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## ***Working Paper Series***

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### **In Praise of Dialogue: Storytelling as a means of Negotiated Diversity Management**

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# **In Praise of Dialogue: Storytelling as a means of Negotiated Diversity Management**

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## **In Praise of Dialogue: Storytelling as a means of Negotiated Diversity Management**

### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper is to develop a conceptual model of ‘negotiated diversity management’, a pluralistic approach that takes into account the multiplicity of stories of culturally diverse employees in understanding and realizing diversity management in the workplace.

**Design/methodology/approach**– The aims of the paper are achieved by situating the notions of storytelling, narrative and antenarrative within the context of diversity management in organizations.

**Findings** – The paper suggests that one possible approach to deciding among mainstream and marginalized stories is through dialogue and negotiation, which will provide for the creation of what is termed ‘negotiated diversity management’.

**Originality/value** – The paper develops a new approach towards diversity management. The findings are expected to be of value for scholars and practitioners involved in organizational change processes.

**Keywords** Diversity management, Storytelling, Dialogue, Negotiation, Cultural diversity

**Paper type** Conceptual

*‘I see... dialogue as a chance for people of different cultures and traditions to get to know each other better, whether they live on opposite sides of the world or on the same street’*  
(Kofi Annan, 2000).

### **Introduction**

Given the extraordinary socio-economic and technological changes taking place in the world today, business organizations and academic institutions are increasingly engaging in more innovative and spontaneous ways of managing. Adler (2006) and Allison (1988) suggest that simple linear solutions conventionally advocated in the economics literatures are no longer valid for today’s complex business environment. There is a need to develop and apply artistic processes in strategic and day-to-day management. This paper identifies storytelling as one such artistic process that may be deployed for effective management in employment and broader societal contexts. Adler positioned her argument and emphasized the need for ‘hope’ in the complex context of the political conflict in the Middle East. Allison positioned his arguments against linearity amidst management strategy models. We argue that storytelling offers one

possible pathway towards hope. Though we share Fisk's (2006) concern when he laments different, politically separated narratives in the Middle East, we believe there is hope, and that 'it is human to have hope'<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, if human action always achieved its intended results, there would be no space for stories (Gabriel, 2000, p. 239). We argue that storytelling offers the much-needed avenue for all stakeholders to engage with each other's narratives in order to manage through dialogue and participation. In this sense, the aims of this paper are consistent with Muhammad Khatami's 'Dialogue among Civilizations', an approach that encourages cross-cultural discourse in the midst of growing conflict worldwide, ultimately aiming at the betterment of human life.<sup>2</sup> Conceptualized within the realm of workforce diversity, the paper may be seen as a response to Khatami's (2006) recent appeal to diverse scholars and institutions to 'confront the waves of artificial apartness (otherness)'. We argue that diverse stories must be heard in the workplace, as well as in other contexts, as a means of promoting change through negotiation.

Storytelling is increasingly used in employment contexts to make sense of the past and the present, to evaluate organizational resources, and to build future plans and strategies. In particular in Weickian sense-making there is a recent shift to balance retrospection with prospecting (Weick and Nord, 2005; also see Boje, 2007; Ricoeur, 1992). Previous research suggests that individuals use stories in order to stake their claim in limited organizational resources, to legitimize their past actions as well as prospective future plans (Ozbilgin and Tatli, 2006). The same is true in the broad field of diversity management, in which policy makers, employers, employees and other stakeholders draw on competing stories in order to justify, promote, and implement their strategies. In story ethics, there is recognition that life plan to realize Aristotelian 'good life' depends on the compelling nature of story, what Bakhtin (1990, 1991) calls answerability, what Ricoeur (1992) and others call responsibility, and what Levinas calls summoning responsibility (Hand, 1989). Story ethics is more about the social fabric of story in action, than just text, which is more the subject of narrative (in terms of its structure, readability, followability, interplay of reader and author, etc).

Written in the context of cultural diversity and its management in organizations, this paper argues that storytelling can be used to understand a variety of workplace perspectives and experiences of diverse employees. We argue that by understanding and negotiating multiparty stories of diversity, it is possible to develop a realistic understanding of what constitutes cultural diversity and how it could be better managed. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the world witnessed various socio-political and legal movements towards civil rights and equal opportunities in many industrialized countries, such as the US, UK, and Australia. To varying extents, such movements have resulted in alleviation of inequities in employment and other societal contexts. The outcome is a variety of approaches towards diversity (Gabriel and Willman, 2005) and diversity management (Syed and Kramar, 2008) – ranging from favorable treatment towards ethnic minorities, women, and other disadvantaged groups, an approach known as affirmative action, to a corporate voluntary approach, diversity management, that promotes the business benefits of workforce diversity. However, critical race scholars have

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<sup>1</sup> Elie Wiesel, cited in Rourke, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> In 1998, Muhammad Khatami, then President of Islamic Republic of Iran, delineated his vision for dialogue of civilizations in his address to the United Nations General Assembly. Subsequently, the UN declared the year 2001 as the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.

argued that national laws and labor policies continue to be predominantly shaped by the powerful members of the society, such as white males in the US context, whereas the perspectives of the marginalized groups, such as ethnic minorities and women, remain generally ignored (e.g. Calmore, 1992; Solorzano and Yosso, 2001; Syed, 2007). Similarly, multiracial feminists argue that issues of gender empowerment and equal opportunity continue to be influenced by white feminism which may not be relevant to the issues faced by minority ethnic women or to non-Western contexts in general (e.g. Mohanty, 1988; Syed, 2008).

Indeed, one major challenge facing diversity scholars pertains to how to unravel the mainstream bias embedded in the purportedly neutral discourses on diversity and equal opportunity. Gabriel and Willman (2005) note that it is important for scholars to realize that relations of power are built into the very language that levels all humans to the undifferentiated condition of the mainstream or natural. In other words, there is a need to understand the relation of narrative identity to a theory of (Weberian) action and ethical identity (of responsibility) (Ricoeur, 1992). Not unlike Adler (2006), Gabriel and Willman refer to a political example, this time the anti-balkanization, to illustrate that dialogue, not integration, is more likely to reduce hostilities and enhance understanding. They term integration at the cost of identity and individuality as a misleading notion, such as in the context of the current debate surrounding the future of the European Union. We argue that an assimilating discourse, particularly one which does not offer a realistic pathway towards equality of outcomes for disadvantaged groups, is inconsistent with the spirit of diversity and multiculturalism. At issue, for us is the relation of narrative identity of selfhood (following Ricoeur) and answerability for stories told by the other (following Bakhtin). Indeed, an assimilating approach is inconsistent with the 'Dialogue among Civilizations' and similar international projects, such as the United Nations Global Compact that urges businesses to supporting a sustainable and inclusive global economy (Cooperrider, 2004). Supporting the need for a more inclusive stance towards management, this paper argues for developing and engaging with multi-party stories in the workplace in order to arrive at a meaningful notion of diversity management. To achieve that goal, the paper uses storytelling to develop an inclusive framework that provides for the creation of what is termed 'negotiated diversity management'.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part discusses the role of storytelling in highlighting and subverting hegemonic discourses and practices of management within which voices of disadvantaged groups remain invisible and neglected. The second part discusses the role of contextual factors and examines how certain contexts help establish which narratives are privileged. Here we use Boje's (2001) antenarrative approach to unravel the privileged and neglected narratives. Drawing on research on storytelling by Ricoeur (1991), Davies (1996), Czarniawska (1999), Gabriel (2000), and Boje (2001), the third part offers a conceptual model of negotiated diversity management, outlining a five-stage participatory approach towards understanding and implementing diversity management in the workplace

## **Hegemonic discourses and marginalized voices**

In the last two decades, there has been a surge of interest in organizational theory and culture. Such interest is amply reflected in the field of storytelling in organizations. For example, Czarniawska (1999) describes organization theory as a literary genre, which has lots of space for storytelling. Boje (1991, p. 111) defines story as 'an oral or written performance involving two or more people interpreting past or anticipated experience'. Bruner (1991) suggests that stories

come naturally to human beings; they are the key form of interpersonal communication. Discursive forms, such as narratives and stories (e.g. Boje, Rosile, Dennehy, and Summers, 1997; Cohen and Mallon, 2001; Gabriel, 2000), have been studied to understand a wide range of aspects of organizing (Mills, 2005). The underlying premise of narrative inquiry in organizations is the belief that individuals make sense of their world most effectively by telling stories (Clandinin and Connelly, 1994; Wiltshire, 1995). Within the culture of a social collective, such as an organization, narratives can take the form of a living-story (Boje, 2005). Here stories are fragmented; their shreds collected together with those from other stories, in a disparate, random and spontaneous fashion over time, by diverse individuals in the collective. However, from an interpretive research perspective, the historical truth of a story is not the primary issue (Riessman, 1993, p. 64). Instead, the intended meanings of the stories constructed by diverse storytellers are more important (Bailey and Tilley, 2002).

Diversity is typically defined as the degree of heterogeneity among team members on specified demographic dimensions (Ely and Roberts, 2007). Culturally diverse groups 'collectively share certain norms, values or traditions that are different from those of other groups' (Cox, 1993, pp. 5-6). Such groups are usually associated with power differentials in organizations (Ragins, 1997; Ridgeway and Berger, 1986). The idea of a multicultural organization implies that the usual privileged positions must be dismantled, and that power mechanics are transformed (Cavanagh, 1997; Marsden, 1997). However, to what extent diversity management can enable such transformation remains in question (Kamp and Hagedorn-Rasmussen, 2004).

The issues of power differential and the effective management of multicultural communities have become increasingly important in the last few decades, particularly in view of the changing demographics of the population in industrialized countries. There is now much interest among governments and businesses to achieve more inclusive, responsive and participatory governance (Syed and Kramar, 2007). However, despite the diverse composition of the population and the workforce, diversity principles in most countries have remained largely marginal in political institutions as well as in business organizations. This situation has created a power inequality for different groups resulting in a loss of policy legitimacy and various degrees and forms of tensions (LGI, 2007). Critical race scholars have unraveled the primacy of the mainstream perspectives in the institutions and practices of diversity management. They challenge the traditional claims that governments, organizations and other related institutions make vis-a-vis objectivity, meritocracy, race neutrality and gender equity. It has been argued that such traditional claims act as a camouflage for the self-interest, power and privilege of the dominant groups in society (Calmore, 1992; Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano and Yosso, 2001). For example, Ely, Thomas, and Padavic (2007) acknowledge that, in the US context, Whites as a group have higher status and hold more formal organizational and political power than do racial minorities. Research on how cultural diversity can impact group interactions shows that inequality at the societal level creates asymmetries in racial groups' experiences at the interpersonal level (e.g. Tropp and Pettigrew, 2005). Most notably, ethnic minorities often suffer from 'power deficits' that 'may deter them from expressing their unique ideas' under conditions that would not deter whites (Swann, Polzer, Seyle, and Ko, 2004, p. 22).

This paper argues that storytelling offers an opportunity for researchers to disentangle the issues of power and oppression by providing a more profound understanding of the experience of individuals and groups within organizations (Boje, Luhman, and Baack, 1999; Thurlow, Mills, and Mills, 2006). The paper supports Ozbilgin and Tatli's (2006) suggestion that researchers may

use storytelling to investigate diversity management, not as indifferent bystanders but with keen attention to the ways stories are used, to share political and others forms of power in work contexts. Ozbilgin and Tatli's study demonstrates how stories of diversity management are relationally constructed. That is, the subfield in which the diversity management story is located as well as the particular connectedness of the diversity professional to other subfields help shape the diversity management story that they tell. Thus, the prevailing power deficits in organizations may be attributed to the hegemony of the mainstream narratives, perspectives and policies, of diversity management. In various national contexts, such as the US and Australia, diversity management has been enacted through a series of laws, regulations and organizational policies, which are superimposed by a powerful elite, politicians, business and trade unions, and other lobby groups. However, it lacks a participative and pluralistic approach. Also, it lacks flexibility because it does not adequately take into account the dynamic contexts within which diversity needs to be continuously negotiated and managed. As a result, there is scanty evidence on any substantial progress that diversity management was able to bring in the employment outcomes of ethnic minorities, women and other disadvantaged groups (Syed and Kramar, 2007).

Indeed, diversity management has a social significance that reaches far beyond the workplace, occasionally reinforcing or challenging conservatism in the society. It may be treated as a social process arising from the interaction of diverse people and groups. For example, Palmer (2003) argues that mainstream management education and research are often associated with the maintenance of existing elitist social structures and statuses. A sociological participatory approach may allow a more sophisticated view of diversity management. Indeed, organizations are never totally controlled from the top and many diverse actors will influence the management process (Gardner and Palmer, 1997; Palmer, 1996). It is also a fact that traditionally organizations prefer to leave issues of diversity to the human resources department (Thurlow et al., 2006). There seems to be a predominant emphasis on the human capital case of diversity management, which suggests that individuals' career opportunities are shaped by their skill, whereas issues related to race, ethnicity and gender remain relatively ignored (Syed and Kramar, 2007). For example, the official Productive Diversity policy in Australia promotes the economic benefits of diversity management, and is, in this pursuit, largely dependent on quantitative research. Such perspectives tend to ignore the complex cultural-environmental challenges culturally diverse employees face within and outside of their organizations (Ho, 2006; Syed and Kramar, 2007). Storytelling may provide a critique of this practice, and contribute to the growing understanding of the limitations of traditional practices of diversity management.

Scholars have expressed concerns over a predominant reliance on quantitative research, which has failed to illuminate the underlying problems with diversity management, be it as a program, field of research or paradigm. For example, a feminist critique of the state of workplace diversity offers valuable insight into the fundamental issues that need be addressed if diversity management is to succeed (Thurlow et al., 2006), such as the potential of backlash towards marginalized groups and a fuzziness surrounding the concept of diversity management (Jones and Stablein, 2006; Syed and Kramar, 2007). This paper argues that storytelling may address this challenge by providing a richer and more comprehensive picture of issues related to diversity and discrimination in organizations. However, storytelling, and other forms of qualitative research, must not be seen as an alternative to quantitative research and can even be complementary. Indeed, such decision would depend on researchers' individual preferences and understanding of qualitative and quantitative research. For example, in her study of women managers' stories of gender, Olsson (2000) examined the role of organizational myths and stories in the definition of



leadership as heroic masculinism. The study analyzed a sample of 26 stories on the bases of recurring the mes, and classified attitudes towards women managers in three interrelated categories: invisibility, sexuality and stereotypes. The study reveals how women's qualitative stories may 'break the silence' and expand official organizational myths about women's experiences in the workplace. The stories suggest that women's career journeys are not only shaped by their competencies or abilities but also by stereotyped attitudes encountered along the way (p. 302).

This paper argues that storytelling helps unravel a variety of visible and hidden discourses on diversity. The approach is particularly relevant in the workplace context because organization is usually a terrain of diverse desires, anxieties, and emotions (Gabriel, 2000). Indeed, culturally diverse employees as well as other organizational members express their multiple and intersectional identities by affirming themselves 'as independent agents, heroes, survivors, victims, and objects of love rather than identifying with the scripts the organizations put in their mouths' (p. 129). In this way, stories primarily reflect the 'armor' of the oppressed members of organizations in their resistance to the control of the oppressors, i.e. organizations. Similarly, workplace stories can also expose issues related to sexual harassment and the gender dynamics of bullying. For example, Lee's (2002) research involved 50 semi-structured interviews with male and female workers who had been exposed to bullying. The stories provide insight that challenges previous findings in this area, based on a quantitative perspective, that bullying in the workplace is not a gender-related issue (Adams, 1992; Mothering, 2001). These studies generally attest to the importance of identifying recurring meanings within and across stories (Bell, 1988). Indeed, there is a variety of ways in which storytelling may subvert hegemonic discourses in the workplace. For example, the discursive and rhetorical strategies to clarify or strengthen the meanings of stories may include use of metaphors, idea or word repetition, and variations in the tone or form of presentation (Antaki, 1994; Polanyi, 1989). Individual case stories may clarify such details by focusing on the intersection between demographic and personal characteristics, such as race and sex as well as occupation and position. However, it must be recognized that storytellers do not usually analyze or explain their behavior to themselves; their stories offer only some clues. The researcher's task is to reconstruct all the information contained within the narratives as well as the contextual information into a theoretical explanation that fits with the facts.

### **The story behind the story**

Gabriel (2000) argues that the best way to gain access to stories in organizations is to actively ask the respondents for them, and that the researcher must act as a 'fellow traveler'. However, the fellow traveler approach has been contested by Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000), who argue that a certain amount of distancing and criticism is useful because it may prod the interloper to defend her story by expounding it further. Since there is a multiplicity of individuals and groups within a culturally diverse organization, there is likely to be a multiplicity of stories about the way diversity is managed and perceived in that organization. One important consideration is to make sense of what is happening in organizations by looking at them from a narrative perspective, and also by collecting short stories that emerge within the organizations (Gabriel, 2000). Such stories may not be realist but they are always profoundly symbolic. Researchers may use sensemaking to understand various organizational cultures, politics, and

change. However, understanding diverse stories in the presence of complexity and information overload is a formidable task, one that is likely to generate much anxiety (p. 718).

In her study of white pre-service school teachers, Dingle (2005) examined implications of racial privilege for individuals' perspectives on cultural diversity. She explored various experiences that could have an influence on the perceived readiness of teachers to successfully teach and communicate with cultural minority students. Dingle's study provided white pre-service teachers the opportunity to describe in their own words, in-depth insight into their various everyday cultural life experiences. The teachers had their own unique traits and cultural life stories, which played a vital role in shaping how they viewed their cultural selves as well as how they acted in a multicultural world. The study reveals that prior to that research none of the teachers had ever really had to think about who they were racially. To them, cultural diversity was a non-issue. For most of their lives family, friends, and the media had helped to shape their normative view of whiteness and the privileges perceived to be associated with whiteness. Indeed, privilege is an important external force driving the discourse on cultural diversity. Furthermore, privilege, such as white privilege in the US context, is hard to see for those who are fortunate enough to have been born with access to power and resources (Kendal, 2006). However it is easily visible for those to whom such privilege is not available. Dingle (2005, p. 7) argues that the subject is problematic not least because many white people simply do not feel empowered or that they enjoy certain privileges that others do not. Dingle suggests it may resemble 'asking fish to notice water or birds to discuss air'. Thus, those who enjoy privileges based on their race, gender or class, it just is – it's normal (Kendall, 1996).

Applying these debates to the context of diversity management in organizations, it can be argued that it is not just narratives which are important but also the contexts which help establish which narratives are privileged and why (and vice versa). Boje's (2001) antenarrative approach may be useful to unravel the privileged and neglected narratives. Boje defines antenarrative as 'the fragmented, non-linear, incoherent, collective, unplotted, and pre-narrative speculation, a bet' (p. 1). The approach may help challenge the conventional diversity management discourse based on hegemonic mainstream stories. It may enable researchers to abandon the usual single-voiced and single-authored narratives and in the process adopt an antenarrative stance (Clark, 2002). Following are a number of methods Boje (2001) describes to draw out a multi-voiced story within its context.

- The first method is deconstruction analysis, which exposes the taken for granted viewpoint of a story to its marginal or excluded opposite. The story is then reversed by putting the marginal at the center. This leads to a new perspective in which a story is resituated beyond excluded voices and singular viewpoint.
- Grand narrative analysis helps tease out the 'local' stories that are embedded in and possibly resisting the grand narratives ('regimes of truth'). This requires a comparison of the differences between the macrostory and microstory. The process may enable many local stories to emerge from the shadows.
- Microstories focus on groups who are more usually excluded from historical narrative (e.g. ethnic minorities and women). Microstory analysis helps trace acts of resistance by the 'little people' to the 'elitist' grand narratives that control their lives. Consequently, the dominant narratives can be re-narrated in a more multi-voiced text. The interplay between the multiple narratives generates new meaning and understanding of a previously taken-for-granted phenomenon.

- Intertextuality refers to a complex web of inter-relationships ensnaring each story's history and situational context with other stories. A story is always embedded in a broader chain of signifying systems that both constitutes, and is constituted by, the story. The methodological task is to disentangle a story's intertextual network of attributed and unattributed links to other stories. By exposing the chain of sign systems that give a story authority it becomes a denuded and plural entity in which different interpretations are possible.
- Story network analysis permits the diagrammatic representation of links among people, groups, organizations, story themes, and other actors. It seeks continually to display the flow line by mapping how the different elements of a story, such as context, teller and audience, interlink over time. It can provide critical information on the ever-shifting relationships between the elements that comprise the storytelling event.
- Causality analysis unravels the too tidy narrative accounts because of their ability to sweep aside the random occurrence, coincidence, the misattributions. Instead of focusing on the reality of the causal attributions, an antenarrative approach is concerned with examining how particular views of causality emerge and become widely accepted.
- Plot analysis offers a conceptual structure that permits the analysis of stories through an interplay between pre-understanding, emplotment and embedded contextuality. A plot is not a clearly articulated causal chain that links events and episodes together but tends to be a loose collection of elements. These are a precursor to our ability to follow the plot of a story and make sense of it by 'grasping together' the events, characters and actions as it is related *in situ* (embedded contextuality).
- Finally, theme analysis is about what gets left out of theme taxonomies as well as the inter-relationships between the cells within classifications. The focus is, therefore, on the polysemous (multiple meanings and interpretations) by encouraging a dialogue between researchers as they co-construct themes from the data.

The above description of antenarrative approach has a number of implications for the diversity management paradigm in organizations. For example, in addition to highlighting the importance of comparing diverse stories, the approach may also help examine how antenarratives transform in intertextual ways with various narratives about diversity and discrimination in the workplace. Yolles (2007) explains how through enantiomer dynamics, patterns of narrative can be related to un-patterned arbitrary antenarratives. This means that a story may be told in a way that enables narrative structures to be intermingled with antenarrative thereby forming a thematic story event that has potential to engage more dynamically with the listener. Research also suggests that the antenarrative approach is useful in unraveling the multiplicity of stories in organizations. For example, Barge (2003) applied antenarrative approach to organizational communication and managerial practice by focusing attention on ways people manage the multi-voiced non-linear character of organizational life. According to Barge, the approach requires managers 'to recognize the multiplicity of stories living and being told in organizations' (p. 7). Similarly, Gardner (2002) contrasted heroic, bureaucratic, chaos and post-modern narratives of expatriates. The relevant finding is that the bureaucratic forms are interconnected and tidy narratives, while the chaos and post-modern forms generally represent antenarratives. Haddadj (2006) studied stories of organizational change told by different actors in

a family organization that experienced a CEO succession. Haddad concludes that the representation of succession as an event that is due to the unique vision of the leader must give way to a multilevel interpretation where all players are directly and indirectly involved in the succession, and where there is a lot of room for paradox and diversity in possible actions and interpretations. Indeed, there is a diversity of discourses on storytelling, representing the fact that discourses are simply a construction of the meaning of actors, and are never the complete truth (Wilkins and Thompson, 1991).

On a conceptual level, narrative and antenarrative may also be treated as part of the deviation-countering and deviation-amplifying forces of organizational transformation. The implication for management theory is that when there are narrative forces for standardization, there are also counter-acting forces of the antenarrative variety (Boje, Rosile, and Gardner, 2004). These counter-acting forces have been traditionally missing in the official narratives of diversity management. These findings are also supported by Ozbilgin and Tatli (2006) who demonstrated the possibility of a mismatch between researchers' expectations of how an equitable work environment would operate and the expectations of the hegemonic decision makers (Martin, Feldman, Hatch, and Sitkin, 1983). Thus, instead of privileging one perspective over the other, there is a need for a more balanced approach to negotiate various narratives of diversity management.

## **Negotiated diversity management**

The foregoing demonstrated the need for multicultural, subversive stories instead of mainstream narratives of diversity management. Ewick and Silbey (1995, p. 220) describe subversive stories as ones 'that break the silence.' Such stories articulate an alternative reality by exposing the discrepancy between the general and the particular in a hegemonic story. Similarly, Ozbilgin and Tatli (2006) highlight the necessity of organizational change in order to realize diversity management plans, and reveal how stories change with different audience. For example, diversity professionals, in their study, presented different stories when representing their organizations and explaining their institutional work and when the study investigated their own personal lives. Indeed, there are many different stories to be told about the workplace (Kjeldal, Rindfleish, and Sheridan, 2005). The responses invited by such stories are not to counter the 'facts' they contain, but to engage with their meanings (Gabriel, 2000). As recognized by Czarniawska (1997, p. 20), it is not possible to decide among them, except through negotiation. Negotiation would, in turn, require more than one participant to construct a meaningful dialogue. There is a need to promote this process as an important means of change management (Sheridan, Rindfleish, and Kjeldal, 2006).

According to Ricoeur (1991), our life generally consists of three relations, which are mediated by narratives. First, at the level of worldviews, our relation to the surrounding world is interceded by various narratives. We understand our world by listening to and recalling stories. Second, at the level of interaction and communication, narratives mediate between an individual and other people. Third, at the level of identity, there is a relation between a person and her/himself. In this case our narratives reflect self-understanding and individual identity (Lamsa and Sintonen, 2006). This description of narratives can be adapted to the context of diversity management, to examine how diversity climate and policies function in organizations. At the worldview level, an employee's narratives would entail her relation with the work environment, including her organization, colleagues and clients. An employee is continuously surrounded by

events and stories in the workplace, which define her perspectives about inclusion or discrimination in the organization. At the interaction level, her narratives are shaped by her conversations and interaction with diverse colleagues and clients. This may range from easily noticeable experiences of exclusion, such as racial slur or sexual harassment, to subtle forms of discrimination, such as differential opportunities for training or promotion. Finally, at the personal level, an employee's perception of the self is continuously impacted by the diversity climate in the workplace. This is the level of individuality and agency, in which an employee constantly evaluates her identity and possible course of action in response to various tensions in the workplace.

Diverse stories embedded in and reflecting organizations' culture may mitigate against the maladies that organizations frequently impart to their members (Gabriel, 2000). We argue that storytelling may provide a constructive platform to diverse groups and individuals to discuss and share their unique experiences in the workplace. It may help in arriving a negotiated understanding and conception of diversity management. Indeed, the relevance of multi-voice stories would stem from the fact that they echo the voice, thinking, and perception of diverse individuals and groups in the organizations. For example, Davies (1996) offers an evolutionary approach to monitoring and evaluation of an industrial development project, termed the most significant change.<sup>3</sup> There are three main parts to Davies' approach: establish domains of change; set in place a process to collect and review stories of change; and conduct a secondary analysis of the stories. In the first stage of the process, the evaluation audience identifies the 'domains' of change that they think need to be monitored at the project level; for example, changes in practice. This process is a discrete activity and need only occur once. Various research techniques may be deployed in this process, such as the Delphi technique. Unlike performance indicators popular in business organizations, such nominated 'domains' of change are not precisely defined but are left deliberately fuzzy. Instead, it is left to individuals to interpret what they feel is a change belonging to any one of these categories. The next stage involves the collection and review of stories of significant change (according to the defined 'domains' of change that had been nominated using the Delphi process). The stories are collected by those most directly involved in the project delivery. Diverse individuals at various levels of the project hierarchy then review a series of stories, selecting those they think represent most significant accounts of change. The stories are selected through an iterative voting process, to generate as much consensus as possible. The process requires the participants to document and present their rationale for selecting those stories. This information is then shared with the storytellers and the project leaders. This feedback and monitoring system may be seen as a slow but extensive dialogue up and down the project hierarchy. Annually, the selected stories are circulated amongst the project leaders, along with the criteria used by the review fora. Finally, at a round table meeting, policy makers are asked to review and select the stories representing the most significant accounts of change. In addition to the production of such a document comprising stories and reviewers' interpretations, the whole process is monitored and additional analysis is carried out.

The above approach represents a dynamic process in which multiparty stories are continuously collected, analyses and interpreted to develop a holistic picture of key issues in the workplace. In this sense, Davies' approach seems to be consistent with Czarniawska's (1999, p.

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<sup>3</sup> Developed in the context of a micro-credit development project in Bangladesh, the approach incorporates the collection and systematic interpretation of stories. The approach was subsequently applied in an industrial development project in Australia (Dart, 2000).

22) narrative approach in field research, which involves watching how the stories are being made; collecting the stories; interpreting, analyzing, and deconstructing the stories; putting together your own story and comparing with other stories. Indeed, different methods of doing narrative research are not mutually exclusive; they may add up and overlap, as the whole process of organizing can be seen as storytelling (Czarniawska, 1997).

Drawing on research on storytelling by Ricoeur (1991), Davies (1996), Czarniawska (1999), Gabriel (2000), and Boje (2001), a five-stage model can be identified reflecting a participatory approach towards understanding and implementing diversity management in the workplace (Figure 1). The model is based on the premise that diversity management needs to be a multi-party process involving reciprocity, negotiation and democratic contestation among various groups. The process of negotiation and reinterpretation of common good lays special responsibilities on policy makers and managers.

"take in Figure 1"

Figure 1 represents a conceptual model of negotiated diversity management comprising five stages. The first stage involves the collection of stories from diverse individuals and groups within the organization representing mainstream and marginalized narratives. In the second stage, researchers or managers will review collected stories and analyze them in the context of their antenarratives. The third stage involves discussion of reviews. At this stage, reviewers and storytellers (representatives from each group) will collectively reflect on the stories and their analyses in order to establish the key domains of change. On the basis of such reflection, the next stage involves practical course of action, i.e. negotiated diversity management. At this level, aims, policies and strategies of diversity management will be established. The final stage involves secondary review, which reflects the fact that negotiated diversity management is a dynamic, ongoing process, based on continuously evolving interaction of diverse groups and individuals. The feedback loops from storytellers to the stages of reflection, decision-making, and secondary review reflect the participatory nature of the proposed negotiated diversity management.

We argue that the above framework for negotiated diversity management may be helpful in highlighting the voices of ethnic minorities and other marginalized individuals and groups. Indeed, it is not just ethnic minority persons who would gain from having a voice on issues related to diversity and difference. For example, Dingle's (2005) study gave voice to white pre-service white teachers' beliefs about race, culture, and their potential ability to teach students who may not look like themselves. However, researchers must also take into account the economic and socio-political environment in which diversity management takes place. For example, an important component of the antenarrative is the evolution of industrial relations and its implications for diversity management. Palmer's (2003) study demonstrates that the methods to promote diversity in the workplace have not been conventional industrial relations methods. The conventional industrial actions, such as strikes, are far less likely to be mobilized to attack forms of discrimination that divide, rather than unite, the industrial workforce. Instead, the main changes that have come have been through the national politics. That is, diversity management has been altered and constrained by legislation rather than industrial negotiation. Political campaigns and strategies, in turn, require sufficient numbers of people, who self-identify with and are prepared to lobby for a particular identity group, are concentrated in ways that can put pressure on a political constituency. Given the evolution of anti-discrimination legislation in

industrialized countries in the West (e.g. Palmer, 2003; Syed and Kramar, 2007; Solorzano, 1997), it can be argued that the balance of advantage to the discriminated against groups, such as ethnic minorities and women, is more likely to depend on the balance of power in national politics.

Similarly, the relative lack of power associated with ethnic minorities may be attributed to their historical disenfranchisement, limited access to resources, small numbers, and scattered communities. It may also be attributed to a shortcoming of a majoritarian democracy in which the powerful mainstream enjoys unchecked authority, at times overruling the interests of marginalized minorities. Perhaps one possible way forward is to negotiate and realize diversity management at multiple levels, i.e. macro-national, meso-institutional, and micro-individual, instead of the conventional single-level conceptualization of diversity management within the realm of legal or organizational policy (Syed and Ozbilgin, 2007). On a political level, the approach may be treated as consistent with the notion of a consociational system, which encourages cross-cultural dialogue, and guarantees the participation of all main cultural units in important political decisions in a society (Chryssochou, 1994; Lijphart, 1997). Such system would guarantee members of ethnic groups their legitimate rights and needs, thus constituting an ideal environment for negotiated diversity management. In its broad sense, civil society would include political parties, professional bodies, trade unions, and other non-governmental organizations on the community and national levels. Such associational network is the nerve of a participatory political system (Ibrahim, 2000). From a labor policy perspective, a negotiated approach will involve the consideration of diverse stories in designing and implementing regulatory, procedural and substantive policy-making activities of diversity management. Various multicultural perspectives will then feed into a diversity focus within managerial practice as well as within conflict resolution. Indeed, a meaningful diversity management is hard to achieve in the absence of a power-sharing mechanism at the level of the political economy, i.e. which provides adequate mechanisms to ensure the participation of all major groups in decision-making (LGI, 2007).

The ambitious approach we argued for in this paper is based on the premise that storytelling can be effectively harnessed for participatory evaluation only when the collection of stories is coupled with a process of systematic and collective interpretations. Indeed, such interpretations themselves may tell another story, and the process of collective interpretation may have several beneficial outcomes for evaluation utilization. Future researchers may like to benefit from the critical race perspectives to investigate in detail the negative outcomes of extant approaches towards diversity management, as well as from the mainstream management theory, in order to refine the modalities of negotiated diversity management in the workplace.

## **Conclusion**

The paper highlighted the role of storytelling as a collaborative experience in designing and realizing diversity management in organizations. It identified storytelling as a valuable research and management approach to collect and make sense of various stories related to diversity and discrimination in the workplace. It argued that the future of diversity management could be secured by adopting a participatory culture which encourages dialogue among culturally diverse employees in organizations. By situating the notions of storytelling, narrative and antenarrative within the context of diversity management, the paper developed a conceptual model of 'negotiated diversity management', a pluralistic approach that takes into account the

multiplicity of stories of diverse employees in understanding and realizing diversity management in the workplace. The paper, however, acknowledges that the diverse stories within and surrounding the workplace must not be treated as representing or countering certain 'facts' but as useful resources comprising certain 'meanings'. It suggests that one possible approach to deciding among mainstream and marginalized stories is through dialogue and negotiation, which will provide for the creation of 'negotiated diversity management'.



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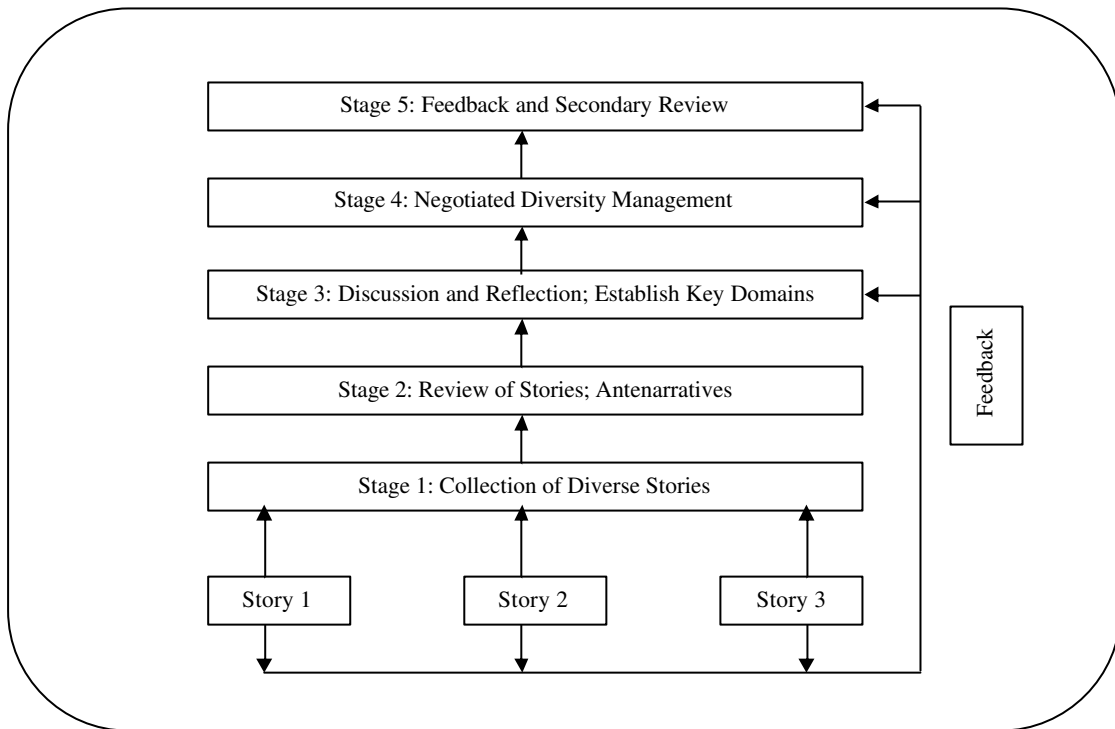
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**Figure 1.** A storytelling approach to negotiated diversity management



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