses of diversity. In Boogaard & Roggeband's study, for instance, they mention that there are “affirmative action policies that strive towards a greater presence of women and ethnic minorities in the higher ranks of the police force” (p.67), but it remains unclear whether interviewees are aware of these policies or whether they draw on a societal level discourse of cultural differences as valuable.

Critical studies taking an intersectional approach are highly needed in diversity research. Not only for de-essentialising differences, but also by looking at both agency and structure intersectional studies can more forcefully point to the necessary change in power relations in including difference.

2.4.3. Subjectivities at work

A third stream to understand minorities in organisations managing diversity is to look at selves and subjectivities in work. Even if this stream of literature does not focus on minorities per se, it depicts a theoretical frame(s) for understanding the way minority members come to understand themselves in work. Largely drawing on Foucault and ideas of power/knowledge regimes, managerial discourses are seen as constituting subjectivities of organisational members. The extent to which discourses are seen as powerful, and individuals’ agency as possible (see Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000), however, vary between different authors.

Common to poststructuralist studies on selves or subjectivities in work is the rejection of a notion of the individual as autonomous, separate and separable from social relations and organisations (Kondo, 1990, Fournier, 1998, Collinson, 2003). The interest of poststructuralist research focuses on how specific power/knowledge regimes are inscribed on subjectivity. Work organisations are seen as not only producing the product or service it is organised to produce, but also as constructing gendered, racialised and class identities (Collinson & Hearn, 2006; Kondo, 1990).

Collinson (2003) identified three main selves in work: the conformist, the dramaturgical and the resistant. The greater part of research has focused on the conforming to and resisting of discourses. Fournier (1998) studied graduates in one organisation in UK and their complying with and resistance to the new career discourse. She shows how the discourse produces different subject positions as enterprising selves or militant others, and how these subject positions are hierarchically and spatially differently positioned in the organisation. The graduates that resist the new career discourse construct themselves as actively choosing to opt out of a corrupt model where individuals are to develop in the interests of the organisation. The resistance of the discourse, however, reinforces it, as resistance is not possible outside the discourse. In a similar way, Kondo (1990) shows how resistance produces both empowerment and marginalisation. In her study of identities in Japanese workplaces, she shows how women working part time enhance their position as elder women, mothers, in relation to younger artisan men to whom they bring help, but in so doing draw on a traditional discourse of womanhood that actually marginalises their
position. So, according to Kondo, resistance cannot be understood in a uniform way, but consent coping and resistance can be performed simultaneously.

Resistance is a significant concept in work on subjectivities in work. Dick and Cassell (2002) are among the few having studied resistance to discourses of diversity (see also Swan & Fox, 2010). Studying the diversity initiatives in the UK police force, they identified two main discourses: 'promotion practices are fair and above board' and 'banter is healthy and normal' and show how respondents take direct or reciprocal subject positions within these discourses, depending on their stakes. What is in play in the way respondents position themselves in relation to diversity initiatives is the construction of subjectivities. For instance, normalisation of sexism is constructed in a way to uphold one’s own integrity.

Zanoni & Janssens (2007) have studied the control and agency of minority employees in relation to (diversity) management. They conceptualise (diversity) management as a set of controls embedded in an organisation's discursive and material structures. They are interested in both identity regulating discourses (see Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and material structure as control mechanisms. The identity regulating discourses they found construct minorities either as 'individuals with professional skills' or employees with specific linguistic and cultural skills. They look at how minority employees comply with and resist the controls that exert influence on them, and show how both compliance with an identity-regulating discourse as well as resistance can enable emancipation. They found minority employees constructed positive identities from the resources available in a given situation. While they place their study within diversity management literature, and theorise about diversity management as a constellation of identity-regulating discourses and bureaucratic controls, information about the existence and nature of diversity management initiatives in the studied organisations remain vague. Most importantly, as their title suggests, minority respondents did not seem to reflect over, or engage with, diversity management.

Much identity research, regardless of the approach to discourses, has had a tendency to overlook the historical and social contexts that shape the constructions (Alvesson et al. 2008). Many studies have indeed focused solely on organisational / managerial discourses, leaving societal discourses with less attention. Pauline Leonard (2010), studying white subjectivities in Hong Kong, has taken the opposite approach. She contextualises her study to the changing social political and economic discourses of Hong Kong and British relations after the return of Hong Kong to Chinese rule in 1997. She shows how whiteness, gender and nationality shape the subjectivities and working life identities of her British interviewees working in Hong Kong. The context of post-colonial Hong Kong renders previous subjectivities questionable, and privilege needs to be renegotiated. Just as in studies on the meanings of diversity in different contexts, contexts should be integrated into the analysis, also in the case of minority subjectivities in relation to discourses of diversity.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, the focus has been on previous studies of diversity management. The emergence of diversity management in the late 1980's US and the spreading of the trend to almost all parts of the world were described. What diversity management is and means was in the literature often found to be explained by how diversity management is different from, or similar to, equality approaches to differences in work.
Once diversity management had been presented, the focus turned to specific areas of diversity studies. First, studies paying attention to the context of diversity management were discussed. Here, the main focus was on country contexts, and it was seen that diversity has gained different meanings, has been attached to different policy developments and has focused on different dimensions of difference in different countries. Contextualised studies on diversity management were found to have increased and developed considerably in recent years. However, diversity studies taking context into account were often found to use the context as an explanatory factor of the findings, rather than an element in the analysis of diversity meanings. This was particularly found to be a problem in studies taking a discursive approach, as by detaching the context from the analysis these studies participate in naturalising the knowledges about the context as given facts.

A second specific stream of diversity literature focused on was the stream of discursive studies on diversity management. The strengths and weaknesses of discursive diversity studies were discussed. Discursive studies have importantly shed light on the different underlying assumptions diversity programmes are built on. Discursive studies have tended to identify two principal discourses of diversity – the business and the equality discourses. These discourses have been identified through the arguments for diversity, and the discourses have been treated as separate. However, privileging the arguments for or against diversity as the defining feature of a diversity discourse may be too narrow, as discourses produce a set of knowledges. The knowledges that previous studies have found discourses of diversity to commonly produce were discussed, namely: diversity as being of business interest, the value of difference as depending on its ability to contribute to the bottom-line, and differences as discrete categories.

The third set of literature focused on was the literature on minority perspectives on diversity management. There are very few studies looking at minority perspectives on diversity management, and even less so of studies that have been conducted in diversity-promoting organisations. However, different streams of literature can function as a basis for reflecting on how minorities position themselves in diversity-promoting organisations. Firstly, studies looking at ethnic minorities' work life experiences from a rather positivistic approach were discussed. These studies showed that ethnic difference is often related to disadvantage, stress and discrimination. The second stream of literature focused on intersectional approaches to differences. Intersectionality is a new approach within organisation studies, and has still been left without attention within the diversity management field. Intersectional approaches to differences in work have shown that the way individuals manage to position themselves in their work context depends on both the context and the constellation of differences and their meanings that they can draw on in a specific situation. The meanings of different differences change both with context and with the different ways in which different differences intersect with each other. The third set of literature looked at focused on individuals' subjectivities in work. In this literature, individuals' ways of understanding themselves in work are not dependent on the individual, but are shaped by the discourses available in a given context and time.

Diversity management can be related to all these three literatures looked at in the section on minority perspectives. Firstly, diversity management is a practice that aims to reduce the negative effects of difference, and turn difference into something positive for the organisation and presumably also for the individual. The experiences of ethnic difference in work could thus change into something more positive than the previous literature has suggested. Secondly, even though intersectional approaches are still missing from the field of diversity studies, diversity management work addresses
several differences at the same time and positions people in different ways, depending on their different differences. Thirdly, diversity management is a way of speaking about differences in work, and is constituted by different discourses, all of which provide different subject positions to ethnic minority individuals.

The different streams of literature that were reviewed in this chapter highlight the central questions that will be treated in the remaining parts of this thesis. The aim of this study is to contribute to these literatures by looking at how contexts of diversity participate in shaping the meanings of diversity, what sets of knowledges different discourses produce, and how minority ethnic employees’ position themselves in diversity promoting organisations.
3 METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

Planning a qualitative research process has been described as resembling the planning a vacation – one has an overall idea of what one wants to see and do, but has no fixed plan of how to travel between the different sites (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The aim of this chapter is to summarise the plan of the journey of this research project, and describe how it finally unfolded.

3.1. The research process

My overall interest at the beginning of the project was to study diversity management and ethnic discrimination in different European countries. Diversity management was at that time a relatively new concept in Europe and a theme that the European Union invested interest in, in the form of different campaigns, often coupled with the theme of anti-discrimination. My plan was to look into diversity management and ethnic discrimination in three European countries with different immigration histories and experiences of difference, as well as different welfare state regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Within the countries that fulfilled those criteria I chose the ones I had greatest initial knowledge of: my home country, Finland; Italy, where I had lived and gone to school as a child and studied at University; and France, where I had worked twice before my graduate studies.

In this first stage, my approach could have been called what Silverman refers to as a “kitchen sink” gambit (Silverman, 2000). I was highly enthusiastic and planned to cover the issues of diversity management and ethnic discrimination from numerous angles – looking into EU and national legislation and policies, studying organizational policies and diversity manager discourses, as well as ethnic minority employees’ individual experiences in all the three countries. This scope narrowed down along the way, and in the first year of study I had already decided to focus on only France and Finland. This was a way to privilege depth of context.

Of the two initial main terms – diversity management and ethnic discrimination – diversity management lived through the entire research process as a central concept. My interest in experiences of ethnic discrimination did not diminish during the process, but it became clear that focusing on discrimination as such was difficult and too narrow in scope to grasp the reality of ethnic minority employees’ working life experiences. Instead, the first set of interviews with ethnic minority employees led me to widen the approach and explore questions of difference and the interaction between different differences in the work context.

Choosing the theoretical perspective to follow in this study was a long process. When I first started as a doctoral student, I worked for another project, in which positivist epistemology was for the most part an unquestioned norm. My prior research experience thus was one of positivism and quantitative research methods. It was partly my uneasiness with these assumptions that made me change project, and start doctoral research on my own. However, at the beginning of this research, I would describe my position as an unconscious positivist. It took considerable time for me to make explicit the assumptions which I was used to working with, and to find alternatives.

Different ontologies and epistemologies have different assumptions about reality and how it can be studied, and thus result in different views on what constitutes good
research. At the beginning of the project, I felt constrained by positivist evaluation criteria, such as objectivity, comparability and generalisability. In planning the research sites, I, for instance, aimed to find corresponding sites in Finland and France: having studied a supermarket chain in Finland I tried to gain access to a supermarket chain in France too. And in the first interviews, I felt concerned about my own impact on the interview, trying to minimise it.

Moving from positivist assumptions to constructionism was a gradual, unplanned and unsystematic process. It was a process of search and change which cannot be separated from the research project or myself. It was a result of personal values and of interaction with the field. When I started conducting interviews in France, the contradictions between what I still believed were the criteria of good science and my research practice seemed too great for me. I felt that much of what was interesting in the different contexts would not be seen if I continued trying to keep things comparable. I listened to my intuition and no longer followed positivist research quality criteria. Instead, while doing the substance of research I simultaneously sought an epistemological and theoretical perspective that would provide the basis for keeping the project together.

This moving from a positivist to a constructionist epistemology while conducting the research was challenging but also extremely instructive. It entailed a great deal of confusion and anxiety. It was a process of unlearning and learning, and even once I found the theoretical perspective I felt comfortable with, producing my own texts within this frame has been like learning a new language.

3.2. Different perspectives on diversity management – four different research settings

Organisational phenomena and inequality can look very different depending on one's position (McGee Calvert & Ramsay, 1996). My overall aim throughout has been to see how the reality of diversity management appears from the perspectives of both management and minorities in two different national contexts.

This investigation of diversity management from two perspectives in two national contexts led to four different research settings: managers in Finland, managers in France, minorities in Finland and minorities in France. I will describe each of these settings later in this chapter. Here, I will discuss the interrelations of these settings and my own positioning vis-à-vis and in between them.

The different settings share some points of commonality and differ in different ways in terms of who the participants are, where they are located materially, and what resources the participants have to make sense of diversity management.

The national context and shared language create a strong common point for the research settings in Finland and France. As will be seen in later chapters, both managers and minorities in both countries drew on societal discourses related to national self-images when talking about diversity and difference. While the national culture and language tie managers and minorities together, the managers in Finland and France share the professional status and the position of those who define and drive diversity management initiatives. On this dimension, they were closer to each other than to minority employees in their own contexts.
The research settings with minority employees differed between Finland and France in many ways. The societal positions of the participants were quite different. In France, most minority participants were French nationals, and many were born in France. In contrast, in Finland, minority participants had recently immigrated, and not all of them spoke Finnish. However, many of the minority employees in the two countries worked in similar positions and contexts, in low-skill and low-paid jobs. Some of the work sites in France and Finland also resembled each other strikingly. This extract is from my notes after a day interviewing at a Finnish bus depot:

The place was so strikingly similar to the French depot! Really incredible how it was like re-entering a world I already knew. The building resembled – the disposition of the desk and the rest area were exactly the same. The TV back in the rest area placed just like in Paris, people hanging around, coming and going, with their dayplan-lists. The noise was similar, the smell and the order. Only people didn’t go around and shake hands with everyone.

I also recognized the macho atmosphere. I was clearly an odd figure there.

Even the meeting room where the interviews were done resembled, and strikingly, was just like in Paris, in a separate building, on the second floor.9

Post-Interview L5E123

While the work sites of minorities in Finland and France can sometimes be so much alike, the realities of the headquarters and the work site of ethnic minorities within one organisation can be like two distinct worlds. One day, I interviewed a manager in Paris, in the headquarters of a big company, in the 16th arrondissement. The surroundings of the work place of this manager were very chic, and the building an elegant mix of cold clear windows and steel and warm, soothing full carpet. Right from this interview, I headed to the next interview in the suburbs, where I was to meet bus drivers. While travelling through the city the population and visual image surrounding me changed. From the spacious and calm quarters of the 16th, I travelled towards Northern Paris, into some of the most underprivileged suburban areas. And from having been part of a majority in being white I started to become part of a minority, and during the last stops of the metro ride I felt uneasy in being so white and so clearly not belonging there.

The organisational status of being a manager of diversity or a minority employee is, however, only one dimension shaping one’s perspectives. The location one speaks from shapes the range of discourses one can draw on, and that location is not only one of organisational hierarchy, but one of gender, age and origin (among others). As exemplified by my experience travelling between the two interviews, ethnicity does not have the same meaning in all circumstances. The meanings of ethnic belonging are contextual and negotiated. Minority employees were not only ethnic minorities, but in some contexts they were the majority in their ethnicity. Minority women’s (and men’s) positions were also shaped by their gender. And managers were not all members of the majority ethnic group, but could be seen as minorities by their nationality or their skin colour. Power is never fixed and stable, but continuously changing and open to resistance, and interviews were a site where identities and power were negotiated, both the participants and my own identity.

In positivist approaches, the researcher has been treated as an invisible and objective observer, and at the beginning, as mentioned earlier, I tried to live up to this expectation by minimising my effect on the interview. This seems very naïve now, as my identity was as much a topic of negotiation between the participants and myself, a

9 Notes taken verbatim from my notebook and may well contain minor linguistic slips and errors.
tool for me when trying to position myself *vis-à-vis* the participants, and shaped by the research. I did not want to intimidate the participants, but neither to be underestimated by the managers. With the managers, I would use managerial terminology to underline my knowledge of the field and my insiderness (Tienari et al., 2005). Similarly, in France I could use my foreignness as an excuse for not understanding, as a way to prompt on difficult questions. I dressed in a certain way depending on the audience, in jeans and sneakers when seeing minority workers, in more business-like dresses when seeing managers.

My position was one of shifting between being an insider versus an outsider, a majority versus a minority. Especially for minorities in France, my belonging or non-belonging to France was a recurrent question. I was seen as a student, but how I defined my disciplinary belonging changed over the years. The entire time I have been a doctoral student at Hanken School of Economics, but I spent three years in a sociology department in France. I told the participants about my two affiliations, to both Hanken and Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, and, depending on their own interests, they tended to note one more than the other.

While the Finnish and French languages tied together the different research settings in each country, English has been a tool for tying the different linguistic settings together. Working in Finnish and French in the field in each country enabled a deeper understanding of the field, and positioned me and the participants in different ways as insiders and or outsiders. Working in these three languages has been both a way of gaining in-depth understandings of contexts and also a way to distance myself from the empirical contexts and analyse them outside the language used. English has been my research language throughout the process. I did not translate the interview transcripts, but all my notes and writing have always been in English. Even though I have reviewed the literature on diversity published in Finnish and French, the core literature I have based my reflections on is the diversity literature published in English. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the literature on diversity in Finnish and French is still not very extensive, while the English language literature on the topic has a longer history. Secondly, I have treated the diversity literature published in Finnish and French as telling me about the diversity context and debates taking place in the countries.

### 3.3. Theoretical perspectives on interviews

The primary empirical data this study is based on are interviews with different organisational members. Interviews have been widely used in organisation studies (Cassell, 2009), but the view of interviews, of the data interviews generate and of the interviewer, have changed. What is often referred to as the traditional view of interviews has been challenged (Fontana & Frey, 2005). This has not led to the total abandoning of the traditional interview, but to a greater variety in the theories and practices of interviewing.

As I mentioned earlier, my own understanding of what was going on in interviews, and how I was to act as the interviewer, changed during the project. In the beginning, I had more of a traditional view, or took the neo-positivist position (Alvesson, 2003), where what is said in interviews is expected to reveal something about what is actually taking place in the organisation, or even about the motives or moral positions of the interviewees. Interview accounts are treated as unproblematic evidence of organisational realities.
Whilst conducting the interviews, it became clear to me that this view of interviewing, where bias, for instance, should be controlled for, was not appropriate for what I wanted to do. The people I met had different histories, different resources, lived different realities, and could not be interviewed in a standardised way. I had an interview guide for managers and for minorities which I first used in Finland. When starting to interview in France, I translated the manager guide, but also realised I needed to be more flexible, and allow more space for the diversity in experiences. My interview guide became less structured, and more adaptable to the person and organisation being interviewed.

Building on the critiques towards the traditional interview, interviews have increasingly come to be seen as co-constructed. The knowledge constructed in interviews is produced by both the participant and the researcher. The researcher no longer needs to be seen as a tool for retrieving information, but can acknowledge his/her inevitable impact on the interview. Here, the interviewer comes to play an active role.

How the interviewer is to conduct the interview depends on the aims and the theoretical approach. Alvesson (2003) identifies two different approaches to interviews, in addition to the neo-positivist/traditional: the romantic and the localist. The romantic interview emphasises the importance of rapport and trust – it is assumed that the more the participant feels close to and trusts the researcher, the more honest the answers will be. From the localist position, interviews cannot be seen as reflecting some reality that exists outside the interview situation. Interview accounts are “situated accomplishments” so interviews cannot be used instrumentally. Interviews are local, and what they actually reveal is the cultural resources the participants have access to in producing their versions of reality.

This localist position is closest to how I see interviews. Reality is constructed in interviews, but the type of reality that we construct in the interview setting is not independent of the surrounding society. We do not come to the interview situation ‘blank’; the interview situation is one where existing discourses are reproduced and reformulated. What interviews do reveal, however, is what the discourses are that circulate in society and the organisations, and which discourses are available to the participants in the given interview setting.

The discourses that were available to the participants and me in the given settings also depended on the way we perceived each other. Interview participants may try to produce the expected account. And my personal biography and experience as an interviewer may have made me more able to hear some versions than others.

Interviews are not the privileged material of discourse analysts, as naturally occurring data is often considered more valuable (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). Naturally occurring data could have been accessed through observation or by studying documents. The disadvantage of these would have been the inability to prompt, to invite the participants to reflect over situations, trying to see events from multiple perspectives. And where traditional interviewing values patterns and consistency, discursively inspired interviews seek complexity (Langdridge, 2004).

3.3.1. Why is power an issue in interviewing?

From many perspectives, the research interview has been seen as a situation in which the researcher has the power. From such a perspective, I would have chosen who I
wanted to interview, what I wanted to ask, and when and how I wanted to ask my questions. Partly, this is, of course, what happened. I did plan my questions, and I did at least approve the research sites if not select them. Nonetheless, there were also many aspects that I could not predict, choose and define to suit my interests.

I do not see it relevant to think of the interview situation as one where either I or the participant has more power. I even see it as impossible to always know who is more powerful in a given situation. But it is important to acknowledge that the encounter in the research interview cannot be detached from power relations. What happens in the interview, and around it, is not only knowledge production about the subject under study, which per se already cannot be detached from power relations. The interview event, and what happens before and after it, are also situations of negotiating identities and positioning. Further, during the interview, both the participant and I enact different selves. A manager can talk as a manager, but also as an employee, a mother or a person belonging to an ethnic minority – or all these at the time. Therefore, during an interview different truths unfold, sometimes leading to contradictions in relation to what already has been, or to what will be, said in one and the same interview.

Both the participant and the interviewer come to the interview encounter with their personal histories, social identities, and resources, such as cultural capital, status via organisational position and economic resources (Warren, 2001). From a more traditional perspective on power, it could be assumed that the person with better language skills has more power in the interview situation than the person with weaker language skills – or that an older male manager participant has more power than a young woman interviewer. Rather than these identities or skills automatically positioning us in advantageous or disadvantageous terms in the interview, these identities have to be negotiated throughout the interview situation (Dunbar et al. 2001).

It is often acknowledged that the knowledge produced in an interview depends on the interviewer’s ability to create an atmosphere where the participant feels free and safe to express his or her thoughts (Kvale, 2007). This is what an interviewer will try to achieve, and, as I described previously in this chapter, I tried to present myself to the participants in ways that created some points of commonality that would help in creating this atmosphere. The interviewer, however, never knows ahead of time what the interviewee is like a person and what she or he wants to achieve with the interview. As I noted after an HR interview in France, interviewing is demanding:

“You embark in a totally new environment, meet a person you often know nothing about, and you will have to be capable of adapting to the level of the respondent, be extremely sensitive. It is extremely difficult and demanding. But extremely interesting. I like it, but realize now how incredibly difficult it can be”. Post-Interview notes N6G1

What is it that I felt that difficult on that particular day? Reflecting back on it, I think what I was referring to was specifically the positioning in the interview. All the things that happen in the interview which are not directly about the topic under study but are an integral part of what interviewing includes: listening, being sensitive to non-verbal messages, reacting to the answers in ways of showing that you understand the world of the participant, and sometimes using all your self, your own history and your emotions.

The negotiation of identities and positioning can take different forms, from being explicit to being expressed between the lines. The negotiation probably is rather invisible when it leads to a good atmosphere, trust and confidence. When the
negotiation leads to clashing identities, it is difficult to be unnoticed, and it directly influences the interview dynamic.

This type of clashing of identities took place in an interview with a diversity manager in France. At the end of the interview our racial identities became explicitly significant. I came through as a privileged white person. The manager was black, and pointed to my whiteness as a reason for me to be unable to go into the Parisian suburbs. Our difference was presented by the participant as separating us, and he seemed at the end of the interview to be mistrusting my aims and values. Trust and rapport were hampered by our difference, by the meaning that racial difference was given in the situation.

Another type of negotiation of identities took place in many ethnic minority interviews in France. There, many of the participants related to my background as something that we had in common. They defined me as a “French person with a foreign origin”. This created a context of sharing and trust, very different from the interviews with Finnish ethnic minorities, where our differences were more important than our similarities. Building rapport and a confident atmosphere with Finnish ethnic minority participants was indeed much more difficult than with the minority participants in France.

What, then, are the consequences of power and positioning in the interviews? From different positions and in the different power relations, different knowledges are produced. From a positivist point of view this would be a weakness, but from a poststructuralist perspective this is what is interesting. Within the multiplicity of different varieties of reality about diversity management and difference in work, the complexity of the phenomena is the interesting part.

3.3.2. What are ethics in interviewing?

There are different views on research ethics; the main differences being based on different epistemological/ontological stances (see Christians, 2008). Even when one relies on academic associations’ ethical guidelines, such as the British Sociological Association’s, it is not unproblematic to define what actually counts as ethical. The researcher’s values and position inevitably plays a role in, for instance, defining how a society’s well-being can be improved, which should according to the association be the aim of sociological research. And what is ethical differs from one context to another. In Finland, I felt that the only right way to gain access to minority employees of an organisation was through management, but in France, a manager I asked for access to minorities felt this to be very unnecessary. He was surprised by my request, and even upset. He could not understand why I relied on such a consensual approach, as my topic was so challenging. For him, I was not to ask management for permission, but just go and meet the employees.

Informed prior consent and confidentiality are the very basics of ethics in interviewing, but even the question of informed prior consent can be problematic. How much should the participant know about the themes of interest, and how much can an interviewer even with the best of intentions say what the interview will be about prior to the interview? How the interview evolves and the directions it takes, is not only in the hands of the interviewer, but also depends on the attitudes and interests of the participant. Also, who should provide their consent, only the participant or also those people figuring in the stories told (see Hollway & Jefferson, 2000)? I did tell the participants that the interview was a part of my on-going Ph.D. work, in which my
interest focused on diversity initiatives of companies and the experiences of ethnic minority employees in these diversity promoting work contexts. I told them about my university affiliations, and let them ask me questions before starting. In one case, the participant felt during the course of the interview that I had been misleading, and suspected that my aim in the interview was different from the one that I had stated at the beginning. This led the participant to abruptly end the interview.

Consent should be freely given. All the participants gave their consent, one participant, though, felt suspicion towards the consent form and felt it was wrong for me to ask her to sign it. The way the participants were identified for the research varied. Sometimes, it was the employer that identified potential participants and set up the meetings: in these situations, my first contact with them was at the moment of the interview. In these cases, I felt more concerned about the motivations of the participants to take part in the study. I did not want them to participate because they wanted to show respect towards the employer, and underlined that participation was fully voluntary. Many of the participants then mentioned that it was nice for them to be there; perhaps they saw it as a paid pause in their work, and one participant described it as a “free Finnish course”. In those cases in which I set the meeting with the participants myself questions of motivation were, or at least seemed, less ambiguous.

I assured all the interviewees that they and their companies would be treated in an anonymous manner, and that the data I collected would only be used for research purposes. Some participants did not care about anonymity, saying that they were proud of the things they were able to tell. Despite the participants’ view regarding anonymity, it is the researcher’s obligation to protect the identity of the participant and the company. My interpretation of our discussion is in no way only positive for the companies in question, and were I to reveal their identity it could cause them harm. This is another ethical concern related to research. Research should not cause harm to the participants, interviewees or the researcher (Bulmer, 2001). Studying diversity and experiences of difference can, however, lead the interview discussion to sensitive questions, such as harassment and discrimination, and lead the participants and the researcher to feel distressed. Indeed, some of the interviews could have been emotionally upsetting for the participants. In the course of the interview, some of the participants seemed to become aware of the discriminatory reality they were coping with, and that they had tried to rationalise. However, as one of these participants told me after the interview, he had appreciated the discussion and saw now things differently. Holloway and Jefferson (2000) suggest that it can be reassuring and therapeutic to talk about an upsetting situation in a safe context. In those cases in which participants discovered themselves as victims of discrimination during the interview, I told them about whom to contact if they wanted to get support in making a complaint or discussing discrimination at work. Sometimes, at the end of the interview I also told the participant that he/she should feel free to contact me if there were things he/she wanted to discuss further.

3.4. Conducting the interviews

The interviews were conducted in Finland between April 2004 and January 2007, and in France between February 2005 and June 2006. In all, 85 interviews were conducted.
Table 1  Number of interviews conducted per research setting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Diversity manager</th>
<th>Ethnic minority</th>
<th>Expert</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I will describe each of these datasets separately with regard to selection and access, the interviews, the organisation and participant profiles. Thereafter, I will describe the transcription and the analysis for all the datasets together.

3.5.  Researching managers in Finland

The interviewing phase of the study began with meeting diversity managers in Finland. Via the manager interviews, I wanted to study how managers working with diversity talk about diversity. The principal criterion of selection, therefore, was that the company should have a diversity engagement and/or concrete work to promote diversity. A second criterion of selection concerned the employment of ethnic minorities. As I planned to study diversity from both the angle of the managers and the ethnic minorities within the same organisation, in order for an organisation to be suitable for the study it needed to employ ethnic minorities.

3.5.1.  Selection and negotiating access

At the time of the first interviews, very few Finnish organisations communicated anything concerning diversity initiatives. As Meriläinen et al. (2009) report, in 2005 the majority of the twenty biggest Finnish companies did not discuss diversity management on their corporate websites at all. Six organisations mentioned diversity, but only Nokia provided more detailed information, such as information about diversity statements and the concrete measures taken to promote diversity.

Eventually, taking the scant communication regarding diversity into account, finding suitable organisations and negotiating access to them was very easy. A colleague had, in her own research, met a person responsible for diversity, who was very happy to talk about his experiences: a perfect first interviewee. The organisation he worked for, participated in in an EQUAL project called ETMO.

ETMO ran from 2001 to 2005, and involved 16 organisations in four cities. The project was headed by the Kiljava Institute, an educational organisation financed by the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions, and the JTO School of Management, the Confederation of Finnish Industries’ educational institute. In addition, the development partnership of the project involved six trade unions, the central organisations of workers and employers and employment authorities. The ETMO project was, however, more than a typical diversity engagement. The aim of the project was to work in a collaborative fashion and form working groups in each of the
organisations in which workers and managers from different parts of the organisations and with different backgrounds meet to discuss, plan and design working methods, materials, training and good practices to promote tolerance and multiculturalism in workplaces as well as improve the employability of immigrants \(^\text{10}\).

ETMO became my first source for suitable companies. Through their involvement in the project, all the companies worked for diversity in a way or in another. They also all employed ethnic minorities, as the project’s main focus was on multiculturalism and the “employability of immigrants”. In the first phase, I contacted people in charge of diversity in six of the participating organisations by e-mail. Four of them accepted meeting me just a couple of weeks later. The two others declined, referring to lack of time. I think that gaining access so easily was partly due to the novelty of the theme of diversity. Many of the Finnish managers were quite devoted to diversity work, and probably rather alone with this interest within the organisation. Having the possibility to discuss diversity from one’s own perspective was probably also seen as an opportunity to reflect on one’s own work with the help of another person, thus not just as a service given to a student.

At the very end of the interviewing for the entire study, I came back again to interview a few more managers in Finland. By then, in late 2006 and early 2007, diversity in the sphere of work had become a more frequently-discussed theme. I contacted two organisations, one public transportation company, and one multinational in the telecommunications sector. The increasing number of immigrant bus drivers had been discussed in the media, and in newspaper articles the company was portrayed as working for the integration of ethnic minorities into the working community. The company in the telecommunication sector clearly mentioned diversity work in their corporate communication materials. Both of the persons I contacted eventually agreed to meet me and participate in the study.

\subsection*{3.5.2. The organisations}

Five of the six studied organisations were active in sectors employing low-skill workers and had either experienced at the time of the interviews, or previously had, problems of labour force shortage at least partly due to problems of attracting candidates. To address this challenge they had started to recruit people from more “untraditional” pools. Three of the organisations had also trained unemployed people into their professions in collaboration with employment authorities. This has led to an increased diversity among their workforces mainly in terms of nationality. The sixth organisation differed from the five others in this respect. The typical employee was a professional with a university degree, and the organisation had had no work force shortage challenges due to problems of attractability.

The companies were active in different sectors. One company was a big organisation within the petrochemical industry, but the unit participating in the study was a sales unit. Therefore, both the manager and the employees participating in the study were active in this sector. One company was a big organisation in the retail sector, another company was active in the facility services sector, and another was a public transportation organisation. One company was a big industrial employer. All these companies, or units of the participating companies, employed people in low-pay and

\(^{10}\) The achievements of the ETMO project, see Sintonen, www.SAK.fi, http://www.sak.fi/suomi/ServiceServlet?type=attachment&source=SAKAttachments&id=143
low-skill jobs. Only one company mainly employed people in professional positions, and this was active in the telecommunications sector.

It is not straightforward and clear how one should define an organisation’s national identity and belonging. Such questions as ownership, where the revenues come from, where the company headquarters are located, where the company has its physical presence, where the most important part of the staff is located or what the clients perceive the organisation to be are ways of defining a company’s identity, but none of these questions give a comprehensive picture of what an organisation’s national belonging is. Many organisations today are international or multinational, from the outset, even though they are physically located in only one place. Ownership may change rapidly, while changing a corporate culture takes time. What matters here is mainly where the HR and diversity decisions and strategies are designed, and for what market.

Five of six of the organisations are Finnish, as by ownership and/or by historical identity. One organisation is a European multinational. However, the local versus global focus of these organisations do not follow the nationality of the company. The European multinational and its diversity work was very locally oriented and shaped, while one of the Finnish companies had a global approach.

3.5.3. The participants

The organisational position of the participants in Finland was rather similar in all cases, albeit they worked at different hierarchical levels. They all were HR professionals, and five out of the six participants were or had been involved in recruitment work in their current organisation. All manager participants had within their remit responsibility for their company’s diversity work, or part of it. Therefore, a common term to denote the manager participants is that of diversity manager.

Three of the participants were women, and three were men. In terms of age, they were rather homogeneous, and the majority of them were in their 40’s, one respondent being over 60. Half held a university degree, and half of them had a diploma from vocational training. Five were Finnish nationals, and one had another European nationality. The non-Finnish participant had been in Finland for less than a year, and did not speak Finnish.

3.5.4. The semi-structured interview

One important step before actually meeting the diversity managers I was to interview was the designing of an interview guide. In the first interviews, I had an interview guide with six main areas of questions:

- questions about the company
- questions about diversity management in Finland in general
- questions about diversity and equality in the company
- questions about the effects of diversity on the company's practices
- questions about ethnicity/difference in work
• questions about the participant’s own background

I planned the questions based on my own pre-understanding of diversity management which I had acquired through literature. The majority of the literature was non-Finnish. To complement this academic and non-Finnish literature, I went through material I found on the ETMO project and on the companies.

An interview consists of different types of questions: the main questions that direct the conversation, probes that are used to clarify the answers or to dig deeper into the theme, and follow-up questions relating the answers and their consequences to the main questions (Rubin & Rubin 1995). Particularly from a constructivist perspective, the interviewer will move between different types of questions, and remain open to how the interview progresses.

When conducting the first interviews, my approach was not as constructivist as it would become during the research process. I was also not an experienced interviewer. Both these influenced the way the interviews would unfold. I did not do as much probing as I could have done, and would do in later interviews, and I was not particularly sensitive to the interview situations, as much of my concentration and energy was directed back towards myself and at performing the role of the interviewer.

I met the diversity managers in Finland on their work premises. In four out of the six interviews, we sat in their office. With one manager, we sat in a meeting room, and with one manager in the company cafeteria. The location of the interview is not without meaning. Different locations provide different opportunities for confidentiality. In the cafeteria, a colleague of the participant or her boss could in principle at any moment come up to us or pass by and hear what we were talking about. This was in no way an ideal location. I said this to the participant before starting the interview, but she did not believe that she could arrange another space for us. Interviewing managers in their offices was in many ways much better. It was easier to guarantee confidentiality, and their office spoke about their professional identities as managers.

Before the interview, I recorded on a paper my thoughts and impressions about the interview. This could include the image I had got of the person when setting up the meeting. After the interview, I did the same thing, wrote down my thoughts, emotions, ideas and the impressions the interview had evoked in me.

The interviews with diversity managers in Finland lasted between 41 and 103 minutes.

3.6. Researching managers in France

Conducting the diversity manager interviews was my first entrance into the field in France. I started my fieldwork in France some months after the launching of the French diversity charter, and even though diversity was still a new trend at the time, it was a topic much discussed in the media, and it was possible to find information about companies engaging in diversity in both the press and through the Internet. Therefore, identifying potential companies for the study was somewhat easier than it had been in Finland, where I firstly had to rely on the ETMO programme.
3.6.1. Selection and negotiating access

As described before, my initial approach to interviewing was more structured and positivist than the approach I now have at the end of this study. Therefore, at the beginning of planning the interviews in France, I tried to ensure that the French diversity manager interviews were as similar as possible to the Finnish diversity manager interviews in terms of sector of activity of the company and the employee profiles. As a consequence of both the difficulties of gaining access to the ones I had identified as the “best corresponding” ones, and my gradual change of perspective, I started to perceive the criteria of selection in a less narrow way. From having in the beginning contacted only a narrow selection of companies that had a diversity engagement and I felt corresponded to the Finnish company profiles, I started contacting companies that had signed the diversity charter and/or were active in the field of diversity, for instance, in diversity seminars.

Gaining access to diversity managers in France was a much more complicated process than in Finland. In Finland, I gained immediate access to six out of the eight organisations I contacted, and did not need to contact the majority of the people I was interested in interviewing more than once by e-mail. In France, contacting managers was a longer process. I first sent an e-mail, and then called the person up. I did not always succeed in reaching the person by phone, and some of my contacting efforts never led to any sign from the contacted manager. Further, sometimes the person I was to interview transferred the interview to some other person within the organisation, without letting me know beforehand.

The initial period of trying to secure contacts within the companies was very challenging. I only received a few positive responses. Therefore, in addition to trying to gain access by directly contacting the person I was interested in interviewing, I also started to put effort into building up a network of contacts around these managers. I interviewed people I have called “experts”, people working in the field of diversity but not directly employed by a business organisation: consultants, researchers, project managers in higher education. The access to these “experts” was significantly facilitated by my academic contacts. A professor following my work called up a person having worked in designing the diversity charter and suggested to her that she should meet with me. I already had contacted her organisation, the Institut Montaigne, before, but without any success. Through my professor’s network, the meeting was immediately set up. Fellow doctoral students were also of great help. One student had worked for many years at a higher education institute working for diversity and could arrange a meeting for me with their HR manager and the person in charge of their diversity programme. Through these contacts, and being able to demonstrate to people during the following stages that I knew people within the field, helped in opening new doors.

The final selection criterion for the manager participants in this study was an engagement in diversity management. All in all, I interviewed 17 managers in 13 companies. Of these companies, 11 had signed the diversity charter. The two companies that had not signed the charter were foreign MNCs (multinational corporations) with a longer history of diversity management. Their diversity management programmes were mainly designed as global programmes at their headquarters.

In France, I conducted many more interviews with diversity managers than I did in Finland. Access was, curiously, a reason for this. As I wanted to interview ethnic minorities in the same organisations as the managers, and as the majority of the managers could not provide me with the permission to meet, or contacts with, ethnic
minorities in their companies, I increased the number of managers I met. As will be seen later on in this chapter, ultimately not all ethnic minority participants were accessed through the managers’ contacts.

3.6.2. The organisations

What characterises all of the participating organisations is that they are large in terms of number of employees. On average, the companies employed 25,800 persons in France, ranging from 500 to 135,000. Only one of the companies employed less than 1000 employees in France. Worldwide, the MNCs employed between 20,000 and 210,000 persons.

Most of the companies were multinational corporations, with their headquarters in France. Three companies were foreign MNCs, three companies were local companies, and the remaining seven organisations were French MNCs. The diversity programme was not, however, always defined by the type of national origin. Some foreign MNCs had very locally developed diversity plans, whereas some French MNCs imported the diversity work they had developed in another country.

The organisations were active in varying sectors: Automotive industry (1), Consulting (1), Energy (1), High-Tech (1), Media (1), Petrochemical industry (3), Public Transport (1), Recruitment (2), Retail (1), and Tourism (1). The sector of activity can be decisive in how and why diversity issues are taken up on the company agendas; however, my aim was not to highlight the different organisational contexts where diversity was managed. What united all the companies was that they were big, important employers both nationally and internationally.

3.6.3. The participants

The professional profiles of the participants vary to some extent, mainly in terms of hierarchy. Five were directors, five managers, and six were either professionals or assistants. Their professional area was often related to HR, but not all managers in France held an HR-related position. In some of the French companies, diversity management fell under the responsibility of a social relations manager, public policies manager or even a sustainability manager.

Half of the participants were female, and half male. The age spread went from 25-60, the majority being between 45-55 years old. Ethnically, there was very little difference between the participants. Fifteen of them were white western European, and only one was black. In terms of nationality, two were foreign citizens: one European and one African.

The professional and educational backgrounds of the participants for the most part resembled each other, but, on the other hand, they also include some big differences. Even though many of the participants had a traditional business and HR background, some came from outside the business world, such as from social activism. Many held a university degree, but a few participants had no formal higher education at all.
3.6.4. The semi-structured interview

When planning for my first diversity manager interview in France, I went back to my interview guide used with managers in Finland. I used the Finnish interview guide as a basis, and in the first interviews with managers made few modifications. The themes were the same as with the Finnish managers: questions about the company, about diversity management in France in general, questions about diversity and equality in the company, effects of diversity on the company’s practices, questions about ethnicity and difference in work, and questions about the participant’s own background. After the first interviews, I shifted the order of questions, and started to be less structured. Instead of asking the participant about the company at the beginning of the interview, I asked about the company at the end, if time was left. When I did not ask about the company at all, most of the information was available on the company’s web pages.

The interviews with the managers in France were not as standardised as the first interviews in Finland, and were affected by my increased experience of interviewing (in the same period of conducting the interviews in France for my Ph.D., I interviewed about 100 persons with very different profiles in relation to a research project on immigration history)\(^{11}\). With time, I became more confident as an interviewer. This enabled me to focus more on the interviewee and adapt my language and my questions to the person I was talking with. Also, where I in the first stages of interviewing prepared by focusing on the interview guide, I instead began focusing more on going through information about the company, and, where possible, the person I was going to meet. Both my increased confidence, and the fact that I often had a quite good picture of the company and its diversity engagement prior to the interview, allowed me to be more empathetic, prompt more and try to create an engaged and positive atmosphere.

The interviews with the diversity managers took place in either their offices, or in a meeting room on the company premises. In most cases, a secretary came down to the reception to meet me, and walked me to the manager I was to meet. However, the person I met in the company was not always the one I thought I was going to meet. Sometimes, the person I had scheduled a meeting with had transferred the meeting onto another person, and on other occasions I met with two people while I had organised a meeting with one person only. In this sense, the interviews with the managers in France were less predictable.

The interviews with the French diversity managers lasted between one and two hours.

3.7. Researching minorities in Finland

The interviews with ethnic minority employees in Finland formed the second empirical research setting I entered. I interviewed nineteen ethnic minority employees during spring and summer 2004. The last six ethnic minority interviews in Finland were conducted in December 2006. The interviews with the ethnic minority employees in Finland took place very shortly after my initial contact with the employing

\(^{11}\) This research project focused on potential visitors’ perceptions of French immigration and immigration history of the then not yet inaugurated Cité National de l’Histoire de l’Immigration. The research is published in: Poli Alexandra, Louvrier Jonna & Wieviorka Michel (2007): La cité nationale de l’histoire de l’immigration, Quels publics?, Hommes et Migrations, October. The project, while totally independent of my Ph.D work, was highly instructive regarding questions such as ethnic relations and minority questions in France.
organisation, and in each organisation I had interviewed the diversity manager a very short time before the interviews with the ethnic minority employees.

3.7.1. Selection and negotiating access

There were two selection criteria for the ethnic minority employee participants: that they belonged to an ethnic minority, and that they were employed by one of the diversity-promoting organisations included in the Finnish diversity manager sample.

Belonging or not to an ethnic minority is not a straightforward question, and was not something that I could easily determine and control for prior to an interview. The contacts with the ethnic minority employees in Finland were all provided to me by a manager I had interviewed in the company's diversity management. Therefore, the belonging to an ethnic minority was in fact determined by the manager participant. However, all of the minority workers eventually also identified themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority in Finland.

Access to the minority employees was very easy and quick. All the managers I asked for contacts with their ethnic minority employees were positive about my request and provided me with a list of persons and contact information within a few days of the interview. In one case, the manager even scheduled meetings for me with their employees on the company premises during the employees' working hours.

The negotiation of access to the ethnic minority employees in Finland could be seen as consisting of two phases: the agreement of the managers to provide the needed contact information, and an acceptance on the side of the minority worker to participate in the study. When the interview was scheduled and organised by the manager directly, the second phase of access took place once meeting the minority employees and consisted in gaining their will to participate as interviewees. All of the minority employees that I had been given contact with agreed to participate, but a few participants were hesitant once in the interview situation. Whether it was the interview situation or the participation altogether that they did not feel comfortable with remained unclear. I did stress the fact that there was no obligation for them to participate, and that I was conducting a totally independent study that their employer did not have access to. Two of the participants preferred me not to tape record our discussion.

3.7.2. The organisations

The ethnic minority participants worked in the following tasks: sales (2 organisations), cleaning (1 organisation), and bus driving (1 organisation). The colleagues of ethnic minority employees working in sales were most often Finns. Cleaners' and bus drivers' colleagues most often were of a non-Finnish origin. In these organisations, approximately half of the workforce were of non-Finnish origin.

The work conditions of the participants were in most respects poor. Their working hours were often irregular, and their work shifts involved working during the night, late in the evening or very early in the morning. At the beginning of their employment, many participants had to, or even still had to, put up with constraining conditions. Workers of a supermarket chain were initially not directly employed by the company, but the minority workers had to form co-operatives through which the company hired employees when needed. Thereby, employment security was significantly weaker than
for workers directly employed by the company. New bus drivers have to put up with especially difficult work schedules. They were not assigned to a specific bus line, but worked only on peak-hours. That meant that they worked half of their shift in the morning, then had several hours’ break, and then again worked half of their shift in the evening. Some of the participants on such contracts I met lived over an hour away from the bus depot, and thus had no real opportunity to go home during the ‘pause’.

3.7.3. The participants

While there was considerable variation and difference between the different participants in the Finnish sample, two aspects linked them all. They all had moved to Finland, and they all worked at low-skill tasks. While the very majority of them were identified by the dominant population as being non-Finns, some physically resembled the dominant population and had good language skills to the point that people had sometimes difficulties in placing them. This resemblance provided them with the possibility of playing with their difference, and be both insiders and outsiders.

The participants’ motives and routes by which they had come to Finland were complex and varying. Some of them had arrived as refugees. Others had come to Finland because of marriage. Some were in the country on a short-term job visa, others had a student visa. Some had returned to their roots, for instance to a parent’s home country. In some of these cases, the participants were not distinguished from Finns by the Finnish authorities as they held Finnish and/or double nationality. While they all shared an immigrant identity, the way migration authorities defined their status in Finland put different immigrants in very different positions and may have had important consequences regarding the individual’s relation to work (see Himanen & Könönen, 2010). The differing positions on the labour market based on the relation to the Finnish authorities can affect not only one’s approach to work, but the workplace dynamics with colleagues and managers. Most of the participants were in relatively permanent situations. They had been in Finland long enough to have a permanent residence permit; some were in the process of applying for citizenship. But some were more precarious in their rights to reside in Finland, having recently arrived as a refugee, or having the right to stay until the end of their studies. Often a precarious residence status is coupled with demonstrating great flexibility and need to show being exemplary.

The age-spread of the respondents was from 20 to 55. Those working in sales or as bus drivers all spoke Finnish, and preferred to use Finnish as the interview language. Among the cleaners, only one participant preferred to speak Finnish, all the other cleaners preferred to speak in English. The educational background of the respondents also varied. The majority had a diploma from a vocational institution providing training in an area often not related to the profession they practised. Eight of the participants had studied at university; many of them, however, had terminated their studies before graduating because of moving to Finland, or were at the moment completing their studies. Four of the participants had not studied after high school.

The participants came from 14 different countries, with the biggest group, six of the participants, from Russia. Other countries were Bosnia (4), Vietnam (2), Philippines (2), Somalia (1), Lebanon (1), Ghana (1), Egypt (1), Serbia (1), Turkey (1), Peru (1), Bulgaria (1), Estonia (1) and Ethiopia (1).
3.7.4. The semi-structured interview

The first interview guides I planned for minority workers were much more detailed than those I used at the end of the interviewing, and included main questions, the potential follow-up questions and possible prompts. The main themes and the focus of the interview guides did not, however, change much. The interviews went through the following sections:

- the typical work day
- personal history and identity in work
- diversity in work
- discrimination and racism
- formal aspects of work relationship

While doing the very first interviews with minority workers, I still conceptualised the main themes of my research as diversity management and ethnic discrimination. My focus thus tended to be on the negative consequences of difference. As it very soon became clear to me that the ethnic minority workers did not perceive, or name, their experiences as ones of discrimination, and that difference was perceived in a much more complex manner, my questions became less narrowly focused and less directive.

The interviews were most often conducted on the work premises of the participants, in a meeting room, in a personnel coffee room or in the storage-room. Also, some of the interviews were conducted outside the participant’s workplace, in a café or a bar. Many of the interviews conducted at the participant’s workplace did not seem to be importantly affected by the fact that colleagues were not far away, and that the interview sometimes was done in the middle of the person’s shift. However, some of the interviews conducted on the work premises could have benefited from more distance vis-à-vis their work. It did not happen often, but it could happen, that a colleague of the participant peeked into the coffee room while we were doing the interview, and for participants with particularly negative experiences talking in such an environment could have been difficult. Furthermore, interviews conducted outside the workplace, in a café or a bar, lasted longer. However, the taping quality was often much poorer in the interviews done in cafés, which led to more difficult transcription work. The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours.

3.8. Researching minorities in France

The interviews with minorities in France made up the last research setting of the study. I began interviewing ethnic minorities in spring 2006, and conducted the last interview with an ethnic minority employee in mid-summer 2006.

3.8.1. Selection and negotiating access

The selection criteria of ethnic minority employees in France followed the same logic as in Finland: the participants had to work for a diversity-promoting organisation, and belong to an ethnic minority. As identifying people based on ethnic criteria is contested
in France, it was very difficult to find managers who would agree to provide contact with ethnic minority employees. Some managers accepted at first, but later withdrew, explaining their decision not to help in different ways, as becomes clear in the e-mails I received from some of the manager participants here below:

Mail 1:

Jonna,

I have a very hard time pointing « visible minorities » to you without being at unease. In fact, as I explained to you, our policy is entirely based on integration and we do absolutely not take diversity of origin/race into account in our HR policies.

Identifying someone with the term “visible minority” we would take the risk of offending certain persons, and in any case that is not something we do.

Mail 2:

Concerning your request of interviews I will not hide our embarrassment: the persons of foreign origin that join us do not like to be considered as such – “stigmatized” – especially in the context of political and media debates on minorities.

Gaining access to minorities in France was thus very challenging. Initially I relied on the same method as in Finland. After having interviewed the person responsible for diversity, I would ask them whether I also could meet with a few of their employees to gain an insight into the employees’ experiences of diversity. A few managers agreed to help. However, as seen above, some of them withdrew. Others provided me with contacts that did not correspond to any criteria of ethnic minority. In one organisation, I was provided contact with an HR assistant working with diversity management. In another organisation, I was given the contact details of a trainee without education, a young male belonging to the dominant population. In some cases, I did interview the persons I was provided contact with, such as the HR assistant working with diversity management. In other cases, I tried to gain access through other channels. Also, negotiation of access to minority employees eventually succeeded in one organisation, and finally I gained access to several employees and workers.

As access proved so difficult, and as I already had increased the number of manager interviews, hoping in this way to increase the chances of meeting a helpful manager in the process, I multiplied the ways in which I tried to gain access. I participated in a big trade union’s diversity and discrimination working group, observing the meetings and building contacts with the participants, all working for one of the big companies in which I already had interviewed management. Through these trade union contacts, I managed to gain access to four ethnic minority workers.

I also relied on my other existing networks. I posted an e-mail describing the type of interviewees I was looking for on my university’s mailing list. Through fellow doctoral students’ and friends’ contacts I managed to gain access to, and interview, one person working for a company where I already had interviewed the diversity manager.

The entire process of negotiation of access was overall very complex, time-consuming and messy. In the end, I tried to use all opportunities available, and was even ready to not be so strict concerning my criteria of the persons having to be employed by a diversity-promoting organisation. While conducting interviews for another research project I, for instance, happened to come to interview a bus driver, a white male with no other origins than French. I asked him whether he would agree to meet me for my thesis too, and help me meet with his ethnic minority colleagues. He agreed to meet me
and tell me about his work community, but I had to end the contact after this meeting as he started to make advances on me. I also interviewed a friend and fellow doctoral students’ and friends’ friends with immigrant backgrounds. All in all, I interviewed five persons fulfilling the ethnic minority criteria, but not fulfilling the criteria of being employed in a diversity-promoting organisation. I also interviewed two minority students of the higher education institute that promoted diversity among their students, and where I had interviewed the HR manager and the person responsible for their diversity programme. As I finally did manage to get sufficient interviews with persons fulfilling the criteria of both ethnicity and work in a diversity promoting organisation, I did not include these interviews in the analysis.

In the one organisation where access was provided through management, I met sixteen people: managers and bus drivers of a public transport company. Through the manager responsible for diversity, I gained access to two managerial-level employees. Through these employees, I further gained access to four more managers.

### 3.8.2. Organisations

The ethnic minority employees that did work for a diversity promoting organisation, and thus were included in the final analysis, worked for four different organisations. One organisation is active within the petrochemical industry, but the participant works within the sales sector. One organisation is a public transport company, where the participants work as managers within engineering or administration, or as bus drivers. One organisation is a big international consulting company, where the participant works as a director of a business unit. The fourth organisation is active within the tourism and leisure sector; in this organisation the participants worked as cleaners or administrators in a hotel.

The working conditions of the different participants varied to a very large extent. Some of the participants are in economically favourable positions and have high status jobs where they have the possibility to influence their work, make independent decisions and plan their own days. Others, such as the cleaners or the bus drivers, have poor working conditions. They have difficult working hours, having to work late at night or very early in the morning, and have to put up with changing shifts. They also do not always know even a few days in advance whether they will be working, and at what time of the day.

The ethnic composition of the work places the participants work in also differ considerably. The ethnic minority managerial-level employees are in a minority in their area, whilst ethnic minority cleaners are in a minority within the entire organisation, but in a clear majority in the specific task of cleaning. Ethnic minority bus drivers are in a minority within the organisation, and even within the community of bus drivers working at the same bus depot, but they belong to the majority when looking at the composition of the population they transport.

### 3.8.3. Participants

The age range of the participants was from 24 to 56, the majority being between 30 and 40 years old. The vast majority of the participants had French nationality; many of them were children of immigrants. The ones with French nationality had different ethnic origins: 5 had North-African origins, 2 had origins in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2 in
Asia, 2 in Eastern Europe and 1 in the Middle East. Two participants were from the French Antilles, and had thus also always been French citizens. Six of the participants had foreign nationalities at the time of the interview, and were Tunisian, Iranian, Lebanese, Algerian or Senegalese.

All the participants had excellent French language skills, and there was nothing that could have revealed who was a French citizen and who was not. Among the managerial level employees, two had a diploma from vocational training, and six had different university degrees. One participant held a doctorate. Among the worker-level employees, one participant had a university degree, a few had vocational training, and the highest education for many was high school, or a part of it. Two respondents had not attended even high school.

The group of ethnic minority participants in France was therefore characterised by both unity and variation. All the participants had very good language skills, and had very good knowledge about French culture. Many of them had lived in France for a very long time, and even those that had immigrated more recently shared a long history with France – for instance through relatives who had lived in France from a long time back. However, the class positions and the social capital the participants held varied a lot. Where the ethnic minorities in Finland all worked in very similar type of positions, the ethnic minority employees in France lived highly different realities depending on their class position.

3.8.4. The semi-structured interview

The interviews with the ethnic minority employees in France were among the last interviews I conducted. At the time that I made the first ethnic minority interview in France I thus already had more experience of interviewing and did not need to spend as much energy on my own performance, but could instead focus on listening, being sensitive to non-verbal communication, and building trust and rapport.

The interviews with the ethnic minority employees in France followed the same themes as the interviews with ethnic minority employees in Finland. However, I was not strict on the order of the themes we discussed. Thus, even though all the interviews I conducted for this thesis fall under the category of semi-structured interview, the interviews had different degrees of structuring.

The ethnic minority employees in France were fantastic, even though emotionally tough, to interview. The interviews were intense. They lasted between one hour and three hours, the typical duration being approximately one-and-a-half hours. The participants were open, ready to share their own experiences and their opinions, also about topics at a general level. All of the ethnic minority participants in France, for instance, had opinions about diversity management and were prepared to share them, even though only a few of them had ever heard about diversity management prior to the interview. This was a difference compared to the ethnic minority interviews in Finland, where very few participants were ready to express any opinion about diversity management, and very rarely talked about anything else than their own personal experiences.

The stories the ethnic minority participants told were, however, very often distressing. The stories of the ethnic minority participants in Finland were not positive either, but my own involvement was then more distanced. In France, I was more empathetic, lived
through the stories they told with the participants. Writing down notes immediately after the interviews was then very helpful, and a way to distance and detach myself from the reality the interview had taken me to.

The interviews were conducted on the participants’ work premises. The interviews with the managerial-level employees took place most often in their offices, behind shut doors, so that confidentiality was guaranteed. The participants who shared offices with someone organised a meeting room for us. One of the managerial level employee interviews was, however, conducted in the company cafeteria, outside on a terrace. This was the only interview where we could have been overheard.

The interviews with the bus drivers were conducted in a meeting room in the bus depot. I spent three full days at the bus depot, interviewing approximately 3 persons a day. The room we had access to was in a separate building, above a garage. It was a quiet and calm space for discussion. Spending time at the bus depot, before and between the interviews, was very interesting. It gave me the chance to discuss with many other bus drivers than those I interviewed and observe the daily life of the depot. Additionally, travelling to the depot, through the Parisian suburbs, was instructive and made it easier for me to relate to the experiences of the bus drivers.

The interviews with the hotel workers were conducted in different locations. One interview was conducted in the office of the participant, where we were not disturbed and could talk in a confidential manner. One interview was conducted in a café. Two of the participants were interviewed in the cleaners’ office, in the basement of a hotel. There, the door could not be closed, and people passed by. In particular, the hotel manager passed by as he had heard that someone was interviewing the cleaners. This however did not seem to intimidate the participants at all, they spoke very directly and expressed critical opinions about the hotel management and difference in work.

3.9. Transcription

All diversity manager interviews and all but two ethnic minority interviews were tape-recorded. These two interviews were the ones conducted with the minority participants in Finland who felt uncomfortable with the tape recording. In these cases, notes were taken during and after the interviews.

The tape-recorded interviews, with managers and ethnic minorities, were with the exception of one, fully transcribed. The one not transcribed was done with two participants at the same time, and the many overlaps made it difficult to have a readable transcript, thus the analysis was made by listening and taking notes. I decided not to transcribe the expert interviews and only used these as background information to the context.

The following system of transcribing was followed:

...                   pause (if more than 5 seconds long seconds marked in brackets after the dots)

=                   the speaker continues immediately after the previous speaker, marks the end of the first speaker and the beginning of the second speaker
the speaker speaks simultaneously with the previous speaker, marks where the second speaker starts

(comment on other than verbal communication, intonations and attitudes) Underlining marks the part of the text where the speaker’s voice alters, type of voice use marked in brackets

(all talk and happenings not directly related to the interview (knocks on the door, telephone rings etc.)

[incomprehensible 03 : 15] Incomprehensible utterances, followed by exact stage in the recording, minutes: seconds.

The transcriptions were made by me and professional transcribers. I did a total of 20 transcriptions. The remaining transcriptions were done by professional transcribers. However, the transcriptions done by the professional transcribers concerning the French interviews were of so poor quality that most of them had to be controlled and corrected, which in terms of effort and time did not differ much from doing the transcriptions from scratch.

The analysis was done on the non-translated transcriptions. The citations in this final text are translations from these transcriptions. Not all the above symbols of transcription were retained in this process, as these could not be accurately used in a translated version.

3.10. Analysis

There are no straightforward or standard rules to follow when analysing qualitative interviews with a discursive approach; indeed, it ought be argued that these could even be counterproductive (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). There is no recipe to follow as Potter and Wetherell (1987) so accurately express it. According to them, it is rather like riding a bicycle: one knows how to do it once one is capable of it, but expressing in detail how to do so is more difficult. Neither is there unanimity where analysis starts and ends. Is the selection of data, transcription and coding of the material already a part of analysis, and what about the writing process: does analysis still take place when writing about the findings? Whichever position one takes on these questions, there are nonetheless some aspects that tend to characterise all discursive analyses of interview data: analysis is a long and iterative process, where the researcher reads and re-reads the transcripts to find patterns, similarities, differences, contradictions and absences.

This was very much what characterised the analysis of the data in this study, too. The analysis process was long, “messy” in the sense that I did not follow a plan, and I did not know how to do it before the analysis; the only way was to try, fail, learn and re-try. The process included a significant amount of reading, re-reading, relying on intuition and going back and forth between different levels – between a specific section of an interview and the interview as a whole, and between an individual interview, a specific set of interviews and the context.

I believe that analysis already takes place before the interpretation of the interview data, working on the context chapters on Finland and France for this study were, for instance, in my view integral and very important parts for analysis. Also, writing the
results of a study cannot be detached from analysis. Writing the results is a process of selection and prioritising. The researcher has to choose which findings are the most relevant, which findings need to be written about, and which findings can and should not be reported about. The analysis I describe in this chapter is the analysis of the interview data from the four different research settings. While being interesting parts of the research, I have decided not to describe the analytical work involved in writing the context chapters, or the writing process in general, in this book.

3.10.1. Starting with NVivo

Once the interviews were transcribed, I coded each dataset separately with the help of the computer software NVivo. My assumption was that by using NVivo it would be easier to handle the material, organise the themes and concretely have the data in order. I believed that using NVivo would be a way to organise the material into more manageable chunks. Once I had coded the material for a dataset, I went through each theme separately, and identified the patterns of similarity and difference within them.

For three of the four datasets, I wrote first versions of the empirical chapters based on this stage of analysis. I found many themes very interesting and felt that the data in itself was rich and valuable. Once these three empirical chapters were written, however, I felt disappointed, and realised I had made the typical error Antaki and colleagues (2003) call under-analysis through summary. I had described the ways in which the participants talked about different issues: how they argued for diversity or how they described diversity management practices. But all I did was report their ways of talking, and this was not proper analysis. It did not reveal anything about the effects of their statements.

3.10.2. Continuing with paper and pencil

I thus went back to the interview transcripts, and back to re-reading. This time, I did not use NVivo, but chose to re-read and make notes with a paper and pencil approach. I coded the material once again, on paper, and drew mind-maps on each interview separately. Also, once I felt that I had sufficiently gone through the interviews for a dataset, I could draw mind-maps for specific questions arising from the interviews, or a summary mind-map of the material as a whole.

For diversity managers, I coded the material using the following codes: differences, diversity management (motivation, practice, definition, dimension) equality, discrimination, society, France/Finland, organisational culture, merit/competence, ethnicity and class. For the minority employees, the following codes were used: differences, differences in work, discrimination, merit/competence, diversity, diversity management, organisational culture, own identity. In addition to these common codes, some codes were useful for specific datasets. In France, for instance, the code suburb was useful, and in Finland passages about the characteristics of the dominant population were coded under the code of the Finn.

This phase of analysis was extremely interesting, inspiring and frustrating at same the time. I did not know exactly what I was doing. It involved relying substantially upon intuition, being open, and accepting that things felt very messy and disorganised at the start. But it presented a real advantage compared to the coding in NVivo. It was much easier for me to move between levels with notes on paper and mind-maps; it was easier
to see linkages, patterns and contradictions within specific interviews and within the dataset as a whole.

Where treating the material as specific themes in NVivo led to separating sections of interviews and combining specific questions together, working with mind-maps on paper allowed me to address several themes at a time. Most importantly, this allowed me to see how different themes were linked, and how different themes together participated in constructing versions of reality. This is what a discursive analysis should focus on: the consequences and effects of what is said (or not said) in the interview. As I in the first stage of analysis organised the material and then described it, in this phase I asked questions such as: “What does the way this participant talks about diversity practices tell us about the knowledges he or she constructs about difference, about the role of the organisation, about the views on society and/or about equality and discrimination?”

As analysing was a process of learning, the analysis of some datasets now seems more superficial and the analysis of other datasets more in-depth. Also, I chose not to analyse all the ethnic minority interviews conducted in France with the same level of detail. I focused on the managerial-level employees, and carried out a more summarising analysis concerning the worker-level employees. Where the analysis of the managerial-level employees looked into differences and contradictions within the interviews as a whole, I analysed the worker-level employee interviews with the aim of identifying the commonalities. Where the managerial-level employee analysis brought forth the different positions within the group, the worker-level employee analysis focused on finding the shared voice.

3.11. Evaluating discursive research

How can and should discursive research be evaluated? What can the criteria be, as the criteria I tried to maintain at the beginning of the research process – such as comparability and objectivity, or more generally validity, reliability and replicability – are not suitable measures for this type of an approach? Replicability, for instance, would imply that the reality studied does not change but stays fixed, and that the role of the researcher is unimportant in the research process. However, discursive research acknowledges the situatedness of research results, research results speak about a certain reality in a given time and space, and the researcher participates in the construction of the results to an important degree (Taylor, 2001a).

One criterion for evaluating discursive research is thus the acknowledgment of the reflexive nature of research and the role of the researcher. The identity of the researcher is relevant at several stages of the process: the selection of the topic, the collection of data, the interpretation of data and analysis and the writing up of the study (Taylor, 2001a). I have discussed my role, and the way I acted and the way I felt that I was seen by the participants in the interview situations. What I still have not talked about is my relation to the topic in general, which affects the analysis and the writing-up.

The selection of a research topic in a Ph.D. project often reflects the personal history of the researcher. At the beginning, I was not aware of my more personal motivations for studying diversity and difference in work, but during the process I have come to identify many linkages between my own history and the topic. I am a bilingual Finn, speaking Swedish and Finnish as my mother tongues. Reconciling the Finnish and the
Swedish-speaking identities has not always been easy for me. My different linguistic identities have positioned me in different ways in different situations, and have been used by me and others as resources or as motives for exclusion. In addition to my bilingual background, I have grown up in contexts of cultural difference, and experienced how different contexts allow for difference to be lived in different ways. As a pre-teenager I lived in Italy for two years. During the first year, I attended an international school, where the majority of the pupils had different nationalities and cultural backgrounds. The second year I attended a public Italian school, where I and my little brother were the only foreigners. Where the experience of difference in the international school was very positive – we shared a lot and were very united despite all the differences, the all-Italian school was a totally different context. I was included and made a lot of friends, but I always remained different, strange in my blondness. Where I in the international school was not seen through my nationality or my physical appearance, but as an individual, I never got rid of my nationality and hair colour in the Italian school.

A personal interest towards a topic would traditionally be seen as a source of bias. However, in discursive analysis it can be regarded as a resource, and as a position to be acknowledged (Taylor 2001b). I believe that my own lived experience of cultural difference was an underlying motive for me to focus on ethnic minorities. I also believe that my experience was a resource for me in both conducting the interviews, and in the analysis of the data. The insider status of the researcher is indeed sometimes used as an argument for the quality of the interpretation of the interview data, which again is one criterion for evaluating discursive research (Taylor, 2001b). However, I do not suggest that my background necessarily leads to better interpretations than a person with less, or another type of, lived experience of cultural differences. But my interpretations certainly have to be seen in relation to my own background and experiences.

Overall, the criteria for evaluation of discursive research can be divided into two main categories: general principles of good academic practice, and principles for discursive analysis (Taylor, 2001b).

One aspect of general good research is the practice of relating the research to previously published work. A good qualitative research does not re-invent the wheel, but acknowledges what already has been done. The study also needs to be coherent and persuasion built on argument, not on emotion. Data should thus not be let to speak for itself, as I in the first phase of analysis was at risk of doing. Data has to be analysed in a systematic way, and both the data and the process of analysis have to be rigorously presented to the readers, requirements that I have tried to fulfil in the previous sections of this chapter.

The quality of the interpretation that was mentioned above has been proposed as one criterion for specifically evaluating discursive research. In addition, discursive research has been evaluated on the following criteria: the quality of transcription, the relevance of the data and the project in relation to a social issue, the fruitfulness of the findings and usefulness of an analysis, either academically or in real life (Taylor, 2001b).

The relevance of this study can be examined at several levels. In the two previous chapters, the focus was on diversity management literature and research. The relevance of this study in relation to the academic diversity management literature will depend on the way in which the findings can contribute to complementing or questioning this literature. Often, academic research is indeed evaluated almost solely on this level. However, the relevance of the study should also be reflected on in relation to the reality
outside academia. There are different views on how discursive research can accomplish effects outside academia. For some, the mere conduct of a research project can be seen as an intervention with at least indirect effects on the reality studied. Others see that discursive studies should aim at producing explicit recommendations of changed practices (Taylor, 2001b).

In the next chapters, the realities of the studied contexts will be described, and the relevance or irrelevance of reflecting over diversity and difference in work contexts in these settings can be more fruitfully considered. My belief is that making dominant ways of constructing knowledge about diversity and differences in the different contexts visible will enable change, and create possibilities for new knowledges to emerge, with new positions and positive identities.

3.12. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have walked the reader through the research process, from the beginning of choosing the topic, through the selection of participants and conducting of interviews to the transcription and analysis. It is not an easy task to report or describe in detail all the false starts, the new insights and changes in perspective that have taken place during the research process. However, I have sought to be as open about, and honest to, the process in the description. To conclude, one can say that the journey of this research has been equally learning about the research process itself, as it is has been learning about and discovering the subject area. From the next chapter on, the focus turns to the subject area.
4 FINLAND, DIVERSITY, DIFFERENCE AND WORK

While writing this book, a Country Brand Delegation consisting of a number of eminent personalities strategically planned and constructed what Finland is and should be. The flashy country brand report, published in November 2010, set out a number of missions and tasks for citizens, school pupils, researchers and many others, of developing Finland and showing the rest of the world how great Finns are. A country brand report depicting the future of a country is, just like writing history about a country’s past, a tool in constructing the self-images of a people. The focus of this chapter is on the Finnish context of diversity. Here, the self-images of Finns, and the related images of non-Finns shape the way diversity and differences come to be understood. Once the historical background is set, the look turns to how diversity and ethnic difference today structure Finnish work life and minorities' positions in it.

This chapter starts by presenting the way Finland and Finns have been described in many historical and sociological writings. As will be seen, in many of these writings Finland has often been described as a culturally homogeneous country. At the same time, Finns have often been constructed as inexperienced with regard to differences, even with the heterogeneity among the population, such as regional and linguistic differences, that has existed. The Finns have often been described in rather essentialised ways. The description of Finns in this chapter is my interpretation of these writings. I do not wish to suggest that Finns should be seen in this essentialised way, but describe the common way of talking about Finns in much research literature, the media and in everyday discussions. Once the historical background concerning Finland and Finns is outlined, the overview turns to how diversity and ethnic difference today structure Finnish work life and minorities' positions in it.

4.1. Finland constructed

Even if Finland as a state has existed for less than 100 years, the sense of Finnishness can be traced to the 18th century (see e.g. Fewster, 2006; Manninen, 2000). Finland was a part of Sweden until 1809, and thereafter an autonomous region of Russia till 1917. The first meanings of Finland and the Finnish people grew in these conditions, while under the rule of Sweden and Russia. Where Sweden, and afterwards Western Europe have functioned as the ideals the elite have striven towards, Russia has been the negative side to be rejected from oneself (Lehtonen, 2004b).

Finland’s national identity has traditionally been constructed around language, geographical location and nature, and ideas of a national character forged in a rudimentary living context. In the 19th century, the comparisons were especially made to Swedes, and focused on language differences. In the 20th century, the comparison

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12 However, my writing style in this chapter has a tendency to reproduce the essentialised view of Finns. This may in part be due to the influence of the literature I worked with for this chapter, and in part due to the research process. This chapter was among the first chapters written for this book, and my ontological/epistemological development was not as constructionist as it was when writing some of the other chapters.

13 Finland is a republic located in northern Europe and shares borders with Sweden, Norway and Russia. In 2009, Finland had a population of 5,326,314.

14 Terminology defining geo-political and cultural areas are not neutral or objective. The term Western Europe, predominantly used today, is a product of the Cold War era. It has been preceded by the terms Europe and Latin Christianitas. (Jordan, 2002)
has been made to a larger group, especially to Western Europe, and at the same time the focus has been shifted from language to the specificity of Finnish nature, compared to European urban culture (Peltonen, 1998, p. 28-29). Today, expertise in technology and the success of the Finnish educational system as well as the high educational level are elements of a more positive self-image (see, for instance, Mission for Finland..., 2010; Lehtonen, 2004c, p. 195).

The discussions around the meanings of Finland and those of being a Finn have been vivid since the 1990’s (see Alasuutari & Ruuska, 1998; Alasuutari & Ruuska, 1999; Gordon et al., 2002; Lehtonen et al., 2004; Kuortti et al., 2007). With the geo-political changes related to the end of the Soviet Union, and Finland’s accession to the European Union, the previous kind of Finnishness needed to be dismantled, and a new one constructed as old identity categories no longer functioned (Lehtonen, 2004a, p. 18, 26). Finland was finally becoming a legitimate part of Western Europe, for which it had until then been an inferior ‘Other’ and on the periphery. Membership of the European Union was seen as Finland opening to the rest of the world (Ruuska 1999, p.71), and as a real relief – “finally we can breathe more freely” 15 – commented a politician at the time of accession. Being European is still today something Finns have been found to aim for: feeling something lacking from the self, Europeans are valued – against which Finns depict themselves as inferior (Löytty, 2004c, p.222-224).

4.1.1. Self-images of Finns: a homogeneous, ordinary and self-deprecating population

Finland has for long been seen as a culturally homogeneous country. This understanding has been explained as stemming from linguistic and/or ethnic similarity, a common national character, or even the fact that Finland and Finns have for long lived in isolation from the rest of the world (Löytty, 2004a, p. 46). The strong national unity this construction enabled was needed in the wake of independence, civil war and in its defence in WW II. Internal differences were particularly challenging in the aftermath of the civil war in 1918. The pressure for unity and similarity was strong to the point that a more relaxed approach to differences emerged only in the 1960’s and onwards, when the nation no longer needed to signify a community of people with same opinions, and one will (Alapuro, 1999).

The construction of Finland as a homogeneous country has required that differences are masked or ignored, be it differences within the national population or influences from abroad. It hides the diversity of Finnish people: national minorities, geographical differences, political positions etc. For instance, linguistic differences between regions within the Finnish language have been deprecated, and people speaking dialects have been seen as conveying a “comic and stupid image” of themselves (Alasuutari, 1998, p.171).

The construction of Finland as a homogeneous entity has also implicitly presented multiculturalism as a new phenomenon, a non-Finnish feature. Despite its national ethnic minorities, Finland has been portrayed as a country which does not have experience of coexistence between different ethnic minorities (Forsander & Ekholm, 2001, p.84). The common way of presenting matters is to say that multiculturalism arrived with the increased immigration in the 1990’s. This leads one to think that multiculturalism is something new that Finland has to learn to grapple with. Finland is

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thus different from countries that have experience of immigration, and just has to mature in its multiculturalism to eventually become like other multicultural societies (Huttunen, Löytty & Rastas, 2005, p. 22). It is true that the immigration rate to Finland was very low between 1945 and 1990. However, Finland has always been multicultural, and immigration between the World Wars was extensive, especially after the Soviet Revolution. In this period, up to 100 000 persons from Russia immigrated to Finland, to stay or as a location of transition (Forsander 2002, 23). Both the homogeneity of the Finnish population as well as the scant immigration before the 1990’s are national myths (see, for instance, Lepola 2000, p. 1999; Leitzinger 2008). Finland has always had national minorities: people have both immigrated to and emigrated from Finland. Furthermore, regional differences exist, and the increased internal migration of the 1960’s made people from different parts of the country live and work together in urbanising centres.

The common culture constructed has wiped out all these differences. The pressure for similarity has been seen as so strong that not everyone living in Finland or even all Finns can become part of the national identity. It has also made becoming a Finn when of foreign origin very difficult if not impossible (Lepola, 2000). Even mere discussion and reflection over multiculturalism has been perceived as difficult (Huttunen et al. 2005).

One way to uphold the image of a homogeneous people is to stress being just ordinary. Being ‘ordinary’ has been said to be an important part of the national project, and to function as a quality control mechanism (Löytty, 2004a, p. 52). It can be seen as a strategic construct: being ordinary is not standing out, masking differences, fitting into the homogeneous. The consequence of the requirement of being ordinary is a weak tolerance for differences. In a study on teenagers’ ways of making sense of themselves, normality and ordinariness were indeed central (Tolonen, 2002).

In addition to being a homogeneous ordinary people, Finns have been constructed in a self-deprecating way. In comparisons to Swedes and Europeans, Finns have obtained the self-image of a deficient forestry peasant people, uncivilised and undeveloped. The collective understanding also involves ideas of Finns as incapable of conversing, without any social skills. The reasons for these images have been seen as stemming from language, biology and cultural heritage (Apo, 1998, p.85-86).

The elites that defined the people were themselves different from the people, and this may be one cause for the deprecation. The nation-constructing elite saw that they had to form the ordinary Finns. The deprecating self-image may reveal something about the elites’ understanding, and the uneasy relationship between the rulers and the people (Apo, 1998, p.86; Alasuutari, 1998, p.165).

Another long-lived belief has been that the Finnish language inevitably constructs a poor, intellectually undeveloped people. It has been seriously claimed that the Finnish language is characterised by a “poor semiosphere”, and, as with other Nordic countries, Finland has a low-context culture “where messages do not need to be interpreted in depth” (Anttila 1993, cited in Löytty, 2004b, p. 112). In addition to the role of language in these claims, language has been problematic in other ways. Firstly, national identity was primarily constructed around language, but many important texts for the nationalistic project, such as the national hymn, were initially written in Swedish. Also, due to the difference in language compared to many other Indo-European languages, Finns were perceived as belonging to another race, “Mongols in a wrong place”, which
were labelled as inferior to Europeans both by their mental abilities and their physical appearance (Ruuska, 2004, 209-211).

In parallel to this negative talk that Finns maintain about themselves, there are other, more positive, discourses (Alasuutari, 1998, p. 164). The high level of education has been drawn on for a more positive image, and has lately been strengthened by the positive results in the PISA\textsuperscript{16} surveys. The great successes in the PISA surveys have been approached with pride, not corresponding to the stereotypical picture of Finns, and there have been plans to ‘productify’ the Finnish school system: to start selling and exporting it to other countries. In the 1980’s, side by side with the negative self-understanding, a common saying was that “To be born in Finland is like winning the lottery”. However, despite these positive discourses, the presentation of Finnish culture in a negative manner still lives on strongly (Ruuska, 2004, p.218).

Thus, being a Finn can be described as being ordinary and modest. As a Finn, one should not be proud of oneself, or boast about one’s achievements. Rather, one should minimise oneself, and exaggerate one’s negative sides. Exaggerating negative sides is perceived as being more honest and truthful, than telling others about one’s positive sides (Keltikangas-Järvinen 1996, cited in Lehtonen 2004b). Differences should, if not masked, at least not be put forward.

The relationship of Finns’ to racism is conditioned by this history and the self-image of having no experience of multiculturalism and differences. The assumption is that without experiences of multiculturalism Finns do not have any experience of racism either. Lentin (2004) has shown how this is equally the case of Ireland, where the country also has been seen as a homogeneous country. In Norway, the “innocent self-image” has also been seen as making it difficult to handle racism (Gullestad, 2004).

4.2. Images of ‘Others’

Finland is not a colonial or previously colonial country, but had during the colonial era only rare direct connections to colonised parts of the world. The most important encounters were undertaken by religious missionaries, whose missionary work took them principally to Africa. Their writings, in newspapers and memoirs, provided an important source of knowledge about the Africans for the Finnish population. Kaartinen (2004) and Löytty (2006) have studied these materials and have found that while the material reproduced the dominant Western European colonial understanding of Africans, it also differed from the colonisers’ descriptions. Löytty explains that missionaries also had a loving and admiring approach to the populations they were devoted to. However, these positive descriptions were constructed against the general negative understandings of Africans.

Some of the ‘Others’ against whom Finns have constructed their sense of self were thus not physically present but represented in textual and visual materials, such as newspapers, school books and commercials. In these, Western colonial knowledge about the ‘Others’ were current, and are still reproduced today. For instance, Rossi (2009) has studied Finnish TV commercials and has shown how blacks are exoticized, described as primitive against a modern picture of the technologically competent Finn.

\textsuperscript{16} “PISA is an international study that was launched by the OECD in 1997. It aims to evaluate education systems worldwide every three years by assessing 15-year-olds’ competencies in the key subjects: reading, mathematics and science. To date, over 70 countries and economies have participated in PISA.” www.oecd.org/pisa, accessed 04.05.2013.
Even though some products have had to change name or labels as perceived as racist, other commercial messages still continue to reproduce unequal power relations through colonial images and understandings of the ‘Others’.

School books and educational material are in a particularly influential position in the creation of collective understandings, even though today commercial communication and popular media can have an at least as influential position as educational material. Paasi (1998), studying geography manuals used in schools in Finland, concluded that until the 1960’s the world was horizontally divided and value-laden in these works. The Western Europeans were represented as intelligent, hardworking and clean, whereas Eastern and Southern Europe, as well as areas outside Europe were negatively labelled. In particular, Blacks were negatively described with reference to their different race as a particularly childish and undeveloped population (Paasi, 1998, p. 237, 229). As these representations were uncritically taught to entire generations of school pupils until the 1960’s, a large part of today’s Finns have grown up in a context where differences in behaviour and capability were explicitly constructed around race. This was equally the case in many other European countries, some of which were still colonial rulers.

4.3. Minorities and Finland in statistics

Finland has several minorities recognised by the state: the Swedish speaking Finns, the Sami, the Roma, Jews, and Tatars. Persons belonging to these minorities most often have Finnish nationality, but the Roma and Sami people in particular have been used as an ‘Other’ that Finns have constructed their own image upon (see. e.g. Kuokkanen, 2007; Pietikäinen & Leppänen, 2007, Nordberg, 2010). The most protected and established minority is constituted by the Swedish speaking Finns. At the end of 2008, 5.44% of the population were registered as having Swedish as their mother tongue. Even though the majority of Swedish-speaking Finns never have, and do not today, belong to an upper class, Swedish-speaking Finns are still today often considered to do so (Forsander & Ekholm, 2001, p.89).

The immigrant population has steadily grown since the beginning of the 1990’s. For long, Finland was a rather closed country for immigration, and in the 1960’s and 1970’s emigration from Finland exceeded immigration. The first refugees after WW II arrived from Chile in 1973 and were 180 in number. It was not until 1986 that a regular admittance of refugees was initiated as Finland committed to receive a UNHCR quota of refugees on a humanitarian basis. At the beginning, the number was 100 per year, today it is 750. There are repeated discussions on whether Finland should increase, or even decrease this number. In practice, the number of 750 refugees per year is not always fulfilled.

At the end of 2011, there were 257 248 people with foreign origins living in Finland, which represents 4.8% of the total population. Of these, 219 702 were born abroad, while 37 546 were second-generation immigrants, thus born in Finland. The largest immigrant groups came from the neighbouring countries Russia (67 127 persons) and Estonia (30 250 persons). Thereafter, the biggest groups consisted of Somali (13 930

17 Brunberg’s ‘Neekerinsuukko’ (Negro’s Kiss) chocolate was renamed ‘Suukko’, (Kiss) in 2001. Fazer’s licorice bars wrappers were redesigned, and the caricature picture of a black boy was removed in 2007.
19 Compared to, for instance, the UK or France, class differences have been perceived to be small in Finland, to the point that Finland has been described as being “one big middle class” (Tolonen, 2008).
20 http://www.migri.fi/netcomm/content.asp?article=3269
persons) and Iraqi nationals (10,072 persons), as well as people from the former Yugoslavia (Official Statistics of Finland, 2011).

4.4. Diversity and difference in work life

The ethnic composition of the Finnish workforce has undergone, and is undergoing, important changes. In the second decade of the third millennium the number of people retiring from the workforce is double that of 2000, and, for instance, the health and service sector will lose up to half of its workforce by 2025. The situation is even harsher in agriculture, where up to 60% of the workforce will retire by the same year (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 2009b). Recruiting foreign labour has been suggested as a potential solution to the situation, and in 2006 the Finnish Government Migration Policy Programme highlighted the promotion of work-related migration as a central objective. Active recruitment of employees from abroad to the most affected sectors has been undertaken by private employment agencies and, for instance, the recruitment of Filipino nurses has attracted both media and research attention (see Simola, 2008; Cleland, 2010).

Even more than the active attraction of work-related immigration, increased immigration on a variety of immigration grounds has resulted in the population of Finland becoming increasingly multicultural. Immigration has increased considerably from the 1990’s onwards, and in 2009 there were 26,300 foreign nationals living in Finland, compared to only 155,705 in 1990. Between 1990 and 2009, 61,523 foreign nationals have also been granted Finnish nationality21 (Statistics Finland, 2010). For long, the primary motive for immigration was related to family reasons, but job-related immigration is expected to rise and even exceed family-related immigration (Arajärvi, 2009). Furthermore, the number of foreigners studying in Finland has increased, which has also been a governmental objective (Söderqvist, 2005). In 2009, 1,100 university degrees were obtained by foreigners in Finland, which is more than 4% of all university degrees obtained that year (Statistics Finland, 2010).

Finnish work life has in consequence become more heterogeneous in terms of nationalities and cultures, and the diversity of the workforce is expected to further increase (Moisio & Martikainen, 2006). This increased diversity, even though seen as a positive trend by most employers, also brings about challenges. For instance, the labour market has become more differentiated along identity lines, and work life inequality has increased (Wrede et al. 2010). Foreigners already in the country face challenges in building careers and advancing in the Finnish society, despite the official plans to promote employment of foreigners and business organisations' positive approach to diversity.

In this context, diversity management as an organisational initiative addressing questions of difference and inclusion has arisen as a topical and important issue (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 2011a). The literature on diversity and its management in the Finnish labour market, however, is contradictory in the evaluation of current diversity interest. Practitioner-aimed literature promotes diversity management and presents projects, best practices and rationales for organisations to

21 Since the 1st of June 2003, Finland has recognised dual citizenship, thus foreigners obtaining Finnish citizenship no longer need to renounce their former citizenships. In 2009, more than 50,000 persons had dual citizenship, whereof Finno-Russians constituted the biggest group. (http://www.stat.fi/tfi/vaerak/2009/01/vaerak_2009_01_2010-09-30_kat_001_fi.html; HS: Kahden passin kansalaisisuudet kovassa kasvussa, 24.10.2010)
invest in diversity management. Academic researchers studying diversity management in Finnish organisations, however, conclude that diversity management is still not an issue in Finland, often seen as a consequence of the national context and the country's historical background.

4.4.1. Diversity management in Finland

Many researchers commenting on diversity management in Finland have concluded that diversity management is not a suitable approach in the Finnish context (Trux, 2010) or is only taking its first steps in Finland (Meriläinen et al. 2009; Sippola 2007a). However, at the same time several collaborative projects between business organisations, trade unions and public authorities have been run where the aim has been to promote multicultural work communities and good practices in these (for an overview of projects see: Vänskä-Rajala, 2007; Ruhanen & Martikainen, 2006). Further, several studies have looked at multicultural work communities, and how to best manage them. Some of these studies use the terminology of diversity management (Savileppä, 2007), others use such terms as ‘multicultural’ or ‘intercultural’ organisations (Vartia et al, 2007; Pitkänen 2005). But as the central question has been how to manage a multicultural workforce in such a way as to foster good relationships between organisational members, these studies do entangle themselves upon diversity management. Considering the extent of this type of research conducted in Finland, both academic and practitioner-focused, diversity management can be said to be in the air du temps. Non-academic research on the topic is influential in the constructing of diversity management as a social phenomenon (Bairoh & Trux, 2010, p. 197) and should therefore also be considered when evaluating the relevance of the topic in Finnish work life. Diversity management has also entered the curricula of universities (see Vänskä-Rajala, 2007).

4.4.1.1. Diversity dimensions

Finland has been rather active in promoting gender equality and, compared to most other European countries, has attained good levels of gender equality in some areas of societal life. This focus on gender equality was found by Meriläinen et al. (2009), studying corporate communication materials, to be one reason for diversity management not to be more widespread. They suggest that the equality discourse, found in many organisations, silenced questions of race and ethnicity. In a similar line, shifting attention to diversity management has been seen as a way to not pay attention to gender, and thus as a threat to gender equality (Meriläinen & Tienari, 2007). Hearn et al. (2009) indeed have found that some companies shift from gender equality policies to diversity management policies at a stage where gender equality policies are still under-developed.

These studies show how gender and diversity are seen both as related and as separate issues in the Finnish context. Gender equality work has a longer tradition, and separate legislation exists for gender equality and equality on other grounds, such as ethnicity. The Act on Equality between Men and Women22 came into force in 1987, and since 1995 has required that companies employing more than 30 persons have an equality plan, a plan for active measures in guaranteeing and furthering equality between men

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and women. The Non-Discrimination Act\textsuperscript{23} concerning age, racial or ethnic origin, citizenship, language, religion or belief, conviction, opinion, state of health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics, came into force in 2004, and requires a similar plan for promoting equality between persons with different ethnic backgrounds. However, this requirement only concerns public administrations, not the private sector. Gender equality work in work organisations had thus been developed for several years by the time that diversity management became an issue in Finnish work organisations in the early 2000’s. The first collaborative project on multiculturalism in work organisations, called ‘Käytössä koko paletti’\textsuperscript{24}, was launched in 1999, and followed by ETMO in 2001 (Vänskä-Rajala, 2007).

Diversity management has in consequence most often been related to multiculturalism, ethnic diversity and immigration. Immigration and the increasing cultural diversity in work organisations has been seen as a new phenomenon that managers have to take into account and learn to manage. ‘Monimuotoisuus’, the Finnish term for diversity, has primarily been attached to these dimensions, even though the vision of diversity as encompassing all the ways in which people are different, is also common and defended. In a study surveying the importance given to the different dimensions of diversity and their effect on workplace practices, age, gender, mother tongue and ethnicity were all perceived as important constituents of an organisation’s diversity, but ethnicity was by far the most important when looking at diversity in relation to organisational activities. Sexual orientation and religion were shown by the same study to be given little importance in organisations today, and their importance was not expected to increase in the future (Haapanen, 2007).

4.4.1.2. Diversity and organisational practices

Even if diversity among the workforce is seen as both a positive and challenging question, organisations have not been found to be ready to change with diversity (Sippola 2007b; Haapanen, 2007; Söderqvist 2005). Studying ten organisations in Finland, Sippola and Leponiemi (2007) concluded that diversity management induced little or no changes to HRM practices. Söderqvist (2005) found a similar result in that the diversification of employees is very seldom taken into account in HRM practices, and that very few organisations had strategic HRM. Managers believed that entering a Finnish work organisation as a foreigner was without problems, and that there is enough induction provided. However, induction mostly did not take foreigners’ special needs into account. Managers did identify new challenges touching their own work though, and felt that when a foreigner is recruited it has effects on the communication within the organisation. They reported a need for more communication and leadership (Söderqvist, 2005). The assumption seems to be that while among Finns many things are self-evident and tacit, they have to be spelled out when someone not sharing the Finnish background is included.

Of the rare practices that are modified to better accommodate diverse employee needs, training and induction are among the most often cited (Sippola & Leponiemi, 2007; Sippola 2007b; Savileppä, 2007; Juuti, 2005; ETNO). Training and induction address both minority employees and the majority population. Minority employees are provided with information about Finnish work life norms, and organisations may draft common rules of conduct. Induction programmes are seen as needing increasing


\textsuperscript{24} Direct translation: ‘The entire palette in use’.
attention, and the induction of immigrants as especially important. Finnish colleagues however both found that immigrant employees should receive more induction than was the case and that induction currently required too much in the way of resources (Juuti, 2005). This same situation where diversity management practices portray the immigrant as lacking has been found in Denmark, where diversity management practices position the ethnic minority as a weak group and in need of development in order to be able to integrate into the Danish work life (Kamp & Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2008). Finns again are seen as needing more information about different cultures and cross-cultural matters. Managers are not knowledgeable enough about different cultures, which may lead to ignoring foreign competencies and skills both in recruitment and in work (Söderqvist, 2005). Civil service providers have been found to feel that they would need more intercultural competence and language skills in order to be able to perform their work well (Sippola & Hammar-Suutari, 2006).

There is very little information on the type of training companies provide their employees with regarding multiculturalism. Salo and Poutiainen (2010a, 2010b) are the first to have studied induction material including information on multiculturalism. They show how manuals aiming to foster positive multicultural working communities construct stereotyped understandings of Finns and immigrants, and rather than challenging the division into us Finns and the immigrants, the manuals construct differences between the groups. Induction manuals, as well as diversity-promoting reports from the EU and state authorities, serve as a site where norms and expected behaviour are presented. Immigrants are assumed to comply with these norms, and Finns’ suspicions towards difference can be legitimised. In a report published by the Ministry of Labour and Economic Affairs cultural difference is presented as unwanted in the sphere of work: “practicing religion during a work day, a regime diverging from Finnish traditions or different clothing rules, may bewilder Finnish co-workers and employers” (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 2009a, p. 22). In this manner, immigrants are given hints concerning accommodating to the Finnish ways of behaviour, and Finns are encouraged in their potential prejudices against religious and culinary differences.

In addition to training and induction, recruitment practices are sometimes modified (Sippola & Leponiemi, 2007). Recruitment practices are mainly changed in terms of the recruitment channels used. New recruitment channels are sought, or ethnic minorities are recruited through existing employees’ contacts. In addition, special recruitment events for immigrants have been organised, as have job advertisements been designed to especially attract immigrant job candidates.

4.4.2. **Ethnic difference in work**

Compared to the majority population, ethnic minorities are in many regards in a weaker labour market position. They are more often unemployed, have more short term contracts, and are paid less than Finns (Alho, 2010; Forsander, 2002; Forsander & Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2000). It is also not uncommon for immigrants to work in positions not corresponding to their educational background (Rintala-Rasmus & Giorgiani, 2007). Beyond this, the positions between different immigrant groups vary considerably. Where 12% of Finns have a temporary work contract, 17% of all immigrants, and 29% of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa and the African horn work on temporary contracts (Vartia et al., 2007).
These unequal positions, and the difficulties immigrants experience in entering the labour market altogether, have been explained in two principal ways: by human capital theories and by focusing on majority attitudes.

The general assumption in human capital explanations has been that immigrants are deficient in language and professional skill, and learning Finnish has been shown to be a way to improve their chances of succeeding and advancing in work (Tiilikainen, 2008; Forsander, 2001). The motivations for employers to require Finnish skills are related to clients’ needs, colleagues’ weak language skills, avoiding accidents and as a proof of the applicant’s intent to stay in Finland (Söderqvist, 2005). It is reasonable to require the language skills needed to perform the job, but Finnish employers also demand Finnish language skills even in situations where the work task is performed in English (Vehaskari 2010). With regard to requiring Finnish skills as a proof of their intent to stay in Finland, it is both unreasonable and discriminatory. The poor Finnish language skills of immigrants has also been contested by Holm et al. (2008), who found that 70% of immigrants have good enough Finnish skills for employment.

Consequently, a considerable amount of public sector effort has been invested in providing Finnish language training, and professional courses. There are a number of problems with human capital explanations. Even though recent immigrants may benefit from language and professional training, lacking skills cannot solely explain the marginalisation of foreign employees. Human capital theories also leave the receiving society and the structures of the labour market without attention (Wrede et al., 2010). Finally, portraying the immigrant as lacking in various respects allows the responsibility for the situation to fall on his/her shoulders.

Ethnic minority employees have sensed the frame of deficiency they are evaluated through in their work. Studying foreign nurses, Nieminen (2010) has shown how ethnic minority employees feel their professionalism is questioned, their work controlled and that they are given the least demanding work tasks. Ethnic minority workers have repeatedly reported a need to show their worth, and to over-perform (Nieminen, 2010; Silfver, 2010; Juuti, 2005). This can be seen as a way in which ethnic minority workers attempt to detach themselves from the stereotyped way of seeing immigrants in Finnish society.

Finns’ attitudes is another way of making sense of ethnic minorities’ positions in work life, and has been found by several studies to be a major hurdle in the full labour market participation of ethnic minorities. Prejudice and discrimination against ethnic minorities both in work and in society at large are extensive, ethnic discrimination being the most prevalent form of discrimination in Finland (Eurobarometer, 2009). For several years, Finns’ attitudes towards increasing immigration became more positive, but since 2009 these attitudes have been becoming harsher. In 2009, up to 49% of Finns did not support the idea of facilitating increasing immigration in the face of future labour force needs (Haavisto & Kiljunen, 2009). In March 2010, 60% of participants of a survey ordered by the biggest daily newspaper Helsingin Sanomat stated that they would not increase immigration (Helsingin Sanomat, 15.03.2010). This same trend, of harsher attitudes towards foreigners and immigration in an economic downturn was visible in the recession of the 1990’s (Jaakkola, 1999, 13, 23-36; Jaakkola, M. 2000, 45). Openly racist attitudes are also not uncommon. In 1998, 42% of respondents were of the opinion that “persons belonging to some races are simply not fit to live in a modern society”, and 34% agreed that “the fact has to be admitted, that some people (nations) are more intelligent than others” (Jaakkola, 1999). Racist attitudes are often legitimised, and explained as not being about racism. 59% of Finns...
explained in 2009 that Finns' hesitant attitudes towards foreigners is intelligent cautiousness, not racism or ignorance (Haavisto & Kiljunen, 2009).

Employers have also been found to be hesitant in the face of foreign workers. There is prejudice and suspicious attitudes, and foreign work experience is seldom valued (Ahmad, 2010; Söderqvist, 2005; Jaakkola, T., 2000; Raunio, 2003). Once employed, ethnic minority employees have reported feeling untrusted, not valued, and that Finns are preferred in promotions (Rintala-Rasmus & Giorgiani, 2007; Raunio, 2003). At the beginning of the first decade of the 2000’s, not talking to minority workers, or even staring at them, were also not uncommon (Jaakkola, T. 2000). Quantitative studies have shown the prevalence of discrimination experiences at different stages of employment, and how discrimination experiences differ between different immigrant groups. Somali minority employees are more often discriminated against and harassed than Estonians or Russians (Pohjanpää, 2003, see also Jasinskaja- Lahti et al. 2002). It has also been shown that with minorities’ increased labour market participation discrimination in the sphere of work has increased, while discrimination in the surrounding society has decreased (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2002).

The non-attention to ethnic minorities’ special needs which has been found to be prevalent in Finnish organisations can also be seen as one form of racism even when presented as equal treatment (Verlot 2002, cited in Laurén & Wrede, 2010, p.175). Foreigners and ethnic minorities are recruited as if they were Finns, and their culture-specific knowledge and skills are seldom drawn on in work (Söderqvist, 2005). Finnish companies are losing talents because of an inability to identify non-Finnish competencies and experiences, perhaps due to managers’ own insecurity in the face of difference. Even though foreign experience and diplomas are seldom recognised as valuable in Finnish organisations, the importance of studies undertaken in Finland also remain unclear. The chances of gaining employment after studies in Finland have been found to increase (Forsander & Alitolppa- Niitamo, 2000; Jaakkola, T. 2000), but employers have also been found to attach little importance to Finnish diplomas (Söderqvist, 2005). In Söderqvist’s study, employers claimed that what makes the recruitment decision is the overall evaluation of the person, his or her skills and attitude. To have the right attitude is seen as important, and in Finland it is about having an attitude in line with Finnish norms. Forsander and Alitolppa-Niitamo (2000) found that the informal competence of an applicant is of special importance for gaining employment: the social, attitudinal, and cultural competence required in the Finnish labour market.

4.4.2.1. The figure of the ethnic minority employee

The media picture of the immigrant, which also frames the ways ethnic minorities are seen in recruitment and employment, has changed from being a passive unemployed person without an important occupation, to that of an employee. In the early years of the 2000’s, ethnic minority members were portrayed through the frames of unemployment and difficulties in relation to work, but today the proportion of articles focusing on immigrants as individual employees are among the most frequent (Simola, 2008). In the media, ethnic minority employees are portrayed as ordinary employees.

25 Not talking to colleagues one does not know may be a typical Finnish habit, part of a Finns' self-image. Even though the intention behind the lack of talkativeness is not necessarily discriminatory or racist, it is certainly experienced as racism. In Finland, the definition of racism has been dominantly focused on motives, while the focus should be on meanings and consequences – what does it mean to not talk to a colleague, and what is the consequence? (Rastas, 2009)
Their integration into Finland and their role in their work is described in positive terms. Most of these articles describe European and North-American immigrants. Their position as good employees seems to be commonly accepted, while the same does not go for immigrants from other parts of the world. When an African immigrant was interviewed about his work, the image of him as a good employee had to come from his Finnish boss (Simola, 2008).

Finnish managers employing ethnic minorities present them in positive, albeit stereotypical ways. Ethnic minority workers are seen to have a good attitude towards work and clients, to be committed and loyal (Juuti, 2005). In the health and social service occupations, ethnic minorities are seen as more socially-oriented and more ‘human’ than Finns (Rintala-Rasmus & Giorgiani, 2007). In Juuti’s study (2005) Finnish co-workers of ethnic minorities, however, seemed to perceive minorities quite differently, and through two frames: as totally ordinary co-workers, ignoring differences, or through racism and negative prejudice.

Ethnic minorities themselves see their ethnicity as both a burden and a strength. They are well aware of the prejudices they face, but at the same time portray themselves as very motivated and determined, and believe employers see and value these characteristics. Ethnic minorities aspire to be seen as individuals, professionals, outside the narrowing immigrant image. Achieving a job has been reported to be very important for this (Rintala-Rasmus & Giorgiani, 2007). This distancing from the stereotypical immigrant figure is, however, difficult to achieve totally, and the need to over-perform both remains and is renewed with each new encounter (Nieminen, 2010; Liebkind et al, 2004). In the case of ethnic entrepreneurs, however, over-performing can lead to marginalisation. Becoming an entrepreneur is a way to achieve social status and even though in economic terms not always profitable, provides ethnic minority entrepreneurs with a positive sense of self. However, Wahlbeck (2010) has shown that if the entrepreneur manages to build up a successful, profitable business, the majority population becomes hostile and starts marginalising the minority.

There are no studies looking at ethnic minority managers in Finland. Nieminen (2010) has shown how the advancement of ethnic minority colleagues to managerial positions can lead to particularly concrete ‘othering’. An ethnic minority manager challenges the socio-cultural understandings related to immigrants, and produces resistance. In an attitude survey, immigrants were indeed preferably seen as friends, co-workers or cleaners, rather than in leadership positions, as medical doctors or teachers (Jaakkola, 1999).

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter has taken a tour through the Finnish context of diversity. The context was described through the Finnish self-images, the images Finns’ have held about Others, and the composition of the population. Thereafter, diversity and ethnicity in the sphere of work was discussed.

Finland has for long been understood as being a culturally homogenous country. This knowledge, which has to be seen as social construction and as one version of reality, has shaped the way Finns have understood themselves and related to others, as well as the way in which racism and discrimination have been explained.
The positions of ethnic minorities in Finnish society and work life have mainly been explained using the theory of human capital, where immigrants have been seen as deficient. Ethnic minorities are still on the margins in many work contexts, and have been described as encountering considerable discrimination. Diversity management is based on the literature, a rather new trend in Finland, but one way in which ethnic minorities’ work life positions and experiences have been addressed.

To the best of my knowledge, no research has been conducted on the differences constructed and the positions that diversity management discourses in Finnish companies produce. Diversity management discourses could be sites where these dominant knowledges about Finns and Others are challenged, and sites that could provide new understandings of minorities and the majority, enhancing inclusion and equality.

How do diversity management discourses construct differences and position ethnic minorities? Are dominant knowledges about ethnic minorities and Finns reproduced, or challenged? This is the focus of the next chapter.
5 FINNISH DIVERSITY MANAGERS TALK ABOUT DIVERSITY, DIFFERENCE AND DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

In the previous chapter, we saw how differences have come to be understood in Finnish society in general, and how ethnic minorities have been positioned in work life. In this chapter, the focus turns to Finnish diversity managers. The chapter begins by describing how diversity managers in Finland talk about Finns and about immigrants, and how diversity is conceptualised in relation to discursive constructions of Finland.

Thereafter, first the way in which discrimination and racism and then diversity in organisations is talked about will be described. To conclude, the organisations' diversity initiatives will be discussed. It will be seen that, when talking about diversity management, managers construct knowledge about Finland, the organisation, as well as about Finns and non-Finns. These knowledges participate in the ordering of power relations and in determining what is possible in diversity management work.

5.1 Diversity and Differences

Diversity talk constructs differences by both naming and non-naming, and both including and excluding differences from the organisation. When, for instance, immigrant status is named and the diversity work of an organisation is focused on this dimension, the organisation could a priori be assumed to be rather inclusive of people with immigrant origins. But diversity talk constructs differences in different ways: some constructions position differences in inclusive terms within the organisation, other constructions exclude them altogether or only provide narrow spaces within the organisation.

As much as the constructed differences can include or position those different in the margins, the non-naming of a difference can have the same effects. In the Finnish organisations studied, not talking about women is a way to not construct gender difference in diversity talk, but also a way to leave the gendered nature of organisations without attention. In this way, the male is the norm and the women are positioned in identities of deficiency or excess. Even though I recognise that the non-naming and the absences in the diversity talk would be interesting aspects for analysis, my focus will here be on the differences (mainly) constructed through naming.

In the interviews, once the managers have presented their formal diversity approach where all differences are included, most talk revolves around the differences between Finns and non-Finns. As is typical for diversity management texts, they treat the categories as homogeneous groups. They are not attentive to the intersecting of differences, but do create differentiation within the groups through othering. There are different types of Finns, and different types of immigrants – however, these are again generally treated as homogeneous groups.

5.1.1 Finns

Similarity between Finns is most often a taken-for-granted assumption. Most of the participants cite the typical differences a diversity programme could entail, such as age, gender and disability, but these are rarely discussed and constructed further. These differences become existing dimensions of diversity management, but as unworthy of
further discussion they at the same time become unimportant, as having an unproblematic existence in the organisational context.

Similarity among Finns is the dominant knowledge managers construct about Finns. However, there are a few instances where the homogeneity is almost placed in question. These are situations where I ask the participants whether there are any Finnish national minorities working in the organisation. The first reaction was bewilderment – what did I mean? This question led some of the participants to talk about native Finns coming from different areas of the country, stressing that not everyone was born in Helsinki. This bewilderment related to my question about national differences, and the recurrent silence about, for instance, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, gender or age differences, can be seen as participating in reproducing the image of Finns as homogeneous, which was also common in the literature reviewed in Chapter Four.

There was one difference that more than one participant took up as a difference constituting a national minority. These participants talked about the Roma minority, and their difference was then described in very essentialised and negative terms:

I: Yes, well do you have national minorities?

R: You talk about Romas and the Sami

I: Yes

R: Haven't even come to apply for a job so I haven't ever encountered

I: What do you think is the reason?

R: Well, I don't know what to answer, so so, well yes, we have encountered very many Romas as our customers and and so well, as troublemakers we have more, in cases of theft, we have more Romas than any other

I: Right,

R: So we have like, like negative experiences. But it doesn't like impede recruitment or so, but the fact is that they don't even apply for jobs, during these seven years I haven't even had the chance to discuss with a Roma in a recruitment setting.

Or as another manager says:

R: Admittedly I have encountered very few Romas. If I think that I have myself been involved in different HR jobs for almost 18 years, so, if I think, as previously I interviewed job candidates more often, so I can think of one or two that would even have applied for a job.

I: Yes

R: So if one thinks about that, so, it must be that they too have their own culture.

The managers draw here on the dominant knowledge of the Roma in Finland as a people who “do not work” and are “unproductive”. This knowledge effectively excludes the Roma from work communities, as even in these organisations where difference and tolerance are promoted, the knowledge is not questioned. The knowledge about the Roma in relation to work is however not only limited to how their position in relation to work is structured. As Nordberg (2010) has shown, the assumed non-working and unproductiveness of the Roma has put their citizenship into question.
5.1.2. Immigrants as a homogeneous group

The dominant way to talk about immigrants is to treat them as one homogenous group. Little attention is given to their origins, their route to Finland or the length of their stay. As one participant states, whether an immigrant is a first or a second generation immigrant makes no difference. In the eyes of the members of the organisation, he or she will always be an immigrant.

And what is an immigrant like in the eyes of the participants? As immigrants are highly needed in the participating organisations they are, on the one hand, seen as resources. They are flexible, at times hard-working, committed workers. And they are good in customer service, better than Finns.

I: Have you seen in your activities, that recruiting foreigners in general would have brought any advantages in general?

R: Yes, I do, I do see for instance, let's say so, that we have discussed a lot for instance this customer service, and so, as it is often said, that the Finn is not, that the basic character of the Finn is not, is not like the best for a customer relationship setting. And now then foreigners, so it seems that, that they are, the service mind is like inborn for them.

I: Mmm

R: And we do have seen it as a positive example.

I: Mmm.

R: So how like, customers have been satisfied in the service they have got, and and, so, it would be worth for us Finns to learn from that.

I: Mmm, mmm.

R: It is, it is at least a concrete [thing], we have discussed a lot, and on which we have received positive feedback from customers and that we have discussed in the work community, and

I: Yes

R: And mmm, then for instance a question like (laughs a bit), many of foreign origin, for instance dress, men, very tidy and

I: Mmm

R: Smart and take care of, as we have work dresses, of the fact that the dress is straight, and clean and so, so, we have paid attention to this, and we have discussed it, like that this is like a good thing.

I: Yes, yes.

R: And and, it would be worth for Finnish men, to learn this, for some of the men. L5G1

At the same time that immigrants are described in these positive terms, there is a widely shared understanding of immigrants as deficient. Not only do immigrants lack Finnish skills, but also professional skills and experience. They are, however, rarely directly pointed out as deficient. Their deficiency is constructed by describing a job task, such as being a cashier as relatively demanding for “them”, or by taking for granted that an immigrant cannot have a required amount of experience, such as here:

I: Mmm, mm. Are some of your sectors of activity especially entry level professions?
R: Yes, cleaning services without question and that comprises hotel services

I: Yes

R: We, in our house. But well, the care sector is of course, also like, that there are, and facility services too, but it is, that the sectors where there is a requirement of a specific professional competence, so like permits to some, like electricity work or other, or long term like experience, so that is something that is often lacking,

I: Mmm.

R: At least about the Finnish way to do also. If there is then, now we do have in our planning services also architects, engineers and so on, so they do like plan and build top buildings, so that requires at least ten years of know-how from here

I: Mmm.

R: Well that can’t really be imagined that... L4G1

As the immigrants are understood through this prism of deficiency and uniformity, their potential position in the labour market is rendered very narrow. The advancement of immigrants in Finnish work organisations is seen as improbable by most. One reason for the difficulty of immigrants to advance is related to this lack, the other reason is Finns’ prejudices. Finns are seen as having accepted, to some extent at least, that immigrants have entered Finnish work organisations, but how would they react to having an immigrant as a manager? Not well, according to some of the participants. They suspect that the society is not ready for that yet.

R: So I would say that this stage functions well now, so on the worker level we begin to have a nice amount of immigrants, not so that we would search consciously, that now we want, but when there are, we take. But then we come to that next level, when they, the first start applying to foreman-trainings, to foremen, not to talk about director positions, so so that will be quite a jump. It is like for someone who has moved to Finland, so it is terribly difficult, because you should have rather fluent Finnish skills. It isn't enough that you speak more or less, but you should

I: Mmm.

R: Be able to express yourself in writing and write communication leaflets and else. But when their children of course, are in the stage that they graduate from institutes and even from University and when the question will how they will be placed, like then it will be a very interesting stage.

I: What will it be like?

R: Well then we will measure really attitudes. It is so easy

I: Mmm.

R: To say that yes we employ immigrants.

I: Mmm.

R: For cleaning jobs and a bit behind the counter, but when we start to talk about selecting a person to an executive group level job or else, so I would guess that that would in many companies be quite a threshold. L3G1

The constructed deficiency of immigrants could also be read as talking about Finns’ prejudices. The image that is depicted of the immigrant as lacking tends to treat all immigrants in a uniform way, and makes immigrants with perfect Finnish skills, long
experience of Finnish working life and excellent professional skills invisible. This leads to an underutilisation of foreign talent in Finland (see Vehaskari, 2010). There is an urgent need to recognise the dominant way of constructing the immigrant and what consequences that has on the possibilities with which the immigrant is provided. The picture is much more complex than one where immigrants are uniformly “lacking”.

Making the picture more complex and shedding light on the diversity among the immigrant population may, however, not be in the interests of the participating companies. When immigrants are understood in more individualised ways, it may indeed lead to demands for advancement, and immigrants’ dissatisfaction with the current tasks that many Finns find unattractive. What the current constructions of immigrants do is to portray them as perfectly suitable for the jobs they now have and as unsuitable to “more demanding” jobs. In this way, the employers have a good, skilful, flexible workforce.

This does not, however, mean that the managers consciously construct immigrants as unfit for greater responsibility, and try to keep them in low skill tasks. The knowledge they produce about immigrants as lacking is also one that is extensively circulating in society. When immigrants’ labour market participation, for instance, is explained, a common reason found for challenges and marginalisation is lacking local human capital (Ahmad, 2010). Thus, even though the construction of immigrants as lacking may benefit the employers, it does not mean that it is a strategic move on their part. They could be seen as progressive as they have employed many immigrants in the context where immigrants are both seen as lacking, and approached with hostility by both clients and co-workers. However, acknowledging the dominant constructions and challenging them would benefit companies as they would not miss out on capabilities and immigrants would get positions where they could draw on their skills and capabilities. Portraying immigrants as lacking is discriminatory, leads to frustration among immigrants, and in the long run increases the cleavage between the Finns and non-Finns.

While the uniform treatment of all immigrants as belonging to one group is the most dominant approach, differentiation between different origins is also made. First of all, not all non-Finns are considered as “immigrants”. People coming to Finland for a specific job are not included in the group. While these diversity managers do distinguish between immigrants and these “global talents”, global talents have been found to have very similar work life experiences to those seen as immigrants in Finland (see e.g. Silfver, 2010). Another group of immigrants not perceived as immigrants are people coming from Western countries to work in a business where their origin is an added value.

R: In the restaurant business we always have foreign workers, often it is already the business idea that requires it. So when we have an Irish pub, we have Irish guys there. In our Italian restaurant we have Italian waiters. I don’t know, they might not be seen as immigrants

I: Mmm.

R: But it is like significant as

I: Yes

R: Measures as an international atmosphere=

I: Yes.
Some groups are seen as having more problems than others to integrate; some groups again awaken more worries in the management. Partly, these differentiations follow what has been called the ethnic hierarchy in Finland. The more visible the difference is, the more trouble it is expected to lead to. Partly, however, the positions different managers give to different groups can differ considerably. For one manager, Ingrian Finns\textsuperscript{26} are a very troublesome group, while for another Ingrian Finns adapt easily into the organisation and encounter little prejudice.

When immigrants are not merely seen as immigrants and non-Finns, they are seen as both representatives of their own culture, and then again as belonging to a homogeneous group. Their cultural difference is generally seen in essentialist terms and in narrow stereotypic manifestations. Russian women are seen as being affectionate and physical, easily wanting to hug. Immigrant families are seen as having a strong influence on their members. Africans are seen as having a different notion of time. Seeing immigrants in this way, as being defined by their culture, naturalises their difference. Drawing on such essentialist notions of difference between immigrants and Finns perpetuates the division between Finns and non-Finns and in the long run excludes immigrants from being equal members of the organisation. While the managers mark the difference between we Finns and them, for instance “we Finns and those Somalis”, the managers soften the difference by talking about “our Somali”, or “our Muslims”. On the one hand, this can be a way to distance the Somalis that have been recruited from the Somalis in general, positioning them more favourably, detaching them from common stigmas. On the other hand, it can also be seen as a colonial way of patronising.

5.2. Diversity and Finland

The way diversity managers discursively construct Finland contributes to the construction of meanings of diversity and presents them as self-evident, natural and inevitable (see Carabine, 2001). I identified two principal patterns in the ways in which the managers construct Finland. Via one discourse, Finland is in a state of change. The second discourse presents a contradiction, as Finland is both a peaceful society without conflicts and a society touched by widespread prejudice.

5.2.1. Finland in a state of change

Finland is in the middle of a process of change according to the dominant description of the interviewed managers. The change is occurring in two directions: On the one hand, the change concerns Finland’s position in the world as Finland is becoming more international. This increased internationalisation is due to Finland’s membership of the European Union and to the globalisation of markets where business is often conducted across borders. On the other hand, change is also occurring within the borders of Finland. Increased migration leads to a change in the local context, as the Finnish population comprises an increasing number of people coming from different parts of the world.

\textsuperscript{26}Ingrian Finns are descendents of Finns who migrated to the area around St. Petersburg from the 17th century until the early 20th century (Forsander & Ekholm, 2001).
Constructing change simultaneously constructs knowledge about the situation before “the changes”. As the changes in Finland are about increased contact with foreign markets and especially increased immigration to Finland, the Finland prior to the change is constructed as untouched by migration and internationalisation. Thus, multiculturalism arises as a new phenomenon:

R: And well, hum, we encounter it, when we meet clients, the majority by all means still belong to the natives but today our clientele is very multicultural. And, and if we as an employer can like respond to it, then we have to go along and play the game, so that we have to accept the client and accepting the client we have to, we have to be able to change with this society to look like it. And multiculturalism, according to me it is, it is...it is this kind of...I think it is this kind of an attitude according to which each one of us should encounter and understand where this society is going. L1G1

One way to emphasise change is by describing it as an inevitable process that touches different parts of the world at different moments. The managers construct a hierarchy of locations for the process of change. Change occurs first on international arenas, foreign countries from where new ideas emerge. Then, it moves to the capital region in Finland, and, finally, to the provinces in Finland. In these descriptions, foreign countries are ahead of Finland in terms of progress, and the capital region precedes the provinces. As progress refers to the ability to handle differences, Finland is less experienced than foreign countries in being multicultural, and the provinces in Finland are less experienced than the capital region.

Here, a diversity manager describes how diversity arrives in Finland, and positions Finland in a subordinate position vis-à-vis foreign countries.

R: It came, this corporate responsibility, it must have existed already in the 70’s even, like for the first time that it was activated in Finland. But only in the late 90’s the term was being anew imported to Finland and with that then, when these came, and there started to be discussions about responsible HRM and other, so it felt like, that then these diversity and diversity management things started to come. So I suppose it is like, that the waves of change reach our coast too, and it arrives with that.

I: Mmm.

R: I don’t know, would Finns have invented it by themselves? L3G1

And here managers distinguish between different parts of Finland:

R: The theme of multiculturalism can’t at this point concern anyone else than the capital region. Because we have here potentiality to build and test a bit more than there in the provinces. And then on the other hand we have the greatest need, so we should find such solutions that in the long run are beneficial for the company. L1G1

R: I feel, that this capital region […] we are like however more tolerant and open, when one listens to colleagues from units in the country side, like how it is in Mikkeli and so on, so we are like ahead in that sense. L3G1

This discourse of change reproduces the dominant ideas that circulate in society about Finland as a culturally homogeneous country. Even though it is incontestable that immigration to Finland has significantly increased in the last 20 years, the discourse of change should not be taken as a self-evident one and as the only possible description of the Finnish reality. Otherwise, there is a risk that the consequences of the discourse will remain naturalised, and that other versions are hidden.
In relation to diversity, the discourse of change has several effects. It hides other differences than those related to immigration. It becomes evident that diversity speaks of immigration, while differences existing within the Finnish population are minimised, just as in the construction of Finland as culturally homogeneous.

The discourse of change depicting Finland as culturally homogeneous, however, is commonly drawn on also by academic researchers. When talking about Finland being behind other European countries in the area of diversity, Sippola and Smale (2007) explain:

“one possible reason behind Finland’s perceived need to catch up with the rest of Europe in these areas [diversity and equality] could be its relative cultural homogeneity and thus lack of multicultural experience, where the clear majority has belonged to the same race (Finnish), the same religion (Lutheran) and spoken the same language (Finnish).” (Sippola & Smale, 2007, pp. 1904-1905, citing Alho et al., 1989).

Conducting research by taking the national context, or races even more so, as a given is problematic. It does not only impede one in seeing that the depicted national context is only one possible discursive construction, that there would be alternatives, and that this construction has effects on which knowledges about diversity become possible in the first place. More serious than this is that also, in explaining the results of their study by drawing on the dominant knowledge about Finland as culturally homogeneous, the researchers participate in naturalising the discourse further.

5.2.2. Finland a prejudiced and non-conflictual society

The diversity managers also construct Finnish society as characterised by widespread prejudice and by the non-existence of conflicts. On the one hand, Finland is characterised by the lack of experience of differences and is described as a “peaceful haven” (lintukoto in Finnish) untouched by conflicts. On the other hand, however, prejudice and discrimination are described as very common in all spheres of society and among all types of people: among the managers of the company, among the employees and among the clients. In particular, hostility towards immigrants is described as common. The participants describe how middle managers question decisions to recruit immigrants. Customers are told to overtly verbally abuse immigrant workers and to complain to the company top management about the company having recruited immigrants into service occupations. One organisation had conducted a survey among their customers to ask what their clients thought about the organisation employing people with different types of differences.

R: Our customers were most critical towards immigrants, so 40% of the respondents were a bit of the opinion, that, they are not necessarily fond of immigrants working in our business sites, while concerning disabled people it was a couple of per cents, so when comparing these. L3G1

Understandably, the managers do not see themselves as prejudiced or discriminating. Rather, they take the position of the one that is able to identify prejudice in others and to anticipate it. They present themselves as mediators between the prejudiced context and the immigrants. However, in their role of mediators they do not prepare the immigrants for the discriminatory context or support them in their experiences of racism. Instead, their role is to know how much diversity an organisation can take.
before it leads to overt conflicts. The role of the diversity manager is one of knowing the limits of tolerance.

R: 15% is the amount of immigrants that our activities can bear at this point. And it is not about an economic bearing point or in any way a question related to money, but a question related to attitudes and and to questions related to the structure of the work community. And I do have as an aim that those units where there still aren't immigrants, there will be one going there at some point, during this year. L1G1

This construction, which seems contradictory at first sight, gives meaning to discrimination as a non-conflictual phenomenon. It relates to portraying racism and discrimination as being about something else than prejudice (Haavisto & Kiljunen, 2009). The ways in which racism and discrimination are explained and portrayed as something else in the participating organisations will be turned to in a later section on discrimination.

5.3. Discrimination and racism

Discrimination and prejudice are constructed as common features of the diverse Finnish work context. The prejudice against immigrants is described as being extensive, and concerning managers, employees and clients. Increasing the organisations' ethnic diversity thus inevitably leads to working with questions of discrimination.

Prejudiced attitudes are seen in others. The managers, however, reproduce the racism and discrimination that circulates in society, minimise the seriousness of discrimination, and portray it as something else. One way in which managers reproduce the positioning of immigrants in a subordinate position is by drawing on a racist discourse. One diversity manager, for instance, describes how they recruited their first “nigger” (neekeri). The manager was not necessarily consciously choosing this word to refer to the black persons they had recruited as to manifest a racist attitude. Rather it can be seen as telling about the Finnish atmosphere in general, that it is still possible that a person managing a workforce comprising a lot of diversity, can use this term in an “innocent” way. It has been found that many Finns still have difficulties in seeing the term “neekeri” as a pejorative term (Puuronen, 2003, p. 196). Nonetheless, designating an organisation's black workers as “neekeri” is an effective way to position them as inferior Others – not exactly what diversity managers could be expected to do.

The reproduction of the prevailing power relation based on race and ethnicity is not only limited to the words the managers use in their talk. They also describe staffing practices which are clearly discriminatory. Two of the participants describe how the origin of an applicant defines which unit or which client the person can be sent to. What they actually do in their everyday practices is beyond the scope of this study, but what is clear is that they construct good business to be about anticipating clients’ discrimination and avoiding it by staffing accordingly, that is, by participating in the discrimination.

I: Are there then some immigrants that are more keenly recruited than others?

R: no, no no. We are not aiming for a maximum variety of nationalities or a mention in a book on records. We look for personalities, it is like in the end so that, each person that I, with whom I discuss, so I think and look at him/her like to which unit does this person fit, because of course this goes also for the majority population, so where do I get the best out of this person, where is s/he at his/her best, in what type of a unit, this is totally the same, if I take an example, so do we put a black Nigerian to [unit and area of city] for a night shift or as a permanent worker or do we
rather put a white Russian there. So it is totally, there is only one right answer, and it is of course
the white there, as there are a lot of Russians in that direction and 'the black man' is not
appreciated there. So already the area of the city may determine into which direction someone is
recruited. Or in area X where the store manager says that we don’t have a first immigrant in the
whole area here so we can’t take an immigrant worker here then, so there are situations of all
kinds, so this is like being a balancing artist. L1G1

One of the respondents functioning like this recognises that their practice is illegal, and
asks me not to underline this part of their activity. This participant works in the
cleaning sector, and maintains that they cannot force a client to accept a cleaner of
some origin, if the client does not wish to. Until the interview, they had always
managed to find alternative sites for persons with origins that clients reject, and to do
so without the cleaner being aware of his/her placement being done taking his/her
origin into account. The fear the participant expresses is that when the economic
situation gets worse, they will end up with employees without sites and sites without
employees where they however cannot send their available cleaners. Then, the
discriminatory system will become visible.

The participant knows it is illegal activity, but justifies it by maintaining that if they
send a person of a certain origin the client does not want to have, they will lose the
client, and particularly the cleaner will lose a job. That this is what they want to avoid.
What makes the practice somehow acceptable is the guaranteeing that everyone gets a
job, gets to keep the job, and the fact that the participant with her colleagues manages
to anticipate the situation – they make the discrimination invisible. But by doing so,
they become the discriminators and commit illegal activity on behalf of their client.

It is not only through these staffing practices where discrimination is hidden, but when
discussing discrimination in their own organisation that the participants have the
tendency to render discrimination invisible and unimportant. While prejudice and
discrimination are pervasive in general, in their own organisations discrimination is
expected to be about isolated events. The inability to see the structural side of the
phenomenon has important consequences for the way the events are treated and the
efforts to counteract the events (McGee Calvert & Ramsey, 1996). As the diversity
manager of the public transport company explains:

R: We did receive feedback, some, where they said, that black men can return to where they came
from, and and, so we received these racist messages, like don’t you really have the possibility to
choose Finns, do you have to take niggers here, here to work. So they also called me, we got some
written feedback,

I: Mmm.

R: But it was individual,

I: Mmm. Mmm.

R: And so we let them be.

I: Mmm. And so these came mainly from clients?

R: Clients

I: From clients

R: From clients. Specifically (stresses) from clients. We had of course some issues in the work
community, there were things, about which we then had to discuss with the employees, and and,
so but
I: What were these situations like?

R: Well, for instance precisely that kind of non-suitable “humour” L5G1

The participant continues to describe what the reactions were when foreigners integrated the work community, and maintains that as these were only isolated events, they were not paid much attention to. However, in the continuation of the talk, the situation changes entirely, from having been such isolated events that they were without importance to incidents that have become such an every-day part of the work community that they are perceived as “nothing special”.

R: But extensive discrimination,

I: Mmm.

R: That has not existed, so

I: Yes

R: So they are isolated events.

I: Mmm.

R: And it [discrimination] happens like today too, happens always

I: Mmm.

R: Things like, scolding and telling off. And, and I have an acute issue to be solved here, like job, or colleagues among themselves, so there is a person, whose identity I haven't had the time to check, who shows a bit finger marks to a chap of foreign origin, and he made a notification on it to me yesterday, and like asked me to examine it.

I: Yes

R: So there are like these kinds of things, so is the reason the foreign origin, or is it like some other reason

I: Mmm. Mmm.

R: So, we have of these every now and then

I: Mmm.

R: But now today, as already 30% of our drivers

I: Mmm.

R: Have a foreign origin, so it is like an everyday thing

I: Mmm.

R: So at our work sites we have all types of people

I: Mmm. Mmm.

R: So like, for us it is nothing special anymore. L5G1

As can be seen in these quotes, the seriousness of discrimination is made questionable in several ways: as not being systematic, as being about else than discrimination based
on origin, and about being totally normal every-day activity. Another participant similarly defines discrimination as totally normal:

I: Hmm, so well, you said that you had had some cases of ethnic discrimination or racism

R: Yes both from clients, as I mentioned this member of the parliament who came to scold and and, but there are totally clear cases of naming from the part of the clients. But there have also been some cases among the personnel, like people have different worldviews and we of course need to accept that. But sometimes we have to, sometimes the situations become heated and then we have to solve them in a group. But no one has had to be fired, but solve situations several times

I: So it is most often like naming?

R: It is naming and sometimes a bit like pushing out, and and and, judging and complaining, and and and, a bit of childrens' sandpit fuss every now and then

I: can it be like that that a local working community excludes someone and

R: Yes, this can happen

I: So it is from several persons

R: Yes yes. The question is about who is strong in the long run to gather the team around oneself. And this is totally normal in this kind of, like immigrants themselves say, so in Finnish work life it is a totally normal way to function. L1G1

Despite the fact that discrimination and Finns’ prejudices are seen as one of the major obstacles for immigrants to be able to fully participate in Finnish work life and one of the main challenges organisations aspiring to become more diverse have to combat both vis-à-vis clients prejudice and also co-workers and superiors prejudices, the managers responsible for diversity construct discrimination in ways in which they only become integral parts of Finnish work life. They do not describe the discrimination as serious, they do not reject the expectations put on them to discriminate, and when events take place within their own organisations the events are minimised, silenced and normalised.

5.4. Diversity and organisations

I: Well why according to you do Finnish organisations start to pay attention to things like diversity or multiculturalism?

R: If we think, we think about what is good business, so, as behind everything there must be a business-link, that is of course where we start from, we have to produce value to our shareholders, to our owners, that is of course where we start from. L1G1

This citation here above presents in a nutshell the basis for diversity work in organisations.

As mentioned earlier, the competition for workforce is a challenge for five of the six organisations. On the company level, it is this competition for and retention of a cheap workforce that constitutes the primary motive for diversity initiatives. The reduction of turnover and search for new recruitment potential was also the most frequently cited reason for increased diversity in Sippola and Leponiemi’s study (2007).

Even though the aims of diversity in the participating organisations are similar, the routes taken to working with diversity differ. In some organisations, the increased
diversity among the workforce is a strategic choice, whereas in others it just has turned out in such a way that job candidates increasingly are of foreign origin.

R: We had like a political, or not a political but like a practical change has taken place, as it is in very many work communities, that when we looked for employees and if the application was, so that the undersigned was of a foreign language, or if someone called and tried to come to an interview as a non-Finnish speaker so, like so, today it is like totally impossible. So now we have as a starting point that those people are on the same line, which by no means was [like that] when it was easy to get good work force. Today good work force, you have to compete a lot for good work force, and if we always have to use the most expensive solution in that competition, that is euros in order to get a good and permanent work force, then that road will never end. So the right way is that we find the persons who, who may have had difficulties in getting a job, but then when they get it they are ready to start creating a career for themselves, and in that way it is transformed into euros for us too. L1G1

If change per se is not reason enough for organisations to invest in diversity, then increased immigration can be turned into a business question. However, it is not the specific cultural knowledge of persons that constitutes the business advantage of increased diversity, as business case diversity discourses often profess (Litvin, 2006). The primary reason for immigrants to be interesting from the employers’ point of view is the discrimination they are subject to on the labour market. As long as other employers continue to discriminate against immigrants, they produce a cheap and flexible labour force that those that have decided not to discriminate can benefit from.

5.4.1. Positioning the organisation vis-à-vis diversity and society

While all companies have a business approach to diversity, they position business in relation to society and diversity in different ways: as change-makers, as passive adapters and as guardians of business conditions.

5.4.1.1. The change-maker

From the position of the change-maker the organisation is seen as primarily being business-driven, but also as a societal actor. When positioning in this manner, the participating managers do not directly attach diversity management to a corporate social responsibility theme or programme. However, they see that not only the organisation has to change with society, but at times it also has to be ready to head the change. However, in a context where discrimination against immigrants is widespread, heading the change in increasing ethnic diversity is not always easy. From this position, the organisation has to accept that change will lead to discontent among customers.

I: So there are problems with clients?

R: Yes, yes there are, even employment relationships, client relationships have terminated because we have immigrant employees. Even a known Member of the Parliament came to scold our cust, euh, employees as Hottentots, told them to ship back where they have come from, and so, but these are left without attention. They of course don’t change our activity, so that if the customer, the customer has then an option and can go elsewhere. L1G1

This position has to be seen in the context of the specific industrial sector. The participants mainly positioning themselves as change-makers were working in the retail sector, employing people in low-skill service jobs. In their area, the customer relationship is negotiated separately with each individual customer for each customer interaction. Thus, employing an immigrant does not put an important part of customer relationships at risk, and the risk may not be long lasting. This is a risk that they are
ready to take, and which probably is less significant than the benefits of reducing turnover, thus the business rationale remains intact. In contrast, in the cleaning sector the customer relationship is negotiated on a larger scale at a time, as the cleaning company competitively wins projects. In this competitive constellation, the client gains in importance and the company is much more hesitant to push for the acceptance of immigrant workers. This leads to a co-production of discrimination that will be discussed later in this chapter.

5.4.1.2. The passive adapter

From the position of the passive adapter, there is neither an aim for change nor a resistance towards it. This is a position which was mainly taken on in the public transport sector company and the cleaning sector organisation. The job profiles they have to offer are such that people with limited language skills have been able to gain employment in their organisations, and the occupations have become to be seen as entry level jobs for immigrants. Therefore, the organisations have not had a need to actively attract foreign workers. The increase in ethnic diversity has on the contrary awakened some worries. The recruitment challenges in the cleaning sector, for instance, have been seen as being increased as the sector has been marked as an immigrant-dominated sector (Pitkänen et al., 2009, p.127). In the public transport company, this has also led to discussions.

I: Is there a difference with Finnish drivers, that Finnish drivers don’t experience it as an equally respected profession?

R: We have discussed this increasingly lately, and, there is the ri, or we are afraid, there is the danger, that now that this has become like a foreigners’ profession

I: Mmm.

R: So, so Finns feel that it will decrease drivers’ appreciation and like the appreciation of the profession [...] we are afraid of it, that especially young Finns will think like this, that they can’t choose to become drivers, as any kind of rubbish people (laughs a bit) can get in. L5G1

Despite these negative scenarios, there is very little overt resistance towards diversity from this passive position. This non-resistance can be understood as a non-choice option. These organisations would not be able to function without their foreign workers. According to the Trade Union for the Public and Welfare Sectors up to 40% of bus drivers in the capital region are immigrants (Taloussanomat 9.06.2010).

From the position of the passive adapter, difference is not per se seen as a value. Diversifying the workforce is simply a way to survive. Differences are not drawn on in the work context, neither are differences constructed as positive. The organisation only needs to manage and adapt to the change.

5.4.1.3. The guardian of business conditions

The third position is one where business is placed before everything else and should shape the way in which society is organised. This position is taken by the participant from the industry sector. He is concerned that society does not realise the importance of his industry for the well-being of the nation, and is annoyed that the authorities do not invest enough in the education of people his sector needs.
This is a position of adaptation and discontent: diversity is not an aim, but a reality that exists. Until this point, this position resembles that of the passive adapter, but this diverse reality is not a neutral fact from this position, it is a problem, a reality that leads to challenges. Cultures are different, and when people from different cultures work together it supposedly leads to problems.

I: Yes, yes, well how does the collaboration then work out in these groups where there are foreigners?

R: I can't say anything special what it would be, why would it be any more special than anywhere else. It is the same phenomena in these things like there isn't anything special here in our work that here they would be something special. When people with different nationalities do, aim for the same result and work in the same space.

I: Yes, yes

R: One can figure out what it leads to or does not lead to. L2G1

This participant's company cannot do without foreign workers, but from this position the organisation cannot adapt to differences. While from the position of the adapter, the organisation is ready to find solutions, find new practices and is ready to adjust, from this position the organisational practices are maintained, motivated by business conditions. Diversity and tolerance can only be realised within the limits of the business conditions.

I: What is a tolerant organisation then?

R: ... Well there of course we come to the, like that, the basic questions of an organisation is maintaining its ability to function and competitiveness, so that the company can continue its activity. And from these premises, so with mere tolerance probably a company can't be held up, so that, it is precisely also about tolerance and understanding in two directions, that we understand that there are some conformities to law, some rules of the game, and for instance the market is what it is, the context where we compete is what it is, and that has like to be understood, so that if this, if we take these things too far and forget what ensures this activity continuity so then it is probable that there is no equality, there is no diversity, as there is no company either. L2G1

5.5. Diversity initiatives

The managers responsible for diversity refer to a number of concrete practices and changes that they have undertaken in their organisation as a consequence of increased diversity and/or as a way to increase the organisation's capacity to grow more diverse. These diversity practices are not aimed at attracting diverse candidates as such, as finding suitable diverse candidates does not seem to be a problem. There are skilled people with immigrant backgrounds for the positions they have, and the organisations do not have to compete for the foreign workforce. They also do not see the commitment of diverse employees as a challenge. The underlying motive in the concrete diversity initiatives seems to be to enable using a diverse workforce just as any other workforce.

The diversity initiatives are focused on changing managerial practices, preventing conflicts, and shaping attitudes. Some of the practices could fall under several of these headings. Shaping the attitudes of the majority workforce into more foreigner-friendly also leads to fewer conflicts. Preventing conflicts, again, may sometimes lead to changing organisational practices. Not all companies however have concrete practices related to diversity, and, for instance, from the position of the “guardian of business conditions” changing organisational practices should not be a primary solution.
5.5.1. Changing managerial practices

The increased diversity within the workforce has forced some organisational practices related to managerial work to be changed. First of all, recruiting managers need more knowledge about work permits and administrative questions related to employing foreigners residing in Finland on different statuses. This has led to more complexity in the recruiters’ job. The knowledge recruiters now are said to need is novel, and acquirable with time. One participant describes how they have made mistakes with permit issues, and have been sued for use of illegal workforce as an employee’s permits were not in order. Another participant describes how it was difficult in the beginning when they started to recruit more foreigners, and how even the state authorities did not know how to assist them with questions related to work permits. But she explains that with time they have become experts and can now also advise others, including the state authorities.

The recruitment of foreign workers is nonetheless overall seen to be different from recruiting a Finn, regardless of the immigrant’s migration status. The participants describe how a recruiter has to be more meticulous and accurate when recruiting a foreigner. The foreign candidate is more difficult to evaluate, and his or her background is more difficult to check. Checking for language skills is brought up by many of the participants as a challenging and important aspect of the recruitment phase. Some mention that they have had plans to start using language tests, as they say that it is difficult to evaluate the real level of Finnish skills just by talking. The testing and cautiousness is not, however, limited to language capacity. One participant mentions that the recruiter should check using the candidate’s other networks whether the candidate really is what/who she or he declares him/herself to be. What seems to be at stake is ensuring that the candidate’s difference does not impede his or her fitting in. Then, the question how far a candidate’s difference pertains to the area of work and how far an employer has the right to look into one’s private life arises:

I: Mmm, so what types of issues is it that you especially attach importance to when you recruit a foreigner, or a person with foreign origins?

R: It is of course clear that the background has to be checked more in detail, and you of course need to call to previous employers [...] and then when we get very close to some more private questions in some situations, and there it is clear that religion is an issue. And, and we would not want to make mistakes here either, but we would want to guarantee the person his or her privacy, if she/he wants to keep that protection, but we need to check that the person is able to perform the tasks that we expect to be done. Then the question is like working alone, working night-shifts, handling pork meat, aah, these types of questions. And and, as here, if the religious conviction is very strong, then, then it can be that the employment relationship cannot work.

Recruitment practices have also changed in terms of the channels used. At least in some of the organisations, the participants state that today foreign applicants are not rejected as they were before. So recruitment discrimination has decreased. Some of the organisations have started receiving more job applications from foreigners, as they have been identified by immigrants as an employer accepting foreigners. Also, foreign workers’ own networks function as good recruitment channels. Grapevine recruiting was also found by Sippola & Leponiemi (2007) to be increasing in Finnish diversity promoting organisations.

While most of changed practices relate to recruitment, in some organisations the increased diversity among the workforce has also translated into taking difference into account in more day-to-day activities of the work. This is especially the case of work
shift planning. Even though accommodating difference to work shifts is not a rule, some of the interviewed managers raise the issue of work shift planning as a situation where the organisation may show flexibility and respect towards the employees with different cultural backgrounds. When possible then, a person wishing to be free on a specific day, for instance the end of Ramadan, will be allowed to take a day off that day. The variation in the preferences related to days off can also be seen as a positive development from the employers’ perspective. Rather than all being off on the Finnish traditional festive days, such as Midsummer or Christmas, it makes shift planning more flexible when some of the employees value other days.

5.5.2. Shaping attitudes

Another diversity practice is related to shaping attitudes. As most of the participants share the view that prejudice is a problem in their organisations and in society, trying to change these attitudes and make them less hostile is described as to some extent in the interest of all the organisations employing non-Finnish workers. Totally eradicating prejudice could, however, lead to diminishing the business benefits of diversity. If both current and potential diverse employees faced no discrimination, they would most probably have the same demands regarding work conditions as the dominant population. Thereby, decreased discrimination could lead to losing a flexible workforce, now committed to working in sectors the dominant population tends to find unattractive.

How are these attitudes then to be changed? As was seen before, some of the participants state that discriminatory attitudes and behaviours cannot be opposed, whether it is an employee or a client holding them. Employees’ different worldviews have to be respected and clients cannot be forced to accept cleaners from some parts of the world. It is thus not the prejudice that is in the focus. The work around shaping attitudes seems to be based on the contact hypothesis, and assumes that through knowing more about those who are different, attitudes will change.

Knowing more about differences is assumed to happen through training. In some of the participating organisations, middle managers are already provided with different types of training targeted at improving the managers’ competence to lead and work with people coming from different parts of the world. In other companies, there are discussions and plans about including multicultural questions in the standard leadership training.

In addition to training, attitudes are assumed to be mouldable through information provided in booklets. In two organisations, booklets are being produced on different cultural differences. In one organisation, there is also a booklet being produced for managers on what a manager should know when employing an immigrant.

R: We have to tell all our employees what we should know about those cultures that we encounter in these working communities. It is something we are collecting material for. What is Judaism, what is Asian, what is Russian, what types of people there are in the Balkans. These are all totally different people if we look at the average, if we compare averages against each other. There are of course always similar persons around the world, but each one has always specific traits. The African has own people, the Estonians are a group apart, and each one has specific traits and we should be able to tell about them to everyone. L1G1.

Along the contact hypothesis, prejudice will decrease as the prejudiced group learns more about the minority group (Allport, 1954). According to the classical theory, there are some conditions that need to be met for contact to be able to decrease prejudice,
such as equality between the groups, common goals, the possibility to relate together as friends, and the support of some larger, higher instance, such as company management, that supports the interaction. The companies shaping the attitudes of the employees seem to base their thinking on this increased knowledge as a way to decrease prejudice. The problem is that the increased knowledge they provide seems to be the opposite of that needed to support the aim of increased contact. In the contact hypothesis, prejudice decreases as the generalisations and stereotypes of a group are proven to be mistaken through the example of one’s own lived experience. The materials the companies produce seem to reinforce rather than question stereotypes and generalisations (see also Salo and Poutiainen 2010a, 2010b).

5.5.3. Preventing conflicts

A third area of diversity practice focuses on preventing conflicts within the organisation. Preventing conflicts is undertaken in different ways: by anticipating prejudice and counteracting it in advance, and by minimising the differences that may lead to conflicts.

5.5.3.1. Minimising differences

There are several ways in which the organisations studied try to minimise differences. It is, however, not said that they see their activity as one of minimising differences. Rather, what they do is eradicate the reasons for Finns to be prejudiced. One typical way is by induction. Managers have in previous studies also been found to believe that by increasing induction, support, feedback and coaching to immigrants and by accommodating their personal needs, discrimination can be decreased (Sippola, 2007c).

R: The induction part is a lot more significant than with immigrants. Finns, because we always have to check that things have been understood, and these have to be done much more meticulously. And we need to teach the job tasks but we often also need to teach the Finnish culture, so that silly situations don’t arise. L1G1

While the view of the importance of induction is commonly shared by the managers, the organisations have not put specific induction programmes for immigrants in place. Nevertheless, the immigrants’ difference is taken into account in the induction. When possible, a person speaking the new recruit’s mother tongue is used as a support person in one of the organisations. However, stressing the role of induction in decreasing discrimination portrays discrimination as caused by the immigrant and his or her difference.

Another way to minimise differences is by installing new rules that prevent too flagrant differences from arising in the working community. In order to decrease the risks of conflict, some organisations design new rules when the personnel comprise more diversity. Mainly new interaction habits and situations related to difference are taken one at a time, and with flexibility. Still, some situations may become sensitive, and there a common rule can be a helpful way to treat the potential for conflict. In one company, stipulating a rule on WC-hygiene was seen as necessary when the fact that some Muslim men washed their feet in the washbasins in the toilets was felt to be disturbing by the Finns.
In one organisation, a rule on clothing was stipulated as a consequence of Muslim women’s headscarves. Headscarves have not been at the centre of many debates in Finland, unlike in France, and the practices vary from one organisation to another. It is still rare to encounter a person wearing a headscarf in a customer service occupation or in a managerial position, but there is no clear position for or against. Whilst headscarves were forbidden in one of the studied retail organisations, another big Finnish organisation in the retail sector accepted cashiers wearing headscarves.

5.5.3.2. Counteracting prejudice

As was mentioned earlier, managers responsible for diversity describe how they may take the origin of a candidate into account when thinking about where the person would fit in, or at least where the person’s origin will not lead to conflicts and rejection from clients. Some of the diversity work of the persons responsible for diversity falls under this type of work: anticipating and counteracting discrimination.

It is both clients and members of the own organisation that are the targets of this counteraction work. In one organisation, it has become usual practice that when a diverse employee moves to a new client, the employee is presented to the client by the management. This has been found to avoid discrimination and potential tensions and rejection of the different employee. The aim of this presentation is to underline to the client that the employee, albeit being different, for instance being Black, has all the competencies needed to perform the job without problem. In another organisation, a similar type of counteracting is done vis-à-vis shop managers. There the aim is to associate shop managers with the recruitment of diverse employees, and in so doing increase the probability that the shop manager accepts the workers with differences.

While these practices de facto can ease the integration of an employee into a new working environment, these specific practices touching only upon those perceived as different, and potentially different in a negative way, do not put the discriminatory attitudes which are the basis of the potential problems, into question. By relying on these practices of preparing the work context for accepting a diverse employee, the grounds of discrimination are, on the contrary, reinforced. By specifically presenting an employee with differences, the employer indirectly asserts that the stereotypical image of those different as non-competent is an accurate one in general but not in the case of the employee being presented.

5.5.4. The consequences of diversity initiatives

Neither the changed organisational practices nor the knowledge produced about Finns and immigrants in the training and communication material challenge the dominant understanding about differences and discrimination. The concrete work around diversity that organisations undertake to create more inclusive workplaces could be expected to combat structures and eliminate processes that impede minorities in becoming full members of the organisations. In the studied organisations, however, the concrete work around diversity mainly reproduces dominant knowledges about differences and stereotypical images of immigrants, and thus excuses and hides Finns' prejudices.
5.6. Conclusion

This chapter has described the way in which diversity managers in Finland give meaning to diversity and the knowledges that the managers construct about differences.

The majority of the managers interviewed for this chapter worked in organisations facing problems of a lack of workforce and high turnover. In all these organisations, the motivations for promoting diversity were related to business needs, and particularly to the need to recruit and retain people from non-traditional pools of candidates. The organisations could not fill the positions with Finnish workers only. Diversity was thus approached from a business perspective.

Diversity was in all accounts mainly attached to immigration and ethnic minorities. Other dimensions of difference were at times mentioned, but most of diversity motivations and practices were related to increasing the number of immigrant workers and to ensuring the efficient functioning of the organisation despite the changed composition of the workforce.

In the interviews, the managers constructed different knowledges about the relation between difference, the organisation and the society. The different knowledges they produced positioned the companies as change-makers, passive adapters or guardians of business conditions. Only from the change maker position were differences seen as valuable resources and the organisation as ready to change proactively in order to become increasingly diverse. The passive adapter had a neutral stance towards differences, and was ready to modify organisational practices only as much as necessary. The guardian of business conditions did not see the value of difference, but was constrained to recruit immigrant workers. From the perspective of the guardian of business conditions, changing organisational practices to better suite a diverse workforce was not an option.

The meanings of diversity, its management and the diversity practices interviewees described were all shaped by knowledges about Finland and Finns. Finland was described as being in a state of change, turning from a monocultural homogeneous country into an increasingly diverse and multicultural society. This knowledge presented diversity and its management as a new and needed management practice, but also informed the knowledges about discrimination and prejudice and provided positions to the Finns and to the non-Finns. Finland was in addition described as being a non-conflictual society in which discrimination is current.

The knowledges about Finland as inexperienced with cultural difference, as a non-conflictual society and as a society where discrimination is current all shaped the way discrimination and diversity practices were understood. Discrimination was on the one hand described as a pervasive problem, but on the other hand, when talking about discrimination within the organisation, both it and its seriousness were minimised. Discrimination was explained as stemming from the inexperience of having different groups working together, and being caused by colleagues’ negative attitudes. These were, however, legitimised, and explained as normal parts of Finnish work life.

The managers constructed knowledge about Finns and non-Finns as separate and homogenous groups, and relied on essentialist notions of difference. Finns were described as still having to learn how to handle situations where different cultures encounter, while immigrants were described as having different traits that may
bewilder their Finnish colleagues. These knowledges position Finns and non-Finns in different ways. Finns are in the process of learning, and have the right to hold on to negative attitudes towards foreigners. Ethnic minority workers are left alone to face the prejudice of colleagues and clients.

Diversity practices focused on minimising discrimination, but reproduced the order between Finns and non-Finns. Finns' needs were in the focus. One diversity practice was to shape attitudes. This was done by providing the, presumably inexperienced, Finns with information about immigrants. However, the information about immigrants that was distributed to managers and colleagues seemed very essentialising and as producing stereotypical understandings about cultural differences. The other diversity practice focusing on reducing discrimination was that of minimising differences. The assumption seemed to be that if immigrants were less different, knew the Finnish work context better and did not bring differences to the fore, clashes between Finns and immigrants could be avoided.

In the next chapter, the focus turns to the immigrant workers working for the same organisations that the diversity managers in this chapter do.
6 ETHNIC MINORITIES IN FINLAND TALK ABOUT DIVERSITY, DIFFERENCE AND DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

As seen in the previous chapter, the focus of diversity management practices in Finnish companies was often to reduce discrimination, though at the same time discrimination was effectively legitimised and explained as stemming from Finns' inexperience with multiculturalism. In this chapter, the focus moves to the ethnic minority workers' experience of Finnish work life and to how they understand difference and discrimination in the context of work.

The chapter is based on 25 interviews with ethnic minority workers employed by 4 diversity-promoting organisations. The participants work as sales persons, cleaners or bus drivers.

The chapter unfolds in the following manner. First, I will describe the dominant ways in which the participants talk about Finland, their work organisation and discrimination. Then, four different subject positions, drawing on the different versions of these dominant knowledges, are presented. By taking on the different subject positions, the participants reconcile discrimination and success in their work-life experiences in different manners.

6.1. Finland and differences

The dominant knowledge participants construct about Finland is that of a society where discrimination and racism are current. This knowledge is sometimes challenged by constructing different and opposing knowledges – Finland as having always been multicultural and Finland as being a harmonious country. Here, the focus will be on the most common knowledge about Finland, and the other knowledges will be discussed in relation to the different subject positions.

6.1.1. Finland as a racist society not used to multiculturalism

The most dominant way to describe the Finnish context is to depict xenophobia and racism to be common. The participants share with me a variety of experiences of interaction with Finns both inside and outside working life, where they have been physically and verbally assaulted, insulted and unfairly treated.

There are two components constructing Finland as a racist society. First of all, racist events are described as being common, occurring on a regular basis and taking place in different spheres of life. The participants described racism encountered from total strangers in the streets, the prejudice of neighbours, racism in school, and also in work, where both colleagues and superiors commit racist acts. When racism in this way becomes an every-day phenomenon, it becomes a structuring element of society, visible for the individual who is the victim, while mainly invisible for the dominant population. For the victim, regular racist events participate in constructing Finland as a racist society.

The other component constructing a country context as racist is the way in which societal structures and institutions make racism visible or invisible, resist it or co-
produce it. Widespread racism is difficult to resist, and in Finland there is scant support available for victims. This is especially true for discrimination in work, as the ombudsman for minorities whose role is to assist minorities in situations of potential discrimination, does not cover the area of work life at all.

The participants also felt that the societal structures and institutions in Finland made it difficult to resist racism. Some of them explained that when an authority was involved in the treatment of the racism they had been subject to – in school or in the public area - the outcome had been negative, worsening the situation further. As a young Somali woman explains her experience of public institutions in relation to racism and support:

R: Once just I remember in 99, then I was working in a day-care centre and, one, I can’t say that he was a racist or something you know he was drunk, I was sitting, I had gotten from work, I was going home and that one man came sitting in the metro, I sat in the metro, he entered, immediately as he noted he scold me, I said “hey shut up you don’t need to scold me, I didn’t do anything to you”, suddenly he, some woman was with him and both they were drunk I don’t know did it depend, were they racist or was it that they were drunk but they just scolded me and I didn’t say anything to them I just sat calmly. Another Finn that had a young boy said, “Hey that girl hasn’t done anything to you, she is sitting nicely on the bench, be quiet and sit on your own place”, because he [incomprehensible] his fingers in my eyes you know, and the boy scolds the other man and says “Now you sit down and calm down”, the boy sits beside me and suddenly the man who is drunk scolds the other boy and he said, “Hey why do you defend a nigger”, and he said “Niggers didn’t do anything to you and we are all same and now be quiet and sit”, he didn’t listen you know, he suddenly hit that man my eye you know, he had some ring on his finger, my eye became all black and

I: Yes, yes, the drunken one, hit you in the eye?

R: Yes, the one who was drunk, after that I was really angry and couldn’t do anything, someone called the police, and then when the police arrived what most makes me angry is the police you know, because the police came, they let the drunken people go you know, and my eyes was totally black, the surrounding was really black and the eye inside became really red and the police just said, “well come with us”, “where?”, “we interrogate you”, “what the hell”, when my eye you know, was really hurting, and my eye was really black, and the other people they let go, nobody said anything to them and the police almost two hours I was there at the police station, waited for some person who interrogates me, after that they said “yes yes yes, what happened you have started”, even if I didn’t start anything, and then they said “do you have any proof, eye witnesses?” where do I get, because even the boy if had you know, near me then if the police had asked immediately because the boy I know he says directly that he started but nobody asked then, because they just took me and everyone that man who was drunk and other woman and they just left

I: It is totally horrible

R: And I had to sit two hours at the police station and after that [they] sent me home and said to me “just go”, I had hurting eye, “Hey if I go to the doctor I will get from there medicine or something like that and I have to pay myself the medicine and the people that did this to me you let go” and the police answered me that you came to their country, this is not your country

I: No

R: Hmm, then I was really angry at the police you know, I didn’t ever like the police because they don’t at least do the matter the same you know, they always defend, according to me the police are racist persons. L1E2

The quote above exemplifies the different levels of racism ethnic minorities are subject to. Firstly, racism is lived in one-to-one relationships, where individual neighbours, colleagues, unknown men and women in the street, treat minorities in racist manners. Secondly, minorities feel that there is scant support from public authorities for opposing the racism they are the victims of.
The construction of Finland as a racist context highlights the Finnish past and the Finns' experience and lack of experience of difference. Racism and discrimination are, according to this construction, understandable set in the context of Finland’s past, where Finns have had few opportunities to encounter people with differences. Racism and discrimination come to reveal more about the inexperienced Finn than about a prejudiced attitude or a supposedly negative difference of the victim. In this manner, the victim of discrimination can uphold a sense of self-worth without condemning discrimination and racism. From this position, racism is not intentional, and will disappear with time as Finns gain in experience.

R: For Finns, for a long time [...] there was an ideology, a politics there was that no immigrants move to Finland, and because of this politics people still need to get used to the fact that we are in our own homes, [...] and now that people come from different countries, it is difficult, it is however troublesome, I am sure, I am sure it is troublesome. People [Finns] suffer but on the other hand they learn quickly. L4E1

In the construction of Finland as a racist society due to its past, the immigrant's position is to get used to living with racism. One has to learn how to anticipate it and avoid it. It is a position of adaptation, where one has little power to change things. Three of the participants, for instance exemplified their adaption by describing their friendships with neo-Nazis or former neo-Nazis. In their accounts, the participants did not condemn their friends’ racist ideologies, rather, the focus was on describing people’s attitudes as totally unimportant.

This is from my notes after a day interviewing cleaners:

After the interview with Mark, both Samy and Mark wanted to smoke some cigarettes, and we stayed and talked outside for 20 minutes or so. If I only could have recorded that discussion! It was so interesting. They talked about different nationalities, how nobody liked the English and how it was normal as the English are arrogant, have done such much harm in the world, how they always shout. And they compared the relation between the Irish and English with the relation between Finns and Swedes... Also, Samy told that Finns do not like foreigners, that for instance 8 out of 10 of his friends did not like foreigners. And that two of his friends even have a Nazi cross on their sleeves, but that it doesn’t matter, despite that they go out and drink beers together. And how he had been near Tampere for the mid-summer weekend, at a place of his wife’s friend, and that there the man in the house was a fanatic fan of Hitler. That he has a whole collection of books on Hitler, arms, and that there were all these shining army boots in the entrance. And he said something as the following, “That’s normal, he was a very powerful guy”. Post-interview notes L4E12345 (Mark Irish, Samy Turkish)

6.2. The organisation

According to the declarations of diversity-promoting organisations, an organisation managing diversity will look into not discriminating against anyone and providing employees the same opportunities regardless of background. The organisation should provide all employees with the possibility to work in a context free of racism and discrimination. This is by and large also the way participants construct their organisations. The dominant way to construct the organisation is to maintain that it is characterised by equality. Some of the participants are aware of the organisation being involved in a diversity project, and refer to it as a proof of the organisation’s intentions to treat all equally. Others have never heard of diversity projects and think that diversity projects are not needed. What they base their understanding of the organisation’s equality on is their own opportunity to work in the organisation or even the fact that they have been proposed advancement.

R: Like myself for instance. I am in principle like, or I am of foreign origin as such so,
The participants, however, attach the equality or inequality of their organisation uniquely to access. The organisation is constructed as equal based on the fact that minority workers are accepted as organisational members. In the few descriptions of the organisation as unequal, it is also the recruitment phase that is in focus. Some among the participants working as cleaners felt that the organisation's staffing practices were not always in line with the formal language requirements. They had witnessed people without Finnish skills being accepted to sites where non-Finnish speakers *a priori* had no access. The recruitment of these persons was then seen to be based on personal networks: the superior favouring a friend or a friend's friend.

The construction of the organisation as equal is based on an understanding of the organisation as being essentially the same as "the office". The office is composed of the administrative staff and the recruiting manager, and is not located on the job sites of the participants. The office is described as a place to which one can turn in case of problems, and a place from where support will be given. Relating the equality of the organisation to the recruitment and advancement phases, thus uniquely seeing equality of access and ignoring equality of treatment as pertaining to the organisation's responsibility, positions the "office" as not responsible for what takes place in the local work communities. The organisation is understood as consisting of the formal organisation only.

The administrative staff are, however, absent from the participants descriptions of their job. When they talk about their job, it is the immediate context they describe. They describe the relations with colleagues, to their superiors and to their clients. It is mainly in these interrelationships that they form their understanding of themselves as employees, and as organisational members. And it is in these relationships that they describe racism and discrimination.

Maintaining that the organisation is equal, even when the closest interrelationships and the everyday practices on the job site may be discriminatory and racist, requires framing the organisation and racism in specific ways. First of all, the closest colleagues and superiors acting in a racist manner are not associated with the organisation – they are just colleagues. Secondly, racism and discrimination are seen as an individual problem. The participants do not perceive the organisation to be responsible for guaranteeing a racism-free working environment. Rather, they take the responsibility of racism and discrimination on themselves, as will be seen in the next section.

The importance of their closest colleagues in the descriptions of their job may be typical at the worker level. They do not have a strong professional identity based on specific skills or an educational background. They do not have many contacts with other parts of the organisation, but seem to form their sense of themselves as employees in the local units, suspecting that elsewhere things may be different, and that they are lucky to be where they are:

R: At least not here [company name], I don't know if somewhere else [there are complaints over foreigners] but here no, at least here in [area of city]. L3E5

The lack of a sense of belonging to a larger organisation underlines the importance of their closest colleagues in the inclusion of the participants. Inclusiveness takes place in the interpersonal interactions in the local unit in these companies. Here, a minority
employee is more vulnerable in the face of racist remarks than a person in a more managerial position, where the work context is wider and where both organisational declarations and a strong professional identity can provide more support. The non-intervention in the event of an employee’s racist comments, especially on the worker level, not only makes the organisation a co-producer of racism, but costs the organisation money and damages the victim’s right to a healthy workplace.

This knowledge about the organisation as equal and the job as one where one is happy, frames then the way experiences within the job can be understood, and the way in which one can position oneself vis-à-vis discrimination taking place within the organisation.

6.3. Differences constructed within the organisational context

In the interviews, the participants construct differences between themselves as foreigners and Finns. The difference between Finns and non-Finns seem so dominant, that other differences are very little voiced. Even though gender and age intersect with the dominant difference, the belonging or not to the category of ‘Finns’ determines one’s position. There are no instances where the participants emphasised another difference to underplay the non-Finnish identity.

What is it then to be a foreigner? It is to not be something. They do not construct themselves as members of their culture, or representatives of a specific country. The first and dominant way to view the issue is that one is not included. Being a foreigner is constructed as a marginal position, where more effort is needed to gain the same as a Finn, where one needs to feel satisfied with less, where mistakes in the workplace have more serious consequences than for a Finn.

6.3.1. Difference through negative acts

When the participants talk about their jobs and colleagues they reproduce the knowledges about foreigners and Finns that are dominant in Finland – the foreigners as lacking in some way and the Finns as inexperienced. The differences between themselves as foreigners and Finns arise through negative acts targeted at the foreigners. Discrimination and the threat of being identified as different, and thus discriminated against, are ever present. It is not only customers who have prejudices and can express them in a direct and harsh way, colleagues and supervisors, too, expose directly and indirectly their hostility towards immigrants and/or reserve differential treatment to their immigrant colleagues.

The discrimination the participants have experienced is both subtle and blatant, and sometimes turns into bullying. While the line between the different types of discrimination and bullying is often difficult to draw, and what someone feels is subtle discrimination may for someone else resemble blatant racism, the practices of naming can be of great importance for the victim and for making the seriousness of discrimination visible. What seems to be happening at the time of the study is that all forms of discrimination and racism are explained as “just racism”, and normalised in different manners. For instance, naming bullying appropriately as ‘bullying’ would be beneficial for seeing the potentially very serious consequences it may have. Differentiating between racism and bullying could also be a way to detach negative acts
from the Finns-foreigners divide, where negative acts are justified through Finns' characteristics.

Even though racism in other countries has tended to change from blatant to more subtle forms (Bobo et al., 1997), blatant racism is not an unusual part of many of the participants' work life realities. They have experienced racist remarks from clients and colleagues. Customers have called them names, treated them as “incapable niggers”. When one participant asked her colleague who treated her with hostility why she did not like foreigners even though her husband was a foreigner too, her colleague had replied that he was not as dark skinned as she was.

Subtle discrimination is less obvious than blatant, but harmful treatment which has become so normalised that it can be difficult for it to be seen as harmful, especially by the non-victim. Here below, a bus driver describes what he calls hidden racism. The racist act does not remain hidden to the victim, but since it is not voiced aloud, it remains invisible for other members of the personnel.

R: There are everywhere like those, hidden racists and like that but

I: Mmm. How does one know, that?

R: Well how, if I say “Hi” and like. Then he just looks at me, swears something, and turns around.

I: Doesn’t greet?

R: Doesn’t greet. L5E5

Some of the participants live with pervasive and frequently-occurring subtle discrimination in their work. One participant working in a gas station is not talked to. Particularly, it is her superior that does not speak to her, but also her colleagues prefer to speak to each other rather than to her when working on a same shift. Another participant tells about jokes, where she feels that her difference is a target. Yet another describes her reluctance to have a night shift together with a non-Finn, as when two non-Finns work nights together their colleagues will complain about the work they have performed.

I: Yes, yes, well are there often those kinds of complaints?

R: Yes, yes there are, at least there are when two foreigners are on the same shift. That’s why I at times hate when I am together with a foreigner on the same shift. It is nice you know to be two foreigners on a shift, but then always there are these complaints when we are on a same shift with a foreigner.

A bit later in the interview:

I: There are problems. Well does it tell about the fact that they are prejudiced against foreigners or are a bit racist or

R: Well it is not because of that, I can’t say they are racist because at least they don’t show they are racist. But it can be that it is because they think that we are not on the same level you know. L1E2

This is a threat immigrant workers live with. Many of them say that immigrants need to work harder, prove their value, and that as an immigrant you are not allowed to make mistakes. Further, if you do make a mistake, it will be seen as caused by the fact that you are an immigrant. The stereotype of the immigrant is that of an incompetent.
Being constantly evaluated through your immigrant origin may lead to what is termed ‘stereotype threat’. A stereotype threat takes place when you are at a risk of confirming, as a self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about your own group (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Studies have shown that the stereotype threat increases underperformance (Steele, 1997). Living with the constant threat of being identified as an immigrant and thus underperforming may indeed increase the risks of underperforming.

The consequences of both blatant and subtle racism are considerable both for the organisation and the individual. Racial discrimination has been found to leading the victim to distancing and isolating oneself from the work community (April & April, 2009). Subtle discrimination can also have negative consequences on cognitive capacities. Both of these hamper the organisation in achieving its greatest efficiency. For the individual, racism and discrimination can cause stress, lose of a sense of self-worth, have negative effects on health and reduce the opportunities available in life.

However, both the managers and the minority employees often minimise the importance of discrimination. Minority participants follow very similar lines to the managers, and normalise both the blatant and the subtle forms of discrimination in their talk.

6.4. Ethnic minority workers' subject positions

In the previous sections the most common knowledges the participants constructed about Finland, the organisation and discrimination were described. In the interviews the participants drew on knowledges about these topics in different ways. By taking different stances towards these knowledges the ethnic minority participants took on different subject positions. All in all five different subject positions could be identified in the interviews: the subject positions of 'the lead-taker', 'the insensitive', 'the lacking', 'the superior immigrant', and 'the happy'. These subject positions were identified by looking at the different ways in which the ‘diverse individual’, the Finn, discrimination and Finland were constructed. These different subject positions are now described.

6.4.1. The lead-taker

The position of the lead-taker is a position that many of the participating minority workers often take on. The lead-taker position to a considerable extent draws on the knowledges about Finland, the organisation and about discrimination that were described as the common construction in the previous sections.

The lead-taker position reproduces the knowledge about Finns as inexperienced with cultural difference. It is in face of the inexperience of difference that the immigrant can take a leading role, and introduce the inexperienced Finn to being with people with cultural differences. Here, a distinction is constructed between the older and the younger Finns, as young Finns are suspected to learn quickly. At the same time, older Finns can’t be expected to change overnight, and can’t thus be blamed for their racism. It is instead the immigrant’s role to teach and educate the Finn to be with foreigners.
R: One should probably give persons [the chance] to try at least, and to be with immigrants, and try to be [...] if s/he can’t be it is, it is not a bad person, s/he isn’t yet ready. Those people should be understood. And before, I always suffered, I wondered well why is s/he not yet ready (laughs). It is the same as with a flower for instance. If a flower doesn’t give flowers it is not worth hating the flower, why did you not give flowers, come on give, well it is dumb. It is the same with people, if s/he is not ready, s/he should let be and think about the ways that should, what to do with him/her, what s/he needs. Maybe s/he needs kindness, love, more attention. And then it depends also on the immigrant, for instance on me. I have to give more than I can sometimes. But in the beginning for me, in the beginning it was difficult to always be kind, but I have to be, in all situations always to everyone ‘sorry, sorry’, I forgive everyone, and then I am forgiven for everything. L1E1

The majority population is from this position seen as prejudiced and as discriminating. However, against the background of Finns as inexperienced, the discrimination is understood and legitimised. Discrimination can be avoided, as in the quote above, by teaching the Finn, but also by changing one’s own behaviour, by anticipating discrimination and by avoiding situations that could lead to pointing to one’s own difference in a negative way.

From this position, the ethnic minority worker is active in shaping the work context in which he/she works. The lead-takers actively interact with their colleagues and shape the interaction by their own behaviour. One participant talks about how she has become very talkative and outgoing, while before she started to work in Finland she was not like that at all.

R: Finns are. I say they are not cold, they are just afraid. So they, it takes time before they come close and they get to know you. But once they get to know they are so sweet. So the ice, ice, or how can it be said, the mountain that is in front has to be melted first, the iceberg, and then perhaps. And I, maybe because I speak and I am open, so that was the reason why I was accepted here, so I was the one who initiated, started, before I was really quiet, now I am totally different. Now I speak and speak. Like today there is a new guy with me, he has also been a bit cautious, but again I continue with the same so that I speak, maybe then in a month we are good friends like the others. L1E3

Overall, from the lead-taker’s position the outcome of interactions with colleagues and customers is seen as being entirely the minority members’ responsibility. Minority employees need to be sensitive to situations, reread them before reacting, and interpret them in the right way, as not being about racism.

I. How then according to you, other foreigners that are working here and have faced discrimination because of skin colour

R: Well that one who just have left, maybe – in his regards there were quite a lot, but it was a bit of his problem, that his attitude was a bit bad, perhaps we too, our problem is our attitude, maybe we take a bit too seriously, they don’t mean what they say, or maybe we understand what they want to say, maybe because of that there were some contradictions and words, that is why I always first look and think before I let out from the mouth, (respond), maybe s/he doesn’t mean, I just have understood, as the Finnish language is quite rich, one should just see and try to understand, the one that was here and left did not speak Finnish well,[...] I said many time to him that your attitude is a bit wrong, that you should look a bit, that they are not bad. L1E3

The lead-taker position thus draws on knowledge about the ethnic minority individual as having a lot of agency in face of the discriminating Finn. By drawing on knowledge about Finns as inexperienced and discriminating, and by presenting the ethnic minority workers as having a lot of agency, the discrimination ethnic minorities may face in work are both legitimised as telling about Finns inexperience and also as falling on the responsibility of the minority. The minority’s need to take over the responsibility for the relationship with the dominant population has been pointed to in previous studies. For instance, Fleming and colleagues studying African Americans’ preferred
reactions to racism also found that many of their participants felt they needed to educate the dominant population in order to be able to start a relationship based on equality (Fleming et al., 2012). The lead-takers’ position could be seen as a minority-majority dynamic where the minority is required to adapt, and where the Finns’ inexperience is used as a cultural resource to maintain the power order.

### 6.4.2. The lacking

The subject position of the lacking partly draws on similar knowledges to the lead-taker. Both the lacking and the lead-taker position hold that there is discrimination in Finnish work organisations, and that it is understandable and legitimate. However, the knowledge about the ethnic minority individual and his/her agency differ, as well as the attention given to Finland and Finns. These differences shape the way discrimination is given meaning.

Instead of drawing on knowledges about Finland and Finns to legitimise discrimination, from the position of the lacking all that matters is the individual ethnic minority and his or her skills and capabilities. In the following excerpt, a young woman working as a service station attendant describes the reasons why her colleagues do not talk to her. She starts by pinpointing language as the cause, then her activities that differ from her colleagues, her appearance and her lack of friends in Finland. She does speak good Finnish, and makes herself very well understood.

I: Yes. Well how, still about this kind of a situation that they just talk and you are excluded so you said that it could be your fault?

R: It is according to me also my fault. They do have sometimes tried to talk with me but it can be that I didn’t understand one hundred per cent, or I do understand but I have difficulties in talking with them

I: Yes

R: It is at least easy for me to understand when talking

I: Yes

R: But then I do not have that many experiences from Finland

I: Mmm–m

R: I go to school I work but I do not have a lot of time outside, I do not have a lot of experiences

I: Yes

R: Therefore even if they talk with me it is like not funny to talk with me, it is quite funny to talk with me, if I go to Vietnam, quite much people like to talk with me, I am quite a good speaker (laughs)

I: Yes

R: But as I do not know, like I do not know Finnish yet well and like [...]...when I am here in Finland, it is not my home country, [...] my appearance is different, I am so small and short and then they are so big, it does differentiate a bit.

I: Yes

R: And the biggest part is the language skills. L1E6
Racism and discrimination are from the position of the lacking seen as totally stemming from one’s own incompetences. The discrimination has to be understood as legitimate considering one’s own weaknesses, and the discrimination has to be lived with.

From the subject position of the lacking immigrant, the organisational behaviour is also affected. The participants explain how they try to always take everyone into consideration, how they are very adaptive to the needs of others, and how they do everything they can in order to avoid their difference being visible in the result of their job. Having a feeling of lack, the participants try to compensate by doing better and/or more work in the tasks they are good at.

R: I am small and there many, sometimes I can’t lift or move some heavy things and they help me and and then I always have this kind of, I always talk to myself that what do I have as weak side and what do I have as a strong side, so I don’t speak well Finnish and then I am small, I can’t do all the tasks there and then I try others so I just clean more than they do. L1E6

The position of the lacking reproduces the knowledge about the immigrant as lacking and incompetent, that both the managers in the participating organisations construct, and that circulates more widely in society. From this position, the Finns are left without attention, and the situation of the participants can only improve through the immigrants’ improved skills and capabilities. Organisations are constructed as fair and treating people according to their merits.

6.4.3. The insensitive

From the position of the insensitive, difference does lead to negative situations. It is a challenge to be different in the Finnish work context. The position of the insensitive, however, does not draw on the knowledges of Finland and Finns, neither on the characteristics of the ethnic minority employees to explain discrimination. Discrimination is simply constructed as unimportant.

By constructing discrimination as unimportant, the participants can maintain a description of their work and their work community as positive. The events where the participants are discriminated against are not talked about in terms of discrimination, but the participants describe the way they feel about them. They say they feel annoyed by colleagues and clients, and they feel that situations are difficult, that they feel ill and/or sad. However, even though they describe these emotional reactions that the events create, they immediately deny discrimination by describing how they actually are not affected by the events.

Here a black young woman describes an event that took place when she was new in the job, and a colleague refused to help her. Instead of giving the advice needed, the colleague puts the black woman down, and complains about her to the customer the woman was serving. The complaints thereafter became regular and were also made to other colleagues.

R: [In the beginning] there was a woman, but fortunately now she has moved away [...], she annoyed a bit in the beginning, even that I didn’t care at all. L1E2

One way is to distance oneself from the discrimination and adopt a position where one is unaffected by it, to say that one does not care. The participants also smooth out situations of tension by letting them pass, ignoring them, or by claiming that the situations are actually fine. They forget, and they isolate themselves from the work
environment. One participant explains that she has started to do Sudoku’s, and that in
this way she is rather detached from the immediate environment, and able to choose
which conversations to listen to and participate in. The participants talk a lot about
what they do with their ears. They close them, they let something in one ear, only to
immediate put it out the other ear.

R: Well, calling names, it is every day, but I don’t, I like close this ear totally.
I: Mmm.
R: I don’t even want to hear, listen, hear them. L5E5

Not speaking Finnish can in this way be turned into an advantage, a way of distancing
oneself from the work community. A young Bulgarian girl working as a cleaner first
describes herself as a very talkative person, who likes to discuss. When talking about
her Finnish colleagues, however, she finds not discussing with them to be an
advantage:

I: Do your, does your Finnish colleague, colleagues have the same experiences?
R: I have no idea, I mean, I don’t discuss this with them like
I: Yeah.
R: [...] I am so happy I am not, I am not speaking Finnish to understand about their problems. L4E6

The choice of relating to discrimination as unimportant or the event being about
something else, can be seen as taking on a position of ‘the insensitive’. Here, the
position of the ethnic minority is that of a silent endurer, and the one with the right
attitude. They focus on the positive sides of the work. This position is probably also
related to the perception of choices, or as foreigners, the non-existence of alternatives.

I: Do you feel that you aren’t equally valued?
R: Yes I do feel at times, but it isn’t worth it because I know that I am not in my own country, it is
just best continue your life as long as you can
I: Well do you feel that both supervisors and colleagues appreciate less foreigners?
R: Well as the supervisors are, the supervisor and that that Mikko are nice guys and even that
supervisor is a really nice man, I at least like, they have no complaints from my side at least and
those colleagues are just, sometimes they feel just nice, but sometimes they annoy, but anyway
even them I don’t listen you know even if they annoy, nothing harms me. L1E2

When diversity management rhetoric claims that difference increases creativity in
general and the commitment of those different, isolating oneself from the work
community as a means to manage being different is in deep contrast to the desired
behaviour. However, this is supported by the organisations, as in the case of a Somali
girl when complaining about a racist colleague, the supervisor says, “Don’t care she is
just a racist”. In line with this, this girl feels she just needs to forget:

I: Yes, well how did it feel, I mean like
R: Well it felt like...feel bad and everything but it is not worth thinking about
I: Hmmm
R: Because you just have to forget about that kind of thing. L1E2

Being insensitive to discrimination in work can also be a common position in many service occupations. While working in customer service, one cannot avoid meeting badly behaving customers. Being professional in these instances is to not lose one's temper but to continue smiling (see e.g. Hochschild, 1983). Not losing your temper and letting racism and discrimination go can thus be part of ethnic minority workers' professionalism, but it should not apply to colleagues and supervisors.

6.4.4. The superior immigrant

From the superior immigrant's position, the dominant knowledge about Finland and Finns is a myth. Finland is seen as a country that has always been multicultural, and immigration in Finland, even though it has increased in the last decades, as not a new phenomenon.

R: When I moved to Finland, then Finns always explained to me that immigrants are a totally new thing for Finns, it is not like this. Because I believe and I am certain that one hundred years ago the situation was the same, and I believe that in one hundred years the situation will still be the same. L3E2

While the three previous subject positions drew on knowledges about discrimination being a part of Finnish work life, or at least difference being related to negative outcomes in the work context, here discrimination is not seen to exist. From this perspective, what could look like discrimination, rather reveals more about immigrants' insufficient efforts to integrate and succeed in work life. Here, the superior immigrant's position resembles that of the lead-taker's. The situation of the ethnic minority worker is totally dependent on his or her own activity and choices:

R: If s/he [ethnic minority] wants to get a job, s/he will get a job. One has to have initiative, and try, try and try. L3E2

This construction provides the speaker with a position where everything is possible despite one's difference. Finland provides the same opportunities for foreigners as for Finns, as what counts concerning success are the person's ambitions. Finnish society and work organisations are not touched by discrimination and racism.

From this position, a difference between Finns and the immigrants does exist, but the difference is positive for the immigrant. Immigrants are described as better, more motivated and more efficient workers. They also bring new knowledge to the work.

R: Everyone knows what a quality work immigrants do. Everyone knows that immigrants are more hardworking than Finns, this can't be denied. L3E2

And Finns are constructed as not that intelligent:

R: Finns are slow, I speak directly here now

I: Mmm, so you should

R: Of course I need to. One needs to accept how people are, there is nothing bad about it. But when a person is slow to think, then the person will be slow in doing. L3E2
According to this construction, organisations should employ immigrants and promote them. If this is not often the case, it should not be interpreted as a question of discrimination. Rather, Finns have just not yet realised the intelligent thing to do.

6.4.5. The happy

The fifth subject position is that of the happy. From this position, differences are irrelevant. There exists no discrimination and everything is harmonious. Finland from this position is seen in positive, somewhere between neutral and adoring terms.

R: In my opinion there is nothing bad in Finland, at least I haven’t experienced. L3E5

From the position of the happy not only is Finland seen as positive, but also the work, colleagues and customers are described in positive terms. As this young woman from the former Yugoslavia explains, there is nothing she does not like about in her work. She adores her customers, and has felt welcome and well-treated since the first day in the job:

R: Everyone here has always been beside me, so that immediately if there is something coming up, they will help and everything, and they always ask if everything is fine, have you got along well here, is it good for you to be here, so that really makes one feel good.

I: Yes, yes

R: Especially if it is your first job in Finland.

I: Yes

R: It is really, I will not leave this place as it is so nice. L3E5

The happy maintains that there are no differences between Finns and immigrants once the immigrant has learned the routines in the new workplace. All workers are the same, and differences are not pointed to, nor are they resources. Even customers tend to not note differences. As one participant coming from Estonia explains, people tend not to note her different origin at all:

R: Once a person asked that are you foreign or are you a Swedish-speaking Finn, so once asked. L3E4

Many of the participants taking on the position of the happy were persons that had returned to their roots. Among them were Ingrian Finns who had spoken Finnish in their homes in Russia, but experienced racism because of that. For them, moving to Finland was something of a liberation and the fulfilment of a long-held dream. On the one hand, they probably experienced less discrimination than, for instance, immigrants from Africa, as they physically resemble the dominant Finnish population. On the other hand, they probably were not inclined to be receptive to, or note, the negative aspects of Finland as easily as someone for whom Finland was not the country of their dreams. They had more at stake in maintaining the image of Finland as a positive location.

6.5. Subject positions to reconcile success and discrimination

When the ethnic minority employees talk about their work life, their access to work life and their integration into Finland, the stories are most often a mixture of success and
discrimination. This is the thread that goes through many of the interviews. The general tone of the participants is positive, and one could probably read the interviews as describing successful integration. At the end of some of the interviews, I even commented to the participants that it was so nice to hear that things went so well, that everything was so positive and that the participant had not met that much racism. When re-listening to the tapes and re-reading the transcripts I cannot understand what made me say that, as what the interviewees say, albeit surrounded by the positive tone, is all but positive. They talk about pervasive discrimination, and about great loneliness in the face of it. What they do, however, is describe these difficulties, the racism and the discrimination, in different ways – as if it was all unimportant.

One reason for presenting difficult events as successes can be seen as a way for the participant to take on a positive subject position and avoid being a victim. It enables one to identify as an active agent of one’s own life, even in the context of racism.

As a way to avoid discrimination and be an active agent of one’s own life, one of the participants had changed profession during her years in Finland. The participant was a nurse by education, but had also studied medicine for a couple of years to become a doctor. In the beginning in Finland she worked as a nurse. She described how she liked the patients and the doctors, loved the profession, but how the other nurses excluded her from their community. She said her colleagues were used to seeing immigrants in the kitchen or in cleaning and had difficulties in accepting her as a professional. She would sit alone in the cafeteria, as no one wanted to speak to her. After a couple of years, she decided to quit. The job was too heavy and stressful.

While the treatment she got from her colleagues made the job she had invested many years of studies in too heavy, she describes the outcome, she now works as a sales person in a service station, as her own choice, and as she is a big fan of the F1 racing driver Schumacher, the service station job is something that she is happy with. She would never change back to nursing again.

R: I never thought I would work in the retail sector. When I started nursing school my dream was to become a doctor. Now when I think, this is my field now. L1E3

The intertwining of discrimination and positive pictures can also reveal something about the unavailability of cultural resources to talk about discrimination in another way. It can disclose about the lack of importance discrimination is given in society and the organisation, and the meagre initiatives to combat discrimination against immigrants and improve the conditions of persons with immigrant backgrounds. It then becomes safer not to point to the discrimination. Pointing to the discrimination could be seen as further exposing one’s difference and vulnerability. For instance, when one participant had complained about the racist remarks her colleague had made to her, her superior was of no support.

R: She explained to me, you know, she said “Don’t care, she is a racist”. L1E2

By suggesting that she shouldn’t pay any attention to it, as everyone in the organisation knew the person was a racist, the superior either is unaware of, or uninterested in, the fact that racist remarks in the job are producing inequality and creating a stressful environment for the victim. The manager leaves the immigrant totally alone with her experience and with the challenging relationship with her colleague which continues until the “person everyone knows is a racist” is promoted and moves to another unit. The promotion can also be seen as a further manifestation of the unimportance of
racism in the organisation: promoting a person that everyone knows is a racist portrays racism as, if not acceptable, at least not to be condemned.

The intertwining of discrimination and success can also be read as revealing the general situation of immigrants in the Finnish labour market. At the time of the interviews, the immigrant was still predominantly described as a passive unemployed person in the media (Simola, 2008). Against this general picture of the immigrant, the participants are successful as they do have a job. Finding a job was for all very difficult, so being employed, albeit unfairly treated by colleagues and customers, can be framed as a success.

The positive tone in the description of their realities can also reveal a change for the better. Many of the participants depict the Finnish context as one where racism and hostility towards immigrants used to be much worse. Things have not only become easier, but there is a steady belief among the participants that things will continue improving. In this way, the participants reproduce the managers’ understanding of the Finnish society as undergoing an important change.

It is also possible that the relationship between the participants and me made the participants frame their experiences in a certain way. They may have wanted to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear. They might have thought that I would have resisted knowledge about discrimination, just as many around them have done. By softening the experiences with the positive tone, the negative incidents are made less important and do not separate us that much – them as the victims of the Finnish prejudice, and me as a member of the dominant population.

The intertwining of discrimination and success probably says something about all these questions. It provides the participants with a way to uphold a subject position as an active agent of their own lives. It can expose the lack of cultural resources to voice discrimination in any other way. It may also reveal the generally even more negative situation of immigrants, and about the interview dynamics between a person seen as belonging to a minority and a person seen as belonging to the majority.

6.6. Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the image that ethnic minority workers depict about diversity and difference in Finland. First, the dominant knowledges that ethnic minorities draw on about Finland, about the organisation and about differences were described. Then, five different subject positions reproducing or opposing these dominant knowledges were discussed.

The ethnic minority worker participants were most often found to construct knowledge about Finland as having a past where ethnic difference had no place. Finns were consequently described as inexperienced in the face of cultural difference. Discrimination and racism were in this context often not only described as very common, but also as understandable and legitimate in different ways.

The lead-taker combined knowledge about Finns as inexperienced, discrimination as common and knowledge about the ethnic minority worker as having considerable agency. Discrimination was understood as stemming from Finns’ inexperience and hesitation in the face of ethnic minorities, something the lead-taker perceived as the responsibility of the ethnic minority to manage. By teaching the Finn and by being
proactive and avoiding situations where one's own difference could position one in unfavourable ways, the lead-taker could maintain a positive image of the organisation and the colleagues.

The lacking shared the knowledge about discrimination in common with the lead-taker. However, the lacking focused solely on the characteristics of the minority individual to explain and legitimise the discrimination that Finns exerted on minority workers. From the position of the lacking, discrimination stemmed solely from the incompetence of the ethnic minority being discriminated against.

From the position of the insensitive, discrimination is talked about in other terms than discrimination. Discrimination is not admitted as a part of the workers' every-day reality, and situations where difference leads to negative events are described as normal. These events are also described as being without importance to the individuals facing them. The insensitive were found to withdraw from every-day interactions and distance themselves from negative events in different ways, such as by not listening to discussions and by not interacting with colleagues. The insensitive position leads to a detachment from the work community.

The superior immigrant drew on similar knowledges as the lead-taker and the lacking, but in a reverse manner. From the superior immigrant's position, Finland has always been multicultural, and Finns will not become more tolerant or able to face differences. According to the superior immigrant's position, there is, however, no discrimination in Finland. If and when immigrants feel that they are unfairly treated, they probably just have not tried enough. The superior immigrant draws on knowledge about foreigners as an especially good workforce with, much like the lead-taker's view, considerable agency to shape one’s own destiny in the country.

The subject position of the happy drew on knowledges about Finland as a harmonious and positive context, also for people with different origins. According to those speaking from this position, racism and discrimination were phenomena they had never met in Finland. Differences between Finns and immigrants were not constructed, the focus was rather on the similarity between different people.

In three of the five subject positions, knowledges about Finland, Finns and the deficiencies of ethnic minorities were drawn on and confirmed as truths, from the superior immigrants’ position, the same knowledges were drawn on, but these were rejected, and explained to be false. These knowledges were the same knowledges that were found to describe the Finnish context in the literature treated in Chapter 4, as well as drawn on by the diversity managers in Chapter 5. These knowledges should be seen as discursive resources that ethnic minority workers draw on to reconcile the discrimination with positive experiences of the organisation and their work-life. These are the knowledges that diversity management discourses should address and challenge if organisations aspire to provide their ethnic minority workers with new, more positive ways of positioning themselves.
7 FRANCE, DIVERSITY, DIFFERENCE AND WORK

7.1. France constructed

In 1986, Fernand Braudel’s three-volume series on the identity of France was published, and constituted the first large-scale work on the question of French identity (Thiesse, 2010). The first chapter is entitled, referring to a previous article by Lucien Febvre (1946) “Que la France se nomme Diversité” - “Let France name itself Diversity”. The point made was that France is geographically, sociologically, and demographically heterogeneous. In the conclusion of ‘L'identité de la France’, Braudel returns to diversity, underlining that, yes, France is diverse, “Oui, la France est diverse” (1986, 423). This diversity Braudel refers to is, however, not diversity in terms of ethnicity and race. The differences between people are restricted to geographical and cultural differences and dialects found within the national borders. The questions of immigration and colonialism are barely treated at all in the over-1000 pages of L'identité de la France.

France is, however, one of the world’s largest countries of immigration. In the 19th and most of the 20th centuries, France received more immigrants than any other Western country (Scott, 2010, p.80). Along with the United States, the French population to a large extent consists of descendants of immigrants. Migrants from neighbouring and near-neighbouring countries, such as Belgium, Italy, Spain, Poland and Russia, as well as colonial and post-colonial migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa have played an important role in the construction of the French economy. However, this importance of migrants in the construction of France has been poorly recognised (Savarèse, 2000). This non-recognition of the role of immigrants can be seen as illustrating a larger phenomenon – important for understanding the meanings of diversity in the French context – and has been called by Walzer (1997) the “French anomaly”: the existence of cultural differences and the non-existence of a concept. This paradoxical situation has its roots in the ideology of universalism, which has been seen as the defining trait of the French republican system.

The aim of this chapter is to shed light on these contradictions, and introduce the French landscape of differences. I will begin by describing the most important elements of French national identity and the space for difference in this identity. Then, the way in which universalism and differences have been reconciled by public authorities at different stages will examined. After looking at minority populations, the main legislative frames will be reviewed, followed subsequently by a discussion on the genesis of diversity management in France.

7.1.1. French national identity and differences

The French national identity has in recent years been greatly debated, especially in the wake of the creation of the ministry of national identity in 2007. Under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy, the Fillon government created the “Ministry of immigration, integration, national identity and development of solidarity”. The project was protested against from several fronts: associations, scholars, politicians, and even outside the
borders of France the UN rapporteur on racism and xenophobia criticised the ministry harshly and found it trivialised racism (Nouvel Observateur, 11.06.2007).

It is common to oppose the French and the German models of nationhood as distinctive and even antagonistic, where the French model is seen to be based on political values and the German model to be focusing on ethnic origin (Brubaker, 1992). The French model, with its political contract at the base, leads to a situation where adherence to the values of the republic constitutes the basis for belonging. This was particularly the situation at the time of the Revolution, when nationality was not the issue grouping people into us and them, but the support given to the Republic versus the Monarchy. But still today, adherence to the republican universalist values of equality, freedom, brotherhood and secularism – ‘laïcité’, are seen as the building blocks of what it is to be French. Being French is a choice to support, adhere to, and live along the principles of the republic.

What does republican universalism then entail, and how is the nation understood? Central in republican universalism is the idea of the state as being totally neutral vis-à-vis any differences among its members, whether they be cultural, social, philosophical or religious. Therefore, differences between people cannot be taken into account in laws or rules. However, the universalist conception of the nation does not exclude respect for differences. Citizens have the full right to adhere to different communities, have different beliefs, use different languages and perform different cultural habits, as long as all these differences remain in the private sphere. No citizen can claim specific treatment by the authorities based on a particular identity. This model of ignoring differences in the public sphere is seen as guaranteeing the equality between all citizens, another central value of the republic.

Based on the idea of universalism, equality can thus only be acquired through sameness, between abstract individuals stripped of any social identities that may divide the nation. Therefore, any demands based on ethnicity or race have also been unthinkable and illegitimate in the French public sphere. France as “one and indivisible” prevents differences being formally recognised, outlaws any statistical data on ethnicity and race, and makes action addressing ethnicity quasi-impossible. However, at the same time as the state with its ideal of universal equality makes ethnicity illegitimate, social relations and institutional action are de facto ethnicised (De Rudder et al., 2000).

The central focus on this political contract in the debates about national identity obscures the cultural aspects related to nationality, which have also, and still do, play a crucial role in the definition of the French (Thiesse, 2010). By focusing on the ideological aspect of Frenchness, the illusion of universalism, or the communalism of the dominant, has been maintained. Indeed, many important cultural norms, and the expectation of adherence to these, have lived along with the expectation of universalism.

An important cultural expectation is the expectation that one speaks the French language, which was seen at the time of the Revolution as the language of freedom, and a necessity to everyone. Minority languages, at that time dominant, were seen as anti-

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28 The monarchists and the republicans, however, did later identify with different ancestors. The republicans held the Gauls to be their ancestors, whereas the monarchists were seen as descendants of the Frank. At the time of the Revolution, all foreigners in France were declared French, whereas anti-revolutionaries were excluded until 1802. From 1804 till 1899, only children born of a French father could become a French national.
revolutionary and as threats to the republic, and were effectively repressed (Thiesse, 2010). Knowing French is still today a precondition for gaining French citizenship, albeit not sufficient. Many immigrant families have also chosen to abandon their language of origin as a way to improve their children’s opportunities with regard to social mobility.

Another central building block of French national identity is the French school. Obligatory schooling for all children between 6 and 13 was instituted in 1883 with the aim of “teaching the people the nation” (Thiesse, 2010). The republican school has played, and does so still, an integral role in the socialisation of pupils into republican values, and constructing them into citizens. For instance, the integration of immigrants’ children to French society is still today expected to happen through the school: a child born in France to foreign-born parents will become French by schooling and education (Weil, 1997). The expectation has been that by the second generation an immigrant will in this way be totally socialised.

Acquiring the cultural norms, for instance through the republican school, and adhering to the universalist ideology, are, however, not necessarily sufficient preconditions to being fully integrated into the mainstream of French society. While the universalist ideology speaks about treating all individuals equally, it has nonetheless created differentiation between different citizens. For long, women did not have the same citizenship rights as men, and received the right to vote only in 1944. Algerians were considered nationals from 1862 onwards, but without citizenship rights. Still in the depression of the 1930’s, recently naturalised citizens did not have the same right to practise the professions of lawyers and medical doctors as did nationals with a longer history of citizenship. (Thiesse, 2010)

The differing citizenship rights for populations with different origins was based on the belief that some were voluntarily capable of assimilating and some incapable. The cultural difference between the French and North-African and West-African colonised peoples was, for instance, perceived to be so great that the assimilation of the colonised populations seemed unrealistic. Those deemed to be culturally too different were not accorded the rights of citizenship (Fredrickson, 2005). This cultural difference is still today often ascribed to populations with North-African or West-African immigrant origins, and they are often marginalised in society.

Difference in the French context is thus a contradictory and complex phenomenon. There is a clear discrepancy between the way that representations of ethnicity and race shape social relations and the space for voicing these representations. Under the pressure of the need to show the capacity to assimilate and adhere to universalism, individuals that find themselves victims of the negative representations of ethnicity and race do not have ways of legitimately voicing their experiences (de Rudder et al, 1998). This challenge of voicing one’s experiences because of the nonexistence of a legitimate vocabulary is further complicated by the public space given to immigrants. Hmed (2008), studying the representation of foreign workers in France between 1960-1990, shows how public authorities have expected immigrants not to make any demands, nor to express themselves politically. This expectation, coupled with a ruling on the entry of foreign nationals, where foreigners have been required not be a threat to public order, makes access to public demands and the public space very difficult and their position in the country insecure: “Be it in their work or outside work, foreigners are always doomed to show loyalty towards the receiving society, and state authorities can always respond to the demands of foreigners with threats of expulsion or prosecution” (Hmed, 2008, p.62).
Challenging the universalist ideals is not only complicated for immigrants and citizens in precarious positions. Even for a fully integrated individual, with full citizenship rights, to question the republican equality and universalism is seen as threatening the nation, and as unpatriotic (Wieviorka, 1997). How has then difference been treated in the public sphere? This is what will be examined next.

### 7.2. Approaches to difference

The model of republican assimilation based on universalism functioned rather well with the first waves of immigrants, who mainly arrived from neighbouring European countries and melted into the French pot (Noiriel, 1982), but it has been seriously challenged in relation to post-colonial and colonial migrants, women and religious minorities (Streiff-Fénart, 2002; Scott 2005; Scott 2010). However, initially the universal assimilation model was not applied to post-colonial immigrants. North-African immigrants, the number of which significantly increased between the end of the 60’s and the early 1980’s, were initially perceived as temporary labour migrants, who eventually would return back “home”. In order to facilitate and guarantee this returning home, the state provided these populations their own cultural programs – TV programmes, mother tongue instruction for their children in public schools, and subsidised the construction and maintenance of religious sites. As the returning home, however, did not happen as planned, the government tried to accelerate it, with little success, by paying a sum of money for those choosing to return – le million de stoléru (De Laforcade, 2006).

In the early 1980’s, temporary labour migrants slowly began to be seen as permanent, and the Front National, a populist far right party, entered the political scene and imposed immigration as a problem eventually all political parties had to take a stance on. The republican model of assimilation was said to be in crisis, and the cause was found within the populations that should be assimilated. Their cultural difference was too great. The social problems would cease to exist, it was assumed, if immigrants managed to assimilate, if their cultural difference were to diminish. As the problem was one related to the immigrants, the responsibility over the outcome was theirs (Streiff-Fénart, 2002). Public policies and legislation enforced the requirements on those different, for instance access to citizenship of persons born in France to foreign parents was rendered more difficult by the Pasqua laws in 1986, and required a ‘voluntary declaration’ from the side of those to become French. In this declaration, the applicant was required to declare that he or she accepted the refusal of the logic of ethnic belonging in favour of a national abstract individualism.

### 7.2.1. From Assimilation to Integration, Discrimination and Diversity

At the end of the 1980’s, the interpretative frame shifted from assimilation to integration. The “Haut Conseil à l’Intégration” (HCI), a state authority focusing on how to favour integration of immigrant populations, and a Secretary of State in charge of Integration, were installed. The HCI formulates what will become the theory of integration, a “multiculturalism à la française”, where cultural differences on the one hand are recognised as private commitments, and immigrants on the other hand are required to reject the idea of there being distinct ethnic or cultural minorities” (HCI, 1993). The main challenge of integration is seen as one of preserving the French society from the threat of communalism – and thus one of preserving universalism (Streiff-Fénart, 2002).
During the 1990’s, it began to be clear that the problems of integration were not solely the responsibility and fault of the “immigrants” – often these “immigrants” in fact were French citizens, who were born and had grown up in France. Instead, the focus shifted to the discrimination “immigrant” populations were faced with in society. Several reports in the second half of the 90’s caused alarm over the inequalities touching immigrant populations and the then Minister of Work and Solidarity, Martine Aubry, ordered a special report²⁹ on the “means that permit the effective combat of discrimination related to nationality, real or supposed, to ethnic origin or religious behaviour” (translation mine). Aubry presented a real change in concepts, and in a speech given at the launching of new actors such as a research group on discrimination “GELD” and a toll-free phone assistance to victims of discrimination “numéro vét 114”, she stated that “today we know that the problems these young people face […] are no longer caused by a lack of integration, but are due to “blocages” existing in the French society” (cited in Streiff-Fénart, 2002, translation mine). The problem of integration was articulated as a problem of discrimination.

Just as with the theory of integration, the objective of anti-discrimination efforts is seen as one preserving the republic from communal developments. Eradicating discrimination is seen as a way to guarantee that immigrants, the youth of immigrant origin, trust the nation, and will prefer to identify themselves as individual citizens rather than members of an ethnic group. The discrimination approach to differences thus does not challenge republican universalism, but has as a main concern the protection of it.

Combating discrimination with a universalist approach implied embarrassment in recognising the differences that lie at the basis of the discrimination. A way to circumvent this tension – avoiding race and ethnicity while aiming to combat racial and ethnic discrimination – has led to peculiar effects on terminology. Designations such as “the youths from the suburbs” became recurrent and used in official arenas, implicitly referring to descendants of postcolonial immigrants. Focusing positive action on geographically circumscribed areas, such as the ZEP – Zone d’Education Prioritaire³⁰, has been a way to affect immigrant populations without naming them. This has been seen to be in line with the principles of universalism, as not addressing specific populations by ascriptive criteria, but categories defined by social and economic situations (De Rudder et al., 2000, p.16).

The discrimination approach to differences was only some years later replaced by an equal opportunities approach. This shift took shape in the creation of the High Authority against Discrimination and for Equality (hereon HALDE) in 2004 and the law on equality of opportunity in 2006. What this change entails is that racial and ethnic differences become one type of difference among many, and risk being subsumed by other, more legitimate differences. Indeed, ethnic and racial differences, and the attention paid to them, still awakens suspicions among many, and researchers have presented results indicating that racial and ethnic differences are among the differences that most rarely lead to discrimination, whereas appearance, dialect or clothing are more strongly linked to discrimination (Algava & Beque, 2004).

³⁰ A ZEP is literally an “Area of prioritised education”. In these areas, schools are accorded greater resources and increased autonomy in order to successfully manage the educational and social difficulties present in the area. The ZEP system in this way departs from the egalitarian ideal of the French schooling system.
The equal opportunities approach was related to, and later intertwined with, a diversity approach, spreading from managerial circles and the business world to a variety of areas of society. This approach will be discussed in greater detail in a later section of this chapter. For now, it can be noted, that in all the approaches to differences – integration, discrimination and equal opportunities – the underlying logic has been that of universalism. The reconciliation of universalism and these frames has not been unproblematic, and at times the very meanings of universalism have had to be reframed, such as in the parité movement which led to sexing the abstract individual (Scott, 2005). The contradictions between universalism and integration were circumvented by stressing the dividing lines between private and public spheres, and the contradiction between discrimination and universalism by drawing on euphemised notions for designating the troublesome differences.

7.3. Minorities and France in statistics

The motives for migration to France have experienced the opposite development to that of Finland. From having been predominantly motivated by employment, immigration to France has become dominated by family reasons. In 2007, 55% of immigrants entered France because of family reasons, mainly because of marriage to a French citizen, whereas only 5% of residence permits were granted for employment reasons (Tribalat, 2010).

In January 2011, the French population was estimated to be 65 million: 63.1 million in metropolitan France and 1.9 million in departments in overseas territories. The data for minorities is fragmentary. There is no official data concerning ethnic belonging, even subjective, nor on religious affiliations. The last census regarding religious affiliations was conducted in 1872, and estimates about religious groups today are mainly based on the groups’ own estimates of the number of their adherents (Machelon, 2006).

In 2007, there were 3,682,218 foreigners residing in France, of which Portuguese citizens constituted the largest group, followed by Algerians. Census data for long only differentiated between French nationals and foreigners. One step in the direction of increasing the visibility of immigrant populations was taken in 1990 when the category “immigrant” was added to the census. In the census, the immigrant category consists of persons with foreign nationality living in France and French citizens born abroad with a foreign nationality at birth. The categories of “foreign” and “immigrant” thus overlap, and the different propensities to take on French nationality within the groups lead to different figures for different populations. For instance, Portuguese immigrants have very rarely applied for French citizenship, and Algerian applications for nationality were likewise scarce until the 1990’s, after which they have doubled. In contrast, Italians, Spaniards and immigrants from south-east Asia have often taken French nationality (INSEE, 2005). So, while Portuguese nationals composed the biggest foreign group in France, the biggest immigrant group in 2007 was constituted by persons born in Algeria.

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32 The Catholic religion remains the most important religion in France, with 65% of the French population declaring itself to be catholic. 25% of the population claim not to adhere to any religion. Islam is France’s second most important religion, with 6% of the population. People adhering to Judaism are estimated to amount to 600,000 persons (0.9%). (Machelon, 2006)
33 http://www.insee.fr/fr/themes/tableau.asp?reg_id=0&ref_id=immigrespaysnais
### Foreigners by nationality in France 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>1 433 517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Union 27</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>1 285 203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Spanish</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>130 604</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Italian</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>175 018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Portuguese</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>490 444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- British</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>145 622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other EU 27 nationalities</td>
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<td>343 516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other European nationalities</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>148 314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>41.4</td>
<td>1 525 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algeria</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>475 294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>451 926</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>144 148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other African nationalities</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>453 633</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
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<td>500 832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>223 421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>42 814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Asian nationalities</td>
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<td>234 597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American and Oceanian</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>222 869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nationalities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3 682 218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1  2007 census: Foreigners by nationality in France**

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As a large number of those constructed as immigrants in everyday interactions are nonetheless born French, they are still not rendered visible with this change. Indeed, already twenty years ago, 80% of the children and grandchildren of immigrants that had arrived in France during the last century, were French citizens at birth (Tribalat, 1991). In 2008, the number of persons born French in France over the period 1950-1990 and having at least one immigrant parent amounted to 3.1 million (Borrel & Lhommeau, 2010). This group is, of course, heterogeneous, and some of the descendants of immigrants, for instance of Italian, Polish and Spanish origin, are today considered totally French, while others' difference perpetuates their immigrant status.

### 7.4. Legislation concerning differences

Even though ethnic and racial discrimination were quasi-absent from public debates till the end of the 1990's, legal measures against discrimination have a longer history.

Discrimination against racial minorities has been regulated by the “Pleven law” since 1972. The Pleven law for the combating of racism is the first specific law to address the situation of persons or groups treated differently because of their “origin, their belonging or non-belonging to an ethnic group, a nation, a race or a specific religion”

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The law specifically treats hate speech (incitation to discriminate), slander/libel, insulting, service provision and recruitment and lay-offs. The punishments are not without importance. The punishment for discriminating in recruitment was set to be from two months to one year of imprisonment and/or a fine of 2,000 to 10,000 Francs. The Pleven law was complemented in 1990 by the Gayssot law, which in addition to maintaining the repression of racist acts, required the French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights to submit an annual report on the combat against discrimination to the government on the 21st of March, and made the public denial of crimes against humanity unlawful.

The first specific legislation on discrimination in work life comes in 1983 with the "Roudy law". The situation of women in relation to work life had previously been improved in 1965 when women obtained the right to work without the consent of their husbands, and in 1972 when a law was passed on pay equality for jobs of equal value between men and women. The Roudy law was more complete and forbids all professional discrimination. It made the principle of positive action towards the group of women possible. The law also enabled the comparison of men's and women's situations in different facets of work life, and introduces the negotiation of equality plans to promote women and improve their working conditions. However, the negotiations about equality plans did not become a common practice, as by the end of the 80's only 30 equality plans had been agreed on and less than half of companies authored a comparative report (Bender, 2004). The Guénisson law reinforced the Roudy law in 2001 and made company internal negotiations of equality obligatory, as well as a company-specific comparative annual gender report.

Discrimination legislation improved considerably when the EU Race and Equality directives were transposed into French legislation in 2001. The law “related to the combat of discriminations” introduced indirect discrimination into the legislative frame, reverses the burden of proof, concerns discrimination in all stages of a career and expands the dimensions concerned to: origin, sex, habits, sexual orientation, age, family situation, the belonging – true or supposed – to an ethnic group, nation or race, political opinions, labour union activities, religious convictions, physical appearance, name, health and disability. It makes it possible for unions and non-governmental organisations to sue employers for discrimination instead of the victims. A telephone service for discrimination victims was created and it was made obligatory to post information about it in most private and public organisations.

Disabled persons were the first group to benefit from affirmative action types of measures. In 1987, a law was passed specifically concerning the employment of disabled persons. In this law, a restrictive measure in the form of quotas was installed. Since then, employers with more than 20 employees are obliged to ensure that 6% of those they recruit are disabled persons. If they do not attain the 6% of disabled employees within their workforce, they have to pay a penalty, a fee for a national association promoting the integration of disabled persons. In 2005, a new law was

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36 http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006076185&dateTexte=20110331
38 LOI no 2001-1066 du 16 novembre 2001 relative à la lutte contre les discriminations
passed, and the fines and requirements imposed on the employer were increased. That said, despite the law of 1987, entering the labour market is still difficult for disabled persons, who are twice as often unemployed as the population in general (Dares, 2008). As a result of the new requirements, employers have to make special efforts to integrate disabled people, and collective bargaining on the issue has to be undertaken regularly. With the law of 2005, the population of disabled people also increased, as the list of characteristics counting as a disability was expanded.

The public policy and legislative scene related to discrimination, equality and minorities has developed but has also come to contain contradictions in the last years of the first decade of the 2000’s. On the one hand, the legislative apparatus to combat discrimination has been significantly strengthened, and where cases of racial discrimination taken to court were exceptional before 2000 (Fassin, 2006), complaints over discrimination have risen considerably (Halde, 2009). On the other hand, the legislations adopted depict the very contradictory relationships France maintains with minority questions. For instance, a law adopted in 2005 underlines the positive consequences of colonialism, and states that school programmes have to especially recognise the positive role of the French presence in overseas territories, and provide the French armed forces of these territories the distinguished position they are entitled to. Another law increasing the ambiguities in relation to equality is the law for equality of opportunities passed in 2006. It comes a few months after the riots in the suburbs, and addresses the need to improve the situation of immigrant youth. This is a law that functions in at least two directions. On the one hand, the law strengthens anti-discrimination work by making the practice of testing lawful, by increasing the mandate of Halde, and it aims to increase the diversification in the audiovisual sphere. But, on the other hand, at the same time the law can be seen as stigmatising minorities. The law, for instance, introduces a parental contract. The parental contract is presented as a measure to combat exclusion, but de facto penalises parents. In the event of any trouble with school pupils, such as serious absenteeism or behaviour impeding the good functioning of the school, the parents can be demanded to sign a contract where they engage in, or are obliged to take responsibility over the behaviour of their children. If they refuse to sign the contract, or do not respect the engagement (which often is signed for a period of 6 months) all family-related social benefits can be withdrawn. The law also reinforces city mayors’ power in the face of incivilities, and introduces a training programme especially for young people, starting at 14 years, having problems in accessing the labour market from specific underprivileged areas. By mixing the two registers, the combat against discrimination and the combat against incivilities give a very ambiguous message. Combating discrimination and combating incivilities in the same law can be read as an insinuation that the discrimination of individuals from certain areas is due to incivilities.

7.5. Diversity Management in France

The diversity approach towards differences in the sphere of work – which emerged in the autumn of 2004 and progressively spread to other spheres of societal life, such as politics (Escafré-Dublet & Simon, 2009); higher education (Sabbagh & Van Zanten, 2010), and the media – also took place in a context characterised by contradictions between universalism and recognition of differences. On the one hand, the traditional

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http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000000809647&dateTexte
ignoring of differences based on universalist ideals was still strongly defended. On the other hand, however, differences were at the same time increasingly being recognised: there was an increased public awareness of discrimination and an increased demand for identities to be acknowledged in the public sphere (Wieviorka, 2008). As seen previously, antidiscrimination legislation had also significantly been reinforced, and, in the context of work, gender discrimination was not only forbidden but gender equality required actions in the form of negotiations and drafting of comparative reports. Similarly, legislation on disability rendered disability a category that no company employing more than 20 persons could ignore.

The change in approach was sparked off when managerial actors took over the combat against discrimination (Bereni, 2009). Discrimination had until then mainly been a preoccupation of associations and public institutions, and had gained little attention from labour market actors, be it employers or trade unions. With the taking over of the cause of equality, the terminology of discrimination and equality was replaced by, or at least complemented with, that of diversity.

The term ‘diversity’ was introduced to public discussions through several publications, most of them initially in one way or another related to the Institut Montaigne, an independent think tank, founded in 2000 by Claude Bébéar, the former chairman of AXA42. In the first book, called “the outcast from equality of opportunity”43 authored by Yazid Sabeg and Laurence Méhaignerie, the disjuncture between republican values and the every-day reality of populations with immigrant origins was highlighted. Diversity management, and a diversity charter by which companies could demonstrate their diversity engagement, were suggested as measures to improve the equal opportunities of ethnic minority populations (Sabeg & Méhaignerie, 2004).

Other publications followed44. The prime minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin requested Claude Bébéar to author a report “shedding light on the business interests of companies engaging in diversity and equal opportunity” (Mission statement, cited in Bébéar, 2004). The report was published in November 2004 under the name of “Companies in the colours of France” (Bébéar, 2004). The report describes the challenges facing the French economy and society in terms of a simultaneous demographic change and future labour force shortage and an underutilisation of visible minorities. Bébéar presents a number of propositions, of which the idea of relying on anonymous CVs in recruitment was to remain in debates for several years (see, for instance, Behaghel et al., 2011).

The idea of diversity was quickly taken up by business actors and spread both within business companies and to labour unions. A diversity charter was launched in October 2004, and initially signed by 35 organisations (Le Monde, 23 October 2004). The Institut Montaigne was also behind the charter: it was planned and drafted in working

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42 On the institute’s web page the institute is presented as follows: “The Institut Montaigne, a pioneering think tank in France, produces publications and organises conferences, playing an active role as a stakeholder in democratic debate. It brings together business leaders, senior civil servants, academics and representatives of civil society from diverse backgrounds and with a wide range of experience.” http://www.institutmontaigne.org/tout-sur-l-institut-52.html

43 Title in French: Les oubliés de l’égalité des chances. Participation, pluralité, assimilation... ou repli ?

groups co-ordinated by people close to the institute, and launched under the institute's name (Doytcheva, 2008).

The diversity charter stipulates that companies engage in:

• Sensitizing and training our managers, HR managers and collaborators that are involved in recruitment, training, and career management, to the challenges of non-discrimination and diversity.

• The promotion of the application of the principle of non-discrimination in all its forms, and in all stages of HR management which consist especially of recruitment, training, advancement and professional promotion of collaborators.

• Try to reflect the diversity of the French society and especially its cultural and ethnic diversity in our employees, at different levels of qualifications.

• Communicate about our engagement in favour of non-discrimination and diversity, to the totality of our collaborators, and inform them about the practical results of this engagement.

• Turn the elaboration and implementation of the diversity policy into an object of dialogue with the personnel’s representatives.

• Include in one of the annual reports a descriptive section about our non-discrimination and diversity engagement: methods and procedures, objectives and results.

With the launching of the diversity charter, diversity was put on the business agenda. From being an unfamiliar issue within the French cultural context, diversity was extremely quickly lobbied to become a central concern of HR professionals. Only one month after the launching of the diversity charter, a survey conducted among young HR directors showed that diversity was seen as the third most important challenge of HR professionals (ANDCP, 2004, cited in Garner-Moyer, 2006). And only three months after Institut Montaigne’s charter, four big labour union confederations signed their own charter in favour of diversity, which encouraged labour unions to sign collective agreements on the theme of anti-discrimination and diversity in business organisations. This general acceptance and promotion of diversity top-down in labour unions is especially interesting considering the previous lack of enthusiasm towards moving to combating discrimination (Garner-Moyer, 2006). Within labour unions, local attitudes towards diversity, however, have also been found to be more critical (see e.g. Stringfellow, 2008).

The speed of this spread can be seen as the result of several forces. A crucial role has been played by the joining forces of what Bereni (2009) calls “diversity entrepreneurs” – HR and CSR professionals who function as mediators between the societal cause of diversity and the business reality. They translate diversity into the language of business, and spread information, produce documentation and train business actors in the cause of diversity (Bereni, 2009). Another important favouring condition is constituted by the financial and symbolic support diversity receives from the public sector, such as the

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state, and from EU-financed EQUAL projects\textsuperscript{46} to combat discrimination. The state authorities support for business actors working on the theme of diversity is almost astonishing, and this support will gradually become direct involvement (see Van den Walle & Mordet, 2008) (also central actors change roles from being diversity promoters to becoming members of the government, such as Sabeg). Raffarin asking for a special report from Bébéar on diversity’s business interests not only designates Bébéar as a legitimate proponent of diversity from the government’s point of view, but presents diversity as unquestionably in the interests of business, and as to be approached from a business perspective. The diversity charter was also already mentioned in government plans prior to its existence, as in summer 2004 the Plan Borloo for social cohesion gave the diversity charter two years’ time to improve corporate practices before the state would intervene. And from 2005 to 2007, the promotion of the diversity charter was undertaken by the Minister of Equal Opportunities, Azuz Begag, who organised a “Tour de France de la Diversité” where he went around in France and sensitised managers to the challenges of diversity. In 2010, the tour de France de diversité was headed by Claude Bébéar, accompanied by the “ministers concerned”\textsuperscript{47}.

The promotion of the diversity charter has thus benefited from the complicity between leading actors within state authorities and eminent business personalities. The number of companies that have signed the charter has constantly risen, and amounts in May 2013 to 3 535 organisations. The increase in signatories of the charter has also relied on the drawing on business networks and interpersonal relationships (Doytcheva, 2008). As a diversity expert interviewed for this study explained, at the signing of the charter in a company he had followed, the leader of the company didn’t even care to know what the diversity charter was about, but told the HR director to sign the charter, saying that if it is Claude Bébéar asking us to do something, we do it. The signing of the charter is additionally made very easy, both practically, as it only demands going and clicking on a web page, as well as ideologically, as the charter is of very elusive nature and requires almost no action by the signing company.

The diversity charter was, however, soon followed by more detailed engagements. In October 2006\textsuperscript{48} the diversity charter was followed by a collective agreement\textsuperscript{49} on diversity in the firm between employers’ organisations and trade unions. In March 2008, this agreement was made compulsory for all companies in France, regardless of agreements on the sectoral or local level\textsuperscript{50}. However, the penalty for not following the agreement was somewhat theoretical (Bender et al., 2010).

The collective agreement broadly speaking follows the legislation of 2001 on combating discrimination. The categories focused on are the same, and diversity is introduced as something emanating from equal opportunity and equal treatment work and something that has to be accepted in all domains of work life. The agreement introduces concrete advancements in terms of planned actions in organisations in a collaborative fashion between the employer and the representative of employees: the engagement of top management, sensitivity and combating stereotypes, training managers and employees,


\textsuperscript{48} This took place some months after the last interviews for this study were conducted. Some of the companies participating in the study already had local agreements between the employer and employee representatives.

\textsuperscript{49} http://www.journal-officiel.gouv.fr/pdf/bocc/20070014/CCO_20070014_0014_0012.pdf

\textsuperscript{50} http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=JORFTEXT000018198940
recruitment and career advancement. The issues related to equal opportunity and diversity are to be discussed once a year between the employer and the employee representatives.

The focus of the collective agreement on equal opportunities, and the treatment of diversity as related to equal opportunity and not as separate issues, shows how diversity and equality very much intertwine in the French context. The actions suggested by the agreement are uniquely ones that aim to decrease direct and indirect discrimination and facilitate combating mechanisms leading to these. Diversity is not given a proper meaning and differences are not highlighted or framed in a way of a suggested increased value. Where the approach differs from pure EO is when the motives are described in terms of ethics and economic and social interest. The demographics are to change, and the companies function better in a favourable societal environment. So EO and diversity are assumed to respond to the change in demographics – “companies need to get prepared to receive, from now on, all the competences needed for their activity”, and this is, according to the agreement, going to be turned into an additional opportunity to promote diversity. These motives are, however, presented in a way that suggests that it is only the economic and social fronts that are new for companies, and that ethics have always been there. As “in their economic activities, companies have always allowed the integration of population of foreign origin and have allowed persons from different origins to co-exist. Companies contribute to the respect of republican principles and do not leave space to communitarism”.

The agreement underlines the voluntary nature of the planned actions. It is true that the actions go in a sense beyond the law as the law only prohibits indirect discrimination, but does not stipulate how, for instance, it should be combated. The agreement includes proactive measures, such as training managers to better include differences, modify sociocultural representations, and takes on the anonymous CV to be tested until the end of 2007.

In September 2008, another step forward in the formalisation of diversity activity was taken, as companies with initiative can aspire to differentiate themselves from those merely communicating about their intentions, by applying for a diversity label. The diversity label is delivered by an officially accredited labelling office, for three years at a time, and is dependent on an external evaluation of diversity practices. In this way, the diversity label constitutes a manner for active companies to communicate their seriousness about the issue. However, the company has the right to choose in which unit of the company the evaluation is made, and does not need to open the doors to all units in order to receive such a label (Van den Valle & Mordet, 2008).

### 7.5.1. Meanings of diversity

At the same time as there seems to exist a rather broadly-shared consensus about the importance of diversity as a project, the socio-political stakes of which have been described as “so important that the diversity project can’t be allowed to fail” (Robert-Demontrond & Joyeau, 2009), the definitions of diversity remain ambiguous, and the implementation of diversity in organisations face obstacles (Barth, 2007). The underlying contradiction between diversity and republican values is one major obstacle and reason for ambiguous definitions, however, seldom directly addressed by diversity promoters or researchers.
The opinions among diversity professionals regarding how diversity and republican values should be reconciled diverge. One position is to hold that diversity is in contradiction with republican values and poses a threat to the republic. Fauroux’s report on combating ethnic discrimination in the sphere of work (2005) is on these lines and warns about the risks diversity rhetoric entails in terms of ethnicising employees, resulting in communitarism. From this point of view, diversity is threatening if it leads to a valuing of differences. In a similar vein, Garner-Moyer (2006) sees that as diversity touches upon the republican model of universal equality, its implementation in organisations is a delicate affair since a precondition for as many actors as possible to engage in diversity initiatives is that this universal equality model remains intact. Bender (2004), equally identifying diversity management as forcefully knocking against the republican universalist conception, assumes that equal opportunity approaches are more easily adaptable to the French context than are diversity initiatives. In addition, managers have been found to feel that diversity is sensitive since it touches upon national cohesion (Cailleba & Cuevas, 2009).

Others see that if diversity initiatives are in contradiction with universalism, it is not the diversity initiatives that are the problem, but they become problematic as they point to the failure of the mythic universal equality. In this manner, for instance, the evaluation of diversity work is seen as troubling, as it forces recognition of the fact that mere declarations of equality do not lead to equality (Palt, 2011, p.14-15). The myth of universalist equality is, however, seen as being so strong that it cannot be challenged and worn down by knowledge of the realities of discrimination and exclusion (Vatteville, 2010).

How is diversity then accommodated into the French cultural context, and what does diversity refer to? The meanings of diversity have rarely been problematised: the term has appeared on the lips of many without clearly defining what is talked about when talking about diversity. In company annual reports, for instance, the term is rarely defined, and is presented as a well-known notion (Point, 2006). The word, however, is all but clear in meaning. It has been criticised for being an empty notion, possible for use in relation to anything and for advancing any interests (Bereni & Jaunait, 2009). For Barth (2007), the concept is both “generous and simplifying” and masks the complexity of the phenomena.

Empirical research on how diversity is understood in business companies is rather rare, and even if diversity research has experienced a very important increase in the last years of the first decade of the 2000’s (see Barth & Falcoz, 2007; Barth & Falcoz, 2010; Peretti, 2007; Peretti, 2006; Peretti et al., 2006), empirical research on diversity in general are in a minority51. What empirical research findings do show is that meanings of diversity, and the dimensions of difference diversity refers to, are multiple (Doytcheva, 2009), and that diversity is in France understood differently from the US or the UK. The empirical studies looking at diversity dimensions and meanings have concluded that in France the initial dimension of diversity was ethnicity, and diversity is seen as associated with discrimination and equal opportunities (Bender & Pigeyre, 2010; Gröschl & Takagi, 2009).

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51 Even when studies are based on empirical data, details of the data material and methods are often scarce.
7.5.2. Diversity motivations

The rationales for engaging in diversity have been articulated around three main themes: business reasons, legal reasons and social justice reasons (Robert-Demontroend & Joyeau, 2010; Cailleba & Cuevas, 2009; Garner-Moyer, 2006). The first and foremost reason is presented as being that of business – in Bébéar’s words diversity is not about compassion but business interests (Bébéar, 2004). As will be seen, all of the different rationales for diversity can, however, in the end be motivated by improved business results.

7.5.2.1. Business outcomes by promoting equality in a voluntary fashion

The business rationale of diversity has been underlined by both diversity promoters (Bébéar, 2004; IMS-Entreprendre pour la Cité, 2008; Goodwill Management, 2010), and researchers (Frimousse & Peretti, 2007). While neither the relations between diversity and equality (see Laufer & Silvera, 2009; Bender & Pigeyre, 2010) nor those between diversity and performance are straightforward, and even though the term diversity itself remains fuzzy (Vatteville, 2010; Barth & Falcoz, 2010) diversity is implicitly presented as the intermediary term linking equality with business.

Where the English language diversity literature on the business case focuses on the valuing of differences and drawing on differences for the company’s benefits, in France the focus of business case arguments on differences is more inconsistent. Even if business case arguments for diversity are dominant (see e.g. Point, 2006), and diversity is among others seen as a way to improve the understanding of customer needs (Leroux et al., 2008), differences are rarely highlighted or made space for, not even in line with the access-and-legitimacy paradigm (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Rather, managing diversity either combines equality work and a recognition of differences (Barth & Falcoz, 2010) or aims to assimilate differences by harmonising them (Frimousse, & Peretti, 2007). The business logic behind diversity lies in the construction of discrimination as uneconomic (Bébéar, 2004). This argument is often built on reference to a North American study from the 1950’s, which shows that discrimination leads to a suboptimal balance in a community, and is from an economic point of view irrational (Becker, 1957). In this way, diversity literature and debates in France have constructed a dominant understanding of discrimination as not in the interest of business organisations. This knowledge has allowed the linking of equality with business, and the presenting of diversity as a business issue without lifting differences to the fore. By constructing diversity as a business question, diversity is in addition presented as something any organisation will undertake in a voluntary fashion.

This is one of the aspects linking diversity and legal questions. By presenting diversity as rational business-wise, business actors can more forcefully push for a soft law option (Bereni, 2009). Another aspect is related to managing the risk of legal pursuit. With the increased legal apparatus concerning discrimination, companies run an increased risk of being accused of discriminating. Diversity initiatives have been suspected to be motivated by pure defensive reasons, a proactive way to build an image of the corporation as respecting equality and anti-discrimination legislation (Garner-Moyer, 2006). The anonymous CV is a good example of where business actors at the same time are proponents of a practice assumed to increase diversity and also arguing for the importance of not rendering the practice to be regulated by law. In 2004, Bébéar expressed his view on the possibility of rendering the anonymous CV obligatory, by saying that it would not be effective as laws can be circumvented (Le Monde,
1.12.2004); in April 2011, the issue was discussed again and a diversity specialist at IMS Entreprendre pour la Cité (also founded by Bébéar) expressed worries over the possibility that the anonymous CV would become obligatory, which then could impede other diversity initiatives to be undertaken (L’Express, 22.04.2011).

7.5.3. Diversity dimensions

The struggle over the meaning of diversity is, as with any term, constantly on-going. When diversity was first highlighted, in the first publication of Institut Montaigne (“The outcast from equality of opportunity”), diversity was related to ethnic minorities and immigrants of different generations. Diversity was presented as a way to address the particular situation of ethnic minorities. Not long after this publication, a second publication by Institut Montaigne promoted a much more inclusive notion, that of positive equality, as “diversity”, according to the author, could lead to essentialising difference, and strictly speaking, could contribute to validating the idea of group specificities which then could evoke a demand for specific public treatment (Blivet, 2004; see also Louvrier, 2005). Also in the working group producing the diversity charter struggles over what diversity should be about were intense. Many of the business leaders participating were hesitant about the notion of ethnicity, and its inclusion in the charter was felt to be a victory for the co-ordinators from Institut Montaigne (Doytcheva, 2008).

In business organisations, the meanings of diversity have gone towards either attaching diversity to any differences, a large scope definition, or to focusing on a few specific differences, most often gender, age and nationality. Even though managers identify diversity as being related to social problems of “bad neighbourhoods”, and thus to inequality between different ethnic groups, ethnicity is seldom a category business organisations focus on. Even in companies where diversity is related to an explicit engagement to combat discrimination, the category of ethnicity often still remains taboo (Doytcheva, 2009). Studying the experiences of 248 managers, Cailleba & Cuevas (2009) found that over 90% of the respondents felt used to working with women and young employees, and 88% felt used to international foreigners. But both ethnicity and disability were categories the respondents did not feel used to work with. Up to 68.9% of the respondents did not feel at ease with disabled employees, and 43.5% of the respondents had no experience of working with youngsters from suburbs (Cailleba & Cuevas, 2009).

At the same time as the focus in business organisation contexts has shifted away from ethnicity to other dimensions, in the media the development has been the opposite. While in the beginning of the 2000’s, diversity was used as a way of relating to a variety of differences, after the riots of 2005 a clear shift has been noted where diversity has come to specifically refer to questions of ethnicity. Starting from 2005, articles treating diversity have focused on underprivileged minorities or problems related to them. Press articles about diversity have tended to focus on urban violence and the political, societal and managerial responses to the riots of 2005 (Gröschl & Takagi, 2009).

Even though the diversity trend took shape around ethnicity, diversity promoters have since also taken more inclusive approaches to diversity. The people behind the diversity label, for instance, promote a large scope definition of diversity and encourage any initiatives on any diversity dimension. This approach has been legitimised by the supposition that working on any diversity dimension will benefit all other diversity dimensions too. The rules of the diversity label also de-incite focusing on ethnicity, as
diversity initiatives related to ethnicity are not that easy to measure, and one condition for gaining the diversity label is to show progress. As improvements on the level of ethnicity are difficult to document, the diversity label can be read as indirectly communicating the relative unimportance of ethnicity.

7.5.4. Diversity practices

Not much is said to be known about what French companies are really doing in terms of diversity work (Robert-Demontrond, 2009; Garner-Moyer, 2006; Point, 2006). For instance, in a study analysing company reports of 31 international hotel groups, wherein French companies, only six said anything about the actions taken involving diversity work and their results, and that in a very vague manner (Point & Gröschl, 2010). At the same time, companies have also been seen to turn intentions into actions. According to Barth and Falcoz (2010), what used to be merely good strategic ideas are now being implemented into diversity policies with strategic plans, actions, deadlines and evaluations.

7.5.4.1. Recruitment

One way diversity work has been implemented is by changing recruitment practices. One objective with new improved recruitment practices is to avoid discrimination and ensure that all candidates are guaranteed the same chance of gaining a employment within the organisation. The anonymous CV, in which the candidate’s name, origin and address are masked, is probably the most debated tool addressing this. Another way to focus on candidates’ competencies and avoid recruiters stereotypes is to base the evaluation of candidates on assessment centres, developed for instance by the national employment centre “Pole emploi” (Naschberger, 2008; Garner-Moyer, 2006).

New recruitment practices are also needed in order to reach a more diversified population. To do so, employers have concluded partnerships with associations providing them with applicants with “diverse” backgrounds (Naschberger, 2008). Reaching out to new candidates is also attempted by employing through specialised recruitment agencies focusing on diverse candidates, and participating in recruitment events directed at diverse populations. In addition, placing advertisements in minority outlets or specifically mentioning that minority candidates are welcome in mainstream advertisements are ways to reduce the risk of candidates’ auto-discrimination.

According to a study conducted by INERGIE, a consultancy organisation, showed that the most prevalent organisational practice that had been modified because of the organisations diversity engagement was recruitment. In 70% of the 279 organisations that participated in their study, recruitment processes had been reviewed. 74% had formalised job descriptions based on competences, and 64% had increased the recruitment channels used. 57% of the respondents, for instance, had participated in recruitment events or forums especially dedicated to populations “originating from diversity”, that is immigrants.

A marketing campaign aimed at both reducing auto-discrimination, and profiling the company as pro-diversity, was undertaken by ADIA Temp Work in 2005-2006. In the

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52 Recruitment agencies specifically providing candidates with diverse origins have been founded in the last years. As examples, see: http://www.moaikrh.com/; http://www.aperecrutement.com/
campaign, called “Don’t trust appearances, trust competencies”, posters exposed stereotypes typically attached to different differences. The message of the campaign was in a nutshell what diversity initiatives related to recruitment seem to aim for: construct knowledge about competency as unrelated with identity. The campaign showed that minorities, too, can be competent, in a similar way as majority candidates can, without highlighting the minority candidate’s difference as one trait of competency, or value, for the organisation to benefit from.

7.5.4.2. Cultural change

The need to change the organisational culture in order to benefit from diversity is much less discussed by researchers or reported by companies. When taken up, the needed change is described as one of transforming organisational practices in line with anti-discrimination. Frimousse and Peretti (2007) talk about changing traditional understandings of cultural difference, which need to no longer be seen as a threat. Minority employees’ specific needs are very seldom addressed, or only indirectly as in Peretti (2004) where the new employee is said to be one who wants his/her values to correspond to his/her work. Otherwise, the employee is encouraged to change jobs, which increases the company’s personnel turnover. Training and sensitivity increasing is another way in which companies attempt to change the culture towards one more open and non-stereotyping. A temp work agency, studied by Giraudo (2010), put a special focus on training not only personnel about the questions of discrimination and diversity, but also inviting client companies to an information and sensitivity session about discrimination.

Diversity teaching to university students/future leaders has been found to be non-existent (Barth & Falcoz, 2009). However, diversity chairs have been created in leading business schools, such as ESSEC and Paris-Dauphine53. The creation of these chairs can be interpreted as a positive signal per se, but remains very exclusive and affects a very limited number of students. Therefore, Barth and Falcoz’s worries are well-founded, as there is a need to ensure that the majority of persons working in management positions have at least the basic knowledge regarding questions related to discrimination and diversity.

7.5.4.3. Communication

Communicating about diversity engagements is another important practice, sometimes even suspected to be the only practice undertaken (Maresca, et al. 2007). In communicating about the company’s diversity engagement to external stakeholders, signing the diversity charter has been an easy first step.

Diversity work and the seriousness of the engagement has also been made visible by founding specific diversity units or nominating diversity officers. Such units exist or have existed at France Télévisions, L’Oréal, SFR, PSA-Citroën, Total and Casino (Frimousse & Peretti, 2007; Vatetteville, 2010). Companies where the diversity work has not received a formal autonomous unit may have nonetheless founded diversity commissions by engaging voluntary employees to work on the questions (Doytcheva, 2009). However, even when companies clearly are ready to invest in diversity, they are poor on reporting on concrete aims, actions and results.

Nevertheless, based on the previously cited INERGIE study, 65% of respondents had named a person to be in charge of diversity and equality within the organisation, and more than half of the organisations had a formal plan on how to promote diversity within the organisation.

7.5.4.4. Reporting: a question of measuring progress?

Both the need to report on diversity and the difficulty of doing so, have attracted a lot of attention in recent years (Héran, 2010; Palt, 2011; Attali, 2008; Simon & Clément, 2006; Bébéar, 2004). The law on “data processing, files and liberty” makes it illegal to collect sensitive personal data, such as data on ethnic belonging. This law and the universal principle of transcending differences have been seen as impeding effective diversity work. Without data on the ethnic diversity of an organisation, it is difficult to set targets and evaluate progress (Palt, 2011). The diversity charter and the spreading diversity trend, have therefore re-spurred debates about ethnic statistics (Héran, 2010; CNIL 16.05.2007; Conseil Constitutionnel 15.11.2007; Badinter et al. 2009; Felouzis, 2008).

The debates on ethnic statistics have been on-going for several years. The pressure to modify legislation in line with allowing statistical data capturing the populations facing discriminations is important. The need to be able to identify discrimination is not contested, but the means with which to achieve the end still divide both politicians and researchers (for two different positions within the research community, see Héran, 2010; Badinter et al. 2009; also Libération 29.06.2009). In November 2007, the Constitutional Council declared that studies investigating discrimination, integration or diversity cannot be based on information on ethnic or racial origin. In December 2008, Sarkozy however re-launches the question. In a speech on diversity and equality of opportunity, he states that France needs statistical tools to measure diversity, but that these tools have to be objective and cannot be allowed to privilege an ethnic reading of the society. Here lies the challenge – measure without naming.

Some managers and researchers have turned to alternative ways of researching potentially discriminated populations. Jean-Luc Vergne, then Director of Human Resources at PSA-Citroën, reporting on his organisation’s diversity practices in a management journal, describes how in order to evaluate the progress of their diversity work they have made qualitative studies on themes which cannot be studied in statistical terms because of legislation (Vergne, 2008). Casino (a large retail company) in collaboration with labour unions and ISM-Corum, conducted research on discrimination related to origin by looking at the first names of employees. They categorised the employees of a hypermarket, a warehouse and a supermarket, 608 persons in total, in the following groups based on their names: European, with subcategories of Spanish, Italian and Portuguese; and Non-European, with one subcategory of Arab and Turk. Their study allowed them to show in a statistical manner the ethnic composition and structure in the three units and the differences between them. They showed that ethnic minority employees were more often employed through

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54 Loi n°78-17 du 6 janvier 1978 relative à l’informatique, aux fichiers et aux libertés: http://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/affichTexte.do?cidTexte=LEGITEXT000006068624&dateTexte=20110511
temp work agencies; however, when looking at career progression, ethnicity was not as significant as was gender (Cediey & Foroni, 2005). A similar methodology was employed by Felouzis in studying ethnic segregation in schools (Felouzis, 2003). Even though basing a study on discrimination on first names involves limitations, such as only approximately describing a population, these studies are the first able to show the actual differences in positions between populations57. In 2007, CNIL recognised that studies based on names in relation to discrimination may in some circumstances be relevant, but that names should not in any case be used as a descriptive of an ethnoroacial origin (CNIL, 16.05.2007).

The opposition to ethnic statistics has been based both on principle and feasibility. Simon and Clément (2006) conducted an experimental study on the feasibility of surveying employees’ origins. On the basis of a survey filled in by 1327 employees and students, they tested the coherence between different ways of reporting one’s origin, as well as the respondents’ tendency to answer questions on their own origin. Overall, they concluded that in a context where differences in origin mostly are used to stigmatise, the respondents were open, albeit cautious, about data on origin and ethnicity.

The current inability to collect and analyse organisations’ diversity progress in terms of ethnicity does not limit the possibility of efficiently working on other dimensions of diversity. The diversity label, for instance, requires clear documentation on the progress of diversity dimensions. The risk is that as long as it is impossible to follow up work on ethnic diversity, the focus of diversity work will remain on other dimensions. With regard to the extent of discrimination based on origin, it is urgent that tools to work on ethnicity be provided. The Comedd report, ordered by Diversity Commissioner Yasid Sabeg on ethnic statistics, suggests in in exactly this way that it be obligatory for companies employing more than 250 employees to draft an annual report on diversity, where origin would be included and measured by the country of birth and nationality of the employee and his/her parents (Hérán, 2010). Defining ethnic difference through these questions was found by Simon and Clément (2006) to rather well correspond to self-reported ethnic difference, but were seen as becoming obsolete in the ten following years, as a new generation enters active life. Further, people from overseas territories, equally facing the risk of discrimination due to skin colour, cannot be identified by these questions.

7.5.5. Positioning vis-à-vis diversity

Very little research has been conducted on the way different actors, such as diversity managers or minorities, respond to diversity and its management. A special issue of Raisons Politiques looked into how different actors use the term diversity and concluded that diversity is used to promote the different actors’ own interests (see Bereni & Jaunait, 2009). One of the issue’s articles focused on work life, and looked at how diversity professionals in organisations define diversity to concern specific dimensions and legitimise their definitions (Doytcheva, 2009).

The general assumption seems to be that managers are positively inclined towards diversity; many diversity officers even have been found to have a personal engagement with the question (Doytcheva, 2009). Thus, in many cases diversity officers could be expected to be convinced proponents of diversity. Robert-Demontrond & Joyeau (2010)

57 Studying origin based on the first name of a person clearly does not give a precise indication of a person’s ethnic belonging. The first name can, however, be considered as more informative than the family name. The first name can be seen as indicating the degree of integration, the will to be French.
studied the representation of diversity of three groups, HR professionals, marketing professionals, and consumers/employees, and found that all groups saw diversity as positive and as contributing to profits by improving internal social relations in an organisation. Along with this positive image they, however, also report about more hesitant and negative representations, such as diversity as leading to cultural clashes, diversity as hampering economic profitability by shifting attention away from business reasoning, such as in the case of positive discrimination, where minority status is favoured at the cost of competence.

Giraudo (2010) is among the rare few, if not only one, having studied the positioning of HR employees towards diversity. He studied the diversity work in a temp work corporation, and interviewed and observed employees implementing an anti-discrimination and diversity programme in relation to their clients, some of whom demanded the hiring employees on racial bases. He found employees take on one of four positions. One position is that of the “converted”, employees that are convinced the programme is good and feel they are capable of implementing it in their client relations. Another position is that of “converted pessimist”, who does not question the programme, but feel disarmed in face of the clients’ racist demands. A third position is that of “critical obedient”, they implement the programme but feel that the managers designing the policy do not understand what type of a reality they face – they feel there is a large disjuncture between the policy and the reality. A fourth position is that of “opponents”. Their position is to hold that anti-discrimination is not for businesses, and focusing on it will affect the company negatively. Giraudo (2010) has contributed to highlighting the complexity of the understandings people working with diversity have about it, and showed how a diversity programme can contribute to rendering discrimination and racism more invisible, not to remove it. Therefore, the assumption that diversity is positively viewed and promoted by convinced professionals has to be challenged in order that the more negative aspects and the masked discrimination and racism can also be seen.

7.6. Conclusion

This chapter has focused on describing the French context of and for differences and diversity, from different angles and at different levels.

Firstly, the focus was placed on national identity and the place of differences in the conception of the French nation. The tensions between republican universalism and differences were discussed, and the ways in which universalism and differences at different periods have been reconciled were examined.

While differences are not taken into account in the public sphere, French society is traversed by differences, as seen in the section on minorities in statistics. The minorities visible in statistics are therefore only one part of the visible minority population since, for instance, people originating from overseas territories remain invisible. France has an important immigration history and a past as a colonial ruler, both of which influence the composition of the French population today.

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58 The study was based on individual and group interviews with 102 individuals. However, very little is told about the empirical material and methods, probably because of the dual researcher and practitioner orientation of the journal Revue Management & Avenir in which the study was published. The findings should be interpreted cautiously: for instance it is not clear when respondents refer to diversity in society in general and when to diversity in work organisations.
A legislative apparatus has existed since the 1970's to ensure that differences are not taken into account. Where acts of discrimination based on race and ethnicity were treated under separate laws in the 1970's, the legislative development has led to race and ethnicity being included in laws concerning discrimination related to many different situations. From having been a specific issue, ethnic discrimination has in recent years become one among many. At the same time, the issue of discrimination has gained increasing attention in research, among public authorities and in public discussions.

Difference in work life was for long not a central concern, but has received increasing attention since diversity management entered the managerial discussions in 2004. The way diversity management has spread within managerial circles and to other labour market actors and spheres of society was described. The French diversity management development has benefited from a very close collaboration between business leaders and state authorities. State administrations have pushed for diversity to be taken up on business agendas, then taken on the promotion of the diversity trend and imposed diversity work upon all companies in France through the binding collective agreement.

What diversity and its management represents in French business companies and how different organisational members understand diversity and difference in France has been barely examined at all in empirical studies. Furthermore, very little attention has been paid to how the French context shapes these understandings. This is what the next two chapters will concentrate upon.
8 FRENCH DIVERSITY MANAGERS TALK ABOUT DIVERSITY, DIFFERENCE AND DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

What are the meanings of diversity, difference and diversity management from the French diversity managers’ perspectives? This is the central question that this chapter addresses. We will see that the participants give meaning to diversity and its management through the construction of knowledge about their context, their organisation, their business and the society. Diversity talk constructs differences, and it will be seen that different discourses of diversity highlight different dimensions of difference.

8.1. Introduction

The trend towards diversity management has developed strongly in France. As seen in the previous chapter, diversity emerged from being a practically unknown concept to being the dominant concept used with relation to difference and equality in both public and work life in only a couple of years. All the organisations studied in this chapter are actors in this diversity movement. Eleven of the thirteen companies have signed the Diversity Charter. Only the two foreign MNCs, where diversity policies are decided upon globally, had decided not to sign the charter, as they felt that they were already ahead of the French companies in their diversity initiatives.

The field of diversity management in France can also be seen as rather united. Today, there is a strong institutionalisation of the field through the Diversity Charter, the Diversity Label and the binding collective agreement on diversity. At the time of the interviews that this chapter is based on, the diversity charter was relatively new. The companies studied share an interest in the promotion of diversity and most of the participants hold a similar view on why diversity has become an issue in France in general. The participants see the rampant discrimination of ethnic minorities, the failure to integrate minority populations and the riots in the suburbs as severe societal problems to which diversity management can be a solution. If diversity issues are not taken seriously the future could become alarming:

R: If we don’t give them [ethnic minority youth] a chance, there will be twice, three times, four times as many riots as last November in the suburbs. N12G1

While the participants share the concern for society’s well-being, and see diversity as a solution for some of the major challenges of integration and discrimination, the discrimination against ethnic minorities is far from being the most common motivation for diversity once the organisation is in focus.

This chapter is composed of two sections of analysis, with each section having a separate conclusion. The chapter will thus unfold in the following manner: First, the focus will be on describing four different discourses of diversity. These discourses will initially be discussed by looking at the different motivations for diversity and the different practices of diversity management. Once these discourses, and the knowledges produced in these discourses, have been described, a conclusion on the discourses will be presented. Thereafter, the focus will be placed on the nature and dimensions of difference that the different discourses produce. A conclusion for this section is presented, after which a general discussion of the entire chapter concludes the chapter.
8.2. Four discourses positioning diversity

Within the organisational context, diversity is linked to a variety of questions in the participants’ talks: problems the organisation is facing, labour market conditions, societal expectations concerning the company, internationalisation, discrimination, equality, and internal organisational practices. The central nodes of these discussions are the motives and the practices of diversity. By mapping the different ways of talking about diversity in relation to the motives – solutions to problems and expected positive outcomes – as well as practices, it is possible to identify four different discourses for diversity: the business discourse, the equality discourse, the CSR discourse, and the trend discourse.

The different discourses positioning diversity both overlap and are distinct: participating in a trend has positive business implications; having a solid CSR programme is assumed to have a positive impact on business, and promoting diversity for business reasons may have a positive impact on equality. In the end, all the different discourses of diversity in the participating companies could probably be drawn down to improving business conditions and results, the only raison d’être of business organisations and the only social responsibility of the firm according to ultraliberals such as Milton Friedman (1970). However, while the majority of diversity initiatives can ultimately be related to questions of business, it is important to note the differences between the discourses as they construct different types of knowledges and position the company and different groups of people in different ways.

8.3. The business discourse

R: I have always paid attention to the fact that we don’t have a social discourse on diversity, it is to say, a discourse where we would say, er, we have to help people, our social responsibility as a company is to help people, er, that are in difficult positions etc.
Because this, er, you can succeed in it, but only working with managers who, who are convinced by the social aspect, and then it is never the top priority of business, because it is done in addition, I really wanted that we have a business anchoring. N16G1

The business case argument has long been dominant in the mainstream literature and among business organisations. Even though the main argument in the business case literature is that differences are useful and should be recognised and drawn on in the organisation’s activities, far from all business driven diversity initiatives are founded on this premise. As Ely & Thomas (2001) have shown, promoting diversity does not always translate into a recognition of differences and inclusion of differences into the work practices. Not even in countries where recognising differences is far less complicated and not as clearly related to tensions as in France, where the universal ideal refuses to leave place for differences in the public sphere.

The business case argument for diversity is dominant in the French context, but, unsurprisingly, the equation between diversity and business is not built on a straightforward valuing and recognising of differences. None of the participants talking within the business discourse explicitly highlight differences as resources to be recognised. While some of the expected outcomes of diversity would require differences to be included into the work, in the French business discourse the organisation is not responsible for/able to make more space for difference.
8.3.1. **Motivations**

In the French diversity managers' accounts, there are two different directions between diversity and business interests. Diversity is assumed to be related to business through the improvement of organisational practices. The company will achieve better results because of what diversity brings with it. This assumption reflects what Cox already suggested in the early 1990’s: a multicultural organisation is more efficient and productive than a monocultural organisation (see Cox, 1991). The other assumption that the French managers base the business case on is that diversity will reduce the costs of the organisation’s activities. Here, however, the diverse organisation is not per se seen as valuable – diversity enables the continuing of business without increasing the costs of doing so, costs to which non-diversification could lead. The reduction of costs has also been mentioned in earlier research, but often the costs have been internal to the organization, such as turn-over or absenteeism. In the French managers' statements, the costs that increased diversity can reduce are external costs. By having a diversity plan the company can improve its ability to gain contracts and to negotiate lower credit rates.

8.3.1.1. **Diversity as improving organisational practices**

There are several ways in which increased diversity among the organisation’s employees is seen to improve the organisation’s practices.

**Closeness to the clients**

Increased diversity among the workforce is assumed to be positively related to closeness to the client, and closeness to the client is related (at least) to two questions. Firstly, by being close to the client the company will be better in producing the products or services the client needs. Secondly, by being close to the client the client will more easily identify him/herself with the company. This second aspect relates to company image and legitimacy (treated in more detail later in this chapter).

Knowing the client makes it easier to plan the product or service the organisation provides to correspond to the clients’ needs. By employing young people and women in the marketing team, a high-tech manufacturer will be better equipped to understand how the young and women conceive of computers, how they use them and what requirements they place on their computers. And thereby the computer manufacturer can compete and gain market share in the specific market niches of the young and women.

R: Today, many people buy a PC for other than technical reasons, for reasons like image, it is like with phones, I mean, a phone, today it is used for many different things. And so this, it is something that, the business managers very well understand that we need to, we need to integrate this into our business reflection, and it is not by only having engineers that we will succeed in it, it is not by only having men, it is not by only having 40-years old, that

I: Mmm.

R: We need very young persons who are near the teens, who feel the tendencies, we need women, who, we need persons who do not understand anything about technology, so we have, in our marketing teams, persons who are not engineers, while ten years ago we had nothing but engineers in the marketing teams. N16G1
Staffing marketing teams with people with different backgrounds is what Ely & Thomas (2001) have called the access-and-legitimacy paradigm to diversity. This is the dominant approach in the motivation to become closer to clients. This is also the case in the national media company participating in this study. The company's aim is to address the entire French population, regardless of ethnic origin, and thus it becomes a prerequisite for the organisation to employ people with different backgrounds to fulfil its mission.

R: France is a country, where the number of French with an origin are estimated to approximately 10, 10% of the population.

I: Mmm.

R: That is 6 million people, it is enormous.

I: Mm, yes.

R: Yes, we have to be interested in those people.

I: Mmm.

R: They have to feel concerned, they have to feel represented. N12G1

Being close to the client thus has a double function. For the company it is a way to ensure that what takes place within the company matches what the surrounding society is interested in. But it is also to an increasing extent a question of image. The clients need to be able to feel recognised by the company and its services. As the diversity manager of a temporary work agency expressed it:

R: In our agencies, we, we, well we have a bit of diversity, certainly not enough, but hmm, I think that, when a young person from the suburbs enters, pushes the door of an agency, well, if he sees a young person, er, who resembles him, er, who receives him, I think, I think he can have a more positive image of things. And, as a result, they will understand each other better, also, no? N14G1

Innovation

Increasing innovation is another business motive for promoting diversity where differences are seen as indirectly valuable. The participants believed that a diverse team will outperform a non-diverse team in its capacity to innovate and solve problems. This is what the diversity manager of a high-tech company said:

R: I have always had the habit of saying, that [company name], is a company that lives thanks to its capacity to innovate, it is this that makes our success. It is our capacity to produce innovative products, with innovative methods, and so on. And we know that innovation, is related to, to differences. If, if we have two identical brains, or if we only had clones, we would not have innovations. And this, this is a discourse that is very easy to communicate in our company, because everyone understands it very well, it is clear. N16G1

Even though differences are seen as the basis for innovation, the participants describe how an organisation does not have to emphasise differences or make more space for them, other than by recruitment. Rather, the role of the “different” employee is central. Increased innovation is based on both difference, and the strong character and diplomatic skills of the “different” employee. While the participants hold that companies should not do anything to foster the valuable differences, differences are not expected to melt into the dominant culture. As the diversity manager of an industrial company responds when I ask how the difference of a person is translated into the work practices if the company does nothing to make more space for differences:
I: So without that, the diverse person adapts too much to the dominant culture, is that it?

R: Well, that is where it is important that they are enough in number, and then where, well, I believe that one should not be mistaken, in the fact that, this is also a question of personality. The people we recruit need to have real (that is strong) personalities.

Or as another participant puts it:

R: It also means that the people who are a bit different also must be capable of having an impact on their surroundings. People who are able to listen, and once they have listened, after that they will be able to say what they have to say. But, they also have to be people that are able to unite.

Attracting talent

France is, like many other European countries, in a demographic situation where new arrivals on the labour market are fewer than the number of people leaving it. Therefore, the competition for new employees will become more severe. Companies need the best talents available, and need to attract them to a reasonable price.

This situation creates a basis for diversity in the business discourse in two ways. On the one hand, diversifying the organisation is seen to be an attractive feature for talented potential employees. And on the other hand, the companies say that they now are aware that talent comes in many forms. So they need to start paying attention to recruiting from pools of candidates that they did not traditionally rely on, as talents are also to be found within “non-traditional” candidates.

8.3.1.2. Diversity and diversity management as enabling the attainment of organisational goals

Legitimacy

The risk of a lack of legitimacy is a reason that can motivate companies to promote diversity as a way to reduce costs. In MNCs, the composition of the top management of foreign subsidiaries creates questions of legitimacy in certain contexts. By diversifying their foreign subsidiaries top management by recruiting local directors, companies can achieve more legitimacy vis-à-vis the local community and government. For a petrol company operating in Africa, legitimacy is a crucial issue for the very continuation of operations:

R: It is evident that petrol companies will not have the right to operate for long anymore, in the countries of production, if they are not capable of making the local elites more autonomous, if, if, the people, the local governments, always see French people front of them.

But legitimacy can also arise as a question in domestic operations. In the public transport company studied, the diversification of bus drivers is a question of gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the passengers. Prior to the diversification of the personnel, the company had problems of violence; youngsters had, for instance, a habit of throwing stones at the buses. In the suburbs, the bus company was seen as a representative of the state (one of the few remaining actors going into these suburbs, when even police can avoid certain areas). By diversifying the personnel, the company managed to create a more favourable company image, and the acts of violence towards the buses decreased significantly.
Financial raters

Credit rating companies have started attaching more attention to corporate social responsibility, and as a result MNCs evaluated by corporate rating companies have an interest in promoting diversity. Against this rationale, which some of the participants from big MNCs cite as an important push factor for their diversity work, the interest in diversity is not primarily the diversity as such, but the capability to prove that the company has undertaken systematic diversity work and has a solid CSR programme. This is required for gaining good evaluations from the big credit rating agencies, which then again is important for keeping the cost of money as cheap as possible.

R: In the beginning we said to ourselves, we will take care of diversity, because there was an increasing demand of our stakeholders. And among the stakeholders, one of the stakeholders that interests us the most are the financial analysts. We saw how societal raters became more influential, and we saw how credit raters integrated into their performance evaluations not only financial and industrial evaluations but also evaluations on social and societal performance. And as one of the first questions that emerged was diversity, so well we started to work on this a bit as in response to these demands. N3G1

Customers demand for diversity plans

Customers’ demands form a third way in which diversity management becomes a prerequisite for doing business as before. Big multinational companies have started to include a question about the existence of a diversity policy in their competitively-decided projects to subcontractors. Having a diversity plan can thus help in gaining projects:

R: There are companies that ask for information on us, and who ask whether we have a diversity programme, what the percentage of female managers is and so on. Procter and Gamble for instance asked all their subcontractors, in a competitive offer, and the only one who as able to respond positively, was X. So we won the, the Procter client thanks to diversity, because in fact it was an element on which we had a plus, you see? N16G1

8.3.1.3. Discussion: motivations in the business discourse

The motives for diversity in the business discourse are based on increasing profits through innovation, a positive employer image and better products, or on decreasing costs through increased legitimacy, good financial evaluation reports and an improved position in the competition as a subcontractor. Realising these different expected outcomes requires different types of organisational practices, and different extents of space for difference within the organisation.

Most expected outcomes are realisable without making more space for differences in the day-to-day activities. Financial raters, customers and potential employees will base their understanding of the diversity of the organisation on external communication. Image is also central concerning legitimacy, not, for instance, what actually takes place in the interactions between different organisational members. In order to attain these outcomes, it is enough that the organisation engages in discrimination-and-fairness and/or access-and-legitimacy types of practices and recruits people with different backgrounds which thereby improves their image and personnel statistics.

In order to attain more innovation and creativity and to produce products that better correspond to the needs of a diverse population, the mere recruitment of people from different backgrounds will not be enough. Instead, the different members of the organisation need to feel respected in their difference and able to draw on their
different knowledge in the day-to-day work. To achieve innovation and creativity there needs to be space and legitimacy for challenging the dominant way of doing things, the dominant culture.

These are the questions the next section will focus on.

8.3.2. Practices

Training and reviewing HR practices are the most common diversity practices, both in the business discourse here as it is in the equality discourse that will be discussed subsequently. There are, however, clear differences in the focuses on these, depending on the discourse. In the business discourse, diversity also leads to practices such as communication, reviewing the content of the product and recruiting persons from “non-traditional pools” of candidates.

Training

R: We asked two consultants, who we knew, who hadn’t, who didn’t know each other, to work together to create for us [...] a seminar that would enable everyone to better know oneself and better know the others, and to have a more, more creative more constructive interaction in the teams.

I: Mm

R: So, and so I tell you this example, because it is a tool, hmm, for women, for foreigners, it is a tool that we even can use with French, er, all male, for instance, because each one has one’s differences.

I: Mmm

R: And so, this has been, an accelerator of, of creativity, of innovation, of performance in the teams, because it has enabled everyone to be more conscious about his/her strengths, of his/her specificities, and about those of others, and to know to ask the right persons for the appropriate questions.

I: Mmm, mmm.

R: So it is not organising the work, in terms of, er, redefining job descriptions etc, but it is more about how, er, well we capitalise on differences in order to draw a benefit from them. Ni6G1

Training is offered to both people in leadership positions and to middle management. The focus of training in the business discourse is on raising people’s awareness of differences. The objective with awareness raising training is to make people aware of the variety of ways in which people differ, and to portray these differences as positive and something that should be respected. By focusing on all the different ways in which people differ, diversity becomes inclusive. When no specific identity categories are specifically highlighted, anyone can identify themselves as different, even the 50-year-old white male manager.

When the focus of training is on differences as positive, very little or no attention is usually given to discrimination and inequalities. The participants describing these trainings include these questions by allusion. They do not take up questions of power differentials or discrimination as organisational phenomena. Rather, they talk about stereotypes and micro-inequities. They frame these as individual attitudes that they try to shape and challenge. By so doing, negative aspects of difference can be treated,
without placing them into the organisational structure. Stereotypes and micro-inequities are the responsibility of each individual.

One way to shift the focus away from differences between different groups within the organisation is to find a common denominator that all can identify with. This can be done by creating an out-group to which members of the organisation do not belong. In one company, such practice is described as taking place in the training. During the training, a video is shown on the different living conditions of people in different parts of the world, showing the poor conditions and the difficulties that hamper people, such as when having no access to clean water. These are difficulties that the members of the organisation never have to even think of. By so doing, the trainers aim to show how, ultimately, all the members of the organisation are very much alike, all a minority and all privileged. This practice could be based on social identity theory's idea of group boundaries. By establishing a superordinate group boundary between all the employees of the organisation versus the poor in the third world, boundaries between other groups are made more irrelevant.

The only specific group some of the participants cite as being offered training are women. They have the opportunity to get training in areas where they are supposed to be weaker than men, so that career progression is possible. This again portrays gender discrimination, not as a phenomenon the organisation causes, but as something being based on women’s actual lack in competencies.

**Reviewing HR statistics**

Reviewing HR practices is a way to follow up the diversification of the personnel. However, what also very much counts is that this diversification will be visible in the personnel statistics. Personnel statistics proving diversification is needed for the financial analysts in order to be favourably rated. At times, this requires that HR processes are changed to visualise diversity better, such as in one of the petrochemical companies:

R: Measuring is very important for us [...] and it obliges us to handle our existing statistics differently, which weren’t usable as such, as for instance, we have a system E, for evaluating the different positions [...] well each position is described with the holder, but the holder is not described as male or female, so we do not know if G is George or Geneviève, and Dupont, we do not know if it is French or international. N3G1

**Communication**

Communication about diversity initiatives is sensible from a business perspective. It is a way to inform potential employees, clients and other stakeholders about the company's engagement with increasing diversity, be it serving a more diverse market or attracting the best talents – including those having minority backgrounds.

For a few of the organisations, communication is an important part of their diversity work, while for others communication around diversity is said to be non-existent. The companies that communicate on this issue in an explicit and conscious way produce both internal material as well as participate in national events and provide interviews in the national media. Further, as all the signatories of the charter have engaged in reporting on their progress in relation to diversity, all de facto should communicate. Against this background, and the fact that communicating is an important part of the image building of a diverse organisation, surprisingly few have any consistent and planned diversity communication policy.
Recruitment of “non-traditional” candidates

Recruiting from non-traditional pools of candidates is a way to solve the problem of a lack of labour force. In particular, organisations employing manual workers and workers in poor conditions present this as one of their diversity practices. In one organisation, there are plans to go and recruit directly from abroad, as it had become difficult to find willing engineers to work night shifts.

In organisations recruiting personnel for low skill positions, foreign-born French or more recently immigrated people already living in France are among those seen as non-traditional candidates. By recruiting foreign-born French or recently immigrated people, the companies are able to fill positions that French-born people would not accept. The recruitment of immigrants thus allows companies to continue their activity without increased costs, as the immigrants are happy with a lower salary, worse working conditions and a lower status than the French employees.

The ethnicity of professional employees is seldom highlighted. The ethnic background of professional level employees is mentioned as interesting in a few French companies with operations in Africa or North Africa. Ethnic minority professionals are then recruited in France, with the future prospect of the employee being sent back to his or her home country to work in the local subsidiary.

Reviewing the content of the product

Even though in the business rationales of being close to the client, and knowing the market demands, the aim is to be able to adapt the product to the clients, only one participant mentioned the changing of the content of the product as a specific diversity activity. This participant, a diversity manager in a national media company, had taken on as a task for himself discussing with programme managers about the contents of their programme. It was thus not an organisational change as such, rather single-person activism to improve things.

8.3.2.1. Discussion: practices in the business discourse

The different diversity practices that the participants take up focus on increasing the diverse composition of the organisation and give no attention to changing the dominant culture and making more space for differences in the day-to-day work.

The practices within the business discourse are in line with increasing legitimacy, attracting talents from different backgrounds, achieving positive evaluations from financial raters and with having a positive position in the competition for large clients. However, none of the practices described clearly correspond to the expectations of increased innovation and improved products.

8.3.3. Conclusion: Diversity and diversity management in the business discourse

The business discourse for diversity constructs a version of reality where the differences of employees can solve pressing business problems, and/or provide additional revenues hitherto underutilised. The business discourse presents the organisation as a purely economic actor, and the society as rather absent from a business organisation's
concerns. Of external actors, clients, financers and foreign governments are among the few to be discussed. Differences are at the centre of the business discourse. However, the extent to which differences gain space within the organisations is limited. Within the organisation, nothing is undertaken to ensure that the differences of the employees from different origins are used and drawn on in the day-to-day business: the practices are all within the discrimination-and-fairness and access-and-legitimacy paradigms.

As long as the dominant ethnicity, the dominant gender and the dominant nationality are seen as neutral, the minorities’ knowledges will remain on the margins. Leaving minorities’ differences without much attention in the day-to-day practices may indeed become a major hurdle for attaining increased innovation and better products for specific markets. People tend to adapt to the dominant culture, and this has especially been a precondition for success in France. However, this should not be a problem according to the participants, as they expect their recruits to be exceptions. The persons they recruit “will have strong personalities” and “unite and federate around them”.

What would then be paying attention to differences, and providing differences more space? For instance, having an in-house nursery as a means to include women could be seen as a way of making space for differences. However, by providing an in-house nursery, the woman is merely aided in her (expected) ambition to function along the lines of the male norm. Therefore, only by recognising the difference of the dominant, is one really capable of recognising minority differences. And by recognising the difference of the dominant, one recognises power differentials. In the business discourse, differences in power and discrimination are, however, also left without attention. While discrimination is not totally silenced, discrimination is not seen as inherent to the organisation. Discrimination is something that may exist between colleagues, and is mainly spoken about in other terms, such as stereotypes and micro-inequities. In this way, the business discourse talk excludes power and discrimination from the formal organisational sphere.

8.4. The Equal Opportunity discourse

R: [In the mid-1990’s] I recruited people with competences within the industry sector. My clients were other [internal] recruitment agencies that sent me their orders by fax. 70% of the orders had an ethnic criteria - blue white red. Blond with blue eyes. Yes.

I: Oh, it’s incredible

R: Well yes. That is where we start from, if you like, it is terrifying because in this system you are in a total denial. I had a colleague, whose name was, he had a Maghrebi name. He lived this everyday. One day he says to his boss “I would like to become a manager in this sector”, and there the boss replies “But wait, with your name, an Arab in the commercial sector, it will not be possible”. Yes, yes (laughter) at that time it was possible and at that time it was normal. And everyone says bravo, it is the right way to do.

That discrimination and combating discrimination are at the centre of diversity management is another common supposition in the studied French companies. Relating diversity management to questions of anti-discrimination and equal opportunities is not surprising given the general tendency in France to perceive diversity management as being about improving minorities’ positions in society. While

59 In French bleu blanc rouge – as a national label
the motivations for diversity as equality remain poorly developed, the diversity practices within the equality discourse are extensively discussed by the participants.

8.4.1. Motivations

The motivations to promote diversity within the equality discourse are somewhat ambiguous. At the centre of the discourse is the recognition of discrimination as a severe problem needing to be addressed. The reasons for a business organisation to put effort into this type of work are not described in a as straightforward fashion as in the business discourse, and not always does it seem easy to bring together the personal motivations of the participants and the organisation’s interests.

The main bedrock on which the equality discourse is based is a moral imperative to combat discrimination. The participants describe the extent of discrimination in France, compare the French situation to other countries, and construct a picture of France as lagging behind in both the integration of immigrants and in recognising their place in the national history. They also clearly state that their own organisation is not an exception to this situation, but that discrimination has been the normal way of functioning, and that they have a lot of work to do in order to stop discrimination within their organisation.

R: Someone has to explain to me, how in a company like France Media, 750 journalist have been recruited, perhaps I don’t know, in 30 years, and unfortunately there isn’t a single one, or not many,

I: Yes

R: of French of immigrant origin. It may be ignorance, it just happened, but there is a problem.

N12G1

The morality of anti-discrimination is for the most part left to stand on its own as a reason enough for diversity management. A few companies link the need to combat discrimination directly to the organisation, by stating that as a public service provider or as an intermediary between employees and employers they need to show a good example. Otherwise, only as side comments do the participants mention factors that support or push organisations to work with diversity from the equality discourse.

The push factors for diversity as equality are related to the increased institutionalisation of the anti-discrimination field, as well as the discontent on the streets, such as the riots. The legislation in France had recently become more severe on discrimination, as a consequence of the EU directives. Overall, the EU was seen as an important actor in forcing anti-discrimination onto company agendas. Also, the recent existence of the HALDE (the High Authority against Discrimination and for Equality) made discrimination work and the surveillance of discrimination matters in France potentially more severe than in the past. All these developments in the institutional field increase the organisation’s risk of being punished for discrimination. One of the organisations had indeed already been condemned for discrimination, which had led the company to make major efforts to counterwork discrimination.

The EU is not only an actor pushing companies to work with anti-discrimination but also an important supporter. The EU’s financing of different anti-discrimination projects had made it easier for some of the studied companies to work with these questions, both through increased internal legitimacy as well as through the receiving
of funding. In addition, the diversity charter and the trend around it were seen by some of the participants as positive resources for anti-discrimination work.

8.4.1. Discussion: motivations in the equality discourse

Equality talk constructs companies as wrong-doers, discrimination as pervasive and as existing in all organisations. Diversity work is aimed at doing right. The expected result is reduced risk of discrimination complaints and a positive image as an exemplary organisation.

How can an organisation achieve these aims? Guaranteeing that the organisation follows the equality legislation is a first requirement. However, an initial consequence of beginning to actively combat discrimination can be an increase in discrimination complaints as employees become more aware of the discrimination phenomenon. This awareness is, however, not only organisation-specific, but awareness may also be expected to have increased in society in general.

In order to achieve a positive and egalitarian image, the actions the company is undertaking to work against discrimination must also be made known to internal and external parties. Therefore, it can be expected that equality work is communicated about.

The motives for diversity as equality let us thus believe that what an organisation needs to do is respect equality legislation and communicate about their efforts. So, on the one hand, the requirements are simple and the work remains within the discrimination-and-fairness paradigm. Differences do not need to be recognised, they just need to be ignored in decision-making. On the other hand, however, the work can be much more complicated than this. First of all, how should discrimination and equality be understood? What is reasonable to be expected from an organisation in terms of equality? Is colour blindness or colour consciousness the right way to go? And secondly, if discrimination is as pervasive as the participants portray, challenging and changing this norm requires work on many fronts, as well as power to withstand the resistance towards this change. These are the questions turned to now. In the concluding discussion for this section, the different understandings of equality will be addressed.

8.4.2. Practices

The majority of talk about diversity management practices falls within the equality discourse. In addition, participants who solely presented business motives for diversity often also constructed their diversity practices within the equality discourse. In this discourse, the practices have as a supposed aim the increase of equality between different groups and the reduction of the possibility of discriminatory organisational practices. There are three types of practices within the equality discourse: making diversity as equality a relevant issue; ensuring equality in organisational practices; and proactively changing the outcome of the current organising.

Making discrimination an issue

When working within the equality discourse, one part of diversity managers’ work consists of “selling” the project to internal and external stakeholders. This is something
that needs to be done within all discourses, but is more challenging within the equality discourse as the primary aim is not to affect the bottom line of the business. There are three main activities related to this: training, lobbying, and communication.

**Training**

Training within the equality discourse focuses on anti-discrimination. The participants describe the objective of the training to be that of making people aware of discrimination and helping them identify those situations where they themselves may be discriminating. This type of training is especially provided to recruiters, and both of the studied temporary work agencies where a large percentage of the employees work as recruiters have focused on this type of activity. However, it is not only recruiters and managers who are the potential audience of this type of work – temporary work agencies’ clients are also invited to anti-discrimination sessions. By making the clients aware of their own discriminatory practices, the temporary work agencies can more easily refuse to undertake discriminatory assignments.

**Lobbying**

Achieving support for their diversity work and managing to handle the resistance towards change is, according to many participants, central to the success of their diversity work. In most of the organisations studied, the participants describe the top management as convinced about the need to promote diversity. This conviction is based on either business motives or on equality motives. When the conviction is one based on equality, it is the values, personality and/or personal history of the supporting top manager(s) that are highlighted:

R: The CEO of [company name] is from a worker background. Someone, well, with poor parents. So it is a question of conviction, it is personal.

I: Mmm

R: In my opinion, it is his conviction, and professional too. And he has taken this as his own agenda.

I: Mm mm

R: He gives me the resources, he supports me, it is his business within the organisation. N12G1

When the support for diversity work is not as immediate as in the case above, the organisation has to be changed one section at the time. As another participant states, his aim was to conquer “bastions”. His strategy was to lobby for the issue of equality one unit at the time, and then spread the information about the support.

R: You occupy certain bastions, once you have gotten the bastion of the general director it is much more easy, then you go to that bastion there. Then you work a bit over here, a bit over there and there, and then at a given moment the system works, meaning that you can’t go backwards anymore. Once you have managed to engage a certain number of people, even though, ideologically, that is not the case, but if there was a real opposition among the sales personnel, in the end the resistance will drain away. N9G1

**Communication**

Some companies are eager to communicate about their diversity work, and would have liked to be mentioned by name in this study. Communication is both internal and external. In the equality discourse, communication is beneficial in rendering the work
legitimate. It increases the knowledge of organisational members about discrimination and also the expected effort to counterwork discrimination. Furthermore, it assists in constructing a good image of the organisation for the public. Where the motivation related to image in the business discourse was on attracting talents, here the motivation is the combating of discrimination, being identified as an actor of change.

**Ensuring equality in organisational practices**

Ensuring that the organisation does not produce inequality through its practices is a second domain of diversity practices. This is done through training, reviewing existing HR practices and testing. Training focusing on ensuring equality is twofold. One type of training focuses on the customer relationship and provides tools regarding how to meet the discriminating client. The second type of training provides tools for how to manage an atypical employee.

**Tools to combat discrimination in the customer relationship**

In many organisations, diversifying the staff may make visible the prejudice not only of organisational members but also of clients'. As a response to the clients' negative attitudes towards difference, temporary work agencies have started training their own customer service personnel in how to meet the discriminating client. They have sessions in which they try to provide tools for how to keep a client while refusing to provide him/her with the discriminatory service he or she asks for, such as selecting an employee along racial criteria.

**Tools to help manage an atypical worker**

Only one participant talks about training in relation to the management of differences in the day-to-day activities of the organisation. In this organisation, training is provided for managers concerning the way in which non-dominant groups are to be managed. The participant sees managers as unused to dealing with women or the disabled, and as afraid of not knowing how to handle the situation of a woman to be managed. Therefore, the organisation provides tools to help in learning how to do so. The supposition here is that managers are men and able-bodied. In this way, actually, the diversity initiative itself constructs knowledge about the manager which impedes diversity and restricts managerial positions to men.

**Review HR processes**

Reviewing HR practices is a very frequently cited diversity initiative. The aim of the revision is to detect potentially discriminating practices. Most of the companies studied review their HR practices focus on recruitment; one company, however, reviews all the different stages of an employee’s life cycle.

There are several ways in which potential discrimination and non-diversity-friendly practices are to be detected. In some companies, the first step into diversity work has been to take a “photograph” of the organisation, as a way of identifying the make-up of the organisational members in terms of gender, ethnicity, age and other social divisions. Doing this is not straightforward and simple according to some, as it implies modifying personnel statistics, and there is no easily accessible information on the ethnicity of employees. Others see it as easier – as according to them diversity is visible: if an organisation is white it by definition then is not ethnically diverse.
Revision of HR practices is based on various different perspectives. One way is to take a practice and evaluate its impact on different groups. Another is to take personnel statistics and look at how different groups are represented and change over time in different organisational activities. A third way is to test one’s practices with the help of “testing” – letting an external consultant test the practices by, for instance, sending fictive applications and see how the organisation treats job candidates from different backgrounds. Existing employee surveys are also used to check the organisational climate.

Testing

“Testing” means that an external actor evaluates the egalitarianism of the organisation’s HR practices. The aim of testing is to detect unequal treatment in situations where two people are otherwise totally comparable, but differ in one aspect, for instance gender, age, ethnicity, appearance or disability. Jean-François Amadieu, Professor at Sorbonne University and Director of the “Observatoire des discriminations”, has been a pioneer in this area. In 2004, he carried out a first testing on recruitment in France, taking several dimensions of difference into account at the time. He sent out seven different CVs to 258 job announcements. These CVs differed in the dimensions of gender, ethnicity, home address (suburbs vs. inner city), appearance, age, and disability. While his white male candidate who lived in the inner city received 75 invitations to take part in a job interview, the ethnic minority candidate, a person with a Maghrebi name but otherwise totally comparable to the ethnically French candidate, was only invited to interview 14 times. The candidate with a disability had an even lower chance of being called to interview – in Amadieu's study, the candidate with a disability only received five positive answers to the 258 job applications sent.

The testing method was also used in some of the companies included in this study. Testing is an efficient way to detect discriminatory practices, and for ethnicity, which is difficult to study with personnel statistics, testing provides a particularly good tool. Its limitation is that it can only be used in specific career stages and ignores the more subtle day-to-day discrimination and racism. This, however, is not seen as a problem, as discrimination is believed to be a problem of access only. So, discrimination is only expected to be located at different career stages: recruitment, advancement and compensation.

Pro-actively changing the outcome of the system

The third set of practices aims at influencing the outcome of the system without changing the system itself. Partly, the system is outside the hands of the participants, being related to national gender roles or societal structures. Partly, however, the system is designed by the organisation, such as when concerning recruitment and selection.

New pro-active HR practices

In a few companies, not only practices are reviewed for potential discrimination, but new practices are added to ensure the promotion of equality and diversity. These are mainly related to providing some specific under-represented group the chance to gain access to positive career-building activities. When choosing an employee for a foreign
assignment, for instance, a company can have a policy of always short-listing at least one woman candidate for the position, or making sure that women are offered the same amount of professional training as men. These pro-active measures start upon entrance to the organisation. In a few organisations, a new policy has been set according to which the company has to recruit the same proportion of women as the proportion of women candidates, or the same proportion of business graduate women as women graduate from the most prestigious business schools, or recruit the same proportion of women as they receive women trainees.

The participants in the companies having these pro-active measures regarding recruiting a specific percentage of women, or always having a female candidate for foreign assignments, were all against quotas. Their understanding of quotas is that the final recruitment decision is dependent upon a candidate’s gender. However, their practice actually is also in practice one of quotas, though it is at the stage of selection.

**Partnerships with schools**

Concluding partnerships with schools is especially a CSR-related practice. In some organisations, however, the partnership also has a clear equality-enhancing focus. Then, the organisation works together with higher education institutes to increase the number of minority students and provide minority students traineeships within the organisation.

**In-house day-care and other home-related measures at the workplace**

The methods to increase equality between men and women are varied and based on different suppositions. One equality-enhancing practice presented by a participant is that the organisation provides in-house day-care and other home-related services, such as dry cleaning services, hairdresser services, and so on. While these arrangements make the managing of several tasks smoother for the employees – simply dropping off your shirts at the ground level of your workplace is easier than going a block away with them – this practice also further blurs the line between home and work. As an equality-enhancing practice, it is based on a supposition that these are tasks that women take care of. At the same time that it may make it easier for many to have these services in-house, it also perpetuates the gender order related to domestic tasks.

### 8.4.2.1 Discussion: practices in the equality discourse

The different practices that the participants take up within the equality discourse focus on different issues, and can be grouped according to the underlying aim: making discrimination a legitimate question, ensuring that the current system is equality producing, and, thirdly, pro-actively changing the current order. While these all have discrimination at the core, the view regarding the causes of discrimination and inequality and the effects of the practices on equality differ. Ensuring that the current system does not discriminate is based upon a supposition of discrimination as an effect of organisational procedures. It is often seen as an unintended negative effect of the way things are organised on a specific population. The desired organisational practices that are aimed at are neutral and treat everyone the same.

The practices aimed at changing the current system also have different suppositions at the base. Quotas are used in order to counter-effect the stereotypes that recruiting managers may have about women or minorities. Partnerships with schools are aimed at
decreasing minority students’ auto-discrimination and reducing societal segregation of cultural and economic capital. Home-related in-house services are aimed at increasing women’s availability, and as a side-effect perpetuate the traditional gender roles.

Table 2  Diversity management practices within the equality discourse: aims, view on inequality and space for differences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Overall aim</th>
<th>Inequality the result of</th>
<th>Space for differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Make discrimination an issue</td>
<td>Multiple sources</td>
<td>Depends upon how equality is defined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobbying</td>
<td>Make discrimination an issue</td>
<td>Multiple sources</td>
<td>Depends upon how equality is defined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Make discrimination an issue</td>
<td>Multiple sources</td>
<td>Depends upon how equality is defined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review HR-practices</td>
<td>Ensure current system is equality producing</td>
<td>Indirect, produced unintentionally by organisation</td>
<td>Focus on similarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing</td>
<td>Ensure current system is equality producing</td>
<td>Indirect, produced unintentionally by organisation</td>
<td>Focus on similarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotas</td>
<td>Change the current order</td>
<td>Stereotypes, autodiscrimination</td>
<td>Name a difference but aim for similarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partnerships with schools</td>
<td>Change the current order</td>
<td>Societal segregation, autodiscrimination</td>
<td>Name a difference but aim for similarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home-related in-house services</td>
<td>Change the current order</td>
<td>Women’s non-professional roles</td>
<td>Similarity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.4.3. Conclusion: diversity and diversity management in the equality discourse

Diversity in the equality discourse speaks about discrimination as a severe problem and all organisations as discriminating, including one’s own organisation. Differences are not in any way seen as valuable, and differences are not described as needing to be recognised within the organisation. None of the practices in the equality discourse shed light on the gendered and racialised aspects of the organisation. In the rare instances that a specific group is focused on, the motive for so doing is the negative stereotypes
other groups hold of them, not the difference in relation to the organisation. When groups potentially discriminated against, such as women, are provided with additional help to enhance their careers, it is not the organisation that is in focus, but the expectation is that inequality stems from managers’ personal stereotypes and women’s own lack of ambition. Organisations are thus constructed as discriminating, but also as neutral systems functioning with the principles of meritocracy.

In the interview situation, the participants mostly did not anchor the anti-discrimination work in any other motives than the morality of it. However, it is probable that in other contexts some of them would either underline more strongly the push factors for anti-discrimination work, or draw on business discourse motivations (see Ahmed, 2007). Some of the participants would, however, probably remain within the equality discourse, as they saw business-driven diversity management and equality-focused diversity management as opposed to each other.

While all the diversity talk within the equality discourse share the premises of discrimination as a problem and as needing to be addressed within the organisation, there is also considerable variation within the discourse. There are semantic struggles over which terms to use, ‘diversity’ or ‘discrimination’, and how they are related or opposed. What is equality, and what should be aimed at? The participants talking via the equality discourse sometimes also distanced their own personal view of diversity and diversity management from the organisation’s view on diversity management. While in the business discourse the participants’ spoke from the organisation’s point of view, within the equality discourse it thus happened that the participants spoke as individuals, often as personally convinced individuals of the wrong that companies are doing.

8.5. The Corporate Social Responsibility discourse

R: We signed this charter, because we think that there is a problem in the French society, for instance, you see, that a certain number of minorities are insufficiently represented in the companies. And that that is not normal. It is not normal. And that thus there is a societal challenge, to rectify that. [...] If I refer to studies, to several studies done in this country, the fact of being a small black or a small Arab makes access to employment more difficult. Very simple. At the same level of qualification. It is not normal. It is not normal. N5G12

The third diversity discourse is constructed around the societally responsible identity of the organisation. The CSR discourse to a large extent reflects the general concern the managers all shared about especially ethnic minorities being discriminated in the French society. Engaging for diversity is a way of recognising this problem, and participating in combating it.

8.5.1. Motivations

In the CSR discourse, the motivation for diversity is presented as unrelated to the organisation. Diversity does not respond to any organisational problems, and the participants say nothing about the outcomes they expect the diversity engagement to have on the organisation. Diversity is simply constructed as being about the recognition of a societal problem, discrimination, which companies need to work against. The need to work against discrimination is constructed as self-evident and as being altruistic in nature. The companies working with diversity as a CSR question do not recognise that
they could themselves have problems of discrimination in their organisation, instead the attention is focused on what happens around the organisation.

The only explicit motivations for why a company needs to pay attention to diversity as a CSR question are related to large company size. The participants see that, on the one hand, being a large employer the organisation has an important social responsibility through its employees and its impact on the national economy. The size of the organisation is, on the other hand, also seen as an advantage, making CSR work more feasible through resources in HR work.

R: the second element, which isn’t only an interest for the company but which is, an awareness of our corporate social responsibility, which we have, well we have, we are lucky to be a big, big company that has resources to develop policies, we have a social responsibility towards the society, so it is our responsibility to ... accompany the populations that are more or less in difficulty, in order to attain health objectives of the company, I mean of the society in general.

N15G1

The slip of the tongue of this participant raises the question of whether companies actually do have an interest in taking care of a societal problem. And do business companies really undertake diversity work for purely altruistic reasons? Probably not, or at least, if they do, there are positive consequences to their engagements. Just as the participants explained under the business discourse: having a diversity engagement is beneficial in terms of the credit ratings companies obtain from credit raters. In addition, diversity work and CSR work in general can improve the company’s image. The business and the equality discourses came to similar conclusions, but the CSR discourse arrives at these without attaching any attention to the internal state of diversity. The CSR discourse could thus also be seen as a way to shift attention away from an organisation’s own diversity and/or discrimination.

8.5.1.1. Discussion: motivations in the CSR discourse

The CSR discourse constructs the organisation as guided by its interest in acting as a responsible societal actor. The organisation is seen as not guided by a business interest, but a desire to do good for the society in which the organisation is operating. When diversity is constructed against a pervasive societal problem of discrimination, the problem that diversity is to solve remains outside the organisation. This general problem of discrimination is so enormous, and dependent upon so many actors, that building a diversity initiative against it does not present clear objectives and areas of intervention. The vagueness of the definition and the large scope of CSR driven diversity work may render the designing of effective policies quite challenging. Equally, the other way around, very many activities can be framed as CSR-focused diversity work.

The participants describe the company as participating in the construction of the society, but at the same time, the company is seen as untouched by societal phenomena, such as discrimination – which is not an internal organisational problem. As the problem of discrimination does not exist within the organisation’s sphere, diversity practices have to be taken outside the borders of the organisation. In the next section, the attention is turned to the practices within the CSR discourse.
8.5.2. Practices

The diversity management practices within the CSR discourse take place both inside the organisation as well as outside. The common characteristic of the practices is a focus on an extra-organisational problem and collaboration with external actors.

Receiving CVs through minority associations

One diversity practice within the CSR discourse is to collaborate with minority associations and/or the diversity charter organisation, and receive the CVs of minority candidates through these associations. The explicit aim of the practice is to help minorities gain employment. From the company perspective, using this new recruitment channel may be a way of being pro-active in the recruitment of minorities, without reviewing its own existing recruitment practices. For minorities, these associations and agencies functioning as intermediates between the candidates and the employers, which have increased in number, provide a promising channel for recruitment since employers using these agencies a priori should have positive attitudes towards racial and ethnic difference. Subsequently, these agencies often then provide guidance and support to job candidates61.

Insertion

Insertion is called a diversity practice, but has actually existed in those companies having this practice since the early 1990’s, when diversity was a non-existent policy theme. In insertion, the company collaborates with public employment agencies and offers people without diplomas the opportunity to work and gain training in a profession. This is a way to reduce the exclusion of people from the labour market, and simultaneously provide a source of labour for unskilled professions.

Partnerships with elite higher education institutions

A common way for big companies to promote diversity as a CSR question is to create partnerships between the company and a higher education institution. These partnerships are centred around two different types of target populations: underprivileged pupils in state schools and talented minority students in elite higher education institutes. One type of activity focuses on promoting the school towards the minority population. This is done, for instance by visits to schools where the majority of the pupils have an immigrant background. During these visits, representatives of the school and the company talk about the studies at the school and about the profession these studies lead to. The supposition this practice is based on is that minority pupils tend to have integrated negative understandings about their potential in studies, and that these information sessions may reduce their auto-discrimination.

Another way the companies try to create links between higher education institutions and underprivileged pupils is by helping students of the elite schools to collaborate with underprivileged pupils. The elite students help pupils with their homework or take them to the theatre and organise cultural events for them. The aims of these practices are to make the school known to talented pupils and reduce the cleavages in society62.

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61 See, for instance, the services of afip-asso.org
62 As an example of this type of collaboration between an elite school and a deprived high school, see this video from ESSEC (http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xil729_essec-diversity-and-leadership-chair_webcam
Helping students with minority background in elite schools is also part of these partnerships. Here, the aim is to help minority students succeed in their studies and in the, for them, unfamiliar environment. The company can finance parts of the studies of a talented minority student, and help him or her to find their first employment or traineeship after graduation.

Give a helping hand to the excluded

A fourth diversity practice within the CSR discourse is to help people 'excluded' from the labour market to gain resources for improving their position. This group is constituted of people with long histories of unemployment and, for instance, people with limited reading or writing skills. The companies work with associations to provide these excluded persons help in the form of training, in reading for instance. The company may also directly work with the 'excluded' in order to provide them with assistance in drafting job applications, CVs or offer help with a foreign language.

8.5.2.1. Discussion: practices in the CSR discourse

The diversity practices within the CSR discourse are focused on affecting the discrimination against people on the labour market without challenging the organisation's internal practices. The diversity practices within the CSR discourse are mainly placed outside the organisation. Thus the practices do not have any direct impact on organisational life. However, the partnerships with elite schools may in the long run make it possible for the organisations to recruit more minority managers with (at least a thorough knowledge of) the dominant elite culture. The relationship of these practices to the recognition and valuing of differences is ambiguous. Receiving minority CVs via an association could be seen as a way to pro-actively increase the number of minority CVs altogether, and minority differences as desirable, but it could also be a way to decrease the perceived difference between the candidates and the recruiters. As the candidates come through a known association, it could lead the recruiter to see the candidates as less different than if they did not have an intermediary presenting them.

8.5.3. Conclusion: Diversity and diversity management in the CSR discourse

The CSR discourse constructs knowledge about the organisation simultaneously as a societal actor, and as being independent and untouched by discrimination taking place in society. While power differences are recognised within society, and practices are undertaken to change these, no attention is given to the power relations within the organisation. Overall, what is most striking with the CSR discourse is this tension in the construction of the organisation as an integral part of the society albeit untouched in its own operations by the problem existing in society. The participants describe how they want to help people that are excluded from the labour market, but they don’t ponder about their own role in the process of exclusion. The process of exclusion seems to be orchestrated by the society, and now the responsible company can come and save the excluded.

One way to maintain this contradiction is by constructing knowledge about discrimination as stemming from minorities lacking resources, minorities lacking belief in themselves, and a failed societal system. No attention is accorded to prejudice and racism within organisations.
### 8.6. The trend discourse

In the fourth discourse, diversity and diversity management are made meaningful against a trend taking place in society and among business leaders and managers. Following the trend is important for the participants as it enables them to gain an identity as managers taking part in the newest developments of management practices.

In the trend discourse, diversity is seen to be a natural state of affairs, and something that has always existed. In companies having international operations, it is the international aspect that is referred to as constituting diversity, but even in local companies with known histories of recruiting in very narrow ways, diversity is constructed as ever-existing. The company is thereby presented as managing diversity since the outset of its history.

R: Diversity is something profoundly displayed in our organisation, and consubstantial, consubstantial, you understand the word?

I: Mmhm

R: totally intrinsic

I: Mmm

R: to the DNA of the group ... but we haven’t expressed a completely formalised policy. N4G12

This fourth discourse does not construct any problems that increased diversity will or can be a solution to, neither does it present diversity as a potential additional resource for the business. Indeed, in this discourse, diversity management is related to no new practices, no changes. Even the communication of diversity is felt to be irrelevant, as becomes clear when this participant explains the choice not to communicate about the signing of the charter:

I: Is it correct to say that diversity started by signing the charter?

R: No, because there wasn’t a lot of publicity around this. That is to say that the company didn’t circulate internally “we have signed the diversity charter”, maybe it should have been done, maybe it should had been communicated about, maybe...but we are in a situation where we consider diversity to be natural and it is not worth hammering it in. N2G1

As diversity is and has been the natural state of organisational life, this discourse does not highlight differences or power relations. There are no expectations of diversity. The only need the organisation has vis-à-vis diversity is to be part of a trend that is taking place in society and in management circles.

R: I think that the current concept of diversity is very important, and very unveiled. Today the mayor of Paris says openly, I have a different sexual identity

I: Mmhm

R: Well, so it means that today it has entered public life. And so the organisation must also have a position vis-à-vis this. N4G12

Taking part in the diversity movement can be assumed to be an important motive for many organisations in France to talk about diversity. The pressure to join the trend has been exerted by influential business and governmental figures, such as Claude Bébéar and different governmental personalities. Regarding the rapid rise in diversity charter engagement, it may well be that in many companies diversity started as participation in
a trend. This is not a bad thing per se; the social pressure to talk about diversity has managed to spread the language of diversity widely in a short period of time.\(^\text{63}\)

8.6.1. \textit{Conclusion: Diversity and diversity management in the trend discourse}

The trend discourse constructs knowledge about diversity as a natural state of affairs, and especially as a legitimate and required theme of debate and discussion. As the discourse is not a response to a problem or an expected improvement of anything, no practices emerge from this discourse. The trend discourse merely describes the \textit{status quo} in new terms, thereby taking part in the diversity language. On the other hand, as I profoundly believe that words matter, this could be seen as a positive development. The trend discourse legitimises diversity as a relevant topic. It is, however risky: by constructing diversity as natural, the discourse is without resources to create any change.

8.7. \textit{Conclusion: four different discourses}

In order to give diversity meaning, the participants were found to construct a specific context for diversity. The managers highlight different problems, different needs, and different requirements placed on the organisation by external parties. They create a “burning platform”, a necessity for change. By placing diversity within the discourses of business, equality or CSR, diversity and its management becomes dynamic, and translates into concrete practices. Only the trend discourse does not constitute a base on which diversity could be transformed into practices of change.

\(^{63}\) See also Chapter 7 on the pressure to sign the charter.
Based on these findings with the French diversity managers, it is possible to conclude that diversity has several meanings in the French context. Each specific way to motivate diversity work, and to describe diversity practices, produces different knowledges about diversity, discrimination, the organisations and society. The different ways of talking about diversity produce recurrent patterns, and four different discourses about diversity can be identified. The discourses are not clear cut and separable, rather they should be seen as on a continuum, where different aspects are highlighted and where organisations are positioned in different ways.

These discourses can also be placed on two axes. One axis concerns the extent to which discrimination versus belongingness is underlined. One the one side, the Business and the Trend discourses focus on inclusiveness and belonging, while the Equality and the CSR discourses focus on discrimination. On the other axis, the discourses shift between the focus on society versus the own organisation. Both the Business discourse and the Equality discourses produce knowledge about diversity as an internal organisational phenomenon. The CSR discourse and the Trend discourse do the opposite: diversity is natural in the own organisation but needs to be addressed in the surrounding society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discourse</th>
<th>Expressed problem/Need</th>
<th>Expected Outcome</th>
<th>Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Attract talent, Legitimacy, Meet stakeholders demands</td>
<td>Innovation, Better performance</td>
<td>Awareness-raising training, Personnel statistics, Communication, Recruitment from non-traditional pools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>Equality</td>
<td>Training, Testing, Review HR Processes, Pro-active selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>Societal problem of discrimination and exclusion</td>
<td>Position as a responsible organisation</td>
<td>Partnerships with schools, Insertion, Helping the excluded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trend</td>
<td>No problem or need</td>
<td>Image, participate in a trend</td>
<td>Participating in the charter</td>
</tr>
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</table>
8.8. Diversity as dimensions of difference

The four different discourses raise and silence different dimensions of difference, and construct different knowledges about the nature of differences. However, as will be seen, they all tend to produce the same effect – difference is not promoted within the organisations.

8.8.1. Business: gender, internationals, age and ethnicity

Even though the business discourse presents differences in general as a resource, and the training in the business discourse focuses on creating an inclusive environment where all differences are valuable, in practice only some differences are of interest for the organisations. The dimensions focused on in this discourse are gender, international profile, age and ethnicity. The different dimensions function in different ways and respond to different needs. Gender, age and international profile are attached to innovation and to improving the diversity make-up of the personnel statistics, while ethnicity is related to solving problems. The participants elaborate further on this mostly around gender and ethnicity, thus the focus here will be on these dimensions.

8.8.1.1. Women: potential resources and potential burdens

Women are constructed in two principal and contradictory ways. On the one hand, women are seen as carrying a positive difference that the organisation can benefit from.
On the other hand, women are also a group that is difficult to help advance in the organisation.

In the business discourse, gender is conceived of in essentialised terms. Women are seen to be inherently different from men. While this difference has previously been a cause of discrimination and exclusion, the difference women bring along to organisations is today seen as something companies should benefit from.

R: Now there is the explanation and the awareness that women are different from men, and men different from women. And that we need to integrate this, get it into the heads of the people.

I: Mmm

R: and that there are these differences that exist, and that these differences need to be drawn on, for the benefits of the organisation.

This women's difference that companies should take an advantage of is talked about in stereotyping and generalising ways. Women are said to be more attentive to details, and to be better at interacting with people. Women are also seen as having a positive impact on work teams. Work teams composed of both men and women in the industry sector, for instance, are said to have fewer work accidents than teams composed solely of men. Young women are also found to be better performing than men. The diversity manager of a consultancy group explains this difference in performance by women's more serious attitude towards work. Women are meticulous and serious workers.

R: In general, they [women] have the aptitude of being more rigorous, more serious, so it is true in the first five years [that they earn more].

Even though women's difference is essentialised and diversity communication mostly treats women as a unitary group, often in practice only a specific segment of women are of interest within organisations. The unitary group of women is indeed scattered by intersecting gender with, for example, family status. When gender is intersected with family obligations, the knowledge about women changes as women become challenges rather than resources for the organisation.

Motherhood is at the centre of the participants' changed knowledge about women with families. Motherhood is also seen as an essential difference, changing women, their aspirations and their approach to work. Therefore women with children are provided with different opportunities than women without children. For instance, in an organisation where a woman candidate always has to be short-listed for a foreign assignment, women with families will not be short-listed. Instead, women with families will be proposed positions in the provinces.

R: [It means proposing women] managerial positions, all positions abroad, as long as they don't have children, they are more mobile. And to propose them technical positions in the factories [when they have families]

I: Mmmhm

R: because these are careers that are very valued, er, and at the same time that allow

I: Mmmhm

R: a family-life, because well there are not all these problems, the traffic jams of Paris, and these types of things.
Women with children are thus not highly valued when choosing candidates for managerial positions. A participant that had just described all the advantages of women in positions of responsibility in the hotel sector explains that the lack of female managers in their organisation was not due to a lack in the organisation's desire to promote women. Rather, the life conditions of women were the reason: women with families were simply not fit for managerial careers. In this interview, two persons from the organisation participated: the manager that describes women's characteristics and opportunities, a man in his fifties, and an assistant, a 24-year old woman. The manager intertwined statements about the organisation's open attitude towards women managers, and explanations about the preconditions for women to advance in the organisation in such a manner that one could wonder whether the statements were more directed to the assistant than me as an interviewer.

R: Managerial positions are however very absorbing and sometime it is, not always easy, to conduct a life of a woman, and a life of a hotel manager.

I: Mmm

R: but it is true, that it also demands however, a choice. For example Céline, who is a young lady of 24 years (the other participant), has decided to become operational, but she does it without hesitation, because she is sing-, or she isn't single, but she hasn't children, and that is something. But for someone who is 33 years old, who would have three children, well. But anyhow, for us there is no problem for...for instance for women to become, er, become a manager. N4G1

Motherhood is the main issue shaping women's positions in these accounts of difference. But just as Céline is described in the quote above as having made the choice to have a career, and thus not to have children, motherhood and the careers women will have are described as dependent on women's own choices. Therefore, the group of women that diversity promoting organisations are keen to advance are those women who have made the right choices.

R: We can favour, women who come to us, with a desire to have an engineer's career, a manager's career, a masculine career

I: Mmhmm

R: But we cannot force women, who have not, who will not make that choice, to make it anyway. N3G1

The business discourse constructs knowledge about women as a group the organisation needs: there is a need to recruit women and a need to guarantee that women advance within the organisation. However, the knowledge the discourse constructs about gender and family-status effectively keeps women with families in the margins. Women without children, and as in the quote above, women with a desire to have a masculine career, are promotable but so also are those that have integrated the dominant norms. The extent to which the increased presence of women without children and masculine norms will contribute to diversity can be questioned.

The knowledge the business discourse constructs about careers and motherhood as personal choices not only positions the challenge of reconciling family-life and careers on the individual and in the private sphere, but indirectly also constructs knowledge about domestic work and gender equality in the private sphere. Women's more demanding share of domestic work is taken for granted, and women are provided different opportunities based on these assumptions. The different opportunities in work life due to these assumptions should, however, also be seen as participating in structuring the organising of domestic responsibilities. By constructing knowledge
about women as the primary care-takers, the discourse also construct men as free from
domestic work. When this assumption is integrated into organisational practices, the
organisation perpetuates the unequal division of domestic responsibilities. In this way,
the business discourse of diversity can function as hampering the diversification of the
workforce.

8.8.1.2. Ethnic minorities: between essentialised socio-cultural differences or
international experience

R. In many [companies] today, diversity focuses on this history of, of ethnic origins.

I: Yes, yes, is it a terminology that is used, ethnic?

R: Yes well, there are several words in France. There are the differences visi- , er, visible
minorities. This is the word, er, politically correct. [laughter]

I: That can be found in the diversity charter.

R: Absolutely, absolutely, and that enables one to cover all the persons that have curly hair, that
have a vi, that have a darker skin, well that, etc, well, and that typically are of, er, immigrant
origin, er, second or third generation, it depends on the people, so from Africa, North-Africa and
Black Africa, in fact I think it is this, I think, principally. N16G1

There is a variety of terminology related to ethnic difference that is used in French
companies. Visible minority is often seen as the politically correct way to denote people
with an immigrant background originating from former colonies. However, both
ethnicity and visible minority are terms that the French organisations do not use much.
This does not mean that knowledge about differences based on what in Anglo-phone
contexts are labelled ethnic minority are not constructed. The terms used instead, in
addition to or intertwining with ethnicity, are such as “youngsters from the suburbs”,
“suburban culture”, “immigration” or “race”.

While there is this variety of terms describing ethnic minorities, the knowledges about
ethnicity in the business discourse are rather uniform. An ethnic minority person is
seen to have the following recurring characteristics: to be of immigrant origin, to live in
the suburbs, to have low or no education, and to lack cultural capital. Often, the ethnic
minority person is also gendered as male. The way the participants talk about these
differences essentialise ethnic minorities as inherently different from the French. Here,
a diversity manager employing many ethnic minorities explains:

R: You can have people, when I say people coming from the suburbs, coming from the suburbs
will mean that it is often people that are of French origins but who have a mode of functioning
which is the culture of the suburbs. And I would say, even if they are French, it is possible that
the perceptions that we have, are much more different, much more marked, between those
people than between foreigners from a Western country, as there we will really be close, and
there will be no problems. N2G1

In another example, a diversity manager who had explained that her organisation did
not recruit ethnic minorities relates ethnicity to social problems:

I: But how, what is this population?

R: Well it is the populations that hmm, the French school has not been able to integrate, it is
populations that have a bit matured in their difference [...] there is a tendency in France to
stigmatise these youths coming from immigration, because it is them we see in the RER (Parisian
metro-train), it is they that shout, it is they that speak, but, it is a population that is much more
hmm, it is a population that is in the process of being excluded [...] and broadly speaking I would say that it is the children that the school has not known how to, wanted to or been able to socialise. N3G1

While ethnicity in general is seen only as a problem and a threat, in some business contexts this can be turned into an advantage. By intersecting ethnicity, origin, education and living in the urban underprivileged areas, the ethnic minority is positioned as having low social status, and it is this knowledge of ethnicity as being about low social status that enables companies to turn ethnicity into a business case:

R: Luckily we have immigrants, because without immigrants we would have no one or not enough personnel to keep our service stations [...] we are almost constrained to take these people, because we don’t have enough French, who, who would accept to work in the service stations [...] We lack. Why? Because, as I told you earlier we are in the world’s most competitive market in France. We have a lot of problems to be profitable, so if we had people, if we hadn’t people who are satisfied with less. It is not gaining hundreds and millions but gaining correctly their lives. So, if I take the service station network in France, we have, I don’t know if the majority of the people are of French nationality, I, I I am sure they aren’t. You see, at least of origin, perhaps,

I: Yes

R: It is second generation [...] It is the same problem that hotels have. In big hotel chains. But fortunately they have foreigners that they recruit. Because, we would not have enough, of, because the working hours are very restricting, the working hours hmm, they are poorly paid and so on.

I: Mmm

R: So I think that at us they are well paid, they are relatively well paid, comparing to the medium. So that is not a problem. N1G1

In this way, the business discourse, by intersecting ethnicity with low socio-economic status, positions ethnic minorities as an exploitable workforce. Ethnic minorities are a needed workforce and happy to work in the positions normal French citizens find uninteresting or too demanding. Another consequence of the intersection of ethnicity and low socio-economic status is that people with immigrant origins having a university education and a professional profile are not seen as having a different ethnic background. Here, a diversity manager explains why ethnicity is not a dimension her organisation focuses on in their diversity work:

R: For us it is not really a problem, a major, this problem of er, of ethnic diversity in France

I: yes

R: for two reasons. The first one is that we are not in contact with the final consumer [...] and for the other part, when we recruit people, we recruit, hmm, managers

I: yes

R: so people with an important education, and for us, among the young that we recruit, the fact that they have international experience, it is hmm, a plus. N3G1

In this way, the minority ethnicity of an employee is turned into “international experience” once the employee is in a professional position. The knowledges constructed about ethnicity thus provide two types of positions for ethnic minority people. The first knowledge highlights the ethnic origin of a person, which enables the person to be positioned as inherently different and in the margins. The other knowledge ignores the ethnicity of a person, and provides the person with the position
of a professional who has no ethnicity. This creates a tension between professionalism and ethnicity. In order to be a professional, the ethnic minority has to stress professional identity and hide his or her ethnic belonging.

By intersecting ethnicity and socio-economic status, ethnic difference is both constructed as a valuable resource for the organisation, and as a totally irrelevant difference in the majority of the organisation. The value of ethnic difference is only constituted by the exploitable situation of ethnic minorities. While the business discourse constructs differences as valuable resources in general, ethnicity is not constructed as a value and a resource the company can draw on.

8.8.1.3. Conclusion: difference in the business discourse

The business discourse of diversity constructs knowledge about differences as valuable resources organisations need to learn to draw a benefit from. However, managers drawing on the business discourse focus on some specific differences, rather than any differences. The business discourse constructs knowledge about women, internationals, people of different ages and ethnic minorities as particularly relevant in the diversity work.

The business discourse constructs differences as essential properties of individuals and groups. A more detailed look at the way in which specific differences are talked about, however, reveals that only narrow segments of people with differences are seen as valuable for the organisation. While the business discourse speaks about the value of differences, the knowledges the discourse constructs by intersecting different differences presents the value of difference in a narrow way. When ethnic minorities with an education are not seen as having an ethnic minority background, and when women with families are constructed as not fitting to managerial careers, the business discourse de facto also excludes difference from the organisation.

8.8.2. Equality: focus on all differences, all irrelevant in the organisation

R: So we follow what we have the right to follow by law
I: Yes
R: and so it is women, the disabled, it is foreign national employees, of foreign nationality,
I: Nationality, yes.
R: and eh it is age, the ones over 45 years. N13G1

The equality discourse of diversity focuses on any differences that can lead to a disadvantaged treatment in the work organisation. In some organisations, such as in the quote above, the focus is on measurable differences, whereas in some others all differences that may stigmatised employees are mentioned, such as homosexuality, body size or appearance. While the repertoire of differences the equality discourse highlights is broad, differences are constructed as having no role in the sphere of organisations and work. The difference of an employee is of absolutely no interest for the organisation, and indeed the focus of diversity work is placed on ensuring that differences are not taken into account in any organisational decisions. As a manager explains:
R: We don’t give a damn who the persons are. The identity of someone, it only concerns him/her outside the work. N9G1

This inattention to differences within organisations is not surprising given that the dominant equality approach in France assumes that people should be stripped of their social identities to achieve equality. The participants drawing on the equality discourse describe this model as structuring diversity work, and to be a sacred part of Frenchness as well as of their own identities.

R: We don’t care about knowing whether the model is correct, whether it is good or not good, we don’t care, but it is there. You cannot deny it, you can’t just remove the model that comes from the French Revolution, it is extremely structuring. N9G1

To simultaneously ignore differences and promote diversity can at first sight seem contradictory. In order to be able to both ignore differences and promote diversity the equality discourse therefore needs to rely on knowledge about organisations as previously massively discriminating. The equality discourse holds that by ignoring differences, and focusing on competence only, the workforce will become diversified. The discourse thus constructs knowledge about differences and competences as separable and independent issues.

The choice to ignore differences and focus on competence is defended as not only the required way to do things in France, but also the only expectation minorities will have of an organisation. The equality discourse constructs minorities as not wanting to be seen through their difference, the only difference they want to make is that of performance. Further, if differences were to be taken into account, that would de-legitimise the successful minority employees’ positions.

R: We have received reactions from minority employees that have succeeded, who have functioned well, and who may react negatively in face of the fact that no, you are not to promote people who do not have the competences because of the principle of saying that they belong to this or that minority. So it is really this notion of equality of treatment that we need to keep. N13G1

Ignoring differences is also rendered possible by constructing knowledge about differences as being the product of prejudice and discrimination. Differences are not essential properties of individuals, but rather socially constructed. Taking differences into account in organising would only produce differences that otherwise would not exist. The managers drawing on the equality discourse formulate the expectation of ignoring difference not only for the organisation but also for the individuals. Individuals should not bring a difference to the fore. As differences are not essential properties of individuals, they can be detached from individuals. Therefore, individuals are expected to make the choice of not being different – otherwise, difference can be interpreted as incompetence.

R: Well it is evident that, eh, if we recruit a sales clerk, this sales clerk needs to accept the image we have of the woman.

I: Mh

R: And so it is, however, often a woman that we see in bras, we see them, well.

I: Mh.

R: So eh, if this person who comes to work, to [big department store], is a woman of Islamic radicalism or if she wears a veil
I: Mh

R: It will be difficult, it will be difficult.

I: Mh, mh.

R: But well there. It would mean that, it is a problem of competence.

I: Mh.

R: It means that she, she doesn’t put herself in a mode of being pleasant in face of clients. N6G1

The equality discourse thus constructs knowledge about any dimension of difference as relevant to diversity work, but only with the objective of rendering all differences irrelevant within the work organisation. Differences are seen as socially constructed through prejudice and discrimination. The equality discourse provides those who are different with the possibility to melt in and guarantees that their difference will not be noted. The equality discourse thus positions minorities as silent. According to the equality discourse, the strategy for succeeding as an ethnic minority is to hide one’s difference.

8.8.3. CSR: immigrant youth, the long-term unemployed, and the disabled

The corporate social responsibility discourse focuses on a set of specific differences which are constructed as being of no value within the organisation. The focus is on underprivileged groups: immigrant youth, the disabled and the long-term unemployed. The corporate social responsibility discourse to a large extent reproduces the knowledge constructed about ethnicity in the business discourse. The central dimensions of minority youth are that they are presented as a problematic group and as culturally lacking. Their own culture or difference is not pondered about or recognised.

The knowledges about ethnic minorities differ in two ways between the business discourse and the CSR discourse. First of all, where the business discourse essentialised ethnic difference, the corporate social responsibility discourse constructs ethnic difference as socially constructed. It is because of the lack of resources of schools in certain areas, the failed societal system in general, and the socio-economic disparities between families in inner cities and the “bad neighbourhoods” that difference between different ethnic minorities exist. A diversity manager of a large petrochemical company explains the causes of the differences thus:

R: Well why [do the differences exist], because since the beginning of schooling they find themselves in ghettos where they are less followed. [...] they are always in classes where it is very difficult and where they are thirty and where there are pupils who hardly speak French, and it is extremely difficult. N1G1

The company can help these groups by providing them additional resources to fill the gaps they have accumulated because of different social problems. In the company the person above works for, the action takes the form of helping elite students assist underprivileged pupils in different ways, for instance by providing them with experiences of mainstream culture.

R: They [students from the elite school] give them courses, they help the students, equally much on the level of their own studies but also on the cultural level. For instance, they organise outings
 Secondly, the business discourse and the corporate social responsibility discourses differ in the role differences are given within the organisations. The corporate social responsibility discourse constructs the differences focused on as totally irrelevant to, and even absent from, the realities of the corporate world. As a diversity manager of a big consultancy group puts it:

R: We do not see the, the people failing in school [...] we do also not see the long-term unemployed. So

I: Mmhmm, mmhm

R: It is the dichotomy between the world of work and, the civil society.

I: Yes, yes. So these are, however, questions that are a bit far away from the perspective of the business company?

R: Oh yes, oh yes. Even though once again, we can try to link them, and exactly by working with [name of an elite school] we receive long-term unemployed [...] help them remake their CVs, study English, well.

I: Mmhmm

R: Because it is true that at [name of the company] we really feel that we have a responsibility as a company ... but it is true that here we turn towards the civil society [...] it is however two distinct worlds.

The corporate social responsibility discourse constructs knowledge about differences as socially constructed, and knowledge about society and business organisations as distinct spheres. Thereby, even though, for instance, ethnic minorities are not seen as carrying an inherent difference, they are excluded from the sphere of the organisation based on the knowledge of them as lacking. The corporate social responsibility discourse only speaks about differences of underprivileged groups that are mostly not in contact with the business world. As a result, the corporate social responsibility discourse does not provide resources that any minority group within the organisations could use to position in more favourable ways.

8.8.4. Trend: all differences valuable

The trend discourse constructs differences as valuable for the organisation and as essential characteristics of individuals. No specific differences are focused on, but any difference is seen as contributing to the diversity of an organisation. As no specific difference is focused on, and as diversity is described as a natural fact, diversity management requires no action from the part of the organisation. When I asked two managers of a petrochemical company whether differences, as they had described them as valuable, should be underlined in some way within the organisation, they reacted like this:

I: So you have to underline differences, the characteristics of different differences?

R2: No you should not underline according to me, the difference arises by itself.

R1: No but wait, if you are black and I am white,
I: Mh

R2: What do you (laughs) we are not going to cake your face in paint (laughs) we are not going to cake your face in paint

R1: the difference is evident.

I: Yes.

[...]

R1: You see, it is all there is to it. It is not a problem of denying it, or to, it is, and, it it is a fact. Simply a fact. N5G12

In the trend discourse, the diversity of an organisation is constructed around a plethora of differences, all independent of the organisation. As any differences are equally valuable, the status quo of the organisation is maintained. Even though the knowledge of differences as valuable resources could be drawn on by minorities to position in favourable ways, it is probable that the all-inclusive notion of diversity makes this difficult.

### 8.9. Conclusion: different discourses and different dimensions of difference

The four different discourses can be placed on two axes related to differences and their nature. One axis focuses on the dimensions of difference the discourses highlight, while the other axis focuses on the extent to which differences are seen as valuable or irrelevant to the organisation, and the extent to which differences are seen as essential or socially constructed.

The business discourse highlights a set of differences. Most often, these differences are gender and internationalisation, but age and ethnicity are also dimensions of difference that can be addressed within the business discourse. These differences are seen as valuable for the organisation. The differences are seen as essential, something that individuals possess regardless of the organisation. While it was seen in the first section of this chapter that the business discourse constructs an inclusive image of diversity and its management in the organisation, when looking at how differences are talked about this inclusive image is challenged. The business discourse not only focuses on certain differences only, those that are valuable, but also scatters the unitary groups it speaks about. By intersecting gender and family status, or ethnicity and education, the groups of women and ethnic minorities are scattered and only a part of the groups portrayed as valuable for the organisation. Women without families are valuable, while the knowledge about women with children positions them as not fit for demanding careers. Ethnic minorities with education are not seen as having an ethnic minority background, but are seen only through their professional status. The ethnic minority status is reserved for persons in low pay jobs.

The trend discourse focuses on all possible differences. Differences are constructed as valuable to the organisation, and also as an integral part of the identity of the organisation. However, differences are something that the organisation has no impact on. Differences are essential properties of individuals.

The equality discourse shares the focus on all differences with the trend discourse. However, the approach differs significantly concerning the role differences are given
within the organisation. In the equality discourse, differences are constructed as totally irrelevant to the organisation, and as something that organisations also have the obligation to consider irrelevant. Differences are not essential properties of individuals, but socially constructed, for instance through discrimination and prejudice. As long as organisations guarantee the equal treatment of all, based on the criteria of competence only, differences within organisations should cease to exist. However, differences are related to competence when the individual brings a difference to the fore. If an individual in a work context holds on to a difference, then this behaviour is considered to reveal the incompetence of the individual. Differences are thus also seen as choices: all individuals are provided with the opportunity to not construct a difference, and both requested and expected not to.

The corporate social responsibility discourse focuses on a few dimensions of difference only: youngsters with immigrant origins, disabled people and the long-term unemployed. These differences are in no way seen as resources and valuable for the organisation. The differences are seen as the result of a failing societal system, on which the organisation can have an impact. By working with groups belonging to the categories the discourse focuses on, such as by providing the underprivileged groups additional resources, for instance knowledge of the mainstream culture, the organisation can reduce the existence of these differences.

The effects of the ways in which differences are constructed and related to the organisation are, however, rather similar in all of the discourses. All of the discourses tend to privilege similarity and maintaining the current power order within the organisations. When differences are constructed as essential and unrelated to the organising, such as in the trend and the business discourses, the current order is not challenged. In addition, in the business discourse, by intersecting the differences that are of value for the organisation with other differences, only those groups that do not challenge the organising and the power order are seen as valuable – such as women choosing a masculine career. In this way, the focus shifts from the value of difference to the benefits of similarity. In the equality and the corporate social responsibility discourses, the fact that differences are seen as socially constructed allows for challenging of the current order, and makes more space for differences in the organisations. However, as the discourses simultaneously construct differences as irrelevant for the organisations, differences within the organisation remain without any attention.
8.10. Concluding discussion

What can be concluded from the results of this part of the study? It is clear that diversity management does not have a unitary meaning in the French context, but that there are (at least) four different discourses that can be drawn on when talking about the motives, practices and the dimensions of diversity. The variation of meanings of diversity is not only found in the French context as a whole or on certain organisational levels; instead, during the interviews, the managers drew on several of the different discourses. The managers could therefore be seen as talking in an inconsistent manner, while the discourses they draw on construct coherent knowledges about difference, equality, discrimination, the organisation, and society.

The business discourse on diversity is not surprising, given its prevalence in many other contexts. It is also a discourse with which it is easy to “sell” the idea of diversity to internal and external stakeholders. However, while the French diversity managers easily drew on the business discourse to motivate the need to work for an increased diversity, it did not seem to be a comfortable discourse for describing diversity practices. There are no practices described that challenge the dominant norms of organisations and make more space for differences. The idea of valuing and drawing on differences for an organisation’s business interests may be difficult to reconcile with the French dominant norm of universalism, according to which individuals in the public sphere are stripped of their particular identities. The business motives of innovation and understanding the client are thus expected to happen through the mere increased recruitment of people with differences. However, when the constructions of difference
were examined in more detail, the business discourse, by intersecting the valuable groups' differences with other differences, was found to favour similarity over difference.

The equality discourse seems to have a more legitimate and unproblematic position in the French managers' diversity talk. The business and the equality approaches to diversity have been found to intertwine in the French context. The results based on the diversity manager interviews came to similar conclusions, and suggest that the equality discourse is prevalent when diversity practices are in question. The equality discourse very clearly also produces knowledge about differences and the organisation that privileges similarity and excludes difference form the work context. In the equality discourse, the focus of the diversity work is on guaranteeing a meritocratic system where competence and difference are fully detached from each other. Competence and difference, however, were found to intertwine when minority individuals hold on to a difference. Then, being different can be constructed as incompetence, and the exclusion of difference motivated by meritocratic principles.

The CSR discourse provides the diversity managers with a way to work with diversity and construct discrimination as an important problem, and at the same time to avoid challenging and changing any organisational practices. When diversity and diversity management are understood as pertaining to the societal sphere, an organisation can gain the benefits of having a diversity-friendly organisational identity, while preserving the dominant order within the organisation.

The trend discourse could be seen as a reaction to the institutionalisation of the diversity field and related to the diversity charter that had been launched shortly before the interviews. The field of diversity management has in just a couple of years become institutionalised to a significant degree. At the time of the interviews, the pressure to conform to the diversity trend was probably already felt to be important.

Overall, the findings underline the variation in the meanings of diversity. There are several discourses managers can draw on in a specific context. These discourses are not independent of each other, but exist interdependently. Together, the four discourses form the discursive field of diversity available at a given moment in the French business context.
9 ETHNIC MINORITY EMPLOYEES IN FRANCE TALK ABOUT DIVERSITY, DIFFERENCE AND DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

9.1. Introduction

Diversity management initiatives have often been described as being orchestrated by human resource managers, leaving the voice of the people concerned by the initiatives excluded. Diversity management initiatives have been seen to be top-down led processes, and the importance of top management support has been often underlined. Little attention has been paid to employees and ethnic minority members of organisations. However, the success or failure of a diversity programme is dependent upon the reception of the programme by the minorities themselves. Also, in order to touch upon the questions that cause trouble in the organisation, minorities’ experiences should be understood. Otherwise, there is a risk that the diversity initiatives are unable to address relevant issues.

How do minorities experience their work life in companies where diversity is promoted? Is difference a relevant question for them in the sphere of work? And what do they think of diversity management? These are the questions that this chapter addresses.

The chapter is based on the interviews conducted with ethnic minority employees in France. As described in Chapter 3, access to this population was very difficult. As a result, the sample consists of a disparate group of employees, in terms of sector of activity, hierarchical organisational position and channel of access.

The main focus of this chapter will be on the ethnic minority managerial-level employees' subject positions when talking about diversity and difference in work. The worker-level employees will be treated in a more summary fashion, highlighting the characteristics of each group. Why has this choice to focus on the managerial-level employees been made? The reason for focusing on the managerial-level employees is to make possible the adoption of a different perspective to that taken in the Finnish ethnic minority sample treated in Chapter 6, where all the participants were workers. Rather than privileging comparison, it seemed to me more important to emphasise variation and diversity of perspectives.

The chapter begins with a description of the managerial population and the subject positions managers take on when talking about diversity and difference in work. After a concluding discussion on these subject positions, the bus-drivers' accounts will be briefly described. Then, the hotel workers' accounts will be focused on. A discussion about what the results suggest for diversity management concludes the chapter.

9.2. Ethnic minority managers: four subject positions

The ethnic minority managers work for three different organisations. One participant is a sales manager in a petrol company, one is a director of a big international consultancy company, and six work as engineers or business managers in a public transport company. All these companies are engaged in promoting diversity. However, only one of the participants was aware of her employer's engagement to diversify the workforce.
The interviews with the participants followed a similar pattern to a great extent. We discussed the participant's work, her/his interactions with colleagues and superiors, the organisational culture, the participant's personal history and the participant's thoughts about diversity management. In these discussions, the participants took different positions vis-à-vis differences and diversity in general, and vis-à-vis their own difference. In all, I identified four different subject positions. Each subject position is based on different knowledges about differences, the organisation, discrimination and diversity management.

During the interview, the participant may position themselves in different ways. The participants do not talk in a completely coherent manner. They do not always maintain a consistent story throughout the interview. At one point, a person may, for instance, hold that discrimination is non-existent in the organisation, but at another point tell a story of discrimination and identify it as such. The participants thus shift between positions. However, certain positions are more dominant in certain participants' accounts than in others. Therefore, the way the subject positions will be described here is by relating a position to some specific participants. This serves as a way to grant more visibility to the participants themselves.

In the next section, I describe these different subject positions through the stories of the participants. In order to guarantee anonymity, I have changed some of the background information of the participants, such as gender or country of origin. Also, some of the stories reported may have been told by another participant. These changes are such that they do not affect the stories and positions in any significant way.

The four subject positions were identified by looking at the knowledges about differences, discrimination and the organisation that the participants constructed, and the different expectations they had vis-à-vis the treatment of their own difference. The four coherent subject positions are named as follows: the “successfully integrated”, “the silent in the margins”, the “I am different and it does disadvantage me” and the “I am different but the others don't see it”.

9.2.1. The successfully integrated

Karïm is a young North-African man in his thirties. He arrived in France as a student to continue his studies in a French Higher Education Institution. When I met him, he had been living in France for almost ten years and had worked for his current employer for two years.

At the time of the interview, Karïm is very satisfied with his life. He very much likes his work and his colleagues, and has a confident approach towards the future. Things, however, have not always been as positive.

I: But has it been like this all the time, since the beginning?

R: Since the beginning? No. I have changed I think. I feel more integrated. I think that in the beginning I was a bit isolated. In addition, I arrived with a group of [people from his home country] so we were all together to continue our studies, and we stayed all the time among ourselves. We didn’t mix. And the problem was that we didn’t mix, and then we said to ourselves, ‘why do people not talk to us’.

I: Yes
R: Why do the French not speak to us. Why? And in fact if was our fault. It was the fact that we stayed outside [by ourselves]. It was because of this that we didn’t really integrate during our studies.

Today, in his job Karïm feels that he is fully integrated. His difference does not play any role in his work, and this holds true for other peoples' differences too. All that matters in the organisation is that you are competent and have the right personal characteristics. In this manner, Karïm and Mohammed, a second-generation immigrant from North-Africa, produce the same type of knowledge that so many of the diversity managers did as they maintained that the only differences within the organisation that count are related to competence. Karïm and Mohammed also draw on the republican equality discourse stressing meritocracy.

About differences between nationalities Karïm tells me that “There is no, there is no differentiation between a foreign person and a non-foreign person. No. I haven’t felt this differentiation, not at all.” This differentiation, or lack of differentiation indeed concerns all types of differences. As Karïm continues:

R: Young, or more senior. Well there, no, there are not problems related to this. This is not really a criterion of choice. The age of a person. So it is more the open-mindedness of a person, his or her capacity to be, to work in a team, his or her capacity to, to keep, to be able to manage, no, not even. I was going to say to manage his or her stress. But here our projects are rather long term, so in general we are not very stressed.

In the years before and during the interviews, there were quite a lot of discussions about positive discrimination in work life, and whether that could have been a way to improve the situation of ethnic minorities in the sphere of work. In these discussions, the ever-returning question was competence. Would positive discrimination lead to the advancement of non-competent persons?

Mohammed has lived in France since his very early childhood, and like Karïm portrays his situation in very positive terms. He, too, takes the position of the fully and successfully integrated person. And in the same fashion seen in a recurrent position in the debates around positive discrimination, he, too, places competence and difference in opposition. By maintaining that differences play no role in work and that organisations only focus on competence, he underlines his own professionalism and competence. Here, he describes his experience of entering the organisation as a way to show that the organisation does not care about differences.

R: I was interviewed three times, we were approximately one hundred persons, and then there were several selections, and so finally it was me that was retained...So for my part, hmm, there were all communities, so, that had applied, and there were quite a lot of French persons, and so I was retained, and so, I was, I was happy because I was retained based on my competences, based on my diplomas. And I don’t have the feeling that it was based on my origin or else.

Stressing competence in work however does not mean that Karïm and Mohammed totally deny their differences, but they seem convinced by the fact that they have to adapt. There are certain spheres of life, such as work, where they are obliged to leave their differences apart, and act like the French. Karïm explains that some of his colleagues probably do not even know that he is not French, and that he prefers it that way, and when I ask Mohammed if his origin is important for him he answers:

R: Yes, yes yes. My, my mother whom I visit every weekend, she is there, and she reminds me of my origin every day.

I: Yes, yes. But is it something that doesn't interfere with the work? Or is it important in the job?
R: Not at all.

I: No?

R: Not at all. Not at all. No, No, because, hmm, it is, it is, but there it is because of my parents. My parents always considered that starting from the moment that I am, that we were in France, we had to, hmm, behave like any French citizen.

And he continues:

R: I do not come wearing a djellabah to work, I don't come here, no. I am just like anyone else.

Religion is the only difference that Karim and Mohammed say to differentiate them from other colleagues. They do not eat pork, or drink alcohol. But for them this is not a problem. There always is a pork-free dish in the cafeteria. And one can bring his or her own food to work. During Ramadan their colleagues are curious about their religious traditions, but according to Karim and Mohammed this only in a positive tone. Karim says he tries to inform his colleagues about Muslim traditions as well as possible.

R: So I try to explain to them how our traditions are, how things are from a religious point of view and everything.

I: Yes, yes

R: So they are rather open, they love to speak about it.

I: Yes so there is space for speaking about religion?

R: Oh yes, yes. There is space for speaking about it. There is no, no blocking whatsoever.

From Karim's and Mohammed's position of the successfully integrated, discrimination is not an issue within their work community, nor even is it a societal problem as the media would like to let one believe. They explicitly state that there is no discrimination. Even so, they do refer to a few instances where they were negatively treated because of their social identity. However, these incidents are not in their view proof of a discriminatory context. Rather, the negative events reveal something about the discriminating individuals' problems.

Here Karim refers to an experience he had with a former employer. His boss used to make disrespectful comments and show that he doubted Karim's competence.

R: In the beginning I totally lost all self-confidence. I said to myself that it was true that I wasn't worth anything ... afterward when I got my job here I totally took the upper side. And at that moment I started to tell myself that it was him, the unworthy person, who did not at all know how to exploit my competences. That he did not know how to manage the situation. And then everything went fine.

Karim and Mohammed could not uphold an image of France and work-life as nondiscriminatory in an unproblematic manner given the many debates and discussions about ethnic discrimination in work life taking place in the media at the time of the interviews. However, from their position as the successfully integrated for whom differences made no difference whatsoever, the existence of widespread structural discrimination had to be challenged. One way is to totally deny the existence of discrimination. Another way is to recognise discrimination, but position oneself above it.
There are a number of ways to explain the non-existence of discrimination. One way is, as Karim did above, relating the incident to the personality and/or capabilities of the discriminating person. Another way is to maintain that discriminatory events really are isolated events, and thus should not be paid attention to. Here, Karim stresses the importance of not making all of a fuss about discrimination.

R: One has to be attentive because it is true that sometimes [stories about discrimination] are isolated events, but the media make all a story about it, a story, I was going to say, a state affair, when it may be only isolated cases.

Discrimination can also be explained as revealing something about the weakness of the person who believes he or she is discriminated against. Karim talks about several of his friends from the time of his studies and says that they have difficulties in finding a job. The fact that many people around him with a foreign origin encounter difficulties in recruitment, however, does not tell much about a discriminating context; rather, he explains the difficulties as stemming from his friends’ personalities. They simply do not try hard enough. And when they receive a negative response to a job application they too easily believe their origin is at cause.

R: If you stop, if you stop at the first small hurdle you encounter, you will not get ahead, you will not get ahead.

I: Yes, yes.

R: You know we are in the 21st century

I: Mmh.

[...]

R: For me it is serious. [...] and for me when people say that I wasn’t hired because I am Arab or White or because I am Chinese or whatever, I don’t believe it.

Another way to reconcile one’s own position as successfully integrated and a potentially discriminating society is to construct discrimination as a relevant societal question but to exclude oneself from its sphere. Mohammed does this by explaining that there are a large number of unexploited talents in the suburban population, and that the image of the suburban youth should change. He himself comes from the poor suburbs, but talks about those living in the suburbs as “them” opposed to “us”, the integrated, distancing himself from the difficulties people from the suburbs are described as confronting in the media. Not only does he see himself as different from the potential victims of discrimination, but he is also in the eyes of racist people “a special case”. Here, he explains that some of the people he used to play petanque with made racist remarks.

R: I like to play petanque, but I don’t play with them anymore because of this type of comments. Not directly to me because they treat me as an exception. Because for them I am not an immigrant, I am not a foreigner like the others because I work at [company name], I have a normal situation and my wife too. So, for them I am a special case. But I don’t like their comments.

In this context, where differences do not play a role in work and where there is no discrimination, the opinions about diversity management are rather neutral – neither strongly against nor especially enthusiastic. From the perspective of the successfully integrated, diversity management is not seen to be related to the current local context. As there are no problems of discrimination to be solved, diversity should materialise naturally.
I: So you feel that at [company name] now there is not, there is not a need for a conscious engagement for hmm, for hmm [diversity]?

R: I don't even know if they need an engagement. I think it will come all naturally.

According to Karïm and Mohammed, diversity management could, however, make sense with increased internationalisation and in improving the image of the organisation. Employees with different cultural backgrounds could be an advantage when a company aims at international markets. In this manner, the cultural difference which has no impact on work in the local context can become an additional resource in an international context. But diversity management could also be seen as positively underlining the meritocratic principles of the organisation. As Karïm states:

R: I think it [diversity management] is good for the image of the company. To say that the company does not focus on, hmm, only French personnel, that it searches for the competencies a bit all over the world, I mean any other type of person. It is good for the image to say that we search for competencies rather than for a specific nationality.

9.2.2. The silent in the margins

Aziz is an educated engineer with a long work history in his home country. He is between 40 and 50 years old. At the time of the interview, he has lived in France for nearly ten years, with his wife and their two children. They come from Algeria, and he describes how he and his family has always had a close relationship with France. His close relatives fought in the war besides the French, and he used to spend all his holidays in France as a child. He tells me that France is part of his identity, and that he has studied in French since elementary school.

Despite his strong link to France even prior to moving to France and his perfect French language skills, the first thing he says when we meet is to apologise for his bad French. At the beginning of the interview, he also seems very nervous and stressed. As the interview progresses, he becomes more relaxed, till the end of the interview we had achieved a confident and positive atmosphere, and we continued to chat in an engaged manner even after the interview ended. Throughout the interview, it became clear that the stress and nervousness I sensed at the beginning of the interview probably were not (only) related to the interview situation, but to the way Aziz experienced his work context in general.

Aziz feels that he is different from his colleagues. He is proud of his origin, and does not try to hide the difference, but being different is not always easy. He says he is in a constant state of fear. He is suspicious, and has a hard time to trust others.

R: I have no problem. No problems related to my origin. But I am suspicious.

I: Also in the context of work, that you have had.

R: Yes, absolutely. So in the work context yes. Even if I wanted for instance to say something, I filter, I filter, I cannot, I cannot just speak out like that, claim, claim or something, like someone else can.

I: Mmmh

R: It is because of fear of course. It comes from fear. Fear of losing the job. Fear of losing. And then you can see that when there are remarks made. There will be remarks made to you. No remarks to the others, but you will get remarks. So that’s how it is.
Even if Aziz here clearly says that he is in a disadvantaged position compared to others, he holds that in the job competence is all that matters, and that there is no discrimination in the actual job. In this sense, his position is similar to the successfully integrated ones. This is also the opinion of Rachida. Rachida is a first generation immigrant from the Middle-East. She came to France to continue her studies, after which she started working for her current employer. She is highly educated and ambitious. She, too, thinks that differences do not disadvantage you in the actual job, but there are instances during the working day where being different puts you in a disadvantaged position. Both Rachida and Aziz maintain that their work is free of discrimination by only relating disadvantage to informal situations. However, where the line between the formal job and the informal part lies is a blurry question.

Aziz says that his colleagues exclude him and do not value his knowledge. He feels that if he comments on something in a meeting it will most probably be ignored, since the comment came from him. If someone else had said it, it would have been valued. Even though a meeting is mostly a formal part of a job, Aziz maintains that this is informal interaction.

R: What I have noticed, if I intervene for instance, I want to add something to the discussion, a plus, whatever, no one will look at me. Even if the thing you will bring in is good, even if it makes sense, no. As it is you that say it, you keep it to yourself. You don’t say it. That exists.

But this type of a situation does not count as discrimination for Aziz. Even when his boss makes direct unnecessary negative comments to him, he does not perceive it as discrimination. This also when he suspects that the reason behind is his origin. Rather than seeing it as discrimination, he relates it to the personality of the perpetrator, and stresses that these negative events do not have anything to do with the organisation and the job: It is the people that are like this, not the organisation, and there is nothing you can do about it as you cannot change people’s thoughts.

R: These people, that are there, they exist in the company, but they also exist in the streets, and they will exist elsewhere, so you have to live with it.

I: Yes

R: You have to live with it. That’s all. It is not, well, it is not [company name] that produces this type of persons.

I: No

R: They were like this already before.

Just to live with these types of events and this type of an atmosphere is described as something you learn both by Aziz and Rachida. Even though they admit that in the beginning negative comments and suspicious attitudes towards oneself are hard to take, and that they make you sad and desperate, they both describe their current situation as unaffected by it. With time, things become easier, and as Aziz says:

R: You have to live with it, you just have to. Why? Because you have absolutely no chance when you are in a minority. You are the minority and it is the law of the majority. And if they think, if there’s one that thinks like the other and so on, then you are beaten, so you have no choice. The only solution is to circumvent the problem. And there is a thousand and one ways to circumvent it. If it is not to speak, then I don’t speak. But what will I lose? I will not lose anything. So I don’t speak. And even. It is like a play, in the end it becomes like a play. And where it leads, that I don’t know.
Rachida takes a similar approach. She says she does not let her work suffer from her difference and the potential tensions between her and her colleagues. In work, she mostly sees everyone as similar, but in informal situations differences can resurge. Both she and Aziz talk about the prejudices their colleagues have about Muslims. They make unpleasant remarks, such as “you cut sheep throats”, or show that they are shocked by the way Muslim women are treated. In these situations, she remains silent. She does not feel that the workplace is a place where it is fruitful to explain religious differences, and she tries to avoid any situation where differences become visible. Mainly these are social events. She says:

R: Why search for problems, so let’s stay in the margins.

I: Mmm–m

R: In the situations where we are seen as different. And let us be present in the situations where we are not different.

I: Okay

R: So we are present in the meetings, in the work, in mmm, that’s it, when we are not different, we all work, but for, for mmm

I: All that is informal?

R: All that is informal.

For an ambitious professional in the early stage of a career this, however, is not an evident solution. Rachida had wondered how this may affect her career. At the time of the interview, this was the best solution she had found, however. Even though she did realise that remaining in the margins in the informal organisational life could turn out to cost her career dearly.

Even though from the ‘silent in the margin’ position discrimination is not the named reality they have to confront in their organisation and work life, the position allows to acknowledge that discrimination is an existing problem. Where the successfully integrated challenged the idea that discrimination is a societal problem, Aziz describes most work organisations and society in general as being pervaded by discrimination. According to him, most work organisations would not even recruit a foreign-born employee. Against this picture of discrimination as a massive problem in society, the organisation Aziz works for stands out as exceptional.

Diversity management does not seem to be a very compelling policy for those in the margins. Aziz fears that talking about diversity can increase the tension between communities. Rather, he prefers the current situation, where tensions related to differences are solved on a day-to-day basis. In his words, everyone has to make an effort, collaborate and stay calm. Think first, and then act. The solution for diversity is that individuals control their feelings – filter, as Aziz said he has to do. Silence themselves. What Aziz does not say is that this mainly concerns the minority. The demands on the minority are high.

9.2.3. I am different and it does disadvantage me

Malik is of African origin and arrived in France as a child. His father had been working in France for a long time at that point, and he came to live with him. He describes his
childhood as one where school had a central place, and tells me that he was a very talented student.

The employer Malik now works for is the second employer since he graduated in engineering. He proudly tells me about how he managed to quickly find a job, just after graduation, but also about the moment when he decided to leave his first employer. He liked the first job. He describes how his former position was technically very demanding, and was within a very attractive industry. But he chose to leave the employer as he felt that he was not recognised and did not get the same opportunities as his white colleagues.

At the time of the interview, Malik has been working for six years for his current employer. He really likes his job. He likes to be with his colleagues. He describes himself as an outgoing person, and enjoys the social interaction at work. He describes himself as a committed employee who easily takes work home to work on in the evenings.

We meet for the interview some weeks after the company’s annual advancement plans have been published. Malik was not promoted. This is the second time he has not received a promotion while a colleague who started after him in the company does. As a consequence, Malik feels that his work is not recognised, and that demotivates him a lot. He says he will not make any extra effort anymore. He will just do the minimum required until his work is equally recognised.

Malik does not have a clear answer as to why he is the one that has to wait for at least one more year to be promoted. He believes he did a good job the previous year, and that those who were promoted did not demonstrate better performance. The only reason he first can think of is that he is still being punished for an error his team made a couple of years before.

R: I made an error, but well, it has been paid for.

I: Mmhm

R: It was in 2004, in 2004 I made a mistake on a site of mine, and well, I paid for it last year because it led to a very bad bonus. But it seems as if this error still is taken into account.

I: You think that it is for that that you were not promoted.

R: I think so.

At the same time, he describes the society and work organisations as racialised. Differences clearly do matter for him. He feels different from the majority, and he believes differences do play a role in work.

R: Well they see me as different. But anyhow, one shouldn’t try to mask the reality, I feel different. And they too, why do I feel different, because they see me as different.

What he mainly refers to as ‘difference’ is not cultural background or religion. It is ethnicity. People are positioned in different ways based on their ethnic identity, or the way the majority defines one’s ethnic identity. Malik has no illusions about the effect of ethnicity on people’s careers and opportunities. According to him, a black or an Arab person needs to work at least twice as hard as a white person in order to be on the same level. The black person always needs to surpass his own limits, always make an extra effort. He says that he is very aware of this, and that there is nothing one can do about
it. It is the reality all over the world. When I ask him whether the fact that minorities work twice as hard also translates into advancement he laughs and says:

R: Oh of course! (laughing sarcastically). Promotion, hah, promotion, what a nice invention! Because, hah hah, because promotion. There are people, there are people who work normally, who will not move their asses for it, but they have the fibre, and they do so that they will be valued for it, they have a promotion. Because they're called Pierre or Paul or Jacques.

I: Mmmhm

R: And there are others who are called Abdul, Mohammed or Ali. They remain silent. They do their job. They do what they are asked to do. Well, they are not promoted as quickly. You see. And this does also exist here.

According to Malik, organisations are well aware of the different positions of different ethnic groups in work life. And employers use it. Minorities are extremely motivated and high-performing. This high motivation is due to a need to demonstrate their abilities, but also to a fear related to the insecurity minorities face on the labour market compared to the majority.

R: It is true, [here] they recruited people based on their competences. And I think that, but you always need to, but well it is like that in all companies, you always need to surpass your limits. In order to be equal to Paul. That's how it is. He is European. Because if you kick out Paul, he doesn't even care. There will always be a door opening in front of him. But hey, Abdul, what will he do? He will stay a couple of months doing nothing, or a couple of years, because he doesn't find. And he will end up doing things that will put him into trouble.

From Malik's position, discrimination thus appears to be a structural feature of society. Even though he says that discrimination has always existed, and exists everywhere, and even though he adopts the position of the one who needs to work twice as hard as his white colleagues, he seems to hope for a work-life free of discrimination. He left his former employer when he felt unequally treated. And now he has confronted his boss about the lack of promotion. He feels that his boss did not give a clear answer to why he was not promoted. Even so, he does not feel ready to denounce his employer for discrimination. He still needs to feed his family. But he clearly has lost his work motivation and commitment towards his employer. It is as if he after all had believed his employer functioned on the basis of meritocracy, but now has to admit that different rules apply for Pierre and Malik, in his current organisation, too.

Malik is very attached to the idea of meritocracy. That is the way organisations should function. So his first reaction to diversity management is negative. He fears it would lead to quotas, and to recruiting incompetent persons. He does not see that minorities should be helped. Organisations should just be meritocratic. Then everyone would advance as he or she should. However, he sees that organisations do have an economic interest in promoting diversity, and the economic rationale is the only one that should count in business organisations.

R: Because a business company exists for what? A company needs to make profits. It is not there to act as a, it is not Mother Theresa. It is not John Paul the second who is in the, who is the boss. And yet him (laughter). I say, a company must first think of making profits, because profits, hmm, exploit to the maximum all that is exploitable, in order to make money. Without thinking that we do this because of politics, in order to say that we are not racist. Well no, it is like this I see the thing.

One resource companies should exploit according to Malik is precisely the differential position of minorities on the labour market. Companies should employ minorities because of their higher motivation and need to demonstrate their abilities. In this way,
an employer will be guaranteed a motivated and high-performing work force. By only recruiting white employees, there will be no competition, and the white employees will be lazy.

The one employee participant who knew about her company's diversity management initiatives presents similar arguments for promoting diversity. Zaida is a second generation immigrant. Her parents arrived in France in the middle of the 20th century. She grew up in the suburbs of Paris, and happened to be very good at school “without having to make any effort” as she says. She now works for a large international consultancy company, and belongs to the team of directors.

She is very interested in promoting diversity and improving the conditions of students in the poor suburbs. She is aware of her company's diversity initiatives, and says that for the company the interest in diversity may result in creating competition between new recruits. Traditionally, her company has recruited in specific elite schools. Now, she says, the graduates from these schools have ever rising demands and expectations in terms of benefits and compensation.

R: One of the ideas, or one of the arguments that I was presented, and in which I believe, hmm, because I would have had the same reflection, and say, well by recruiting elsewhere, by recruiting in other=

I: Other schools?

R: In other schools we have. And, it is precisely in widening our recruitment that we can create competition vis-à-vis this elite.

I: Yes, yes.

R: And to re-evaluate a bit all these pretensions, because, hmm, they start to be spoiled kids, and well, we will turn towards others who they need

I: Mmm

R: To work, to show that they can, show that they can progress.

9.2.4. I'm different but the others don't see it

Kassim is a first generation immigrant from the Middle East. He arrived in France to continue his studies. During his year in a well-renowned Engineering School, he met his French wife, and decided to stay in France, for the time being at least. He describes his background as one imbued with diversity. His family is composed of different nationalities, his friends and relatives live around the world, and he has studied in different languages in schools and universities headed by different religious groups. He himself is Muslim, but in his family there are Catholics, among his friends there are Jews, and he attended different Catholic schools in his home country. He says he misses this diversity and openness, something he can't find in France.

Kassim describes himself as a very ambitious and forward-looking person. He has worked for his current employer for a couple of years. He very much likes the job he does, and he is a respected colleague and employee, but he does not feel at ease in the organisation he works in. The main reason he cites is the fact that the managers and the administration totally ignore the fact that he is not French. His difference is never taken into account. This does not hamper his career, he is valued and recognised for
what he does, but the lack of attention to his own difference demotivates him and leads to situations that he feels are discriminating.

Kassim describes a central feature of the organisational culture as being long-term commitment. The standard career for his employer is a career of a lifetime. Once you enter the organisation, you are expected to stay. To Kassim, the fact that his employer more or less requires this type of a commitment from him is evidence that the managers totally ignore his origin. For Kassim, it is evident that a career of a foreign-born person cannot be managed in the same way as the career of a native employee.

R: In my opinion there should be a difference. It is not the same thing that is treated. Someone whose family is here will always stay here. Someone who, someone who, not necessarily, what I want to say is that someone who is born here, who is, whose all family is here, he has his apartment here, maybe his only motivation is to go a bit abroad to see, it is not, he is well here. I see my colleagues who are here, normally they enter the organisation, they want to buy an apartment, as [company name] is a secure employer. For a foreigner I don’t see the same thing, for me I don’t see the same thing.

I: But also on the side of, I mean the treatment from [company name], so in a sense there is this expectation that foreigners engage in a similar manner, or

R: There is an expectation that foreigners commit without taking into account, as I told you at the moment of my evaluation after one year, I told you that during the interview I told the HR “well everything is fine, everything has gone well” and she replied to me “well okay, it is very good, so you are here and you will stay for thirty-five years”. I said “oh, we will see, no, no we will see”. I did not say no, but I said we will see. So it is to say that they require a foreigner to, without taking into account, without really studying, well what is the case of this foreigner, is it for the rest of his life he is here, will he detach, thirty-five years is a real detachment from his country of origin. It is really to take here to your home country.

Kassim thus finds that this feature of the organisational culture (and expectation of practice) is in clear contradiction with his origin. It is also in contradiction with his residence permit. He finds it strange that his managers let him understand that they expect him to stay, when he only has a temporary residence permit. But the clash between nationality and administration arises in other instances, too. There are social benefits the company offers their employees, which Kassim feels he will not be able to use if needed. For instance, the HR department did not know at all what would happen to the pension he now paid for, if he no longer lived in France at the time of his retirement. Also, the company pays for medical treatments for their employees and pays for the funeral if the employee dies. These are benefits Kassim believes that he will not be entitled to, if he needed treatment in his home country, or if he wants to be buried there.

All this is demotivating to Kassim. He feels that he is not seen. In addition to the clashes with administration he described, he talks about the difficult atmosphere as a result of being different. Difference is not appreciated. And difference is even a taboo one should not talk about. If he speaks Arabic on the phone, people will look at him in a negative way. If he does not drink alcohol, people will find it strange and try to convince him to drink a glass of champagne. All this does not seem to have a negative effect on his work and career, only on his own attachment to the organisation. He knows how to handle the situation. He knows that things will run much more smoothly if he plays the game and acts as similar as possible to the others.

I: Yes, yes. So you say that sometimes you try to be as close to the French way of doing as

R: Yes, I try to come close, many times. It is even my method.
R: Difference distances you, so smooth out a bit, I work like them.

I: Yes, yes, and in practice, how does it work?

R: Very well. Very well.

I: And what do you need to smooth out, in what kinds of situations?

R: Well they have these things, they have these things sometimes that, well I don't know, they have these small things ... I will give an example ... So to start with we do not make the same type of ... during the meetings many times there has to be a moment of relaxation

I: Mmmh-m

R: Many times you have to speak about things that is, something that calms, that nananana. I speak like them, but I don't find it at all, at times it doesn't make me laugh at all, not at all, but I laugh. That's how it is. In this way they are happy, and I can let it pass.

I: So one has for instance to take part in jokes?

R: Yes things like, things that they are interested in. I don't know. I take as an example a joke a few days ago on accents, people from Lille, or people that come from any other city, I don't know. Well it doesn't interest me. I really don't care (laughter). But I laugh with them (laughter).
knowing others; it is a resource, a way to become more open. He describes how he likes the fact that in London there is something for everyone on restaurant menus:

R: For me [diversity] it evokes the right of individuals to be different, and sometimes, to have to have treatment that corresponds to their needs.

I: Mmmh-m

R: So to treat people in ways that it corresponds sometimes to their needs, that's it. In London, I like, I don't like everything, but there is one side that I like which is that in the restaurants in general there is always a vegetarian side for people that are vegetarian, there is a side where the meat is halal, and there are people that want this. I'm not too attached to halal but well it exists, there is a side, so it is more accepted, perhaps it is a country where there are these religions too, it is, but it is interesting how, their way to do, not their system, hmm, political system, but their way of integrating the diversity of people.

Kassim believes that this type of recognition in work life would lead to better commitment from people with foreign origins. This is the case not only for foreign employees, but he says that the treatment of second-generation immigrants should also take into greater account their attachment to another country. He says that he himself would probably have thought differently of his future career had the company shown more interest towards his origin.

However, he is rather pessimistic about the possibilities of diversity management to change anything. The atmosphere of the country is important, and nothing in the French context seems to him prone to diversity. Diversity is in his view only seen as something negative. The newspapers and the television only show the negative sides of diversity: Arabs causing problems, illegal immigration, Sarkozy proposing stricter laws to solve the problem of immigration... That companies now could manage to present diversity as a positive resource seems to him to be a difficult task to succeed in – a difficult but a very much needed one.

9.2.5. Discussion: managerial level ethnic minority employees’ subject positions

The different subject positions are based on different knowledges about differences, the individual, discrimination, the organisation and diversity management. Each subject position provides the individual adopting it with a different way of seeing the world, and a way of explaining one’s own reality to oneself and others.

Drawing together the knowledges that the successfully integrated base their position on creates a picture of work life and differences where the individual is at the centre. The individual has a major responsibility to adapt, and to have the desire to succeed. The organisation functions on the basis of merit, and as long as the person is competent there is nothing to stop her or his advancement. Structural discrimination does not exist. When cases of discrimination are taken up, the focus is on the individual: either the flaws of the discriminating individual or the weak personality of the one being discriminated against. Diversity management cannot be seen as a way to improve the situation of minorities in work as everything already is fine. Rather, diversity management becomes a question of competence and internationalisation. Diversity management can underline and maintain the existing order.

The position of the silent in the margins is also based on knowledges of difference and diversity emphasising the individual. In this sense, the position is close to the
successfully integrated. Where the positions differ is when the silent in the margins brings up a disadvantage. For the silent in the margins, discrimination definitely is a serious problem, also as a structural phenomenon. However, the silent in the margins has not been subject to structural discrimination him or herself. All the disadvantages that they encounter are caused by individuals. Furthermore, the key to a diverse organisation where differences do not lead to tensions also lies within the individual. It is the different individual who has the responsibility to fade away in potentially tense situations. Diversity management is not a solution as it could reinforce group boundaries.

The position of the different and disadvantaged is based on a construction of reality where minorities are locked in by their ethnicity, name and/or skin colour. From this position, people with different ethnicities inevitably have different opportunities in work life. The focus is not here on individuals. It is not because of colleagues or because of some named perpetrators that ethnic minorities are at a disadvantage. It is because of racialised and ethnicised societal structures. Even though the individual is not the focus, from this position the ethnic minority individual is given the responsibility to be at least twice as productive as his or her majority colleagues. However, this does not change a thing for the individual, nor does it affect the structures. It is simply that within these structures ethnic minorities are expected to behave in this way. It maintains the order.

The subject position of the different and disadvantaged highlights and challenges the racialised order of organisations. From this position, the ideal system is based on merit. It is difficult to demand a system where differences are promoted when it is precisely what one is claiming that is not fair in the current system. Therefore, diversity management where differences are taken into account is from this position not interesting. However, from this position merit is not seen as an objective fact. Today, being of European origin is a merit. Tomorrow, being a hard-working minority individual should be valued and translate into better career advancement than the white colleagues' advancement.

The subject position of the different but not seen is based on knowledges of discrimination as a structural question. Differences exist between different groups, but the society and work organisations are constructed around specific norms and expectations that only correspond to the differences of certain groups. In this way, discrimination arises when an individual with different differences than the differences of the "normal" group enters a given situation. Discrimination is not here portrayed as being about prejudice – it is simply the inability and unwillingness to recognise differences. From this position, diversity management is seen as a very much needed approach. Differences need to be recognised in work and in society. Otherwise, those different with a number of competences detach themselves and move elsewhere. Further, the recognition has to take place on the organisational and the societal levels at the same time. It would be impossible for companies to change within a society that is negative towards differences in general.

These four subject positions are related through the fact that they are based on different versions of knowledge on different issues. The positions take shape through the degree to which the focus is on individuals or structures, and the degree of highlighting disadvantage or stressing the non-existence of disadvantage in the sphere of work.
Four ethnic minority employee subject positions: between the individual and structures, disadvantage and no disadvantage.

The different subject positions position the individual in different ways vis-à-vis the organisation and the job. Only the successfully integrated ones seemed to have an unproblematic relationship with the organisation. The silent in the margins were very loyal to the organisation and see the organisation only in a positive light whilst trying to find ways to keep their job and manage to continue their careers despite their negative experiences. However, this at the cost of silencing themselves and withdrawing into the margins in some situations. The different and disadvantaged feel disappointed and have a lower commitment. They do not give their best anymore and wonder if they should move on. The different but not seen are also detached from the organisation. They are committed to their own job, but not to the organisation.

9.3. Ethnic minority workers talk about diversity and difference in work life

The ethnic minority workers participating in this study worked in two different organisations: the public transport company where the managerial-level ethnic minority employees also worked, and in a big international hotel chain. The work life realities they described were different from the managerial-level ethnic minority employees', and they constructed different knowledges about difference, discrimination and diversity. Where the bus drivers mainly focused on an ideal of similarity, the hotel workers described their work organisations as being racialised.
9.3.1. **Bus drivers**

The minority bus drivers I met in France work for the same organisation as most of the managerial-level minority employees did. Their profile is, however, quite different. They do not hold a university degree, and, in contrast to the managerial employees, they were born in France. Many of them do not speak the language of the country from where their parents immigrated, and most of them have grown up in the suburbs surrounding the bus depot.

The bus drivers describe the organisation they work for as a really good employer. An employer you will continue working for during the rest of your life. They had a good image of the organisation before starting there, and seem to be proud of being a member of the organisation. It was not so easy to enter, and working for the organisation provides one with the status of a serious person.

At the time of the interviews, the good image of the organisation, however, was something that for many only related to the exterior. They still could feel respected as good employees in the society in general, but the image of the interior life of the organisation had suffered a serious clash when they entered the organisation. They had believed that the working atmosphere was positive, that people kept together, that everyone was included. This is how they described it to be:

R: I hear other seniors, who told me that before, we used to arrive one hour before, sometime two hours before, just to talk among ourselves. That's to say that the atmosphere was different, but at that time things were not like this, it wasn't, it was, we always say, it was, there only were white you see, they found themselves among themselves, so, so it didn't disturb them.

Today, the atmosphere is different. And the main reason is said to be racism. There is prejudice amongst colleagues and racist behaviour. Many minority bus drivers do not feel welcome, and feel excluded from the community they believed they would become a part of. The ones that reject them are all white and senior bus drivers. Some of these senior bus drivers are unhappy seeing minority colleagues being recruited. As the minority workers themselves say, the senior workers see them as troublemakers:

R: Me, in the beginning, they were hesitant, the the drivers, they didn't shake our hands. They said, "yes so, so what did they take, they took guys who used who break our buses, now they put them in front of the wheel".

The racism and prejudice takes different forms. A situation very many bus drivers described to me occurs when they come to work in the mornings. Everyone is expected to show up at least ten minutes before the start in order to check the bus and the day plan. This is the moment of the day when you meet with several of your colleagues at the same time. Everyone greets everyone, and shakes hands. The minority bus drivers find this moment very difficult and unpleasant. They say they feel that many of the older workers greet them with disrespect: they don't look at them and they don't speak to them. There is a clear difference in how they treat new white recruits and new recruits with some visible minority ethnic origin.

One way the bus drivers handle these situations is by separating the colleagues and the organisation, their private self and the work. Many of them talk about the importance of doing a good job. They present themselves as people for whom it always has been important to work. That by working they can respect themselves. When they repeatedly encounter racist colleagues, they just need to remind themselves that they are there for their employer, not for their colleagues. And they all see the employer as a fair
employer. Everything in the organisation is organised around the principle of seniority. So ethnicity does not play a role in advancement and benefits.

The most general approach to differences among the minority bus drivers is that ethnicity is unimportant. Their own focus is on similarity. They do not feel different from people with a different origin. They stress the fact that in work a person of any colour will do the same job, and in the same manner. But the societal context and the organisational atmosphere in which they live constantly makes ethnic difference visible. Ethnicity is imposed on them, by others.

They themselves are used to differences and to diversity where the origin of an individual plays little role. They explain that they have friends with all imaginable origins, different religions, and that they have grown up together. Most of them feel 100% French. France is the only country they have lived in, and French is the only language they speak fluently. However, when they exit their surroundings, their suburb, they are seen as non-French. They need to show their ID in order to prove their citizenship. According to one of the bus drivers, anyone who is not white in France is considered to be a foreigner. Another bus driver says that he does not want to travel in France, as in France he will be seen as a foreigner but not as a tourist. He prefers to go abroad where he can be French and a tourist.

Even though the minority bus drivers stress the similarity between people, they do construct a difference between people from the suburbs and people from other parts of the country. They see that their suburban origin can be an asset in their job. The job of a bus driver in the suburbs is not easy. You meet all the social problems related to suburbs: unemployment, poverty, criminality and violence, just to mention some. Some of the passengers behave very badly. There are fights between passengers, disrespect towards the driver, acts of violence towards the driver and the bus. In managing these tension the role of the driver can be crucial. By having grown up in the suburbs, the minority drivers know these problems. They know who the people are, what they are living through. How to talk to them. How to react. One driver says that being a bus driver in the suburbs is like being a social worker. You need to sense the atmosphere and the tension, and show that you are there, show that you are there also for the people. Talk to them. Some drivers accentuate these problems according to this driver, by trying to distance from them, by for instance using a bus with a plexiglass to separate between the driver and the passengers. And another driver says that:

R: One thing that has been positive is that, in putting us behind the wheels, this is a certainty, the aggressions have diminished.

The minority bus drivers do not want to be recognised as different. They want a work place free of racism. Free of labelling. They see that the work place is a site for being professional, and different differences, such as religious habits, do not fit in. Most of them had never heard of diversity management. What diversity management could and should bring to them is recognition of racism. A work place which you can to come without having to feel sad about the treatment you will get from your colleagues.

9.3.2. Hotel workers

The hotel workers I met for this study all defined themselves as being black. Three of them were women. Patricia, Diémé and Keïta worked as cleaners. One was a man, Babacar, and he worked as the person responsible for making orders and taking care of the stocks of the hotel. The particularity of these four workers was that they all were, to
different degrees, active in a labour union. They all worked for the same hotel chain, a big international tourism and leisure corporation.

They had arrived in metropolitan France in the 1970's from French overseas territories and from different African countries formerly colonised by France. Patricia, Diémé and Keïta did not have any formal education. Babacar had a university degree on education from his home country where he also had worked as a teacher for ten years. Subsequently, he had obtained a university degree on management, obtained at the Sorbonne in Paris.

For these hotel workers, race is a central defining factor in one's work life. They see their own organisation, and society in general, as being very clearly racialised. Black people simply do not have the same opportunities as white people do. This was the case in the 1970’s when they arrived and tried to find a job, and it still is a real problem. As Babacar says:

   R: Whatever your competences are, it is your colour that strikes first! And this, hmm, unfortunately, we still battle against in order to integrate. So integration is not easy, already because there is the colour barrier, which ever your accent is, you are first and foremost a black.

Many of the tasks in the hotel are divided along racial lines. There are only black cleaners. The hotel workers I talked to said that they hardly knew of any white cleaner, and the few they knew worked in the most prestigious hotels of the chain. Also, in the kitchen white people could hardly be found. As Babacar expressed it, “it is a tough job, you need to get up at five in order to serve breakfast; there are no white persons who are ready to do that job”.

This segregation among tasks seems to be a generally known fact. The interview with Diémé and Keïta was conducted in the basement of a hotel, in the small office of the cleaners, where the door could not be closed. During the interview, the hotel manager happened to pass by, and stayed for a while to discuss. In the conversation, he exclaimed:

   Hotel manager: But what do you expect, it makes me all funny to see a little blond in here, as normally there are only blacks!

This segregation is coupled with the lack of advancement. As a black worker in this hotel corporation one is stuck where one is. They all speak about how they see their black colleagues do the same job year after year. In the reception, for instance, a black person will be a receptionist for decades. There will be white trainees who come in, the black person will train them, and the white persons will advance. The white persons will end up managers. This was also the case for Babacar. His superior entered the organisation after him, Babacar trained him, and then he moved on. Babacar, however, had never been suggested a move of any kind or an advancement.

Babacar was not an exception. Diémé and Keïta had not experienced advancement either. Only Patricia had a period of three years where she had been promoted as a substitute housekeeper. The ordinary housekeeper was on a sick-leave. However, when she returned to her job, Patricia’s experience as a housekeeper was not recognised. She was told to return to clean 21 rooms a day, after four o’clock in the afternoon the day before the ordinary housekeeper was to return. Or to take sick leave, something she absolutely did not want to do. In her opinion, the hotel manager could have found another solution, suggested another position to her, but she was unwilling to do so because of Patricia’s skin colour and her labour union activism.
R: I say to myself, if I had white skin, if I had white skin and I wasn’t a representative of the personnel [...] If I didn’t defend the personnel, I say to myself, damn I would manage.

Babacar has a slightly different perspective on his labour union activism. For him, the labour union has been a way to advance. While his day-job has not changed for years, and he has not been provided with additional responsibilities, through the labour union tasks he has been able to regularly discuss with the management of the company. He says that this has been a way for him to get a bit rid of his skin colour. The trust the employees’ have given him to represent them has enabled him to make his voice heard and show his capabilities. Even for the workers, he says he is a “black-white”, as he is equally capable of discussing with black cleaners and with the highest managers of the organisation. Even though being a labour union representative probably has not eased his career, he sees that it has been the only possibility for him to develop professionally. His race would in any case have kept him where he was.

When talking about diversity in work-life and their employer’s engagement in promoting diversity, they all are sceptical. At the moment, they do not feel there to be any diversity. There only are blacks and Arabs working around them. The company should increase the number of white persons in the lowest levels of the organisation if they wanted diversity, they say. They should also increase the number of blacks and Arabs in the management. Diémé, Keïta and Patricia have never heard of the company’s diversity engagement. They are positive towards diversity. “One always learns from people different from oneself”, they say. Nonetheless, in the company context, in order for there to be any diversity the most important thing for them is to stop racism. Stop looking at skin colour. And there they see a long journey to be done.

Babacar knows about the company’s diversity initiative well, as he is the national labour union representative and often interacts with the top management. He takes much the same line as Diémé, Keïta and Patricia. Diversity management should as a matter of priority be about equal opportunities – the equal treatment of all. He says diversity should even be synonymous with equal opportunities. But then adds that the company should also respect each individual’s cultural differences. He himself is Muslim, and appreciates it greatly when the Chief of HR wishes a happy Aïd to all Muslim workers.

This type of recognising differences is something that Patricia, Diémé and Keïta do not at all wish for. They feel insulted if and when they are seen to be different. They are French citizens. But Patricia, for instance, says that she never has been proud of being French, as she always has been given to understand that she was not French in the right way – she was French and black.

The perspective on diversity and difference shown by Diémé, Keïta, Patricia and Babacar is clearly different from the ethnic minority managers’ and the bus drivers' perspectives. They construct a reality where race overshadows all social relations. For them, discrimination and racism are daily realities that permeate the organisation. They do not try to explain discrimination as something else, forgive it or ignore it. On the contrary, racism and discrimination are the frames though which they make sense of their working lives. All they do is wish that the situation will be different for their children and grand-children. They have been ready to make the sacrifices, but their children will not.
9.4. Conclusion

The group of minority employees, and their accounts and experience, that this chapter has described and analysed is a very diverse group in many regards. Some of the employees have arrived in France less than a decade ago, others have never lived anywhere else. Some are French citizens; others have a more precarious status as a foreigner on a temporary residence permit. Some of the employees have university degrees and prestigious professional positions; others work in the lowest ranks of the labour market and can hardly read. There are women and men, young and older. Some are black, others white, Asian or Arab.

How do minorities react to diversity management? What do minorities expect from diversity management? And what do minorities feel to be the relevant issues of difference in work? To answer such questions in a straightforward and unitary way is impossible. Diversity, difference and work all mean different things for people in different positions, and as shown in the first part of the chapter when ethnic minority managers were in focus, there is also variation in the positions between people in similar organisational and socio-economic positions.

What all the participants in this part of the study share is an understanding that differences between minorities and the majority population do exist. However, the nature of those differences and the origin of those differences vary. For some, difference is about religion and culture; for others it is race and ethnicity. For some, differences are individual private issues – and they should stay that way. For others, differences both pre-exist and are further constructed in the interaction between the minority and the majority. For yet others, differences still only exist within the individual, and are not seen by the majority, or in contrast, as was the case for many bus drivers, differences only exist and are caused by the way others choose to perceive you. It is the others that make you different.

What the place of difference should be in work life also differs between different positions. However, the vast majority of the participants, though in different positions and based on different realities, hold that differences should not interfere with work. This is the opinion of the successfully integrated managers, who hold that competence is all that matters, but it is also the opinion of bus drivers and most of the hotel workers, who just want to be treated as everyone else. Today, they feel that they are constantly seen as ethnic minorities and that in a deprecating way. Thus, difference in the sphere of work is seen as a threat by them. To make the jump to a reality where differences would not hamper one’s career but actually be taken into account in a positive fashion, seems to be too big a jump.

What does diversity management mean to ethnic minority employees? Is diversity management good for ethnic minority employees? And do they feel that it is an approach that makes sense and is justifiable in the French work life context? All these are also questions that there are many answers to.

As was seen before, for a few, diversity management should be about drawing on differences. This was the case of the successfully integrated ethnic minority managers for whom diversity management should focus on cultural differences used in internationalisation. For many, diversity management should be about equality of opportunity. This was the case of the silent in the margins, the cleaners in the hotel. The cleaners and the bus drivers also pointed to the need for combating racism. For the bus drivers, racism was a problem among colleagues, whilst for the hotel workers, of
management. For some, in addition to providing equal opportunities diversity management should also be a way of recognising and providing more space for differences in work.

What diversity management means and whether it is a justifiable approach in French work life depends on the knowledges the position of an individual is based on. From a position where meritocracy stands out as the only right and fair way of organising the recruitment and advancement of the personnel, a justifiable diversity management can hardly be presented as an approach based on quotas. From a position where race appears as the most centrally defining factor of an individual's career, and where such a reality is described as condemnable, quotas are also hard to justify. Then, diversity mainly means treating everyone in a fair manner, diversity comes to mean non-discrimination.

Where most of the different positions converge is around equal opportunity. It is clear that there is no single way of understanding equal opportunity, and the different participants would probably have highlighted different aspects of equality and argued for equality in many different ways. However, it is possible to conclude that the different participants for this part of the study, from their different perspectives and via different lines of arguing, depict working life in France as far from equal. Equality is the most pressing problem, and the first step to be achieved in the area of differences in work life. While not all diversity managers looked at in Chapter 8 held this same understanding, most of the concrete diversity management initiatives they described were focused on improving equality. However, there is a sharp contrast between what the diversity managers were preoccupied with and what minorities felt was producing inequality. Diversity managers focused on the formal organisation, HR processes for instance, while minorities to a large extent focused on the prejudice between colleagues. This is an area that should be more paid attention to. Racism and discrimination between colleagues is very costly in terms of work well-being, but also translates to and damages commitment, turn over and productivity.
10 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

10.1. Introduction

In the first chapter, I argued that there could not be one single meaning of diversity management, but that the meanings of diversity, difference and diversity management vary. In Chapter 1, I discussed some of the underlying assumptions that shape the ways in which diversity and diversity management are understood in organisations. I also set out my theoretical perspective, according to which meanings are discursively constructed. From this perspective, meanings are never fixed but always contextualised in time and space. The aim of this book was described as that of looking into the meanings of diversity, difference and diversity management in different country contexts and from the perspectives of different groups.

Until now, Finland and France, and the managerial and the minority perspectives, have been treated independently, without relating and/or comparing either contexts or perspectives. Questions such as “How are the managerial and the minority perspectives of diversity, difference and diversity management related in a given country context?” and “How do managerial perspectives of diversity management and diversity in work resemble and/or differ from the minority perspectives?” have until now remained unanswered, but will be addressed in this concluding chapter.

This chapter starts by going back to look at the research questions set out in the beginning of the book. Thereafter, the results of the different context and empirical chapters will be summarised. I will begin by looking at what diversity management looked like from the managers’ perspective. How did managers in Finland and France talk about diversity, difference and diversity management? What knowledges did they construct? After the managerial perspective, the focus will be placed on the minority perspective. What did ethnic minority employees voice when they talked about difference and diversity in work? Finally, we consider the question, How did the managerial and the minority perspectives resemble one another and/or differ?

Once the findings of the manager and minority perspectives have been discussed, diversity, difference and diversity management will be examined in the different country contexts. How did the country contexts of Finland and France shape the meanings of diversity, difference and diversity management, and how did the results from Finland and France resemble one another, and/or differ?

After the different findings have been discussed and compared, I will discuss the theoretical and methodological contributions of the study, suggest some practical implications stemming from the results and end by discussing the limitations of the study and propose some paths for future research.

10.2. The research questions

The aims of this research have been articulated around four distinct research questions:

1a: What knowledges are produced in the discourses that give meaning to diversity management?
1b: What are the underlying assumptions managers responsible for diversity management hold about difference when they talk about diversity and diversity management?

2: What kinds of subject positions do ethnic minority employees take on in the diversity promoting work context?

3: How do knowledges about the societal context shape the meanings of diversity management?

Research questions 1a and 1b were mainly addressed in Chapters 5 and 8, the chapters dealing with the managerial research settings in Finland and in France. The findings from these chapters will be summarised in section 10.3.1 of this chapter. The second research question was addressed in Chapters 6 and 9, and the results of these will be summarised in section 10.3.2. In section 10.3.3, the findings related to questions 1a and 1b and question 2 will be discussed together. Question 3 has been addressed in all the empirical chapters, and will particularly be discussed in section 10.4 of this chapter.

10.3. Diversity, difference and diversity management from different perspectives

One of the aims of the study, articulated around research questions 1a, 1b and 2, was to look at both the discourses that diversity managers and ethnic minority employees working for the same organisations drew on when talking about diversity, difference and diversity management in work. As we are always governed by several discourses at a time, and the constellation of discourses we are shaped by affect the discourses that are available to us, the assumption was that managers and ethnic minorities had access to different discourses related to diversity, difference and diversity management.

Diversity managers in this study could, however, be ethnic minorities themselves, and ethnic minority employees could be managers. Therefore, the groups are not clearly distinct, and could overlap in some situations. However, the diversity managers for the most part spoke as representatives of their organisations, that is, for the majority of the time, they spoke from an organisational perspective, whereas the ethnic minority employees spoke as individuals.

10.3.1. The managers’ perspective

While the interviews with the diversity managers exhibited a large degree of variation, not only between different managers, but also during one and the same interview, there was one element that united all the managerial accounts. All the managers constructed an organisational need or imperative for diversity, a “burning platform”, against which diversity and diversity management was portrayed as necessary and mostly valuable. However, the ways in which this imperative was constructed varied from one situation to another.

In total, five different sets of knowledges were drawn on to link diversity with the organisation’s needs and to give diversity management meaning. In Finland, the diversity managers (Chapter 5) reflected the need to manage diversity back on knowledge about a societal change taking place in Finland. I did not call this a discourse, as the managers positioned themselves in different ways against this societal
change. The three positions I identified were called the change maker, the passive adapter and the guardian of business conditions. These different positions drew on different knowledges about the role of the organisation in relation to society and about the value of difference. However, while the diversity managers in Finland drew on these different knowledges, they also drew on many similar knowledges, for instance sharing similar knowledge about discrimination. In the interviews with the French diversity managers, I identified four different discourses: the business, the equality, the CSR and the trend discourses (Chapter 8). These different discourses were related to different sets of knowledges.

I will here summarise the most common different knowledges diversity managers construct when talking about diversity, difference and diversity management. These knowledges are: the relationship of the organisation to society, the nature of difference, the value of difference and discrimination.

10.3.1.1. The organisation and the society

The different discourses identified in the French material and the different positions managers in Finland take on vis-à-vis the societal change that they use as the backcloth for diversity management position the organisation in different ways vis-à-vis the society. In one extreme, the organisation is depicted as constructing and taking responsibility for the society, while in the other extreme the organisation is detached from society, the society having the responsibility to guarantee favourable business conditions for organisations rather than the other way around. The type of relationship the company is constructed to have with society positions the organisation in different ways, and provides the organisation with different identities. The change maker in Finland and the CSR discourse in France both constructed the organisation as heading societal change. From this position, the organisation was ready to invest in practices that did not directly improve the organisation’s performance and may even cost the organisation in the short run. The position of the passive adapter in Finland and the trend discourse in France constructed knowledge about the organisation as merely following the trends of society, trying to do business as well as possible despite changed conditions. The business and equality discourses in France shared with the position of the guardian of business conditions in Finland a privileged focus on the organisation. From these positions, the organisation was seen as quite independent of the surrounding society.

10.3.1.2. The nature and value of difference

Another set of knowledge the diversity managers constructed in different ways depending on the discourse they drew on was the nature of difference itself. In Finland, all diversity managers drew on knowledges about differences as being essential properties of individuals and groups. In France, this knowledge was drawn on in some discourses, mainly the business and the trend discourses, but not all. The conceptions of difference in France varied between the essential and the socially constructed, in addition to which French diversity managers also drew on knowledges about differences as intersecting in the business discourse and as being the result of personal choices of individuals. While all the diversity managers in Finland seemed to base their understanding of diversity and diversity management on conceptions of differences as essential, they varied in the manner in which differences were seen as valuable within the organisation. The different discourses in France, too, provided different roles for
differences within or outside the organisation. In Finland, the change maker, and in France the business and the trend discourses valued differences, and the organisations were described as drawing on them in the doing of business. In Finland, the passive adapter, like the equality discourse in France, held a more neutral attitude towards differences. For the passive adapter, differences existed, but the organisation should be managed in a way to allow the differences to influence work as little as possible. From the equality discourse perspective, however, differences did not necessarily even exist, as long as the organisation made sure that the organising did not differentiate between individuals. From the equality discourse, the same objective held as in the position of the passive adapter – differences should not influence the work in any way. The guardian of business conditions in Finland saw differences as being troublesome and negative. This was also the case for the CSR discourse: differences resulting from living experiences in underprivileged conditions were to be removed outside the organisation, whilst differences in the CSR discourse did not enter the organisation itself.

Within the business discourse, the nature and value of differences could also vary from one situation to another. Within the business discourse, female gender was constructed in rather essentialist terms as a resource when the needs of the organisation were in focus. However, when the organisation’s practices and responsibilities related to difference were in focus, female gender was intersected with age and family situation, narrowing down the valuable group of women to those not having family responsibilities and being of a suitable age. By doing so, the inequality between genders was also constructed as stemming from women’s personal choices related to family life.

10.3.1.3. Discrimination and the organisation

The diversity managers in Finland and France drew on different knowledges about discrimination and its relation to the organisation. The managers in Finland shared an understanding of discrimination as an existing problem within work organisations. However, managers in Finland also saw discrimination as an inevitable part of work communities, and management as having limited capabilities to eradicate discrimination from the organisation. This incapacity to remove discrimination from the sphere of work in Finland at least partly stemmed from the fact that discrimination was seen not as the result of organising, but a phenomenon taking place among colleagues or between clients and employees. To eradicate discrimination, the organisation would therefore need to condemn the attitudes of employees and clients, something which was described as out of reach of the management. In France, the knowledges about discrimination were more complex. Three out of the four discourses, the business, the trend and the CSR discourses, constructed organisations as free from discrimination. The CSR discourse did identify discrimination as a problem, but solely in the societal sphere, not within the organisation itself. Only the equality discourse constructed knowledge about discrimination as an organisational problem. The equality discourse focused on organisational practices and the guaranteeing of equal opportunities to everyone. However, the knowledge about discrimination differed considerably from the Finnish acknowledgement of discrimination as a problem. In the equality discourse, discrimination was only seen to exist in the formal organisational practices. Discrimination was not situated among colleagues and in informal situations as in Finland. These different knowledges about discrimination set out very different agendas of diversity management work for the organisations, and provided different positions to individuals potentially facing discrimination in work.
10.3.1.4. Different knowledges constituting the complexity and variety of meanings

Overall these different discourses and knowledges give different meanings to diversity, difference and diversity management. The answers to questions such as “Why should an organisation manage diversity?” “How should diversity be managed?” “Who are concerned by diversity management?” or “Is discrimination a relevant problem in our organisation and who can and should react to it?” differ according to the different constellations of knowledges on the above-mentioned issues. The findings show that there is no one managerial discourse or perspective on diversity management. The managers draw on different knowledges at different points of time. The different discourses and the related knowledges should be seen as constituting the regime of truth of diversity management – it sets the limits of what diversity management can be in a given context at a given point of time.

The different discourses, the different truths about the nature and value of difference, discrimination, the diverse organisation and diversity management also provide different positions for individuals with a minority background. In the next section, the focus turns to ethnic minority employees’ perspective on diversity, difference and diversity management.

10.3.2. The ethnic minority employee perspective

Considering the fact that the ethnic minority participants in Finland and France had rather different histories of immigration and partly worked in very different positions – the participants in Finland being low-skill workers and the participants focused on in France being managers – there were quite a number of similarities in the ways in which they positioned vis-à-vis diversity and difference in work. All in all, nine subject positions were identified: four subject positions in France and five subject positions in Finland. In Finland, the subject positions were named 'the lead-taker', 'the insensitive', 'the lacking', 'the superior immigrant' and 'the happy and described in Chapter 6. In France, the subject positions were named 'the successfully integrated', 'the silent in the margins', 'the different and disadvantaged' and 'the different but not seen'. The French minority subject positions were described in Chapter 9.

The ethnic minority participants mainly talked from an individual perspective, mostly describing their own personal experiences of work as a person potentially identified as belonging to an ethnic minority. The vast majority of the ethnic minority participants had no knowledge about their organisation’s diversity initiatives.

The different subject positions identified in Finland and France overlapped in different ways. They were based on knowledges about discrimination, where discrimination takes place and what the cause of discrimination is, about the role of difference in work and about the organisation and the different individual. These different knowledges can be seen as resources the ‘different’ individuals use to position themselves in the work context when reconciling difference and work in different ways.

10.3.2.1. Difference in work as discrimination

The ethnic minority employees’ descriptions of difference in work were articulated around discrimination to a great extent, but the knowledges about discrimination the different subject positions made visible varied significant. While discrimination in
some positions was portrayed as almost or even totally non-existent, in other positions discrimination came out as a very structuring element of ethnic minority employees’ work-life realities. In addition, when discrimination was constructed as an existing phenomenon, the different positions drew on different knowledges about the nature of discrimination, the reason for discrimination and the minority individual’s role in the diversity-promoting work context.

Only from the subject position of ‘the happy’ in Finland discrimination portrayed as non-existent and differences as having no influence whatsoever in work. All other subject positions in a way or another drew on knowledges about discrimination as being a question related to differences in work life. I will now discuss the different constellations of knowledges related to discrimination, the individual and the organisation the different subject positions were based on.

10.3.2.2. Nature of discrimination

What discrimination is considered to be varied between different subject positions. From most of the subject positions, discrimination was related to a differential treatment because of one’s origin. For ‘the different but not seen’ in France, discrimination could, however, also arise in situations where differences were, in contrast, not taken into account. By ignoring an individual’s difference, his or her different needs and conditions, the different individual could end up in disadvantageous positions vis-à-vis individuals corresponding to the dominant norm.

10.3.2.3. Reason for discrimination

The reason for discrimination looked different from the various subject positions that the ethnic minority employees took on, ranging from the different individual him/herself, to the attitudes of colleagues, and to racialisation of society and organisations. The knowledges of the reasons for discrimination the subject positions were based on acknowledged or denied discrimination in different ways, located discrimination in different spheres and positioned the minority individual in different ways.

‘The lead-taker’ and ‘the superior immigrant’ positions in Finland as well as ‘the successfully integrated’ in France were all based on knowledge about discrimination as a phenomenon related to difference in work but denied that it stemmed from unequal treatment. From these positions, discrimination was not the true problem of ethnic minority individuals. Rather, what was called discrimination revealed ethnic minorities’ insufficient efforts to advance in work life. For ‘the lead-taker’, the minority individual experiencing discrimination had in addition not been empathetic enough vis-à-vis the Finn. While for ‘the lead-taker’, ‘the superior immigrant’ and ‘the successfully integrated’, the real issue of discrimination was individuals' insufficient efforts to integrate, the subject position of ‘the lacking’ in Finland was based on resembling knowledge, but related to it from another perspective. From the position of ‘the lacking’ the reason for discrimination was internalised as being one's own fault. From this position, discrimination was also justified by the characteristics of the discriminated individual: ethnic minority individuals facing discrimination were simply not skilful enough to be treated in an equal way.
Where ‘the lead-taker’, ‘the superior immigrant’, ‘the successfully integrated’ and ‘the lacking’ positions placed the reason for discrimination on the discriminated individual, in Finland ‘the insensitive’ and in France ‘the silent in the margins’ both placed the reason for discrimination on the discriminating individual. Discrimination was from their positions seen as stemming from colleagues’ and other peoples’ attitudes. While the discriminated individual was not seen as being responsible for the discrimination taking place, they were described as being responsible for managing the situation. The ethnic minority individual was described as having to ignore negative attitudes, and to not let discriminatory comments affect oneself in the workplace. The minorities taking the subject positions of ‘the insensitive’ and ‘the silent in the margins’ drew on similar knowledge as those diversity managers in Finland who described even racist personal attitudes as the right of each and everyone. Attitudes and values were from their positions, even when discriminatory, acceptable and simple facts that the ethnic minority individual had no influence on.

The only two positions from which discrimination was seen as related to the organisation were 'the different and disadvantaged' and 'the different but not seen' positions. From the 'different and disadvantaged' position, organisations were seen as racialised. Being white and male was seen as leading to privileged treatment and to better career advancement. The consequent discrimination against people of colour was not seen as being due to managers’ personal attitudes or prejudice against black people, but to an unquestioned racial hierarchy existing both in work organisations and in the surrounding society. The 'different but not seen' position equally positioned discrimination within organisational practices, and did not focus on the individuals implementing them. From the different but not seen position, discrimination stemmed from formal and informal organisational practices that were based on a cultural norm which was taken by the majority to be a neutral norm. From this position, when organisational practices are incapable of taking difference into account, the individuals with a minority ethnic background will inevitably find themselves in situations where their difference positions them in disadvantageous ways.

10.3.2.4. The different individual, discrimination and the diversity-promoting organisation

The different subject positions and the related knowledges about discrimination and the reason behind it portrayed the role, responsibility and the opportunities of ethnic minority individuals in different ways in the diversity-promoting work context. From some subject positions, the individual portrayed as having considerable agency, whereas from other subject positions the individual was seen as being more dependent on existing structures.

The positions of ‘the insensitive’ in Finland and ‘the silent in the margins’ in France depicted the minority employee as someone who has to adapt to the work context, and get used to the discriminatory events taking place in it. This adaptation to the challenging work context required ignoring negative situations and led to withdrawal. From ‘the insensitive’ and ‘the silent in the margins’ positions an ethnic minority individual succeeds the best if she or he manages to not be touched by negative remarks, discriminatory comments and does not make any noise about oneself. The organisational behaviour of these individuals however becomes that of withdrawal – from this subject position, the ethnic minority employee is described as avoiding contact with other organisational members and as unwilling to participate in discussions and in expressing his/her own opinions.
From the positions of ‘the lacking’ and ‘the different and disadvantaged’, the role of the ethnic minority individual was depicted as one where the individual has to make up for the difference he or she carries by working twice as hard as those in the majority. Discrimination being something of an accepted fact from this position, there is nothing the individual can do to challenge it, other than performing as well as possible. In this way, the ethnic minority employee can try to shift attention away from the disadvantageous difference he or she has, to the competence one holds and hope for meritocratic treatment.

From three subject positions, the ethnic minority individual depicts as not influenced by difference in his/her career success. From the positions of ‘the superior immigrant’, the successfully integrated and ‘the lead-taker’, work-life opportunities are seen as fully dependent on one's own competencies and capabilities. All an ethnic minority individual has to do to succeed is perform a good job and ensure they possess the needed competencies. However, 'the lead-taker' in Finland also has to have the ability to avoid Finns' prejudices. From 'the lead-taker's' position, the ethnic minority individual has to teach the Finn and be proactive in such a way as to impede the Finn in expressing his or her negative attitudes towards foreigners.

From the position of 'the different and not seen', the ethnic minority individual's opportunities in the diversity-promoting organisation can only be real if and when the ethnic minority individual's differences are taken into account in the organising. If the organisational culture and the organisation's values do not correspond to the ethnic minority individual's values, the ethnic minority employee will always be at a disadvantage, and it is in his/her interest to find an organisation better corresponding to his/her traits.

10.3.2.5. The (ideal?) diverse organisation from the ethnic minority perspective

Some ethnic minority employee participants described what an ideal diverse organisation should be like in a very direct way whilst others did this more indirectly. Overall, however, the knowledges about difference in work, the nature and location of discrimination, as well as the knowledge about the individual and his/her role and responsibilities the different subject positions are based on, portrayed the diverse organisation and the challenges the diverse organisation faces, in different ways. Addressing these challenges of difference and diversity the ethnic minority employees talk about would not necessarily lead to an ideal diverse organisation in the eyes of the different minority participants, but at least indicates the direction on which the different minority employees would like the organisation to develop.

Of the nine subject positions identified, only two, ‘the different and disadvantaged’ and ‘the different but not seen’, expressed discontent with the way the formal organising was currently treating differences. All the other positions were based on knowledges where the organisation depicted as not needing to take differences into account, and also as not related to the negative consequences of differences in work – discrimination was the result of either the discriminated individual's characteristics or the discriminating individual's personal attitudes and beliefs. From these subject positions, while ethnic minority employees were described as often facing discrimination, the organisation was still seen as functioning on meritocratic principles. From these subject positions, the organisation was not seen as responsible for organisational members’ speech and actions despite these harming organisational members with an ethnic minority background.
From 'the different and disadvantaged' position, the ideal organisation depicted as being the same as that described by subject positions expressing satisfaction with the current organisation. 'The different and disadvantaged' did not desire the organisation to attach any importance to difference: all the organisation should do was to treat all equally based on merit – that is, put an end to the privileged treatment of white males. From this position, diversity management should not in any way favour minorities, only assure the true meritocratic functioning of the organisation.

The only position that challenged the purely meritocratic model, in which differences should be ignored, was 'the different and not seen'. However, this is not to say that this position was based on knowledge about a need to pro-actively promote minorities. Instead, from this position, the question of the possibility of achieving equality by treating everyone in a similar way was raised. From this position, an ideal organisation would be one that acknowledges that the organisation and its culture are not neutral.

10.3.3. Discussion of managerial and minority perspectives

The findings from the diversity manager and the ethnic minority employee interviews show that no single managerial perspective exists, neither is there any one ethnic minority employee perspective on diversity management. Both diversity managers and ethnic minority employees construct and/or draw on a variety of knowledges when giving meaning to diversity, difference and diversity management. The results show that neither diversity managers nor ethnic minority employees can be treated as homogeneous groups, nor as holding opposing perspectives on diversity management. Instead, contrasting the results from the diversity manager and the ethnic minority employee analyses shows patterns of both similarity and difference between the two perspectives. The variation of knowledges present in the managers' discourses could at least partly be found in the variety of subject positions of the ethnic minority participants.

The diversity managers and the ethnic minority employees constructed and/or drew on similar knowledges concerning the value of difference, the existence of discrimination, and the role of the organisation in relation to discrimination. Both the diversity managers and the ethnic minority employees drew on a variety of knowledges about the value of difference. From the two perspectives, difference could be seen as a value for the organisation and diversity management then as relevant as a way to increase the resources of the organisation. That said, difference could also, from the two perspectives, be seen as totally irrelevant for the organisation; however, the knowledge about difference as irrelevant did not impede either the diversity managers or the ethnic minority employees in portraying diversity management as relevant for the organisation.

Patterns of similar variation of knowledges were also found in the way that diversity managers and ethnic minority employees described discrimination. Both the diversity managers and the ethnic minority employees constructed discrimination as an existing problem, while the two groups also drew on knowledges about discrimination as a non-existent problem. However, there was a slight difference between the two groups: all the diversity managers acknowledged discrimination as a general societal problem, but could deny its existence as an organisational problem, whereas ethnic minority employees could also deny discrimination as a problem altogether, whether within the organisation or in society in general.
The third knowledge found in both the diversity managers' and the ethnic minority employees' accounts was related to the relationship between the organisation and discrimination. When discrimination was portrayed as an existing problem, the minority ethnic employees and diversity managers described the role and responsibility of the organisation in different ways. Diversity managers and ethnic minority employees shared knowledge about the organisation as non-discriminating; while acknowledging that ethnic difference led to disadvantage and challenging situations in society and work in general, both the diversity managers and the ethnic minority employees maintained that this challenge was not present in their organisation at all. However, both groups also shared opposing knowledge where the organisation was portrayed as an important site of discrimination and inequality related to ethnic difference.

The knowledge dividing the diversity manager and the ethnic minority employee accounts was that which speaks about the locus of discrimination. Where diversity managers located discrimination in work in formal organisational practices when discussing discrimination, ethnic minority employees in the vast majority of the cases located discrimination in work in informal situations. Ethnic minority employees very often attached discrimination to interpersonal relations with colleagues, informal organisational happenings such as coffee breaks or corridor discussions. In the majority of the ethnic minority employees' subject positions, the organisation was totally detached and given no responsibility for the discrimination taking place in the work. Instead, most of the subject positions found ethnic minority employees take over the responsibility for discrimination or pass it over to colleagues, who are seen as totally independent of the organisation. At the same time, diversity managers paid no attention to the racism between colleagues, and most of the equality-enhancing initiatives were uniquely focused on formal organisational practices.

The different knowledges that the diversity managers and the ethnic minority employees drew on were identified as related to different discourses and subject positions. The discourses and positions were not labelled in identical ways in Finland and France, even though they did sometimes overlap or at least resemble each other to a large degree. Thus, for instance, 'the passive adaptor' and the trend discourse (partly) positioned the organisation in similar ways vis-à-vis diversity. Different names were given to the findings in Finland versus France as the analyses of the datasets were done separately. In a future study, the data could be analysed together.

At this point, some comments on how these findings relate to previous diversity frameworks may be of interest. Comparing the findings with the three perspectives of diversity management found by Ely and Thomas (2001) it can be concluded that in France the managers constructed knowledge about differences and diversity in a way that closely resembled the discrimination-and-fairness perspective. In Finland managers drew on knowledges that also resembled the discrimination-and-fairness perspective. In addition, it has to be noted that knowledges related to the access-and-legitimacy perspective were also drawn on by some proponents, and as such this usage was relatively marginal. Knowledges resembling the integration-and-learning perspective, according to which the differences organisational members have are seen as linked and leading to valuable skills and experiences for the organisation, could not be identified in either France or Finland.

The ethnic minorities in both Finland and France mostly held expectations towards the organisation that resembled the discrimination-and-fairness perspective. For most minority respondents the organisation they worked for was not considered to be
discriminating, and they had no other expectations regarding organisational treatment of difference than the provision of equal opportunities. Differences were simply to be ignored. It has to be noted though that they did not approach the question from the organisational perspective, but from their own individual perspective. Only very few participants said that differences could be used in some more productive way for the organisation, for instance in internationalisation. Therefore, minority participants also talked in ways that were similar to the discrimination-and-fairness perspective and the access-and-legitimacy perspective.

The findings of this study, however, shed light on more than just the attitudes organisational members hold towards difference. The different discourses identified construct knowledge about discrimination, the relationship between organisations and society, and about the individual and his/her opportunities to influence his/her career outcome. The findings of this study show the complexity, variety and the subtlety of different meanings related to diversity and diversity management. In part, this more important complexity found can be seen as the result of the discursive approach. The approach was not to search for coherent perspectives within organisations. While Ely and Thomas suggest that organisations have specific perspectives on cultural diversity, my findings suggest that even individuals do not necessarily adopt consistent perspectives. There exists a variety of ways to give meaning to diversity, difference and diversity management, and the discourses individuals draw on may vary from one situation to another.

10.4. Diversity, difference and diversity management in different country contexts

Another of the aims of this book was to look at how the meanings of diversity, difference and diversity management were related to or shaped by the knowledges about the societal contexts of Finland and France. This aim was articulated in research question 3, and relates to chapters from four to nine.

While it is impossible to provide a consistent and a unitary view of what diversity management means in Finland or France, there are some themes and approaches that characterise the meanings of diversity, difference and diversity management in the two countries. In the empirical chapters of this book, the differences within the contexts were examined, while here the focus will be on the threads that are commonly shared within the country contexts.

10.4.1. Diversity, difference and diversity management in Finland

As seen in Chapter Four, difference between citizens has been described as a challenging question in the Finnish context. The focus in Finland has traditionally been on the similarity between Finns, and being different has even been considered as contemptible. Therefore, the idea of promoting diversity was found to not fit into the Finnish context in a problematic unnatural manner.

In the Finnish data, diversity and its management were dominantly attached to ethnicity. Ethnic minorities were discussed by all the participants, both diversity managers and ethnic minority employees themselves. One of the common threads between the different organisations and the different participants was indeed their
focus on ethnicity as the primary dimension of diversity. Many other differences were not highlighted at all and remained silenced.

To the participants in Finland, ethnicity meant non-Finnishness. A recurrent way to see the Finnish population was to see it as ethnically homogeneous. National ethnic minority groups were mentioned only if and when directly asked about, and then seen as not present in the labour market in the first place. This was the case, for instance, of the Roma population, which was described as hardly ever coming into contact with work communities. Other national ethnic differences, such as being a Swedish-speaking Finn or Sami, were differences that according to the participants did not manifest themselves in any way in the work organisations.

Another idea that was commonly shared by both diversity managers and ethnic minority employees in Finland, and which significantly shaped the meanings of diversity and the positions of those different, also related to the supposed ethnic homogeneity of the Finnish population: that is, the idea that Finland and Finns are unused to cultural difference. Diversity management was seen as becoming an issue as Finland now was in a state of a change, where a previously monocultural society was turning into a more and more multicultural society. This change stemmed from the increased immigration in the previous fifteen to twenty years, and the immigrants were now entering the world of work.

The knowledges about cultural diversity as a new phenomenon, as well as the knowledge about the Finns as inexperienced with multiculturalism were extensively drawn on when talking about diversity in the work organisations, and positioned different people in different ways as well as gave meanings to the different organisational phenomena related to difference. For instance, prejudice and discrimination were the issues that most participants highlighted as an important diversity-related organisational phenomenon. Prejudice and discrimination were systematically reflected back on the supposed inexperience of Finns to handle multicultural questions. As discrimination was seen through the frame of Finns' inexperience, prejudice and discrimination were legitimised, naturalised and excused on the basis that Finns simply did not know. Prejudice and discrimination became normal parts of Finnish work life that did not stem from condemnable attitudes or malevolent actions. By relating discrimination to Finns' inexperience, Finns were excused and understood and ethnic minorities were positioned as those who needed to solve or at least endure the discriminatory situations. These knowledges were drawn on both by the managers and the minorities themselves, who indeed often took the responsibility over the discriminatory situations. Diversity management programmes and diversity training designed to inform Finns about cultural differences, if they reproduce these knowledges, will not, necessarily lead to increased inclusiveness. The discourses about Finns and cultural difference need to be challenged if organisations aspire to be more inclusive of differences.

Differences were mainly seen as essential characteristics of individuals and groups. This was particularly, but not only, the case for diversity managers. Immigrants were on the one hand seen as belonging to a rather homogeneous group: all immigrants were seen as lacking language skills and cultural competence, and only with difficulty suitable to managerial positions. On the other hand, specific cultural differences were attached to specific groups according to the area of origin. Russians were seen as having their own particularities, Africans their particularities and so on. Little attention was given to how the fact that many of the ethnic minority employees had lived in
Finland for a long time, and some had even grown up in the Finnish society, had moulded their identities and cultural competence.

The general knowledge about immigrants was that they were deficient. Some managers saw specific competencies within the immigrant population, such as an especially positive attitude towards customers, but even then, the underlying general knowledge of them was that of lack. When at the same time Finns were constructed as inexperienced and lacking in knowledge about cultural difference, the organisations that did describe concrete diversity initiatives mainly focused on two aspects: increasing the competence of immigrants and increasing the knowledge about cultural differences within the Finnish population. Both providing the immigrants with more knowledge about the Finnish work habits and increasing the cultural knowledge of Finns were seen as ways to decrease tensions and potential discrimination within the work communities. Uncomfortable situations could be avoided if immigrants better knew what kind of behaviour was expected of an employee and a co-worker, and tensions between majority and minority employees could be lessened if only Finns were better prepared for potential differences in behaviour by their immigrant colleagues.

Thus, discrimination was explained and efforts were made to counteract it indirectly by increasing both the majority and the minority groups’ understanding of each other. This approach to discrimination was based on knowledge about the context. Had not Finland been described as inexperienced in the face of multiculturalism and immigrants as lacking, other types of diversity initiatives, other types of positions, and other types of reactions within the organisations would have been possible. Finland and Finns as inexperienced in the face of cultural difference, and immigrants as lacking, are not unproblematic “facts”, however, but discursively constructed knowledges that have been dominating in the Finnish society. Diversity management talk in Finland to a large extent reproduced these discourses. Therefore, the meanings and positions that diversity management was related to in Finland mainly participated in maintaining the status quo.

10.4.2. Diversity, difference and diversity management in France

France, too, was found to be a context where differences were not easily reconcilable with the national identity. Where Finland was characterised by knowledge about a culturally homogeneous people, in France the nation has been constructed around the idea of sharing the republican ideology, where differences are to remain in the private sphere. Chapter 7 described the effects of the republican ideology and universalism on the treatment of difference in society in general, and showed how treating discrimination has been a challenge in a context where differences should not enter the public sphere and should not even be voiced in order not to differentiate between people.

Chapter 7 also showed how diversity emerged in France in the middle of the first decade of the 2000’s as a new terminology to talk about differences. The term ‘diversity’ is today used in many areas of societal life, but the initial spark for the trend came from the business world. Diversity was highlighted by a managerial think-tank as a solution to the difficulties of people with immigrant origins to integrate into work life. Diversity management was seen as a way to foster a positive climate in which ethnicity would not be seen as a motive for exclusion and discrimination.
The interview participants in France, talking in Chapters 8 and 9, also saw diversity as a response to societal problems related to ethnicity. The participants thus attached diversity to ethnicity, or in the French words, to populations issuing from immigration, when talking about diversity and its management on a general level. However, when they talked about diversity as an internal organisational question, diversity could be attached to many different differences, but especially in the diversity manager interviews diversity was most often not attached to ethnicity at all.

Diversity and its management was a very well accepted idea and practice by the diversity manager participants described in Chapter 8. However, just as previous terminologies treating difference in society, such as integration or discrimination, diversity did not seem to lead to much increased recognition of differences in the managers' talks. Even though there was no single way of understanding diversity and its role in organisations, what united most of the managerial accounts was this non-recognition of difference. The universalist idea of similarity, where competence and merit are the only factors influencing a person's position in an organisation, were very common and shaped the way diversity management took form in the organisations. The common way to treat differences in organisations was to make sure that differences did not affect an individual's career and opportunities. Every employee was to be treated in a similar way, regardless of origin or any other difference. In the words of one of the diversity managers, the identities of the employees simply did not interest the organisation. Diversity practices often focused on guaranteeing this non-attention to differences by training managers about anti-discrimination and by reviewing existing HR-practices.

The meritocratic model, where differences are ignored and everything that counts is competence, was the preferred model of both diversity managers and ethnic minority employees. However, the relationship between competence and difference is not simple and neutral. The diversity managers constructed knowledge about different differences which positioned people in different ways and attached them to different levels of competence. Ethnicity and competence were, for instance, constructed as being in contradiction. Ethnicity was understood as something that denotes young troublemakers from the suburbs, people with low skills and people perfectly fitting low-pay jobs with poor working conditions. In organisations where the majority of employees were professionals with higher education, ethnicity was not seen as a relevant difference at all, as the persons with different backgrounds had a solid professional status, and thus their ethnicity could be ignored.

Another dimension of difference that the diversity manager participants in France related to competence in different ways was gender. Different knowledges about gender positioned women in different ways. Young women were constructed as very competent and high-performing professionals. With age, however, women were described as less well suited to certain types of jobs, such as to managerial responsibilities or to expatriation. Therefore, even though competence and merit were suggested as the only factors influencing an individual's position and opportunities, and differences were assumed to pertain to the private sphere, there were instances where diversity managers took individual differences, such as family situation, into account and planned a person's career with that in mind. What diversity managers did was to intersect different differences and construct different positions for different populations of people that according to their diversity initiative, however, belonged to a homogeneous group, for instance the group of women.
Minority participants shared the knowledges that the diversity managers drew on concerning the meritocratic model, but they also constructed differing knowledge about the place of difference in work. They described organisational realities where differences did play a role. Their accounts of their work life experiences, for instance, described how one’s opportunities are shaped by one’s difference, and many of them explained that their colleagues saw them to be different. The knowledge they drew on about the meritocratic model was one where the model did not function as it should. However, they did not challenge the model but shared the idea of the diversity managers and maintained that differences should not exist in work. Most ethnic minority employee participants did not want to be seen as different and did not perceive their difference as a relevant question in work-life. In their view, the best model for them was the meritocratic model where they would only be seen through their competence.

The underlying assumptions of differences were varying. Some differences, in some contexts, were seen as essential characteristics of individuals. This was particularly the case when the positive sides of diversity were focused on. Women for instance were then seen as inherently different from men, and as able to contribute in a different way due their nature as women. At other instances, from other perspectives, differences were described as more socially constructed. This was particularly the case when the participants argued for inattention to differences. From this perspective, if and when differences were accorded attention, it would lead to a simultaneous construction of differences.

Differences were not simply seen as being on a continuum between the essential and the socially constructed, they were also seen as intersecting and as selectable. The intersecting of differences such as gender with family status and of ethnicity with educational level, positioned people belonging to these groups in different ways. Differences could also be used as a way to exclude, and to question competence. If and when a person chose to hold on to a difference in the sphere of work, that is, to manifest a difference in other terms than in competence, then the person could be seen as unprofessional and incompetent. The difference was then indirectly found as a reason for exclusion and discrimination.

The idea of differences as choices provides considerable agency and responsibility to the individual. It is also an underlying assumption of differences that fits very well with the republican ideal. If the public sphere is intended to be and to remain neutral and untouched by differences, it implies that individuals are able to leave their differences in the private sphere. However, as both the results from the managerial and the minority interviews showed, this ideal was not achieved. It nonetheless remained the ideal that both diversity managers and ethnic minorities had as their guiding light.

### 10.4.3. Meanings of diversity, difference and diversity management shaped by knowledge about country contexts

As seen in Chapters 4 and 7, Finland and France are in many respects very different contexts for diversity. Finland has a small population with a shorter history of immigration, while France has both a long and important history of immigration and colonisation leading to a very diverse population. Despite these differences, there are many aspects where Finland and France resemble one another in the area of diversity management and difference in work life.
Diversity management emerged in both countries in the first half of the first decade of the 2000’s to solve problems related to immigrants’ integration into work life. In Finland, the problem was both societal and organisational. Immigrants needed to be integrated into society through work, and work organisations employing low skill workers were experiencing a lack of labour force and needed new recruitment sources. These two needs met in the project of diversity management. In France, the original aim of the diversity movement resembled the Finnish aims: the need diversity management was addressing was the better integration of persons with immigrant origins into work life. However, as seen in Chapter 8, this initial agenda was seldom shared by work organisations.

Both Finland and France also share a national identity where differences do not easily fit in. In Finland, the idea of a culturally homogeneous people with scant experience of cultural differences, and in France, the ideal of universalism, underlay most of the descriptions of difference and diversity be it in the diversity manager interviews or in the ethnic minority interviews. However, this similarity regarding making space for difference only with difficulty was coupled in the different countries with different other knowledges which shaped the meanings of diversity and positions of minorities in different directions.

One difference between the Finnish and the French results lies in the underlying assumptions about the nature of difference that the participants in the different countries held. In Finland, the common assumption was that differences are in-born and essential. In France, the picture is more complex – differences are both essential and constructed and also intersectional and choices. These two different assumptions of differences could be seen as stemming from the different national identity constructions, and affected the way diversity initiatives turned out in the organisations.

In Finland, the underlying assumption of differences as essential led to diversity practices that tried to alter an assumed behaviour related to given groups. Immigrant workers were provided knowledge about the norms and expectations existing in Finnish work life. This practice was based on an expectation that an immigrant from a certain area will have a tendency to behave in a certain way, and that this had to be corrected. Also, managerial practices could be altered according to the expectations of the different needs and habits of people with specific origins. The majority population in Finland was provided with information about those different, as Finns were constructed as not having enough knowledge about difference. These practices, where the different groups were treated in different ways, were expected to decrease tensions between groups and to foster a positive working climate.

In France, the assumption of differences as choices led to quite different diversity practices. The main focus of diversity initiatives within organisations was to ensure that the organisation would not produce a difference between people which was not based on merit. Individuals were seen as having a choice of being or not being different, and the organisation had the responsibility to treat everyone equally without taking a difference into account. In many organisations, this led to reviewing and testing HR practices for eventual discrimination. In the few cases when differences were taken up in training sessions with employees, the focus was on building a feeling of everyone belonging to the same group, thus reducing differences within the group.

In both the Finnish context of homogeneity and the French context of universalism, the different individual was left alone to manage the challenges of difference. In Finland, the minority employees were assumed to understand the discrimination to be
stemming from the inexperience of the discriminating individual and was given the role of teaching the majority. In France, the minority employee was assumed to make the right choices and avoid being seen as different. In both countries, the diverse organisation was assigned little responsibility for the discrimination and racism taking place within the work organisation.

Both the Finnish and the French parts of the study show that to a significant degree the ways of talking about diversity reproduce the same knowledges about difference, minorities and competence as the ones previously circulating in society. The participants related diversity to existing discourses. Even though the knowledges produced in the two contexts to a large extent participated in maintaining the status quo, lifting diversity up on organisational agendas cannot be seen as being without effect. Talking about diversity voices questions in partly new ways and provides new positions for the organisation as such vis-à-vis society.

10.5. Theoretical and methodological contribution

This study seeks to contribute to theory and methodology in four principal ways, which to some degree follow from the four research questions in their respective order. The findings that were discussed mainly in Chapter 8 showing that meanings of diversity management are constructed not in separate diversity discourses, but in wider discursive fields, constitute a first theoretical contribution. The second theoretical contribution relates to the way differences are conceived of when talking about diversity and diversity management. Thirdly, the findings shedding light on the ethnic minority employee perspective on diversity, difference and diversity management contribute to diversity management literature and theory in providing insights into an area still very poorly investigated. The way context was taken into account in investigating the meanings of diversity, difference and diversity management in different national contexts constitutes the methodological contribution of the study. Here, each of these contributions is now briefly discussed.

10.5.1. Meanings of diversity in discursive fields

It has not been uncommon in previous diversity management research to talk about “the managerial discourse of diversity” or the “diversity discourse”. The findings of this study however show that there is no single discourse of diversity, be it among diversity managers or ethnic minority employees, and that individuals draw on a variety of discourses giving meaning to diversity (and many other related issues) interchangeably. Talking about “the diversity discourse” or “the managerial discourse of diversity” therefore hides the complexity of the meanings of diversity management. Instead, different, interrelated and at times opposing and complementary discourses form the complexity and variety of what diversity management can come to mean in a given context and at a given point of time. Therefore, rather than seeking the meanings of diversity management by identifying “the discourse of diversity management”, or even the discourses of diversity management in the plural, this study shows that we should look at the broader discursive field of diversity management. In this way, we can be attentive to the variations, contradictions and complexities of the knowledges related to diversity management. The sum of the different discourses and related knowledges that different participants drew on in the study constitute the discursive field and the regime of truth of diversity and diversity management at a given point of time. Talking about “discourses of diversity” as being separate and independent vis-à-vis each other
renders the field of diversity management too simplistic. However, every description of a discourse or a discursive field inevitably hides some aspects, as in silences, absences and gaps, while it highlights some others – true, too, naturally of my description of the field of knowledges related to diversity, difference and diversity management.

Studying “diversity discourse” as many previous studies have approached the topic, is problematic also in another way: it gives diversity an essentialised status and easily narrows down the knowledges examined when seeking to identify the meanings of diversity. It has been very common to focus on the motivations for diversity management as the central defining element of a discourse – as in the case of the business and the equality discourses much discussed. Even though the motivations for diversity were central also in the diversity managers’ talk about diversity management in this study, and even though I named the discourses according to the primary motivation presented for diversity and diversity management, the discourses construct many other knowledges. The discourses where diversity and diversity management are given meaning also produce knowledge about the organisations, provide organisations with certain types of identities, place differences within or outside the organisation, construct knowledge about the relationship between the organisation and the society, and construct knowledge about differences – voice certain differences and silence others.

10.5.2. The nature of differences

Previous critical studies on diversity management have been concerned about the tendency in diversity management policies and programmes to conceive of differences as being essential characteristics of individuals and groups. The findings of this study challenged the idea that diversity management initiatives are solely based on essential views of difference; however, the findings also showed that despite different views on the nature of difference, the role of the organisation in challenging the dominant inequality producing constructions of difference remained unseen.

In Finland, the diversity managers and the ethnic minority workers all drew on knowledges about differences as essential. However, in France the variety of knowledges related to the nature of difference was larger. In the French diversity managers’ talk, differences were seen as socially constructed or essential, but also as intersecting and as being personal choices. The findings showed that even though diversity managers talked in such a way as to intersect different differences, this was not related to an improved acknowledgement of potential discrimination, rather the contrary: intersecting differences was used as a way to legitimise and reproduce discrimination. Also, basing diversity management initiatives on conceptions of differences as socially constructed did not lead to an increased awareness of the role of the organisation in participating or challenging dominant constructions of differences. In France, both the equality discourse and the corporate social responsibility discourse were found to base diversity work on conceptions of difference as socially constructed. However, as neither discourse constructed differences as being socially constructed simultaneously both within the organisation and in society, but focused on only one sphere – the equality discourse focused on not constructing differences within the organisation and the CSR discourse on counteracting the production of differences within society, both ignoring the other sphere – the discourses did not in any way challenge the differences constructed in society within the organisation.
These findings result in the second theoretical contribution. It is definitely relevant to be attentive to the nature of difference a diversity management programme is based on, but it is insufficient for predicting how differences will be valued and seen within the organisation or explaining diversity work’s ability to challenge the current order of differences. Diversity work based on essential and socially constructed conceptions of differences, as well as diversity talk taking the intersecting nature of differences into account, can all lead to preserving the interests of the dominant group and silence the oppression of those different.

10.5.3. Manager and minority perspectives on diversity, difference and diversity management in diversity-promoting work contexts

This research is among the first studies focusing on both the manager and the ethnic minority perspectives on diversity, difference and diversity management in organisations that do seek to manage diversity. As seen in Chapter 2, studies taking a minority perspective on diversity management are rare. The few studies looking at minority experiences of difference or at minority employees’ subject positions in diversity-promoting organisations have not shed light on both the discourses around diversity management in a given organisation and (ethnic) minority organisational members experiences or subject positions. The ways in which minorities described the relationship between their difference and work life in this study did not, however, differ much from findings looking at ethnic minority employees’ experiences of difference in work in organisations not explicitly managing diversity. In earlier studies, too, minorities have been found to experience a need to over-perform, a need to be insensitive to negative remarks related to difference and to hide one side of oneself – to conduct parallel lives.

While the diversity-promoting context in some previous studies has been found to (also) provide positive resources for minorities in positioning favourably in the work context, the minorities in this study mostly did not draw on differences as positive resources in their own positioning. However, this does not mean that the ethnic minority employees’ did not draw on knowledges constructed in the diversity managers’ discourses about diversity, difference and diversity management. The dominant knowledge of ethnic difference in these managerial accounts was indeed not one of ethnicity as a resource. Ethnic difference was seen as (also) a resource only in the managers’ accounts in one organisation in Finland and in relation to bus drivers and workers in unfavourable conditions in France. Those rare instances that ethnic minority employees drew on ethnic difference as an advantage were precisely in these same contexts.

Overall, the findings of this study showed that diversity managers and ethnic minorities working in the diversity-promoting organisations drew on similar knowledges about diversity, difference and diversity management. At the same time, the vast majority of the ethnic minority employee participants were totally unaware of their organisation’s engagement to promote diversity. This finding could suggest that the discourses the diversity managers drew on circulated in the organisation without them having to be identified as diversity discourses by the minorities, and that the knowledges both managers and minorities drew on reproduced discourses circulating in society in general.
10.5.4. Contexts shaping meanings of diversity management

The methodological contribution of this study consists of underlining the importance of national societal context in diversity studies. The findings of this study showed that not only is it important to contextualise diversity meanings to the societal level, but especially is it important to do this as a way of acknowledging the discursive nature of context. If the national context is treated as a given, as having an essentialised status, it remains difficult to see how the knowledges about the national context participates in giving meaning to diversity, difference and diversity management. The findings of this study showed that both in Finland and in France the meanings of diversity, difference and diversity management, and the related practices described, were indeed shaped by knowledges about Finland and France.

What is the difference between treating the context as a discursive construction or a given background factor? If we close our eyes to the discursive nature of the national context and only reflect our results back on the context taken as a given, we will on the one hand be unable to capture the participation of the knowledges about the context in the shaping of meanings, and on the other hand, we will ourselves as researchers allow our findings to reinforce the dominant knowledges about context. Diversity studies should be particularly attentive to the way in which context is taken into account as questions of diversity and difference cannot be detached from society. Attention to discursive construction should be present throughout the research process, in collecting data to analyse and in formulating the findings.

10.6. Practical implications

What do the findings of this study imply for diversity, difference and diversity management in practice?

First of all, the diversity managers in this study tended to define their diversity work according to a specific objective – such as improved performance in the business discourse or enhanced equality in the equality discourse. However, the practices they described did not always correspond to the expressed aim of diversity. For instance the increased innovation described as a motivation in the business discourse was not supported by any organisational practices. These findings raise two practical issues. First of all, it is important that those people in charge of diversity management are attentive to the coherence between aims and practices and that they measure the outcomes of practices. In this study, very few organisations had any system for keeping track of the results of their diversity management practices. When such a process is lacking, it may easily happen that the aims, practices and outcomes do not meet. Secondly, it would probably make diversity work more powerful if diversity managers were more open to the complexities of diversity and diversity management. The positive organisational outcomes of diversity will not attain their full potential if diversity management is seen in a narrow fashion. For instance a business-driven diversity initiative will not attain all the results possible if equality between organisational members is not guaranteed. The different motivations, practices and organisational outcomes of diversity management should not be seen as mutually exclusive.

It would also be helpful for managers and employees involved in designing and implementing diversity work to be more aware of the heterogeneity of experiences within different groups. This is especially needed in the Finnish context, where
immigrants tended to be treated as a homogeneous group. This awareness of the heterogeneity of experiences and positions of ethnic minority employees is also of importance in other country contexts. The findings from France clearly showed that among ethnic minorities in similar occupational positions, engineers working in managerial positions, the meanings attached to diversity and difference and the expectations vis-à-vis the diverse organisation varied to a sizeable degree. From different positions, the minority employees saw discrimination in very different ways and related discrimination to different sources: to the discriminating, the discriminated, or to the organisation.

Diversity management programmes need to take the discrimination among colleagues and in client relationships seriously. The diversity management practices described in this study were focused on organisational practices and the attitudes of managers. While the ethnic minority employees mainly felt that discrimination resided in the informal relationships between colleagues, and the minority employees described discrimination as not being an organisational phenomena, the diversity management practices totally ignored the racism and discrimination taking place among colleagues. In leaving the ethnic minority employee alone to solve the discrimination taking place in his/her daily work-life, the organisation loses the minority employees’ full participation in the actual doing of the work (and produces knowledge about the racism in interpersonal relationships as being about private affairs).

Diversity managers and others involved in diversity work, such as trade unions, should be aware of the discourses circulating in society about us and them, and about the socially constructed nature of these knowledges. Otherwise, there is a risk that diversity management programmes will be based on the dominant knowledges, and only perpetuate the dominant order. In order to achieve a change and improve the organisation and its performance with increased diversity, the programmes need to challenge dominant knowledges, provide new resources for different individuals, and allow for minority individuals to make their voices heard.

10.7. Limitations

This book is a Ph.D. thesis describing research and findings from a study stretching over many years. Doing research for a long time leads to both strengths and weaknesses, of which the latter constitute some of the limitations of this study.

A first limitation relates to the time span. The context of diversity, difference and diversity management in Finland and France looked very different in 2003 when I decided to begin studying diversity management in the two countries (in 2003, I was even told by researchers in the two countries that studying diversity management in the countries was not possible as it was not an issue in companies). I conducted interviews between 2004 and 2007, but also since then much has happened in both contexts. As a result, the description of the country contexts presented in Chapters 4 and 7 are based on history and sociology research writings, among others, published in the 1990’s and the early 2000’s. However, in some of these studies, the data used for the publications were probably collected and analysed many years before the publication date. Therefore, the different materials used for the research de facto talk about different time-contexts. However, this is a limitation that a researcher studying multiple contexts from different angles often has to accept.
Another issue which can be seen as a qualified limitation relates to my changing epistemological stance and theoretical approach during the research process. The research process was not straightforward, well-planned and coherent. My own view on the subject developed significantly between the start of the data collection and the end of the data collection, and as I described in Chapter 3, my performance as an interviewer towards the end had improved significantly, leading to much richer interview data being produced. In research other than a thesis, this would be a real limitation. However in a PhD thesis, where the aim is to show that the candidate has obtained the skills and capabilities required for conducting good quality research, this could even be seen precisely as testifying about the candidate’s development as an independent researcher.

A third limitation of this study concerns the breadth of scope. I have studied diversity, difference and diversity management in four different research settings, tried to critically analyse the societal context of two countries and take the societal context into account in the analysis of my findings. Studying diversity, difference and diversity management in two country contexts and from two perspectives in a number of organisations has led to a large set of qualitative data. However, not all the data collected for this study could be fully analysed and used. Further, working with four research settings has the limitation of not being able to focus in detail on specific themes.

10.8. Future research

Diversity difference and diversity management in the workplace are themes that have attracted increasing academic attention in recent years. The field has developed significantly, and many fundamental questions have been addressed. However, the areas of diversity and difference in the workplace and diversity management still need major research effort and multiple approaches.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the ontology of difference has received scant attention in diversity management studies. The findings of this study showed that diversity managers do draw on a variety of conceptions of difference when talking about diversity and diversity management. However, it was also seen that different conceptions of difference did not lead to more inclusive organisations, or to challenging the dominant order of differences. Future studies could look more closely into the conceptions of difference drawn on in discourses of diversity, and the ways in which the different conceptions challenge or maintain the dominant order of differences, make inequalities visible or legitimise them. Also, the findings of this study showed a difference in the ways managers and minorities conceived of differences in the two studied countries. Future studies could also look in greater depth into the relationship between a national context, the construction of national identity, and the way in which differences are seen in business organisations.

Many participants in this study, both diversity managers and ethnic minority employees, juxtaposed the recognition of difference in organisations with meritocracy. Their argument was that diversity management should not allow for differences to be taken into account in career advancement and compensation but that the treatment of organisational members should always strictly follow meritocratic principles. There have been many studies conducted on the relationship between meritocracy and equality, questioning the “neutrality” of competence. However, the relationships between merit, competence and difference should also be investigated in contexts of
diversity management. Diversity management inevitably takes a stance on difference. How diversity management discourses and practices uphold and/or challenge the neutrality of meritocratic systems would be an important research question within diversity research. It is for these reasons, amongst many others, that diversity, difference and diversity management are and continue to be important questions in both theory and practice.
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APPENDIX 1 CONSENT FORM ENGLISH

Diversity and ethnic minorities in Finnish and French work organizations

This Ph.D. research on diversity and ethnic minorities in Finnish and French work organizations is conducted at the Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration. The study, conducted by doctoral candidate Jonna Louvrier, is supervised by Professor Jeff Hearn and Minna Hiillos.

The research focuses on organizations’ internal diversity initiatives and policies, as well as on the professional experiences of ethnic minorities.

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Interview agreement

The undersigned have agreed upon a research interview. The interview material is collected and utilised only for research purposes. All material is treated anonymously and confidentially.
APPENDIX 2 CONSENT FORM FINNISH

Monimuotoisuus ja etniset vähemmistöt suomalaisissa ja ranskalaisissa työorganisaatioissa

Väitöskirjatutkimus monimuotoisuudesta ja etnisistä vähemmistöistä suomalaisissa ja ranskalaisissa työorganisaatioissa toteutetaan Svenska handelshögskolanissa. Tutkijana toimii Jonna Louvrier ja ohjaajina professori Jeff Hearn ja KTT Minna Hiillos.

Tutkimuksen kiinnostuksen kohteena ovat yrityksen sisällä tapahtuvat monimuotoisuuteen tähtäävät toimintaperiaatteet ja ohjelmat, sekä etnisiin vähemmistöihin laskettavien työntekijöiden kokemukset.

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Tutkimussopimus


Jonna Louvrier
Tutkija

Haastateltava
APPENDIX 3  CONSENT FORM FRENCH

Recherche doctorale sur la diversité et les minorités ethniques dans les entreprises Finlandaises et Françaises.

La recherche doctorale sur la diversité et les minorités ethniques dans les entreprises finlandaises et françaises est réalisée à la Swedish School of Economics and Business Administration à Helsinki en Finlande et à l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales à Paris. La recherche est conduite par Jonna Louvrier, et dirigée par le Professeur Jeff Hearn et le Professeur Michel Wieviorka.

L’attention de l’étude se focalise sur les pratiques et les programmes en place dans l’entreprise qui ont pour objectif d’augmenter la diversité. Un intérêt est également porté aux expériences professionnelles des minorités ethniques travaillant dans ces entreprises finlandaises et françaises.

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Contrat de recherche

Les soussignés se sont accordés sur une interview de recherche. Le matériel de l’interview est collecté et utilisé uniquement dans un but de recherche. Le matériel est traité en toute confidentialité et de manière anonyme.

Jonna Louvrier

Chercheuse Interviewé
APPENDIX 4  INTERVIEW GUIDE DIVERSITY MANAGER

1. Diversity management in general
   To what does diversity refer to?
   Which differences/groups are talked about when talking about diversity?
   Why did diversity become an issue in Finland/France?
   What is your opinion/view on diversity initiatives in Finland/France today?

2. Diversity and equality at X today
   What incited X to start to attach attention to diversity?
   Since when?
   Why?
   Where? Global / local policy?
   Objectives of your diversity policy?
   Did X have an equality policy before diversity policies? Do you today have separate equality and diversity policies? Why?
   How do you perceive the relation between diversity and equality?
   How do the two notions differ?

3. Diversity and company practices
   How has diversity management influenced different HR-practices?
   Do you communicate about diversity management?
   Do you measure progress? How?
   Do you study the composition of your workforce? How?
   What are the main challenges of implementing diversity management?
4. **Ethnicity/ Difference in work**

Which are the populations that you hope to reach by your diversity initiatives?

Why these populations – what do they bring with their difference?

Does a diversity promoting organisation need to take employees’ differences into account? Which differences? How?

Is discrimination a problem related to diversity? How? What can be done?

5. **Own background**

Age

Education

Professional history

Own ethnic origin

Ethnic origin of closest family members

6. **(Information about company)**
APPENDIX 5  INTERVIEW GUIDE ETHNIC MINORITY EMPLOYEE

1. **Typical work day**
   Describe a typical work day:
   Progression
   Colleagues
   Clients
   Since when working here?

2. **Personal history and identity at work**
   How do you think your colleagues/clients/superiors perceive you?
   How do you feel yourself?
   How do you think that X are perceived today in Finland/France?
   Is this image present in the work context?
   Does cultural or national origin play a role in work relationships?
   Does it bother you if you are identified as belonging to a minority?
   Could you describe your personal, educational and professional path?

3. **Diversity**
   Have you heard about diversity in the world of work?
   What does it refer to/what does it make you think about?
   What do you think about diversity in work?
   Opinions (positive, worrying, for whom?)
   Is diversity management an interesting approach for the business world?
   Do you know about X’s diversity policy?
   How did you learn about it?
   What do you think about it?
According to you, what is the objective of the diversity policy, and what should it be at X?

Does/should a company recognize and respect employees’ differences, for instance cultural differences?

Do you think that diversity initiatives will change something for the persons originating from immigration in the world of work?

What is the relation between diversity and equality?

4. **Discrimination and racism**

Have you (a colleague/friend) witnessed/had an experience of discrimination or racism in the world of work?

What happened?

What did you do?

How did your coworkers/superiors react?

5. **Formal working conditions**

Contract

Vacations

Salary - evaluations

Advancement

Training

Labor union engagement – what, since when, why?


