

ESSEC Chair of Diversity and Performance Academic Conference

at the ESSEC Business School, Paris

23 April 2010

**‘The value of investigating stakeholder involvement
in diversity management’**

Anne-marie Greene (Warwick University Business School)

Anne-marie.greene@wbs.ac.uk

and

Gill Kirton (Queen Mary University of London)

g.kirton@qmul.ac.uk

The value of investigating stakeholder involvement in diversity management

Introduction

We have been researching and writing about diversity management (DM) for over a decade now and this conference has provided an opportunity for us to reflect on our work and contribution to the scholarly debate. When we were writing our first book about DM in the late 1990s (Kirton and Greene 2000), diversity as a field of study was relatively small in the UK and even smaller in the rest of the EU, particularly compared to the US where there had been a sudden growth in DM research in the mid-late 1990s. As well as there now existing a fairly large literature in the UK, DM as an object of study now seems to be a global phenomenon with academics researching DM in a vast range of national contexts including European countries, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and the Middle East. Collections such as Konrad et al's (2006) and Ozbilgin's (2009) bear witness to this. DM is also now a ubiquitous management discourse and there has been an explosion of what we might call a 'diversity industry' catering to the increasing demands from business and management for practitioner guides, diversity training and diversity consultants.

Much of the academic debate on DM takes place either in the general management or the human resource management (HRM) literature – as a managerialist paradigm, this perhaps seems the natural home for DM research. Many of our own articles are in HRM journals (Kirton and Greene 2006; Kirton and Greene 2009; Kirton et al. 2007; Kirton and Healy 2009), however we deliberately positioned our latest book on DM within the industrial relations (IR) literature (Greene and Kirton 2009). The book deals with both unionised and non-unionised employment contexts and with multiple actors and stakeholders and their perspectives, including employees, trade unions, line-managers and diversity practitioners. Our aim, even though we use the managerialist label

‘diversity management’, is to claim IR as the space where contemporary policy and practice on equality and diversity in the employment relationship are analysed and discussed. We believe that this approach has the added value of keeping workers, trade unions and all that is involved in the *collective* employment relationship in the picture when in an era of (unitarist) HRM it might be easy to exclude them from DM research as irrelevant (see Kirton and Greene 2006). With regard to scholarship on DM, part of the problem from an IR perspective lies in the fact that many authors writing on DM (even where the research context is unionised) tend not to engage with the question of union involvement in policy development and implementation or even the difference (if any) union presence makes¹. Some might argue that this is because unionization is so low that the unions *do not* make any difference at workplace level. However, we have to remember that rates of unionization are highly variable between sectors and across industries, with the public sector being more highly unionised in most industrialized countries. Thus, there is at least *potential* for unions to make a difference on equality and diversity in some workplaces.

This is the background to this chapter on the value of investigating stakeholder perspectives on DM. It is essentially a position piece which briefly describes the main findings from a two year, UK-based DM research project (reported fully in Greene and Kirton, 2009 and other publications) and informed by multiple stakeholder perspectives, it situates these within broader themes and debates within the DM field. The general picture of DM in practice revealed by this research informs our latest views on the prospects for DM as a paradigm to advance the equality project within UK organisations. In particular we reflect on the value of a stakeholder perspective in DM research and its ability to illuminate the different and complex organisational experiences of DM and the tensions and dilemmas that these multiple experiences reveal. We also critically appraise the value of a stakeholder perspective for equality and diversity research.

Revealing our positionality

Within industrial relations there have been a number of calls recently for authors to reveal their ‘positionality’ (e.g. Holgate et al. 2006). Revealing our positionality as DM researchers is relevant to our arguments about the value of a stakeholder perspective. As academics writing in this area, we obviously have to recognize our place within the ‘diversity industry’ referred to above – we ourselves are stakeholders in this industry. There can surely be no doubt that the increasing interest in DM outside of the academy has provided opportunities for many business and management school academics to access research funding, to publish books, articles and to progress their careers. Nevertheless, our position has always been one of taking a critical stance on the phenomenon of DM, meaning that we have not sought via our research to produce ‘business solutions’ and we have not focused in any detail on establishing the contribution of workforce diversity to business performance. Further, regardless of the importance for scholarly debate of definitional and theoretical explorations of DM, in the end, what is most important for us is to try and ascertain whether the DM paradigm actually advances the equality agenda. Thus, we position our work on DM within a rights-based paradigm. In essence, underlying our work is always the question does DM benefit those workers who face discrimination and disadvantage within organisations and the labour market? As we argue more fully in Greene and Kirton (2009: 3-5), as academics from industrial relations backgrounds, we would count ourselves amongst those for whom ‘industrial relations is an ideological activity’ (Healy et al, 2006: 293). Therefore, we aim or at least hope to achieve progressive outcomes from the research we engage in. We would summarise our position as not purely interested in DM as an academic exercise, an abstract and conceptual debate, but in trying to understand what DM policy and practice in organisations means for workers and how it addresses and hopefully *redresses* employment discrimination and disadvantage.

Where have we come from and where are we going?

In the late 1990s, when there was relatively little DM research, especially in the UK context, our work was inevitably concerned with definitions – namely, what is DM and how is it distinct from traditional equal opportunities (EO) (Kirton and Greene, 2000;

Kirton, 2002)? This revolved around distinguishing the key features of DM, our most recent iteration of which is summarized below in Table 1.

Table 1: Differences between principles of EO and DM

Equal Opportunity	Diversity Management
Reliance on legal regulation and bureaucratic procedures to eliminate discrimination	Systemic, cultural transformation of the organization to promote the value of workforce diversity
Highlights discrimination and the penalties that organizations face under the law	Uses positive imagery and celebratory rhetoric
Efforts justified by reference to legal compulsion and the social justice case	Efforts justified by reference to the business case
Social group-based differences are the focus – e.g. gender, race/ethnicity, disability, etc.	Individual differences are emphasized, including lifestyle, appearance, work style, etc.

Source: Greene AM and Kirton, G (2009: 33) *Diversity Management in the UK: Organizational and Stakeholder Perspectives*, Routledge Research in Employment Relations, Taylor and Francis, New York

Thus as well as being interested in policy and practice, we aim in our work to explore the theoretical assumptions and propositions of the DM paradigm (Kirton, 2008, Greene, 2009; Kirton and Greene, 2010) and to show how these pose a challenge to progress on equality and diversity. We argue that the differences between the principles of EO and DM summarised in Table 1 threaten to undermine the equality agenda. Along with others (e.g. Dickens, 1999; Kersten, 2000; Lorbiecki and Jack, 2000; Woodhams and Danieli, 2000; Cunningham, 2000; Kossek et al, 2003) we have explored the contingent and partial nature of the business case approach, the potential for the emphasis on individual differences to reinforce stereotypes and ignore similarities between groups, the way that positive imagery and celebratory rhetoric fail to confront the realities of discrimination and disadvantage, and the lack of concrete initiatives within DM to change organisational culture.

In view of the flaws we see as inherent to the DM paradigm, we have come to a position, more fully articulated recently in Greene and Kirton (2009) that argues for the value, even necessity, of exploring the varied ways in which different organisational stakeholders perceive and experience DM, including diversity practitioners, senior

managers, line-managers, trade unions and non-management employees. In particular, we argue that within the DM paradigm (as delineated above), there is little room for involvement of *worker rights-oriented* stakeholders such as trade unions or other employee representatives. Even *direct* employee involvement seems unnecessary when DM positions employees as *recipients* (rather than active makers) of policy initiatives designed to benefit management and the organisation.

Like many (UK) industrial relations academics we are pro-union and we believe that where unions have a presence they are the best means of advancing a worker-rights-based agenda in organizations. Therefore, much of our DM research has focused on the ways in which the turn to DM has had or could have negative implications for unions. We have extensively explored trade union perspectives on and attitudes to DM and have found that trade union officials and representatives harbour grave concerns about the potential for DM, with its positive, celebratory rhetoric, to be used as a smokescreen to divert attention from difficult to tackle or sensitive equality and diversity issues, especially race/ethnicity. Further, we have found that union officials are concerned that DM seems to exclude the voices of non-management workers, preferring instead to position workers purely as organisational resources. From our research, it is clear that unions do not buy into the idea of mutual gains and instead see the discourse of DM as dehumanizing and exploitative. Nevertheless, unions are necessarily pragmatic organisations and have revealed themselves as willing to ‘talk diversity management’ as long as there is space to consider the effects of new policies and initiatives on employees, rather than simply focus on organisational benefits.

We have identified three main problems with DM from a trade union perspective. The first problem is the underpinning economic rationale for DM, which stands in contradiction with the employee rights-based approach that trade unions take. Although it goes without saying that unions have an interest in the long-term financial health of organisations, their primary concern is employee interests. So although the unions will often promote the business case for diversity, where the business case might call for poorer treatment and conditions or lower pay for example, it is the employee perspective

that unions must necessarily uphold. The second problem is the focus on the individual within the DM paradigm. Trade unions are collective organisations and as such they rely on collective identification – people perceiving that they have something in common with similar others. The traditional equality paradigm focuses on patterned, social group-based discrimination and disadvantage and potentially at least raises workers’ awareness of a collective dimension to their individual circumstances. On a practical level unions see collective agreements as the vehicle for reducing inequalities, rather than individualized management techniques recommended within the DM paradigm. The third problem is that DM is positioned as a top-down managerial activity. It is the vision and commitment of top management that is seen as critical to the success of DM initiatives, rather than the involvement of other stakeholders such as trade unions. When employee involvement does feature in DM it is usually in individualized forms such as suggestion schemes or attitude surveys (Kirton and Greene 2006). These three problems combine, theoretically at least, to direct DM policy efforts away from the trade union aim of social justice, dilute the union focus on group-based forms of discrimination and disadvantage, and marginalise the role of trade unions in bargaining for equality. However, it is necessary to add a note of caution here. This is a summary of the theoretical problems that DM holds for trade unions, particularly in the UK context. In practice the picture is more mixed both in the UK and other countries and contingent on the economic, social, political and industrial relations context. For example, in Denmark the unions have used the diversity discourse to pursue involvement in addressing the previously neglected policy issue of race and ethnic inequalities, thus indicating some positive benefit for workers from a discourse of diversity as opposed to equality (Greene et al. 2005).

Despite our research emphasis on trade union perspectives, our vision for a ‘stakeholder perspective’ on DM is multi-faceted and recognizes both a plurality of stakeholders and the legitimacy of their interests in the workplace. This has important policy implications because a stakeholder perspective recognizes that different interest groups have a legitimate part to play in both the development and implementation of organisational policy and moreover that policy is likely to be more successful when those people

affected by policies are involved in developing them. Thus, we have primarily been interested in capturing the ways in which DM is jointly regulated in the workplace by management and non-management groups such as trade unions. Both of these areas of research and writing, the definitional and the expositional, have had a stakeholder perspective underpinning the analysis even if we did not explicitly articulate this position until recently (Greene and Kirton 2009). Looking at the field in the mid 2000s, we argued that there was still little known about DM in *practice* in the UK and the voices of some key stakeholders were still often absent from the debates, particularly non management employees, trade union representatives and junior and middle level line managers. This was the context of our successful bid to the European Social Fund (ESF), which funded our 2003-2006 research project – *The Involvement of Stakeholders in Diversity Management: The way forward for equality policy and practice?* – and which culminated in our latest book (Greene and Kirton, 2009). The research project aimed to contribute to knowledge and understanding of DM in the UK context by exploring equality and diversity policy and practice in a range of public and private sector organisations. A key objective was to explore contemporary DM initiatives and measures, the processes involved in developing and implementing these, and views of implementation and outcomes delivered. Our focus on ‘stakeholder involvement’ in DM meant including within the research the widest possible group of organisational members, but specifically the views of diversity specialists, diversity champions, junior and middle line managers, and crucially non-management employees and trade union representatives whose voices are still often unheard in diversity debates. Taking a stakeholder perspective had methodological implications in that we believed it required qualitative research methods that could facilitate the capturing of stakeholder voices in context (see Greene and Kirton, 2009, pp 10-15 for a more detailed discussion of methodology).

Experiences of researching DM

We had considerable difficulty gaining access to organisations for the stakeholder project, particularly in the private sector. Even companies that regularly win awards for their innovative DM policies and that strenuously promote their equality and diversity

achievements, declined to participate. We believe this testifies to the sensitive and controversial nature of equality and DM research and the fact that companies are nervous about letting independent researchers into their organisations, especially to talk to a variety of stakeholders who will not necessarily ‘hold the management line’ (i.e. uphold the rhetoric of DM success). In the end, after months of negotiations with a number of different organisations, we managed to gain access to two case study organisations, one a government department, and the other a private sector facilities company, both unionised. In both research sites we used a multi-method approach involving a range of stakeholders across the organisations including: Human Resource (HR) practitioners, equality and diversity specialists, senior managers, line-managers, trade union officials and representatives, and non management employees. A second strand of the research project involved interviews with DM practitioners – 64 individuals from 49 organisations – covering a range of public sector, private sector, voluntary, trade union and non-governmental organisations. Gaining access to DM practitioners for the purposes of a one-off (albeit in-depth) interview was less problematic, even in the private sector. The project design also included two workshops with practitioners in the equality and diversity field, involving a mix of senior managers, trade union officers and academics; one workshop was held at the beginning of the project and one at the end. This provided stakeholder involvement in the design of the research and an authenticity check on the findings. As this was a qualitative research project, we do of course recognize the limits of generalisability of our findings. However, our interviews with DM practitioners provided a broad coverage of organisational types and sizes found in the UK, while the in-depth qualitative case studies illuminated policy and practice in a way that could not have been achieved with quantitative methods.

A multi-perspective picture of DM policy and practice

As we argue in Greene and Kirton (2009), it is clear that DM is a policy paradigm that has firmly come of age in the UK in that it seems to have become a ubiquitous part of organisational life and of the wider public discourse. There was not a single organisation in our project where the term ‘diversity’ was not used in some way or another in policy

and practice (albeit it was a relatively recent development in some, especially in the public sector), and usually, the term ‘diversity management’ or some variant of this had replaced the more traditional UK policy terminology of ‘equal opportunities’ (EO) or simply ‘equality’. So what did this mean for the different stakeholders that we focused on – diversity practitioners, line-managers, trade unions and employees?

We developed a fourfold typology of diversity practitioners contributing to diversity work in contemporary UK organisations – (i) diversity specialists (their job is largely dedicated to equality and diversity work); (ii) diversity champions (managers responsible for promoting the value of diversity); (iii) diversity consultants (providing external services to organisations); (iv) diversity campaigners (working for NGOs and other public bodies promoting equality and diversity). One significant point to emerge was that diversity work is no longer the preserve of activists, although activists are still found, particularly working on the outside of mainstream organisations. It is clear that a broader range of different ‘types’ of people now have significant roles in DM development and implementation. Even so, what we detected was a shift, rather than a seismic movement away from traditional equality goals and values. For example, most of the diversity practitioners in our study espoused the business case as the main driving force behind their own diversity work and what they thought should be organisational priorities. But many also had social justice goals, but they saw the business case as the vehicle or at least the discursive device for achieving these. Therefore, there was some suggestion that social justice and business cases could co-exist (as suggested by Liff and Dickens 2000). Certainly, the diversity practitioners who were consultants and campaigners were promoting a multi-faceted and complex business case that moved beyond thinking solely in terms of the ‘bottom line’ to include ethical business practice. However, one problem with this was that the general failure of respondents, particularly those on the inside of mainstream organisations, to engage critically with the diversity discourse meant that there was very little confronting of the fact the DM makes management the primary constituency, not disadvantaged social groups, such that diversity specialists probably do not act as an interface between management and employees in the way that their

predecessor equality officers did (Cockburn 1991). Yet, nearly all the respondents in all groups of practitioners were aware of the potential and capacity for line-managers – the primary constituency of DM – to disrupt or subvert policy initiatives. Therefore, it was clear that for most specialists, consultants and campaigners, allies were rarely found among line-management, with the exception of those who had stepped forward to take a visible leadership role – the diversity champions. On the whole practitioners saw the business case of DM as a progressive development, one that would win over senior and middle managers, where the social justice case of EO had failed to do so, especially in the case of middle managers.

With regard to line managers, they are the ones who are meant to be at the coalface of DM implementation, but they have become the most common scapegoat for why in practice DM does not meet the expectations of policy statements. However, rather than simply blaming line-managers and seeing them as the barrier to successful DM, we argue that there is a need to understand their perspectives – the pressures they are under and the views they hold, all of which could leave them hostile or just indifferent to DM. What comes out clearly from our research is that line-managers face many conflicting priorities, including heavy workloads and tight deadlines and that these difficulties often lead them to opt out of actively ‘managing diversity’. Many saw equality and diversity as something else they had to think about, but something of lower priority than their ‘real’ work. Further, in many of the organisations we spoke to restructuring is a common and regular feature of organisational life and the day-to-day pressures on line managers are exacerbated. However, our findings agree with others that for some line-managers it might not simply be a question of lack of time or commitment, rather that they might genuinely be at a loss to understand exactly what it is they are supposed to do to demonstrate that they value diversity (Foster and Harris, 2005). Some managers in our private sector case study thought that their role in diversity was primarily about resolving tensions and conflicts between different groups of workers – usually majority versus minority ethnic groups. Another issue is that while line managers have responsibility for certain areas of HR practice, they have little influence upwards on the way in which HR

policies in general (including DM) are developed because they are so far removed from strategic planning. In addition, we found that many line-managers lacked equality and diversity awareness and had undergone little training. Most in our study were unwilling to think beyond compliance with legal requirements (i.e. they were aware of the need to avoid discrimination based on sex, race, ethnicity etc).

The findings from our study underline how surprising it is that relatively little attention has been paid to the experiences and perspectives of non-management employees in previous accounts of the implementation and impact of DM. Analysis of our research data creates an impression of a vicious circle in which a problematic organisational culture is perpetuated by the flawed implementation of DM rather than the organisation being transformed by the success of DM. From the perceptions and experiences of employees, three key factors emerge. First there is a lack of shared ownership of policy and practice, most clearly evidenced by a lack of understanding and awareness amongst employees. This may relate to the 'slipperiness' of the concept of DM itself as well as to a failure of communication resulting in the absence of a shared discourse between managerial and non-managerial employees. The fact that this resonates strongly with concerns expressed by other research about DM being something that 'is done' to employees (Prasad and Mills 1997; Lorbiecki and Jack 2000), suggests that there is a need to refocus DM to enable employees to be *active participants* rather than *passive recipients*. Second even where policy is understood and efforts have been made to involve employees in its delivery an impression of tokenism emerges, even though the intention is sometimes seen as well placed. Third there was a perceived lack of management commitment to diversity sometimes because of the way in which discretion is exercised by line managers and sometimes because of the lack of emphasis on equality and diversity in day to day management practice. Listening to the voices of employees allows us to identify a number of fault lines within the DM context. First, where the composition of the workforce does not fully reflect the population from which it is drawn, particularly at certain levels such as more senior positions and in particular types of job, the rhetoric of DM rings hollow for employees. Second, the reality for employees

is that workplace relations are not always sufficiently harmonious or integrated (for example in terms of ethnicity or gender) for there to exist a culture of ‘valuing diversity’. Third, some DM initiatives (e.g. flexible working arrangements) are seen to benefit some and not others and perceptions of unfair treatment persist despite the DM policy. The overarching fault line is that employees may feel that despite a rhetorical commitment to DM, there is in reality an absence of equality of opportunity for lower level workers, underlining the crucial importance of non-management employees being empowered to share ownership of the policy and responsibility for its implementation.

Finally, when it comes to trade union perspectives on DM, we found considerable scepticism and some hostility towards DM among the national equality officers who had a sophisticated and politicized understanding of equality and diversity. However, at the same time as pragmatists they signalled their preparedness to ‘talk DM’ if this seemed the most expedient way to keep equality and discrimination on the organisational agenda. The union negotiators and workplace representatives generally expressed more qualified approval for the principles of DM, but naturally the potential for union exclusion from policy development was a matter of serious concern. Their experiences suggested that their exclusion could result in a narrowing of the equality and diversity agenda and in a reinforcement of the perception of non-management staff that DM policy offered few benefits to those on the ‘sticky floor’. So, what kind of input into DM development and implementation were the unions having? Our research confirms the findings of the latest Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS) survey indicating low levels of *bargaining* activity on equality and diversity (Walsh 2007). However, that is not to say that the unions in our research had no influence on DM, or that they were not consulted or informed. Our research demonstrates that it is possible for unions to exercise influence that falls short of collective bargaining, with discussions (consultation) often occurring outside of the formal bargaining arrangements, sometimes between individuals on the union and management sides. In the banking sector and in our public sector case study, we did find evidence of union input into the design and implementation of DM policies. Our research revealed a *degree* of joint regulation of equality and diversity, but the

relative failure to institutionalize bargaining and consultation on DM renders trade union influence fragile and dependent on relationships between individuals.

Therefore, despite much talk of DM being the new organisational paradigm for equality and diversity, as the final chapter of our book describes, our research involving multiple stakeholders identified a number of continuities: i) a continuity of practice, ii) a continuity of limited stakeholder involvement, iii) a continuity of the generic business case. In order to elucidate the wider significance of these findings, we briefly discuss each of these below (summarising the more extensive discussion found in Greene and Kirton, (2009: 211-220)):

A continuity of practice

Overall we found that actual practices and initiatives continued to reflect a traditional EO paradigm. We did not detect much of what we would expect to find if organisations were working within the DM paradigm beyond a lot of talk and rhetoric. The clear evidence of this was that the core components of the DM policy at all of the organisations were still focused on social groups (namely women, black and minority ethnic workers, disabled, lesbian and gay, with some looking also at age). Most of the policy initiatives would not have looked out of place in a traditional EO paradigm. Thus, the focus is therefore still largely on the equality strands covered by legislation and there can be no doubt that the need to comply with legislation retains primary place within the understandings of stakeholders and organisational policy-makers.

A continuity of limited stakeholder involvement

Contrary to the inclusive rhetoric of DM being ‘everyone’s responsibility’, we found that responsibility for equality and diversity continued to rest primarily with the HR function and there was very limited involvement of other stakeholders (line managers, non-management employees or trade union representatives) in policy development. It was worrying to see the extent to which the majority of organisational stakeholders had little opportunity to influence DM policy. Most concerning of all was the fact that most

respondents (including line-managers and employees) had no understanding at all what DM meant, what DM was for, what DM policies existed, or how DM policies related to their own work. A prime example of this is the way in which line managers were commonly seen by other stakeholders to be the biggest obstacle to the success of DM within organisations. At the same time our findings point clearly to the difficulties that line managers find in understanding what DM meant and/or in making DM a priority. This situation is only exacerbated for stakeholders further down the organisational hierarchy and only a tiny group of organisations in our research appeared to have the kind of integrated, supported and multi-channel forms of employee involvement that could potentially lead to significant input by non-management employees.

A continuity of a generic business case

Our research also confirms that UK organisations are employing the business case as a prominent feature of the rhetorical rationale for DM, (although not necessarily to the exclusion of the moral/social justice or legislative case). However, the business benefits cited by the DM practitioners and other organisational stakeholders closely resembled those advocated in prescriptive management literature. In other words the most common position taken by organisations in our research was to put forward generic, ‘best practice’ business case arguments. The problem was that organisational stakeholders found it difficult to apply this generic business case to their everyday work. Failure to identify context specific business case arguments compounded the difficulty that line managers found in operationalising DM and in understanding what the policy actually meant for them in terms of day-to-day practices. Thus it is not surprising that our research reveals that line managers’ practice of DM was widely seen by other stakeholders as uneven and inconsistent. Equally, it is not surprising that DM issues were not a priority for line managers, particularly given a context of competing demands on their time and resources. Our findings indicate that non-management employees also found extreme difficulty understanding what the business case meant for them. The vast majority of non-management employees in both the case study organisations had no knowledge of the

DM policy at all and very limited understanding of the concept of diversity. Overall, there was pessimism that diversity initiatives would hold any tangible benefits for them.

Value of a stakeholder perspective

The type of research that ignores the presence of stakeholders other than management tends to be located in the HRM journals. HRM articles tend to focus on and emphasize the importance of management policies and practices and their consequences for organisational performance. Where the impact on employees is considered, it is likely to be in relation to performance and business issues and employees are likely to be constructed as passive recipients of management policies. Within this orientation tackling equality and diversity is a management project designed to meet management objectives, and things will improve for 'minority' groups once more and better management policies and practices are established (by management). In contrast, where HRM studies have an IR orientation, collective and individual conflict, resistance and contestation are all visible within the questions asked, the methods used and the analysis of findings. We have attempted to position DM within IR by opening up an enquiry into the impact on unions and workers of the shift to a diversity paradigm. We argue that this is important, particularly in countries where unionization is still significant in some industries and occupations where DM is clearly visible (Greene and Kirton 2009; Kirton and Greene 2006). But even in the absence of unions, it is still important to consider how different groups of employees are affected by DM and how they experience and resist this management-led policy approach and whether or not non-union employee 'voice' mechanisms exist.

What does our research conducted with multiple stakeholders indicate about the state of DM practice and of DM research? We believe that the theoretical definitional work on DM has probably now run its course, and we now have enough expositions of the paradigm (as distinct or not from EO), at least in the UK. This is not to say that there is not definitional work needed in terms of how the DM paradigm is evolving in other European contexts and whether the Anglo-American model is useful or appropriate (e.g.

Wrench, 2001, 2004; Greene et al, 2007; Kirton and Greene, 2010; Point and Singh, 2003). However in the UK, the main research gap is in discovering what DM means in practice for those stakeholders involved in developing and implementing policy as well as for those who are the intended recipients. Our research has indicated the utility of a methodology which incorporates contextualised multiple stakeholder perspectives of DM. While the academic and practitioner literature had earlier established what the DM paradigm looks like and what policy initiatives might flow from such a paradigm, does this reflect what is actually happening at the organisational level? What do various stakeholders understand as DM, from their experience is it any different to EO and if so how?

As we argue, taking a stakeholder approach to research is valuable in revealing the nuanced and multiple ways in which different organisational members understand and engage with the DM concept and therefore has uncovered the complexities of its implementation. Overall, we believe such an approach offers a valuable sensitizing detail to our research and provides a much richer, more rounded and more contextualized picture of DM in theory and practice. For example, many of our taken-for-granted assumptions about how a particular stakeholder would or would not respond to aspects of the DM paradigm, and concomitantly how it was then implemented, were often challenged by actually speaking to the different stakeholders themselves (Greene and Kirton, 2009).

We identified for example the multifaceted ways that diversity practitioners understood the rationale for DM: with a mixture of passionate commitment to equality, readiness to use both social justice and business case arguments to achieve their aims, but also clear genuine belief in the business case for equality and diversity emerging from their accounts. This allowed us a perspective from which ‘it is possible to avoid assuming that diversity practitioners are not progressive, simply because they are willing to talk in the language of the business, or to genuinely have a belief that a business case was important, and/or could be made’ (Greene and Kirton, 2009: 228).

Paying attention to gathering views from as wide a group of organisational stakeholders as possible is also important in tempering the extreme positions that often emerge with a more limited focus. Talking to line managers offered important insights into *why* they are viewed as obstructive to DM by almost all other stakeholder groups in the organisation and allowed us to better understand the difficulties they face in operationalising DM. Perhaps the most important stakeholder to involve is non-management employees, because they are the key recipients of DM policy, thus we believe it is difficult to justify excluding them from the account. Our research reveals that non-management employees are not simply passive victims, or waiting recipients of policy, but exhibit palpable frustration at their lack of involvement in DM policy.

Another important question is whether DM is a threat to the equality agenda. We have argued that potentially the DM paradigm is theoretically less able to advance equality in the workplace (Kirton and Greene, 2006; Kirton et al. 2007). Given that we found in this latest research that there were very few, if any examples of organisations that were developing a coherent strategy within the DM paradigm, the question of this threat may be seen by some as somewhat redundant. However, we believe it is still a salient route of enquiry, the reasons for which are illuminated by taking a stakeholder perspective. Interviews with line-managers perfectly illustrate the dangers of privileging the business case when managers (the people who deliver on business objectives) do not sign up to it or even understand it. Similarly, interviews with line-managers reveal the problems associated with a focus on individual differences and the individual employee rather than social groups. Managers simply find it too time consuming to work out ways of accommodating, let alone valuing, multiple differences and find it quicker and easier to stick with treating employees the same. Interviews with trade union officers and representatives and with non-management employees reveal the dangers of marginalising the role of trade unions in that an opportunity is provided for organisations to downplay discrimination and disadvantage.

Moreover we argue that there is a need to consider stakeholder involvement in DM policy, because the DM paradigm seems to offer less opportunity for involvement. A

number of voices are still relatively absent from the DM debate, notably non-management employees (see for example Pringle et al, 2006: 533), but also line-managers and trade union officers/representatives. However, where these stakeholders have been included within research, questions about their involvement in the *design and development of policy* are not common. As industrial relations scholars we have a particular interest in discovering how and to what extent the voices of the marginalised and less powerful are involved in DM policy development and implementation. Despite the rhetoric within the DM paradigm about shared ownership and accountability, our research indicated a real ‘responsibility vacuum’ within organisations. Line managers had difficulty understanding or implementing DM; trade unions, where they existed, were not routinely seen as partners in DM policy-making; and there were very few examples of anything more than superficial involvement of non-management employees.

Our argument is that while there may be certain continuities of practice, the DM paradigm does seem to lead to less involvement from a broader range of stakeholders who were often at the table when equality issues were discussed within a traditional EO paradigm. For example, we found that diversity practitioners now typically do not come from activist backgrounds (Kirton and Greene, 2009; Kirton et al, 2007) and that this is associated with the limited employee involvement in DM that we now see. In essence, what we found was that there was lots of rhetoric about how DM should be everybody’s responsibility, without the structures and accountability in place for it to be taken on proactively by any organisational stakeholders beyond senior management.

While research often examines DM *policies*, this may not be as useful as exploring how policies are *implemented*, which as Purcell and his colleagues point out, remains a research gap in the wider HRM field (Purcell, 1999; Purcell et al, 2007; Hutchinson and Purcell, 2007). In order to understand the impact of DM on those most disadvantaged in organisations, we need to focus on capturing the voices of all stakeholders, but especially those often silent in the debates (namely non-management employees, trade union representatives and line-managers). There is clearly a need for further research in this

area and we believe that the types of research that emerge from taking a stakeholder perspective can make an important contribution to understanding of DM in practice.

Final Comments

We are aware that as critical researchers within the field, our accounts can sometimes be overly negative and can often offer a disappointingly pessimistic view of the state of things. In part we think that a degree of pessimism is healthy in order to counter some of the overly optimistic and celebratory assessments that can emerge from the management and practitioner texts and from academic research that is focused on the senior management perspective. Returning to our positioning outlined at the beginning of this paper, this negativity belies our commitment to upholding the importance of action on equality and diversity within organisations. Despite the rather gloomy headline findings emerging from our research, there are positive examples of progressive diversity practices at organisational level. We hope that our critical analysis will indicate possibilities of thinking about and practicing DM in different ways; in particular we hope that it will encourage greater stakeholder involvement in research and practice.

We feel that there are still huge gaps in the DM knowledge base. We need to take on board the growing consensus within the HRM field that what is needed is research that aims to investigate the dynamics of policy implementation. We argue that a 'stakeholder perspective' is a valuable tool to better understand these processes at organisational level.

References

Boxall, P and Purcell, J (2008) *Strategy and HRM*, 2nd edition, Palgrave Macmillan.

Cunningham, R. (2000). 'From great expectations to hard times? Managing equal opportunities under new public management.' *Public Administration* **78**(3): 699-714.

Dickens L. (1999) Beyond the business case: a three-pronged approach to equality action', *Human Resource Management Journal*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 9-19.

Foster, C. and L. Harris (2005). 'Easy to say, difficult to do: diversity management in retail.' *Human Resource Management Journal* **15**(3): 4-17.

Greene AM, Kirton G and Wrench J, (2005)'Trade Union Perspectives on Diversity Management: A Comparison of the UK and Denmark', *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 11:2, 179-196

Greene, A. M. (forthcoming)'Equal opportunities and HRM' in Wilkinson, A., Redman, T, Snell, S and Bacon, N. (eds) *Handbook of Human Resource Management*, Sage.

Greene, A. M. and Kirton G. (2006). Trade Unions and Equality and Diversity. *Handbook of Workplace Diversity*. A. Konrad, P. Prasad and J. Pringle. London, Sage: 489-510.

Guest, D. and Peccei, M. (1998) '*The Partnership Company*', Involvement and Participation Association.

Healy, G., Hansen, L. L. and Ledwith, S. (2006) 'Editorial: Still uncovering gender in industrial relations', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 37: 4, 290-298.

Holgate, J., Hebson and McBride, A. (2006) 'Why gender and 'difference' matters: A critical appraisal of industrial relations research', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 37: 4, 310-328

Hutchinson, S. and Purcell, J (2007) *The role of line managers in people management*, CIPD: London.

Kersten, A. (2000). 'Diversity management: dialogue, dialectics and diversion.' *Journal of Occupational Change Management* **13**(3): 235-248.

Kinnie, N and Swart, J, (2009) 'Human Resource Management and Organisational performance' in Redman and Wilkinson, 'Contemporary Human Resource Management: Text and cases, Prentice Hall.

Kirton G and Greene, A M (2000) *The Dynamics of Managing Diversity: A Critical Approach*. First Edition, Butterworth Heinemann: Oxford

Kirton G and Greene, A M (2010) *The Dynamics of Managing Diversity: A Critical Approach*. Third Edition, Elsevier: Oxford

Kirton G. and Greene A.M, (2006) 'The Discourse of Diversity in Unionised Contexts: Views from Trade Union Equality Officers' *Personnel Review* Vol 34, pp 431-448.

Kirton G. and Greene, A.M. (2007) 'What does diversity management mean for the gender equality project? Views and experiences of multiple organizational actors in the UK, Paper presented at the *Gender, Work and Organization Conference*, 27-29 June, Keele University.

Kirton G., Greene A. M. and Dean D. (2007), 'British Diversity Professionals as Change Agents – Radicals, Tempered Radicals or Liberal Reformers?' *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18: 11, 1979-1994

Kirton, G. (2002). What is Diversity? *Managing Diversity in the Workplace*. S. Johnstone. London, LexisNexis: 1-23.

Kirton, G. (2008) 'Managing multi-culturally in organizations in a diverse society' in S Clegg and C Cooper (eds.) *Handbook of Macro Organizational Behaviour*, Sage:

Kirton, G. and Greene, A. M. (2009) 'The Costs and Opportunities of Doing Diversity Work in Mainstream Organisations', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 19: 2.

Kirton, G. and G. Healy (2009) 'Using competency-based assessment centres to select judges – Implications for equality and diversity.' *Human Resource Management Journal*, 19(3): 302-318

Konrad, A., P. Prasad, et al. (2006). Handbook of Workplace Diversity. London, Sage.

- Kossek, E., K. Markel, et al. (2003). 'Increasing diversity as an HRM change strategy.' *Journal of Organizational Change Management* **16**(3): 328-352.
- Legge, K. (2005) *HRM: Rhetorics and Realities*, Macmillan.
- Lorbiecki, A. and G. Jack (2000). 'Critical Turns in the Evolution of Diversity Management.' *British Journal of Management* **11**(Special Issue): S17-S31.
- Marchington, M. and Wilkinson, A. (2005) 'Direct Participation and Involvement'. In S. Bach (ed.), *Managing Human Resources*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Point, S. and V. Singh (2003) Defining and Dimensionalising Diversity: Evidence from Corporate Websites Across Europe, *European Management Journal*, 21(6), 750–761.
- Pringle, J., Konrad, A., and Prasad, P. (2006) 'Conclusion: Reflection and future direction', in Konrad, A., Prasad, P., and Pringle, J (eds) *Handbook of workplace diversity*, Sage: London, 531-539.
- Purcell, J. (1999) 'The search for 'best practice' and 'best fit': Chimera or cul de sac?', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 9: 3, 26-41.
- Purcell, J. and Hutchinson, S. (2007) 'Front line managers as agents in the HRM-performance causal chain: Theory, analysis and evidence', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 17: 1, 3-20.
- Walsh, J. (2007). "Equality and diversity in British workplaces: the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey." *Industrial Relations Journal* **38**(4): 303-319.
- Woodhams, C. and Danieli A. (2000). 'Disability and Diversity - A Difference Too Far?' *Personnel Review* **29**(3): 402-416.
- Wrench, J. (2001). Diversity management - the new way of combating ethnic discrimination in Europe? *Ethnic minority workers and the European employment strategy*. European Trade Union Institute, Brussels.

Wrench, J. (2004) 'Trade Union Responses to Immigrants and Ethnic Inequality in Denmark and the UK: The Context of Consensus and Conflict' *European Journal of Industrial Relations* 10 (1) 7-30

ⁱ I have chosen not to provide examples as my intention is not to attack researchers' work, but simply to highlight the limitations of the DM research that is outside of an IR paradigm.