Reframing the Business Case for Diversity: A Values and Virtues Perspective

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Abstract We provide an ethical evaluation of the debate on managing diversity within teams and organizations between equality and business case scholars. Our core assertion is that equality and business case perspectives on diversity from an ethical reading appear stuck as they are based on two different moral perspectives that are difficult to reconcile with each other. More specifically, we point out how the arguments of equality scholars correspond with moral reasoning grounded in deontology, whereas the foundations of the business case perspective are crafted by utilitarian arguments. We show that the problems associated with each diversity perspective correspond with the traditional concerns with the two moral perspectives. To resolve this stalemate position, we argue that the equality versus business case debate needs to be approached from a third, less well-known moral perspective (i.e. virtue ethics). We posit that a focus on virtues can enhance equality by reducing prejudice and illustrate this by applying it to the HRM domains of recruitment and selection and of performance management. Subsequently, we argue that values are key to aligning virtues with each other and with corporate strategy, delineate our values and virtues perspective on diversity, and argue why and how it can enhance organizational performance.

Keywords (Managing) diversity · Equality · HRM · Deontology · Utilitarianism · Virtue ethics

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The most striking feature of contemporary moral utterance is that so much of it is used to express disagreements; and the most striking feature of the debates in which these disagreements are expressed is their interminable character. I do not mean by this just that such debates go on and on and on—although they do—but also that they apparently can find no terminus. There seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture—MacIntyre (2007, p. 6).

The past two decades have witnessed a huge amount of attention to managing diversity that comes from two different streams of research. Inspired by the question whether differences between co-workers in member characteristics (e.g. age, gender, functional background etc.) lead to increased creativity, higher quality decisions, more innovative solutions and various other positive team- and organizational level outcomes, proponents of the business case for diversity (i.e. supporting diversity as a means to achieve, ultimately, organizational profit) conducted and published numerous studies aimed at providing verification for the so-called value-in-diversity hypothesis (for recent meta-analytical reviews, see Bell et al. 2011; Joshi and Roh 2009; van Dijk et al. 2012). At the same time, a distinctive group of scholars oppose this instrumental take on diversity that the business case for diversity represents (Jones and Stablein 2006; Noon 2007; Zanoni and Janssens 2004; Zanoni et al. 2010). These scholars depart from the perspective that power inequalities in societies exist in organizations too and that, as a consequence, organizations should pursue diversity in order to empower minority groups and transform these inequalities (Noon 2007).

At surface level it appears as if the equality as well as the business case perspective on managing diversity posits

that diversity is good and that organizations thus should pursue having a diverse workforce. Moreover, Tomlinson and Schwabenland (2010) recently suggested that in practice the contrast between the two perspectives is less strong than in theory (see also Liff and Dickens 2000; Kirton et al. 2007). However, 15 years of debate between equality and business case proponents have not yet lead to a theoretical perspective on dealing with diversity in organizations that adequately integrates the main arguments of the equality and the business case perspective (Syed and Kramar 2009). In a recent review of critical diversity studies, Zanoni et al. (2010, p. 19) argue that the business case perspective is unable to sufficiently represent and defend the rights of minorities as it does not compensate minority group members for their—often—reduced access to resources and, in fact, may 'even contribute to its reproduction'. Moreover, because the business case perspective ignores the historically rooted and today still persisting inequalities in society and organizations, Noon (2007, p. 781) suggests that the business case perspective does not constitute an ethical approach to managing diversity:

> The argument for the moral case based on the human rights of all employees and job seekers must not be abandoned for the current fashion of diversity and the business case.

Consequently, Zanoni et al. (2010, p. 19) plea that equality scholars 'next to formulating critique' should 'examine and develop practices and interventions reflecting an affirmative, engaged and pragmatic ethos on diversity', which entails that equality scholars are encouraged to develop a viable alternative for the business case perspective on managing diversity.

In this article, we advance such an alternative perspective. We do not, however, opt for one of the two (i.e. the equality or the business case) perspectives as a starting point of reference. Instead, we consider and evaluate the equality and the business case perspectives from a moral point of view and assert that equality and business case proponents are (implicitly) stuck in a stalemate position as their foundations are grounded in two moral perspectives (i.e. deontology and utilitarianism, respectively) that do not only differ but also oppose each other. As a solution to this stalemate position, we propose a novel approach to managing diversity that is grounded in virtue ethics.

In the following, we discuss the shift from the equality to the business case rationale in terms of a shift from a deontological to a utilitarian perspective on dealing with diversity in organizations. In drawing from theory on moral difficulties with deontological and utilitarian perspectives, we outline the negative (moral) ramifications when organizations would exclusively adopt either an equality or business case approach to diversity. After introducing

virtue ethics, which posits that morality ought to be assessed based on the character of a person, we illustrate how virtue ethics may enhance equality in selection and assessment procedures. Subsequently, we advance our 'values and virtues' perspective and argue why we consider that a more (morally) benign approach to managing diversity within organizations.

Issues of Morality with Current Perspectives on Dealing with Diversity

The first advocates for diversity on the work floor based their arguments on the (moral) conviction that excluding a person based on demographic or non-task-related characteristics essentially constitutes discrimination and hence is/should be illegal (Ferner et al. 2005). In the USA, this led to equal employment opportunity (EEO) and affirmative action (AA) policies and programs in the 1960s, which proved to be effective means to increase the representation of minority groups in the workforce (Crosby et al. 2006). In the 1980s, several scholars pointed to the negative consequences of EEO and AA programs (Gilbert et al. 1999; Litvin 2006). Among others, a time of job insecurity, backlash effects for beneficiaries of AA policies, anti-affirmative action groups, and complaints of and law suits involving reverse discrimination initiated a decline in EEO and AA policies in the USA (Graham 1998; Kelly and Dobbin 1998).

Threatened by losing their jobs, advisors and consultants of EEO and AA programs in the USA responded to these developments by reframing the anti-discrimination policies into the business case rationale (Kelly and Dobbin 1998; Litvin 2006). Consequently, the transformation from equality to business case rationales appeared to be rather natural and, if anything, a step forward. Indeed, USA-based scholars–consultants like Cox (1991) and Thomas (1991) argued that the business case perspective on diversity represents a better argument for increasing the representation of minorities by reasoning that EEO and AA programs lead to legal compliance, whereas practices based on the business case involve voluntary commitment to creating a diverse workforce (cf. Ely and Thomas 2001; Gilbert et al. 1999). This business case rhetoric was quickly adopted by international companies world-wide and thus found a way in European countries as well (Lorbiecki and Jack 2000; Mor Barak 2011).

The emergence of the business case perspective on diversity led to a surge of research focussing on the question whether diversity in work groups and organizations relates to positive outcomes (e.g. competitive advantage, group and organizational performance, creativity), which in particular thrived after Milliken and

Martins ([1996](#)) and Williams and O'Reilly ([1998](#)) concluded in their narrative reviews that the available empirical evidence yielded inconclusive results (Harrison and Klein [2007](#)). Numerous conceptual and empirical studies followed that have greatly advanced our insights into the consequences of diversity for group and organizational processes and performance. However, whereas among practitioners the business case for diversity and hence the belief that diversity enhances business performance is upheld (Edelman et al. [2001](#); Heres and Benschop [2010](#)), the empirical, scientific studies point more and more to the contingent nature of diversity's benefits (Kochan et al. [2003](#); van Dijk et al. [2012](#)). The business case for diversity thus appears not as unequivocal as it sounds, and even diversity management practices aimed at enhancing diversity's positive effects have been found to occasionally cause more harm than good (Pendry et al. [2007](#); Roberson et al. [2003](#); Von Bergen et al. [2002](#)).

Meanwhile, various scholars from widely different domains have criticized the business case rationale in arguing that it does not substitute the need for affirmative action and equal employment opportunity policies as business case perspectives do not (sufficiently) empower minorities in the workplace (Zanoni et al. [2010](#)). The inconclusive findings with regard to the validation of the business case add fuel to the fire as they weaken the arguments of the business case and provide equality scholars with an additional argument to warrant against an instrumental take on diversity. Indeed, the contingent nature of the business case perspective can easily turn into an argument against diversity the moment diversity appears to have a negative impact on organizational performance (Noon [2007](#)).

Consequently, whereas in the past scholars have attempted to reconcile the business case and the equality perspective with each other (e.g. Liff and Dickens [2000](#)), nowadays it becomes increasingly clear that they may be incongruent (cf. Lorbiecki and Jack [2000](#)). In the following, we explain this incongruence by pointing out that the shift from EEO and AA legislation and policies to the business case-philosophy in the USA corresponds to a radical change in thinking and actually represents a shift from a deontological to a utilitarian ethical paradigm. We will show how the differences between equality and business case rationales correspond with the classic binary between deontology and utilitarianism and how the problems associated with the equality and with the business case perspectives reflect the shortcomings of deontological and utilitarian approaches, respectively.

The Deontological Versus the Utilitarian Paradigm

In (business) ethics, the different ethical theories that are discussed are often limited to the deontological, or principle-based, paradigm on the one hand, and the utilitarian paradigm on the other (Ladkin [2006](#); Macdonald and Beck-Dudley [1999](#)). According to deontology, behaviour is moral when it is based on certain established moral principles, for acting based on such principles indicates that the person's intentions are sound (i.e. the good will). In contrast, according to utilitarianism the morality of an act is determined by the extent to which it produces the greatest proportion of good over evil (Macdonald and Beck-Dudley [1999](#)). In opting for a course of action when confronted with several alternatives, the utilitarian paradigm thus indicates that the morally superior alternative is that which overall yields the most positive consequences.

As the ultimate indicators of morality according to deontology are the person's intentions (regardless of the consequences) but according to utilitarianism are the consequences (regardless of the intentions), the two paradigms are generally considered to be mutually exclusive. For example, based on the principle that all people are equal and thus ought to have equal opportunities, deontologists typically would defend individual development programs, mentoring programs and coaching trajectories reserved for underrepresented groups, such as women and minorities, with only a limited regard for the consequences for businesses. In contrast, utilitarians typically depart from the perspective that when businesses prosper, society prospers (de Woot [2005](#)), and hence would never invest in activities if they do not clearly contribute to business results.

A necessary first step to settle a dispute that has its underpinnings in contrasting moral arguments is to understand the flaws of each perspective. To start with deontology, a first concern of addressing moral dilemmas from a purely deontological perspective is that rules represent *general* guidelines of what is good (e.g. it is good to pursue diversity). As a consequence, a deontological perspective tends to be inflexible when contextual details (e.g. the availability of minority members in a certain region, the extent to which members of one group might have a disposition or more relevant experience to perform better on a certain task than members of the other group) alter the outcome of the question 'what is good?'. Second, good intentions do not always lead to equally good outcomes and may even contribute to evil consequences. What if, for example, the costs of trajectories for minorities are not earned back? To what extent could that be considered as a reasonable loss? A strict deontological perspective would consider such a question irrelevant as it does not seek the answer to a normative question in the potential consequences (for business).

There are, however, also several objections to adopting utilitarianism as the moral point of reference. One of these concerns is that the utilitarian principle of the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest amount of people may

include disadvantaging a minority for the benefit of the majority. Examples may be restricting immigrants' access to work or education to prevent them from 'taking' jobs, or ensuring that minorities can only have jobs that are not popular among majority members. In societies where the law is based on utilitarianism only, it can therefore be that inequality, suppression, prejudice and discrimination can be judged to be morally benign when it leads to the most positive consequences for the majority.

Second, a more fundamental difficulty with utilitarianism is the extent to which people can predict what the consequences of their actions will be. There is a quantitative and a qualitative side to this. First of all, our bounded rationality limits our ability to understand the extent (i.e. quantity) of the consequences of our actions: We tend to have only a limited regard for the outgroup in considering the potential consequences of alternative courses of action. Second, in utilitarianism there is generally no regard for the extent to which advantages and disadvantages may be qualitatively different: To what extent does an advantage for one person outweigh the disadvantage of another, and how do the merits of justice, equality, profit, sustainability etcetera compare to each other? Utilitarianism does not provide an answer to these questions that are critical in the application of utilitarianism to real-life situations. Indeed, despite the fact that in the past decades a common consciousness of the equality of all people has been established, in the Western world and in Western organizations—which are primarily governed by utilitarian lines of thought (cf. Edelman et al. 2001)—inequality, suppression and discrimination still exist (Plaut 2010).

Deontological Versus Utilitarian Arguments for Diversity

The differences between the deontological and the utilitarian moral paradigms provide the foundation of the difference between the equality and the business case perspectives on diversity. Although equality and business case proponents both advocate an increase in the representation of minorities in the workplace, the underlying arguments are fundamentally different. From a deontological principle it is wrong to recruit, select and hence discriminate based on member characteristics[1]. In contrast,

the business case perspective essentially entails an argument that is based on the utilitarian conviction that diversity yields better consequences than homogeneity for teams and organizations, i.e. that there is value in bringing together people who differ from each other on whatever characteristics. Consequently, according to the business case for diversity it actually can be beneficial to recruit and select based on exactly those characteristics that according to the no-discrimination principle ought not to be selected upon.

Just as the arguments favouring diversity of the equality and the business case scholars reflect (moral) reasoning based on deontology and utilitarianism, the arguments in opposition to the equality and the business case perspectives reflect arguments against deontology and utilitarianism. A first concern with the business case argument for diversity is that it actually does not celebrate diversity in itself, but that diversity is supported only if and as long as it drives competitive advantage and organizational profit (Noon 2007). The business case rationale thus represents a contingent argument that considers minority members to be a means to an end, thereby violating the deontological principle that people ought not to be treated merely as a means (Greenwood 2002). Second, the business case perspective on diversity appears to depart from the perspective that the single most important consequence that justifies all means is competitive advantage and that it is an established notion that diversity leads to competitive advantage. Indeed, as Joshi and Roh (2007, p. 2) rhetorically wondered:

> If researchers are unable to provide definitive answers regarding the benefits and overall performance gains from diversity, why would companies continue to invest in and implement diversity management practices?

The current empirical evidence, however, indicates that it is anything but an established notion that diversity leads to competitive advantage (e.g. van Dijk et al. 2012). Following the contingent argument of the business case for diversity that organizations should pursue diversity as it is presumed to lead to competitive advantage, from a utilitarian perspective Joshi and Roh (2007) are right in suggesting that findings that show that diversity does not enhance performance (or that diversity might even diminish performance) provide organizations with a (moral) justification for pursuing homogeneity rather than diversity.

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[1] This is under the assumption that such discrimination leads to ingroup favoritism and thus advantages for majority group members. Equality scholars differ in the extent to which they would favor affirmative action or positive discrimination policies (cf. Liff 1997; Liff and Dickens 2000). Equality scholars who emphasize 'difference' generally favor such policies because they compensate minority group members for (structural) inequalities (i.e. emphasizing colourful approaches). In contrast, equality scholars who emphasize 'sameness' generally reject such policies based on the argument that

Footnote 1 continued

all people are essentially the same and hence should be treated the same (i.e. emphasizing colour-blind approaches).

This is not to say that there are no problems with the equality perspective on diversity. First, one may argue that the equality perspective tends to assume that (the compositions of) member characteristics do not bear any consequences and that recruitment and selection based on those characteristics thus constitutes discrimination. One of the major outcomes of research to the consequences of diversity in work groups is that diversity does have consequences, but that those are contingent on the task characteristics (van Dijk et al. 2012). Consequently, in crafting diversity management strategies a context sensitivity may be needed that deontological principles by their nature have difficulty to live up to (Clegg et al. 2007).

Second, a more fundamental problem with the equality perspective is its axiom that inequality is wrong and hence is to be avoided. Arguably, organizations are embedded in a utilitarian context where the highest goods are competitive advantage, shareholder value, and profitability. Consequently, equality does not rank highest on the priority list of most organizations (see, for example, the uptake in modern Human Resource Management thinking on distinguishing different staff categories based on their added value, Huselid et al. 2005; Lepak and Snell 1996). From a deontological perspective that stresses the worth of each human being irrespective of race, gender, colour etcetera, such a prioritization of business results over defeating inequality may come across as immoral, but in a business context where employees are commonly referred to as 'resources' or 'asset' and hence solely as means to an end, it constitutes a reality that is not likely to be sensitive to deontological principles and arguments.

The Necessity of a Novel Perspective on Managing Diversity

In light of the concerns raised above, we argue that neither the equality nor the business case perspective for diversity yields a sustainable or viable framework for managing diversity in the workplace. The problems we identified are probably less apparent in practice because managing diversity practices tend to represent more of a blend of both perspectives and thus are not exclusively based on deontological or utilitarian principles (Gagnon and Cornelius 2000; Kirton et al. 2007; Tomlinson and Schwabenland 2010). However, we argue that there are two reasons why blended diversity practices ultimately may cause more harm than good.

First, the lack of understanding of ethical theory underlying arguments in favour or against specific diversity practices can easily lead to rhetoric and practices that are not aligned with each other and/or that are not aligned with the company strategy. Pendry et al. (2007, p. 44) name the example of employees who undergo training aimed at improving gender relations and improving equal opportunities:

> …should they step back into a working environment where, for example, there are subtle but institutionalized pressures dictating that women should place career before children, or the converse, then equal opportunities have not in truth been achieved. (…) effects may be hampered by an incompatible organizational ethos.

Deontology and utilitarianism are only compatible inasmuch as they yield the same implications. In fact, an assumption underlying the business case for diversity is that equality leverages business results and hence that there is utilitarian (financial) merit in deontological reasoning. The moment that this ceases to be true, a blend of more deontology- and of more utilitarianism-based diversity practices and strategies are likely to be ill-aligned and hence ineffective.

Second, we fear that the current status-quo in theory and practice about perspectives on managing diversity may lead to the perils of (a) diversity scepticism and (b) diversity opportunism. Diversity scepticism refers to a disbelief of the pro-diversity claims that are characteristic of the current business case rhetoric (e.g. Hansen 2003) and that can easily translate into (hidden) anti-diversity practices. Less-extreme and more likely to emerge is the attitude of diversity opportunism, which can be conceptualized as openly supporting diversity when it is proven to be advantageous but (secretly) avoiding diversity when the consequences are likely to be less beneficial. In fact, from a short-term utilitarian point of view such diversity opportunism may even represent the morally superior perspective on managing diversity as it entails that diversity is pursued when it is advantageous for business and that it is avoided when it is disadvantageous. The interesting fact here is that it is indeed such an attitude of diversity opportunism that is promoted in several studies to the consequences of diversity: when findings show positive relationships between homogeneity and (various indicators of) performance, managers are recommended to invest in diversity management practices (e.g. Ancona and Caldwell 1992; Jehn and Bezrukova 2004). In contrast, when findings show positive relationships between (certain dimensions of) diversity and (various indicators of) performance, these findings are broadly quoted and exhibited in order to promote diversity (e.g. Catalyst 2004).

Such utility-driven recommendations suggest that we should pursue a situation where, depending on the question whether they still add value to the business, minority members and diverse groups can be celebrated the one day yet disposed of the next. Derry (1996, p. 105) illustrates this point from a feminist ethics perspective:

…it is not a great step forward to say that women have terrific value in the workplace because now we recognize that female skills could do us some good. Women's redemptive role will last only as long as the current wave of management theory holds sway.

Not only from a feminist or deontological (e.g. Noon 2007) perspective such a future scenario sounds horrendous, from a business perspective the contingent attitudes towards minority members and diverse groups (and, actually, towards all employees) closely resembles the inconsistency that Collins refers to as "the signature of mediocrity" (2009, p. 92), i.e. characteristic of companies that will never become really successful. Collins (2009, p. 92) describes such utility-driven companies as trying out 'all sorts of new programs, new fads, new strategies (…). And when one silver bullet fails, they search for another and then yet another'. Surely there must be room for a better, more sustainable perspective on managing diversity in the workplace.

In the next section, we develop such a perspective based on virtue ethics. First, we introduce virtue ethics theory; subsequently, we outline what a virtue ethics perspective on diversity entails.

Virtue Ethics and Diversity

Virtue ethics has originally been advanced by Aristotle in his Nicomachean Ethics, but gained renewed attention after MacIntyre (1981, 2007) modernized the concept and argued that the virtue ethics perspective is superior to moral perspectives such as deontology and utilitarianism (cf. González 2003). In his historical account of how the different moral perspectives emerged, MacIntyre (2007) posits that deontology as well as utilitarianism suffered from the failed quest in the enlightenment period to identify an objective purpose or 'telos' in life that could justify morality. Albeit the deontological and the utilitarian perspectives differ in their emphasis on the intentions or the wishes/aspirations of people and individuals, both have in common that their justification of what is good is based on properties of people void of context (Clegg et al. 2007). And this is exactly where virtue ethics is radically different, for virtue ethics is grounded in the notion that morality can only be properly understood and assessed when the context in which the moral issue takes place is taken into account.

Virtue can be defined as 'excellence of any kind' (MacIntyre 2007, p. 122). Because the ability to excel is grounded in a person's character, virtues are generally denoted in terms of character traits that can be enacted upon. What kinds of virtues are considered virtuous is

contingent on (a) the situational demands and (b) the position or role of the actor(s) involved. We first explain what is meant with the latter before we turn to the former.

Role theory posits that human beings are members of social positions or roles (e.g. parent, fire-fighter, passenger, student) and hold expectations about their own and other people's behaviours based on those roles (Biddle 1986). These expectations are based on the conceptions, or, more specifically, ideal types that people have of what is required by specific social roles. MacIntyre argues that virtues are those character traits or qualities which 'enable an individual to do what his or her role requires' (2007, p. 128). For example, an ideal-type nurse is someone who, among others, promotes the interests and dignity of those in their care (Gallagher 2004). In order to become such an exemplary nurse, practicing the virtue of compassion would be an example of a quality that enables a nurse to meet the expectations raised by his or her role. Hence, with each role comes an ideal type that delineates the more or less perfect normative description of how that role ought to be fulfilled, and the actual virtuous fulfilment of a role by a person can only be done by exercising those virtues that lead to acting according to the ideal type. This not only entails that different roles may require the exercise of different virtues, it also implies that an act (e.g. washing a patient) can be regarded as virtuous when it is done by one person (e.g. a nurse) but as vicious when done by another (e.g. a hospital manager).

Context is of crucial importance for what specific virtues are required. The situational demands of feeding a patient or assisting in an operation room do not change a nurse's role membership, but they do alter what is expected of him or her. Virtue ethics thus posits that with a role or social position comes a certain responsibility and that context defines what that responsibility is. People can be held (morally) accountable for the extent to which they fulfil their responsibilities, and the actual fulfilment is done by exercising or practicing those virtues that match the normative prescriptions or expectations as denoted in the ideal-type fulfilment of the role.

Consequently, in assessing the morality of an action, virtue ethics asks the question whether the actor has practiced the virtue that was required in the given situation (MacIntyre 2007). In doing so, virtue ethics overcomes the deontological problem of acting based on a rule that in some contexts may be completely inappropriate, while the consistency of the virtues overcomes the potential inconsistency and possibly even contradiction in behaviours and actions that can result from utilitarianism. Moreover, people's limited ability to predict the consequences of their actions easily causes a utilitarian approach to result in acting based on the anticipation of what enhances the happiness of the actor—or at most the overall happiness of

the ingroup (e.g. team, organization) of the actor. Virtue ethics, however, in the words of MacIntyre (2007, p. 150):

> …presupposes a crucial distinction between what any particular individual at any particular time takes to be good for himself and what is really good for him as a man[kind]. It is for the sake of achieving this latter good that we practice the virtues (…).

Hence, in practicing those virtues that belong to the social position or role that a person occupies, virtue ethics posits that ultimately the good of the society or community that the actor is embedded in will be established. What that 'good' exactly constitutes is completely contingent on the situational demands, which causes virtue ethics to be richer and more capable of addressing and balancing different needs or demands (e.g. equality, profit) than deontology or utilitarianism.

Now that we have introduced virtue ethics and contrasted it to deontology and utilitarianism, we are ready to apply virtue ethics to the question of how to approach and manage diversity in organizations.

A Virtue Perspective on Diversity

As virtues refer to excellence or qualities of any kind that enable an individual to do what his or her role requires, the heart of a virtue ethics perspective on managing diversity lies in identifying and denoting those qualities that are considered pivotal to a job role or function. For issues concerning diversity such a focus on excellence in character and in qualities bears the important implication that other personal characteristics (including age, gender and ethnicity) are relevant only inasmuch they are undisputedly related to those qualities. There are two HRM domains where this is particularly pertinent and that serve well as illustrations, namely recruitment and selection and performance management.

Recruitment and Selection

Despite decades of research and attention to discrimination in recruitment and selection, present-day it is still widespread (Agars 2004; Davison and Burke 2000; Plaut 2010). The causes of discrimination in the recruitment and selection process are often contingent on the specific circumstances and the type of job (e.g. demographic characteristics of the recruiter, perceived fit between job type and demographic characteristics of the applicant). One common denominator, however, is that when discrimination in recruitment and selection occurs, it generally has to do with stereotypes being held by the recruiter. As has been substantially demonstrated for instance, the female gender stereotype is often at odds with stereotypes we have of the 'typical', and particularly the

'ideal' worker (Burgess and Borgida 1999; Eagly and Karau 2002; Heilman 2001). Consequently, gender stereotypes have been shown to bias, among others, hiring and promotion decisions (Heilman et al. 2004; Rudman and Glick 2001; Vinkenburg et al. 2011).

We suggest that a virtue ethics approach to recruitment and selection could help in battling these persisting inequalities, not only to the benefit of minority group members but also to the benefit of the organization. A focus on virtues as the prime recruitment criteria entails that before job applicants are assessed; those virtues that they will be evaluated upon need to be identified. This requires discussing and describing the virtues that are possessed by the ideal type of person in the role or position that is vacant. During this process, stereotypes can be addressed and corrected in order to create the profile of the ideal type (cf. Dortants 2010). To use the nurse example again, virtues that may be mentioned are compassion, courage and respectfulness (Armstrong 2006). As it may be hard to assess to what extent a candidate possesses those virtues, the identification of the ideal-type virtues needs to be followed by describing suitable indicators or criteria. It is here where some may suggest that positive patient ratings is an indicator of respectfulness and that being female is an indicator of compassion. The explication of these two proposed indicators provides other recruitment and selection committee members to address the accuracy of these (stereotypical) expectancies and, if necessary, disapprove of them.

Consequently, a focus on virtues that the ideal-type candidate possesses in order to successfully conduct his or her role can help recruitment and selection committee members in distinguishing an ideal type from a stereotypical candidate. Not only can this result in a less biased recruitment and selection process and hence in reduced prejudice, discrimination and inequality but also it can help the recruitment and selection committee members in engaging in a recruitment and selection process that is focused more on only those criteria that are highly relevant to performing well in the role of a nurse.

Performance Management

Discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping do not stop once people are employed by the organization. There is ample evidence that minority group members face discrimination in the different phases of the performance management process too. Performance management refers to the measurement and management of employee performance and includes the creation of performance standards, methods to measure and evaluate performance based on those standards, and providing feedback through, e.g. (formal) performance reviews (Armstrong and Baron 2005; Den Hartog et al. 2004).

Because majority members tend to have more voice in creating performance standards, it is likely that the performance standards will be more considerate towards majority members than towards minority members (e.g. not taking maternity leave into account when compiling a list of best performing employees based on, e.g. number of media appearances or amount of sales). With regard to measuring and evaluating performance, there's a long track record of bias in performance evaluations against minority members (Eagly et al. 1992; Hekman et al. 2010; Kraiger and Ford 1985; Stauffer and Buckley 2005).

Just as in the recruitment and selection process, we suggest that a virtue ethics approach could reduce the inequalities that are caused by these biases and, consequently, be beneficial to the organization and its members. This requires the identification of the (prime) virtues needed for each role in the organization, and subsequently the creation of performance indicators in order to assess the extent to which a person possesses and correctly practices those virtues. Next to reducing bias in performance evaluations, we believe such a virtues-based performance management process may result in more focus on those performance criteria that relate to sustainable, long-term business results (cf. the literature on the importance of setting mastery or development goals instead of performance goals (e.g. Butera et al. 2011; Dewettinck 2008; Jawahar and Williams 1997): as a virtues-based performance management process would focus on the extent to which individuals master the virtues that are required for performing on a certain role, it more or less automatically emphasizes the importance of acquiring and developing competencies over demonstrating that competence in comparison to others).

Having denoted what a virtue perspective on diversity within organizations entails and how it can be applied to two highly relevant HRM domains, we discuss how a virtue perspective can be embedded within the larger organizational context.

A Values and Virtues Perspective on Diversity

What we find is that the enduring great enterprises are driven by purpose beyond money and success. That purpose is rooted in core values that they will not compromise—Collins (2010, in a seminar).

A pending question that remains is whether a virtue approach to diversity is limited to focussing on the core virtues of the individual employees, or whether it also has implications on a more aggregate or general level. If not, a plausible concern could be that the individual focus might result in incompatible profiles for different job positions and that, as a consequence, the organization operates more as a collection of individuals than as a collective whole (cf. Collins 2009; Meglino et al. 1989).

We propose that this is where the importance of (core) business *values* comes in. Business values can be regarded as normative aspects of the (corporate) culture that defines how to do business (Agle and Caldwell 1999; Barney 1986). More specifically, values can be defined as "concepts or beliefs about desirable end states or behaviours that transcend specific situations, guide selection or evaluation of behaviour and events, and are ordered by relative importance" (Schwartz and Bilsky 1987, p. 551). Whereas virtues thus represent individual qualities that can be enacted upon, values denote what virtues are valued as most important. For example, in the health care sector virtues represents those qualities that are needed in order to pursue excellence in caring, whereas values guide the physician into what he or she should give priority: cost effectiveness or quality of care (cf. van der Wal et al. 2011). This entails that values may change: over time the focus of an organization may develop and hence alter. Virtues, on the other hand, are stable: no matter if and to what extent quality of care is preferred; when a physician is spending time with patients there is a given set of virtues that will enable him or her to excel in that practice.

In her inventory of more than 20 years of research to high performance companies, Kirby (2005) denoted that a strong set of values is one of the characteristics that such companies have in common (cf. Collins and Porras 1997). Values related to equality (e.g. inclusiveness) could play an important role in fostering diversity. Indeed, Pless and Maak (2004, p. 130) argue that the potential of workforce diversity can only be unleashed when a culture of inclusion is established:

Diversity is first and foremost, a cultural question and thus a question of norms, values, beliefs and expectations. As such, it is an ethical question and determined by some very essential founding principles of human coexistence. Not before this is taken into consideration, acknowledged and institutionalized, can "diversity management" be successful.

We therefore coin the approach to managing diversity that we have advanced in this article the "values and virtues perspective". Virtues represent the core aspects of our perspective and involve excellence to be pursued by individual employees witshin the organization. Values bring focus to and create coherence among the virtues and hence involve excellence to be pursued by the organization (cf. Ibarra-Colado et al. 2006).

Rebuttals to Arguments Against our Values and Virtues Perspective

Thus having denoted what our values and virtues perspective entails, it is likely that several questions linger.

More specifically, one might wonder if our perspective will lead to less prejudice and stereotyping, if it can really enhance equality, and if it really contributes to the bottom line of organizational performance.

To start with the first, one might argue that ideal types can easily be influenced by stereotypes and hence be biased in favour of majority members. Role congruity theory (Eagly and Karau 2002), for example, proposes that prejudice is likely to occur when inconsistencies exist between member characteristics (e.g. being female) and the characteristics that are (stereo)typically associated with a certain role or ideal type (e.g. being male for leaders). This illustrates a common criticism against virtue ethics about the likelihood that ideal types are subject to prejudice and bias (e.g. Derry 1996).

Whereas we agree that such biases may be apparent, we name two reasons why we contend that our values and virtues perspective could reduce prejudice. First, we believe that virtues are less clearly associated with member characteristics than roles—or at least may be more ambiguous in their associations with member characteristics (cf. Kirton and Healy 2009). In the example of the nurse—which stereotypically is depicted as a feminine role—the virtue of compassion may be categorized as feminine, but the virtue of courage will likely be categorized as masculine. Likewise, the role of an engineer will be easily categorized as masculine, but what about virtues that belong to being an engineer like sensitivity to risk or respect for nature (Harris 2008)? We do not deem those to be gendered virtues—or, if anything, more feminine than masculine.

Second, the main problem with stereotypes and prejudice is that they generally operate on a sub-conscious level. In order to eradicate stereotypes, we thus first must become aware of the fact that we have stereotypes and that they influence the decision-making process. The process of delineating virtues forces people to make any beliefs about potential indicators of certain virtues salient, thereby creating better opportunities to falsify stereotypes and focus on individuating information instead. Nevertheless, in the process of identifying the prime virtues and their respective performance indicators for each ideal type, it is of vital importance that not only the dominant coalition but also a wide range of employees are involved.

From a deontological stance, a problem with our values and virtues perspective might be that it represents a liberal approach to equality: if inclusiveness or equality is not one of the organization's core values, then how does our perspective enhance the position of minority members?

Next to less bias in selection and appraisal procedures, we believe that there are two other ways in which our perspective can enhance equality. First, with its emphasis on delineating an organization's core values, our

perspective forces the (top) management team to be more outspoken in whether or not they endorse equality and to align their strategy accordingly (cf. Pless and Maak 2004). This is all the more important because (top) management support has been found pivotal in enhancing equality in organizations (Kalev et al. 2006). Our perspective thus can help (top) managers to create an inclusive organization *if* they want to. Second, our values and virtues perspective is not necessarily a substitute for more progressive policies and practices endorsing equality. Indeed, one of the advantages of virtue ethics is that it does not conflict with deontology or utilitarianism and thus can easily be used for complementing, for example, deontological rules and/or requirements (MacIntyre 2007; cf. González 2003). Consequently, our values and virtues perspective can be adopted regardless of whether country legislation enforces them to pay attention to equality, and it can be combined with other approaches aimed at promoting equality (e.g. threshold selection, Noon 2012).

Finally, it may be unclear how exactly our values and virtues perspective may enhance organizational performance. First, we have argued how virtues-centred selection and appraisal procedures may reduce bias. This entails that the assessments of candidates and employees may be less influenced by task-irrelevant criteria but focus more on qualities that contribute to their (potential) job performance. Second, the centrality of an organization's values in our perspective may enhance the alignment of an organization's diversity policy with their strategic aims (cf. Dickens 1999). In turn, ample research—among others research in HRM—has shown that strategic alignment enhances organizational performance (Becker et al. 2001; Paauwe 2004). Third, pro-diversity values are likely to enhance the *social legitimacy of an organization*, which refers to "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Schuman 1995, p. 574). As such, pro-diversity values may increase the societal support and trust that is needed in order to perform well.

Consequently, in everything it is of utmost importance that organizations carefully 'rethink' the values that guide their choices (Albert et al. 2000). When practiced accordingly, we argue that the organizational actors' enactment of those values by means of practicing virtues could lead to outcomes that are aspired by equality as well as by business case scholars. Note, however, that such prospects about the practical consequences of our values and virtues perspective are tentative. The contribution of this article is theoretical: empirical research is needed to substantiate—or falsify—the value of our perspective. In addition, the merit of our perspective is likely to be contingent on the extent to which it diverges from existing practices. Legislative

differences across countries have created a wide variety of organizational practices aimed at managing diversity (Mor Barak 2011). The consequences of our values and virtues perspective will probably be more noticeable when its implications diverge more from current practices.

Final Remarks

In this article, we have discussed the contrasts between the equality and the business case perspective on diversity from a moral perspective and reasoned that they are stuck in a stalemate position because they are built on opposing moral perspectives. In practice—and sometimes also in research—the binary between the equality and the business case perspective is often less strong (Tomlinson and Schwabenland 2010). One of the reasons for this may be that business case scholars sometimes use deontological principles (e.g. in arguing that profitability is a business imperative) and that equality scholars sometimes use utilitarian arguments (e.g. in quoting studies that show that diversity enhances business performance) in building their case (cf. Kirton et al. 2007). We introduced virtue ethics and advanced our values and virtues perspective as a more congruent, context-sensitive, and consequently, more sustainable approach to managing diversity. We posit that our perspective can enhance equality as well as business outcomes. Obviously, these claims need to be put to the test. Our perspective thus opens up venues for empirical research that hopefully push the field forward.

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