Diversity in Organizations

Although the concept of diversity has only entered management discussions in recent decades, organizations—including businesses, armed forces, administrations, and associations—have long dealt with various forms of diversity.

What is new about current perspectives on diversity is that they come with a normative claim: diversity in all of its aspects should be made visible and recognized. It is primarily concerned with the equal treatment of minorities and combating discrimination based on certain characteristics such as gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, or disability. Diversity programs aimed at achieving these goals have been established in a wide range of organizations and cultural contexts.

However, these programs have shown contradictory effects, as demonstrated by researchers such as Dobbin and Kalev. Additionally, some large companies have begun distancing themselves from their "Diversity, Equity & Inclusion" (DEI) programs. This shift is driven by governments that reject such initiatives, changing legal frameworks—such as the U.S. Supreme Court's repeal of affirmative action programs—and right-wing movement actors who, for example, mobilize against queer literature in schools.

Thus, while conditions for diversity in organizations are changing, diversity itself is not eliminated, and addressing diversity remains a challenge for organizations. We call for papers that address the current changes and are particularly interested in strategies that either fend off the accommodation of diversity or slip it in through the back door. We also call for papers that discuss the theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of diversity in organizations and we are particularly interested in empirical findings on different organizational approaches to diversity.

Contributions to the special issue will primarily discuss the following aspects:

1. **Approaches from Organizational Theory**
   Theoretic contributions to the relationship between diversity and organizations have obviously much relied on neo-institutionalist perspectives, but also comprise theories of micro-politics, rational choice theory, and systems theory. The question here is how these approaches can be productively applied to explain the contradictory observations regarding diversity in organizations and what other organizational theories have been developed or applied.

2. **Specifics and Differences Between Types of Organizations**
   To understand the relationship between diversity and organizations, it is essential to bring into focus various types of organizations—such as private firms, public administrations, associations, schools, and the military—while highlighting their similarities and differences. This includes analyzing their specific structures and historical developments. Additionally, recent research suggests that new types of organizational forms should be considered that are both bureaucratic and agile and that we should be looking at the contradictory effects that democratic and open structures can have on equity and diversity.

3. **Organizations in International Comparison**
   Current political developments that may occur worldwide, but at a different pace, make it clear that the different national environments in which organizations address diversity must be considered in research. Therefore, explicitly comparative international studies of organizations are welcome as well as single-country case studies whose research design facilitates international comparison. Societies worldwide have experience with diversity. We welcome studies that open the perspective on countries that are not so well covered in the existing literature.

4. **Methodological Approaches to Diversity in Organizations**
   A key area of interest is how to methodologically address the challenges associated with observing and measuring diversity and the effects of diversity measures (and their abolishment) in organizations. What indicators allow for the measurement of the success of diversity initiatives? How can data for these indicators be collected? How can we conduct research on diversity in times when nothing but the word may cause opposition?

Editors

The special issue will be edited by *Maja Apelt, University of Potsdam, Ines Michalowski, University of Münster, and Victor Ray, University of Iowa.*

Format and Schedule

Interested authors will submit a 500-word abstract to the editors by January 15, 2026. Upon acceptance of their abstracts, contributors will be asked to submit papers of at least 4000 words that will be discussed in an online author workshop in June 2026.

Full manuscripts (6,000-10,000 words) must be submitted by September 1, 2026, and will be peer-reviewed in a double-blind peer process. Only papers that are successful in the peer-review process will be included in the special issue. The special issue is scheduled for publication in 2027.