

## Chapter 12

# Promoting Diversity and Combatting Discrimination in Research Organizations: A Practitioner's Guide

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### Abstract

The essay is addressed to practitioners in research management and from academic leadership. It describes which measures can contribute to creating an inclusive climate for research teams and preventing and effectively dealing with discrimination. The practical recommendations consider the policy and organizational levels, as well as the individual perspective of research managers. Following a series of basic recommendations, six lessons learned are formulated, derived from the contributions to the edited collection on “Diversity and Discrimination in Research Organizations.”

*Keywords:* Inclusive work climate; lessons learned; policy recommendations; recommendations for actions; bullying; sexual harassment

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## Transfer to Practice

It is a particular concern of ours to provide practitioners in academic organizations with the insights that they can draw from the contributions presented in this edited collection for their work and their specific organizational contextual conditions. With this essay, we therefore want to offer a comprehensive orientation on the question of what measures can be taken in practice to create discrimination-free working conditions for a diverse workforce, whereby we especially address academic leadership and research managers. Our prototypical program is described in the following steps:

- Based on research on effective gender equality policies in research organizations, we derive four conditions that policy-makers should consider to provide sufficient framework conditions for reducing social and systemic discrimination in academia (see “Recommendations for Policy-Makers” section).
- We outline a compact program of measures at the organizational level, which is essentially based on the studies of the [US National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine \(2018\)](#) about the sexual harassment of women in science and experience of this article’s authors, which we have gained in our own projects (see “Recommendations for the Design of a Discrimination Resurrection Program” section).
- We discuss the role that research management can – or should – play in creating a diversity-inclusive team climate as well as preventing and managing cases of discrimination (see “Recommendations for Academic Leaders and Research Managers” section).

Finally, we discuss how the contributions in this edited collection add to the current state of research on the effective prevention and fair treatment of discrimination in the scientific workplace (see “Our Lessons Learned” section).

### *Recommendations for Policy-Makers*

For more than two decades now, the European Commission has been funding research projects that address the question of how to increase the participation of women researchers in research teams and decision-making positions in the European Research Area. Without claiming to be exhaustive, examples include the Helsinki Group on Women in Science reports first published in 2002 ([EC, 2008](#)), the PRAGES project ([Cacace, 2009](#)), and the STAGES project ([Kalpazidou Schmidt and Cacace, 2017](#)).

A subsequent assessment of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s ([OECD, 2018](#)) Science, Technology and Innovation Outlook appears to be rather skeptical concerning the impact of gender equality interventions in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The authors recognize the strong prevalence of gender equality measures among OECD countries, mainly aiming to increase the number of students in the STEM fields and the provision of support to individual women scientists. However, they criticize the fragmentation of current policy actions “[...] characterised by multiple

institutions acting independently, and limited co-ordination between education, science and innovation actors” (OECD, 2018: 178). They attest an insufficient sustainability of the various initiatives and the need for more systemic evaluations and indicators as well as mutual learning formats. Especially regarding the importance of long-term monitoring and evaluation of gender equality challenges and measures, the OECD report confirms the policy recommendations of the mentioned EC reports. Moreover, the nub of equality measures addresses the quantitative equalization of women and men, yet the quality of work and working climate are a rare issue.

The following framework conditions for success in promoting gender equality in research – and, by analogy, promoting underrepresented or disadvantaged groups of people – can be derived from the reports mentioned above.

- **Gender monitoring:** Highly institutionalized gender monitoring that comprises a high number of research institutions and indicators keeps gender equality on the broader political and organizational agenda and enables problem-framing and impact evaluation of gender equality measures.
- **Leadership:** A clear commitment of political and organizational leaders gives legitimacy to those actors like working groups, equality officers or intrapreneurs who work every day to improve gender equality in their organizations.
- **Networks:** Networks enable mutual learning for research organizations and enable coordinating extensive actions at multiple levels between versatile actors from local to global.

A fourth condition for success – which is not explicitly mentioned in the reports above but should not be underestimated – is the binding nature of anti-discrimination measures. Research shows that a lack of consequences often restricts the effectiveness of gender equality measures (Matthies and Zimmermann, 2010; van den Brink and Benschop, 2012). Firm accountability provides measures such as quotas, voluntary agreements and gender equality plans with the necessary binding force and therefore will be considered in the following discussion, along with the other policy approaches.

### ***Recommendations for Designing a Discrimination Reduction Program***

Structured according to a simplified policy cycle that distinguishes the phases of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation and has an iterative sequence, Fig. 22 lists a number of measures to reduce, prevent and manage experiences of discrimination in the research workplace (see also Marquis et al., 2008: 4–6).

**Evaluating the Status Quo and the Achievement of Objectives.** The basis for developing an effective anti-discrimination program is a sound knowledge base on the distribution of employees according to different socio-demographic characteristics (e.g. age, gender, care responsibilities, ethnicity, etc.). For the purpose of evidence-based development of a discrimination reduction program, ideally data is collected that relates the respective socio-demographic characteristics to organizational status characteristics (e.g., hierarchical position, function, income)

or employee perceptions and experiences (e.g., survey of work climate, experiences of social misconduct, compatibility of professional and private obligations).<sup>1</sup>

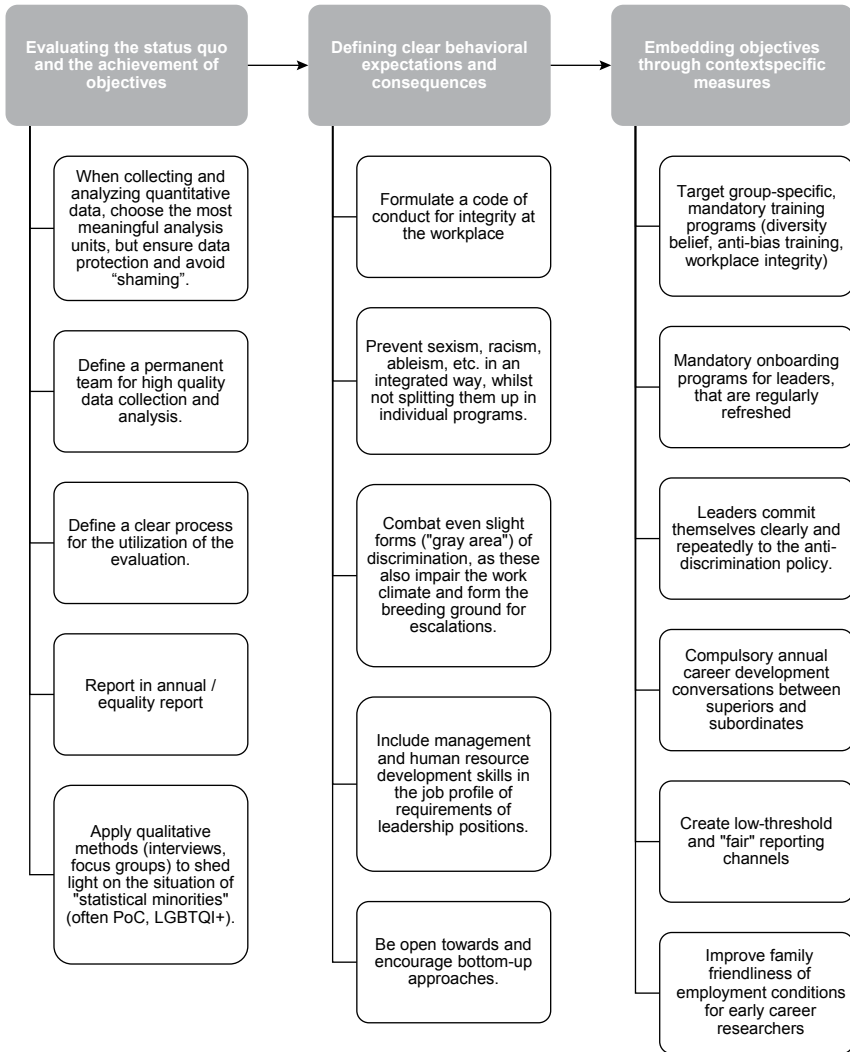


Fig. 22. Building Blocks of a Coherent and Comprehensive Program to Ensure a Discrimination-Free and Diversity-Friendly Workplace.

<sup>1</sup>Potential guidelines concerning the assessment of diversity initiatives: J. Marquis, N. Lim, L. Scott, C. Harrell, and J. Kavanagh (2008), [online] Rand.org. [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional\\_papers/2007/RAND\\_OP206.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/occasional_papers/2007/RAND_OP206.pdf) accessed 10 February 2022.

The finer the units of analysis, the more meaningful the evaluation of the status quo and the achievement of objectives. For example, to identify potential outcomes of systemic discrimination, data should be differentiable by scientific or non-scientific activity or hierarchical level. The work climate may considerably vary between individual teams and across disciplines, depending on conflict constellations that are very situation-specific.<sup>2</sup>

For an evaluation to be successful and – above all – practically relevant, it is important to plan for budget and working time. Evaluations not only involve sending out an online survey and presenting the results in PowerPoint; rather, they require a person or group of persons with sufficient expertise to develop an evaluation concept (key questions are: What do we want to know and why?), implement it using suitable survey instruments (questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, document analyses, etc.) in compliance with data protection regulations, and generate meaningful data that meet social science quality standards (e.g., validity and reliability, transferability, representativeness). In the meantime, there are a number of tools that enable an easily applicable organizational survey tailored to research organizations, e.g., on gender equality.<sup>3</sup> However, without social

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Guidance on measuring socio-demographic characteristics: J. H. P. Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik and U. Warner, *Measuring Ethnicity in Cross-National Comparative Survey Research; GESIS-Schriftenreihe Band 4* (Bonn: GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, 2010); J. H. P. Hoffmeyer-Zlotnik and U. Warner, *Measuring Occupation and Labour Status in Crossnational Comparative Surveys; GESIS-Schriftenreihe Band 7* (Bonn: GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, 2011).

Guidance on measuring diversity and inclusion: K. April and E. Blass, *Measuring Diversity Practice and Developing Inclusion* (2010). [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kurt-April/publication/228668437\\_Measuring\\_Diversity\\_Practice\\_and\\_Developing\\_Inclusion/links/0a85e534e003f59ba3000000/Measuring-Diversity-Practice-and-Developing-Inclusion.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kurt-April/publication/228668437_Measuring_Diversity_Practice_and_Developing_Inclusion/links/0a85e534e003f59ba3000000/Measuring-Diversity-Practice-and-Developing-Inclusion.pdf), accessed 10 February 2022.; S. Thompson, “Defining and measuring ‘inclusion’ within an organization”, K4D Helpdesk Report (Brighton, UK: Institute of Development Studies, 2017).

<sup>2</sup>At the same time, the units of analysis should not be chosen too finely. Data protection requirements are crucial here. The data collected and reported regularly must not allow drawing any personal conclusions, i.e., the identification of a respondent based on the data shared by him or her (which can quickly become the case, especially for research organizations with a three-digit or lower number of employees). Furthermore, when surveying the work climate, opinions and experiences of employees, valid results can only be expected if “shaming” is excluded. The results should not be used to compare individual teams or groups to identify high- or low-performers.

<sup>3</sup>See for example the GEAM Tool: “The Gender Equality Audit and Monitoring (GEAM) tool is an integrated environment for carrying out survey-based gender equality audits in academic organizations or organizational units”, <https://act-on-gender.eu/nes/gender-equality-audit-and-monitoring-geam-tool> accessed 15 March 2022. For another example, see the Immunity to Change Tool, which helps people identify and subsequently alter “competing commitments” that conflict with change (e.g. a change in the gender composition of research spaces), <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/hgse100/story/changing-better>, accessed 16 March 2022.

science expertise, even these tools cannot be used optimally, nor can the data generated be interpreted well.

Statistical methods such as questionnaire surveys often reach their limits when researching minority groups such as employees with health impairments or LGBTQI+ employees. Since social minorities are obviously often small groups in terms of numbers and therefore difficult to reach, collecting data on them often violates data protection regulations. Person-related inferences are easily made possible when – for example – two out of 80 respondents assign themselves to a third gender category. In these cases, qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups, must be used to gather information about any experiences of discrimination. Another strength of qualitative methods is that they enable understanding correlations in data (e.g., why one social group evaluates the work climate worse than another), whereas the strength of quantitative methods lies in detecting and confirming such correlations.

Another necessity for an evaluation that holds practical relevance is a process for its utilization. Within this framework, questions arise concerning how often an evaluation should be carried out, what happens to the results of the evaluation, what happens in the case of conspicuous or critical values at the organizational or team level, who determines the threshold values for the critical values, and who manages this process. The clearer and more binding that the process is for utilizing the evaluation results, the stronger the practical impact of the evaluation.

The data collected and the evaluations carried out on it should be handled transparently to counteract the creation of organizational myths within the workforce about positive and negative discrimination among them, potentially compromising the effectiveness of anti-discrimination policies.<sup>4</sup> The results of the status quo and progress evaluation can be reported in the annual or equality report of a research organization. Continuous progress monitoring requires that the data collected meet social science standards from the outset (see the discussion of evaluation teams above), since data are no longer comparable between two or more time periods if the questionnaire design is changed in significant ways.

The knowledge base generated by the evaluation can be used to develop targeted policies. Noteworthy, the evaluation of the policy program to be established should already be considered during its development (Palmén et al., 2019). Key questions are which indicators can be used to determine whether a program has been successful or whether adjustments are necessary. Furthermore, how are the data needed to answer this question generated, and who collects and evaluates them? Adequate human resources must be planned for ongoing evaluation.

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<sup>4</sup>Organizational interventions such as diversity measures or data collection in the context of such measures are naturally questioned by organizational members. Organizational members interpret such measures based on how they perceive their organization. These assessments can tend to be positive or negative, which is why proactive communication management in relation to diversity policies is important. For a detailed discussion of the causes and effects of diversity resistance, see Thomas (2020).

**Policy Formulation: Defining Clear Behavioral Expectations and Consequences.** When designing a social intervention such as an anti-discrimination program, it is important to formulate a set of goals that are as specific as possible for the state to aim for. Specific goals enable the effective planning and use of the human and financial resources available to implement the program, means-ends relationships can be assessed for appropriateness, and goal achievement can be evaluated. Insofar as an organizational cultural change is aimed for, it should be clearly presented accordingly which behavior is expected from the employees in concrete terms, which complaint channels are open in the event of violations and which consequences may occur (Daley et al., 2018).

A code of conduct can be formulated as a key document that provides a framework of orientation for employees and the anti-discrimination program. The code of conduct should be short and compact. It should not be formulated only by the leadership team but in a participatory process involving employees. This promotes the acceptance and implementation of such a code of conduct. In practice, such codes of conduct regularly address the key issues of workplace integrity and the prevention of workplace incivility. Such broad framing signals that protection against discrimination requires the active cooperation of all employees and that not only extreme cases of discrimination that can be proven in court are to be prevented, but rather that the general aim is to create a positive inclusive working environment in which even minor forms of discrimination cannot flourish in the first place.

Broad framing as workplace integrity or incivility also emphasizes the integrated nature of an anti-discrimination policy. In practice, in most academic institutions, equality officers, disability officers, anti-racism officers, work councils and other bodies are separate institutions that often have to establish mutual intersections. For example, if a sexist work environment prevails at a university or other academic institution, organizational change should not only be the responsibility of the equal opportunity officers, but must be driven by the management level and lived by all employees. Moreover, it is very likely that other types of discrimination are also taking place. A smart anti-discrimination policy takes into account and bridges the functional differentiation of institutional discrimination prevention and management.

In the sense of an integrated approach with clear behavioral expectations, it is also important to explicitly include personnel management competencies in job profiles and subsequently also evaluate academic leaders based on these competencies. At present, the suitability of researchers for leadership positions is often assessed solely based on their academic performance and very few leaders are trained to recognize or effectively address inequitable behaviors. Management and personnel leadership skills are expected in very few job requirements, although “team science” (Wang and Barabási, 2021) is on the rise.

When designing policies, it is also important to encourage bottom-up approaches, i.e., initiatives coming from employee representatives, team members, and not decided by an institution’s management. Such initiatives are more likely to promote equity in a grounded and reflexive approach that might challenge dominant views on personnel management in academia and research organizations.

Bottom-up approaches could *inter alia* help thinking research policies and practices outside a neoliberal managerial grid (see Vandeveldde-Rougale and Guerrero Morales in this collection) and thus contribute to fostering a more caring environment, with more time and resources allocated to thinking and creating, and less to complying with evaluation indicators based on international rankings that tend to reinforce power imbalance and competition both between individuals and between organizations instead of acknowledging the contribution of research to society (Hodgins and McNamara, 2021).

**Policy Implementation: Embedding Objectives Through Context-Specific Measures.** An anti-discrimination program should generally be implemented through context-specific interventions (Palmén et al., 2019). This means that the program should be tailored as appropriately as possible for the specific situation and challenges in an organization. Individual interventions should be adapted to the requirements and needs of different target groups, such as research managers, early career researchers, administrative staff, and others. Measures should also take into account organizational characteristics: for example, in a research organization with low staff turnover, targets for the representation of certain social groups will only be realized in the long term.

In terms of content, a wide range of measures is available, which should be coordinated with evaluating the status quo and formulating goals. Typical measures include welcome actions for new staff, training for employees to enable them to implement the goals of the anti-discrimination program in their daily work; for example, to recognize and overcome implicit prejudices against certain social groups, work productively in diverse teams, or behave appropriately as a bystander to discriminatory behavior in the workplace. Training such as anti-discrimination or anti-gender bias training as part of institutional onboarding after hiring and repeated refresher courses can also help to ensure that managers have the appropriate skills for inclusive leadership and conflict management.

As already mentioned above, the commitment of the academic leaders in a research organization is a central condition for the success of an anti-discrimination program. This commitment should be visible in the organization; for example, through speeches or circulars (provided that these discourses are linked to means and practical actions).<sup>5</sup>

Fig. 22 lists a range of other possible measures through which the goals of an anti-discrimination policy can be implemented: regular career-related and documented development discussions between leaders and their employees promote joint career development and partly counteract biased preference or disadvantage in interactions between leaders and their employees (vertical discrimination), especially early career researchers and their supervisors, as well as among employees

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<sup>5</sup>Of course, visibility per se is insufficient and adverse effects can be observed where there is a discrepancy between managerial discourse (including against discrimination and/or workplace bullying) and organizational practice (see *inter alia*: Clasches, 2019; Bereni, 2020; Vandeveldde-Rougale, 2016).



(horizontal discrimination). Low-threshold, confidential, and well-advertised reporting channels – which can not only be consulted in cases of tangible discrimination – may enable leaders to intervene at an early stage. In cases where the personal supervisor is excluded as a reporting channel due to a conflict, research organizations should offer “neutral” reporting channels that are not embedded in local hierarchies and dependencies. Depending on the context, measures aimed at improving the reconciliation of scientific work and private life are potentially suitable for reducing gender-related discrimination, e.g., crediting parental leave and care responsibilities when assessing the scientific performance of an early- or mid-career researcher, waiving meetings at off-peak times, or offering childcare.

### ***Recommendations for Academic Leaders and Research Managers***

Research managers are considered to be those individuals who provide support services to researchers and academics and themselves have an academic education and – in some cases – experience in research and teaching (WR, 2018: 85).<sup>6</sup> They work in staffs or decentralized units, monitor compliance with quality standards, supervise committees, and are involved with personnel processes in a variety of ways.

While the integration and productive use of diversity in research teams in everyday work is the task of traditional academic leaders – e.g., chair holders, research group leaders or the dean – research managers are regularly entrusted with diversity monitoring and developing and implementing strategic action programs (as exemplified above) from an organizational perspective. A comparable division of labor also exists for preventing and handling discrimination, which are regularly to be resolved initially by “line management,” i.e., the immediate leader in accordance with the academic hierarchical order, but which can be handed over under certain criteria or alternatively to specially established committees, staff units or service providers. Examples include academic ombudspersons, equal opportunity officers, compliance officers, representatives of the severely disabled, staff councils, psycho-social counseling centers, lawyers or other external reporting offices. Nonetheless, as studies in this volume show, these organs do not always interfere flawlessly, which require further optimization of their work and anti-discrimination actions.

**Integrating Diverse Teams.** Regarding gender-diverse teams, Nielsen et al. (2018) discuss how to create a diversity-inclusive team climate in research and

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<sup>6</sup>With the emergence of professional research management, the status of faculty changes from autonomous members of their respective scientific profession to employees of the respective university or research institution, as Gerber (2014) states for the United States. In the European research area, the emergence of the professional group of research managers has been accelerated by the Bologna reform (to harmonize the system of higher education teaching across Europe) and the increased importance of third-party funding for research financing, as a result of which universities have been increasingly entrusted with management tasks (WR, 2018: 85).

innovation development. First, the quality of collaboration and problem-solving ability of diverse teams (and homogeneous teams as well) is considerably influenced by their diversity belief and openness to diversity. Diversity belief refers to the conviction of individual team members that their difference is a strength in the work process (van Dick et al., 2008). Openness to diversity refers to the awareness of – for example – visible, informational or value differences in a team and the willingness of a team member to engage with dissimilar individuals and learn from them (Hobman et al., 2004). Accordingly, it is recommended that academic leaders interact with their teams to determine whether they view themselves as homogeneous or heterogeneous in terms of the professional and socio-demographic characteristics of their members and whether they view each as positive or negative. A low openness to diversity or a low diversity belief would have to be explored in an exchange with the team or a bilateral exchange with the team members.

Second, teams that work productively are those whose interactions (i.e., conversations and collaboration) between team members are determined by the expertise and experience of individual team members rather than social relationships (Joshi and Knight 2015). For leaders, this implies clearly identifying and communicating to the team the competencies and responsibilities of each member of their team. Larger work tasks in research projects should be differentiated according to the competencies that they require to be mastered and how the team members can optimally complement each other in their competencies.

Third, the same applies to the integration of diverse teams that applies to team processes in general, namely teams need team players. Team members should have a certain level of identification with their team, a shared sense of purpose and they must trust the team's ability to accomplish tasks, the team's processes should be transparently coordinated, and team members should treat each other with mutual respect and openness (Nielsen et al., 2018). The team structure should thereby regulate itself based on the competencies and expertise of the team members, as noted above. Too much team cohesion in turn can lead to isolation and silo thinking in an organization and may even be more conducive to exclusion and discrimination processes (Feldblum and Lipnic, 2021).

**Preventing and Managing Discrimination.** The expectations placed on leaders and research managers to prevent and deal with discrimination in the workplace are sometimes high and sometimes seem contradictory. An idealistic and a realistic perspective can be distinguished.

In the idealistic perspective, organizations strive for rationally acting leadership and management personnel. These personnel are sensitized through training and show zero tolerance toward discriminatory behavior and structures in the workplace. They regularly and perceptibly commit to zero tolerance in the organization, set an example through their own behavior, and deal with discrimination claims promptly and fairly (prototypical Daley et al., 2018).

On the other hand, a realistic perspective takes better account of the complexity of social conflicts in the workplace. It is often not possible to say clearly who are the perpetrators and who are the victims in a conflict case. Typical of this

are claims of systemic discrimination based on institutions – i.e., implicit and explicit rules and practices – in an organization or in cases of scandalization. In his studies on academic mobbing, Westhues (2021) recommends a sober and critical approach to complaints of workplace misconduct within the line authority. The respective academic leaders in charge would have a broader perspective to deal with claims sensitively and fairly, whereas individuals and committees specifically appointed to investigate would sometimes tend toward zealotry. Westhues emphasizes that social conflict in the workplace is often borne out of social relationships. The individuals involved in each case seek empathy and allies, which can lead to the aforementioned scandalization, i.e., criticism by a group against an individual (also conceivable in relation to accusations of inaction regarding dismantling discriminatory institutions), without there being any concrete misconduct against the group.

In turn, the realistic perspective reaches its limits where problem-solving by academic leaders does not take place; for example, because they are involved in the conflict themselves, they are not willing to adjust supposedly discriminatory structures and rules, or an adjustment of the structures simply exceeds their work capacities.

In summary, it can be deduced from the comparison of the two approaches that universities and research institutions need sensitized leadership and management personnel who are aware of their role model function and trained to deal with employee complaints objectively, discreetly and rationally. At the same time, due to their embeddedness in the work processes of their own organization, academic leadership personnel are also only capable of objectively and conclusively resolving cases of social misconduct and discrimination complaints to a certain extent. This requires contact points that deal with preventing and managing discrimination on a structural basis (and not exclusively based on a specific case).

## **Our Lessons Learned**

### ***Lesson 1: Identifying and Knowing the Majority Group in a Research Organization Is Key to Understanding Discrimination Processes***

Our first lesson learned is anything but a novel insight; rather, it is the core of social identity theory. The theoretical assumption that there are so-called in- and out-groups in (research) organizations, whose boundaries are constitutive of experiences of discrimination partly formed through experiences of discrimination, is supported in particular by the contributions of Sheridan et al., Striebing, Pantelmann and Wälty, Nguyen et al. and Gewinner. The contributions discuss and/or provide evidence of the negative consequences of deviating from a norm type that can typically be described as male, healthy, and belonging to the ethnic majority in a country. In their paper, Pantelmann and Wälty comprehensively explain the historically formative role of this in-group, leading to what the authors describe as an androcentric academia. A typical example of the androcentric character of work processes in academia is the traditionally very high proportion of men in scientific leadership positions and the low proportion of men in administrative

assistant functions [ e.g., [Kolboske \(2021\)](#) shows this for the German Max Planck Society].

The respective in-groups – which vary in their composition depending on the local context – have defined the implicit and explicit rules and practices in research organizations over time and continue to play a major role in determining their interpretation. Examples of such indirectly exclusionary rules include processes that appear to create rationality and transparency, such as evaluation rules or review committees. These kind of rational processes are problematic when they only aim to create decision legitimacy through processes seen as legitimate rather than a truly legitimate, just, “good” outcome, free of cognitive bias (van den Brink and Benschop, 2012, on the concept of legal legitimacy: [Mayntz, 2010](#)). The Covid-19 pandemic and the associated problem of double jeopardy – especially for the parents of young children – is an example of how processes that appear objective can lead to systemic discrimination when research organizations evaluate process outcomes as “neutral.” The constraints associated with the pandemic have led to an average decline in publication output among female researchers, which will disadvantage their long-term career development if research organizations maintain their unilateral focus on process justice rather than outcome justice ([Squazzoni et al., 2021](#); [Nature Editorial, 2021](#)).

Examples of informal practices shaped and reproduced by an in-group that can have an indirectly exclusionary effect may seem trivial in some cases, but they can be highly meaningful in individual research organizations. One can think of regulars’ tables, meetings in the evening hours, 24/7 lab hours, hiking groups, and other forms of interaction that promote exchanges based on expectations of presence and personal sympathies rather than professional skills and expertise ([Nielsen et al., 2018](#)).

In their study of Vietnamese social scientists, Nguyen et al. illustrate that individuals who assume a higher level of effort in informal household and care work are disproportionately less able to meet academic performance expectations than individuals who assume fewer household duties. In Vietnamese society, it is also usually women who are influenced in their career advancement by more informal work.

In his study on work climate in the Max Planck Society, Striebing also shows for Germany that women with responsibility for minor children rate their work climate lower than men with children or women without children. In Striebing’s studies on work climate and bullying, women generally rate their work climate lower than men and experience bullying more often.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, according to Sheridan et al., it is the employees who deviate from the norm due to their sexual orientation, skin color or health impairments who seem to most frequently experience hostile and intimidating behavior in the academic workplace (see lesson 5).

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<sup>7</sup>The influence of nationality presents a more complex picture, for which an obvious explanation is that nationality groups are attributed different statuses and possibly also different stereotypes.

Using the example of women researchers from the former Soviet Union working in Germany, Gewinner provides a comprehensive picture of the extent to which institutions shaped by the respective national majority society and the in-groups in academic organizations pose special challenges to individuals who deviate from the in-groups; for example, due to their gender, living circumstances, or nationality.

Since academia – shaped by its respective local in-groups – cannot necessarily provide equal opportunities for a diverse workforce, good academic leaders and research managers strive in a self-reflective manner to dismantle those structures and processes that can lead to implicit and indirect disadvantage for certain groups of employees. This means that strengthening disadvantaged groups through mentoring and networking programs as well as training can only be one part, but it is equally important to be attentive to structures and processes that can lead to disadvantage, and to dismantle them.

### ***Lesson 2: Managers Are Not Neutral Regulators and Conflict Resolvers***

Creating an inclusive work culture, designing and implementing anti-discrimination prevention programs, reducing discrimination, and intervening in cases of conflict in the workforce are especially the tasks of academic leaders and research managers. A number of the studies in the edited collection imply that this group of people is not itself a neutral entity and is itself part or non-part of organizational in- and out-groups, as well as one of the most important levers for successful diversity management.

The study by Kmec et al. supports the relevance of belief systems in the interpretation of illegal harassment behaviors. The authors found that individuals who hold more gender egalitarian beliefs (that women and men are equal) are more likely to recognize factually illegal acts of sexual harassment than individuals with traditional gender beliefs. Their study also points to the special importance of merit beliefs: people who believe that they live in a just society tend to regard sexual harassment as neither illegal nor inappropriate in cases that are (in everyday perception) ambiguous.

Striebing's work climate and bullying studies show that a gender gap in the perception of the work climate and the experience of bullying narrows from the PhD level to group or institute leadership. The author interprets this observation as a filtering mechanism of the science system. His results suggest that the "successful" women and men who hold scientific leadership positions perceive and evaluate their work environment differently than early career researchers and – as a conjecture – may have limited empathy for problems of their employees due to this different perception.

Vandeveldel-Rougale and Guerrero Morales' case studies demonstrate the high complexity of bullying constellations. They argue that management ideology and practices force individuals who perceive themselves to be affected by bullying or discrimination into a formalized discourse. They highlight that what a person complains about and how they do so is not only essential for perceiving

conflict dynamics but also for how managers and research management perceive and evaluate the person, and that it can influence the likelihood of success of a complaint:

[...] even in organizations where policies to guarantee dignity and respect have been adopted, showing one's hurt to managers or human resources department is not sufficient so that steps would be taken to ensure a saner working atmosphere; it can even be detrimental to the person showing his/her vulnerability. (Vandeveldede-Rougale and Guerrero Morales in this collection)

The two authors also highlight that it can be problematic to apply seemingly rational approaches (e.g., measures to reduce discrimination and strengthen reconcilability) to issues that primarily have an emotional impact on those involved. For example, a person's perceived work-life balance is not only influenced by organizational factors such as the range of flexible working time models and workload, and not only by cognitive-psychological factors such as a person's ability to cope with stress or the pace at which a person works, but also by situational aspects such as individual career prospects or the management style, or societal aspects such as traditional views on parenting or care. If the individual work-life balance is nevertheless not right in an organization with comprehensive reconciliation offerings, it is therefore not necessarily the individual who is "defective," but rather the broader social context must also be taken into account.

The contributions of Kmec et al. and Vandeveldede-Rougale and Guerrero Morales imply the strong importance of patience and reflexivity – or "attentive listening" – in academic leadership. Thus, on the one hand, leaders and research managers are required to reconcile the different interests and personalities of individual team members and – in cases of conflict – weigh the perspectives of all stakeholders, including both co-workers and organizational goals. In doing so, it is important that academic leaders and research managers not only obtain a comprehensive picture – i.e., take all perspectives into account – but they also need a detailed picture, and they should perceive employees in their entirety as the people they are, with their multiple overlaps of status, character or social background. In doing so, evaluating leaders and research managers must also be aware of the relativity of their own perspective: Why might I find one person in a conflict more sympathetic than another or be better able to understand their perspective?

The article by Kmec et al. also shows the importance of drawing clear boundaries for misconduct in the workplace and sensitizing management personnel to this. Only in this way can clear decisions be made – even in "gray areas" – concerning what is judged to be appropriate or inappropriate, and managers must be supported in setting an example of the conduct desired in the workplace. In this context, with reference to their case study at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Sheridan et al. state that most academic leaders and supervisors had no knowledge of how to deal with misconduct in general. They

recommend that universities should essentially develop a process and disciplinary measures for this.

### ***Lesson 3: The System Can Tend to Individualize and Normalize Discrimination***

Just because a problem is not visible, this does not mean it is not there: in their case study of a German university, Pantelmann and Wälty form a diagnosis that could certainly be extended to other types of organizations:

The university approach to the problem [of sexual violence] paints a picture of sexual harassment as an individual (women's) problem for which individual solutions must be found. Acts of harassment and violence are normalized, minimized, and dismissed by patriarchal gender norms and power relations [...] as well as by complex and uneven systems of loyalty and hierarchy [...]. (Pantelmann and Wälty in this collection)

By the university approach, the authors mean the interplay of patriarchal institutions (see lesson 1), the self-image of a non-discriminatory, neutral and enlightened academy, combined with market-oriented organizational and management structures (e.g., performance evaluation, dependency and competition situations reinforced by fixed-term employment relationships, competition for external funding).

The authors note – similar to Vandeveld-Rougale and Guerrero Morales (see lesson 2) – that there seems to be a contradiction between the rational world of science and experiences of discrimination, harassment, and bullying that primarily take place on an emotional level. The latter are seen as remote from science and more societal in nature. On the part of research managers, this led to a failure to accept their (co-)responsibility for the campus as part of society and a good working atmosphere to the necessary extent, as well as combatting social misconduct and systemic discrimination, even if it remained below a threshold punishable by criminal or labor law.

From these considerations, it can be concluded that in most research organizations an institutional commitment to responsibility for a good research culture and combating discriminatory behavior and structures (as well as other forms of social misconduct) is an essential milestone. Often reviled as “paper tigers,” in this sense codes of conduct are important markers of the way forward and institutional self-assurances that can then have an indirect impact on an organization's discrimination policies. However, due to the tendency to normalize, relativize, and downplay discrimination as described by Wälty and Pantelmann, one or the other skeptical leader must be convinced that the formulation of a formal institutional commitment against discrimination is desirable (but not sufficient *per se*). In this regard, Sheridan et al. emphasize the added value of employee surveys, not least to counter skeptics of the need for anti-discrimination measures with data.

***Lesson 4: How Identity Characteristics Shape Conflicts and Conflict Perceptions Is Difficult to Predict and Strongly Depends on Situational Circumstances (in Individual Cases)***

In particular, the contribution of Vandavelde-Rougale and Guerrero Morales conveys how the multiple socio-demographic characteristics of individuals involved in conflict can shape conflicts and conflict dynamics. Identity categories such as gender, class, nation or race can be intertwined with different power positions. These identity-related power positions may be the starting point of conflicts, and they can be mobilized by participants in conflicts to place themselves in a stronger position (e.g., as part of the search for allies or to normatively underpin their own position), and they also shape the way in which third parties (such as leaders and research managers) perceive and interpret a conflict.

Accordingly, Sheridan et al. highlight that in practice they have found that individuals who receive and process complaints against social misconduct must be well trained in implicit/explicit bias and discrimination. Accordingly, there is a possibility that the view of persons making a report against social misconduct is biased. Thus, the reported person's behaviors would sometimes be interpreted depending on their gender, sexual orientation, race, or other socio-demographic factors.

Striebing's paper builds on this consideration and explores whether a person's gender is related to whether that person perceives one or a series of negative experiences as bullying or sexual discrimination. In practice, it is possible for individuals who complain to a leader or other entity about misconduct or discrimination to be (implicitly) confronted with accusations of being too sensitive (Hinze, 2004). A reference to the identity of the reporting individuals then functions as an easy legitimation for leaders and research managers to justify doing nothing or decide and act along their sympathies and (maybe biased) intuition.

Striebing concludes that the relationship between experience(s) of negative acts in the workplace and their assessment as bullying or sexual discrimination is indeed influenced by the gender of the person concerned. However, the pattern of this correlation – i.e. which specific negative acts are more often seen as “transgressive” by women or men – is so complex and weak in its entirety that a practical effect is questionable.

As a result of these considerations, leaders and research managers should be sensitized to perceive and deal with the identitarian dimension of workplace conflicts and reflect their own positioning appropriately. At the same time, leaders and research managers should be sensitized to be attentive and critical whenever a person's credibility is placed in the context of his/her socio-demographic characteristics.

***Lesson 5: Measures Aimed at Very General Groups of People Waste Financial and Personnel Resources***

Often academic support programs target very open groups of people, such as “the women,” “the students with an immigrant background,” or “the working-class



children.” However, this does not sufficiently take into account the fact that people have a variety of identities and balance them with each other.

The studies by Gewinner, Nguyen et al., Striebing and Sheridan et al. show that – for example – women are not fundamentally less able than men to compete academically and in the working environment, experience a qualitatively poorer working environment or misconduct more frequently. Moreover, women might perceive programs addressing women as discriminatory by themselves, since they subtly and unconsciously label them as less productive, thus manifesting the gender or national differences. Even women in a conservative male breadwinner partnership who take on the main responsibility of raising children in their partnership are not necessarily at a disadvantage if – for example – they are supported by their (in-)parents, as Nguyen et al. show. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to gender aspects in organizing the most suitable form of support programs such as training courses for female researchers. Striebing also shows for the German Max Planck Society that self-perceptions of bullying experiences are more frequent – for example – among male social scientists than among women in the STEM disciplines. In Sheridan et al., among the group of women, women of color and those with disabilities most frequently report experiences of hostile and intimidating behavior in the workplace, and in the group of men, gay men and those with disabilities.

Research management should apply an intersectional perspective<sup>8</sup> when analyzing the need for organizational support measures and conceptualizing these measures. Vulnerable target groups and their needs should be defined and analyzed as precisely as possible. For example, if a measure is to be developed to increase the proportion of women, it should be asked in as much detail as possible which women can benefit from the measure and under which circumstances, as well as which ones cannot. If a measure is to be developed to prevent, e.g., sexism or racism, it should be asked which groups of people are to be protected from which groups of people in particular.

### ***Lesson 6: It Is a Long Way from Raising Awareness through Trainings to Factual Effects on the Incidence of Discrimination Experiences***

Sheridan et al. show in their study that short-term effects of anti-discrimination measures such as training or information campaigns cannot be expected. Based on the authors’ data, it can be surmised that such measures can immediately and quite persistently increase sensitivity to discriminatory and inappropriate behavior in the workplace and knowledge about how to deal with it, but that there are pitfalls for a long-term effect on reported cases of social misconduct in the workplace (see also [Chang et al., 2019](#)). The authors conclude: “We have found supplemental education and resources are necessary to empower individuals to interrupt

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<sup>8</sup>For us, this means considering the complexity of identities and that, e.g., two positive linear effects do not necessarily add up to each other. It also means taking into account “power domains” and “power vectors” (Bilge, 2013).

HIB [hostile and intimidating behavior] in their work environments” (Sheridan et al. in this collection).

It also seems conceivable that local efforts to promote diversity in academia may also be undermined by developments at the regional or national level. For example, Sheridan et al. emphasize a more adversarial political and social climate under Donald Trump’s presidency in the United States. They speculate that this overall climate change might provide a possible explanation for why counterintuitively LGBT individuals were the only ones among the groups of individuals studied to even report an increase in experiences of misconduct in the academic workplace during the study period.

Steuer-Dankert and Leicht-Scholten also highlight the challenges of a multi-level perspective in diversity management. In doing so, they adopt a holistic perspective by analyzing the framework conditions of the German science system and reflecting on the different influencing factors. They link this perspective to a systems theory approach, which highlights the complexity of key positions and emphasizes the need to develop measures that address the specific framework conditions of the respective organization. Using the example of a complex research organization with several management levels – i.e., the institute and network level or the chair and university management level as well as institute-specific cultures – Steuer-Dankert and Leicht-Scholten identify the general challenge in the fact that the diversity climate experienced by the research teams is ultimately a function of the diversity management of the different levels. The authors therefore point to the importance of a common diversity strategy that is co-formulated and supported by all levels of an organizational network and fits the needs of the respective organizational levels. Steuer-Dankert and Leicht-Scholten emphasize the potential of academic leaders as multipliers for establishing an open diversity belief and climate. In their case study of a large German research association, Steuer-Dankert and Leicht-Scholten found that the leadership style attributed to management and the leadership style that they aspired to themselves were closely linked. The authors see these effects of homosocial reproduction as an explanation for this ideational similarity between managers (managers hire and promote people if they feel connected to them due to perceived similarities) and the role model effect of top managers whose style is adopted in practice by team members. Linked to the examined perception of diversity, Steuer-Dankert and Leicht-Scholten also see a direct effect of leadership behavior in the diversity management context on the next generation of scientists. In order to counteract these effects in the long term, they recommend a stronger link between diversity management and the change management approach, which at the same time underpins the long-term nature of corresponding measures.

## **We Can only go Ahead**

Within the framework of the texts published in this collection, not only the extent of discrimination in research organizations was measured and described, but often implicit or direct criticism of established structures was also voiced. The main object of criticism was the effects of “neoliberalization” of universities (Block,

Gray, and Holborow, 2012; Hodgins and McNamara 2021) and “bureaucratization” and “corporatization” of research administration (Sørensen and Traweek, 2021), and in particular the role of academic leaders, research managers as well as representatives and officers for the concerns of the employees. The critique collected here highlights that restructuring the research system does not necessarily lead to a rationalization of personnel processes and career paths. Moreover, academic leaders and research managers are also by no means neutrally administering, measuring, evaluating, and deciding entities, but rather these are embedded in and emerged from the very research system to whose rationalization they are supposed to contribute.

Finally, it should be emphasized once again that we do not believe that the “old research system” – in which research organizations hardly conducted any performance evaluations, academic leaders had more discretion, and third-party funding was not awarded in open competition – could have integrated or managed diversity better. We welcome the increasing reduction of power imbalances in the scientific workforce and see major potential in the professionalization of diversity management and the handling of experiences of discrimination in research institutions, especially in the newly-created professional field of research managers (WR, 2018).

The fact that we increasingly talk about and problematize diversity and discrimination in research organizations can also be seen as a positive sign. The idea of the “integration paradox” (Mafaalani, 2018) highlights that equal treatment of social groups is only demanded when a group and society (or an organization) have become aware that the respective group is to be treated equally. In this sense, it remains to be hoped for the future that conflicts and disputes – as an indicator of an increased awareness for discrimination processes – around the diverse socio-demographic character of the scientific workforce will continue to increase in the future.

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