Moral Perspectives of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

Special issue call for papers from Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Thomas Köllen
Assistant Professor of Management
Vienna University of Economics and Business
thomas.koellen@wu.ac.at

Marja-Liisa Kakkuri-Knuuttila
Professor of Philosophy of Management, emerita
Aalto University School of Business
marja-liisa.kakkuri-knuuttila@aalto.fi

Regine Bendl
Professor of Management
Vienna University of Economics and Business
regine.bendl@wu.ac.at

The Deadline for the submission of papers is December 15th 2016.

This call aims to attract contributions that critically reflect and theorize the moral value (i.e., the moral ‘goodness’ or ‘evilness’) of the differing approaches to equality, diversity, and inclusion. We seek to enrich the discourse on the moral evaluation of diversity management, inclusion programs, and organizational equality approaches with new philosophical facets and perspectives.

Diversity management is currently a widespread practice amongst Western organizations, and its diffusion is still increasing. Besides citing business case arguments for its implementation, organizations tend to present diversity management as some kind of morally ‘praiseworthy’ or ‘good’ organizational practice in their internal and external communication. They “often try to project the estimated ‘goodness’ of these actions onto the actors themselves, aiming at giving the company [or organization] a general label of ethical ‘goodness’” (Köllen, 2015: 2). Often without stating it explicitly, “equality” is assumed to be a crucial indicator for the degree of organizational “goodness” (or even “justice”), which therefore can be seen as the intended, morally praiseworthy outcome of diversity management initiatives or organizational programs of “inclusion” of a diverse workforce.

Equality is mostly equated with equality of opportunity or equality of outcome for all employees, regardless of their diverse demographics or backgrounds. Some actors even label their diversity approach, and with it their contribution towards equality and inclusion, as an element of their “responsibility” towards society or humanity, and, in doing so, bestow upon themselves the quality of moral “goodness.” The category of “equality” itself, then, is not called into question, and it effectively turns into a moral value in itself. However, organizations (and researchers) frequently apply prescriptive and imperative moralities that address either the initiatives themselves or their outcome, and value them morally (Gotsis and Kortezi, 2013), without considering the incentives of specific individuals within the organizations. The question of whether organizations possess moral agency at all, or whether only the human actors within these organizations have this agency (French, 1979; Werhane, 1989) is mostly implicitly responded to by seeing organizations as legitimate moral actors (Wolf, 1985).

Organizational or business research on equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) which stresses its moral value seldom reflects upon the specific moral perspective taken, its underlying basic assumptions, or potential points of criticism; mostly an everyday understanding of what might be morally praise- and
blameworthy is applied (e.g. Jones et al., 2013). Questioning the moral value of EDI seems to be a taboo, which supports Nietzsche’s view, who, through Zarathustra compares the ‘preachers of equality’ with secretly vengeful tarantulas hiding behind the word ‘justice,’ and whose goal is that the “will to equality’ shall henceforth be the name for virtue” (Nietzsche, 1954: 100), only to serve their own “will to power.” This leads him to the dictum: “Mistrust all who talk much of their justice. […] And when they call themselves the good and the just, do not forget that they would be pharisees, if only they had — power” (Nietzsche, 1954: 100). Nietzsche exemplifies only one of many critical moral perspectives on EDI, which hitherto remained silent within the academic discourse on EDI. In the same way the moral legitimacy and value of EDI is rarely expressed explicitly in this discourse, and embedded in concrete moral philosophies.

Although it seems to be a broad and unquestioned consent in research and practice that there is a moral value inherent in diversity and inclusion initiatives, there is a lack of theorizing on this and critically linking these initiatives and their underlying targets with specific moral philosophies. While a lot of research has been conducted on different facets of the economic value of equality, diversity, and inclusion, very little research has been undertaken on its moral value (e.g. Köllen, 2015; van Dijk et al., 2012).

This call for papers aims at contributing to overcoming the undertheorized moral evaluation of EDI, and it invites both papers that derive the moral value of different approaches to EDI from specific moral philosophies, as well as papers that question its moral worth being based on the perspective of specific moral philosophies or philosophers. We encourage submissions that are theoretical and conceptual in nature.

A list, by no means exhaustive, of potential topics includes the following:

- Deontological Ethics: Do organizations and/or individuals within these organizations have an obligation or duty (or: responsibility) towards approaching equality, diversity, and inclusion in a certain way (e.g., Kant, Hegel, or others)? How can existing approaches be evaluated morally from this perspective?

- Virtue Ethics: Is there a (most) virtuous way in approaching EDI within organizations (e.g., Aristotle, Plato, Anscombe, Aquinas, or others)? How can existing approaches be evaluated morally from this perspective?

- Utilitarianism: How should organizations/individuals within organizations approach EDI in order to maximize categories such as welfare, happiness, autonomy, etc. (e.g. Bentham, Mill, or others)? How can existing approaches be evaluated morally from this perspective?

- Other moral philosophies: How can organizational or individuals’ approaches to EDI be evaluated morally from these perspectives?

- What is the role of the individuals‘ and/or organizations’ incentives behind their efforts regarding EDI for the moral evaluation of these efforts and/or of these organizations/individuals? How can the genuine incentives determine the moral praiseworthiness/blameworthiness of organizational approaches to EDI (e.g. Schopenhauer, Hume, Nussbaum, or others)?

- Anti-moralism/Amoralism: How can the attribution of moral worth to different approaches to EDI be unmasked and deconstructed as a mere means to other ends? How can the discourse on the moral value of these approaches be categorized?
• Philosophical perspectives on the notion and moral worth of equality and inequality: Can (certain) organizational inequalities be “just,” morally acceptable, or even morally praiseworthy? Is equality a moral category at all?

• Moral perspectives of quota systems and affirmative actions: What kind of understanding of “equality” do these measures express? How can (dis)advantaging of certain groups of employees be evaluated morally?

Manuscript Submission and Review

Manuscripts will be double-blind refereed by experts in the area, according to the journal’s peer review process.

Please upload your submissions to the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion ScholarOne Manuscripts website http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/edi - select ‘Special Issue’ and submit to the issue listed with the title: Moral Perspectives of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. Submission will be available from September 1 to December 15, 2016.

References