



DIVERSITY IN ACADEMIA – WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

“ Diversity has become a positive buzz word – something everybody wants and everybody is talking about. However, the concept of diversity often masks ambiguities in terms of who we are talking about, what we are trying to achieve and how we are going to achieve it. In working with diversity in academia, we need clearly defined terms, an accurate understanding of what the problems are, and knowledge of effective measures.

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PROBLEM 1:

WHO ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

WE NEED TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN:



INTERNATIONAL
RESEARCHERS



REFUGEES WITH
AN ACADEMIC
BACKGROUND



DESCENDANTS OF
IMMIGRANTS IN
NORWAY

PROBLEM 2:

DIFFERENT GROUPS = DIFFERENT CHALLENGES



INTERNATIONAL
RESEARCHERS

Need integration linguistically and culturally, and their inclusion in the work environment must be ensured



REFUGEES WITH AN
ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

Need qualifications assessed and verified quickly and to find relevant job opportunities



DESCENDANTS OF
IMMIGRANTS IN NORWAY

Need to be motivated to choose an academic career

PROBLEM 3:

NOT ALL MEASURES HAVE THE INTENDED EFFECT:



Compulsory diversity training for management has *no* effect on the percentage of women and minorities



Stringent control regimes that undermine employer autonomy has a *negative* effect



Transparency in recruitment and promotion processes has a *positive* effect



Top and middle managers actively engaging in proactive equality and diversity work has a *positive* effect



Regular monitoring *increases* the positive effects of other measures, but is not in itself enough

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Frank Dobbin et al. (2006, 2015) studied 816 companies in the United States over a 30-year period. This is one of very few studies available that offer quality insight into measures that actually work.

MORE RESEARCH UNDERWAY

Dobbin et al. are about to publish a similar study of American universities. The NORDICORE unit at the Institute for Social Research is in the process of replicating this study in Norway, Sweden, Iceland and Finland.

PROBLEM 4:

DIVERSITY IN THE HE SECTOR

Most institutions in higher education have overarching strategies for equality and internationalization, while decisions are made at department level. As a result, institutions are often inadequately equipped to implement relevant measures. Some key challenges:

MANAGEMENT

Heads of department are often appointed on a fixed-term basis

RECRUITMENT

Management positions are often filled by newcomers

TRAINING

Training in diversity management is not part of management training

MERITOCRACY

Widespread faith in meritocracy, limited awareness of unconscious bias



WE NEED:

Awareness of which groups we
are talking about

Understanding that inclusion of
different groups will to some extent
require different strategies

Knowledge of which strategies
are effective

DIVERSITY IS A MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITY

We need managers – at all levels – who
are able to take on these challenges.

Visions at the top are important, but we
need to bring department managements
on board.

MIDTBØEN ON DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN ACADEMIA



Arnfinn H. Midtbøen is a research professor at the Institute for Social Research. Midtbøen is also active in Institute's Centre of Excellence: NORDICORE – Nordic Centre for Research on Gender Equality in Research and Innovation. NORDICORE studies gender equality and diversity in academia. Midtbøen is also a member of The Young Academy of Norway.

Read more about NORDICORE:

www.samfunnsforskning.no/core/nordicore

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