



Diversity and diversity policy: diving into fundamental differences

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to offer scholars an analytical framework to identify what the fundamental choices are in the definition of diversity (the what), in the motivation for diversity within organisations (the why), and in diversity policy as an organisational strategy (the how). It also hopes to stimulate diversity professionals to reflect upon the underlying assumptions of their policies and, if needed, provide inspiration as to how to align them towards a more coherent approach.

Design/methodology/approach – Academic contributions from political, social and management theory on diversity and diversity policy are analyzed on their conceptual coherence to identify important research gaps and construct an analytical framework that can serve to fill these gaps.

Findings – Although increasing societal diversity challenges many organisations to change and facilitate diversity within their structures, defining diversity and diversity policy is an uncommon habit both in the professional practice and in academic studies, while this definition influences the scope and validity of research results and can have a considerable impact on the practical consequences of diversity initiatives. The few studies in this field tend to be quantitative and jump to explanations for differences. The proposed analytical framework contains fundamental choices in the definition of diversity (the selection, interpretation, and categorization of modes of differentiation), the motivation for diversity within organisations (the desired base of difference is individual or collective, and arguments are moral or practical), and the diversity policy approach (the intensity is high or low, and the relevance of collective difference is high or low).

Originality/value – A theoretical exploration of the concept of diversity and diversity policy draws on sources from three distinct disciplines that have not been combined in such a way before, resulting in a new analytical framework that facilitates theory building and policy learning on the topic.

Keywords Diversity, Diversity policy, Analytical framework, Typology, Business policy, Employees
Paper type Conceptual paper

1. Introduction

After decades of intense immigration, many forms of diversity have become more salient in European countries, following similar trends in traditional immigration countries such as the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In the meantime, both in the professional and in the academic world, awareness has grown of the importance for organisations to adapt to their diverse surroundings. Private and public organisations have turned to specific policies to facilitate the inclusion of employees with diverse characteristics. In Europe, this organisational tendency is reinforced by the adoption of diversity as a central political priority by the European Union (EU) (Shaw, 2005).

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Diversity and diversity policy are also debated in academic literature. However, there seems to be considerable theoretical ambiguity and controversy with respect to these concepts. Ambiguity, as definitions of diversity are not articulated or, if they are, rarely reflected upon. Controversy, as there is considerable disagreement about how to interpret the assumptions, intentions and methods of diversity policies.

Section 2 elaborates why it is not surprising that there is so much ambiguity with respect to the definition of diversity, as the concept is a social construction. But it also argues that, to avoid misunderstandings, scholars and applied researchers in the field of diversity studies should at least make their definition of diversity explicit for the reader and reflect beforehand about the implications of that definition for the scope and level of their conclusions, observations or results. Furthermore, the section introduces the definition of diversity as a highly interesting research topic in and of itself, although in some ways neglected. The empirical studies' very basic question "What fundamental choices can be made with respect to diversity within organisations?" has not been answered so far.

Section 3, which is the main section, answers that question by outlining an analytical framework that identifies fundamental choices in definitions of diversity (the "what"), in arguments for diversity within organisations (the "why"), and in diversity policy approaches (the "how"). The framework is distilled from a selection of key sources on diversity and diversity policy from social, political and management theory in North-America and Europe that have not been combined in this way before.

Finally, the conclusions comment on possibilities to apply this framework and the possible contributions thereof for theory and practice.

2. Defining diversity

As all concepts that refer to forms of human organisation, diversity is a social construction: it is dynamic and plural in nature, and its definition is influenced by the context (Triandis, 1995). It is not surprising, then, that diversity does not have a universal expression, but is defined and visualized differently depending on the context (Zapata, 2009). It has not yet acquired a consistent conceptual meaning (Carrell and Mann, 1995), and it is doubtful it ever will (Smith, 1995).

A universal definition is also not a necessary condition for theoretical or empirical studies in the field of diversity. However, this section first argues that it is important for scholars, researchers and practitioners to explicitly reflect on the specific definition of diversity they employ as it has implications in theory and in practice. Second, it introduces the definition of diversity as an interesting research topic in and of itself, although it indicates some serious gaps in this field of study.

2.1 *An uncommon, but important, habit*

To avoid misunderstandings, scholars and researchers in the field of diversity studies should formulate their definition of diversity, make it explicit for the reader and reflect beforehand about the implications of that definition for the scope and level of their conclusions, observations or results. After all, the way in which diversity is defined affects all aspects of the study (Levine, 1991; Thomas, 1990). This is a common sense notion, but unfortunately it does not seem to be a common practice.

For example, misunderstandings about the appropriate scope of conclusions, observations or results are more likely to occur when the conceptual difference between

diversity and diversity policy is blurred. The first refers to the condition of heterogeneity within a certain whole, such as a society or an organisation. This can be a current or a desired condition. The second refers to the approach towards that condition that can generate specific goals or objectives for certain groups or individuals (Carrell and Mann, 1995), such as “diversity as a mode of incorporation” (Faust, 2009) or “diversity policy as an organisational strategy”. When diversity becomes a shorthand for diversity policy, as sometimes happens in practice (Wrench, 2007), scholars might easily fall into the epistemological trap of “talking on different levels”, “comparing pears with apples”, and so forth.

Also, defining diversity in a certain way has considerable practical consequences that might not be intended. For example, studies that focus on specific forms of diversity (gender, religion, etc.) might give readers the impression that these forms of diversity are more important than others, while it is not necessarily so that the most studied phenomenon are exclusively the ones most deserving of attention. To avoid this kind of misinterpretations, this choice and its justification should be made explicit. And it has other, maybe more considerable, social and practical effects; it may determine, for example, how public budgets are designated to schools, or which development practices receive company funding. It might affect a person’s social status, financial situation, juridical rights, and so forth.

Finally, reflecting on how diversity is defined in the empirical context of study can be of added value for empirical researchers. First, this comparison can be used as a check upon the descriptive validity of their own definition of diversity for that context. Second, researchers can indicate in which measure their research results in different contexts are comparable.

2.2 An uncommon, but important, research topic

The arguments above confirm that the way in which diversity issues are framed is critical to policies and/or organisational approaches to the topic (Smith, 1995). This makes how diversity is defined in specific empirical contexts also a highly interesting research topic in and of itself. However, this field of study contains some serious gaps.

First of all, most of the few empirical studies that have been conducted employed only quantitative methods. For example, Carrell and Mann (1995) developed a two-page survey questionnaire for organisational human resource managers, in which respondents were asked to indicate what diversity (policy) meant to decision makers in their own organisations by checking boxes. Also, Point and Singh compared diversity statements of 241 corporate web sites of top companies in eight European countries by identifying whether there was a definition or not. If they determined there was one, they differentiated between diversity as an approach and diversity as related to specific characteristics. Finally, they counted the use of the words referring to characteristics (2003). While also enjoying many advantages, the disadvantage of quantitative studies is that they often rely on face validity of key terms. This, while possible differences in the interpretation of those key terms may have substantial effects on the research results. For example, when the term “black” is understood differently in different contexts, it refers to different groups of people and the comparability of the results can be seriously questioned. Also, terms like “awareness training” and “sensitivity training” may easily be interpreted in distinct ways, while other terms, such as “workshops on issues” and “skills enhancement” (Carrell and Mann, 1995) might be considered as equal.

Again, this seriously hampers the reliability and validity of the results. Also, what happens with the results of quantitative studies when diversity is sometimes seen as a collective, and sometimes as an individual, concept? In the USA, for example, some practitioners are found to use narrow definitions which reflect American equal employment opportunity law; they define diversity collectively in terms of race, gender, ethnicity, age, national origin, religion, and disability. Others simply define diversity individually as all the ways in which we differ (Wentling and Palma-Rivas, 1997). This calls for more qualitative studies.

Second, most studies on the definition of diversity appear to have been undertaken in the USA (Point and Singh, 2003), where there is a very specific cultural, social and historical context. For example, the size of the US minority ethnic population is more than 25 percent whereas in EU countries it often lies around 5 or 6 percent (Wrench, 2007). The USA also long had a relatively strong anti-discrimination legislation, contract compliance and affirmative action which have set the historical context for diversity policy. Additionally, there is much greater readiness to resort to the courts in cases of “race” and sex bias, and far greater financial penalties exist for transgressions. In Europe, there are no laws and practices of this strength. Furthermore, the European context is one of nation-states and Europe’s dominant focus is on the “problems” of migrant workers and strategies to “integrate” immigrants into the existing labour market and employment structures of individual countries. In contrast, the region of North-America and Oceania have a “historical role in absorbing immigrants” and “a value system rooted in equal employment opportunity, antidiscrimination and fairness paradigms” (Mor Barak, 2005). When, as in this case, contexts are different, it is important to refrain from universalizing ideas and knowledge and focus on the context at hand instead to gain more insight into the matter (Modood *et al.*, 2006). This calls for more empirical studies in the European context.

Third, although there is a considerable amount of “diversity policy good practices” from both the public and the private sector in the EU, the few studies that have been done specifically on the definition of diversity (policy) are all based on analyses of private organisations. Point and Singh (2003) focus on corporate web sites. Liff (1999) and Wrench (2007) draw their information from surveys, overviews and listings of “good practices” from the private sector. Also, these organisations might not be very representative for organisations in general, as participation in these surveys was voluntarily. These companies were probably more focused on diversity than the average organisation. This calls for more empirical studies of public organisations, especially those that do not participate in rankings of good practices.

Fourth, the goal of most studies has been to formulate explanatory hypotheses about what factors influence whether definitions of diversity and diversity policy will converge or differ. For example, factors are: globalisation, emancipation (Wrench, 2007), legal-judicial frameworks at the local, national or supranational level (Phillips, 2008), historical presence (Zapata, 2010), distribution of citizenship rights (Vertovec, 2007), social salience in combination with social discourse on specific themes, such as the “bread winner ideology” (Billing and Sundin, 2005), spatial distribution (Kymlicka, 1995; Vertovec, 2007), norms on the registration of personal information (Wrench, 2007), attitude and power of trade unions (Wrench, 2007), national integration models (Castles, 2002), liberal policy discourse (Penninx and Slijper, 1999), or paradigm shifts in political theory such as the one from class-based socialism to cultural recognition (Taylor, 1992).

However, none of these studies reflect on the definition of diversity; none of them identify what variance in this main variable is important, or relevant, to explain. This calls for the development of an analytical framework that indicates what fundamental choices are made with respect to diversity.

3. Analytical framework on fundamental choices with respect to diversity

Fundamental choices are those choices that influence what comes next. For scholars and researchers, they influence how diversity is studied: what variation is important, what factors are taken into account to explain that variation, what criteria are important to evaluate that variation, and so forth. For practitioners and policy advisors, they influence the real-life effects of diversity policies: who is treated how, who gets what, and so forth.

So far, no framework has been formulated that encompasses all fundamental choices with respect to diversity and policies to facilitate diversity within organisations. Liff (1997) and Wrench (2007) are among the few authors that have constructed typologies to distinguish between diversity policy approaches. However, Wrench focuses exclusively on characteristics of diversity policy methods, and Liff includes both motivational elements (commitment to social equality) and instrumental elements (perceived relevance of social group differentiation for policy making) in her typology, mixing intentions with means. The latter is a common habit in literature on diversity policy that makes the classical distinction between the equal opportunities approach and the managing diversity approach (Liff, 1997; Squires, 2005; Wise and Tschirhart, 2000; Wrench, 2007). For example, the equal opportunities approach is generally said to aim for social equality (motivation) by equal treatment in general and treatment adapted to differences to compensate for unequal outcomes of general policies (means), while the managing diversity approach typically aims for organisational benefits (motivation) by treatment adapted to differences (means).

For the sake of clarity, then, this section distinguishes between three areas in which fundamental choices can be made to construct the analytical framework: definitions of diversity (the “what”), motivations for diversity within organisations (the “why”), and diversity policy approaches (the “how”). It draws on a mixture of political, social, and management theory to outline these choices and provide scholars, researchers, practitioners and professionals with an analytical framework to identify variation in these choices and/or reflect upon them. Examples from earlier publications on diversity and diversity policy will be isolated from their original background and framework, and displayed where appropriate to illustrate this new analytical framework.

The first part of the analytical framework concerns the definition of diversity as the condition of heterogeneity within a certain whole. Unlike many authors who focus on diversity related to immigrants (Vertovec, 2007; Zapata, 2010), this framework includes all possible forms of diversity within society and within organisations. The second part concerns the normative motivation for diversity within organisations. Finally, the third part concerns diversity policy: the approach towards that condition, with a specific focus on diversity policy as an organisational strategy.

3.1 Diversity: fundamental choices in the “what”

Diversity refers to differences between people. To make these distinctions, one needs a criterion, a characteristic to indicate difference. Logically, an infinite number of characteristics can make individuals or groups different. However, what distinguishes

diversity from the mere presence of diverse aggregates (artificial categories of people), is the fact that the characteristic that makes someone different is not just any attribute, such as “speaking rapidly” or “wearing a red shirt”, but a meaningful characteristic: one that influences the identity and the way of life of that person (Young, 1990), such as “being blind” or “being a low-educated employee of the work floor”. These differences are “modes of differentiation”: principles by which people, from context to context, situation to situation, mark themselves and each other as different (Vertovec, 2009).

As said before, diversity is a social construction. This implies that modes of differentiation are historical bookmarks: they only constitute difference at a certain moment in a certain place, and these differences are influenced by certain conditions under which they persist or perish. For example, “gender” may once have been very influential in determining workplace relationships, but this difference no longer provokes the same level of emotional or behavioural response as earlier, at least in Western European countries (Dyke and Dyke, 2002).

Three fundamental choices in the definition of diversity are identified. The first is selecting certain modes of differentiation. The second is interpreting those modes of differentiation, i.e. connecting modes of differentiation with certain (groups of) individuals and not others. The third is categorizing those modes of differentiation by referring to the most basic differences in their nature.

As said before, most times these choices are made implicitly by the involved actors; often, they are not even recognised as a choice and the consequences of that choice are not reflected upon. In line with the main goal of the article, this subsection does not justify or promote specific choices, but primarily aims to make these fundamental choices explicit.

3.1.1 Selection. The range of modes of differentiation currently related to diversity is very broad, as a selection of choices in modern day political, social and management theory and a brief overview of the motivations for and against a focus on culture ethnicity as mode of differentiation will illustrate.

Many political theorists focus on culture and/or ethnicity, although they also subscribe the importance of other modes of differentiation (Kymlicka, 1995, on “multinational diversity” and “poly-ethnic diversity”, or Parekh, 2000, on “communal diversity”). According to Jones (1998), this is because culture (or ethnicity) is not – like differences in religious faith or in aesthetic taste – just one more form of diversity that we can set alongside others: cultures pretend to be all-embracing so that cultural diversity encompasses every kind of diversity that people can exhibit in their lives. Also, according to Phillips (2008), in the context of contemporary Europe culture has special importance, because the differences associated with culture are more specifically bound up with past and present patterns of migration, and thereby with majority/minority relations of power.

Other theorists discard culture as a useful concept, because it carries connotations of shared beliefs, norms, habits, and so forth, which may not be relevant in particular cases. For example, a group may be formed by a process of racialization, where this process makes no reference to ideas of shared practices and values. Furthermore, culture might not be specific enough to describe the dynamics of diversity and markers such as race and religion might be more adequate (Thompson, 2008). Some also question the importance of ethnicity. For example, Vertovec (2007) suggests that it only plays a limited role in political reality. A series of additional variables might sometimes

be more important for understanding political reality, such as immigrant statuses, divergent labour market experiences, gender and age profiles, special distribution, mixed local area responses, and so forth.

Therefore, political theory and social theory offer many alternative modes of differentiation, such as gender, skin colour or race, class, income, educational background, (dis)ability, age, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, parental status, and so forth (Anthias, 2002; Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Griggs, 1995; Litvin, 1997; Pharr, 2000; Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2006; Young, 1990). Management theory underlines many of the alternatives offered by political and social theorists and adds other alternatives, such as life style, political opinion, union affiliation, thinking types, professional experience, personality types, functional background (Point and Singh, 2003; Wise and Tschirhart, 2000). In specific institutions or organisations, then, choices are always made, focusing on certain modes of differentiation and not on others. For example, current EU thinking focuses on sex (gender), racial and ethnic origin, disability, age, religion, and sexual orientation (Phillips, 2008).

3.1.2 Interpretation. The second choice is to identify how the chosen mode of differentiation should be interpreted. Which (groups of) individuals are actually included in this definition? Often, this varies in different contexts. “Age” for example, usually refers to the number of years since a person was born. But what is considered as “old” in a country with a lower life expectancy might be “middle-aged” in a developed country. Even different age groups have different ways of thinking about age, for example, most teenagers define everyone over 40 as old, while most people in their 60 tend to reserve that category for people over 80 (Foddy, 1993). Another example is “skin colour” as a mode of differentiation. What is considered as “coloured” in a country with a majority population that is white, might be considered “practically white” in a country with a majority population that has a very dark skin colour. Also, this mode of differentiation may be employed in several ways to indicate differences: in one context skin colour might refer to a distinction between “white” and “non-white”, while in another the distinction is made between “white”, “black”, “red” and “yellow”.

3.1.3 Categorization. Finally, many authors formulate categories to indicate fundamental differences in the nature of certain modes of differentiation. Most authors choose a binary distinction. The majority distinguishes between “primary” (also called hard, biological fixed) as opposed to “secondary” (also called soft, experiential, fluid) modes of difference. Another distinction is the one between “old” and “new” modes of differentiation.

Griggs (1995), for example, classifies diversity into primary and secondary modes of differentiation. Primary refers to those human differences that are inborn and/or exert an important impact on early socialisation and have an ongoing impact throughout life. According to Griggs, these cannot be changed; they shape our basic self-image and have great influence on how we view the world. Secondary refers to those human differences that can be changed, and these might include educational background, income, marital status, parental status, religious beliefs, and so on. Others have added “physical appearance” to the first group and “language” and “lifestyle” to the second; some call the first group “biological” dimensions and the second group “experiential” (Wrench, 2007). This coincides with the observation of Litvin (1997), who found that diversity was frequently presented as composed of “six fixed primary dimensions of difference” which are held to be inborn or immutable, and “eight fluid secondary

dimensions of difference” which help to distinguish the self from the other but are seen as less permanent and hence adaptable. Barry (2000) refers to this distinction as the difference between not having the opportunity and choosing not to use the opportunity, in other words “hard” and “soft” modes of differentiation. Finally, Dyke and Dyke, 2002 add that one should pay attention to the depth of entrenchment of any of the dimensions of potential difference, because some things about us are more abiding than others; for example, it is easier to change a custom than to change your gender.

This article argues that these distinctions are choices, not truths. They are theoretically clarifying exercises in specific contexts, but not the only correct or best ways in which to categorize modes of differentiation. After all, in certain contexts “secondary” modes of differentiation might indicate greater differences between individuals or groups in practice than “primary” modes of differentiation. For example, in the case of immigrants, modes of differentiation such as “immigrant status” or “spatial distribution” which are likely to be labelled as “secondary”, might be more influential for the treatment they receive in political reality than “primary” modes of differentiation such as skin colour. Moreover, the distinction between what is “primary” and what is “secondary” is not an easy one to make. For example, sexual orientation can be conceptualized in different ways: as a category, emphasizing that being gay or not is something a person is born with, or as a transgressive phenomenon, emphasizing that we are all more or less hetero and homo, downplaying the rigid distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality (Stein, 2002). Also, one can seriously doubt whether class or socio-economic difference is a “primary” mode of differentiation, something you are born into and will always influence you, or a “secondary” mode of differentiation, something more easily changeable, as argues Zapata (2009). Finally, some modes of differentiation that were traditionally considered as “soft” are now argued to be quite “hard”. For example, developments in the sociology of knowledge, psychoanalysis and cultural psychology, have made us appreciate more than before that culture deeply matters to people, leading to a greater acceptance of cultural differences and a redefinition of the relation between politics and culture (Parekh, 2000).

Another binary distinction sometimes made is between “old” and “new” modes of differentiation (Zapata, 2009). Again, this often varies between contexts. For example, religion can be considered as a new mode of differentiation, when immigrants with other religions arrive in a country that has been homogenous in religious beliefs since its foundation, such as Spain. While in The Netherlands, “religion” is more likely to be seen as a mode of differentiation that returns after some time of absence since the “pillarization”.

Finally, diversity can either be considered as an individual concept, or as a collective concept. According to the first perspective, modes of differentiation are so broadly distributed among societies that each individual’s experiences of “being different” is unique and what differences are meaningful (the modes of differentiation) vary according to the different contexts through which this person moves (see also the contributions on intersectionality of Verloo (2006) and Yuval-Davis (2006)). In this perspective, it is ontologically wrong to distinguish groups, because the members of that group will never share the exact commonalities that define the group. According to the second perspective, this is possible, as members of a group do share a specific characteristic that somehow causes the experience of “being different” and affects all members in a similar way. This choice is related to an elaborate debate in political

and social science whether moral standing should be attributed to individuals only (whose collective interests are merely the sum of their individual interests) or also to groups qua groups (whose collective interests are not the sum of the individual interests, but independent of its members). Locating moral standing makes a difference in two very practical ways: it determines who we should listen to (all individuals in the “group” or the authentic, authoritative voice of a group) and it determines whether it is important for individuals to define themselves as a group or not (Jones, 1998).

In sum, three choices underlie any definition of diversity and indicate fundamental differences in that definition, and these can be visualized as shown in Figure 1.

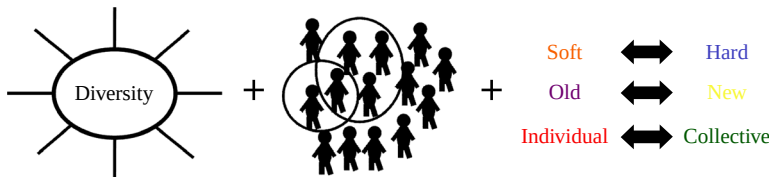
3.2 Diversity within organisations: fundamental choices in the “why”

In contrast with the choice between diversity as an individual concept or a collective concept (which referred to the “what” and in that sense is an ontological choice), the first fundamental choice when arguing for diversity within the organisation is whether the goal is to support individuals (i.e. ensuring equal opportunities) or to support collectives (i.e. ensuring collective differences are valued). In other words, diversity might be seen as something collective in nature (for example, women are physically different from men in meaningful ways), but diversity policies might aim to neutralize those differences (ensuring that their gender does not hinder women from having equal opportunities as individuals) or to recognize and value those differences (for example, valuing the qualities that women are said to have more because of their gender). This is a normative, or deontological, choice.

The second fundamental choice when arguing for diversity within the organisation is on what type of goals to base the arguments: moral or practical. The classical example of the equal opportunities approach versus the managing diversity approach illustrates this distinction. While the equal opportunities approach strives for social equality and justice, the idea behind managing diversity is that encouraging a diverse environment where differences are valued enables people to work to their full potential, resulting in a richer, more creative and more productive work environment. In other words, its rationale is primarily one of improving organisational competitiveness and efficiency, driven by business purpose and market advantage (Wrench, 2007; Wise and Tschirhart, 2000).

By combining these choices, we find both moral and practical arguments for a focus on individuals and a focus on collectives in political, social, and management theory. This combination can be visualized as shown in Figure 2.

An example of a moral argument for a focus on individuals is: focusing on groups is not humane, because it denies the agency of individuals (Squires, 2008) and strengthens stereotypes (Fredman, 2002). Or, a focus on groups is detrimental to individual freedom (Barry, 2000). An example of a practical argument would be: policies should not be based on groups, because group-boundaries do not exist, most individuals have identities that



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 1.
Defining diversity: the
selection, interpretation,
and categorization of
modes of differentiation

Desired base of difference	Collective	I	II
	Individual	III	IV
		Moral	Practical
		Type of arguments	

Source: Own elaboration

Figure 2.
Motivations for diversity
within organisations

are constituted by several forms of diversity. Or, focusing on groups blocks the creation of mutual understanding by only emphasizing collective differences (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2006). Management literature adds that many assumptions about the advantages of a collective focus have not been tested properly in empirical research, or have only been tested in very different contexts without any attempt to double-check the results with those of other studies (Wise and Tschirhart, 2000). It also adds that diversification of the workforce may create institutional tensions rather than increase productivity (Squires, 2005). Finally, a moral argument can be that the collective focus is that it may be employed selectively if representatives of particular groups are perceived to offer greater business advantages than others, which would increase inequality (Fredman, 2000).

There are also moral and practical arguments for a focus on collectives. An example of a moral argument is: groups have a moral value that goes beyond the sum of individuals (Modood, 2008). Or, recognising groups is essential for individual freedom (Taylor, 1992). Or, ignoring groups means ignoring discrimination; an individual approach is more acceptable to white males, but may not actually deliver change, as the social structures which initiated long-standing inequities (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000) and their consequences are left intact (Mor Barak, 2005). An example of a practical argument is: groups exist and therefore should be taken into account. Groups are an inevitable aspect of modern social processes (Young, 1990), because that is how many rights have been and are attributed (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2006; Zapata, 2009). Or, focusing on groups is the only way for marginalized individuals to gain visibility and power that otherwise would never be recognized because of their marginalization within the dominant society (Pharr, 2000). Management literature adds to those practical arguments: optimal use of skills and talent, avoiding internal problems (for example, conflicts and misunderstandings, high absenteeism, great staff turnover, and damage to staff development), making products or services more attractive to diverse customers and clients, increasing innovation and problem solving, accessing international markets with more success, avoiding the costs of racial discrimination (damage to the organisation's image, and/or financial penalties) and improving the image of the company in the eyes of potential investors who choose to invest in companies demonstrating their practices of corporate social responsibility (Wrench, 2007).

3.3 Diversity within organisations: fundamental choices in the "how"

After the ontological choice between diversity as an individual concept and diversity as a collective concept (the "what") and the deontological choice between striving

to promote individuals or collectives (the “why”), there is also the instrumental choice whether to formulate policies that ensure that all individuals are treated the same or policies that adapt processes to collective differences (the “how”). This is the fundamental choice between the individual- and the group-based approach.

This means that sometimes a group-based approach is chosen to promote the equal opportunities of individuals. In those instances, measures that promote equality, besides from eliminating discrimination, are also based on the view that in many instances it is important to recognize social group differences whenever they may lead to some applicants or job holders being disadvantaged. For example, in the UK, company policies relating to career breaks, child care, flexible working, and single sex training (positive action) are not a legal requirement, but have been encouraged. These are best seen as measures which allow organisations to reduce the likelihood that such differences will be seen as relevant to their decision making (Liff, 1997). Also some policies are about overcoming past disadvantages as a consequence of socially-based differences, such as training in skills for women in areas they have traditionally been underrepresented, or specific recruitment efforts directed towards qualified members of underrepresented groups and support for their career development once they are in post.

Also, sometimes an individual-based approach is chosen to promote collectives. For example, by diversifying evaluation criteria so that individuals can compensate for possible gaps in their capacities or knowledge with the specific contributions they can make from their collective identity.

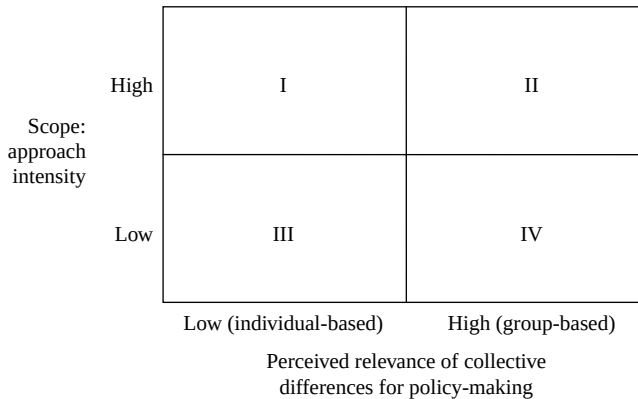
Finally, an example for the group-based approach to promote collectives is every policy that recognises collective differences and see them as the basis for different treatment, such as the design of parallel career tracks for “career women” and “family women” (Liff, 1999). And an example of the individual-based approach to promote individuals is the initiative to allow all jobs to be worked on a part-time or job share basis.

The second fundamental choice is the scope of the policy approach: is it incorporated in the entire organisation (high intensity) or does it have a limited role (low intensity). This choice is extracted from the descriptions Liff (1997) gives of the four approaches she distinguishes. While the approaches of “dissolving differences” and “valuing differences” share the idea that all organisational processes should be adapted to their principles, the approaches of “accommodating differences” and “utilising differences” do not find it necessary to change the organisation fundamentally. So, “policy intensity” refers to the scope of diversity policies. Logically, this is also related to the relative ease by which the company would acknowledge change proposals from individual employees or certain employee collectives. And also to the nature of change: is the aim permanent or temporal change?

In sum, the fundamental choices in the “how” can be visualized as shown in Figure 3.

3.3.1 The way forward [..]. In sum, this article outlined why it is important to reflect on the definition of diversity in research and policy, and argued that this is not a common habit of researchers and practitioners. Also, it showed how research on the definition of diversity and diversity policy is scarce and incomplete, and the question “What fundamental choices can be made with respect to diversity within organisations?” had not been answered so far.

Therefore, an analytical framework is offered that identifies the fundamental choices in definitions of diversity (the “what”), in arguments for diversity within organisations (the “why”), and in diversity policy approaches (the “how”). Three fundamental



Source: Own elaboration, partially based on Liff (1997)

Figure 3.
Diversity policy
approaches

(ontological) choices are related to the definition of diversity: which modes of differentiation are selected, how are they interpreted in practice, and how are they categorized? Two fundamental (deontological) choices are related to the arguments for diversity within organisations: is the goal to promote individuals or to promote collectives, and are the motivations moral or practical? And finally, two fundamental (instrumental) choices are related to the policy approach with respect to diversity within organisations: are processes designed so that everyone is treated the same or are they adapted to collective differences, and do these policies affect the entire organisations or is their scope limited?

This framework can contribute to the theory-building process on diversity and diversity policy and to the improvement of diversity policies in practice. On the one hand, it will allow researchers to compare the definition of diversity, the motivation for diversity, and the diversity policy approach in a clear and structured way and determine the variation between contexts. This solid descriptive base consequently allows for explanatory research (for example, the study of factors that influence similarities and differences between definitions of diversity, or the consequences of diverging definitions of diversity between organisations or between different levels within the same organisation), or evaluative research (for example, by identifying what diversity policy approaches are more successful in what contexts and which organisations can learn in that sense from which other organisations). On the other hand, it gives practitioners, professional, or policy advisors an instrument to reflect upon the fundamental choices that are made in current-day policies, on what consequences these choices have in practice, and possibly on how to improve policies by adapting them or making them more internally coherent.

However, the first step to achieve these contributions consists of applying the analytical framework in specific empirical contexts, to test whether it is sufficiently discriminative (proving that all categories in the typologies are mutually exclusive) and inclusive (showing that all policies related to diversity can be analyzed clearly according to this framework), and to enhance researchers' understanding of diversity policy dynamics by exploring how the three parts of the analytical framework (definition of diversity, motivations for diversity, and diversity policy approach) are related to each other.

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