

## **The Figure of "Diversity Manager" in French Business – Towards a Typology**

by

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### **Summary**

We are currently witnessing a proliferation of "Diversity Managers" in French companies. But what are the responsibilities of the holders of these new posts, and what is their field of operation? What processes are taking place in the company to legitimise the post of "Diversity Manager"?

Linked to the historical development of business and its internationalisation, Diversity Policies in French companies have been characterised by a varied and often inflated inventory of the parameters of the problem, and the criteria according to which progress in the matter is to be assessed. Some stem from an increasing diversity at both the client and supplier level, others from the sources of labour itself (age, the presence of women, social origins, qualifications); some are more logical in terms of evident anti-discrimination (people coming from "visible minorities", victims of exclusion on the grounds of religion, sexual orientation, weight or disability...), while others are linked to the performance of diversified teams at times developed from a distance, the stated objective being to promote unexploited skills within the company and favour the exchange of knowledge and expertise in organisations that seek to develop as a network.

This article explores five original types of "Diversity Manager", which our research has led us to define as "Mysterious", "Apparent", "Exclusive", "Unsuspected" and "Hidden".

**Key Words:** Diversity Management, Diversity Manager, Discursive Space, Change Management, Cultural Skills

## The Figure of "Diversity Manager" in French Business – Towards a Typology

### Introduction

"Manager In Charge Of Diversity", "Diversity and Inclusion Manager" and "Director of Social Innovation and Diversity" are all titles that testify to the proliferation of a new kind of post in French companies, under the general heading "Diversity Manager".

But what is the scope of the post of "Diversity Manager"? Is it simply a question of mentioning the word in the job title? Apparently not, since certain posts designated and presented as "Diversity Managers" by their companies have titles in which the word diversity itself does not appear (e.g. "Associate Human Resources Manager" in the French subsidiary of a washing powder company, "Advisor to the President on Equal Opportunity Issues" in a railway group). What characteristics do these positions have in common that might allow them to be grouped together under the name "Diversity Managers"?

Answering this question is by no means easy: if the characteristics of a post (1) simply refer to the place of work, its content and the practical details of its execution, then it must be stated that these vary considerably from one company to the next in the case of "Diversity Managers". In effect, often linked to functions within the competence of Human Resources, they can, as is the case with an energy company, also come under the umbrella of Sustainable Development. Moreover, they can also have as their *raison d'être* (2) the establishment of HR Management Diversity Policy at group level (a cosmetics group), or the implementation of agreements on diversity and social cohesion (a car company), disability and/or professional equality (post and telecommunications). With regard to the practical details of the job itself, the differences are legion: their roles may include mobilising in the field (a cement company), coordinating (a tyre manufacturer) and influencing (a railway group). Observing all these variations reveals, in effect, considerable "diversity" even among these posts of "Diversity Managers". Over and above simple surprise, this hypothesis has given rise to numerous questions on our part: what factors might lie behind the differences we have observed between these posts? And are they merely temporary?

A first answer might be the choice made by each of the companies we have studied to define the post according to their needs, and independently of the person holding it – as strategic and operational issues of diversity apparently vary from one company to another, it seems evident that the posts should not encompass the same realities. Far more than a consequence of organisational choice, however, this fragmentation seems to have been brought about both by the newness of the field of diversity in France and the controversial character of the debate it has led to. It was not until recently, in 2004, that the subject of diversity entered the public domain with the publication of a report by the Institut Montaigne entitled *Les oubliés de l'égalité des chances* ("Overlooked by Equal Opportunity") (3), which eventually led to the "Diversity Within Business Charter", subsequently signed up to by the directors of 35 large groups, who undertook better to reflect in their workforces the social, cultural and ethnic make-up of French society and make non-discrimination and diversity a strategic theme of their Human Resources Management. Bringing diversity into the public domain opened up a new field of action for French business. But while the Charter might have set the wheels in motion, it provided no regulatory constraint in the matter due to its non-binding and declarative character. Accordingly, in what was effectively uncharted territory, each company, including those that had signed up to the Charter, was free to take whatever action it liked in favour of diversity (isolated actions or integrated diversity strategy, short or long term, etc.) and create, if they so desired, a post of "Diversity Manager" to oversee the process. The issue has since gained added significance due to the controversy this new field of action has given rise to. Given that it is a question of acting in favour of "the" (supposed) diversity of French society, the question of *how* this is to be done has been raised, and discussed in the context of a republic where the French citizen is an individual whose sex, religion and skin colour should play no role in the way s/he participates in the "community of citizens" (4). In committing companies to pay particular attention to differences

and minorities, the Diversity Charter has focused the debate on the question of "positive discrimination", provoking a veritable "quarrel between the 'for' and 'against'" (5). If they create posts of "Diversity Managers", signatories to the Charter remain free to choose whatever actions they choose to assign them in order to make real their commitment. Some do not hesitate to set precise internal recruitment targets, unofficially, leaving their HR managers to establish criteria regarding those populations identified as discriminated against.

Accordingly, we shall formulate the hypothesis that organisational, contextual and also ideological factors may be invoked to explain the "diversity of Diversity Managers". Because the field of diversity is new, we have to recognise that "Diversity Manager" is the term most frequently employed by the media to designate such posts, but what and who do we mean when we speak of a "Diversity Manager"? What are the outlines of the post and its scope of activity? What legitimizing processes are in operation within the company, and with regard to what set of values? Beyond what seems to be the "diversity of Diversity Managers", what characteristics could there be that might allow us to group together under a common name these men and women whose task it is to reflect the diversity of French society?

Owing to its vague character, the concept of diversity is open to several different interpretations, all inextricably linked to the notion of CSR, Corporate Social Responsibility (which we shall hereafter also refer to in its French abbreviated form as RSE: "Responsabilité Sociale des Entreprises"). Although this concept itself is a construct largely emanating from the Diversity Charter, it has never been clearly defined, and is such interpreted in different ways by companies, with the result that the field of action and nature of the "Diversity Manager" posts they create are by no means identical. An analysis of these posts has allowed us to reveal four working modes in Diversity Management: "Generic", "Complementary", "Restrictive" and one we shall call "Evicted". According to these modes we have established five types of "Diversity Manager": the "Mysterious", the "Apparent", the "Exclusive", the "Unsuspected" and the "Hidden".

This analysis is based on a study carried out in 2006 during which about thirty formally or informally designated "Diversity Managers" (designated as such both within their respective companies and externally) were questioned. It is also the result of observations in the field in those groups that have signed up to the Diversity Charter, and in networks whose "Diversity Managers" meet beyond the confines of their companies.

## **A) From vague concept to a diversity of "Diversity Managers" in France**

As stated above, the concept of diversity, due to its vague character, seems to be open to different interpretations, which account for the "diversity of Diversity Managers".

In the current context, French citizens are all equal in accordance with the republican principle of integration and may not be deemed as being different for legal reasons of non-discrimination. Referring to "diversity of the French" then is somewhat paradoxical, insofar as it is a question of "diversity without difference." It also recalls the paradox of "racism without race" justified by the republican tradition: "there is no race [in France]" (6) since the French citizen, in the eyes of the Republic, is an individual like any other.

French universalism aspires to free the individual from all determinism. In France one is first and foremost oneself, what one has decided to be given one's background and one's aspirations, and not a representative of any particular cultural community that would to a large extent determine individual choice. Sex, religion and skin colour have no role to play in the way the French participate in the "community of citizens" (7). And yet, diversity is the word companies are using today to characterise our society.

What do they mean by "the diversity of French society"? We must conclude that it is the Diversity Charter itself that has enshrined the notion of diversity in French culture, notably in a culture of trade unionism that has hitherto preached the gospel of (social and economic) equality. "Diversity" appears as a construct drawn up to a large extent by those who drafted the Charter to characterise French society, the result of their observation that the French Republic has been somehow unable to guarantee equal opportunity, equality between women and men and fight against discrimination. We should note that in the mind of the Charter's authors this construct does not conflict with the republican ideal. The Charter may be taken to mean that equality and difference can go hand in hand, but there is no question of its signatories implementing a policy of positive discrimination. Indeed, the promoters of the Charter maintain that "ethnic origin shall never be *the* criterion for obtaining employment." (8)

Nevertheless, the concept of diversity remains vague: the Charter provides no clear definition of the term, despite undertaking to work on three forms of diversity: social, cultural and so-called ethnic origin. Each signatory is therefore free to provide its own definition of diversity. In a cosmetics group, for example, the conception is global, allied to a mosaic of visible and invisible differences (9), similarities and interactions which influence the attitudes, behaviour, values and strategies of men and women in their professional environment. In other companies, the approach to diversity is more targeted: for a high-tech group, for example, diversity is above all cultural and social. Effectively, the group has undertaken to "favour the insertion of young people from deprived areas, hiring the disabled and sex equality between men and women." (10) Due to the declarative character of the Charter, any signatory to it is also free not to deal with the three forms of diversity it proposes, or to deal with one or more according to its particular requirements and priorities. In the aforementioned cosmetics group no fewer than six forms of diversity were identified – gender, nationality, ethnic origin, social origin, disability and age – while the high-tech group retained only three: social origin, disability and gender (11).

The scope of operation of the signatory companies with regard to the Charter also allows them to choose a nomenclature which best conveys their particular convictions, history, commitment and management. For example, although the expression "cultural and ethnic diversity" is a construct drawn up by the authors of the Charter to designate French citizens "of immigrant origin", some signatories prefer the term "visible minorities" to underline their attachment to France's republican heritage. In effect, this expression, which originates in Canada (12), expresses the visible diversity of a society without recognising distinctive identities. Is the danger one of "a society in which individuals will not fear discrimination on

the grounds of their cultural differences since they will no longer constitute a hindrance to their development"? (13)

To take another example: a railway company which, due to the strong ethno-cultural connotations of the term "diversity", has preferred to replace it with the expression "equal opportunity". Mr. A, Advisor to the President on Equal Opportunity Issues in the group tells us that he "*wanted an inclusive, federal term to avoid exclusion and define people without any determinism whatsoever. With "equal opportunity" we can unite several ambitions: to reflect our client base, employ more women, affirm our intention to value legislation linked to the disabled, and be closer to both deprived and rural areas. I also wanted to avoid giving workers the feeling that their children would have no place in the company, conveying a genuine desire to maintain social equilibrium.*" The use of the term "equal opportunity" here reveals a resolutely ideological stance.

The concept of diversity as presented in the Charter, then, is vague in character: there is no clear definition of it and we do not know if it is exclusively three-dimensional (social, ethnic, cultural origins...) or not. Each company interprets the concept as it sees fit, its freedom of interpretation reinforced by the Diversity Charter's own non-binding nature. Companies can also choose not to use the term diversity at all, for at least two reasons: its association with Anglo-Saxon practices of positive discrimination perceived as negative (even if such practices exist in France at national level (14)), and its clear reference to ethno-racial minorities. Taking such interpretative licence is the also prerogative of those companies who have entered the field of diversity without signing up to the Charter. Multiple interpretations of the concept of diversity help account for the "diversity of Diversity Managers".

By definition, a "Diversity Manager" takes in charge various diversity-related missions within the company. But what kind of diversity do we mean? We understand that the definition of diversity that the company itself chooses is crucial in determining the scope of the post of "Diversity Manager", defining the way in which s/he comprehends the field of action and the dimensions of the diversity s/he has to deal with. The example of a large cosmetics group is telling: Ms. B, Diversity and Inclusion Manager, adopts an approach to diversity defined within the company, namely a global approach. Effectively, her principal mission is to "*take in charge all projects linked to diversity (...)*", which implies that her field of action officially includes all the forms of diversity outlined by the group. On the other hand, Ms. C, in her position a high-tech group, has a more targeted approach: she deals exclusively with gender and disability, insofar as they are the current priorities. "*Today there's a real desire to act in favour of disability in France at group level. Professional equality [is] also [one of our concerns], but less so than disability at the moment,*" she declares.

In addition, different interpretations of the concept of diversity lead companies to choose the nomenclature they feel most appropriate to best express their convictions. The range of terms is especially noticeable among holders of "Diversity Manager" posts. In a car manufacturing group, Mr. D is "In Charge of Innovation and Social Watch", while Mr. E is "Director of Innovation in Social Responsibility" in a mobile telecommunications company and Mr.F "Sustainable Development Manager" in an insurance company. The choice of titles communicates an approach to diversity which is as much an ideological stance on the part of the company involved. In the car manufacturer, diversity is perceived as social progress, and as such an integral part of the group's social discourse (15). This is not yet the case in the mobile telecommunications company, yet diversity does lie within the province of Corporate Social Responsibility (RSE). In the insurance company, it depends to a large extent on sustainable development, so much so that Mr.F's mission is "*to promote diversity as an issue for present and future generations, and question how [the Group's] actions in this domain might integrate them (...).*"

Different interpretations of the concept of diversity itself account for the diversity in approaches, missions, scope of activities and even titles of "Diversity Managers". For greater

clarity, we may consider that diversity takes seven principal forms: social origin, disability, nationality, gender, supposed or real ethnic origin, age and religion (16). However, since the companies we questioned declared that they did not include the latter among their criteria, our study will limit itself to the six others. Although all six have progressively come under the umbrella of RSE, we have noticed that not all of them have been retained and dealt with by companies openly committed to diversity. It would appear that they do not have the same notion of Corporate Social Responsibility; to what extent then might their different conceptions of CSR explain the "diversity of Diversity Managers"?

## **B) Progressive integration of "diversity" in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility**

Companies do not consider diversity in the same way insofar as they do not have the same conception of Social Responsibility. Their individual interpretations of Social Responsibility also seem to account not only for the diversity of posts under the heading of "Diversity Manager" but also for the very criteria that define diversity as a sphere of activity.

Reflecting the social, cultural and ethnic make-up of French society is considered today as part and parcel of RSE. But what is RSE? The Green Paper published by the European Commission in July 2001 defined it as "voluntary integration on the part of companies of social and environmental concerns into their commercial activities and their relations with stakeholders". In effect, this RSE is an "imported" version of Corporate Social Responsibility according to which an economically viable company should, through dialogue with stakeholders, manage the social, societal and environmental impact of its activities. American in origin, the concept of CSR was introduced into the European Union primarily as a response to the social crisis of the 1990s, and subsequently to the effects of globalisation.

It was at this time that social origin was included in the field of RSE, through the problem of integration of communities in difficulty. The law of December 1st 1988 stipulated that "social and professional integration of people in difficulty constitutes a national imperative" (17), and companies accordingly became partners in an economic integration policy put in place by the authorities, whose provisions included procedures to facilitate entry into the job market for young people (professionalization and apprenticeship contracts) and organise the return to work of the long-term unemployed. Even if companies took part somewhat under duress, at times to take advantage of tax exemption, reflecting the make-up of French society was considered to fall within the remit of RSE.

The problem of integrating disabled workers (18) led to disability becoming the second form of diversity to be brought under the umbrella of RSE (19); since 1987, companies with more than 20 employees are legally bound to employ more than 6% of disabled workers, failing which the law allows the firm to meet its obligations by paying a contribution proportional to the number of disabled workers employed, a contribution – not a tax – payable to the AGEFIPH (20). The law of February 11th 2005 on equal rights, opportunities, participation and citizenship for disabled persons maintained the 6% threshold but modified the calculation rate more in line with company practice.

The notion of "sex equality" is more ambitious in scope than the rather diagnostic "gender diversity", but it was through the implementation of sex equality legislation that gender was brought into the domain of RSE. Since 1983, the Roudy Law (21) has enshrined the principle of non-discrimination between the sexes in HR procedures and even a certain form of positive discrimination in favour of women to redress the balance of existing inequality. Even so, sex equality did not appear to be much of a priority to stakeholders during the social crisis of the 1990s, and it was not until the Genisson Law (22) of 9th May 2001 and the National Inter-Professional Agreement of March 1st 2004 that gender was included in the domain of RSE.

As these examples of social origin, disability and gender illustrate, bringing the different forms of diversity into the domain of RSE has been a gradual process. But has this been the case for all companies, and what are the consequences at "Diversity Manager" level?

Integrating the forms of diversity has not been undertaken in the same manner in every company, which has had consequences on the level of involvement of the "Diversity Managers", calling into question their field of action. Should social integration, disability and sex equality be considered separately from other forms of diversity? Some companies, like the cosmetics group we studied, say they should, and maintain posts dedicated to dealing with one or more of these forms. It seems that other companies prefer the concept of Sustainable Development to that of RSE, hence their attachment of "Diversity Manager" posts to their Sustainable Development divisions, a situation explained by the semantic confusion that exists between the concepts of RSE and Sustainable Development

themselves. Bringing the various forms of diversity into the domain of RSE is one explanation for the "diversity of Diversity Managers", and the integration of the diversity into the domain of Sustainable Development might explain why certain "Diversity Manager" posts have been linked to Sustainable Development. Even so, on the basis of our research in the field and closer study of the concepts of diversity and responsibility, we have been able to outline the following different types of "Diversity Manager".

### C) Towards a Typology of the "Diversity Manager" centred around the concept of diversity

Starting out from the premise that the titles of "Diversity Manager" posts convey approaches to diversity and issues specific to each company, our first area of study concentrated on the principal defining modes of diversity, with the regard to the way in which the term appears in the titles of the posts in our sample.

Firstly we identified three groups of titles: those where the word "diversity" is mentioned alone, those in which it is attached to another term, and those in which it does not appear at all. Further scrutiny of these three groups allows us to postulate four defining modes of diversity: "generic", "complementary", "restrictive" and "evicted". It is according to these modes that we subsequently outline five types of "Diversity Manager".

Among those posts whose titles make mention of the word diversity alone, we note that nobody really knows what the term relates to, even though its use conveys an explicit commitment on the part of the company in favour of diversity. The question remains as to what diversity is, so much so that we can call this a "generic" defining mode. We shall describe those "Diversity Managers" whose posts present such generic titles as "**mysterious**", insofar as we are unable to determine what their missions relate to, or believe they are supposed to cover the entire field of diversity. But this first level of analysis must be subtle: despite the generic character of the term employed, not all the forms of diversity maintained and dealt with by the companies are the same. For instance, whilst in a large French bank, Mr. G works officially on sex equality, nationality and social / ethnic origins through the implementation of an equal opportunity policy, Mr C in the high-tech group concentrates on disability and sex equality. This is explained by the fact that the concerns and stakes of each company regarding diversity are completely different, in a large part due to the nature of their business. As such it is clear that, in the "mysterious" category, "Diversity Managers" do not all comprehend diversity in the same way. Nevertheless, in the interests of clarity, we have chosen not to deal with the "form of diversity" variable for the time being.

The second group of titles is that in which the term "diversity" is attached to another term, such as "social innovation" (oil company), "inclusion" (cosmetics group), "ethics" (cosmetics group), "change" (telecommunications group) or "mixity" (postal group). Here, we see the expression of two defining modes of diversity: the "complementary" and the "restrictive". The complementary mode is perceived in cases where the term diversity is attached to another term that makes no reference to the form of diversity. As such, "diversity" retains its generic character, but its association with another term allows us to define it [diversity], by negating the definition of the second term. For example, diversity as such is neither ethics nor inclusion in the cosmetics group. What, then, is it? This first level of analysis does not allow us to answer that question, but it does reveal the position of the company. What is discernible in the cosmetics group is the swing from one position to another: in 2004, ethics and diversity went hand in hand, but in 2005, with the creation of the post of "Diversity and Inclusion Manager", diversity and inclusion were to be thought of as going together. It also reveals that certain "Diversity Managers" wear two hats. We shall describe those posts of "Diversity Managers" whose titles are constructed this way as "**apparent**", since we measure the content of their diversity-related missions by the yardstick of what is not diversity as such. The restrictive mode is perceived in those titles where the term "diversity" is accompanied by another term that refers to at least one of the forms of diversity, and as a result loses its generic character. Diversity is defined by what it is not; but this negation is distinctive in that it is restricted to one particular form [of diversity]. As in the complementary mode, this defining mode also reveals a company position. In the postal group, for example, diversity is not mixity. Sex equality therefore is excluded as a form of diversity as such, to be dealt with separately by the "Diversity Manager", a distinction explained by the fact that the group began to work historically on sex equality well before the other forms of diversity (in a Sex Equality Agreement in 2004 and a Majority Agreement the following year). The restrictive

mode is characteristic of the "Diversity Manager" posts we shall call "**exclusive**", insofar as at least one form of diversity is removed from the list and given special attention.

In the third group of titles the word "diversity" is not present whatsoever, the company (deliberately or not as the case may be) choosing not to employ it. Upon reading the titles we do not know if they are "Diversity Manager" posts or not. This is the "evicted" mode; the eviction of the word diversity is said to be involuntary if no "Diversity Manager" post has been created. Diversity-related missions are undertaken, informally (a food group) or formally (cement company) by people already working on other problems, who we shall describe as "**unsuspected**". If, however, a "Diversity Manager" post has been created and the word "diversity" deliberately ousted, we shall call these "Diversity Managers" "**hidden**".

Accordingly, five types of "Diversity Managers" can be defined in view of the principal defining modes of diversity: the **mysterious**, the **apparent**, the **exclusive**, the **unsuspected** and the **hidden**.

We propose to classify the "Diversity Managers" according to the number of forms of diversity that they officially deal with in their respective companies. This allows us to define the scope of diversity that each is responsible for. Generally, a maximum of six forms of diversity are recognised by companies: social origin, disability, gender, nationality, ethnic origin and age. We note that some companies, such as the large French bank, the mobile phone company and the railway group, bring social and ethnic origin together under the heading "equal opportunity", and that only 10% of "Diversity Managers" in our sample take a global approach to diversity (the Diversity and Inclusion Manager in the cosmetics group and the Innovation and Social Watch Manager in the car company).

45% of these managers have a bidimensional approach to diversity, linking either disability and gender (due to company agreements regarding disability and sex equality), or social and ethnic origin. We should, however, qualify our comments by emphasising that 45% of the "Diversity Managers" studied officially take into consideration no fewer than three forms of diversity. Nevertheless we also note that there is often a discrepancy between the forms that have to be dealt with and those present in the field, notably due to overlapping responsibilities. To take one particular case, although the Diversity and Inclusion Manager of the cosmetics group officially takes a global approach to diversity, she does not take into consideration social origin and disability, which come under the remit of the Coordinator of Apprenticeship and Insertion, and have done for so more than a decade. Our observations in the field have allowed us to analyse the missions and activities of "Diversity Managers" in our sample to define the forms of diversity they deal with in an effective manner. In fact, only one "Diversity Manager" takes a global approach to diversity. Slightly over 50% the "Diversity Managers" take a bidimensional approach, and 75% of "Diversity Managers" deal with fewer than three forms in the field!

We sought to go further in our analysis and suggest an analysis based not on number but of the nature of the forms of diversity dealt with by the "Diversity Managers". In order to measure qualitatively their involvement in the field, we concentrated on the various stages of the process of integrating forms of diversity into the domain of RSE. The classification resulting from this chronological analysis is therefore not a moral grading of the "Diversity Managers". Three levels, each coupling two of the forms, were established: level 1 refers to social origin and disability, level 2 to gender and nationality, and level 3 to ethnic origin and age. We observe that there are "Diversity Managers" who are involved exclusively on one level. For instance, "Diversity Managers" K and B', respectively in a washing powder company and a cosmetics group, are on level 1. Other "Diversity Managers" are involved on the first two levels but do not yet work on ethnic origin and age. Conversely, we note that 70% of "Diversity Managers" work on level 3, which is explained by the "trendiness" inspired by the Diversity Charter, which invites companies to pay special attention to the ethnic and cultural make-up of French society. Only 36% of the "Diversity Managers" work on all three levels.

"Diversity Managers" can be classified according to the number of forms of diversity they officially deal with in the field, globally as well as unidimensionally. According to the nature of the forms of diversity and the chronology of their incorporation into the domain of RSE, they can also be classified according to three levels of involvement. But seen through this prism, what are the issues of Diversity Management?

According to IMS-Entreprendre pour la Cité, they are of several orders (23): economic, social / societal, legal and image-related. These are balanced by the strategic and operational issues of each company. We notice that there is a correspondence between a predominant issue of diversity management for a given company and the profile of the "Diversity Manager" it employs. When economic issues prevail, companies call upon an "**expert**" often specialised in dealing with one particular form of diversity or in project management, whereas they frequently have recourse to a "**militant**" to defend social and societal issues of diversity. If optimising their HR management is a priority, they call upon someone from the HR domain, while "**communicators**" and "**lawyers**" are often chosen by companies when it is a question of anticipating eventual legal and image-related risks concerning discrimination and the promotion of diversity internally, externally and in social dialogue.

#### **D) For a Typology of "Diversity Managers" based on Responsibility (24)**

There seem to be three principal motives behind the progressive integration of diversity into RSE, namely the social shifts of the 1990s, the promotion of diversity issues since the signature of the Diversity Charter in October 2004, and the integration of the theme of diversity into social dialogue. Further analysis of our interviews indicates firstly that the posts created before the first signatures on the Diversity Charter were a direct consequence of the opening up of business to the social changes that took place in the early 90s. Secondly, it seems that many posts were created after October 2004 to promote diversity issues, which would indicate the Charter was a common motive underlying their creation. And thirdly, in view of the Charter's declarative nature, some companies (including even signatories to the Charter) preferred to create "Diversity Manager" posts pursuant to agreements at company level. As a result, we see that the motives for creating "Diversity Manager" posts are the same as those behind the integration of diversity into RSE.

Three types of "Diversity Manager" posts can be outlined, therefore: posts **adapting to social changes**, posts **to promote diversity issues** and posts **negotiating agreements on social progress**.

We can also classify "Diversity Managers" according to the degree of responsibility of the individual holding the post. To do so we analysed the status of the posts in our sample. Five can be identified: the "**Operational Director**", the "**Functional Director**", the "**Manager In Charge**" (of a specific division), the "**Project Leader / Manager**" and the "**Advisor to the President**."

In such a manner our study has revealed different types of posts and profiles of "Diversity Managers" testifying to a wide range of remits and fields of operation. However, despite the many interpretations of the term "Diversity Manager" – which account for the diversity of the posts – it is employed by all and sundry as if there were a common meaning and thought process beyond this fragmented reality.

## Conclusion

### "Managing diversity": steering organisational and cultural changes in business?

As has been stated, different interpretations of the concept of diversity are at the origin of the diversity of approaches, missions, fields of activity and even titles of the "Diversity Managers", even taking into consideration the overarching nature of discourse on diversity. This diversity of posts is reinforced by another factor, the different ways in which each company integrates the various forms of diversity into its RSE. We have defined six principal forms of diversity in the field of operation of a "Diversity Manager": social origin, disability, nationality, gender, ethnic origin and age. Although these have progressively been brought under the umbrella of RSE, they are not all dealt with in the same manner by companies committed to promoting diversity, a situation explained by the fact that the companies themselves do not all have the same conception of what their Social Responsibility is. Some prefer to integrate the theme of diversity into the field of Sustainable Development, which explains why several "Diversity Manager" posts are linked to this department. There are, then, several interpretations of what a "Diversity Manager" is, in the view of what is originally understood by "diversity" and the forms of diversity considered as belonging to companies' Corporate Social Responsibility, and these interpretations have led to the typology formalised above.

Even so, despite the vague nature of the term "Diversity Manager", the majority of companies continue to employ it, in the sense that it carries meaning, implicitly evoking the existence of a common project: to represent the diversity of French society, a project that is leading to a convergence, even a mutualisation of certain practices on the ground. It is principally a question of diversification of sourcing put in place to "represent diversity in the company", both in internal communication and public relations by which the "Diversity Managers" position themselves as "representatives of diversity" both inside and outside the company. This convergence of practices, but especially the difficulties that the "Diversity Managers" encounter in seeking to change both working methods and attitudes show that pushing for change at Human Resources Management level is a common goal for the "Diversity Manager", which serves to legitimise the function in the eyes of their superiors. This process of change finds its most accomplished form in a new way of team management: openly declared diversity management.

One might wonder moreover whether, in progressively transforming some of their HR practices into Diversity Management, some French companies are not pursuing a more inclusive Anglo-Saxon business ideal questioning the limits between professional and private space (25), making the workplace an open and harmonious place where each individual, regardless of sex, age, origin, disability or religion might cultivate their differences and develop their potential without surrendering their identity. We see the first signs of this in a car company where there is already no longer *"a difference in terms of remuneration between men and women, [where] changes are perceptible in results and behaviour."* In effect, *"the social climate is changing (...), older women and men [are] on the production line. (...) It's become habit."* (26)

We note that favouring inclusion is often perceived as a means of making the company's diversity policy apply to the largest number of its employees. Indeed, the development of services for workers, or the balance between private and professional life, concerns everyone. As such, the "Diversity Manager" in charge of deploying a diversity management policy can not afford to cut corners on inclusion policy, however negligible it might seem, all the more so considering that putting into place a diversity policy involves a dynamic evolution of business culture towards ever greater inclusion. Whatever his/her status, the "Diversity Manager" will have to be able to mobilise and coordinate internal resources in order to have the necessary time to lead change in Human Resources Management, and will have to be sufficiently legitimate within the company to steer different diversity-related projects and position him/herself as a veritable project manager driving forward change. But what are the approaches and tools to be mobilised and/or invented to steer effectively this process of cultural change, not in terms of individuals' equal ability but in terms of the valuing and

recognition of their differences?

## FOOTNOTES

- 1) J. M. PERETTI. *Dictionnaire des Ressources Humaines*, Vuibert, 2005, p. 186. "Post: working situation entirely defined by the organisation regarding place of work, content and methods of execution, independently of the holder of the post."
- 2) "Raison d'être : description of the entirety of the missions of a post and its global objectives."
- 3) L. MEHAIGNERIE et Y. SABEG, *Les Oubliés de l'égalité des Chances*, Institut Montaigne, 2004
- 4) D. SCHNAPPER, *La Communauté des citoyens*, Gallimard – Folio Essais, 2003.
- 5) Y. SABEG et Y. SABEG. *Discrimination positive, pourquoi la France ne peut y échapper*, Calmann-Lévy, October 2004 p. 9.
- 6) G. CALVES, *Il n'y a pas de race ici, Le modèle français*, Critique Internationale, n°17 October 2002.
- 7) D. SCHNAPPER, *La Communauté des citoyens*, Gallimard – Folio Essais, 2003.
- 8) Diversity Charter Press Release. Explanation of motives: *Une Charte de la Diversité, pour quoi faire?*, 2004.
- 9) Visible differences : ethnic origin, gender, disability, physical appearance, age. Invisible differences: cultural origin, socio-economic origin, education, experience, religious persuasion, political or philosophical convictions, sexual orientation, values, etc.
- 10) Press Release, Groupe de haute technologie, 15th May 2006.
- 11) Press Release, Groupe de haute technologie, 15th May 2006.
- 12) According to the law on employment equity, visible minorities include "persons, other than natives not of the Caucasian race or not white-skinned." The population of visible minorities includes the following groups: Chinese, South Asian, Black, Filipino, Latino-American, South-East Asian, Arab, Western Asian, Japanese, Korean and Polynesian.
- 13) K. AMELLAL, *Discriminez-moi ! Enquête sur nos inégalités*, Flammarion, 2005, p. 33.
- 14) "ZEPs ["Zones d'Education Prioritaires"], housing aid, educational grants and scholarships, the fiscal status accorded to Corsica by virtue of its 'insularity', hiring incentives... are essentially examples of so-called 'positive discrimination', i.e. measures taken with the aim of seeking to correct social and or economic inequalities." (K. AMELLAL, *Discriminez-moi ! Enquête sur nos inégalités*, Flammarion, 2005, p. 353).
- 15) This policy of diversity and non-discrimination has been extended throughout the world with the signature of the worldwide managerial agreement on social responsibility (...) [The group] seeks to apply and promote, beyond the provisions of existing law, best practices and combat racism, sexism, xenophobia and intolerance with regard to difference, and to guarantee the respect of private life." Groupe Automobile Social Report 2005, pp : 6-7.
- 16) At this stage in our development, we can note that Diversity Management policy in business consists of strategic acts of management that seek to create competitive advantage by meeting the challenge of an ever more diversified workforce. It deliberately emphasises differences rather than similitudes within the team, with a view to gaining efficiency. It deliberately stresses difference rather than similarity in working teams and seeks gains in efficiency. By concerted action outside the usual breeding grounds of recruitment, it introduces an element of difference into an ensemble hitherto perceived as homogeneous. It seeks to value the contribution of each individual to the organisation by recognising and acknowledging his/her skills. Diversity Management policy seeks to fight discrimination, promote equal opportunity as the norm, reduce the dysfunctions that are likely to create diversity, respond to inevitable resistance such measures provoke, calculate the distance travelled and yet to be travelled in order to pilot progress, increase diversity in teams as they develop and eventually recognise unexploited internal skills, ultimately valuing the particularities of each member of staff. A "proactive" Diversity Management policy seeks to capitalise on the intercultural dynamics of diversified teams. Through constant comparison with the local and regional employment pools in which it is implanted, it presupposes the establishment of a managerial culture that favours integration and considers as assets differences between employees in terms of age, gender, real or supposed belonging to a particular ethnic group, nation, race, political orientation, membership of a trade union, family situation, social and cultural origin, physical aptitude, disability, sexual orientation and religious persuasion. This policy is likely to affect work organisation, HR management and corporate culture as well as the understanding and conquest of markets (clients and users).
- 17) By *insertion* – as opposed to *assimilation* – we understand "having an individual enter into a group while respecting his/her differences."

18) A disabled worker being defined as "any person whose chances of obtaining and maintaining employment are effectively reduced as a result of a lack or loss of physical or mental ability." In J. M. PERETTI, *Tous différents!*, Editions d'Organisation, 2006, p. 165.

19) According to G. BERTHELEME, "taking an interest in disability by suggesting an approach [inspired by the RSE] means considering the interests of and risks incurred by each interested party, emphasising the fact that disability, like any characteristic concerning a specific population, can become a lever for performance for the company and facilitate the implementation of a creative dynamic whose value transcends the relations between the disabled employee and his/her employer." In J. M. PERETTI, *Tous différents!*, Editions d'Organisation, 2006, p. 100.

20) A national association managing the funding of professional insertion for disabled employees. Going one step further, some companies have drafted written agreements at company or group level with this association to decide together on how to share costs and expenses related to disability.

21) Y. ROUDY, Minister for Women's Rights from 1981 to 1986.

22) C. GENISSON, Socialist Member of Parliament for Pas-de-Calais since 1987 and author of the report "Femmes-hommes. Quelle égalité professionnelle. La mixité professionnelle pour plus d'égalité."

23) Economic issues refer to the improvement of company performance. From an organisational perspective, it is a question of optimising HR Management with respect to forthcoming retirement. The social and societal stakes are also high, given that integrating fringe groups within the company improves social cohesion and testifies to an engagement of Social Responsibility on the part of the company. Managing diversity also allows, to a lesser extent, to foresee legal and image-related risks related to discrimination. IMS-Entreprendre pour la Cité, *Non-discrimination et gestion de la diversité dans les entreprises en France*, 2004.

24) A typology developed in BROUSSILLON (George-Axelle), *La figure du Responsable Diversité dans les entreprises en France. De la symbolique à l'action de conduite du changement en Gestion des Ressources Humaines*, Dissertation for HR Management, Communication and Negotiation Masters degree (Paris IV / Sorbonne-Celsa), December 2006.

25) Concretely, we can cite several initiatives on the part of companies, including programmes to accompany parenthood, the development of specific services for workers and the adaptation of operational rules to favour the balance between professional and private life.

26) D, In charge of Innovation and Social Watch, Automobile Group.

## **APPENDIXES**

### **METHODOLOGY:**

This contribution is based on a study carried out in 2006 during which about thirty formally or informally designated "Diversity Managers", designated as such both within their respective companies and externally, were questioned in semi-directive interviews. It is also the result of observations in the field (in those groups that have signed the Diversity Charter, and in networks whose "Diversity Managers" meet beyond the confines of their companies), and of an analysis of thirty or so company communication documents, including presentations, annual reports, sustainable development reports and press releases.

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