

**Diversity Management: The Role of Changes in Team Composition, Diversity Climate  
and an Implementation in a Public Organization**

**Summary**

This dissertation investigates diversity management in organizations, the role of diversity climate and leadership, and the conceptualization of diversity as a dynamic team phenomenon. Its overarching goal is to advance a process-oriented understanding of diversity in organizations and to connect research and practice by scientifically accompanying diversity management implementation and by developing a questionnaire that captures leaders' day-to-day diversity management. Across three studies, the dissertation argues that diversity management is not a one-time intervention, but an ongoing strategic task that must be embedded across organizational levels in order to foster a sustainable positive diversity climate (e.g., Mor Barak et al., 2016; Rosken, 2016).

Diversity in teams and organizations does not produce uniform effects. Rather, its implications unfold through team and organizational processes (e.g., Joshi & Roh, 2009; Wallrich et al., 2024). Differences among team members can expand the range of perspectives, knowledge, and experiences available for collaboration, yet whether these differences become a resource for learning and effective problem solving or a source of tension and exclusion depends strongly on leadership, climate, and organizational practices (e.g., Guillaume et al., 2017; Homan et al., 2020; Yadav & Lenka, 2020). Accordingly, the dissertation positions diversity management as the task of minimizing negative dynamics while enabling the positive potential of heterogeneity (Guillaume et al., 2017; Yadav & Lenka, 2020). A central mechanism in this regard is diversity climate, that is, employees' shared perception that diversity is valued, treated fairly, and supported in everyday work (Holmes et al., 2021).

Against this backdrop, the dissertation examines diversity from three complementary angles: as a dynamic phenomenon of team composition, as an implementation challenge in organizations, and as a leadership task enacted in daily practice. Together, the studies aim to show how diversity can be managed in ways that are both scientifically grounded and practically useful.

Study 1 examined gender diversity as a dynamic team phenomenon in a longitudinal design. Using register-based data from 4,807 Finnish healthcare work units across eight years (2012-2018), the study investigated whether changes in gender diversity were associated with changes in sickness absence and turnover. The findings showed that increases in gender diversity were associated with decreases in sickness absence days and short-term sickness absence spells over time, whereas no significant relationship emerged for turnover trajectories. In addition, age diversity partially moderated the association between gender diversity and sickness absence days. Thus, Study 1 extends diversity research by conceptualizing diversity not as a static compositional variable, but as a changing team characteristic linked to collective work-unit outcomes.

Building on this team-level perspective, Study 2 turned to the organizational implementation of diversity management in a Saxonian State Ministry. Across two surveys and interim practical measures, the study examined how diversity management can be developed in a context-sensitive and evidence-based way in a real public-sector organization. The first survey, conducted in March 2024 ( $N = 109$ ), served to assess the status quo of perceived diversity and diversity-related needs and to derive recommendations for the ministry's diversity strategy. Age and gender emerged as especially relevant dimensions. Based on these findings, a workshop on age-differentiated leadership were implemented, which was scientifically evaluated. The follow-up survey in December 2025 ( $N = 152$ ) focused more strongly on diversity climate and leadership. Results indicated generally positive but still

improvable perceptions of diversity climate and pointed to the importance of leadership practices, especially inclusive and age-sensitive leadership, for employee attitudes and well-being. At the same time, substantial restructuring processes in the ministry limited the implementation of broader measures and prevented strong causal conclusions. Accordingly, the study contributes less by demonstrating intervention effectiveness in a strict sense than by showing how diversity management can be scientifically accompanied and adapted under real organizational constraints.

Whereas Study 2 highlighted the practical importance of leadership, Study 3 addressed the question of how leaders' diversity management can be conceptualized and measured more precisely. To this end, the dissertation developed and validated a questionnaire on leaders' actual diversity management in daily practice. Rather than treating diversity management as a uniform construct, the study differentiated four qualitatively distinct approaches based on O'Leary and Sandberg (2017): identity blindness, assimilation, inclusive differentiation, and transformation of the organization toward equity. Across several sub-studies, these approaches were translated into measurable leadership behavior across relevant leadership domains by a questionnaire and vignettes. The findings provided initial support for this multidimensional conceptualization and suggested that more identity-conscious approaches, especially inclusive differentiation and transformation toward equity, are more desirable and more strongly linked to favorable outcomes than identity-blind or assimilative approaches. In addition, the study yielded practical questionnaire versions for both employee ratings and leader self-ratings, while also noting that further validation is still needed.

Taken together, the three studies advance empirical, theoretical, and practical understanding of diversity management. Empirically, the dissertation broadens the outcome domain of diversity research by linking changing team diversity to absence-related outcomes, by documenting the implementation of diversity management in a public organization, and by

providing an instrument and vignettes for assessing leaders' diversity management in daily work. Theoretically, it refines the understanding of diversity in two important ways: first, by conceptualizing team diversity as dynamic rather than static (cf. Li et al., 2018), and second, by clarifying that diversity management is not only an HR strategy, but also a leadership task that is situational and can take qualitatively different forms (Homan et al., 2020; O'Leary & Sandberg, 2017). In this way, the dissertation connects research on team diversity, diversity climate, implementation, and leadership.

The dissertation also offers clear practical implications. Most importantly, it underscores that a positive diversity climate does not emerge automatically from a heterogeneous workforce. Instead, it must be actively created and maintained through organizational structures, needs-based measures, and leadership behavior (Chapman et al., 2022; Homan et al., 2020; Leslie, 2019; Rosken, 2016). Leaders are especially relevant because they translate diversity management into everyday interactions and decisions (e.g., Homan et al., 2020). The findings suggest that the most beneficial approach is not identity blindness, but a more identity-conscious and needs-sensitive way of managing diversity that acknowledges different experiences, reduces barriers, and supports equitable participation. More broadly, the dissertation shows that diversity management should be understood as a long-term developmental process that benefits from scientific monitoring and context-sensitive adaptation.

At the same time, the findings should be interpreted in light of several limitations. The studies relied on non-experimental designs, which restrict causal inference. Further studies investigated diversity either on individual or team-level but not in a multilevel design. In addition, the findings are tied to specific contexts, namely Finnish healthcare work units and a German public-sector ministry, which limits generalizability. Finally, although the newly

developed questionnaire in Study 3 provides promising insights, its factor structure and psychometric properties require further validation in larger and independent samples.

Overall, the dissertation shows that diversity is best understood not as a static demographic fact, but as a dynamic and manageable organizational reality. Effective diversity management requires attention to changing team composition, diversity climate, and leadership practice alike. Across all three studies, the findings converge in highlighting that diversity unfolds more positively when organizations create fair and inclusive conditions, when leaders engage in identity-conscious practices, and when diversity initiatives are systematically monitored and adapted to the specific organizational context.

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