Understanding Diversity Management in the UK

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Abstract Having originated in the USA in the 1980s, diversity is now a discourse and policy paradigm with global reach. This chapter discusses the theoretical and practical shape that diversity management has taken within the UK context. It charts the shift from equality to diversity and examines what this has meant for selected stakeholders, as well as considering how the corporate world has engaged with the diversity concept and how the British legal context has impacted upon policy. Despite depending on business case arguments, some organisations are positioning their diversity efforts within the CSR space, which the chapter concludes will be a real test of organisational commitment.

1 Introduction

Diversity is now a discourse and policy paradigm with global reach. The concept originated in the USA in the 1980s and was essentially a neo-liberal response to simmering political and public backlash to affirmative action introduced under the Civil Rights Act 1964. The Civil Rights Act represented legal recognition of the legacy of slavery and racial segregation in the USA, and affirmative action required employers to take positive steps to end discrimination against African Americans (and women and other minorities) and also to implement proactive programmes to hire, train and promote people from historically disadvantaged groups. Affirmative action met with much controversy and was totally opposed by the Republican Ronald Reagan-led administration 1981–1989. Diversity management, on the

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other hand, was far more business-friendly and urged organisations to embrace diversity voluntarily for the sake of corporate performance and competitive advantage. While it is true to say that the diversity concept was 'exported' to the UK, it met with a different sociopolitical-legal context, which influenced how it translated into policy within UK organisations (Greene and Kirton 2009).

In the UK, the turn to diversity management occurred around the mid-1990s, and in addition to elements imported from the US model, it also has local antecedents in equality theorising, equality laws and organisational equal opportunities policies and practices dating back to the late 1970s. We argue that it is important to be aware of these somewhat different antecedents in order to understand the shape that diversity management has taken within the UK context. The change in language from equality to diversity certainly signalled a shift in both theory and practice in the UK, and the spread and substance of the diversity concept has been the subject of much debate among scholars and of varied responses among organisations and practitioners. In particular, many UK academics have subjected the centrality of the business case within the concept of diversity management to trenchant critique; they place great value on the social justice case within the equal opportunities paradigm and many feel that diversity is a retrograde step. Noon (2007) described the business case as a 'fatal flaw' of diversity management. By way of contribution to the critique of diversity management, we have argued in earlier work for ethical business practice to be on the list of possible organisational advantages of diversity in order to broaden the business case from the narrow bottom-line performance/ profit issues that are frequently cited as benefits. In addition, we have called for multiple stakeholders to be involved in organisational diversity management including employees and their (union and non-union) representatives (Greene and Kirton 2009). These arguments are particularly important if we are to think about diversity management as belonging in the corporate social responsibility (CSR) space.

This chapter looks at how we can understand the theory and practice of diversity management in the UK in the light of the concept's theoretical and practical antecedents, its evolution as a policy approach and the opportunities and constraints of the British legal context. As part of this discussion, the chapter also reflects on the perspectives of a range of internal organisational stakeholders in relation to diversity management.

2   From Equality to Diversity: Theory and Practice in the UK

From the mid-1970s, equal opportunities policies with social justice as their core aim gradually spread across organisations following the introduction of legislation covering employment equality (Equal Pay Act 1970, Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Race Relations Act 1976). By the early 1990s, around three quarters of large

organisations had an equal opportunities policy. The early focus of equal opportunities policies was on combatting discrimination on grounds of sex and race especially at the hiring stage and in selection for promotion. More progressive and proactive organisations, particularly in the public sector, soon started to add other grounds of discrimination to their policy statements/aims including disability, sexual orientation and age. Many organisations and groups associated with the feminist and anti-racist movements were initially enthusiastic about the prospects for progress on tackling inequalities that equal opportunities policies heralded. While they acknowledged that the combination of legislation and organisational policies had removed some of the more overt forms of discrimination, the slow pace of deeper change within the equal opportunities policy paradigm soon disappointed (Cockburn 1989, 1991). This resulted in a mounting critique of policy and practice, with equality activists highlighting continuing inequalities such as the gender pay gap, the ethnic pay penalty, gender segregation, ethnic segmentation, etc. This all seemed to add up to the failure of equal opportunities policies to eliminate the discriminatory processes endemic in the labour market and organisations.

Academics Jewson and Mason (1986) argued that a large part of the problem was the failure of various participants in the policy-making process to articulate a clear conception of equality. This conceptual vacuum was leading to confusion, hostility, disappointment, mistrust and loss of faith among them as they attempted to negotiate and reach consensus on practical equality strategies and practices. The deflated mood surrounding equal opportunities in the early 1990s in turn helps us to understand why for some the time seemed right for a 'new approach' (diversity management discussed below).

Jewson and Mason (ibid) set out, in what has become a seminal article, two very different philosophical conceptions of equal opportunities policies—the liberal approach and the radical approach—which they identified in the course of research on the development of equal opportunities policies in the public and private sectors. These two equality paradigms help us to understand why equal opportunities policies failed to live up to the optimistic expectations of some, plus why they failed to convince others of the need for policy action.

Jewson and Mason (1986) describe the elements of equal opportunities policies (principles, implementation, effectiveness and perceptions) according to the liberal and radical conceptions. The principle of the liberal conception is fair procedures (generally meaning that everyone is treated the same); implementation is achieved through bureaucratisation of decision-making (e.g. the use of transparent and formalised recruitment and selection methods). Maximum effectiveness is obtained through positive action (which promotes free and equal competition among individuals); perceptions are concerned with whether justice is seen to be done (i.e. whether the workforce regards the policies as fair). The liberal conception of equality became the dominant influence on British equality laws and on organisational equal opportunities policies, which in practice did little more than require employers to commit to a principle of non-discrimination and to take steps to prevent overt discrimination. Thus, while it is widely believed that the enacted

laws and policies achieved a degree of success in tackling the most overt forms of discrimination, critics argued that they failed to achieve the much needed deep changes in the gendered and racialised structures of the labour market and organisations (Cockburn 1991; Liff 1997; Webb 1997). The main problem is that in terms of principles, implementation, effectiveness and perceptions, the liberal conception of equality is really only concerned with procedures (and procedural justice) rather than outcomes (and distributive justice). Therefore, to this extent, it could never meet the objectives of equality activists who wanted to see substantive change in what Jewson and Mason would call occupational rewards (good jobs, pay, training etc.).

In contrast, the radical conception of equal opportunities has outcomes and social change at its heart. The principle of the radical approach is fair distribution of (occupational) rewards (e.g. closure of pay gaps, breakdown of gendered and racialised organisational hierarchies). Implementation of equal opportunities policies is achieved through politicisation of decision-making (promotion of 'correct'—e.g. anti-racist and antisexist—ideological consciousness). Maximum effectiveness can only be achieved through the use of positive discrimination (e.g. the use of quotas for under-represented groups); perceptions are concerned with consciousness raising about deprivation, disadvantage and exploitation (e.g. via training). Jewson and Mason (1986) highlight that those who wished to adopt a radical conception of equality were thwarted in their actions by the fact that positive discrimination was not permissible in British equality law. Other commentators argue that there was, and is, little appetite for radical equality measures (which give preferential treatment to under-represented groups) among equality policy-makers or employers who preferred/prefer the long game of waiting for the principles and implementation of the liberal approach to change the landscape.

Over time, radical equality activists lost faith in the capacity of equal opportunities policies to deliver equality of outcome, and at the same time, the policies attracted criticism from some politicians and employers for being overly bureaucratic and failing to meet business needs. Against this waning confidence from many sides in equal opportunities policies, Rajvinder Kandola and Johanna Fullerton's book *Managing the Mosaic: Diversity in Action*—first published in 1994 by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development—can be credited with putting the diversity concept firmly on the map among UK practitioners and organisations. Their stated hope was that the book would provide a 'starting point' for a re-evaluation of the work that had been done in the name of equal opportunities, but also provide a chance for 'a new start' (Kandola and Fullerton 1994: 2). Since the book's publication, there has certainly been much re-evaluation of equal opportunities theory, policy and practice, but whether or not diversity management has ended up providing the new start Kandola and Fullerton had hoped for is a moot point, which we will come back to later.

As a starting point for the discussion of what diversity management is, Kandola and Fullerton (1994: 8) provided a definition:

> The basic concept of managing diversity accepts that the workforce consists of visible and non-visible differences which include factors such as sex, age, background, race, disability, personality and work style. It is founded on the premise that harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everybody feels valued, where their talents are being fully utilized and in which organizational goals are met.

Working with this definition, Greene and Kirton (2009: 33) outline four main components of diversity management, which imply differences between principles, implementation, effectiveness and perceptions of diversity management compared with those of equal opportunities described earlier. Firstly, diversity management advocates a systemic or cultural transformation of organisations (rather than a reliance on legal regulation and bureaucratic procedures as found in equal opportunities) in order to achieve the 'productive environment' where everyone feels valued. Secondly, diversity management invokes positive imagery and celebratory rhetoric to persuade organisational actors of the value of workforce diversity of all types. This is in contrast to the more negative connotations of equal opportunities with the emphasis on discrimination and the penalties organisations potentially face within equality law for discriminating unfairly. Thirdly, diversity management policies and practices are justified by reference to the business case for diversity—how workforce diversity contributes to accomplishment of organisational goals—rather than by reference to legal compulsion or the social justice case as in equal opportunities. Fourthly, diversity management includes a broad range of individual as well as the social group-based differences included in equal opportunities, all of which are meant to be addressed by diversity policies.

Taking each of these components of diversity management in turn, there are substantial criticisms of the diversity management paradigm found in the literature. Research has demonstrated that the first component, requiring organisational *cultural transformation*, is much easier said than done. Webb (1997), for example, found in her in-depth case study of a major UK organisation that diversity policies failed to challenge the structure and culture of the organisation. In terms of how to achieve cultural change, the diversity concept sees line managers as crucial and as critical to the success of diversity policies generally (Schneider 2001). However, many studies have found line managers reluctant to give priority to diversity issues either because they have other more pressing goals or because they fear diversity will be nothing more than a passing fad and therefore a waste of effort (Cornelius et al. 2000; Greene and Kirton 2009; Maxwell et al. 2001). The second component, *positive images and celebratory rhetoric*, may be nothing more than a thin veneer behind which might lie a very different reality where organisations' employment practices show little real commitment to valuing diversity, but instead exploit employee differences as and when required for organisational gain (Greene and Kirton 2009; Kirton 2008; Noon 2007). Further, it is argued in the literature that highlighting diversity among employees might backfire by reinforcing stereotypes, which sometimes end up branding certain people as suitable only for certain jobs/roles/tasks, thus perpetuating the disadvantage they already face. The third component, *the business case for diversity* as a foundation for policy and practice, is much criticised. The main concern is that if there is no complementary recourse to a

broader social justice or moral case beyond direct and quantifiable organisational benefits, then the diversity paradigm may end up ignoring deep-seated discrimination and inequalities (Kaler 2001; Kirton 2008; Noon 2007; Webb 1997). Questions critics ask include what happens in times of economic downturn: will difference/diversity still be valued? What happens if a leap of faith is necessary because no one can actually *prove* a return on investment in diversity? What happens if the nature of the firm and its markets simply means that employee diversity does not add value? In any or all of these possible circumstances, will organisations still have the same commitment to diversity? Coming to the fourth component, the idea of including individual as well as group-based differences in some ways might appeal to our intuitive sense of individuality. However, critics argue that not all differences are equally consequential for career chances or for creating employment gaps/inequalities—in this respect group-based differences such as gender and race/ethnicity are far more consequential than most individual differences. Thus, diversity as a concept has the capacity to gloss over systemic inequalities and does little to tackle them if the logic and principles of the concept underpin policy and practice (Kirton and Greene 2016).

Still, even with these criticisms, it is widely accepted that there has been a shift in theory, but what has it meant for policy and practice? More than a decade ago, it was already observed that over 80 % of UK companies were using the term 'diversity' on their corporate websites (Point and Singh 2003), and it seems from more recent literature that the language of diversity has kept a firm hold. The latest available evidence for the UK indicates that formal equality and diversity policies are now almost universal in the public sector, covering 99 % of workplaces and widespread in the private sector, covering 74 % (van Wanrooy et al. 2013). It is worth noting that the survey (WERS—Workplace Employment Relations Survey 2011) that van Wanrooy et al.'s evidence is based on does not distinguish between 'equality' and 'diversity' policies, which is not simply a matter of semantics, but is actually quite instructive about the content of policies, as they have developed in the UK. In fact, when it comes to actual policy initiatives, one contention repeatedly asserted in the literature is that the shift in theory and language from equality to diversity has not resulted in very much substantive change (Kirton and Greene 2016). Commentators frequently observe that policy initiatives long associated with the equal opportunities paradigm are still present in diversity management policies. For example, a *Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development* (CIPD) report notes that the most common organisational policy initiatives focus on ensuring fair and equal treatment in interviews and assessment; grievance procedures for handling bullying, harassment and discrimination; and raising awareness of equality and diversity via training and development (CIPD 2012). These are all procedures and initiatives that we used to find in the equal opportunities policies of the 1980s and early 1990s without the rhetoric of the business case for diversity being so prominent. Similarly, guidance for employers—*Delivering Equality and Diversity*—published in 2014 by the *Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service* (ACAS) sets out eight key issues that a policy should cover: recruitment and induction, training and development, promotion, discipline and grievances, equal

pay, bullying and harassment, adapting working practices and flexible working. Again, we would have expected all of these to be included in an equal opportunities policy, so it seems that there is not much policy innovation to comment upon, rather this all suggests that the moment for a new start has not yet arrived in the UK or perhaps has not been seized by organisations. In addition, the majority of written policies still appear to cover gender, ethnicity, disability, religion and belief, age and sexual orientation—it is of course noteworthy that these are all characteristics protected by British legislation (van Wanrooy et al. 2013). This suggests that employers are still writing their equality and diversity policies in accordance with equality law rather than policies reflecting their own individual business cases. From an equalities perspective, this is not necessarily something to lament because there is still plenty of work for employers to do towards improving equality of treatment and outcome.

However, there are some signs of change in policy-making that reflect the conceptual shift to diversity. With regard to ownership of organisational diversity policies, in research we carried out in 2004–2006, we found that some UK organisations were beginning to rethink the links between diversity management and business strategy and were starting to locate their diversity work within CSR rather than in the HR function where equal opportunities work had traditionally occurred (Greene and Kirton 2009). What this change might bring is uncertain. On the plus side, it potentially creates opportunities for an expanded and more holistic agenda beyond employment conditions and employee rights to include such issues as service delivery and 'customer' diversity, supplier diversity, outreach work with local communities and stakeholders, reputation-building initiatives, etc. We found that many organisational diversity practitioners supported this shift and the expanded agenda that did or might come with it. But equally we heard critical opinions from equality and diversity campaigners and from trade unionists, both of which groups were gravely concerned about organisations losing focus on workplace inequalities in favour of more externally oriented diversity work that might help to build a good corporate image. Indeed, the most critical were concerned that equality work had morphed into a PR campaign (Greene and Kirton 2009; Kirton and Greene 2006). In any case, it seems that the transfer of diversity responsibility into CSR has been fairly limited. A report based on a global survey by the US-based Society for Human Resource Management found that only 6 % of organisations gave responsibility for diversity to the head of CSR. In 59 % of firms, the responsibility lies with the HR director (SHRM 2009). Further, more than two decades after Kandola and Fullerton (1994) heralded diversity management as a new start, there is still no solid evidence that diversity policies are any more successful than equal opportunities in terms of achieving positive cultural change and creating workplaces where the skills and talents of all are valued.

3   Legal Context: Impact on Diversity Management

Even amid the conceptual shift to diversity and with it the voluntaristic principle of the business case, employers must still comply with equality law. As stated above, a liberal concept of equality as defined by Jewson and Mason (1986) has characterised British[1] equality law from its inception in the 1970s to the Equality Act 2010. Within the current iteration of equality legislation, the Equality Act 2010, gender, race/ethnicity, religion, age, disability and sexual orientation are all 'protected characteristics', and the law is constructed around the principles of non-discrimination and 'no less favourable treatment' than a comparator group (e.g. women compared with men). In the main, at least in the case of private-sector employers, these principles require very little policy action, which is something that has long been a criticism of the law (e.g. Dickens 1997). Hoque and Noon (2004), for example, discussed how many employers had equality policies that were little more than 'empty shells'—a formal declaration of commitment to equality and diversity—but few practical policies and initiatives that would help to achieve either equality of treatment or outcome.

With regard to the point made earlier that the emergence of diversity management to some extent reflects backlash against the duties of employers within equality law, an important point to emphasise is that the controversial US-style affirmative action has never been, and is currently not, permissible within British equality law. Thus although in the USA, it is widely accepted that the diversity management concept first took off around the mid-1980s in a context of growing political and popular backlash against affirmative action legislation and policies, there was not the same level of antipathy among employers or the general public for the weaker laws that existed in Britain. However, there was general employer hostility to employment regulation that deepened during the years of Conservative government (1979–1997), which resurfaced under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government (2010–2015), and continues under the Conservatives (2015–present). For example, the Equality Act was included in the coalition government's 2011 Red Tape Challenge—a public consultation to help the government identify 'unnecessary' regulation with the objective of repealing such. Among other equality campaigning groups, the national network, Equality and Diversity Forum[2] strongly objected to the positioning of equality legislation as 'red tape' and responded to the consultation with concern:

> At EDF's most recent meeting, we discussed the Government's new Red Tape Challenge website, which canvases views on repealing the 2010 Equality Act. EDF's members have

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[1]The equality legislation referred to in this chapter applies to England, Scotland and Wales. There is a separate statutory framework in Northern Ireland.

[2]The Equality and Diversity Forum (EDF) is a network of national organisations committed to equal opportunities, social justice, good community relations, respect for human rights and an end to discrimination based on age, disability, gender and gender identity, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation. Its members are national non-governmental organisations.

asked me to write to you to express their surprise and their deep concern that serious consideration appears to be being given to repealing the 2010 Equality Act, only a year after it was passed with broad all party support. (Letter to the Prime Minister from Equality and Diversity Forum—http://www.edf.org.uk/—dated 03/05/2011)

The Equality Act was not in the end repealed as an outcome of the Red Tape Challenge, but the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government and the Conservative government that followed certainly diluted it in several significant ways compared to its original drafting prior to 2010 under the Labour government. The abandonment of compulsory equal pay audits and equality impact assessments are of particular concern in terms of consequences for using the law to achieve equal outcomes. With regard to equal pay audits, the government introduced instead a voluntary initiative in 2011. The *Think, Act, Report Initiative* (https://www.gov.uk/think-act-report) is described as a business-led campaign for equal pay for women to which employers can sign up. The latest available report on the initiative revealed that while more than 200 firms had signed up, only four had published their gender pay gap and only two of those included details for different pay grades (which was the aim of the campaign) (GEO 2013). This evidence does nothing to reassure equality advocates that employers see a business case for gender *equality* even if they employ plenty of women, and it seems to confirm the critical view expressed by many that voluntary action is an inadequate basis for the pursuit of equality (e.g. Dickens 2007). The abandonment of equality impact assessments is also a lost opportunity to force employers to evaluate how various organisational changes might affect different groups in different ways that could result in creating new inequalities or reinforcing old ones.

Interestingly though, while affirmative action policies have lost ground in the USA, positive action in the UK has been slightly strengthened by the Equality Act 2010. Many commentators originally heralded the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) as a major improvement in British equality legislation. The PSED meant the law would go beyond giving individuals rights not to be discriminated against, to giving some responsibilities to public-sector organisations for promoting equality. It has three key elements: (1) eliminating discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act; (2) advancing equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant characteristic and persons who do not share it; and (3) fostering good relations between persons who share a relevant characteristic and persons who do not share it (Hepple 2010: 18). The implementation gap that now marks the PSED is that the key instrument for proactively identifying inequalities (equality impact assessments) no longer exists as a requirement of the Act. However, one important provision remains. Under certain specific conditions, the PSED allows priority (e.g. in hiring situations) to be given to people with a protected characteristic if they (a) are at a disadvantage, (b) have particular needs or (c) are under-represented in an activity or type of work. This can be categorised as an example of *strong* positive action, while not amounting to the more controversial affirmative action (Kirton and Greene 2016).

As the Equality Act and PSED are relatively new, it is difficult to assess their impact on the content of organisational diversity management policies or ultimately

on equality and diversity outcomes in workplaces. While this most recent iteration of equality law is something of a departure from the liberal traditions of British equality law, the removal of key provisions discussed dilutes the potential transformative effects. Thus, it does not take a cynic to argue that current British equality legislation poses no serious challenge to the voluntaristic principle of diversity management even though the need to comply with the duty to protect against discrimination inevitably has some influence on policies.

4   Equality and Diversity Stakeholders

When looking at diversity management from a CSR perspective, it is particularly apposite to consider the standpoints of multiple internal organisational stakeholders—do they draw on social justice and ethical arguments for equality and diversity, or do they rely on the business case? In this section, we briefly discuss the perspectives of three internal stakeholder groups whose remit involves some kind of diversity management work.

4.1   Diversity Champions and Specialists

Diversity champion and specialist are two roles, which contain some specific diversity management work developing, advising on and promoting organisational policies and initiatives. The diversity champion role is usually a voluntary one taken by middle or senior managers in addition to their normal work. Diversity specialists[3] are people whose job is largely dedicated to diversity work, and typically, they will work in the HR or (less frequently) CSR department of large public- and private-sector organisations.

   Diversity champions usually sit on any kind of diversity board or forum that exists, but beyond that, the role is usually rather fuzzy: they are there to promote the benefits of diversity in their area of the organisation and beyond. People who act as organisational diversity champions often volunteer for the role out of a general desire to contribute to organisational life beyond immediate operational goals and out of a strong sense of citizenship. In our research (Greene and Kirton 2009), they were often involved in community or charitable groups in their spare time. We also found that diversity champions sometimes had some kind of personal diversity experience outside of the workplace, for example, a disabled child in the family, a gay sibling or eldercare responsibilities. Such experiences had sensitised some to diversity issues and to the vulnerabilities that some people face. As managers, the

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[3]Other possible job titles include diversity manager, diversity officer or diversity adviser; sometimes the job title includes equality.

champions had a keen sense of fairness, but there was a reluctance to acknowledge the existence of organisational inequalities, and their primary concerns were in tune with the business case for diversity.

Diversity specialists take the main responsibility for organisational diversity work. Looking back to the era of equal opportunities policies, it is argued that the characteristics of people who did equality work in mainstream organisations were rather different to those we see doing diversity work today (Kirton and Greene 2009). At that time, specialist equality officers typically came from leftist community/political activist backgrounds and were often women and/or black and minority ethnic (BME) people involved in feminist or anti-racist groups campaigning for social justice (see Jewson and Mason 1986; Cockburn 1991; Jones et al. 2000). While research (e.g. Kirton and Greene 2009) on the new generation of diversity specialists has found that they are still most typically women or if not, BME men, their career biographies are often very different from the former equality officers. From our study (Greene and Kirton 2009), we found that only a small minority of diversity specialists had a history of equality activism in the wider community/ environment. They were more likely to have a generic human resources or business background, and often they stepped into their diversity role internally after having spent significant periods in various functions of the organisation. While they all had responsibility for employment matters, many utilised their business experience to work on diversity in relation to service delivery and wider outreach work beyond the organisation.

We concluded that most of the diversity practitioners in the study seemed to think like business managers attempting to deliver value added, or like CSR managers concerned with corporate reputation, rather than like equality activists/ campaigners concerned with social justice and employee rights. This of course does not mean that social justice did not figure in their thinking at all, but we did detect a low level of politicisation of inequalities, a strong belief in shared management and employee interests, together with faith that the business case for diversity could create an inclusive workplace culture. We argue that consequently there does now seem to be less of a place in diversity work for people whose *primary* aim is to pursue a progressive social justice agenda (Kirton and Greene 2009). Thus, the shift to the concept of diversity has influenced how practitioners understand and carry out the work associated with it. However, the break with the past is not complete, and there are still indications that UK diversity practitioners continue to do at least some diversity work beyond the business case or perhaps within an expanded vision of the business case. This could include business ethics and CSR, which would resonate with at least some of the foci of equal opportunities such as attempting to achieve inclusion of historically disadvantaged groups (Greene and Kirton 2009; Liff and Dickens 2000).

4.2 Line Managers

Within diversity management theory, line managers have a critical role to play in policy implementation, as they are the ones who will enable organisations to seize the benefits of diversity (Kandola and Fullerton 1994). Line managers are also the ones who have the greatest influence on the equality and diversity workplace climate, which people experience on an everyday basis. Therefore, if managers do not buy into the aims and principles of the diversity policy, effective implementation cannot be achieved (Greene and Kirton 2009).

In practice, however, line management involvement seems to prove more challenging, partly because of the complex legal context, which managers often regard as a minefield. Recent evidence was that over half (57 %) of managers would consult other managers elsewhere before taking any action over an equality or diversity issue for fear of doing something illegal (van Wanrooy et al. 2013: 52). Another study identified the analytical muddle faced by managers: for some, taking responsibility for diversity management meant taking account of the needs and preferences of all individuals; for others it meant recognising and accommodating social group-based differences; and for still others it meant ignoring differences and treating everyone the same (Foster and Harris 2005). Similarly, in our research we identified a lack of understanding about what a diversity management policy means for managerial practice, and therefore many managers were failing to engage with the policy until and unless an issue cropped up (e.g. a complaint of discrimination or unfair treatment) (Greene and Kirton 2009). Some research has argued that line managers find it difficult to see what the specific and measurable benefits of diversity would be within their areas. They are therefore unwilling to invest the time in thinking about it or they might be unwilling to take the risk of getting more diversity in their workgroups in case it should prove disruptive especially in the short term (Kirton 2008; Noon 2007). Schneider and Northcraft (1999) called this the 'dilemma of managerial participation' in diversity management. They found that line managers were reluctant to engage with diversity management because the costs and disadvantages of doing so appear certain and immediate, while the benefits appear to take a long time to develop. Thus, while in theory line managers are internal diversity stakeholders in practice, most organisations do not seem to have disseminated arguments that are persuasive enough to get them on board with a proactive diversity agenda.

4.3 Trade Unions

Unions have a long tradition of fighting for social justice and fair treatment of workers, and unionised workplaces, often nowadays in the public sector, usually have more progressive equality and diversity policies and better working conditions (Dickens et al. 1988; Colling and Dickens 2001; Kersley et al. 2006; Greene and

Kirton (2009). However, unions are usually absent in the rhetoric of diversity management, and the organisations which advocates of the concept of diversity hold up as exemplars are usually non-union (Kandola and Fullerton 1994). Diversity management is essentially a unitarist management approach, which typically emphasises organisational vision, top management commitment and downward communication of diversity objectives. This stands in contrast to the pluralist equal opportunities paradigm and ideal model of equal opportunities practice advocated by some academics, in which trade unions are seen as a vital piece of the jigsaw making up the workplace equality project (Dickens 1997).

Our study of union responses to diversity management found that trade union equality officers were suspicious of the business-driven motives of the paradigm. Their concern was that the new policy paradigm might prove harmful to tackling discrimination and inequalities because of the way that employee rights are less prominent and the emphasis is instead on employees as organisational resources. However, interestingly some believed that it was possible to talk the language of the business case for diversity with organisations, while continuing to push 'old' equality issues. For example, some unions were arguing that the existence of discrimination and harassment is bad for business because it damages corporate reputation and deters the most talented workers (Kirton and Greene 2006). In this sense, the union officers were pushing for an expanded concept of the business case to include CSR and ethical matters, recognising the false dilemma implied by the juxtaposition of the social justice case and the business case (Liff and Dickens 2000). However, in our research involving many unionised organisations, we did find evidence of union exclusion or marginalisation from the diversity management conversation (Greene and Kirton 2009). This is obviously a concern if unionised organisations want their diversity efforts to be taken seriously within the CSR space.

5   Conclusion

Despite originally arriving from the USA, it is important to acknowledge that as a policy approach, diversity has rather different antecedents in the UK, which have since influenced its trajectory and substance in practice. Nevertheless, like in the USA, UK-based organisations often use celebratory rhetoric and metaphors in their diversity statements, making the policies sound far more positive than equal opportunities policies where the emphasis was on preventing discrimination. This positivity at least in part explains the continuing prevalence of the diversity concept: it fits with corporate image-building strategies.

There are some signs that (in large global organisations at least) diversity management is being repositioned within the CSR space, and future research could usefully evaluate the uncertain outcomes of this development. One issue to consider would be whether the CSR space might offer more scope for (re)inclusion of multiple internal stakeholders whose involvement we discussed here. However,

the field of human resource management has long had a commitment to non-discrimination and compliance with equality law, so whether abstract ethical arguments will prove positive for the equality and diversity agenda remains to be seen. Kaler (2001: 60) comments that 'under certain pressing conditions, there will always be much to lose from being ethical and much to gain from being unethical'; therefore conceptualising diversity as a CSR issue could be a real test of organisational commitment.

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