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Ethical paradigms as potential foundations of diversity management initiatives in business organizations

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the elaboration of a comprehensive moral framework for designing and implementing diversity practices. In so doing, it employs distinct ethical theories that not only elevate respect for differences to an end, but also provide a set of principles, virtues or values conducive to the formation of an inclusive work environment.

Design/methodology/approach – A literature review, in particular contributions critical to current implementations of diversity management, may provide the basis of a non-instrumental approach to diversity issues, allowing for an inclusive and participative workplace. The paper suggests that such an endeavor can be founded on the concepts of organizational virtue, care or human dignity alternatively. In this respect, a theoretical context demonstrating the very way these concepts influence and inform diversity issues, is elaborated, analyzed and properly discussed.

Findings – Three distinct theoretical frameworks capturing the importance of major ethical traditions based on dignity, organizational virtue and care, for reconceptualizing diversity issues, are introduced. It is proposed that non-utilitarian philosophical ethics (and more specifically, Kantian deontology, Aristotelian virtue ethics or ethics of care) is in a position to provide a rationale for diversity policies that affirm the diverse other as a valued end.

Practical implications – The authors argue that a corporation is in a position to develop ethically-informed diversity initiatives that may effectively combine performance with an affirmation of the value of the diverse other.

Social implications – The authors argue that a corporation is in a position to develop ethically-informed diversity initiatives that may effectively combine performance with an affirmation of the value of the diverse other.

Originality value – The paper offers certain insights into the particular conditions that may help organizations design and implement a diversity strategy facilitating thriving and fulfillment of diverse others, grounded on the priority of dignity, virtue or care respectively. Such a perspective, permeating vision, culture and leadership, is invested with a potential that overcomes the managerial instrumentality, so strongly denounced by the majority of critical diversity scholars.

Keywords Diversity management, Ethics of care, Inclusive workplaces, Kantian deontology, Organizational virtue

Paper type Conceptual paper



Introduction

Diversity is a multifaceted, contextual and multidimensional construct (Gonzalez, 2010; Harrison and Sin, 2006; Joshi and Roh, 2009; Prasad *et al.*, 2006; Shore *et al.*, 2009; Thomas, 2004), indicative of a variety in socio-cultural and demographic characteristics that appear salient and symbolically meaningful in the relationships among group

members (DiTomaso *et al.*, 2007). Diversity can be defined as the collective amount of differences among members within a social unit: it is articulated at three distinct levels as (Harrison and Klein, 2007). According to Cox (2001), diversity is reflective of the variation of social and cultural identities among people co-existing in an employment setting. Alternatively, diversity may be conceived of as the varied perspectives and approaches that members of different identity groups bring to the workplace.

Diversity management bears a wide range of connotations, but it predominantly refers to, Voluntary organizational actions designed to generate a process of inclusion of employees from different backgrounds to the formal and informal organizational structures through particular policies, events and initiatives (De Anca and Vazquez, 2007; Foster-Curtis and Dreachslin, 2008; Luring, in press; Morrison *et al.*, 2006; Ozbilgin and Tatli, 2008; Pitts, 2006; Pitts and Wise, 2010; Rodriguez-Garcia, 2010; Shen *et al.*, 2009; Singh, 2008; Syed and Ozbilgin, 2009; Thomas and Ely, 1996; Yang and Konrad, 2011). Organizations are facing the incorporation of diversity in their organizational identity as a form of proactive response to a changing demographic and socio-economic environment that necessarily induces the design of policies centered on managing the new organizational identity, thus affecting both the organization's internal legitimacy and diversity identity (Cole and Salimath, 2013). Not infrequently, these diversity strategies are informed by the prevailing legislative framework on equal employment opportunities, but they are also affected by other factors, such as: social policies, institutional structures, labor market arrangements, cultural codes, organizational policies and priorities and so forth.

As far as we know, the issue of specifying an overall philosophical context underlying the logic of diversity management has remained relatively unexplored in the management and organizational sciences. For instance, the attempt of employing virtue ethics, or an ethic of care as normative foundations of various diversity management practices, has not yet received due attention in the literature. The paper seeks to fill this gap, by placing an emphasis on the importance of inclusive ethics and philosophies for managing differences on a non-instrumental basis. In so doing, this study advocates a progressive problem-shift in the dominant diversity research program, from a market-driven and business-case oriented diversity management to one presupposing and necessitating a substantial change in organizational ethos. Underlying this perspective is the idea of a research standpoint that seeks to transcend the traditional limitations of the managerial function by exploring unique and unconventional instances of organizational exchange (Witt, 2012). However, rather than merely deconstructing current diversity narratives, the paper is intended to explore the potential formulation of alternative discourses, practices and interventions informed by caring principles and values, the latter being effectively entrenched in the conception of a caring, and/or virtuous organization.

The paper aims at elaborating a philosophical and ethical framework for diversity management practices. More specifically, our endeavor consists in grounding diversity management in comprehensive ethical theories (Kantian deontology, virtue ethics, and ethics of care) or in holistic management philosophies that are in a position to facilitate:

- a process of enhancing different rationalities, particularly those presupposing an axiological-rational conception of diversity initiatives in contemporary organizations;
- the societal embeddedness of distinctive diversity management interventions; and
- formal and informal procedures of encouraging various discourses of minority groups.

The paper is structured as follows: in the first section, a concise discussion of why organizations have to engage in diversity management intervention is provided. This research reviews the main arguments of diversity perspectives that are critical to the so called “business case for managing diversity”, one aspect of which remains its purely consequentialist underpinnings. In the next section, the interaction of ethical and diversity discourses is examined in more detail, by placing an emphasis on the need to ground diversity management on non-utilitarian foundations. Three distinct ethical frameworks that are pertinent to and commensurate with this objective, are then introduced and elaborated: Kantian deontology, Aristotelian virtue ethics and ethics of care can significantly enrich our understanding of differences, as well as the rationale for diversity management, a theme further explicated in the section that follows. More specifically, points of convergence and divergence between these three frameworks are critically explored. The authors hold the view that an ethic of care approach is in a position to provide a more satisfactory response to the concerns raised by several critical approaches: in addition, it meets all the three criteria mentioned above. Finally, implications for practice, as well as potential limitations of this endeavor are identified and discussed.

Setting the context for diversity management

Different aspects of diversity

In the past two decades, workforce diversity has drastically increased due to changing demographic trends and constantly evolving socio-economic patterns in advanced industrial societies: not only societies tend to become increasingly diverse, but organizations as well are relying on diverse teams to address issues of ongoing complexity (Smith *et al.*, 1994; Teachman, 1980; cf Pfefer, 1985). Diversity can yield performance-increasing effects, but it is also associated with negative consequences and counterproductive work behaviors. In reviewing the extant literature on workplace demography, Williams and O'Reilly (1998) have argued that group members in diverse teams tend to engage in cognitive processes based on social comparison and on in-group/outgroup categorization, so detrimental to team functioning. In contrast to this socio-demographic diversity, functional diversity denoting task-related differences is beneficial to group processes, albeit these benefits may not accrue automatically (Ely, 2004; cf Ely *et al.*, 2012). Jackson and Joshi (2011, pp. 653-654) have distinguished between different types of diversity entailing different types of outcomes: on one hand, relations-oriented diversity based on the distribution of attributes pertinent to shaping interpersonal interactions is distinct from task-related diversity denoting a distribution of potentially relevant for teamwork attributes. On the other, underlying diversity embodying deep-level differences revealed through interaction, is contrasted to readily detected diversity referring to easily discerned, surface-level attributes.

In sum, the phenomenon is related to both detrimental and beneficial outcomes: in a highly diversified workforce, diversity may denote social identity faultlines activated by various triggers (Chrobot-Mason *et al.*, 2009; Van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2011) that are in turn conducive to stereotyping, lack of communication, irritation, frustration, decreasing levels of cooperation, lower perceptions of fairness and inclusion, and workgroup conflict (Jehn *et al.*, 2008; Pelled *et al.*, 1999; Van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2004; cf Randel, 2002). In contrast to those relational aspects of diversity which can potentially prove dysfunctional, task-related diversity generates new perspectives and brings new insights within a group, thus enhancing creativity, innovative thinking, problem-solving

capacity and quality of decision-making (Bell *et al.*, 2011; Chatman *et al.*, 1998; Cox and Blake, 1991; Grimes and Richard, 2003; Jayne and Dipboye, 2004; Nkomo and Cox, 1996; Roberge and van Dick, 2010; Roberson and Park, 2004; Simons *et al.*, 1999).

The theoretical underpinnings

Research drawing on social psychological theories on identity and intergroup relations (Deaux and Ethier, 1998; Deaux and Philogène, 2001) has decisively contributed to explicating the complex and often ambivalent relationship between workplace diversity and group performance. According to social identity and social categorization theories (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), people tend to classify themselves into meaningful social categories through membership in and belongingness to social identity groups. Taken for granted that people aspire to adhere to groups that confer positive identities, individuals tend to categorize self and others into groups, as well as to develop perceptual and attitudinal biases by favoring in-group, while explicitly derogating outgroup members. This effect is strengthened through a process of excluding dissimilar others, according to the similarity attraction paradigm (Byrne, 1971; Osbeck *et al.*, 1997). In contrast to these theoretical approaches that predict negative diversity-related outcomes, an information processing perspective (Jackson, 1992) focusing on task-oriented team activities, rather than affect-based interaction, is endemic to any effort of capitalizing on the potential benefits of workplace diversity.

Rationales for managing diversity

As already implied, integrating multiple aspects of differences through various responses to managing diversity, is critical to the endeavor of an overall organizational change and development. In response to an increasing workplace demographic diversity, organizations have developed and implemented various formal and informal interventions to maximize the potential benefits, while minimizing possible disadvantages associated with a diverse workforce. Olsen and Martins (2012, p. 1169) employ a broad definition of diversity management as a set of practices that increase the variation in human capital on some given dimensions, and ensure that this variation does not hinder, and/or facilitates the achievement of certain organizational objectives. Other scholars however, have posited that the diversity-performance relationship is highly dependent upon the specific context shaped by distinct overarching strategies to manage diversity. Ely and Thomas (2001) for instance, have moved to this direction by elaborating three different perspectives that reflect different rationales for engaging in diversity management. The access and legitimacy perspective is a more pragmatic one: it favors organizational strategies to achieve access to culturally diverse markets and groups in view of an effective adjustment to the changing demographics of an organization's external environment. The discrimination and fairness perspective is intrinsically normative: it embodies an organization's commitment to enhance justice and ensure fair and equitable treatment of all employees, by reducing discrimination, meeting the needs of specific minority groups and focusing on equality of opportunities in recruitment, selection and promotion decisions. Finally, the integration and learning perspective acknowledges and values identity groups' resources in advancing organizational goals and objectives: diversity is thus celebrated not only as integral to a learning organization, but also as a critical dimension of both adaptive and proactive change management.

Not unexpectedly, economic justifications of diversity occupy a preeminent position in various organizational discourses, thus dominating the respective diversity

management field, but other significant concerns can be equally taken into consideration. According to the diversity, equality and inclusion perspectives, the rationale behind these initiatives consists in the proper empowerment of vulnerable groups so as to more effectively participate in organizational life (see Sippola, 2007), as well as in a deeper intergroup understanding of different social identities, subjectivities and commitments. Research in work group diversity supports the prediction that reactions to diversity are effectively informed by diversity beliefs, the degree to which individuals believe in the intrinsic value of diversity (Van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2007). Accordingly, diversity strategies should aim at fostering the ideal of an inclusive workplace (Mor-Barak, 2011; Da Rocha, 2009; Scott *et al.*, 2011; Shore *et al.*, 2011 Cf, Stewart *et al.*, 2008), in which minority group members would be afforded the opportunity to fully achieve their potential with respect to shared organizational goals. We shall proceed to highlight the principal points of certain competing trends in diversity management literature, by placing an emphasis on those research streams that are critical to the core premises of the business case for diversity.

A critical approach to diversity management literature that an ethical framework builds upon

A business case for diversity?

An implicit, albeit core premise in more mainstream diversity research consists in the fact that diversity should be effectively managed merely in view of attaining tangible outcomes, primarily increased profitability, enhanced productivity, innovation and group performance. The business case for diversity (Bendick *et al.*, 2010; Herring, 2009; Robinson and Dechant, 1997; Slater *et al.*, 2008; see, Kossek *et al.*, 2006 for a review) is thus justified on the grounds of purely economic benefits (meeting the demands of a diversified customer base, enhancing labor relations, responding to the needs of global markets, securing an increased market share and greater relative profits, as well as improved skills of workforce) that ultimately take precedence over the more humane ones. Most importantly however, the business case encompasses an economic argument for diversity drawing on a conception of the organization as an effective combination of distinct bundles of resources in view of securing a competitive advantage in a market environment (see, Morgan and Vardy, 2009).

The underlying rationale in this resource based view is a pragmatic, not an ethical one: a pragmatic justification for diversity focuses on the decision's outcomes, and fails to involve the ethical dimension of the decision. Kirton and Greene (2009) argue that the rise of the business case, and the ensuing decline in equality concerns, were critical to lending diversity management more legitimacy and acceptance; rather than being motivated by social justice, certain diversity practitioners tend to employ rhetorical strategies consonant to a neo-liberal economic policy climate. Johns *et al.* (2012) argue that a business case hardly applies to public sector institutions, thus seeking to justify diversity considerations in advancing moral, deontological arguments. Martin-Alcázar *et al.* (2012) underscore the deficiencies of traditional diversity management practices in simultaneously meeting business and social justice diversity outcomes: they then argue in favor of an overall organizational culture change entailing various HRM systems' transformation in view of effectively coping with diversity on the grounds of appreciating individual differences. Perriton (2009) argues that the business case constrains the discussion of social justice issues at the workplace, thus entailing an inadequate response to justice concerns: market processes tend to produce

discrimination, not equity leading to women's unequal position in a work setting. Valuing and appreciating differences is thus dependent upon the need to maintain an optimal level of organizational efficiency centered on desired outcomes. As a result, established organizational processes tend to invariably replicate social differences codes, exacerbating, or maintaining socio-demographic inequalities within organizations. Far from developing pro-diversity beliefs that affirm and value otherness, this conception diminishes the importance of differences; the latter appear as objectified, neutralized, or desubstantialized, by further reproducing and perpetuating structural inequalities. Most importantly, this process stems from and is effected through organizational discourses that appear to reflect prevailing power relations, thus posing serious challenges to minorities and women the influence of which, as well as their likelihood of acquisition and use of power, appears significantly decreased (Lucas and Baxter, 2012). In this respect, a brief discussion of various approaches that are highly critical of the economic justifications of diversity is deemed necessary, at least to the extent critical diversity scholarship has raised serious concerns on equality, fairness and social justice issues, hardly to detect in business case arguments.

A variety of critical perspectives

A certain trend in the respective literature adopts a critical stance as to the very way diversity management is implemented in work settings: proponents of these views contend that the ultimate goal of diversity policies does not focus on shaping a climate fully supportive of diversity, that is a climate in which differences should be intrinsically valued, supported and deeply appreciated (cf, Herdman and McMillan-Capehart, 2010). On the contrary, diversity discourses tend to be individualistic and ultimately, too instrumental in nature (Ozbilgin and Tatli, 2011; Tatli, 2011); not infrequently, they seem to degenerate into mere rhetorical constructions, by failing to adequately and sufficiently integrate equality and inclusion concerns, thus subordinating diversity initiatives to standard and pre-established business priorities (Oswick and Noon, in press).

Critical diversity research consists of somewhat heterogeneous trends, distinct theoretical perspectives and research streams drawing from different traditions (post-structuralism, post-colonial studies, critical management studies, inclusion literature), but seeking to demonstrate the very way socially constructed and organizationally mediated diversity discourses influence and shape various diversity issues in contemporary organizations. The vast majority of critical diversity studies however, share an emphasis on the potential limitations of a managerial rhetoric organized around a set of dominant discourses that are likely to reproduce existing hierarchical power structures and to drastically impede possibilities of human agency, in particular that of vulnerable groups. In this respect, diversity interventions are frequently implemented in isolation from other substantial organizational processes; such low levels of integration tend to significantly reduce positive outcomes of diversity management practices. Accordingly, minority employees have to either conform to dominant organizational norms through a process of assimilation, or retain their valuable uniqueness but experiencing marginalization, at the expense of their integration in a work environment. As Samnani *et al.* (2012) have properly demonstrated, diverse employees who engage in integration rather than other forms of acculturation strategies (assimilation, separation, or marginalization) are expected to develop stronger and more viable social networks and achieve the most favorable employability outcomes.

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's social thought, Ozbilgin and Tatli (2011, pp. 1247-1248) argue in favor of a reconceptualization of the equality and diversity field, one that allows for reconsidering the struggle for symbolic domination between multiple institutional actors seeking to impose their own vision of diversity. In this view, "diversity and power are embedded and intertwined in any social phenomena" (Ozbilgin *et al.*, 2011, p. 186): business case arguments reflect the core premises of a neo-liberal ideology that seeks to individualize, if not de-collectivize workforces. In sharp contrast to an etic, an emic approach to the analysis of workforce diversity, Tatli and Ozbilgin (2012) contend, can help identify the social categories pertinent to the process of creating and sustaining privilege and disadvantage in a specific context, given the differentials in various forms of capital, that is the constant variation in the access to and ownership of the necessary material, cultural and social resources.

In sum, diversity management practices tend to emerge as a by-product of frequently competing and seemingly irreconcilable discourses (cf, Schwabenland and Tomlinson, 2008; Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010). Diversity is thus reduced to a commodity, or a resource subject to cost/benefit calculation. Accordingly diversity management, degenerating into a simple rhetoric of performance (McVittie *et al.*, 2008), conceals its true nature, that of reproducing inequality by either ensuring existing power structures (Cooper, 2004; Zanoni and Janssens, 2004; Zanoni, 2011), or separating the managers of diversity from the managed diverse, those employees of low status multiple identities (Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000). As a result DM not only fails to conceive of diversity as a socially constructed reality and create genuine opportunities for micro-emancipation (see Zanoni and Janssens, 2007; Zanoni *et al.*, 2010), but it also reduces differences to a minimum (cf, Marcella, 2009), in accordance with standard criteria of organizational functioning (Kersten, 2000; Zanoni *et al.*, 2010) and in conformity to conservative or neo-liberal precepts (Wilson, 2007; Tatli, 2010; Holvino and Kamp, 2009).

A common denominator underlying these critical approaches is, among others, their strong criticism of the consequentialist assumptions, the latter frequently reflecting the internal logic of the dominant discourses employed to justify prevailing diversity management interventions. A non-instrumental view of diversity issues that challenges established assumptions of DM requires a shift from static and rigid conceptions of differences, that appear predominant in the respective literature, in favor of an approach that embeds and construes diversity management in a context of processes and structures shaping and maintaining the inequality dynamics of power interplays. This may allow for the expression of multiple experiences of vulnerable groups, help empower the collective voice of outgroup employees and shape various caring practices addressing specific target groups. Albeit these approaches can hardly be considered as bearing ethical connotations *stricto sensu*, they pose specific normative challenges to the dominant paradigm, and they foster critical thinking on the moral underpinnings of diversity management practices, as we are going to discuss in the following.

It is thus proposed that a deconstruction and a concomitant reformulation of diversity management rhetoric is in a position to provide a rationale for diversity policies that affirm the diverse other as a valued end. Such practices that are likely to affirm human dignity, deeply respect and value differences, and promote inclusion of disadvantaged members, are expected to incorporate a contextually embedded view of diversity management, drawing on different conceptions of rationality conducive not only to the empowerment, but also to an ongoing process of emancipation of diverse groups. We deem that non-utilitarian ethical theories are in a position to help diversity

management initiatives effectively move to that direction. In addition, we posit that these theories have a potential to meet, at least in part, the criteria of enhancing different rationalities, facilitating the embeddedness of diversity management practices and encouraging alternative discourses in managerial and organizational practices, mentioned earlier in this paper.

Ethical foundations of diversity practices. How an ethically-grounded framework can advance the extant literature

The underlying rationale

Diversity management involves a strong ethical component. Not infrequently, diversity policies are evaluated in conformity to the tangible benefits they incur, both to the organization and to various stakeholders. Such criteria, if adopted, may come to imply that, once DM is no longer perceived as beneficial to the organizations, it will somehow cease to exist as an autonomous and distinct organizational practice. Relating to, but sufficiently distinct from a pragmatic, business case perspective, utilitarianism remains an action-based, outcomes-orientated ethical approach that places a primary emphasis on the precise consequences of an action, but fails to take into account the intrinsic worthiness of what is morally right, irrespective of its consequences. Accordingly, in securing the highest levels of well-being for the greatest number of people, utilitarian thinking hardly enhances the vulnerable groups' happiness: in an employment setting, diversity management policies are justified and positively evaluated only if yielding beneficial organizational outcomes. However, and despite the strong emphasis on tangible outcomes with respect to diversity, organizations' commitment to diversity should not imply that other ethical considerations are discredited, or even disregarded. This might be, at least in part, consistent with socially responsible diversity management, and/or with the framework elaborated by Olsen and Martins (2012), more specifically with their definition of "dual-value integration", the latter referring to organizations which recognize the inherent value of diversity as an end state, yet they continue to value differences for their eventual contribution to the achievement of desired organizational goals.

An intersection of diversity and ethical concerns

Our framework makes a further step, by capitalizing on the potential benefits of taking the ethical dimension of diversity into systematic consideration. Not unexpectedly, this effort is not unparalleled in the literature. Nelson *et al.* (2012) for instance, argue in favor of an effective intersection of ethics and diversity, insofar as diversity can be considered as a moral issue. Not infrequently, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups and individuals are the targets of overt unethical behavior: outgroup members may suffer intimidation and harassment in non diversity-friendly, or hostile work environments. In addition, respect for diversity requires and presupposes fair and just treatment (equity in hiring, promotion and performance appraisals) of various identity groups, in view of avoiding discrimination in organizational contexts, as exemplified in various streams of justice theory. Diversity management practices may thus be viewed as integral to a process of enhancing equitable employee outcomes and developing socially responsible interventions to reduce marginalization and alleviate those experiencing enduring discrimination. In this respect, Fujimoto *et al.* (2013) elaborated a coherent diversity justice management model based on core normative principles of various kinds of organizational justice: by integrating basic tenets of procedural,

interactional and distributive justice, diversity management is thus conducive to those affective, cognitive and behavioral outcomes through which diverse employees are afforded the opportunity to flourish in a thriving work environment.

Mamman *et al.* (2012, p. 292) convincingly argue that minority employees experiencing unfair treatment will focus on the interactional and distributive aspects of organizational justice as more proximal to these experiences rather than procedural justice. This is due to the fact that low status minorities suffering discrimination tend to adopt a social identity rather than an impersonal point-of-view: they will react to injustice in a unique way by attributing perceived unfairness not to an inefficient procedural system, but to identity-motivated negative attitudes, thus experiencing a higher level of deprivation through loss of self-esteem and a negative impact on their self-concept. Outgroup members are thus expected to display an attitudinal change, not engaging in helping, pro-social and other extra-role behaviors (Mamman *et al.*, 2012, p. 293).

Ethics is akin to many diversity considerations, yet an ethical dimension in a diversity-related decision is not infrequently unarticulated, even tacit, implicitly stated, or remaining a concealed assumption (McNett, 2009, pp. 287-288). Undoubtedly, diversity education is of paramount importance to achieving inclusion. Increasing efficacy beliefs in relation to ethics and diversity management, Nelson *et al.* (2012) contend, should be an objective, as well as an integral part of organizational courses in management education. Bell *et al.* (2009) share this view and argue in favor of moral, ethical and business reasons for mandatory diversity education for management students.

Diversity training can also incorporate various ethical and moral considerations that may help employees perceive their organization as fostering values much in congruence with their deeper expectations and aspirations. Jones *et al.* (2013) view diversity training as a primary moral imperative that focuses on the moral development of both organizations and employees centered on the idea of a caring organization: diversity-related decisions consist in ethical decisions that are in a position to reinforce positive behaviors of inclusion and reduce discrimination. Viewed through the lenses of a fairness and justice perspective, diversity training embodies a potential that critically informs traditional business case justifications of diversity and favors overall organizational change.

In this line of argument, Kujala and Pietilainen (2007) adopt a female ethics perspective so as to enrich and expand the multidimensional ethics scale to create moral scenarios that may support diversity in managerial moral decision-making. Stewart *et al.* (2011) employed a stakeholder perspective to CSR in their analysis of the relationship between diversity climate and Voluntary turnover intentions. Their findings supported the hypothesis of a negative relationship, between diversity climate and turnover intentions, that was stronger for those employees perceiving a more ethical climate. Triana *et al.* (2012) examined the negative relationship between perceived discrimination against racial and gender minorities, and perceived procedural justice of their treatment by the organization. Their findings suggest that personal value for diversity, i.e. the importance attributed to having diverse groups in a work environment, moderates this relationship: people who highly valued diversity displayed a stronger reaction to the mistreatment of minority groups, a finding supportive of the deontic justice principle according to which people act in conformity to their moral values to assess what is unfair, or contravenes the rule of equity.

Pless and Maak (2004, p. 143) demonstrated that the realization of potential benefits of a diverse workforce requires an overall approach to diversity centered on “the definition of a framework of inclusion built upon principles of recognition, mutual

understanding, standpoint plurality and mutual enabling, trust and integrity, that allows for the integration of different and multiple voices into the organizational discourse". They thus elaborated a coherent framework of an inclusive diversity culture based on a moral theory of recognition epitomized in the aforementioned principles. Yu and Cable (2011) found that informationally diverse teams with a long-term orientation need civic virtue-based voice to properly operate in international settings, yet team members were somewhat unwilling to engage in these behaviors in the absence of specific organizational support systems that encourage civic virtue.

Ethical theories and diversity management

The next step in our reasoning would be to articulate an integrative framework of diversity management and ethics based on and informed by different ethical theories that can substantially enrich our understanding of diversity considerations (McNett, 2009, pp. 280-287). Ethical theories have been employed in several other cases, for instance to shape a more comprehensive view of ethical leadership (Dion, 2012), or to justify positive political behavior (Gotsis and Kortezi, 2010). Gilbert *et al.* (1999) suggest that diversity management cannot solely and exclusively rely on legislative frameworks, insofar as mere compliance to binding laws is quite limited in scope; ethical behavior related to diversity management on the contrary, presupposes a commitment to incorporating ethical principles in the decision making process, that transcends strict legal sanctions. An ethically informed diversity management should not only focus on solely enhancing corporate profitability, or on merely securing procedural and distributional justice, but it would primarily contribute to shaping an organizational environment in which all participants be afforded the opportunity to achieve their inner, true potential, irrespective of the business constraints they are subject to. Interestingly, the framework proposed by Van Dijk *et al.* (2012) effectively adds to this direction.

Van Dijk *et al.* (2012) provide an ethical evaluation of the debate on diversity management, focusing on the contrast between equality and inclusion on one hand, and business case arguments on the other. In so doing, they contend that the existing tension between these two incommensurate and seemingly irreconcilable perspectives could be effectively mitigated. Deontological and utilitarian arguments are often entwined in view of supporting diversity initiatives (see, Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010): business case scholars resort to some kind of deontological principles (for instance, elevating profitability to a business imperative), while equality scholars may evoke utilitarian arguments in their justification of diversity as enhancing team outcomes. Chavez and Weisinger (2008) for instance advocate a relational approach designed to create a more inclusive diversity culture that presupposes both an attitudinal and cultural transformation: this alternative approach to diversity issues, albeit strategic in nature, seeks to capitalize on the unique benefits of a diverse workforce by moving toward a "managing for diversity" direction.

Van Dijk *et al.* (2012) introduce virtue ethics and advance the argument that virtues are in a position to encourage equality aspirations by reducing prejudices, discrimination and other potential sources of conflict. In their view, such a perspective not only proves to be more congruent, context-sensitive and consequently more sustainable, but also is invested with a potential that meets the apparently contradictory exigencies of profitability and equality. A values and virtues perspective, Van Dijk *et al.* (2012) conclude, can be applied to various HRM domains (e.g. recruitment and selection, performance management), often in combination with

other policies aiming at fostering equality, assuming the role of complementing certain deontological requirements.

We now proceed to elaborate three distinct, albeit not incompatible ethical frameworks of diversity management interventions justified on other than purely business arguments.

Three distinct ethical frameworks on which diversity management can be grounded

Framework 1. A Kantian deontology approach to diversity

Albeit business case and equality proponents both advocate an increased representation of diverse employees in the workforce, their underlying arguments remain essentially different. Unlike the utilitarian conviction that diversity is valued insofar as it yields enhanced organizational outcomes, equality arguments are based on the premiss that inequality as a precondition is inherently wrong, and cannot be morally justified. Deontological theories consist in rules, duties and moral obligations situated externally to, but often internalized by the individual. Organizations and individuals have at least a moral duty to tolerate, if not support differences, because valuing (demographic and other forms of) differences originates in a morally sanctioned duty.

According to Kantian deontology, our actions should be consonant to a principle of obligation to pursue what is morally right, attributing weight to good intentions, regardless of consequences. Such principles apply categorically, insofar as moral agents are urged to engage in duties identified through a process of rational exploration of distinct formulations of the categorical imperative. These universally held principles emerge in an ideal community of participants, in which the humanity of each person represents a distinctive quality that has to be treated as an end, not as a means to achieve desirable objectives. Guest and Woodrow (2012) for instance, advocate a Kantian perspective in addressing the relationship between HRM, performance, and employee well-being: the authors suggest that, albeit HR managers have not played an important role in promoting this relationship, there is still a rationale for ethically sensitive HR managers in pursuing ethical goals that focus on worker well-being as an end in itself.

Under a Kantian regime, identity groups and minority employees deserve equal dignity and equal respect, in a way that precludes coercion, intimidation or manipulation: they cannot be treated merely as a means to attain and secure competitive advantage, as prescribed in the business case for diversity. On the contrary, a Kantian conception of organizations encourages individual autonomy, ensures meaningful work (Bowie, 1998; see, Ciulla, 2012 for a review and presentation of Bowie's overall contribution) and fosters managerial practices that facilitate integration in the workplace in view of shared objectives (Arnold and Bowie, 2007; Duran and McNutt, 2010; Ohreen and Petry, 2012; Reynolds and Bowie, 2004; Stacey, 2007). Employing Kant's categorical imperative, universally shared good intentions are epitomized in moral rules, most importantly in the ability to act in conformity to these rules in the form of a binding moral duty. In the case of diversity issues, we have to value diversity insofar as it is morally right to affirm otherness: an organization, as well as dominant group members have a moral obligation to respect other's humanity, not engaging in demeaning and derogatory behaviors that violate the core premises of human interdependence. The human resource management implications of such premises will be discussed in a later section of the paper.

Framework 2. Virtue ethics views on diversity

Diversity should not be reduced to a means for attaining desirable organizational ends, nor should it be assessed solely and exclusively in conformity to an instrumentality criterion. Indeed, this appears to be the case underlying every consequentialist approach to diversity management, according to which diversity interventions should be based on a calculus of anticipated benefits and costs. Being too restrictive, the business case for diversity would be significantly enriched were its scope expanded toward a more comprehensive and encompassing view. We deem that organizational virtue, founded on an Aristotelian ethical framework, is in a position to offer an entirely new impetus to diversity interventions in organizations.

Aristotle is defending a universal conception of the good life (*agathos bios*), of happiness (*eudaimonia*), of human integrity and well-being that goes beyond the utilitarian advocacy of efficiency, or the Kantian commitment to strictly fulfill obligations and perform the respective duties (Solomon, 2003, 2004). Fowers and Davidov (2006) favor a virtue ethics conception of a multicultural environment, according to which cultural diversity embodies the pursuit of worthwhile goals that presuppose the cultivation of virtues, intrinsic motivation, practical wisdom and proper competences centered on an openness to and receptiveness of the other.

The significance of virtues as constitutive and substantive elements of corporate character has been accorded due attention in the organizational and management literatures (Alzola, 2008; Bragues, 2006; Flynn, 2008; Martin, 2011; Moore, 2008; Moore and Beadle, 2006; Sison, 2008; Solomon, 2003; Weaver, 2006; Whetstone, 2005). Crossan *et al.* (in press) articulate a virtue-ethical framework of managerial decision-making consisting in motivational values and character strengths that transcend the consequences-based and duty-based evaluations of human judgment in strategic, as well as in more proximal decisions. McPherson (2012) delineates two core criteria underlying a virtue ethics approach to business organizations: the virtues should be practiced for the sake of our well-being in its wholeness, as well as for the common good of the communities of which we are integral parts, and of their individual members. This perspective seeks to mitigate the apparent tension between the pursuit of self-interest and the achievement of the common good, due to the fact that virtue and integrity are highly interactive with morally responsible corporate policies and strategies (Solomon, 2004). In McPherson's view, these criteria can be met in the context of a "vocational virtue ethic" approach to work that helps align the good life both for ourselves and for others.

Virtuousness plays a central role in reinforcing the beneficial effects of positive emotions, prosocial behavior and trust through mechanisms of building psychological capital that in turn affect team cohesiveness (Wright and Goodstein, 2007). As Chatman (2010) has extensively commented, diverse work groups appear less likely to form and adhere to strong work norms because minority identity group members' responses to work group diversity are distinct from those of the dominant group. Social interaction is complicated due to varying expectations about others' behavior, thus leading to a declined willingness to engage in task-related self-disclosure. More than anti-bias norms, Chatman argues, diverse groups have to develop norms pertaining to openness that foster people potential for growth and enhance a work group' ability to optimize constructive social interactions. Such norms do not emerge naturally; we deem that organizational virtue can shape norms supporting behaviors relevant to a diverse work setting.

Furthermore, virtuousness promotes the moral good insofar as it gives prominence to individual and social betterment through its emphasis upon the quality of human interactions, an aspect so important to the relational nature of diversity considerations. Virtues like forgiveness, humility and compassion as valued ends in and of themselves can reduce prejudice and attenuate rigid social categorizations, thus entailing diminishing levels of stereotypical representations, in view of eliminating various sources of conflict in diverse work environments. Concomitantly, organizational virtue can affect the relationship between diversity and performance through trust and empathy formation, as well as through facilitating self-disclosure in a healthy communitarian workplace.

Framework 3. An ethics of care conception of differences

This paper also considers the importance of an ethic of care (frequently, but not entirely opposing an ethic of justice) deeply rooted in feminist social theory, moral inquiry and practice (Gilligan, 1982; see Held, 2006 for a review) and consistently applied to distinct domains of societal experience, for instance: child rearing, disability and gender, education, politics, public issues, social policy, expanding its perspective to even address ethics and power in the field of international relations (Engster, 2007; Hankivsky, 2004; Holland, 2010; Levy and Palley, 2010; Noddings, 2006; O'Brien, 2005; Robinson, 2006). An ethic of care could also be invaluable as both a specific managerial practice and an overall organizational strategy.

A stream of literature focuses on the possibility of integrating care in human resource management education (Burton and Dunn, 2005; Gabriel, 2009; Kuchinke and Hee-Young, 2005), as well as in leadership and various other areas of organizational life (Delios, 2010; Rynes *et al.*, 2012; Spiller *et al.*, 2011; Sewell and Barker, 2006; Simola *et al.*, 2010; Stensota, 2010). Interestingly, Linsley and Slack (2013) adopted an ethic of care approach to crisis management in examining the case of the Northern Rock bank, a financial institution that was found to be at the forefront during the recent financial crisis in the UK.

An ethic of care focuses on the creation and maintenance of sustainable relationships, informed by a genuine concern for the bonds that unite and connect us with other people: a caring relationship is reciprocal, one that fosters empathy (see, Slote, 2007 for a thorough discussion) and responsiveness to the concrete needs of others. As a result, people are treated not just as means, but as ends: this conception however, substantially differs from Kantian deontology in that an ethic of care does not elevate concern for the other to a universal, binding principle but embeds and construes it in a particular context of reciprocities that are shaped by the uniqueness and particularity of a given situation.

Kroth and Keeler (2009) elaborate a recursive model of managerial caring centered on behaviors that invite, advance, capacitate and connect with employees. Such managerial attitudes allow managers being receptive to, acceptive of and connect with employees, seeing in them a potential for growth, irrespective of demographic characteristics, thus helping employees advance and flourish. Such stances, if adopted, may help diminish the distance between the managers of diversity and the managed others implied in Lorbiecki and Jack (2000). A caring work environment is in a position to foster self-efficacy, dignity and empowerment of all organizational stakeholders: concomitantly, many aspects of diversity management could be grounded in care, thus taking into account the deepest manifestations of workplace diversity.

Operationalizing holistic philosophies of diversity management development*The importance of a deontological framework*

An immediate implication of Kantian deontology for managing diversity resides in the normative injunction to act in conformity to the “Golden Rule”, thus treating others just as we would like to be treated, acknowledging in others the intrinsic worthiness of every human person, irrespective of socio-demographic characteristics. As any human being, minority employees possess equal dignity, and deserve equal respect in an employment setting, thus claiming equal treatment in all the manifestations of organizational life (recruitment, performance appraisals, remuneration, promotion opportunities). Respectful treatment of social identity groups stems from this premise, and has to become an integral part not only of organizational culture, but also of managerial policies that pertain to human development. Employing both the Categorical Imperative and the Golden Rule, we provide further impetus to the proliferation and dissemination of diversity-friendly attitudes, as well as to the establishment of a diversity climate: diversity management can be framed by a deontic commitment to pursue diversity for reasons of dignity and respect, not in ways that reflect treatment of others as mere instruments conducive to organizational profitability. Such a commitment culminates in training and development programs that respect others’ autonomy and independence, thus allowing minority employees to cultivate their potential for the sake of both themselves and the organization.

The role of organizational virtue. Organizational virtue does not emerge in a social vacuum; taken for granted that Aristotle’s theory of household management can be applied to the management of modern corporations as well (Dierksmeier and Pirson, 2009), corporate virtue is embedded in the context of concrete social relationships, more specifically in that of friendship, by affecting the ethos of a business community. Friends are concerned both with their own and with each other’s well-being, caring for the happiness of one another. This is consistent with a view of management as a contextual practice based on a blend of intellectual virtues in Aristotle’s sense (Billsberry and Birnik, 2010). Moore (2009) conceives of an organization as a practice-institution combination and specifies the character of a virtuous institution by providing a set of preconditions that foster excellence in an ethically responsive and beneficial to organizational virtue environment. Members of such a community, motivated by shared values, are expected to develop practices that foster interconnectedness and enable socially beneficial interactive forms on which a non-instrumental view of diversity management could be based.

A business community in which humanity and concern for the other, influence decision-making, can be supportive of diversity attitudes that reflect a psychological safety climate, as well as the salience of shared organizational identity (cf, Rink and Ellemers, 2007). For example, Barclay *et al.* (2012) apply virtue theory to disability and other discrimination processes and underscore the importance of managerial practices employed in virtuous organizations, for effectively addressing underemployment and stigmatization of people with disabilities. Ultimately, these processes shape a unifying framework, that of civic virtue, within which fragmented social identities of heterogenous groups can be properly reconciled, and various tensions between in-group and outgroup members can be effectively resolved. Diversity is thus valued as an end in itself (Luijters *et al.*, 2008; Triana and Garcia, 2009).

The role of an ethics of care

As already noted, care ethics is not intended to advocate a set of substantial values, abstract and universal principles, or virtues insofar as it assumes a critical stance with respect to any moral ontology, the latter being unwittingly dependent upon and reflective of a particular socio-cultural context. As a result, an ethic of care is somewhat inimical to the construction of universally held moral principles given that it focuses on caring practices that emerge in and are shaped by different contexts, the latter often involving certain patterns of inequality, control or oppression.

Diversity management can be founded on such an ethical framework for at least four distinct, albeit interrelated reasons.

First and foremost, diversity management practices reflecting an ethic of care are intrinsically particularizing and inclusive, focusing not so much on abstract general principles, universal ideals or virtues (culminating, for instance, in fairness/equity systems, or in virtuous managerial and employee behaviors respectively), as on the particular and concrete needs of the diverse, unique other.

Second, caring diversity practices are contextually embedded, thus addressing very specific needs of both in-group and outgroup members in a given workplace setting; most importantly, they take into account the institutional and cultural setting in which they emerge and evolve.

Third, diversity interventions informed by caring values reflect a relational and highly interactive view of diversity management, one that fosters belongingness, connectedness, and other-regarding attitudes, the latter being so inimical to rigid social categorization.

And fourth, caring practices demonstrate a profound sense of sensitivity toward particular subjectivities, identities, personal narratives and beliefs. Accordingly, caring diversity initiatives can positively influence career trajectories and affect both advancement and subjective well-being of various social identity groups in the workplace.

Discussion

Through the preceding analysis, it has been demonstrated that comprehensive moral theories, Kantian deontology, virtue ethics and an ethic of care in particular, are in a position to not only significantly enrich diversity interventions in organizations, but also to substantially transform the content, form and objectives of diversity management. Such a transformation presupposes the fulfillment of certain criteria set forth in the introductory section of this paper, namely:

- the abandonment of an instrumental rationality underlying diversity management;
- the adoption of a contextualist perspective; and
- a process of facilitating the formulation of alternative discourses in view of employee micro-emancipation, inimical to a business case for diversity.

Not unexpectedly, and despite their rich diversity in terms of content, the critical diversity studies examined in an earlier section tend to endorse these criteria. Most importantly, advocating and elaborating ethical and moral arguments on why to engage in diversity management, appears somewhat inimical to, or incongruent with the consequentialist reasoning on, and conceptualization of diversity in business organizations. Janssens and Stayert (2012) for instance, elaborated a three-dimensional

cosmopolitan framework of ethical international HRM that abandons the predominant universalizing, neo-positivistic managerialist stance in favor of a more pluralistic conception grounded in post-colonial theoretical traditions. This epistemological choice is in a position to mitigate the tension and existing divide between prescriptive moral philosophies centered on universal principles, and descriptive ethics focusing on situated ethical practices embedded in specific contexts. From a different point of view, De Gama *et al.* (2012) contend that an ethical HRM entrenched in and articulated through the lived experiences of HR professionals, constitutes an alternative to the depersonalizing and neutralizing effects of prevailing discourses that frame the managerial alleged concern for employee welfare. In this respect, the extent to which the moral theories employed here meet these three criteria, is worthy of analytical consideration.

The pros and cons of each ethical framework

The moral theories analyzed in the paper significantly differ in the degree to which they address issues related to these three criteria. To begin with, Kantian deontology satisfactory fulfills the first criterion in that it adopts a non-utilitarian, non-consequentialist justification of diversity considerations, pertaining to an equality and inclusion approach. This justification however, seems to be devoid of context insofar as Kantian deontology is universalistic in nature, failing to adequately taking into account the specific socio-cultural context in which a diversity issue emerges, or through which social codes and stereotypes are reproduced.

Context is of paramount importance to virtue ethics; it constitutes the locus into which character is shaped, virtues are enacted and properly practiced and responsibilities are undertaken to address normative societal expectations. Virtue ethics is contingent on very specific situational demands, thus covering societal aspirations due to the fact that the moral actor is embedded in the particular community to which she/he belongs. However, this approach does not always facilitate the formation of alternative diversity discourses, more specifically in the cases in which equality has not been identified as a core virtue. In delineating its prime virtues, a virtuous organization has to necessarily value diversity and inclusion as an important priority in order to substantially enhance the position of low status minority groups: in other words, it has to prioritize pro-diversity beliefs to claim more societal legitimacy. The paper posits that an ethic of care meets the totality of the criteria required to perform a necessary shift in contemporary diversity management.

A paradigm shift in diversity management literature?

As explicitly stated in an earlier section, an ethic of care perspective significantly differs from instrumental-utilitarian approaches, at least in that care prioritizes the concrete individual needs to be addressed, and places an emphasis on relationships, not on outcomes. An ethic of care remains intrinsically contextual insofar as it embeds the relationship between care giver and recipient of care in the specific context by which it is shaped. In a work setting, caring practices may be perceived as an indication of organizational support, thus helping vulnerable groups, or individuals feel higher levels of self-esteem, making them attribute value to their self-concept and display increased organizational commitment. Institutionalized caring practices may also be interpreted as an attempt, on behalf of the organization, to mitigate power distance, thus attenuating and transforming existing power relations that have appeared as a by-product of inequality. In this respect, an ethic of care approach to diversity issues

might have been more familiar to critical diversity scholars than Aristotelian virtue ethics, or Kantian deontology.

Undoubtedly, an ethic of care embodies such a potential. Eisler (2007) claims that care ethics represent a radical shift in theory and practice, translated in a move away from rigid hierarchies of domination based on control and exclusion, to hierarchies of actualization grounded in democratic processes of partnership and collaboration: whilst the former are intentionally designed to benefit privileged groups by securing their predominance, the latter are intended to foster respect and caring for the well-being of all involved in a given relationship. Drawing an analogy between societal and organizational settings, we infer that certain managerial policies rooted in such hierarchies of domination tend to invariably impede the emergence and dissemination of mutually beneficial caring practices.

Not infrequently, caring practices are viewed as an impediment to organizational efficiency and are thus deemed irrelevant to organizational realities. Irrespective of the consequentialist nature of this argument, an ethic of care performs a critical role in substantiating a second fundamental shift, from an individualistic welfare, to a more holistic, well-being perspective. Martin (in press) argues that community-based organizations foster an ethic of care in helping migrant women view their work experiences as intertwined with, but also independent from exploitation structures through developing alternative political and economic imaginaries. Blatt (2009) argues that entrepreneurial teams facing a competitive environment should have to adopt communal schemes fostering trust, mutual obligation and team identification, thus creating relational capital based on caring about one another's needs. This perspective is further elucidated in Lawrence and Maitlis's model exploring the organizational implications of an ethic of care.

Fostering organizational change

Lawrence and Maitlis (2012) examine an ethic of care as both a practice and a value, located in concrete, enduring and emotional relationships, and enacted in discursive practices. They then identify three domains of narrative practices in work teams informed by the value of caring: the way people construct their experiences, contextualize their concomitant struggles and shape their respective future oriented stories is epitomized in belief systems that increase a team's potency as well as resiliency, collective agency and transcendent hope. Such an ontology of possibility, Lawrence and Maitlis (2012, p. 656) argue, is more likely to emerge "in organizations with structures that foster integration, with cultures that nurture trust and respect the emotional lives of members, and where members have the opportunity to become competent carers".

These remarks offer permeating insights not only on issues of business ethics and corporate social responsibility, but on diversity management as well, in a way that challenges deeply entrenched patterns and business case assumptions. Caring norms should permeate multiple levels of organizational life so as to critically affect the ways through which various stakeholders – managers, CEOs, supervisors, employees, customers – exhibit their commitment to diversity issues. For example, Boulouta (2013) found that board gender diversity significantly constrains the negative practices of corporate social performance insofar as such practices induce a stronger "empathic caring response" in gender diverse boards. Diversity managers should recognize the importance of an ethic of care for designing interventions and undertaking initiatives that foster the well-being of disadvantaged groups. Introducing diversity-friendly practices and proliferating diversity training opportunities that highly-resonate such

caring discursive practices has a potential to properly accommodate diverse biographies, narratives, experiences and subjectivities, as well as reconcile fragmented identities of unprivileged groups. Diversity interventions that embody the tenets of an ethic of care consist in contextually-oriented responsiveness through which minority members may feel empowered and valued. Diversity management is then in a position to display ethical sensitivity to the needs of vulnerable members, allow a better accommodation of differences, mitigate extreme inequality and shape a compassionate work environment through benevolent practices, thus initiating a process of sustainable change. A paradigmatic shift in diversity management perspective, advocated in this study, appears integral to a dynamic process of organizational change: informed by caring values, diversity management is critical in shaping a caring work environment, in alignment with an overall HR strategy centered on the priority of care. Such a relational perspective, involving various stakeholders and social actors and permeating multiple HR practices, is intended to overcome the managerial instrumentality, so strongly denounced by critical diversity scholarship. Above all, the organization has to instill and infuse the value of caring for the diverse other in its vision, mission and culture, thus identifying in care for identity group members the locus of their prospective well-being.

Implications for practice

The ethically-grounded diversity management practices under examination may generate various beneficial organizational and societal outcomes. Desired outcomes appear as a result of the specific content of such practices that are by nature deliberative, inclusive and non-coercive by fostering connectedness, deeply respecting differences, and affirming dignity and uniqueness of the diverse other.

In view of bridging different (macro/micro) domains in diversity research (see, Joshi *et al.*, 2011), the paper categorizes the beneficial outcomes of such ethically-founded diversity practices, and more specifically those rooted in an ethic of care, as being situated at distinct intra-organizational levels. At the organizational level, an ethically-grounded view of diversity management emerging in a caring work environment may result in:

- positive managerial expectations about the intrinsic value of diversity;
- the implementation of contextually-orientated interventions;
- an internal fit among all diversity practices adopted and consistently implemented; and
- certain processes of effectively aligning diversity management practices with other organizational systems, strategies and decisions.

At the team level, holistic philosophies of this type may as well:

- considerably eliminate stereotypic representations and reduce tensions and potential conflict both within and between different identity groups in a work setting;
- enhance wellness of minority and other vulnerable groups;
- encourage cooperation, collaborative work and mutual trust among majority and diverse employees, in view of attaining shared goals;
- and support the formation of various diversity networks.

At the individual level, a caring organization can foster diversity practices that:

- capabilities of outgroup members through holistically-structured diversity training programs;
- allow employees experiencing derogation because of their social identities, to be respected, valued as well as properly integrated in the workplace;
- effectively harmonize multiple and intersecting identities, no more considered as an impediment to career advancement and personal fulfillment; and
- identify and provide genuine opportunities for employee micro-emancipation.

Limitations of the study

The study is undoubtedly subject to certain limitations.

First and foremost, further research is needed to translate these philosophical insights into new managerial practices centered on equality and inclusion.

Second, this research draws primarily, but not exclusively on critical diversity scholarship to build a coherent argument based on an ethic of care, yet more mainstream literature can inform other research avenues; one can plausibly retort that only a business case for diversity secures sustainable outcomes, while critical diversity theory has partly failed to generate viable forms of effective diversity management in for-profit organizations.

Third, future research can resort to other ethical approaches to promote organizational discourses supportive of diversity. As already highlighted, justice theories embody a potential akin to several diversity issues. In a distributive justice framework, decisions with respect to diversity are justified if they are conducive to a fair and equitable distribution of goods, or rewards. Newbert and Stouder (2011) applied a Rawlsian perspective to an entrepreneurial context and defined justice principles to inform ethical decision making in new venture creation. In a Rawlsian framework, an unequal distribution can be maintained if it generates as many benefits as possible for the least advantaged members (low status minority group employees, in particular). A decision on diversity issues should be evaluated by its perceived fairness: diversity is supported because it is morally right to act in conformity to equity norms that compensate an afflicted identity group for perceived (symbolic and material) deprivation, as well as for an eventual loss of status.

Suggestions for future research

As already noted, the paper advances a theoretical approach in framing the discussion on the intersection of ethics and diversity, by employing distinct ethical theories that allow us to move beyond a business case perspective on diversity. In such a relatively unexplored area, further research is needed to investigate critical aspects of this endeavor. Indicatively, we may enumerate certain research questions on integrating care ethics and diversity, worthy of further examination:

- RQ1.* How caring norms influence various stakeholders' commitment to diversity?
- RQ2.* Through which mechanisms caring managerial practices facilitate minority employees' integration in the workplace and affect their career trajectories?
- RQ3.* To what extent inclusive and caring discursive practices affect the organizational commitment, organizational citizenship behavior and well-being of minority employees?

RQ4. To what extent caring practices shape beneficial outcomes for in-group, majority employees with respect to diversity considerations?

Concluding comments

As already stated, there is a rationale in pursuing a research agenda that addresses issues in which rational, utilitarian business arguments on diversity as a mere competitive advantage are confronted with the particularizing expectations, demands and aspirations of distinct identity groups. The paper is intended to provide a contextually and situationally embedded view of diversity management that challenges the rigidity of strict business imperatives. The study offers certain insights into the particular conditions that help organizations design and implement a diversity strategy facilitating thriving and flourishing of diverse others, grounded on the priority of dignity, virtue or care respectively. More specifically, an ethic of care meets the totality of the criteria required in view of transforming diversity management into a bundle of practices intended to serve not only organizational objectives, but primarily the needs of those it is expected to address.

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