



## Diversity approaches and gender mainstreaming

In the last few years, "diversity" - a term that has been used in a number of different international contexts - has been increasingly adopted in gender-political debates. "There are a number of reasons why a standard definition or comprehension of diversity is barely possible. To this day, neither academics nor trainees have been able to achieve a comprehensive [common, editor's note] understanding of diversity and managing diversity (...) Due to the many diverse interest groups and participants, the discussion about diversity has developed into a complex and confusing bundle of opinions and views."<sup>1</sup> However, for gender mainstreaming players it is important to develop a clear position to diversity because managing diversity is being treated as an alternative to gender mainstreaming – especially in the private sector.

We understand "diversity" as the diversity where people differ or resemble one another, therefore the sum of differences and similarities. The focus is on the individual differences of the persons. The degree of this diversity can include many different dimensions, for example age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and physical abilities. If "diversity" in corporations is to be used for economic or personnel policy, a corresponding concept on the part of the management will be required with regard to how this diversity can be dealt with. It's about "experiencing, understanding, appreciating and last but not least, optimal management of the existing diversity and the potential similarities."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, managing diversity works with a very wide definition of multiculturalism that, for example, includes dimensions such as ethnic origin, skin colour, gender, religion, age, physical ability or sexual orientation (see chart on the next page).

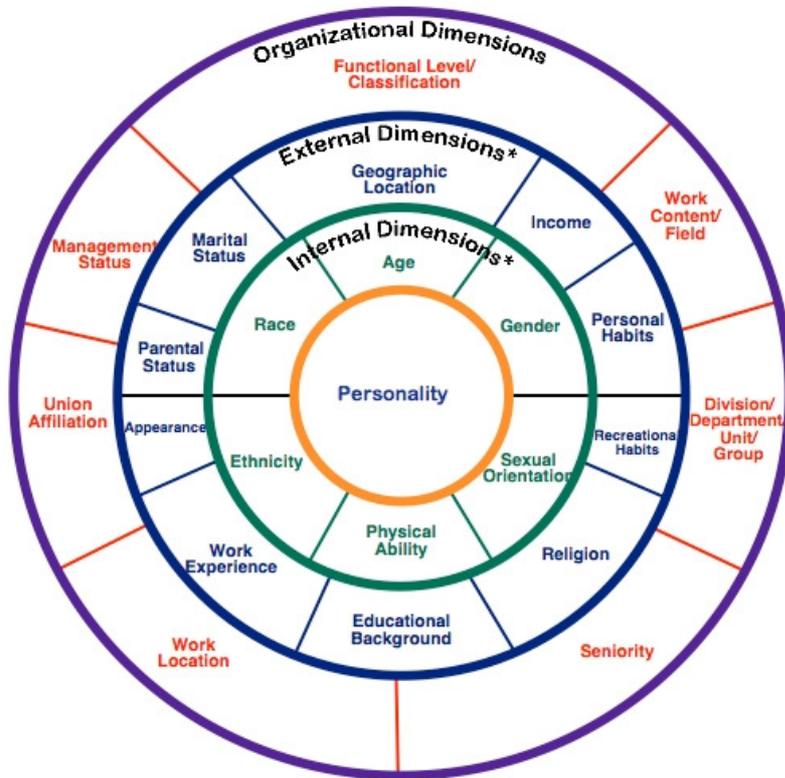
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<sup>1</sup> cf. Sepehri/Wagner 2002.

<sup>2</sup>ib.



### The four levels of diversity



Gardenswartz/Rowe 2003: Diverse Teams at Work, SHRM, Alexandria, Virginia, USA<sup>3</sup>

Individuals are not isolated; they are examined in their respective social context instead. This concept of multiculturalism includes the fact that members of a social group respectively share their own community of values and have developed corresponding communication and interaction patterns that link them. The aim of the

managing diversity approach is a change of perspective: members of different groups ought to respectively be able to put themselves in the position of the other group. This can be achieved by raising awareness, appreciation and openness for the diversity of lifestyles and opinions.

The management principle "diversity" not only means taking previously under-represented or disadvantaged groups, for example women, elderly people, disabled people, migrants etc. in the personnel and business policies equally into account, they must also be actively incorporated. Openness and consequential reasoning in diversity is the core issue.

In Germany, many people are of the opinion that equality and equal treatment lead to justice. In contrast, the diversity approach is based on the view that people are different and accordingly, ought to be treated differently without however establishing hierarchies or inequalities.

Managing diversity wants to integrate the diversity of life and work experiences, views and values in working life. As a human resource development strategy, it is aimed at systematically perceiving and consciously acknowledging this diversity, and deriving a benefit

<sup>3</sup> We would put 'gender' at the centre of this graph instead of 'personality', because in our opinion gender is the more structure-effective category.

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from it for the corporation: for example, on the personnel level, but also through specific, customised product marketing. In our counselling concept, managing diversity is allocated to the personnel level, and affects the expert context in particular.

It can be useful to combine managing diversity and gender mainstreaming, because they have similarities that are not insignificant:

- Both are based on a differentiated perception, but "gender" first defines gender as the more structure-effective category and then differentiates according to ethnic affiliation or background, sexual orientation, social rank position, ability or disability;
- Both specify social structures that shape people;
- Both can be effective against discrimination.

But there are also significant differences in the existing practice:

- Gender mainstreaming is not only aimed at modernisation, but primarily at the gender equality of women and men in their diversity. In contrast, managing diversity puts the economic benefit clearly in the foreground;
- As opposed to gender mainstreaming, managing diversity is not always clearly directed against discrimination;
- Managing diversity orients itself mainly towards the demands of economy and the objectives of corporations, whereas gender mainstreaming can influence and change these objectives;
- Managing diversity is not generally understood as a common task, whereas gender mainstreaming treats the systematic acknowledgement of diversity, as well as orientation with gender equality as everyone's task.<sup>4</sup>

For us, gender mainstreaming and managing diversity are not contradictory. Common approaches are found especially when (socio-)political dimensions are included, and the anti-discriminatory perspectives of managing diversity are combined with the gender-related criticism of hegemonic structures and the construction mechanisms of control and dominance. "If the social category gender is not seen exclusively, but relatively in relation to social differentiation (age, rank, religion, etc.), then men and women appear in various constellations of equality and inequality."<sup>5</sup> This corresponds to our definition of gender in its diversity (gender diversity) and the affiliation on the various advisory levels. However, we want to emphasise that we regard gender as the most significant structure-effective category.

A look at diversity that disregards or neglects gender will never fully take effect.

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<sup>4</sup> cf. [www.gender-mainstreaming.net/gm/Wissensnetz/ziele,did=16586.html](http://www.gender-mainstreaming.net/gm/Wissensnetz/ziele,did=16586.html)

<sup>5</sup> cf. [www.migration-boell.de/web/diversity/48\\_282.htm](http://www.migration-boell.de/web/diversity/48_282.htm)