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Support for diversity practices in Norway: Depends on who you are and whom you have met

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Abstract

An increasingly diverse workforce is a reality for today's organisations in Norway, and a variety of human resource practices are being introduced in order to manage this diversity effectively. However, little is known about what leads to the successful implementation of these diversity practices. Thus, we need to find out more about what affects the willingness to implement that is held by those responsible for the process. In this study we examine how contact with minority groups, values, orientation, and individual differences relate to their perceptions and support for diversity practices. In a survey conducted with 385 Norwegian individuals employed in different organisations and business sectors across the country, we observed a relationship between positive contact experiences with individuals from immigrant backgrounds, diversity values, other-orientation, age, and gender on the extent to which the respondents were willing to support a diversity practice. Theoretical and practical implications and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Age; Contact; Diversity values; Gender; Norway; Other-orientation; Willingness to support a diversity practice

1 Introduction

One of the main strategic challenges for modern organisations is rooted in the changing demographics of the workforce and the subsequent need for effective diversity management (DM) ([Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013](#); [Mor Barak, 2015](#); [Nishii & Mayer, 2009](#); [Roberson, 2006](#); [Sabharwal, 2014](#); [Shen, Chanda, D'Netto, & Monga, 2009](#)). Even though great strides have been made to include women and minorities in organisations, there continues to be widespread disparities between groups and discrimination across countries ([Ely, Stone, & Ammerman, 2014](#); [Huffman, Cohen, & Pearlman, 2010](#); [Jansen, Otten, & van der Zee, 2015](#); [Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006](#)). A significant challenge for human resource (HR) managers today is the implementation of HR diversity practices. These practices often aim to increase, sustain, or guarantee the variation among organisational members along defined dimensions ([Olsen & Martins, 2012](#)). At the same time, the practices need to stay in line with organisational goals. Successful implementation of diversity practices is a cornerstone to effective DM and leaders play a pivotal role ([Chrobot-Mason & Aramovich, 2013](#)), yet not all leaders are equally motivated to implement these practices.

What is known from both the diversity research and general HR management literature is that leaders and line managers (LM) are central in the implementation of practices and effective DM (cf. [Kalev et al., 2006](#); [Ng & Sears, 2012](#); [Nishii & Mayer, 2009](#); [Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007](#)). Diversity research has identified that leaders' values ([Ng & Sears, 2012](#)), relationships ([Nishii & Mayer, 2009](#)), and managerial accountability ([Kalev et al., 2006](#)) are critical for the success of DM. From the HR literature, managers have been recognised as the gatekeepers of whether general HR practices are carried out or not ([Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007](#)) and findings suggest that intended practices are often not realised. Managers blocking the implementation of HR practices is often cited as the reason for the gap between planned and enacted practices. Reasons for the obstruction include lack of interest, time, training, and credibility, self-oriented behaviour, conflict of priorities, and overwork ([Fenton-O'Creedy, 2001](#); [Hall & Torrington, 1998](#); [Harris, 2001](#); [McGovern, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, & Truss, 1997](#); [Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007](#); [Renwick, 2003](#); [Whittaker & Marchington, 2003](#)). Managers are more likely to facilitate implementation when they perceive that practices are in line with their own individual self-interests and values ([Harris, 2001](#); [Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, & Lev-Arey, 2006](#); [Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010](#); [Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007](#)). Managers are individuals with their own motivations, beliefs and preferences, and these individual characteristics might affect their willingness to implement a diversity practice.

In addition, personal experiences with different groups might also affect willingness to implement an HR diversity practice. For example, if a manager has infrequent or negative contact with the group targeted by the diversity practice, he/she might be less interested in implementing this practice. However, if he/she has positive contact with members of the target group, this could positively influence his/her support for the DM practice. Contact theory ([Allport, 1954](#)) postulates that under certain conditions (equal status, pursuit of common goals, and institutional support) contact between different social identity groups leads to reduced prejudice. Decades of research supports the

claim that intergroup contact reduces prejudice, regardless of whether all the conditions of Allport's model are met (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Most of this research has examined positive contact and only recently has the importance of negative contact, and its potentially deleterious effects on attitudes, been investigated (Barlow et al., 2012). Hence, positive and negative experiences with the out-group could differently influence a manager's willingness to implement a diversity practice directed towards these specific groups.

This study seeks to close the knowledge gap on the link between individual experiences and characteristics, and an individual's willingness to implement a HR diversity practice. Specifically, we draw on contact theory (Allport, 1954) and previous diversity and HR work on the centrality of individuals for the implementation of policies (LMs) (Kulik, 2014; McGovern et al., 1997; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Shen et al., 2009). By examining these relationships, we aim to contribute to both theory development within DM and to the HR literature. Namely, we seek to extend contact theory and apply it to effective DM, while by investigating individual's willingness to support specific HR practices we aim to shift the focus towards the individual and the unique practice. We examine the importance of experiences with different others, diversity values, self/other-orientation, and one's own demographic characteristics for willingness to support HR diversity practices (Fig. 1). Given that LMs are individuals who are vital to the successful implementation of diversity practices, the question remains, how individual experiences and who the LMs are, affect their willingness to support the implementation of a diversity practice.

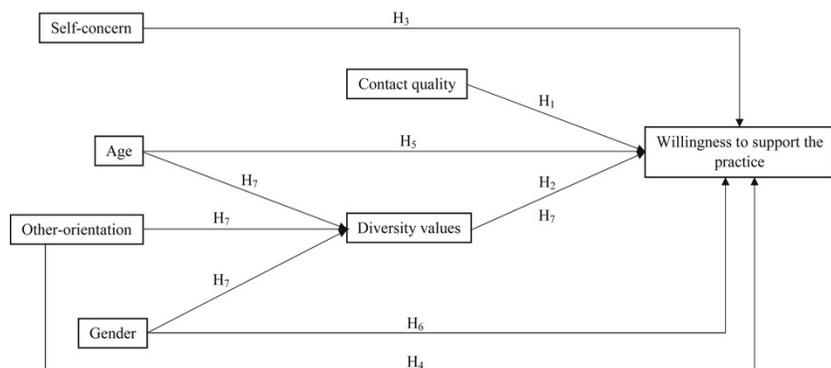


Fig. 1 Conceptual Model.

alt-text: Fig. 1

2 Theoretical background and hypotheses

The successful implementation of HR diversity practices requires active involvement and support from the individuals responsible for this implementation - the LMs. A number of factors can influence LMs' decisions regarding which, and how many, practices to use. This section reviews the diversity and HR literature to identify the relevant individual experiences and characteristics that may be particularly important for successful implementation of HR diversity practices. First, we argue that HR diversity practices are unique and different from other HR initiatives and require special attention. We then examine how intergroup contact theory can extend our understanding of effective DM. Lastly, individual characteristics that might affect the willingness of individuals to carry out a diversity practice are reviewed.

In organisational settings, workforce diversity may be defined as, "the division of the workforce into distinction categories that (a) have a perceived commonality within a given cultural or national context and (b) impact potentially harmful or beneficial employment outcomes such as job opportunities, treatment in the workplace, and promotion prospects - irrespective of job-related skills and qualifications" (Mor Barak, 2014, p. 136). Demographic characteristics, such as ethnicity, race, gender, and age (Olsen & Martins, 2012), have usually been the focus of diversity practices (cf. Kalev et al., 2006). Many of these practices place organisational members into group categories that mirror the social reality of intergroup interaction and/or influence it (Lumby, 2009). As Lumby (2009) emphasised, the practices often have the goal of increasing the degree of representation of these groups and/or achieving inclusive structures and culture.

While a large body of research has shed light on the gap between intended and implemented HR practices, these studies have focused on bundles of practices (Hall & Torrington, 1998; McGovern et al., 1997; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). The variety among distinct types of practices has largely been neglected (e.g., Sanders, Dorenbosch, & de Reuver, 2008). What is unique about diversity practices is that they directly relate to an individual's membership in different demographic groups, which in turn can trigger his/her social identity (e.g., Tajfel, 1982). Diversity practices are complex, since they are designed to redress or attenuate historical forms of discrimination based on demographic differences between employees, while, simultaneously, these same practices can lead to social categorisation (Harrison et al., 2006), emphasising the distinction between "us" and "them" - in-group and out-group. LMs are individuals who see the world and gain experience with other people from within their own social category. Hence, these experiences could influence their attitudes and behaviours

towards out-group members (Bouncken, Ratzmann, & Winkler, 2008), as well as their willingness to implement specific HR diversity practices aiming to benefit these groups.

2.1 Intergroup contact and willingness to support a diversity HR practice

Previous research has documented the importance of past experiences on individuals' present attitudes and behaviour (e.g., Buch, Kuvaas, Shore, & Dysvik, 2013; Graf, Paolini, & Rubin, 2014; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Takeuchi, Tesluk, Yun, & Lepak, 2005). We expand this research by arguing that experiences with different demographic groups may greatly influence individuals' perceptions of and feelings toward these groups, as well as their willingness to support HR practices directed at promoting these groups. Intergroup contact theory proposes that contact experiences with the out-group decrease prejudice (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). This reduction in prejudice includes more favourable attitudes toward particular members of the out-group, as well as towards the entire out-group even in completely different situations (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). In their meta-analysis, Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) argue that the underlying mechanism of contact is that familiarity between individuals engenders liking and reduces prejudice. Hence, Allport's optimal conditions are not necessary for achieving the positive effects of contact, since liking begins with familiarity. In addition to liking, contact also leads to learning about other groups and reducing stereotypical and negative perceptions (Allport, 1954).

Commensurate with the findings from contact theory, and building on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), the international management research also demonstrates the positive effects of cross cultural experience on learning and behaviour (e.g. Ang et al., 2007; Caligiuri & Tarique, 2012; Dragoni et al., 2014; Johnson, Lenartowicz, & Apud, 2006; Ng, Van Dyne, & Ang, 2012; Takeuchi et al., 2005). Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) implies that individuals not only learn from experience, but also tend to engage more readily in behaviours that were previously rewarded, thus learning which actions are beneficial to them. Drawing on the presented research, positive experiences with different others can lead to positive attitudinal and behavioural consequences and reduce prejudice.

However, research on the effects of experience with other groups has primarily focused on positive contact and the impact of negative contact situations has only recently gained attention. Graf et al. (2014) deepen our understanding of negative contact by investigating the relative frequency and impact of positive and negative contact. They argue that both types of contact must be considered, and their findings suggest that negative contact is more influential than the positive one in shaping out-group attitudes. These results were stronger when the negative experience was reported in terms of the contact person, rather than the contact situation. However, a study by Paolini et al. (2014) found that positive or extensive intergroup contact in the past significantly attenuated the effect of negative contact in the present. Accordingly, although past negative intergroup contact is more influential in shaping out-group attitudes (Graf et al., 2014), past positive or extensive contact significantly reduces the influence of present negative intergroup contact on intergroup relations (Paolini et al., 2014). While it might be expected that past intergroup contact will be related to individuals' perceptions and attitudes toward HR diversity practices, this has not been investigated yet. This study argues that understanding the history of contact with the out-groups targeted by specific HR diversity practices could be a central mechanism influencing individuals' willingness to implement such practices.

To study DM, it is essential to specify what constitutes diversity in specific contexts (Point & Singh, 2003; Süß & Kleiner, 2008; Unzueta & Binning, 2012; van Ewijk, 2011). The present study was conducted in Norway, where the workforce is steadily becoming more multicultural (Integration and Diversity Directorate - IMDi, 2012). According to Statistics Norway (2017), immigrants have arrived from 221 countries and autonomous regions, and people who are immigrants or have an immigrant background make up 16.8 per cent of the current population. Norway is part of the European labour market and has experienced a large increase in work immigration as a consequence of the economic situation in Europe (IMDi, 2012). This poses a challenge for Norway in terms of integrating these groups into the workforce and many DM practices today are targeting individuals with an immigrant background. Specifically, individuals from a non-Western immigrant background face the most challenges in the Norwegian labour market¹ and therefore this group is the focus of present study.

Accordingly, we examine whether the quality of contact majority individuals have experienced with people from a non-Western immigrant background is related to their willingness to support an HR diversity practice intended to benefit this group. Hence, those who have experienced high quality contact will be more likely to support HR diversity practices, whereas those who have not experienced any or had negative contact, will not be willing to support the HR diversity practice. It is hypothesised:

Hypothesis 1 *Contact quality is positively related to willingness to support an HR diversity practice.*

2.2 Diversity values and willingness to support an HR diversity practice

Individual differences, which can affect a person's willingness to implement a diversity policy, are not only related to their experiences with the target group, but also to who they are. While individuals are likely to vary in their experiences with different groups, they are also distinct from one another with respect to values, priorities, and demographics. Previous research provides evidence of the importance of LMs' individual attitudes, personal beliefs, values, and motivation being in line with the HR practice in question (e.g., Harris, 2001; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). The significance of individuals' demographic characteristics for attitudes towards DM has also been demonstrated (e.g., Mor Barak, Cherin & Berkman, 1998; Ng & Sears, 2012). Individuals' values have been shown as important in organisational settings and may predict one's attitudes and behaviours in the implementation of HR practices (e.g., Harris, 2001; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Values can also be a reliable predictor of managers' future behaviour (Ng & Sears, 2012), and it is likely that managers differ in the strength of their diversity

values (Yang & Konrad, 2011). Individual values can also have a large impact on the organisational diversity climate (Cox, 1994; Mor Barak et al., 1998) and affect perceptions of diversity programmes.

Accordingly, it is likely that individuals who endorse diversity values will be more willing to support HR diversity practices since the practice is in line with their own values and beliefs. On the other hand, individuals who do not endorse diversity values as strongly will be unlikely to favour these issues and, accordingly, will not be supportive toward the HR diversity practice, nor wish to invest time and effort in its implementation (e.g., Harris, 2001; Harrison et al., 2006; Kuvaas & Dysvik, 2010; Ng & Sears, 2012; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Consequently, it is hypothesised:

Hypothesis 2 *Diversity values are positively related to willingness to support an HR diversity practice.*

2.3 Self-concern and other-orientation in willingness to support an HR diversity practice

As discussed above, individuals differ from each other in the strength of diversity values, which affects their perceptions of diversity programmes. Aside from their values, they also differ in the extent to which they prioritise their own and/or others' interests (e.g., De Dreu & Nauta, 2009; Gerbasi & Prentice, 2013; Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004). According to social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982), a social category to which an individual belongs, and perceives to belong, generates a definition of their identity in terms of this group. This social categorisation leads to accentuation of intra-category similarities, and a tendency for members of the in-group to favour their own group and consider members of the out-group in a uniform manner (Tajfel, 1982). Hence, majority individuals would be aware that diversity-promoting policies do not favour their in-group, whereas minimising support for such practices might benefit them (Unzueta & Binning, 2012). If individuals are more self-oriented, this could accentuate the effect of not supporting a policy. Jonsen, Tatli, Özbilgin, and Bell (2013) argue that self-interested choices within DM lead to collective losses, leaving large numbers of people marginalised and their skills underutilised. Hence, highly self-concerned individuals, oriented toward their own interests and the optimal or maximum result for themselves, should be less willing to support an HR diversity practice aimed at providing benefits for an out-group. On the contrary, individuals highly other-oriented and inclined to act in others' interest should be more likely to support HR diversity practices, since such practices will contribute to the other – the out-group. Accordingly, it is hypothesised:

Hypothesis 3 *Self-concern is negatively related to willingness to support an HR diversity practice.*

Hypothesis 4 *Other-orientation is positively related to willingness to support an HR diversity practice.*

2.4 Demographics and willingness to support an HR diversity practice

As previously mentioned, beyond experiences, values, and orientation, individuals also vary in terms of who they are. In the research on organisational practices, there is evidence for the link between demographic variables and people's attitudes toward HR practices (e.g., Kidder, Lankau, Chrobot-Mason, Mollica, & Friedman, 2004; Konrad & Linnehan, 1995; Mor Barak et al., 1998; Ng & Sears, 2012; Sawyerr, Strauss, & Yan, 2005). Whilst life stages have been found to influence individuals' attitudes toward diversity (Ng & Sears, 2012; Sawyerr et al., 2005), women have often been found to have more positive perceptions of both diversity and diversity programmes (e.g., Kidder et al., 2004; Mor Barak et al., 1998; Sawyerr et al., 2005; Strauss & Connerley, 2003). Thus, it is prudent to investigate how these demographic characteristics (age and gender) may relate to individuals' willingness to support a diversity practice aimed at promoting people from different ethnic backgrounds.

According to Ng and Sears (2012), an individual's age can influence their attitudes toward organisational diversity practices. In their study of CEO leadership styles and the implementation of organisational diversity practices, they found that older CEOs were more likely to implement such practices. As they explained, older individuals accumulate “social expertise” throughout their lifetime, generally have higher levels of cultural intelligence, and wish to leave a positive legacy after their departure from the organisation. Moreover, Sawyerr et al. (2005) found that older individuals with higher levels of self-transcendence tend to recognise value and accept both similarities and differences to a larger extent than their younger counterparts. These authors suggested that the longer an individual has lived, the greater is his/her experience and interaction with a wider diversity of individuals. In line with these arguments, it is likely that older individuals who have gained experience with different others throughout their lives will be more supportive toward an HR diversity practice. Accordingly, this study proposes that individuals' age will be related to the extent to which they are willing to support a diversity practice. Hence, it is hypothesised:

Hypothesis 5 *Age is positively related to willingness to support an HR diversity practice.*

In addition to an individuals' age, gender can also influence one's willingness to support HR diversity practices. The study by Kidder et al. (2004) found that females had more positive attitudes toward diversity-related programmes for minorities than males did. As these authors explained, from a historical perspective, women have traditionally experienced membership in the low-status or minority groups within organisations, and have usually benefited from affirmative action programmes. Moreover, in the study by Sawyerr et al. (2005), it was shown that women with less conservative values had more positive attitudes toward diversity, were more likely to seek a diversity of interactions with others and to feel comfortable with different others than were women with more conservative values. Strauss and Connerley (2003) found that women in general have more positive attitudes toward different others, since they may perceive themselves to benefit from identity-conscious interventions,

as elaborated by [Konrad and Linnehan \(1995\)](#). Similarly, [Mor Barak et al. \(1998\)](#) concluded that based on personal experiences of discrimination or empathy, females are more likely to have positive perceptions of programmes and initiatives aimed at promoting diversity. Commensurate with these findings and arguments, it is hypothesised:

Hypothesis 6 *Women show a higher willingness to support an HR diversity practice than men.*

2.5 The mediating role of diversity values

Regarding the diversity values that individuals hold, these could be influenced to a large extent by individual characteristics. For instance, [De Dreu and Nauta \(2009\)](#) found in their study that justice climate matters more to employees with high other-orientation. Moreover, other-oriented individuals also have the dispositional tendency to be concerned with, and helpful to, other people ([Meglino & Korsgaard, 2004](#)). As [Meglino and Korsgaard \(2004\)](#) noted, those who are higher in other-orientation have higher prosocial and collectivistic values. Other-orientation is also found to be highly related to the values of benevolence (e.g., loyalty), universalism (e.g., a world at peace), conformity (e.g., obedience), tradition (e.g., humble), and security (e.g., social order) ([Gerbası & Prentice, 2013](#)). In line with these arguments, it is necessary to investigate whether other-orientation is related to diversity values.

As previously argued, age, as an individual characteristic, is expected to be positively related to the implementation of diversity practices, not simply due to the accumulated interactions with a wider variety of individuals ([Sawyer et al., 2005](#)), but also because of the values that older people hold. Findings from [Bible and Tadros \(2014\)](#) emphasise that values are subject to change throughout one's lifetime. According to these authors, motivational interests may change across the life stages, where, for example, self-transcendence values become higher at a later stage of life. Similarly, older individuals have a better understanding of daily challenges and can be more tolerant toward people of colour ([Hesselbart & Schuman, 1976](#)). Moreover, social expertise and cultural intelligence are shown to accumulate throughout the life-course ([Hess & Auman, 2001](#); [Ng & Sears, 2012](#)), creating fruitful ground for intercultural curiosity and interest. Similarly, older individuals are more inclined to want to give something back to both their organisation and the society ([Ng & Sears, 2012](#)), which may in turn influence their priorities and values. Therefore, the present study suggests that older individuals may be more likely endorse diversity values.

In addition to other-orientation and age, the gender of individuals may influence, to a certain extent, the values these individuals hold. Women are likely, in general, to have more positive attitudes toward different others ([Strauss & Connerley, 2003](#)). Accordingly, since women may have more positive attitudes toward diversity, this study proposes that female individuals may have a higher level of diversity values as well. Therefore, it is likely that other-oriented, older, and female individuals, whose values are more other-focused and who tend to be more positive toward different others – the out-group, will also have stronger diversity values. We put forward that this will, in turn, lead to their willingness to support an HR diversity practice. Therefore, it is hypothesised:

Hypothesis 7 *The relationship between (a) other-orientation, (b) age, and (c) gender, and willingness to support an HR diversity practice will be mediated by diversity values.*

3 Method

3.1 Participants and procedures

A vignette design was applied to the present study. Vignettes are short descriptions of a person or a social situation that entail precise references to the factors thought to be the most important in the decision-making or judgement-making processes of the respondents ([Alexander & Becker, 1978](#); [Lysonski & Gaidis, 1991](#)). This approach has previously shown high reliability and validity ([Aguinis & Bradley, 2014](#)). For the Norwegian context, a specific group and diversity practice were chosen. The focus was on the contact between individuals with a Norwegian ethnic background and those with a non-Western immigrant background.

During the summer of 2014, the survey was administered to persons across organisations and industries in Norway by means of a web-based questionnaire tool (Qualtrics). Participants received an e-mail requesting participation in the survey, as well as to forward the e-mail to their colleagues. A total of 439 complete responses were received. Of those, 88 per cent were individuals with a Norwegian ethnic background and 12 per cent were individuals with an immigrant background. We retained only the responses from individuals with a Norwegian ethnic background in our analysis, since the hypotheses were directed at this group, which left 385 respondents. Of these, 47 per cent reported having higher tertiary education. In this sample, men (48 per cent) and women (52 per cent) were almost equally represented and the modal age interval was 40–49 with 33.8 per cent of the sample. Regarding business sector, 84 per cent worked in the service sector and 16 per cent in industry. Over 45 per cent reported 9 years or more experience in their current organisation, 32 per cent had between 3 and 9 years and 22 per cent had up to two years' experience. Neither sector nor years of experience produced significant differences between the groups regarding willingness to implement a diversity policy.

3.2 Measures

All the items (excluding demographic variables) were assessed on a five-point Likert scale that either measured agreement with statements ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) or occurrence of behaviour ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (always). In order to test the hypotheses, a vignette was developed for participants to evaluate, inspired by existing HR diversity practices in large Norwegian organisations. This diversity practice vignette

was pre-tested with five researchers at the authors' institution. The content of the practice, its aim, target group, necessary actions of support, and length in time were described in the vignette. Different rationales for introducing the practice were given (the business case for diversity; the morally right thing to do; both and none). No difference was found between the different versions. The vignette was stated as follows:

The aim of the practice is to strengthen integration efforts. The practice will give employees with non-Western immigrant background an opportunity to join a voluntary training programme. This programme will only be available to operational staff from a non-Western immigrant background. The programme consists of job shadowing in different parts of the organisation for a period of one year. The candidates will be offered a mentor, relevant courses, and the opportunity to build networks. This practice should provide advantages for employees from non-Western immigrant background and improve their career prospects.

3.2.1 Independent variables

Contact quality was assessed using the eight-item scale from [Islam and Hewstone \(1993\)](#) with an internal consistency Cronbach's alpha of 0.82. This measure consisted of multiple adjectives describing the nature of contact with people from a non-Western immigrant background where participants were asked to characterise the interaction on a scale ranging from never to always. Items were scored so that the higher the score the more positive the contact. Diversity values were measured using a three-item diversity values scale, developed by [Mor Barak et al. \(1998\)](#), with an internal consistency Cronbach's alpha of 0.75. Self-concern was assessed using the three-item scale developed by [De Dreu and Nauta \(2009\)](#). However, due to the factor structure, the first item in the scale was not retained, resulting in an internal consistency (Spearman-Brown) of 0.67. Other-orientation was measured using the three-item scale also developed by [De Dreu and Nauta \(2009\)](#). Similarly, the first item in the scale was not retained due to factor structure and translation, resulting in an internal consistency (Spearman-Brown) of 0.78. Age and gender were assessed as ordinal and binary variables, respectively.

3.2.2 Control variables

To rule out alternative explanations of the observed relationships, we controlled for the educational level of the respondents.

3.2.3 Dependent variable

Willingness to support the HR diversity practice was measured using three scales - intention to implement the HR diversity practice, perceived fairness of the HR diversity practice and attitude toward the HR diversity practice. Intention to implement the HR diversity practice was assessed using a six-item scale that combined and adapted items from [Devos, Buelens, and Bouckenoghe \(2007\)](#) and [Metselaar \(1997\)](#). The scale demonstrated high internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95. The perceived fairness of the diversity practice was measured using a nine-item scale adapted from [Grover \(1991\)](#). This scale had an internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86. Finally, attitude toward the HR diversity practice was assessed using a six-item scale that combined and adapted items from [Ng and Burke \(2010\)](#), and [Berg \(2009\)](#). This measure had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85. The items of these three scales were highly correlated, and higher scores on all of them indicated more willingness to support the practice, thus they were combined to create one variable having a Cronbach's alpha of 0.81. A combination of these three scales to create one variable gives clarity to the analysis and interpretation of the relationships. Our dependent variable is labelled willingness to support the HR diversity practice. All the items of the measure are presented in the Appendix.

3.3 Analytic strategy

To test the hypotheses, SPSS 22.0.0.0 (IBM SPSS Statistics) was used for linear regression modelling ([Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010](#)). The three-step procedure recommended by [Baron and Kenny \(1986\)](#) was applied to test the mediation hypothesis. According to [Baron and Kenny \(1986\)](#), there are three conditions that need to be met in order to support a mediating relationship. First, the independent variable needs to be significantly related to the mediator variable in the first equation. Second, the independent variable needs to be significantly related to the dependent variable in the second equation. Finally, after entering the mediator variable in the regression model, the relationship between the independent and dependent variables should either disappear, implying full mediation, or be decreased to a large extent, implying partial mediation.

Accordingly, in order to test the mediation hypothesis, the mediator variable was first regressed onto other-orientation, age, and gender. Following this, the dependent variable was regressed onto the independent variables, where diversity values were entered in the last step in order to estimate both the direct effects and the mediation hypothesis. In order to test whether there was a significant difference between the four variations of the rationale for introducing the HR diversity practice with regard to willingness to implement, the one-way ANOVA analysis was applied.

4 Results

Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and Cronbach's alpha for all multiple item scales are reported in [Table 1](#).

Table 1 Descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities, and intercorrelations.

alt-text: Table 1

Variable	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
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		Mean ^a									
1.	Educational level ^b	5.28	0.86								
2.	Age ^c	3.00	1.07	-0.04							
3.	Gender ^d	1.48	0.50	-0.06	0.13**						
4.	Contact quality	3.92	0.51	0.07	0.10*	-0.07	(0.82)				
5.	Diversity values	3.88	0.77	0.18***	0.13**	-.012*	0.48***	(0.75)			
6.	Self-concern	4.10	0.76	0.05	-.012*	0.02	0.06	0.11*	(0.67)		
7.	Other-orientation	4.11	0.75	0.01	0.04	-0.06	0.14**	0.19***	0.46***	(0.78)	
8.	Willingness to support the practice	3.55	0.78	0.17**	0.15**	-.013*	0.43***	0.62***	0.09	0.18***	(0.95)

Note: The correlations and internal reliabilities (Cronbach's alphas) are based on $n = 385$. Scale reliabilities are displayed on the diagonal. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

^a Mean: We reported mode of the respondents' age, in order to more precisely present the sample, where 33.8 per cent of the sample was between 40 and 49 years.

^b Educational level: We coded educational level where no education was coded as "1", primary school as "2", high school as "3", vocational education or similar "4", up to and including 4 years of education at a college and/or university as "5" and more than 4 years of education at a college and/or university as "6".

^c Age: We assessed age on an interval scale where 18-29 years was coded as "1", 30-39 years was coded as "2", 40-49 years was coded as "3", 50-59 years was coded as "4" and 60 years and above was coded as "5".

^d Gender: We coded female as "1" and male as "2".

The data met the assumptions of the statistical models. In order to test the hypotheses, the regression analysis was applied (Fig. 2). The analysis revealed that individuals' contact quality was significantly related to their willingness to support the diversity practice ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.001$). Accordingly, Hypothesis 1, predicting a direct relationship between the contact quality and willingness to support the HR diversity practice, was supported. Moreover, diversity values were significantly related to individuals' willingness to support the diversity practice ($\beta = 0.50, p < 0.001$), in support of Hypothesis 2 that predicted a direct relationship between diversity values and willingness to support the HR diversity practice. Regarding Hypothesis 3, predicting a negative relationship between self-concern and willingness to support the practice, support was not found ($\beta = 0.04, n.s.$). Moreover, other-orientation was positively related to willingness to implement the diversity practice ($\beta = 0.10, p < 0.05$), in support of Hypothesis 4. Hypothesis 5, predicting a positive relationship between age and willingness to support the practice, was also supported ($\beta = 0.13, p < 0.01$). Moreover, gender was significantly related to willingness to implement the diversity practice ($\beta = -0.11, p < 0.05$), in support of Hypothesis 6 (Table 2).

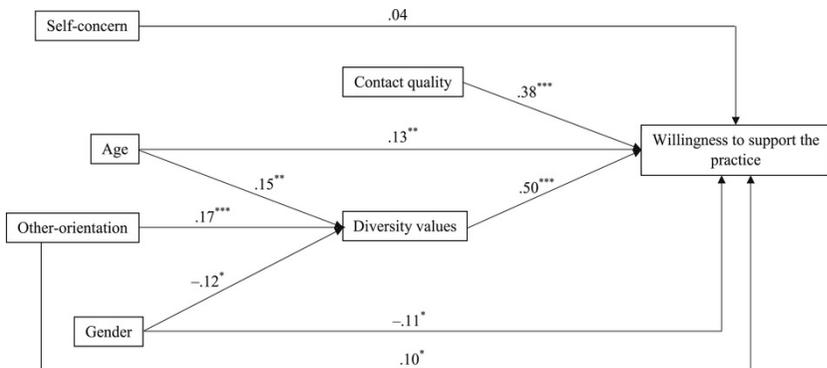


Fig. 2 Regression Model.

alt-text: Fig. 2

Table 2 Results of regression analyses.

alt-text: Table 2

Variable	Diversity values		Willingness to support the practice		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Educational level	0.18***	0.18**	0.17**	0.14**	0.07
Other-orientation		0.17***		0.10*	0.06
Age		0.15**		0.13**	0.08
Gender		−0.12*		−0.11*	−0.06
Contact quality				0.38***	0.16***
Self-concern				0.04	0.01
Diversity values					0.50***
ΔR^2	0.03	0.07	0.03	0.21	0.18
Total R^2	0.03	0.10	0.03	0.24	0.42
ΔF	13.11***	9.42***	11.46**	21.43***	113.20***

Note: Standardised regression coefficients are shown; $n = 385$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

In order to test the mediation hypothesis, [Baron and Kenny's \(1986\)](#) three-step procedure was applied, as presented in the analytic strategy section. First, other-orientation ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < 0.001$), age ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.01$), and gender ($\beta = -0.12$, $p < 0.05$) were associated with diversity values. Second, as mentioned above, other-orientation ($\beta = 0.10$, $p < 0.01$), age ($\beta = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$), and gender ($\beta = -0.11$, $p < 0.05$) were related to willingness to implement the practice. The final step showed that the relationship between other-orientation, age, and gender, and the dependent variable, was reduced when diversity values were included in the model. A supplementary Sobel test ([Sobel, 1982](#)) was performed and indicated that the reduction was statistically significant for other-orientation ($z = 3.43$, $p < 0.001$), age ($z = 2.46$, $p < 0.05$), and gender ($z = -2.58$, $p < 0.01$), indicating mediation by diversity values. Consequently, [Hypothesis 7](#), predicting that diversity values mediate the relationship between (a) other-orientation, (b) age, and (c) gender, and willingness to support the HR diversity practice, was supported.

5 Discussion

In the world of changing demographics, where increased workforce diversity is a reality for many large organisations, diversity represents a prized resource if managed well ([Richard, Barnett, Dwyer, & Chadwick, 2004](#)). Managers' perceptions of HR diversity practices are of vital importance for the successful implementation of DM (cf. [Kalev et al., 2006](#); [Ng & Sears, 2012](#); [Nishii & Mayer, 2009](#); [Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007](#)). Hence, organisations need to be aware of this when recruiting, promoting and training managers, as well as when assigning responsibility for implementation of diversity practices. The results of this study suggest that individuals' experiences and who they are, can play a crucial role in their support for diversity practices. The higher the quality of contact individuals have with people from the target group of diversity policies, the more positive they are toward these policies. Similarly, those with higher diversity values show more support towards the practice. Additionally, individuals oriented towards others' goals and interests are also likely to be more supportive toward diversity practices, even though targets of the practices are from the out-group.

Older individuals and women expressed more willingness to support the HR diversity practice. This study also found that individuals who were oriented towards others' goals and aspirations, and who were older and female, were more likely to have higher diversity values and, in turn, be willing to support the diversity practice. Presumably, individuals who are supportive of HR diversity practices will be more inclined to put in effort and invest time in order to implement such practices. Previous research supports the importance of demographic characteristics for understanding diversity practices (e.g., [Mor Barak et al., 1998](#); [Ng & Sears, 2012](#)), and our findings are in line with these studies.

5.1 Theoretical and practical implications and suggestions for future research

This study contributes to the HR management literature through its investigation of willingness to support the implementation of HR practices, and it enriches the research on effective DM by applying and extending contact theory to the context of DM. Building on the diversity literature, we found that who the individual is and what they have experienced does relate to their willingness to implement diversity practices. First, diversity values were positively related to support for the practice. While these variables may appear similar in their operationalisation, factor analyses provided support for treating them as separate constructs. In addition, they are conceptually different, where diversity values assess the extent to which an individual values diversity in general, while willingness to support the diversity practice is focused on a specific practice. Hence, in examining diversity values, rather than general social values, our findings are more specific than previous research (Ng & Sears, 2012). However, the present conclusion also supports the findings of previous studies: values matter. Second, by applying and extending self-concern and other-orientation to the HR and DM context, these findings indicate that other-orientation relates to an individual's willingness to support a practice that helps others. Third, the empirical results of this study demonstrate that the individual's demographic characteristics are linked to their willingness to support diversity practices. Lastly, an individual's experience with different others is connected to their willingness to implement diversity practices.

Although a large body of research has addressed the gap between intended and implemented HR practices, these studies have only examined bundles of practices (high-performance, best practice, etc.) (Hall & Torrington, 1998; McGovern et al., 1997; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003), while the present study attends to the uniqueness of a specific HR practice. The HR practice related to diversity issues is complex, since it is often developed to reduce discrimination based on demographic differences among employees, and yet this very practice can increase social categorisations (Harrison et al., 2006) and make managers aware of their own membership. For this reason, HR diversity practices require special attention within HR systems.

Many studies have investigated the implementation process of diversity practices in the light of organisational structural support for managers, support from the HR department, communication of the practices and their content (e.g., Kulik, 2014; Olsen & Martins, 2012; Roberge, Lewicki, Hietapelto, & Abdyltaeva, 2011). However, this study suggests that experiences, values and other-orientation are central to the individuals' willingness to implement. For practitioners, this implies that organisations should be aware of the managers' characteristics, and realise that extra training for some managers could be required to galvanise their support for diversity practices. Organisations could also make sure future managers have the chance to work with different others and create opportunities for positive out-group experiences.

There are several avenues for future research. First, a natural next step would be to investigate these relationships in a specific organisation where the importance of organisational context could be investigated. Second, since many organisations in Norway have a diverse workforce, but do not yet have diversity programmes and practices, future research could investigate the impact of managers' experiences and characteristics on their subordinates' perceived inclusion in the workplace and the extent to which they feel embedded in their jobs. More precisely, the findings from this study might be used to test how the quality of contact with different others, values, orientation, and demographic characteristics of managers relate to the extent to which their subordinates perceive inclusion, instead of necessity to assimilate to the majority (e.g., Swann, Polzer, Seyle, & Ko, 2004). Finally, the findings from this study may also be tested on other types of diversity practices and social identity groups, for instance women or people with disabilities.

5.2 Limitations

The results of the present study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the data were gathered at one point in time, making it impossible to draw any inferences of causality or rule out the possibility of reverse causality. In addition, the contact with different others was generally positive in this sample, thus it is not possible to know what might happen if negative contact occurred. This implies that we can only observe the range of high quality contact and the current data do not provide grounds for concluding that negative contact would be negatively related to support for the diversity practice. Accordingly, in order to remedy these shortcomings and improve general understanding of the relationship, longitudinal studies that capture also negative intergroup contact are warranted. Another limitation is the reliance on a vignette and self-reported questionnaire data, as this raises concerns about what actions these individuals would take in real-life circumstances, if they had the opportunity.

A related concern is that individuals are aware of the social desirability of their answers (Wouters, Maesschalck, Peeters, & Roosen, 2014) and, therefore, tend to answer in a socially desirable manner even when such responses do not necessarily reflect what their real reactions and intentions would be. For instance, responses regarding the HR diversity practice could represent the overall expectations concerning such practices in Norway, rather than individuals' real behaviour in organisations. However, while a vignette study does not allow us to draw conclusions about actual actions, the relationships between individuals' experiences and characteristics, and their willingness to support the practice were significant. This shows that there is a variation between individual scores even if social desirability is present, and provides evidence that the hypothesised relationships do exist.

Another weakness is that the study does not include control for possible managerial level of the respondents, thus not allowing us to draw conclusions about willingness to support the HR diversity practice of those who might have the responsibility for implementation. For instance, employees without managerial responsibility might be more supportive towards the practice, since it would be more of a theoretical support than a situation they could face in a real life. In addition, they could be less familiar with the workload of a LM and potential structural challenges for the implementation of the practice. Accordingly, to remedy this issue, researchers should control for managerial level of the respondents in future research conducting similar vignette studies. Moreover, this study does not include control for organisational context, even though Ely and Thomas (2001) found that the organisational context strongly influences individuals' attitudes to diversity and diversity practices. Hence, although internal validity is high in the present analyses, generalisations to specific organisational settings cannot be made. While it should be noted that our

study was focusing on the type of role an individual can have in these processes and not the circumstances and organisational influences; a fruitful avenue for future research would be to investigate the relevance of organisational context and influences for implementation of diversity practices. Finally, it is also important to consider the generalisability of these findings. Even though data were collected from different types of organisations, industries and regions of Norway, research is needed from other countries and cultures before firm conclusions can be drawn.

6 Conclusion

HR diversity practices appear be critical for recruiting, promoting, and retaining employees from diverse backgrounds. Although such employees are highly valuable to organisations, workplace inequality is alive and well, preventing many employees from reaching their potential, as well as inducing them to leave. This results in a loss for organisations that have invested in these people over a period of time and to the individual employee. In order to address these challenges, HR diversity practices need to be successfully implemented in organisations. By investigating the factors that relate to an individual's supportiveness of such practices, this study has shown the potentially important role of a LM's individual experiences, values, other-orientation, and demographic characteristics. Yet, testing of these proposed elements in a particular organisation is crucial for a more comprehensive and realistic model of the implementation of HR diversity practices. By demonstrating that an individual's characteristics can influence their willingness to support diversity practices, our study can help HR specialists make wiser and better-informed choices when assigning responsibility for the implementation of diversity strategies and training LMs. Finally, increased knowledge of the factors that are necessary for the successful implementation of HR diversity practices will be beneficial to both HR researchers and practitioners.

Appendix

Measurement Scales Combined into Willingness to Support the HR Diversity Practice

Intention to Implement the HR Diversity Practice

1. I would be very enthusiastic to support this practice in that organisation.
2. I would think that this practice is really necessary in that organisation.
3. I would put effort into achieving the goals of this practice in that organisation.
4. I would try to convince employees of the benefits this practice will bring to that organisation.
5. I would intend to put effort in order to support this practice in that organisation.
6. I would make time to support this practice in that organisation.

Perceived Fairness of the HR Diversity Practice

1. This practice would not be fair to other employees. (R)
2. Every employee with non-Western immigrant background deserves the right to this practice.
3. It is everyone's responsibility to integrate employees with non-Western immigrant background, and this practice helps to accomplish this task.
4. It is not the organisation's responsibility to provide this practice for employees with non-Western immigrant background. (R)
5. Being an individual with non-Western immigrant background is a source of many challenges, and these employees deserve the aid of this practice.
6. Individuals with non-Western immigrant background are a part of society and it is the responsibility of large institutions to help with the integration efforts.
7. Individuals with non-Western immigrant background need more help and therefore deserve the opportunities this practice offers.
8. In the past, employees with non-Western immigrant background did not benefit of special practices, and therefore it is not fair to offer this practice to new employees with non-Western immigrant background. (R)
9. Moving to another country is a personal choice, and all the developmental efforts should be done by the individual, rather than by the employer. (R)

Attitude Toward the HR Diversity Practice

1. That organisation would spend too much money assisting employees with non-Western immigrant background. (R)
2. I believe such a diversity practice will help the organisation to achieve its goals and obtain financial benefits.
3. I believe such a diversity practice is the "right thing" to do, regardless of its pragmatic utility to the organisation.
4. Integration concerns should be important to executives when companies develop and implement their strategies.
5. A company's effort to integrate individuals with non-Western immigrant background should go beyond what the law requires even if profits might be reduced.
6. Introducing such a diversity practice will increase the opportunities of employees with non-Western immigrant background to reach their potential.

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Footnotes

¹According to [Høydahl \(2008\)](#), in order to simplify for the purpose of statistics, the world was divided in two - Western and non-Western countries, where Western refers to countries from West Europe, North America, and Oceania, whilst the rest was non-Western. Once this distinction was shown to have a large impact on statistics, it was often used in statistical analysis, in politics, and almost daily in newspapers. What is deemed to be Western is often understood as something positive and highly developed, whereas non-Western is more often associated with problems of various kinds ([Høydahl, 2008](#)).

Queries and Answers

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