

Survey on Diversity Perspectives in Austrian Organizations: A Brief Summary of Findings

Setting

Earlier this year 108 managers and employees in 70 organizations located in Austria participated in a survey on **Cultural Diversity at their Workplace**. Questions were divided into five big sections to gather information about their organization, about how they personally perceive diversity and migration, about how their organization deals with diversity, about human resource practices and about themselves. Answers were first evaluated with SPSS, a statistical software package, and then analyzed.

One of the objectives was to find out which of the diversity perspectives identified in our project based on literature and previous research might be the prevailing one in Austria. Research differentiates between **five diversity perspectives** an organization adopts and for a better understanding, these five perspectives are briefly described:

- Reinforcing homogeneity: avoiding and even resisting a diverse workforce
- Color-blind: differences are not specifically addressed; everybody is supposed to be treated as being equal.
- Fairness: Equal and fair treatment shall be supported and discrimination be avoided by specifically acknowledging social inequalities and differential treatment, e.g. because of ethnic, national and/or migration background
- Access: workforce diversity is seen as opportunity to reach new customers and understand international and local markets better.
- Integration learning: diversity is seen as a benefit that promotes understanding and learning throughout all levels of an organization.

Sample

We are pleased to have reached participants from various backgrounds thus covering a wide range of organizations according to size, industry, ownership and workforce composition and various personal profiles. Overall, **108 employees** from 70 different organizations participated. They differed in terms of age, lengths of stays abroad, gender and position. With 54 female and 45 male respondents, the gender distribution among participants was quite even.¹ 1/3 of participants were middle managers (n = 30), followed by professionals (n = 22) and top managers (n = 13), 13 participants work in diverse service, administrative and productive areas on lower job levels and 17 participants were categorized as other. Highly interesting was the fact that even if respondents predominantly came from Austria, 16 different nationalities were represented. It should also be noted that 2/3 of the participants have already stayed abroad for an average of 5 years. The age of respondents varies from 21 years old to 65 years with an average of 35 years. From the organizational point of view various industries and organizational sizes were represented. The majority of organizations came from the services sector,

¹ If numbers add not up to the total amount of participants, we did not receive the respective information from the ones missing.

including industries such as finance (n=9), entertainment (n= 10) and education (n=16) and are in private Austrian ownership (n = 38). Nonetheless an important number of organizations was also publicly held (n=17) or a multinational (n=21).

Results

→ The majority of participating organizations follow a color-blind approach.

After analyzing the diversity perspectives, it became clear that interestingly the prevailing perspective is the color-blind perspective followed by integration, access and fairness. Least of all the reinforcing homogeneity perspective is represented. This goes in line with the preferred ideology of the participants which is also the color-blind approach followed by integration, access and fairness, reinforcing homogeneity again being the least mentioned. Significant relationships between the different perspectives should be noted: The more an organization follows a color-blind approach, the less it supports a fairness approach and the more it leans towards a reinforcing homogeneity perspective. Organizations that support an integration and learning approach also support a fairness and access approach. This means: Organizations that see the benefits of learning from different perspectives due to diverse cultural background also acknowledge the necessity to specifically address issues of social inequalities and unequal treatment. All three perspectives, fairness, access and integration, ground on the importance of cultural awareness.

→ Positive attitudes towards diversity prevail.

Respondents strongly agree with the benefits of diversity and have a positive attitude towards diversity in the society, and **the more respondents saw the benefits of diversity, the more they wished for an integration perspective** followed by fairness and access. Interestingly, the older the participants, the least they saw the benefits of diversity and the more they perceived diversity as a threat. As should be expected, perceived benefits of diversity are negatively related to perceived costs. In organizations that have more subsidiaries and are perceived as more diverse, the benefits of diversity are seen more. Furthermore, in such organizations an integration and learning approach is favored. This may mean that organizations are diverse because the benefits are seen or that in diverse organizations the benefits become more obvious. Organizations, where benefits are seen less, state more reasons to reinforce homogeneity. This may mean that organizations that try to stay as homogeneous as possible do this because they don't see the benefits of diversity; or: that they are homogeneous and therefore cannot see the benefits. Either, or: a negative perspective towards diversity is likely to be reinforced in organizations that strive for homogeneity and a positive perspective is likely to get encouraged in organizations that aim at learning and integration.

→ Industry and ownership make a difference.

With regard to industry and ownership, a few interesting points could be noted. For example, there is a significant difference between the different industries regarding the perception of benefits: **community services, education and public administration see the benefits the most** while electricity, gas and manufacturing see them the least. It also depends on the industry if an organization is diverse: community services, entertainment and consulting services are perceived as very diverse. With regard to ownership of the organizations we remarked that there also is a significant difference between the different types of ownerships and their perceived benefits as well as their perceived cost of diversity. It was interesting that perceived diversity was particularly high in

international NGO's. Industry was not important with regard to the diversity perspective an organization had, but ownership was. The three perspectives on integration and learning, access and fairness could be found the most in international NGO's where the unique cultural background is considered. A color-blind perspective was mostly present in private international businesses.

➔ The perspective matters when it comes to implementing diversity management practices.

We also assessed whether or not diversity management (DM) practices such as intercultural training, diversity workshops, language courses, multicultural work groups or diversity task forces were available in the organizations. We found out that the **integration perspective is positively linked with the availability of intercultural trainings and an overall higher amount of diversity management practices**. There were significant differences with regard to the dominant perspective: Intercultural training could be found the least in organizations that reinforced homogeneity and the most that aimed at fairness. According to our answers most of the organizations have implemented one of the mentioned diversity management measures, and on average three. The measures most frequently mentioned were formalized recruitment and selection followed by multicultural workgroups and coaching. The least used measures interestingly appeared to be the implementation of diversity workshops and implemented overall goals. The focus of organizational goals mainly lay in dealing with gender, age, sexual orientation and disability diversity, only then followed by world view and nationality.

➔ Ownership matters when it comes to the implementation of diversity management practices.

Last but not least, findings regarding the link between diversity management and organizational information proved to be interesting. More diversity management practices could be found in larger organizations with a higher percentage of foreign employees, a higher perceived diversity and more subsidiaries (regardless the number of countries). The industry the organization is in has no influence on the implementation of diversity management measures, ownership however has. **International NGP's have significantly more DM measures implemented**. The more an organization has adopted an integration, fairness and access perspective, the more DM measures are implemented and the more benefits of diversity are seen.

We want to thank all participants for being so open to share their experiences and viewpoints with us!

Dr. Astrid Podsiadlowski
Principal Researcher