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Abstract

The paradox of managing diversity

Observations of a personnel management strategy in mass media organizations

One effect of “globalization” and migration is increased cultural diversity among the labour force in most work organizations in almost all parts of the world. Mainly as an incentive of the marked economy the idea of managing diversity was developed as a management strategy – diversity management – in the early 1990s in the USA. It has since then made success in many parts of the world. Today it is widely applied also within mass media organizations.

Changes in direction of (more) equal opportunity and inclusion chances as to cultural diversity have occurred in the mass media organizations. In a previous study one of my findings was that it is reasonable to assume that diversity management is more adequate than other modes of managing issues of cultural background of journalists, such as quota and also a high confidence as to legal regulations (Jönhill 2011). Diversity management should also be observed as a part of the complex communication inside and outside of organizations.

In an on-going research project on mass media organizations in Sweden, based mainly on interviews with personnel managers of all leading national public service and private media companies, and on policy documents, the intention have been to observe how cultural diversity is managed in the context of the daily and the strategic operations of the media organizations. As main theoretical tool for the analysis, systems theory based on communication is used.

The aim of this article is to discuss some of my main findings and conclusions. Although significant obstacles disfavouring persons with migrant background are admitted, also important changes have occurred during the last decade according to the interviewees. One thesis is that diversity management makes a difference due to a very recent professionalization of personnel work and managing in the Swedish media companies. Professionalization means, among others, that competence-based assessment as a principle generates a prerequisite for journalists with migrant background to achieve equality in opportunity when applying for a position or e.g. by team building. A second thesis is that focusing on the matter of competence by recruitment processes and so on and not focusing on person’s cultural background (but being well aware of the social matter of disfavour), paradoxically, is likely to be a functioning or even successful path of managing this issue. This is (of course) not to say that the ultimate solution to the issue of disfavour is found. Other kinds of obstacles have an impact on and will at least partially prevent changes in a near future.

Keywords
Mass media organization, cultural diversity, diversity management, personnel work, systems theory, professionalization, competence