

Whiteness

Whiteness is a term that aims to make white people visible to themselves as a racialized category (Andermahr et al., 2000). White people have viewed themselves as racially neutral, which it has been claimed gives them power. Invisibility is, as noted by Burgin, a general instrument of power.

White however has the strange property of directing our attention to color while in the very same moment it exonerates itself as a 'color', for we know very well that this means 'not white'... To speak of the color of skin is to speak of a body. (Burgin, 1996: 130–1, in Povez, 2004: 58)

This is important for critical leadership especially with a corporate European-American 'Axis of Malesness and Whiteness' (or as some feminists put it 'pale, male and stale'). Power and patriarchy are still intimately linked, and whiteness is still regarded as neutral and normative, especially in corporations, although some progress has taken place in the public sector in the UK. The task for those in leadership is to recognize this state of affairs and address it with urgency. When locating ourselves, the concept of whiteness can help bring 'normative' European-American behaviours and assumptions into focus.

Diversity Education

Marginalized minorities face discrimination in subtle and indirect ways. Treacher discusses the difficulty of addressing difference because it is 'subtle and yet pervasive'. She refers to:

a series of mantras being repeated ... it is not that I think these are inadequate or wrong but that they operate as shutters against thought, feeling and recognition of how we are all implicated in fantasies of self and other. (Treacher, 2000: 12)

The only possible way to address diversity is from a perspective that begins with ourselves, recognizing our individual and collective social location and historical-cultural position. Unless leaders can do this, then they address these difficult issues with huge blind-spots triggered by their defence mechanisms. Yet many diversity education settings provoke defences rather than build trust. Discussing diversity is problematic, as it inevitably threatens one's identity. When discussed in leadership circles dominated by white men, diversity also asks uncomfortable questions about privilege and power. My experience of workplace diversity and equality workshops is that they often raise anxieties and create defensive responses amongst the participants who are most in need of change if a culture change is to occur. These defences are displayed either passive-aggressive responses or total compliance. Silent resistance occurs that emerges as vocal resistance in small groups over coffee after the event, or aggressive-defensive behaviours, such as 'we are all individuals here and nobody is treated differently' or 'are you calling me a racist?'. Building trust in order to have more transparent conversations is the only possible way to make progress. As every good psychoanalyst knows, pushing at resistance only creates more resistance. When discussing diversity issues it is vitally important not to lose the ability to think or to speak. Diversity policies have made language central to their attempts to change behaviour; however this has a double edge. It does help to improve negative images of racial and gender stereotypes but it also has other consequences. Andrew Cooper points out, 'one of the unintended consequences of Political Correctness is that it has bred a generation of stutterers' (Cooper, 1996: 2). People become afraid to speak, for fear of saying the wrong thing, and being accused of being racist or sexist. It is almost impossible to be 'politically correct' because there is no 'correct', and for those outside the diversity discourse the nuances and changing terms and acronyms used to describe diversity are very challenging. For example, 'what does LGBT mean and whom do I apply to?' 'Should I say gay or homosexual when addressing this issue?' Should I use black, person of colour, brown, mixed-race, African-American, Asian, Indian-British? What is accepted in some countries, regions and contexts is wrong in others, and finding a common language becomes increasingly difficult. Those outside of the latest agreed terms of reference find themselves stuttering or silenced. Engaging people to change from all sides of the diversity spectrum means building trust, openness and understanding.

I am concerned about this alienation that occurs during 'equal opportunity and diversity purges' in the workplace, which can close down rather than open up dialogue. Learning the mantras is easy: 'celebrate difference', 'empower everyone'. Yet if real change is to occur, leadership is required to bring the discussions and debates back to practice, and to tolerate mistakes, slips and misunderstandings in order to surface what is really happening, the subtle discrimination, and to identify where change is needed and the process that will achieve this. Diversity is as much about inclusion as it is exclusion, and this needs to be enacted in diversity education; creating an elite from those who can command the diversity language and agenda creates new barriers, and is not underpinned by the principles of maximizing inclusion.

Using personal experience to locate 'personal and shared' ideas of normative behaviour and defences is the only starting point when dealing with diversity and difference. Addressing systems and power structures, normative attitudes, discourses and behaviours that exclude and diminish minority and marginalized groups is vital to this debate.

Successful future leaders will be those who are able to cope with diversity and difference, as the globalized world demands it.

The Diversity Business Case: Beware!

Diversity issues are marginalized in management circles and business schools. When they are dealt with it is too often as an 'add on' to placate the liberal 'politically correct' lobby. Kandola and Fullerton (1994) take another approach, which emphasizes the business case for managing diversity:

... that there are visible and invisible differences, sex, age, background, race, disability, personality, work-style ... harnessing these differences will create a productive environment in which everybody feels valued, where talents are being fully utilized and in which organizational goals are being met. (Kandola and Fullerton, 1994: 47)

R. Roosevelt Thomas Jr (1991: 16–17), a US diversity consultant, makes the business case, and argues in more concrete terms that managing diversity is

not about a moral responsibility to do the right thing ... it is not a civil rights or humanitarian issue ... it is about maximising employee effectiveness and retaining competitive advantage when working in a global economy with an increasingly diverse workforce. (cited in Fulop and Linstead, 1999: 56)

This utilitarian 'business case' for managing diversity in order to improve efficiency is important as it adds to the argument: for example, in recent work in an international bank with a patriarchal culture they were slow to realize the ethical case, but quickly grasped that their competitors were gaining an advantage by employing women at senior levels, because without doing so 50% of the talent pool was being missed. Yet the utilitarian case is also naive and dangerous when separated from ethical and human concerns. The business case (creativity, the retention and recruitment of talent, maximizing the potential of the workforce etc.) is important but it cannot be the only argument. Unless there is a deeper ethical belief in a diversity agenda it is unlikely to be successful, as privileged elites will repeat the mantras but not change the structures that exclude disadvantages and minority groups. What happens when research shows that the most effective workforce consists of homogeneous groups? Bond and Pyle (1998) researched workplace diversity in the USA: 'A predominant research finding shows that whilst diverse teams can be creative, they also tend to experience less cohesion and greater turnover than more homogeneous work groups' (Bond and Pyle, 1998: 591). Using Thomas's rationale, the business case would now argue for diversity in areas that require creativity, such as design teams, and homogeneous teams for production. My guess is that it would have a pretty devastating effect on employee moral if the company divided teams by race, sexuality and gender, citing efficient working teams as the reason. Martin Parker in *Ethics and Organizations* suggests that utilitarianism is in a sense the logic of organization (Parker, 1998), yet utilitarianism without ethics can have devastating consequences. This is where a critical leadership is called for: to challenge value-free policies that ignore ethics in favour of efficiency, without looking at the whole system ramifications and the human implications.