Diversity and Inclusion: a Solution or a Problem? On the Implementation of a Diversity and Inclusion Program within a Dutch Organization

Ridley, Rebecca

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On the Implementation of a Diversity and Inclusion Program within a Dutch Organization

Written by: Rebecca Maria Ridley

Supervisor: Dr. A. de Koning

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Leiden University Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences

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But today our very survival depends on our ability to stay awake, to adjust to new ideas, to remain vigilant and to face the challenge of change.

— Martin Luther King Jr.

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Introduction

Diversity and inclusion statements, programs, and policies are everywhere. Nowadays, various types of organizations and institutions show a widespread support for diversity and inclusion and present it as the solution for enduring social issues in the work environment. Even though, the broad interest in diversity and inclusion, it often turns out to be very difficult for organizations to work on diversity and inclusion and to make it function as a solution for certain social issues within the organizations. Yet, what makes it so difficult to work on diversity and inclusion?

In the Netherlands, movements like Me Too, Black Lives Matter, and Kick Out Zwarte Piet increased the urgency of incorporating diversity as an organizational goal. Diversity has somewhat become an institutional duty. 'Diversity' as a topic, is also at the centre of academic debates in the fields of social sciences. Despite the widespread use of diversity and inclusion initiatives, there is hitherto a considerable amount of criticism from the academic and public field directed at these very initiatives. Both the vagueness of the terms 'diversity' and 'inclusion' and the business case as a motivation for implementing, repeatedly lead to inefficient or superficial applications of diversity and inclusion programs within organizations. Differences are said to be celebrated and embraced by organizations. These euphemistic phrases and terms turn diversity management into a so-called 'happy talk'. Which persists to ignore or even conceal structural underlying issues of power and inequalities by staying away from the 'uncomfortable' connections it has with 'race', racial hierarchies, and white normativity (Bell and Hartmann 2007).

In her *On Being Included*, Sara Ahmed (2012) investigates the 'work' diversity does in institutional environments. Ahmed writes about 'the gap between symbolic commitments by institutions and the experience of those who embody diversity', which seems to be a reoccurring pattern within diversity work (2012: 153)

This thesis examines diversity work in a department within the municipality of Amsterdam. The municipality of Amsterdam set up an *Inclusie en Diversiteit's* program from 2020 to 2023 (Gemeente Amsterdam 2021: 3). The goal of this program is to make diversity and inclusion the norm within the municipal organization. In addition, the municipality of Amsterdam states they want to be a better reflection of the city's workforce with the prospect of providing better service while being a better employer (ibid.). How this program is concretely shaped, is the responsibility of every individual department within the municipality. Throughout this research, I studied how a department, existing of around five hundred employees, went about this.

This research project for the municipality of Amsterdam was presented to me as part of my specialization Sociology of Policy and Practice within my MSc study Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology. This research was informed by my interlocutor from the municipality, as a qualitative study that should give insights into the implementation process of the diversity and inclusion program and the diversity and inclusion resonates within the department. My key contact at the

municipality, who also is the person leading the diversity and inclusion team, was particularly interested in gaining new insights into the implementation process of the diversity and inclusion program and the dilemmas, obstructions, and blind spots that emerge. During one of my first meetings with my interlocutor, she described the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program as difficult and as of yet with limited results.

This research at this department offers a setting in which the implementation of a diversity and inclusion program and its reoccurring challenges can be studied as they happen. As Sara Ahmed (2012) argues, implementations of diversity and inclusion programs often become an end in itself, without addressing social justice and questioning normative perspectives. This subsequently makes it impossible to question and combat the structural inequalities present. A topic that is deemed to be of such great importance and benefit by organizations repeatedly seems to fail addressing the social injustice it initially claims to combat. Diversity and inclusion are therefore not merely solutions for organizations but can also become a problem in itself for the aim of becoming a diverse and inclusive organization. As Kalev and Dobbin (2006: 590) state, 'Whereas there has been a great deal of research on the sources of inequality, there has been little on the efficacy of different programs for countering it'. This research thus serves as an opportunity to examine the implementation of a diversity and inclusion program in a public organization and led me to the research question: **Why is it so difficult to implement an effective diversity and inclusion policy or program?** To explore and answer this research question, I formulated three sub-questions:

1) How is the diversity and inclusion program formulated and what does that do?
2) How is the diversity and inclusion program implemented and who becomes responsible for the commitment to diversity and inclusion?
3) How do employees define and discuss diversity and inclusion?

Methodology

In this section, I will describe the most prominent research methods that I used in my research and how that affected the gathering of my data. I will also reflect on the difficulties and limitations that I faced over the course of this research and how I tried to overcome them.

Ethnographic fieldwork is central to cultural anthropological research and is a qualitative research method that particularly relies on participant observation (Robben et al. 2012: 2). In my research, I combined participant observation with other methods, such as interviews, survey research, document analysis and focus groups.

Participant Observation

As previously mentioned, participant observation is one of the central methods that cultural anthropologists rely on for gathering data. Participant observation may allow a closer and perhaps a more comprehensive understanding of the research field and the people within it.

In the build-up to my research, from December 2021 to January 2022, the government had announced a lockdown due to the covid-19 pandemic. This made physical participant observation during that time impossible. As an effect of this nationwide lockdown, most communication within the work environment was conducted online through Microsoft Teams, e-mail, and Signal. Therefore, the encounters with my research field and respondents were limited to invitations that I received for the meetings that I was permitted to attend. I benefitted greatly from the help of my interlocutor, who also is the leader of the diversity and inclusion team within the department. She was able to answer my questions, invited me to all meetings related to diversity and inclusion, and brought me into contact with many of her colleagues. However, this also poses the risk of becoming too dependent on one source. Most of the meetings that I attended and respondents that I spoke came from my interlocutor's network.

Overall, my field research involved me being part of the diversity and inclusion team. The diversity and inclusion team were led by my interlocutor Sheila and two or three colleagues who occasionally, for a few hours per week, helped her out during the process and with the organization of sessions. I attended the weekly diversity and inclusion team meetings, helped with the preparations for sessions, wrote reports after meetings and sessions, and brainstormed together with the team about future directions. This gave me an insider perspective on being a diversity and inclusion team member. In total, I attended around fifty meetings or gatherings, of which fifteen were face-to-face meetings. These participant observation moments diverged widely in both form and content. I attended three dialogue sessions, one of which I solely observed, and the other two I joined as participant. Throughout the weekly diversity and inclusion team meetings, I participated as a member of the team. During most of the other online and offline meetings, I observed and functioned as a note-taker. This enabled me to keep a distance from what was happening in the field, which allowed me to analyse people's behaviour

and interactions. Writing down notes of certain interactions at the moment they occur made it possible for me to revisit them later in my research. This was really helpful because those interactions or instances that I documented often made sense to me at the end of my research.

I joined two offline team events, which allowed me to make new connections and allowed me to take part in conversations that were for the most part informal. At the last team session I conducted a focus group which allowed me to test my observations with a group of employees.

Participant observation gave me information and insights that I would not have been able to glean through one-on-one interviews. These insights go beyond the experiences and opinions that people explicitly want to share with me, since taking part in actual sessions, meetings and interactions allowed me to experience at-first hand my research field and allowed me to see the people in this field in action both on- and offline. The dialogue sessions and the focus group additionally gave me the possibility to observe my respondents while negotiating and interacting with each other about diversity and inclusion.

Interviews

Besides participant observation, I conducted twelve semi-structured interviews with employees from the department. All these interviews were held online through video chat. At first, I considered the fact that the interviews were online, as a limitation, because I was not able to physically be in the same room with the person I was interviewing. Nonetheless, online meetings had become standard practice in people's work during pandemic times. I also realized that in some ways, it turned out to be very beneficial. Managers, who in general had a tight schedule, seemed to be much more open to an online thirty-minutes' interview that they could easily squeeze in between two meetings. These interviews, therefore, made it possible to talk to people that did not attend the sessions organized by the diversity and inclusion team, which gave me a broader perspective of the research field.

Furthermore, I also interviewed people whom I met during participant observations. These were similarly conducted online through video chat. I noticed my respondents felt quite comfortable during these interviews and were open to a personal conversation. I cannot be sure that this is because they were talking from their home environments, but in some interviews, this did seem to add a personal touch to the conversation. One respondent, for example, started the interview with introducing me to his dog, which led to a conversation about his home situation. The one-on-one interviews were useful ways to clarify and to get respondent's perspectives on the observations that I had gathered during meetings and sessions. During these interviews, which lasted around an hour, I had prepared a few questions to start the interview off, such as 'Can you tell me a bit about your job within the municipality?' or 'In which way do you encounter the subject of diversity and inclusion in your job or work environment?'. As the conversation went on, I tended to be open to what my respondent wanted

to talk about but still held on to a topic list which had to do with the subject of diversity and inclusion within their work environment.

Online Survey

Halfway through my research period, I conducted an online survey. This survey was initiated by Sheila, the coordinator, who wanted to know how the diversity and inclusion program was experienced by multiple employees within the department so far. I decided to conduct the survey and approach it as a supplement to my research. Until then, I had difficulty reaching employees who did not seem to be as committed to diversity and inclusion as the people whom I had met during the diversity and inclusion initiatives. The survey thus functioned as a tool to gather information from the larger group of people within the department.

I spread the survey throughout the department through an email from the diversity and inclusion team, and later also through an email on behalf of the head of the department. Out of the five hundred people that were included on the mailing list, ninety-five filled out a complete form. Through this survey, I aimed to get an insight into people's experience of and perspective on the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program. Because of the anonymous and efficient character of this survey, I aimed to reach different people and collect new insights that could complement my already gathered data.

The statements presented in my survey were structured according to five themes: Reflection on one's own work in relation to diversity and inclusion, reflection on the organization of the diversity and inclusion program, needs regarding the organization of diversity and inclusion, reflection on one's own intrinsic motivation in relation to diversity and inclusion and reflection on the organized activities concerning diversity and inclusion. A Likert-scale was used to measure the attitudes, values, and perceptions concerning these statements. The survey ended with one open question asking the respondent for any further opinions, remarks, or tips regarding the implementation of the diversity and inclusion team. This open question, particularly, gave a lot of new insights that I could not have gathered from the people who already participated in diversity and inclusion initiatives. I mainly learned that many employees were not familiar with the content of the diversity and inclusion and inclusion program. Many who were familiar with the organized diversity and inclusion initiatives explicitly mentioned how they had experienced the program as something detached from their work processes.

Although a survey only gives a limited amount of information, which is also decontextualized, this method did serve as a great way to get a broader perspective on the topic of diversity and inclusion within the work environment. The new insights that I gathered from the survey were further discussed with the people in my field and during interviews. Besides that, the survey also validated previously found insights through a considerable number of respondents.

Personal Positionality

Growing up in the Netherlands as a person of mixed European and African descent with frizzy curly hair and a light brown skin, I have always been confronted with my 'otherness'. My phenotypic features often raise questions about my cultural background, descent, and upbringing, when people meet me for the first time. This has always given me a feeling of not being able to fully merge into the society that I consider as my own. It has always intrigued me how, even though, I have spent nearly my whole life in the Netherlands and have been brought up by a white Dutch mother, my non-white appearance comes to dominate my social interactions beyond any other features of my identity.

Studying the subject of diversity and inclusion was therefore a deliberate choice. I believe that this complex subject can only be understood if the perspectives and experiences of multiple different people are analysed. Because of my in-between position as a 'mixed person', I hoped that my appearance and my experiences would be a common ground from which I could build open and trusting relationships both with people that consider themselves to fit into the norm and with people that consider themselves to fit outside the norm.

During my research, I noticed that sharing my personal story concerning diversity and inclusion, also made it easier, especially for people of colour, to open up to me. However, I also noticed that during interviews or conversations with people that did not seem to commit to the subject of diversity and inclusion, my presence did not always seem comfortable for them. On these occasions, they tended to avoid a conversation with me or did not share their opinions when I asked them questions about this topic. On some occasions, people did answer my questions but mentioned something like 'don't judge me for saying this but…'. For some employees, my appearance seemed to imply a certain bias in regards to this subject; as if I could not sympathise with some perspectives on diversity and inclusion. Although I do not disagree with the fact that I have biases, and that my personal experiences also shape my understanding of the world, with this thesis, I do intend to convey a comprehensive description of what I came across during this research with attention to different positionalities. The reality, however, is, that my appearance, such as that of any other researcher, has influenced what employees shared with me and who opened up to me.

I must also reflect on my position within the organization. The way I entered the research field has likely shaped people's assumptions about me. Although I frequently, especially during interviews, explained that I conducted my research independent from the municipality, I did work closely together with Sheila and the diversity and inclusion team. For most of the respondents, this did not seem to stop them from talking openly to me. However, I noticed that when people became critical regarding the implementation of the diversity and inclusion team, they often spoke in general terms without explicitly mentioning Sheila's or other colleagues involvement in certain decisions. That I cooperated in some respects with the diversity and inclusion team, despite its many benefits in terms of access, thus also posed limitations of what an employee were willing to share with me.

Ethical Considerations

Ethnography is all about documenting an environment and the perspectives of the people in it at first-hand. This way, I was able to document the perspectives of multiple employees from the department that I was researching. Conducting research in a small-scale environment where the research population is highly interconnected also poses several ethical risks. Throughout this research, I have given thorough attention to ethical considerations to prevent potential harm that could be done to the environment, or the people involved in this research.

My interlocutor from the diversity and inclusion team with whom I also negotiated access initially requested the research conducted. In the build-up of my fieldwork, I was offered an official internship and financial compensation for my fieldwork period. I decided to refuse this to guarantee independence during my research. One of the other ways to prevent ethical risks is to be transparent about my role as a researcher. At the start of my fieldwork, I, therefore, introduced myself and my research during one of the *weekstart* [Start of the week] meetings. Although most of the employees are present during this weekly meeting, I also sent out an email to the whole department with a similar introduction and some further explanation of what I was going to do during my fieldwork. In this email, I also enclosed my contact details for any further questions or concerns. During participant observation and interviews, I always introduced myself as a student researcher and asked for people's consent to use the information shared for my research. Some other ethical considerations concern the anonymity of the people included in my study. All the people included in this thesis are referred to by a pseudonym. On some occasions, details about a person or their story have been altered or left out. Next to this thesis I will also present and share an executive summary with recommendations to my research field to make sure that insights and perspectives described in this research are also shared in a comprehensible way with the department that I studied.

Theoretical Framework

To understand why it is so difficult to implement an effective diversity and inclusion policy or program, I will first explore the prevailing debates in academic literature of the concepts of diversity and inclusion and diversity management. I will start with a background description on the emergence of diversity management. Furthermore, I will discuss various academic definitions of the term 'diversity' and 'inclusion'. Secondly, I look at common obstructions and issues that arise when diversity and inclusion become part of organizational goals and are pursuit by organizations through diversity management. Thirdly, I explore academic debates in the field of social science that discuss the study of bureaucracies and institutions. This range of literature provides me with a good understanding of the issues at stake and how best to study them.

Diversity and inclusion in a diversity management context

Diversity management in organizations traces back to Affirmative Action policies originating in the United States as a reaction to the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Affirmative Action corrected specific forms of discrimination and created and promoted equal opportunity in employment and education (Vertovec 2012: 289). The Affirmative Action Laws and policies initially focused on Afro-Americans as a disadvantaged group but throughout the years more groups were considered as oppressed and therefore enabled to benefit from anti-discrimination policies.

From the 1980s onwards, 'diversity management' became the substitute in the United States for Affirmative Action goals. The premise of diversity management did not focus on rectifying discrimination and oppression of certain groups in the past, but focused on promoting and sustaining heterogeneous groups within the work environment and educational intuitions (Ibid.). Ashikali and Groeneveld (2015) argue that Affirmative Action programs limited themselves to equal opportunity in recruitment whereas diversity management has an 'added value' that boosts organizational performance through 'increased legitimacy, creativity, innovation, and positive employee attitudes and behaviours' (Ashikali and Groeneveld 2015: 147). This added value, often referred to as the business case motive, stimulated the growing popularity of diversity management strategies within businesses and organizations (Wrench 2015).

Consequently, the term 'diversity' is widely used throughout the academic field, by institutions, in business strategies, and public discourses. Yet what 'diversity' exactly signifies in the context of diversity management is a considerable topic of debates in both public and social science spheres. According to Steven Vertovec (2015), 'diversity' is referred to as 'patterns of social difference, mainly in terms of categories as ''race', ethnicity, religion, gender, disability, sexuality, and age'. These 'differences' are often presumed from a white, able-bodied, middle-aged, heterosexual, male perspective (Ibid). In addition to this, 'diversity' as Vertovec (2012) describes it, ranges from ascribed, group-based attributes to self-attributed individual characteristics.

DiTomaso, Post and Parks-Yancy (2007: 475) argue that diversity is a regular characteristic of groups. However, such differences only become effective when they become attached to group-based inequalities, a process of ranking and differentiation between 'us' and 'them' (DiTomaso et al. 2007: 475). 'Diversity' thus becomes something not only because it notes differences but because these categories of difference bear social significance. This has to do with the context in which these group differences exist. They are embedded in the institutions in which they are shaped and reinforced (Ibid.). The categorical distinctions made through a relational process thus create divisions that have consequences for the reality of whom gets or can do certain things and who cannot.

As Sara Ahmed (2012) notes, 'diversity' in the policy world is often directed towards 'race' without making it explicit. The specific social category referred to by 'diversity' depends on its use in context. Heres and Benschop (2010) mention that, 'diversity' for organizations often refers to social categories based on phenotypical distinctions, i.e., skin colour, because it more easily presents an image of 'diversity' which appears that an organization successfully fulfilled its duty. Bell and Hartman (2007: 905) similarly state that 'the discourse of diversity is deeply racialized'. Their research into everyday discourses of diversity in America reveals that respondents' descriptions of personal experiences and understandings of difference exclusively involve 'race' or 'racial others'.

As Sara Ahmed (2007: 240) puts it, 'diversity' is not tied down as a concept. 'Diversity' does not refer to something in particular, which leaves room for people to 'define' it in ways that are problematic or even 'block action'. However, she also mentions that this might be the condition that allows it to work, 'diversity enables action because it does not get associated with the histories of struggle evoked by more 'marked' terms such as equality and justice' (Ahmed 2007: 238). The success of 'diversity' according to Ahmed (2007) has to do with the fact that it can be detached from 'scary issues' like racism and structural inequalities to make it appealing, yet its success also depends on it being reattached to those issues in order to effectively challenge and combat these issues.

'Diversity' can thus be characterized as a sensitizing concept in the way Blumer (1954: 7 in Bryman 2016: 382) describes it, as a concept that 'provides a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances'. In my research, I will therefore examine the use of the concept 'diversity', and what it does in different contexts.

The concept 'inclusion' is often used interchangeably with 'diversity' in the context of diversity management, however, they are two distinct constructs (Mor Barak 2015: 85). An inclusive work environment might reinforce a diverse work environment yet, a diverse work environment does not guarantee an inclusive one. Mor Barak refers to 'inclusion' in the context of the work environment as 'the individual's sense of being a part of the organizational system in both the formal processes as the informal processes' (Ibid.).

It is thus the perception of an individual that determines the level of inclusion that is experienced. This feeling of inclusion, as explained by Mor Barak (2014) encompasses two facets that

ought to be satisfied, i.e., 'belongingness and uniqueness'. According to Mor Barak (2015), the sense of belongingness involves the feeling of being motivated to participate, whereas uniqueness is satisfied when one is recognized for its unique individual input. 'Inclusion' thus balances between being recognized and being respected, whilst being able to retain one's unique self-identity.

Sara Ahmed is very critical of 'inclusion' as a construct: 'Those who in being included are also willing to consent to the terms of inclusion' (Ahmed 2012: 163). The 'terms of inclusion' can be understood as the assimilation to what is expected, or in Ahmed's words, to become 'worthy of benevolence' (Ibid.). Assimilating to a state of being included thus simultaneously reproduces the 'politics of exclusion'. Ahmed states that therefore the promise of inclusion, might, in some cases, be the concealment of exclusion (Ahmed 2012: 183). Ahmed talks about this as 'playing the game' (2012: 166). Which requires a relational process of 'feeling included' and 'being included' by others. This is contrary to Mor Barak's perspective of 'inclusion' as it merely being an individual's sense. In the sense that Ahmed (2012) describes inclusion, it could also mean that the rules of this game are not equally discussed. Hence, the one perceived as 'different' or 'other', the one not included yet, must play the game by the already established rules.

Additionally, to fully understand 'diversity' and 'inclusion' in the context of diversity management in the Netherlands, it is important to look at the Dutch context in which diversity management became a widely used strategy. Where in the United States, Affirmative Action programs reacted to racial discrimination, in Europe, and in the Netherlands more specifically, Affirmative Action programs and later diversity management programs focused mainly on ethnicity. In the Netherlands, 'Cultural difference is seen as a potential source of conflict as well as a source of enrichment' (Essed 2002: 7). Diversity management gained popularity in times of changing workforce demographics in the Netherlands. Hence, diversity management was conducted as a way to manage potential sources of conflict in order to benefit from the sources of enrichment that cultural difference possibly brings to organizations (Ibid.).

The period in which diversity management in the Netherlands gained popularity was also in a time in which, according to Prins (2002: 369), 'the Dutch had become overcautious: wary of being accused of racism whenever they treated people differently because of their ethnicity'. This context allowed for a colour-blind approach, in which racial hierarchies were ignored and all Dutch citizens supposedly received equal treatment (Essed 2002). Although there has been a shift in recent years, Dutch discourses on diversity management in the past predominantly refrained from critical approaches that questioned racial-hierarchies and white normativity.

In the following paragraph, I will point to these very critiques in academic debates on diversity management. I will use the common issues that are present in diversity management that come out of these debates as a foundation along which I study the research question 'Why is it so difficult to implement an effective diversity and inclusion program?' in a department within the municipality of Amsterdam.

Diversity management, a losing game?

Diversity management has for decades been the subject of social science criticism. What the purpose is and who it benefits often remain vague. The use of diversity management by organizations often results in strategies and campaigns that state to celebrate and embrace everyone's unique differences. Yet, it can be questioned if this approach combats the prevailing issues that diversity management initially was set up to eradicate. In the following paragraphs, I will set out the different critiques on diversity management and illustrate how I can use these academic debates in my research.

According to Steven Vertovec (2012: 297), the purpose of different diversity initiatives lies between 'anti-discrimination' and 'positive acceptance'. Where 'anti-discrimination' aims to benefit the marginalized, 'positive acceptance' is benefiting the organizations where 'diversity' takes place. The multivocal purpose of diversity management and the framing of it as an institutional duty presumably stimulated the popularity of diversity offices and the use of diversity management in various fields (Ahmed 2012; Heres and Benschop 2010; Leyerzapf et al. 2018; Vertovec 2012, and many more). According to Essed (2002), the business focus of diversity management forms a weakness. It allows businesses to use diversity initiatives instrumentally without addressing social justice and power inequalities.

Ahmed and Swan (2006: 96) argue that the individualization of difference is problematic because of its disconnection from inequalities and histories of exclusion and discrimination of specific groups. Leyerzapf et al. (2018: 149) argue, that if everyone is considered 'diverse' and this is perceived as natural, normal, without challenging the status quo, it becomes a 'normalization practice' that actively ignores 'social hierarchies and unequal distribution of privilege and disadvantages'. Ahmed and Swan (2006) additionally argue that the 'bureaucratization of diversity' leads to merely ticking the boxes of what diversity management is ought to measure or achieve, while it stays far from challenging inequalities or even covers up the very reinforcement of inequalities (Ahmed and Swan 2006: 97).

As stated by Essed (2002: 8), if in diversity management 'difference' is only recognized as that what deviates from the white mainstream norm', then the norm is not considered or addressed and thus it becomes invisible, 'taken for granted'. In the Netherlands, all who deviate from the white norm, 'others', are often described with ethnic labels defined by peoples 'background', indicating peoples birthplace or that of their parents. 'White Dutch' in this case, 'constitutes an unspoken norm' (De Koning and Ruijtenberg 2019: 4). Not recognizing the norm makes it impossible to change it, which results in 'difference' being an 'add-on' to the already existing norm, without doing anything with the power inequalities in organizations (Bell and Hartmann 2007). The norm and all that comes with it, power, inequalities, and politics of exclusion, is consequentially reinforced without noticing it.

Bell and Hartmann (2007) talk about this by referring to 'white normativity' in which 'whites occupy an unquestioned and unexamined place of esteem, power, and privilege' (Ibid.: 907). They argue

that the very problem of diversity management is that it often aims to celebrate and embrace 'differences' on the surface, yet does not emphasize the structural social inequities that are attached to these 'differences'. The euphemisms attached to diversity discourse are, according to Ahmed (2012: 66), the very tactic of diversity that gets through 'people's defences' and that allows it to work in various fields, by explicitly staying away from the 'scary issues'. This 'happy talk' in diversity management shows the image of committing to diversity and equality by organizations 'by appearing to recognize difference yet failing to appreciate white normativity' (Bell and Hartmann 2007: 896). As argued by Ahmed (2012) diversity management has often become an end in itself. It is 'good practice' and thus implies the achievement of what it ought's to accomplish because what it initially should accomplish is far from explicit.

From the literature, we can conclude that the 'happy talk' phenomenon is a pitfall in diversity management programs. Although the 'happy talk' phenomenon might cause the widespread use of diversity management programs, it also covers up integral aspects of diversity management. I will therefore pay attention to these obscured aspects in my research i.e., power, inequality, entrenched normativity, and racial hierarchies, which allows me to recognize common pitfalls in diversity management and show me if the program I study is able to go beyond the 'happy talk'.

Ethnography of bureaucracies and institutions

Many literatures in social science has been written on ways to do research in bureaucracies and institutions. The academic insights described in this paragraph supported me with an understanding of how I could research my field, a public institution, and how I could make sense of the data acquired during this research.

Anna Tsing (2015) describes the 'arts of noticing', which is a certain way of looking that can go beyond the established systems to gain broader perspectives which possibly leads to unexpected possibilities. This approach can be related to what Ahmed (2012: 22) describes when writing about doing research on institutions. She argues that to explain institutions and to understand how certain activities shape the 'institutional sense', a 'thick description' is necessary. Ahmed (2012) suggests phenomenology to think about 'institutionality'. The way that phenomenologists take notice of things that are often overlooked is, according to Ahmed, an essential approach to doing research in an institution. To think about how certain things become instituted requires attention to features of institutions that are so ordinary or taken for granted that they have receded into the background, e.g. conventions, routines, positions, procedures, hierarchies. Only then one can understand the 'institutional sense' and how institutions are constructed. This way of noticing allows for new possibilities, future perspectives that can go outside the already established instituted features of an institution. This makes ethnography useful in this sense, since 'it illuminates the unknown and interrogates the obvious' (Fassin 2013: 624).

Hahonou and Martin (2019) point out the complexity of bureaucratic environments. They describe this as a result of the tension between secrecy and public accountability when working in bureaucracy. Employees are very aware of their façade as they have to constantly take into account what information can be revealed and what not (Hahonou et al. 2019: 127). This results in a constant shift between 'stages': the 'front-stage', the 'back-stage' and the 'off-stage'. Hahonou and Martin (2019) use the metaphor of the theatre and its different 'stages' by Gofman (2003) to distinguish these different contexts. According to them, front-stage behaviour in bureaucracy involves routinized, 'scripted' behaviour that follows the institutional norm. Back-stage behaviour involves behaviour without the threat of outsiders watching. This involves one-on-one interactions between colleagues during meetings, phonecalls or sessions. Additionally, Hahonou and Martin (2019) argue that paying attention to the off-stage can also be relevant. Off-stage behaviour can be studied when employees are not at work. This can involve moments in between work, e.g. lunch breaks, events outside of the office or during moments of travel between the office and home. Olivier de Sardan and Bierschenk (2019) similarly state that bureaucracy cannot be fully understood based on its official structures. The informal practices and norms of bureaucratic environments, which can only be studied through ethnography, are the significant aspects that shape the environment and the internal logics of it (Oliver de Sardan and Bierschenk 2019: 248).

Thinking with Goffman's dramaturgical perspective makes it possible to consciously research the different contexts in which bureaucrats find themselves and it allows me, as an ethnographer, to anticipate on the different contexts that I encounter.

Oliver de Sardan and Bierschenk (2019) also state the adequacy of an actor-centred approach in the research on bureaucracy. This allows for research that reveals the multidimensionality of bureaucracy. They argue that bureaucracy should not be seen as a homogeneous social field but as a field where multiple social actors are constantly confronted. They use the concept of 'arenas' and 'strategic groups' when illustrating this (Oliver de Sardan and Bierschenk 2019: 251). The 'arena' can be seen as a specific issue on which multiple strategic groups interact. A 'strategic group' is a group of actors that share similar positions regarding the issue. To pay attention to all the strategic groups of a given arena, in my case the diversity and inclusion program, reveals the internal dynamics and power games that are present in my research field. This informs me on how certain things come about and are decided upon. It allows me to look at the organization not merely as a whole, but also at the level of individual acts and perspectives.

Ethnography allows me to research an organization from multiple perspectives. During this research, I aimed to study the complexity the municipality as a work environment while simultaneously zooming into the various individual perspectives that are present within this organization.

Obstructions to diversity and inclusion programs

In summary, we discussed how diversity and inclusion can be defined, why organizations use diversity and inclusion as management tools, how that is put into practice and what the framing of diversity and inclusion programs can do within organizations. Additionally, we have also looked at how an ethnography in such bureaucracies and public institutions could be conducted according to social science scholars.

I will structure the following chapters of this thesis along the lines of three issues that I discussed in this theoretical framework or that need further examination within my field. The first chapter will focus on the framing of the diversity and inclusion program of the municipality. In academic literature, we have seen that forms of 'happy talk' used by organizations make diversity and inclusion appealing for broader audiences yet simultaneously obscure the sources of the problem that it was meant to combat. In this first chapter, I will thus examine how diversity and inclusion are framed within the department of the municipality and what that framing does to its implementation into practice. The second chapter examines how the diversity and inclusion program is put into practice and who then becomes responsible for this commitment to diversity and inclusion within the organization. In academic literature, we have also seen that diversity management was meant to challenge structural inequalities, racism, and discrimination by emphasising the positive effects that diversity and inclusion does for organizations. Yet, we have also seen that diversity management can become a practice of merely ticking the boxes of formulated goals or measurements while staying far from the issues that need to be challenged. The question then rises of who it eventually benefits and who then becomes responsible for achieving diversity and inclusion within the organization. In chapter three, I will focus on the definitions of and discussions on diversity and inclusion. This chapter will look at how different people within the department define diversity and inclusion and how accordingly the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program is experienced by differently positioned people. In the academic literature we have seen that the vagueness of the terms diversity and inclusion is appealing for organizations and people because it can therefore be defined in ways that work in that specific context, yet, this also leads to misunderstandings and confusion which causing these terms to become non-performative.

Chapter 1: Framing diversity and inclusion

> As I open the 'Uitvoeringsplan Inclusie en Diversiteit' or 'Execution plan inclusion and diversity', drafted for the municipality of Amsterdam, the three red crosses on the side of the page representing the symbol of the city of Amsterdam, immediately catches my attention. It reminds me of the three years that I lived in the Jordaan, a centrally located, lively Amsterdam neighbourhood, and how I miss the buzz of this city. On the front page of this execution plan a picture of a group of people, black people, people of colour and white people, all of different ages, greet me through my screen with their smiling faces. Underneath, the words 'inclusion and diversity' are written. When I scroll to the next page, the first words that grab my attention because of the bold font in which they are written are: 'to make inclusion and diversity the norm within the municipal organization'. That is the task the Amsterdam board of officials has taken on with a timeline from 2020 to 2023. Although it sounds like a noble mission, I immediately wonder what it implies and how this will be executed.

To understand why it is so difficult to implement an effective diversity and inclusion policy or program, we should first discern how this policy or program concerning diversity and inclusion is currently formulated. In this chapter, I will analyse various diversity and inclusion documents created by both the municipality-wide diversity and inclusion team and the smaller diversity and inclusion team of the specific department that I am researching.

Furthermore, I will examine what the framing of the diversity and inclusion program does to the implementation of this program in practice. The academic literature on diversity management identifies the so-called 'happy talk' as the main obstacle in the implementation of such policies and programs. Institutions and organizations communicate 'happy talk' to legitimize the performance of diversity management, and in doing so, seemingly accomplish it (Ahmed and Swan 2006). However, through 'happy talk' structural underlying issues of power and inequalities are ignored or even concealed by staying away from the 'uncomfortable' connections it has with 'race', social hierarchies, and white normativity (Ahmed 2012; Bell and Hartmann 2007). This chapter thus explores the questions: What motivates the creation of a diversity and inclusion program within the municipality? How is the diversity and inclusion program framed? And what effects does that framing have in practice?

Motivations for diversity and inclusion

My encounter with the diversity and inclusion program of the municipality of Amsterdam, with which I started this chapter, provides an indication of how the organization deploys the language of diversity. It illustrates an image of diversity and inclusion through 'smiling faces of different colours'. The

language of diversity, Sarah Ahmed (2012) explains, is used in normative ways to describe the organization's 'expression of their priorities, values, or commitments'. It thus becomes something an organization can stand for. By propagating an image of diversity, the organization becomes connected with this image. This can thus function as a marketing strategy, to position the organization in a way that benefits its image.

The term 'diversity' initially signifies difference, yet in this context, 'diversity' implies a concept that is regarded as something that can be managed and obtained by organizations. 'Diversity' in diversity management, in general, refers to patterns of social difference presumed from a white, able-bodied, middle-aged, heterosexual, male perspective (Vertovec 2015). When organizations value diversity and inclusion, this does not directly say something about their actual commitment or action towards ensuring differences in their organization. It simultaneously does not guarantee that these organizations combat the inequalities connected to those differences. Organizations often frame their motives and arguments for implementing diversity and inclusion programs, in terms of a dichotomy between 'the business case' and the 'social justice case'. The business case argument is generally known as one that emphasises the benefits that diversity and inclusion add to the image and performance of the organization (Vertovec 2012: 298). Scholars refer to the social justice case as an argument that on the other side emphasises the benefit of diversity and inclusion in terms of it seeking to challenge inequalities within organizations (Ahmed 2012: 75).

To understand the motivations of the municipality of Amsterdam for implementing this diversity and inclusion program, I will analyse the *Uitvoeringsplan Inclusie en Diversiteit* [Implementation plan diversity and inclusion, here: Uitvoeringsplan]. The *Uitvoeringsplan* is the key document in which the diversity and inclusion program of the municipality at large, is set out. This document functions as the foundation upon which every department of the municipality can formulate and adopt its own diversity and inclusion program, which is adapted to the challenges and goals of that specific department. I furthermore regard the *Uitvoeringsplan* as the embodiment of 'front stage' behaviour by the municipality, when analysing it in terms of Goffman's dramaturgical perspective (1959). This front stage behaviour, according to Goffman, communicates a performance to an audience. The presence of the audience thus influences what is communicated on the front stage, whereas 'the backstage', according to Goffman, is a context in which a behaviour or image is communicated a lot less consciously. Analysing the *Uitvoeringsplan* of the municipality thus helps with understanding the official framing of the issue and the manifestation of a performance that the municipality consciously communicates to an audience.

Municipal motives

In the Netherlands, diversity and inclusion have in recent years become important organizational goals for many companies. Research from the Dutch newspaper *'De Volkskrant'* concluded that two-thirds of the biggest Dutch organizations in 2020 actively aimed to foster cultural diversity (de Ruiter, 2020).

The most important motives for focussing on diversity and inclusion within Dutch organizations are identified as: 'Connecting to the social visions of the organization, positive contribution to the performance of employees and, a better representation of society' (Berenschot 2022). The *Uitvoeringsplan* (Gemeente Amsterdam 2020) puts it as follows: 'The municipality must be an example for its employees, businesses, and organizations in the city. Working in inclusive and diverse teams improves the contact with Amsterdammers and networks in the city.'

The necessity of 'being an example' in this case implies the need to work in inclusive and diverse teams. It can be associated with the motive of 'connecting to the social vision of the organization'. The municipality of Amsterdam ought to be an example for its employees and other businesses and organizations in the city.

The diversity and inclusion program cannot be understood separately from the moment and context in which it was shaped (Yanow 1996: 27). The developments that happen within this society simultaneously seep through the organization and influence its work environment. An example of this are the two global tensions that arose in the very months of the writing and implementation of the diversity and inclusion program in 2020. The start of the implementation corresponded with a period of heightened tension due to the beginning of the global corona pandemic. The pandemic increased already existing social inequalities. Social distancing and working from home created even more isolation and made it harder for people to connect with colleagues from their work environment. Spatial distance consequentially caused social isolation for people whom, for several reasons, struggled to overcome the boundaries posed by the corona pandemic (Ellingrud et al. 2020). The global pandemic in the summer of 2020 merged into a global call for social justice in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement. All over the world and in the Netherlands, demonstrations were held, after the death of George Floyd, a black American who lost his life due to police violence. The Black Lives Matter demonstrations in different cities within the Netherlands fuelled public debates on racism and institutional racism within Dutch society itself. It simultaneously gained massive support in the Netherlands and showed the importance of diversity as a worldwide issue. Such tensions naturally also reverberated in Dutch workplaces. Inclusion in the work environment was increasingly considered to be important.

A further motive for aiming for diversity and inclusion within the work environment is the 'positive contribution to the performance of employees'. The sentence: 'Working in inclusive and diverse teams improve the contact with Amsterdammers and networks in the city' shows an example of the above-mentioned motive. The municipality regards diverse and inclusive teams as factors that improve performance. Here, contact with Amsterdammers and networks in the city are considered objectives that employees working in the municipality of Amsterdam should pursue.

The motive: 'A better reflection of the society' can also be identified for the municipality of Amsterdam based on statements from the *Uitvoeringsplan*. 'A diverse organization is an organization that is a good reflection of the Amsterdam labour force, in all its layers of the organization'. First of all, a diverse organization is defined by the municipality of Amsterdam as an organization that is a good

reflection of the Amsterdam labour force in all its layers of the organization. The following statement implies that a better reflection of society is another motive for becoming a diverse and inclusive organization: 'The employee base has to be a better reflection of the Amsterdam workforce. We want an organization in which the population can recognize themselves and that can utilize differences to keep scrutiny on what is necessary for the city'. In the *Uitvoeringsplan,* becoming a reflection of the Amsterdam workforce is described as a goal. However, from this statement, it can be concluded that the organization does not accomplish this goal yet. This implies that they might see the diversity and inclusion program as the solution for achieving this goal. In the *Uitvoeringsplan* reflecting the Amsterdam workforce is also connected to improving the performance of employees. This statement suggests that a truer reflection of the Amsterdam workforce across the organization makes it more likely to utilize the benefits of those differences, which in turn may well enhance the ability to scrutinize the needs of the city.

The motives for implementing diversity and inclusion programs within the municipality of Amsterdam are thus not necessarily formulated in terms of the business case motive or the social justice motive. From the examples of statements written by the municipality, it appears that multiple motives can simultaneously drive the implementation of diversity and inclusion programs. The dichotomy between the business and the social justice case often discussed in the academic literature on diversity and inclusion, unnecessarily implies a hard divide, as if one excludes the other. Drawing from the examples mentioned, a combination of motives, some more in line with business-related intentions and some more in line with social justice intentions, form the overall justification for the program. As noted by Ahmed (2007: 242), using the business case and the social justice case simultaneously as a reason or underlying motive for implementing diversity and inclusion is a strategic way of making diversity work for different audiences. According to Ahmed (Ibid.), the appeal of diversity management for organizations is the multivocal use of the term, since it is undefined and thus can stand for anything. However, the extent to which some motives are explicit in comparison to other motives, could say something about where the focus of the organization lies with its diversity and inclusion program and who it is meant to benefit. In the following paragraphs, I will go into more detail on this formulation and how that can also become an obstruction to the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program.

The diversity and inclusion program adapted to the department

To understand the diversity and inclusion program of the department, it is important to discern how the department adopts the municipal diversity and inclusion program. Along the lines of the municipal diversity and inclusion program the department can formulate and adopt its own diversity and inclusion program adapted to their specific needs and goals. The implementation from the department is described in the *Procesonterwerp diversiteit en inclusie* [process design diversity and inclusion, here: Procesontwerp] document. During the first meeting with my interlocutor Sheila, she explains that the

municipal diversity and inclusion program has a radically different focus compared to the program created by her and her department. According to Sheila, the municipal diversity and inclusion program is superficially formulated. 'They are mainly focused on *P&O sturing* [personnel and organizational management] instead of the wicked issues that I want to tackle,' Sheila says. She explains that these 'wicked issues' are like strings of spaghetti: 'When you are busy untying one knot, another one appears on the other side of the strings of spaghetti'. She explains with this example that there is no clear-cut solution for becoming a more diverse and inclusive organization. In her opinion, this, however is, how the municipal diversity and inclusion program is formulated.

The municipal *Uitvoeringsplan* formulates seven interventions that are meant to realise the goal of having a better representation at all levels of the organization. The interventions include: a *voorkeursbeleid* [Preference Policy] in scale fifteen or higher, i.e. management and department director positions. With this policy, thirty percent of the positions in these scales should be, as described in the program, 'held by people with a non-western migration background'. Next to that, an inclusive recruitment and selection intervention is formulated in which the used recruitment and selection course is changed to a bias-free and target group specific recruitment and selection of personnel. Furthermore, one of the interventions is the implementation of target figures for scales ranging from twelve to fourteen. These positions are the policy advisory positions and the project and program management positions, in which a minimum of thirty percent of employees must have 'a non-western migration past'. Another intervention focuses on the balance between female and male employees, which throughout the whole municipality in every layer should relate to the composition of the labour force in Amsterdam, as described in the document. The following intervention is focused on measures directed towards employees until thirty-five years of age. In this intervention, twenty percent of the employees of the whole municipality should be under the age of thirty-five. For young employees from a 'minority group', a high potential program is yet to be realised. Then there is an intervention for employees with a (non) visible handicap and/or chronical disease. The municipality creates an accessibility agenda for these employees which ensure that the organization is physically, digitally, and socially accessible.

During an interview with Sheila, she explains how she, together with the department director, approaches the implementation of a diversity and inclusion program and what she thinks of the municipal approach to diversity and inclusion.

> Rebecca: What did you want to achieve when you became in charge of the diversity and inclusion program of your department?
>
> Sheila: I always make the connection to primary processes. I do not believe in *P&O sturing,* which is focused on numbers of people coming into the organization, going out of the organization, and moving up within the organization. Yes, I believe these numbers, and I do think you should make them visible, but what kind of impact does that have on your work and

your way of thinking? I don't believe it has an impact on those things. I really tried to think of the best way to make an impact. Everybody wants to connect with the intrinsic motivation. Everybody wants to do a good job and that is what I want to respond to.

Rebecca: So, you mention that you anticipate on people's intrinsic motivation. Is that something the municipality also does in their diversity and inclusion program? Or is that something specific from your approach?

Sheila: That is specifically our department. I am not sure if any other departments also tackle this as we do. Some departments have a diversity calendar or organize a management day around diversity and inclusion. They are more on the recruitment and selection side when it comes to implementing this program.

Sheila describes herself as a person of colour and occasionally refers to herself as being 'the other' within the organization. Sheila also mentions that due to her being 'the other', she has always had to actively connect with people. She explains that during her long career within the municipality, she was able to make many connections with people from the organization but also with people outside of the organization. She occasionally explains how that has become an important asset that she uses during the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program.

Sheila often brought up people's intrinsic motivation to work towards diversity and inclusion, during conversations. This is also present in the *Procesontwerp,* which states that it wants to connect to 'the intrinsic (learning) motivation of the employees within the department'. According to Sheila, connecting to the intrinsic motivation includes coming up with initiatives that fulfil a need of the employees regarding the subject of diversity and inclusion. By creating a diversity and inclusion program that connects to the needs present in the department, Sheila believes that it also makes it easier to implement it. The department diversity and inclusion program therefore based their *Procesontwerp* on an inquiry that they did among a group of around fifteen to twenty people from the department. Through this inquiry, they aimed to gather the notions that people have in the department on diversity and inclusion and intended to distinguish the needs present. In following paragraphs, I will further explain how this inquiry has shaped the further organization of the diversity and inclusion program within the department.

The *Procesontwerp* document also included the perspective of the head of the department. André, the head of the department, writes in this document: 'As a modern governmental organization, where we work on the organization of collective services with public means, it is necessary to work transparent, efficient and for every Amsterdammer'. He states that, 'to innovate, it is of great importance to take in as many different views as possible'. He follows by explaining, 'Diversity and inclusion is

not because someone ordained it. It is also not about number fetishism. Nobody wants to be a number… Diversity of thinking, assumptions, and the desire to get further together is what we all want.'

The perspective of the head and the previous examples mentioned show a great divide between the municipal approach to diversity and inclusion and the department's approach. The municipal approach operates from the notion that there is a problem within the organization that needs to be fixed for a variety of reasons, mainly having to do with being an example for other organizations and wanting to reflect the workforce. In the municipal program, solutions are given along the lines of goals expressed in hard numbers and percentages. In contrast, the department diversity and inclusion program stay far from that, and mainly addresses the intrinsic motivation of people by developing and challenging people's views, thoughts, and assumptions. The department's program starts with the notion that diversity and inclusion serve the public good. The department's program thus sees diversity and inclusion as a desirable ideal that is considered to be universally beneficial and thus should supposedly appeal to everyone's needs (Bear, Mathur 2015: 21).

Diversity and inclusion as a norm

As I explained at the start of this chapter, the extent to which the diversity and inclusion programs explicates some motives or goals compared to other motives, might say something about where the focus of the organization lies with its diversity and inclusion program and who they are meant to benefit. We have also seen from the academic literature that certain formulations of diversity and inclusion programs could also pose obstacles or become counter-effective when implemented in the organization. In this paragraph, I examine how both the municipal program (*Uitvoeringsplan*) and the department program (*Procesontwerp)* formulate their approach, and what possible obstacles, described in the academic literature on diversity management, can be identified from that.

As described in the *Uitvoeringsplan* written by the municipal diversity and inclusion team, the aim is 'to make diversity and inclusion the norm within the municipal organization'. Yet, what the current norm constitutes within the municipality of Amsterdam is not explicated. The *Uitvoeringsplan* focuses solely on the experiences and the needs of what it describes as 'underrepresented colleagues'. 'Underrepresented colleagues' include, according to the document, young people (under the age of thirty-five), colleagues with a non-western migration background (especially in higher levels of the organization), employees with a (non)visible disability and/or chronic illness, and lhbtiq+ colleagues.

The reason for the implementation, according to the *Uitvoeringsplan,* is the fact that the 'underrepresented colleagues' miss recognition and appreciation and feel that they do not receive equal opportunities. What is striking here is that the 'feeling' of not receiving equal opportunities in this document is allocated as an issue of the categories of 'underrepresented colleagues'. These issues are thus not being regarded as issues of the organization, in which the overrepresented colleagues constitute and construct the current norm. Evidence of the validity of these 'feelings of unequal opportunity' within the organization is, based on this document, not investigated, or mentioned explicitly. However,

the document does factually substantiate the existence of these feelings with a study conducted by the University of Utrecht (KIS 2021).

If these feelings thus can be regarded as legitimate by the organization, then why are they not further explored and why is the source of these feelings not examined? Subsequently, the *Uitvoeringsplan* directs the attention towards the implementation of anti-discrimination policies and multiple support facilities, instead of a critical reflection on the environment and sources that fuel and produce such feelings and or possible realities.

The *Procesontwerp* written by the department, however, does base its design of the diversity and inclusion program on current situation and issues. The inquiry which was conducted prior to the creation of the program, gives insights into employees' experiences with and opinions regarding the topic of diversity and inclusion within the organization. From this inquiry six insights, as formulated in the *Procesontwerp*, emerged: 'There is an undercurrent, one of which is benevolent towards the subject of diversity and inclusion yet is still excluding', 'Insecurity in how to deal with being part of the critical mass, the dominant group, which gives a feeling of impotence and ignorance', 'There is not always a feeling of security and self-confidence which does not challenge people to make different connections', 'We are aware of the lack of diversity in character and background', 'We are aware that there is a gap between the systemic world [the organizational world of the municipality] and the social world [which exists outside of the municipality]'. The mentioned insights all focus on issues or feelings that are expressed by some employees from the department, which, according to the *Procesontwerp* should be tackled by initiatives described in the enclosed diversity and inclusion program.

Furthermore, the *Procesontwerp* seems to formulate a different definition of diversity and inclusion. The municipality in their documents mainly writes about diversity and inclusion as an issue related to underrepresentation, i.e., a lack of colleagues from certain social categories. The department, however, in their program, mentions diversity in thoughts and assumptions. Here, the approach is aimed at all individuals within the department, who should become aware of themselves and their view of the world. As stated in the *Procesontwerp*, 'It should not be about black or white, male or female (etc. visible differences). It is about the differences in assumptions and views'. This quote from the *Procesontwerp* expresses a notion of diversity and inclusion that is not linked to certain social categories, but to that of individual differences. Ahmed and Swan mention that, "the individualization of difference is problematic due to its disconnect with inequalities and histories of the exclusion and discrimination of specific groups" (2006: 96). The way the *Procesontwerp* frames diversity and inclusion, as something that goes beyond social categories, seems to be written from a white normative perspective. Since this perspective obscures the nuance of how certain categories of 'difference' are experienced in relation to others due to the inequalities and histories of racism attached to some categories of 'difference' (Ahmed 2012: 65).

The denial of hierarchies

In the previous paragraph, I described that the emphasis given on certain approaches and notions of diversity and inclusion, in the formulation of both the *Uitvoeringsplan* and the *Processplan,* leads to obscuring the issues of white normativity, histories of racism and structural inequalities. Refraining from such issues similarly occurs in practice during the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program. The framings in such documents seep into the conversations held on diversity and inclusion in practice. The risk, however, of framing diversity and inclusion in ways that do not attach it to inequalities and forms of exclusion, is that it will not be effective in combatting these issues.

Van Eijk (2013) notes, that discussing structural inequalities in relation to moral hierarchies is not easy due to cultural notions of individuality and equality that justify or conceal the hierarchization of differences. The diversity and inclusion program stimulates conversations about differences as an initiative to foster the diversity and inclusion within the organization. Yet, how those differences determine one's position and the superiority and inferiority related to an unjust inequality of resources and recognition remains undiscussed (van Eijk 2013: 527). Van Eijk (2013) argues that the emancipation of previous powerless groups enforced egalitarian thinking, which made expressions of superiority and definite ideas about social hierarchy a taboo. A belief and emphasis on equality in Dutch society accordingly block discussions regarding the reality of class within moral hierarchies (van Eijk 2013: Heres and Benschop 2010). Furthermore, van Eijk (2013) discusses how individualization and the emphasis on individual autonomy, uniqueness, and personal happiness similarly work in ways that deny the significance of class hierarchy.

When we turn to the execution of the diversity and inclusion program in practice, we see a similar denial of hierarchies in their conversations. I observed e.g., a focus group session on diversity and inclusion in which two managers participated. This session was initiated by a group of human resource students who were doing a project on personal/career development opportunities in relation to the topic of diversity and inclusion. Their research was part of the diversity and inclusion program of the department and aimed to give insights into the perspectives and approaches of managers towards diverse colleagues. At least two managers had to join this session. The main question posed by the human resource students was 'What personal/career development opportunities do 'diverse employees' get during their career and why do they seem to fall behind when it comes to growing internally within the organization compared to non-'diverse employees'. What they meant by 'diverse employees' was not specified, yet, from the examples given, I interpreted it to mean: employees who deviate from the norm. Remarkably, no one had questioned this term once during this conversation; all people joining the conversation seemed to know the meaning without it being explicit. The focus group started with the question: 'What comes to mind when you think of fostering career development of diverse employees?' Through real-time voting software, answers from the managers popped up on the screen: 'Development opportunities', 'Logical', 'Ambition', and 'Equal opportunity'. One of the managers, Ben, was asked to explain his answers, and he said: "I answered 'Logical', everyone wants to develop

in their career, and it doesn't matter who you are, everyone has development opportunities. It is more about your ambitions. Those personal ambitions decide the career development opportunities that you get." Maartje, another manager, responded to what Ben said with the following:

> Maartje: I answered 'Equal opportunity' because I can imagine that this is something you want us to talk about. To be honest, I don't do anything different for diverse employees. At the moment, I only have native Dutch people on my team but I would imagine that if I had a more diverse team, I would give everyone the same career development opportunities.

The responses of Ben and Maartje both start with arguments that deny inequality in career opportunities. Ben starts by linking development opportunities to personal ambitions. This implies that he thinks career development opportunities depend on individual initiative and motivation. Maartje, however, immediately directs to equal opportunities which, according to her, is present and therefore, in her opinion, justifies an equal approach towards every employee. Both arguments demonstrate that the career development opportunities that an employee receives are not linked to aspects that point to class hierarchy and the value attached to certain social networks, language usage, or skills gained through upbringing, which increase or guarantee career opportunities.

Furthermore, Maartje notes that for the issue of career development opportunities for 'diverse employees', she would first have to have 'diverse people' on her team, which, as of yet, is not the case. But she doubts this would be an issue even then, since she treats everyone similarly. One of the HR students asked what the reason is that her team only comprises native Dutch people.

> Maartje: That is a good question. The group of people that applied wasn't that diverse. Maybe it is because of the way I write and present my vacancies. Of the five people that I recruited for my team, two or three of them were trainees, whom I eventually hired permanently. In those cases, there is no extensive application procedure.
> I can't really give a clear answer to that question. I guess it has to do with the people who apply for such vacancies. It has also happened that I recruited people from my own social network. Unconscious processes may also play a role when I select. Hopefully, I do look at the capacities of applications, but I could imagine that unconsciously I decide on what feels good. It is not like I don't believe that people who differ from me can't do the job, but it is also easier to choose someone you know can do the job because it is more efficient time wise. I think it is a human thing as well. You must make a choice anyhow. It might help with making more diverse choices if you don't decide [on candidates] based on your subconscious feelings.

Maartje explains that the reason for having a non-diverse team is due to the group that applies for vacancies. She believes she provides equal opportunities. She, however, also admits to probably having

certain preferences herself, when she also mentions that sometimes it is more convenient to choose someone she can identify with or someone she already knows from her network. In the end, she notes that selecting people based on subconscious processes might not be the best way, yet also explains that she regards this as a general human tendency and as an act that saves time. Thus, despite Maartje's belief that she provides equal opportunities, which stops any conversation of hierarchy or inequality short, her reflections show various mechanisms that contribute to the selection of the same, normative employees who are much like her in terms of social and ethnic background. Maartje claims such choices are based on feeling and common sense, which does not imply an explicit sense of moral hierarchy.

The denial of hierarchy is not limited to conversations about diversity and inclusion. From interviews with multiple employees I noticed that the department similarly tends to deny common hierarchical structures in their organization. One of the managers explained this as follows:

> Daniel: This department grew really big in a short amount of time. The mentality here is mainly based on trying as many things as possible and by making a lot of mistakes, we learned how to evolve. Other departments of the municipality tend to describe [our] department as a bit masculine and cowboy. There is, however, a downside to this mentality. Imagine you are new to this department, and you don't know anyone here. In this department, there are no real steady structures or hierarchies for someone. The effect is that people who work here for a long time have a bigger network and are able to achieve much more. I think that in terms of diversity and inclusion, this might be problematic. I mean, the already established social networks in this department are the ones through which you can get things done. The team is also a lot more informal than other departments of the municipality.
>
> Rebecca: So if I understand that correctly, what you are saying is that if you don't have a certain social network and you are new to this department, it is quite difficult to get things done and to get certain career opportunities?
>
> Daniel: Yes, and I think that certain characters and types of people, people who are more forward and assertive, will also eventually get things done, especially if you have the network, of course, but there is definitely an imbalance. A lot depends on the social networks someone has.

Daniel provides an example of how hierarchy within the department plays a key role in which resources, in this case, which opportunities, an employee gets in order to develop their career.

The fact that inequality has not been prominent in conversations regarding diversity and inclusion and is often denied through recourse to other arguments makes it nearly impossible to discuss the reality in which certain differences are structurally valued more than others.

Conclusion

According to Ahmed (2012), diversity management is a possible way of 'viewing or picturing an organization.' It allows some things to be seen and obscures others. The latter is often the case with structural inequalities, which recede from view. In this chapter, I have analysed the framing of the diversity and inclusion program to discern what recedes from general view and to explore what this type of framing does to the further implementation of the program within the department. I determined that the motives for implementing the diversity and inclusion program within the municipality balance between both the social justice case and the business case. This shows the multi-vocality of diversity and inclusion, which, according to academic literature, is strategically deployed to make diversity and inclusion appealing for different audiences (Ahmed 2007: 242). Furthermore, I explained a contrast in the approaches to the diversity and inclusion program between the municipal team and the department team. The municipal team operates from the idea that there is a problem within the organization i.e. groups of people (read: certain social categories) are underrepresented in the organization when compared to the Amsterdam workforce, which the program must fix by reducing the number of underrepresented groups. The department approaches diversity and inclusion as a desirable ideal that serves the public good, which the program must accomplish by stimulating people's intrinsic motivation and developing and challenging people's thoughts, views, and assumptions. These approaches simultaneously allow some things to recede from view. The *Uitvoeringsplan*, which forms the foundation of the diversity and inclusion program, does not once mention or explicate the norm or the dominant group within the organization. Which is problematic because by not mentioning the norm, it becomes self-evident and thus difficult to contest. The *Procesplan* written by the department does seem to reflect on the current circumstances within the department, however, approaches the definition of diversity and inclusion broadly by individualizing differences to the point where any difference in character, thoughts, or experience matter equally for the diversity and inclusion within the department. This approach thus obscures structural inequalities. How is it possible for diversity and inclusion to become the norm within the organization if the current norm and issues are not addressed? In this chapter, I furthermore described an initiative from the diversity and inclusion program that was meant to start a conversation about diversity and inclusion to foster it within the department. However, we have seen that those conversations tend to similarly deny structural inequality and hierarchies through recourse to arguments on equality and individualism.

Although both programs, the municipal diversity and inclusion program and the department diversity and inclusion program, have a different focus, they both seem to incline, in terms of their formulation, toward 'happy talk' (Bell and Hartmann 2007). Diversity and inclusion are in both programs formulated as the solution, yet the exact problem is not explicated, i.e., an organization and department in which the norm is overrepresented, and which insignificantly includes people from social categories that deviate from this norm. Both programs refrain from the 'difficult issues' i.e., white

normativity, discrimination and social inequality, through expressions resembling ‘happy talk’. This framing simultaneously influences the implementation of the program in practice. The denial of hierarchy by means of ‘happy talk’ subsequently undermines constructive conversations which, by revealing these structural inequalities, could be the source for combating these very issues.

Chapter 2: Committing to diversity and inclusion

Diversity work is like banging your head against a brick wall. That is how Sara Ahmed (2012: 26) describes the experiences of diversity practitioners within institutions. A brick wall is a metaphor for institutional limits. It is this brick wall that merely becomes visible when one comes up against it, yet it remains invisible to those who can move uninhibited within the existing institutional spaces. Banging your head against this brick wall resembles the encounters with obstacles that reoccur for diversity officers when they put diversity and inclusion programs into action.

To understand why it is so difficult to implement an effective diversity and inclusion program, it is important to understand the actions that take place during the process of implementation. From a wide range of studies on diversity management, it becomes evident that obstacles mainly occur during the process of translating policies and programs into actions. According to Ahmed (2012: 140), 'Programs and policies that commit to diversity and inclusion on paper do not necessarily commit unless they act'. Yet to cause action, commitment from the organization is necessary. However, this commitment is not initially present in the organization if it needs the implementation of a diversity and inclusion program. According to Ahmed (Ibid.) the individual commitment of diversity and inclusion teams is inadequate to make a change, it must be converted to a collective commitment for it to be taken up by the whole organization. This requires a strategic approach toward the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program in order for it to appeal to as many employees as possible. In this chapter, I will explore, through the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program, what is brought into action by the diversity and inclusion team? and who is made or becomes responsible for the commitment towards diversity and inclusion?

The kick-off

I find myself staring at the greenest grass I have ever seen amidst 55.500 red folding chairs of which around 30 are occupied by employees of the municipality of Amsterdam. It is February 10, a Thursday afternoon. Shivering from the cold, I am listening to the Chief Innovation Officer of the Johan Cruijf Arena, the football stadium which is home to the Ajax soccer team.

This was not quite what I had expected when I received an invitation to the kick-off of a new team within the department. It would be the first time in two years, after corona, that colleagues would see each other in real life. The main reason for this kick-off was the goal of 'working towards a safe, dynamic, diverse, strong and self-conscious South-East' (Gemeente Amsterdam 2020). The Bijlmer, a neighbourhood situated in the Southeast part of Amsterdam, is characterized by people with various cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. It is a neighbourhood with a longstanding reputation of poverty, deviance, and social problems, but also for a self-conscious Black identity in the Netherlands. The municipality of Amsterdam and especially this team have had a hard time connecting with the neighbourhood. As written in the

invitation e-mail for the kick-off, the goal for today is to develop a more conscious observation of this neighbourhood, to know better what this neighbourhood and its people need.

The kick-off had started on the stairs at the Anton de Komplein where the team gathered for a presentation from the chairwoman of district South-East and a welcome speech from a department manager. After the speeches, the department manager asked everyone to walk around the neighbourhood for an hour. He noted that he highly encouraged everyone to walk individually. 'The challenge is to really see and observe what is going on in the Bijlmer neighbourhood', is what he added.

When I wanted to start the walk individually, I had seen a familiar face in the crowd. It was someone from the municipality that I had spoken to a few days before. I had felt a connection with her the last time we spoke as we both identified ourselves as 'mixed' (having parents, each with a different racial-ethnic identity). We had a conversation, and she mentioned she did not really feel the need to walk around this area because she had already been here many times before. We, however, decided to walk to the statue of Nelson Mandala, which was situated in a park close by while we talked about diversity and inclusion, her background, and her experiences of working at the municipality.

After the walk when we headed back to the Arena to reconvene with the group, I realized that this assignment had been written with the assumption that the employees were quite unfamiliar with the Bijlmer area. This seemed to be the case for the majority, yet I also imagined that for some employees, it could have been an alienating assignment. I had spoken one employee who mentioned that she had visited this neighbourhood, the market, and the friends that live here nearly every week. For that person, observations during a one-hour walk did not compare to all these years of experiencing this neighbourhood in all its variety.

The atmosphere on the tribune of the Johan Cruijf Arena was formal and relaxed. A few colleagues were handed the microphone to talk about their experiences of walking through the neighbourhood. These short speeches shifted from anecdotes and serious analyses of the neighbourhood to more lightweight inside jokes about the team and the work they do. The crowd seemed to laugh at these jokes, yet it rarely resonated with me, possibly because of my short presence in the organization. The consensus in many of the analyses given about the walks through the Bijlmer area surprised me. 'We should get out of our bubbles and include residents in the process' is what was a few employees repeated multiple times. Although the microphone was handed to a few people that the department manager pointed towards because he possibly was interested to know their views, the question of whom to ask next after four or five people was raised. Someone in the crowd shouted mockingly, 'maybe a woman for once?', at which the crowd chuckled and the managers on stage responded in an agreeing yet uncomfortable manner. It was after this remark that I realized only male colleagues from the managerial group had shared their observations until now. I remembered what my walking partner with a

frustrating tone mentioned to me earlier during our walk, 'The Johan Cruijf Arena is not South-East, it is not the Bijlmer. Do you want to know what really happens here? Why visit the most profitable area of South-East?' I wondered if she was going to share her critique on today's kick-off and its intent.

Meanwhile, plates with food were handed out throughout the audience. The plates were filled with fries and a soft bun with a beef croquette and mustered, a typical Dutch snack. Although I do not eat meat, I did not feel that it was something I needed to mention, as the people above me seemed to appreciate the food that was hand out. I decided to save the bun for someone else and eat my fries. I looked down a few rows and saw a person who I had been working closely with for this research. She did not seem very happy with the food and then I remembered that she does not eat beef. More people seemed to get a bit restless with the idea that the bun included meat and that there was no other option than to leave it on the plate or give it to another colleague. After a while, some people started asking whether there was no really no other option than meat. It seemed like such a small detail. Yet, the reaction of many colleagues seemed to illustrate that this was far more than just a minor inconvenience to them. On this tribune with a beef croquette on their plates looking over at some other colleagues who were similarly surprised about the food choice solely including meat. While sitting in 'the iron bubble' that represents the Johan Cruijf Arena, talking about the neighbourhood and the projects that will be launched in this area, some of the colleagues seemed to literally experience the feeling of being overlooked.

The R&D kick-off became a significant moment for me as an outsider to experience and understand how the topic of diversity and inclusion occurs during work related events. This very instance also became an example which was used by different employees to illustrate problematic encounters having to do with diversity and inclusion. The R&D kick-off, which was not organized by the diversity and inclusion program, seemed to reveal, according to the responses of some employees, the issues that they frequently come up against in their day-to-day work practices. During one conversation, Sheila brought up the *wereldvreemd* nature [other-wordly, disconnected from what is going on in society] of the municipality and referred to the kick-off.

Sheila: The municipality is *wereldvreemd*. We think we are the norm. I mean we had the kick-off the other day from the R&D team. What did we get to eat? A beef croquette! I don't eat beef and what if I eat halal food? This is like so back to the eighties. And also, the exercise of having to walk on your own through South-East with an open view. So, what they actually were asking is that we had to act like a tourist in our own city. Some colleagues came up to me and were like 'What kind of elite task is this?' I read the task and I did not feel like doing it. I just went to the shopping centre.

Rebecca: Why did you not feel like doing the exercise that day?

Sheila: For me, it is a home game. How can I walk with an open view around a place that feels like home? I can't!

Sheila did not have any say in the organization of this kick-off. She allocated the failure of being inclusive during this day to the disconnected nature of the municipality. A manager at the department mentioned something similar during an interview a few days after the kick-off:

Rebecca: What would you like to achieve regarding this topic [diversity and inclusion] within your team?

Yolanda: So I have never been to a foodbank, I did not have parents that shouted non-stop at me, but I have seen such things from up close and that is the reason that I make other choices in my life but also in the policies that we create. I wish other people that work for governmental organizations could experience such things because people working in governments have quite a responsibility with respect to the citizens of Amsterdam. Well in my opinion, you should at least have the decency to understand other people, but God, that is not just a matter of walking for one hour through the district South-East and reflecting on that. That is not the essence! So, what would help, I think, is that we not only recruit people who can afford living in the city centre of Amsterdam. Recruiting different people is also about enriching the worldview of the organization.

Yolanda does not think that diversity and inclusion within the organization is achieved by simply walking through South-East to understand the lives of different people within the city. To understand the different experiences of people living in Amsterdam, you must experience it from up close. Recruiting people that do not live within a certain bubble, framed here as people who can afford living in the city centre, Yolanda believes, would make her team more diverse and inclusive.

The kick-off however also shows that by having a few people in your team from outside the bubble that Yolanda refers to, the feeling of inclusion is not immediately guaranteed for all. This became evident when I asked Sheila during our conversation if she had heard from other colleagues what their experiences were of the kick-off. Sheila responded by saying: "Yes the reflections, Jesus! Under which rock do they live. I really felt like the odd one out. I did not feel the need to say: 'Well, for me this is a home game.' I just did not feel like it. Then again, it's me, the 'exotic' person who's speaking."

This response from Sheila shows her frustration with feeling the 'odd one out' in relation to the rest of her colleagues. This shows that this instance, the kick-off at the Bijlmer Arena, did not make her feel included but rather the opposite. It made her refrain from the conversation, to hide her experience of feeling excluded.

Cheyenne expressed a similar feeling during this kick-off, later that month in an interview. She mentioned she did not feel represented during the reflection session.

> Cheyenne: Rebecca, I am going to ask you something. I think we sat for four hours at the Johan Cruijf Arena, and did the manager on stage ever give someone of colour or someone who differs from them the microphone to say something? They did not ask someone of colour and I mean they do not have to ask me, but isn't that remarkable?
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> Rebecca: And if they had given you the chance to speak, would you have said something about your experiences that day?
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> Cheyenne: No, I think I would have said something. Obviously, I would have framed it differently, but I would have said that I think it is a missed opportunity that they did not ask for any input from someone who is familiar with the neighbourhood.
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> Cheyenne: There are always the same people in charge of organizing these kinds of events and I find that a pity. That is the reason that every time… I am sorry, but Johan Cruijf Arena? That is not South-East, that is not the South-East where there is work to do at least. Do you get what I mean? I find that, apart from the fact that it was extremely cold that day, I felt like it was a missed opportunity and then you see how diversity and inclusion just do not live within this department. Because why did they not choose someone else to organize it? They did not do that! In an hour time, we had to connect with this district, no.. sorry. You know, again this just also makes that I, that I do not feel represented.

Cheyenne's response to the kick-off illustrates a similar frustration of repeatedly being confronted with her not feeling included and represented within the department. According to Cheyenne, attempts to make connections with other neighbourhoods fail due to the lack of input given to people of colour or people that are part of the minority within the team.

This instance shows, that by having people in the department that are considered 'diverse' or as deviating from the norm, this does not instantly secure the diversity and inclusion within this department. As implied by Yolande, that the diversity and inclusion of a team thus depend on the addition of 'diverse' employees, suggests that the responsibility to commit to diversity thus mainly lies with those employees. The kick-off, however, showed that the employees who consider themselves as

deviating from the norm, were the once whom came up against issues that made them feel excluded that day. Cheyenne noted she wanted to take responsibility for committing to diversity and inclusion yet, according to her, she did not get the chance to do so from the organization or the rest of her colleagues. Sheila on the other hand described that she did not want to be the one having to point out the fact that she experienced exclusion. According to Sheila the organization itself has the responsibility to commit to diversity and inclusion in order for it to become more connected with the rest of society.

In the rest of this chapter, I will go into more detail on how the diversity and inclusion team organizes the actions relating to the diversity and inclusion program. Furthermore, I will explore what those actions do within the department and who then becomes responsible for committing to diversity and inclusion within the organization.

The diversity and inclusion team

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the ambition of the Amsterdam city council of implementing a diversity and inclusion program in every City department, was to be realized by assigning this task to a person within each particular department. Sheila, my interlocutor, was assigned as the *trekker* [point person or initiator] for her department.

The first time I came across the word *trekker* I did not understand its function in this context. I shared my incomprehension with the use of that word within a bureaucratic context with Sheila. According to her, the word was often used to signify a person leading the execution of a specific order from the municipal council. In Dutch *trek* means to pull, *trekker* can thus be freely translated as someone who is pulling. In this context *trekker* for me seemed to be a negative description of Sheila's duty in its figurative sense; as someone who must constantly pull others forward to do something with diversity and inclusion. From an interview I did with Sheila it became clear that her experiences of taking the lead in the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program within the department, in some respects is in line with the figurative description of the term *trekker*.

> Sheila: You know, I am on my own. I have to talk so much, and I just don't know. Everyone finds it important, yet then again nobody finds it important. I must constantly put diversity and inclusion on the agenda. Constantly, I am pulling people together…

Sheila's response illustrates that her responsibility of leading the implementation, is lonely, as she feels as if she is doing it all on her own which thereafter leads to exhaustion of having to put it on the agenda all the time and having to constantly pull people together. Much energy seems to be put into these two activities which leave limited time for the execution of planned actions that encourage diversity and inclusion within the department. During that same interview, Sheila identifies this as the main struggle of the implementation process. I ask her how she became in charge of the diversity and inclusion program in her department. She explains that after years of working her way up internally within the

municipality of Amsterdam, she unexpectedly got linked to the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program within her department.

> Sheila: The municipal council's aim for a diversity and inclusion program for the municipality had been planned in 2019. At that moment I was working on democratisation within my department where I was already working on the question: 'How do we involve people from the city in the interventions that we design for the city?'. I suddenly got *CC'd* in an email about the diversity and inclusion program by André, the head of the department. At that point, I thought it would be interesting to see what this is all about and how I could support the head of the department with the implementation of this program, and that role has since grown.

As evident from Sheila's description, the implementation of the diversity and inclusion team within her department was something she had already been working on in her previous projects. In conversations with Sheila, she repeatedly mentioned that as a person of colour she had always had to make an extra effort to make connections with her colleagues within the municipality. For her taking diversity and inclusion into account in her work became natural, yet she also acknowledged that she has biases and blind spots like every other person. Sheila explained that she can devote sixteen hours of her four working days a week to this project. Additionally, three or four colleagues help her out two hours per week. She had asked those colleagues to support her at the start of the program, in 2020, due to their affinity with the subject. However, she repeatedly noted the inconstant nature of this support. One person had suddenly withdrawn from the team, and another student who was conducting her master's thesis research helped at the start of the process but finished her internship after six months. Another colleague seemed to be very involved at first, yet later, according to Sheila, became somewhat passive and too busy to block the two hours for the diversity and inclusion team. During a diversity and inclusion meeting with me and Sheila, this colleague expressed a lack of motivation for the diversity and inclusion program to Sheila as follows:

> Bo: I admire how you live for this subject. If I were you in this position, I would have given up a long time ago. You can also think f** you all. To be honest, I only do this because you are still here.

Human Centric by Design

Every week we had meetings with the diversity and inclusion team, which at that moment included me, Sheila, Bo, and a student researching the knowledge platform openresearch.amsterdam. During one of those sessions, the team discussed the effects of the term's diversity and inclusion. The reason for this was a dialogue session a few days earlier on diversity and inclusion at which only a minimal number of participants had shown up. According to Sheila, it was the appeal or rather the lack of appeal of the

words ‘diversity’ and ‘inclusion’. She mentioned, those words remain itchy terms for people and that they provoke a certain fatigue instead of action. According to Sheila, this was one of the reasons why ‘Inclusion by Design’ was renamed to ‘Human Centric by Design’.

The department, Sheila together with André, had formulated Human Centric by Design as project and mission under which they were going to further develop the diversity and inclusion program. Sheila, explained that Human Centric by Design stood for putting humanity first in work related processes. She referred to it as the ‘human hack’ where working together with the city and innovation of the inside world (internal organizational processes and internal reasoning of every employee) is central in the design of processes, user experiences, and organizational developments.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the department approaches the diversity and inclusion program set by the municipality of Amsterdam in its own way by making a connection with the primary processes of peoples work such as in the design of new technologies in the city or in the creation of new policies. The reason for this is the belief of both the head of the department and Sheila, that diversity and inclusion within the organization are of benefit for the public good. They presume that by connecting diversity and inclusion with primary processes it will improve the work performance of employees in the department. In Human Centric by Design, they frame this as a benefit for employees, something that might get them on board. ‘Everyone wants to do a good job and I have something for you that makes you do a better job’ is what Sheila explained during a conversation about her approach to the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program. Sheila thus strategically choses to emphasis the business case argument in practice. Under the Human Centric by Design mission, the diversity and inclusion team has formulated a few activities that aim to bring about ‘inclusive integral work processes’, or in other words, aim to integrate diversity and inclusion in everyday operations. According to the Human Centric by Design Project document, these activities are focused on accessible and inclusive processes in which there is room for critical voices.

One of these activities includes learning interventions such as the Socratic Design Dialogue sessions. These dialogues sessions include small groups of colleagues who are moderated by trained colleagues. These sessions are meant to collectively explore and share assumptions, personal insights, and experiences through real-life examples brought in by the participants. The diversity and inclusion team formulates these sessions in the *Procesplan* as ways to fuel the innovation and inclusive thinking of all colleagues. I participated in three of such dialogue sessions. Although some interesting conversations between colleagues came up during these sessions, few people took part, the number of participants from the department during these sessions did not match the expectations of the diversity and inclusion team.

> Sheila: People confuse voluntary participation with participation without obligations. Maybe it is the lack of punctuality within this department. Colleagues do not remain committed to their appointments. Some people sign-up but just do not turn up at the session at all. This is about

how we behave towards each other. There has been put energy, time, and money into these sessions. It is just 'rücksichtslos'. At least leave a message that you are not coming!

Bo: Is this about the dialogue session from Monday?

Sheila: Either people come, or they do not. They should communicate, but not what happens now, that people put time and effort in these sessions, but no one turns up.

The remark made by Sheila conveys she is annoyed with people signing-up for the dialogue sessions without turning up at the actual session. During the session that Sheila referred to, only one person turned up, yet twelve had signed up for the session. Taking part in these dialogues sessions is framed by the diversity and inclusion team as voluntary, however, Sheila simultaneously mentions that this does not mean that it is without obligation. This for me sounded rather contradictory. However, during my fieldwork, I also came to realize that the diversity and inclusion team had identified within their department a need for dialogue sessions on the subjects of diversity and inclusion. From this need for dialogue sessions the diversity and inclusion team had presumed that people would likewise attend these sessions voluntarily. However, I noticed by attending multiple diversity and inclusion initiatives, that the same group of people were active in these sessions. Meaning that around 20 people actively committed to diversity and inclusion, out of the 500 people that the department approximately counts. The people who showed up for the dialogue sessions were the same people that had also been interviewed at the start of the diversity and inclusion program for the inquiry that identified employee's experiences and needs regarding diversity and inclusion within the department. This could accordingly explain why the initiatives did not seem to reach the rest of the department. According to Sheila, it was the connotations people had with the term's diversity and inclusion. Another colleague also mentioned this during a conversation about diversity and inclusion.

Fatima: I have the feeling that most people do not really feel something for the term's diversity and inclusion. That they have been bombarded with this term, which has negative effects.

During a meeting about a survey that I was planning to send out to employees of the department, we also discussed the vulnerability of the terms diversity and inclusion. Originally my survey had been titled: 'Reflections and needs regarding diversity and inclusion'. When presenting this during a meeting with the diversity and inclusion team members, Bo had noted that this title would be tricky if we wanted as many respondents as possible from the department. I anticipated setting out the survey to also reach the perspectives of employees who did not get involved as much with the organized diversity and inclusion initiatives. I presumed that an anonymized survey would help to bring in more honest and varied opinions on the execution of the diversity and inclusion program. However, according to Sheila,

Bo had a valid point regarding the connotations of many colleagues connected to my proposed title. Instead, they proposed *Samenwerking met de stad* [Cooperation with the city] as title. For me it felt rather contradictive, to make a survey all about diversity and inclusion, but not mention it in the title to make it less obviously about diversity and inclusion. I clearly underestimated the strategic nature of diversity and inclusion work. I had envisioned that diversity and inclusion work was a way to shed light on embedded social inequalities within institutions in order to mobilize people to operate beyond those structures. However, what I came to realize only after the fieldwork that I had conducted, is that the value of diversity and inclusion as concepts to think about exclusion, discrimination, and inequalities only becomes useful and brings change if the terms themselves appeal and are used by most of the people in the organization. Ahmed attributes the non-performance of such terms to its repetition of failure and the fatigue that it provokes.

> The repetition of terms is necessary because such terms fail to act. At the same time, such terms fail to act because they are repeated. The repetition of the term is in a way the repetition of failure: we 'say' the term because it has failed, and it fails because we 'say' it. – Ahmed (2007: 239)

According to Ahmed, changing those terms for other terms to avoid the assumption that it has been heard many times before is a way to fuel action. The success of these terms depends on 'what sticks' (2007: 240). Therefore, detaching those terms from issues like inequality and racism might work to make people listen. However, the success of these terms also depends on them being re-attached to those very issues.

Bottom-up or Top-down?

The managerial approach of the diversity and inclusion program is a topic that repeatedly came up during conversations about the low level of participation, with the diversity and inclusion team. Since 2020 the diversity and inclusion program at the department had a bottom-up approach. The program was designed in a way that left room for employees to initiate actions and sessions regarding diversity and inclusion. As stated in the documents, the diversity and inclusion program has a 'high DIY [Do it your self] degree' through which the diversity and inclusion team anticipated to connect to the 'intrinsic motivation of employees'. The idea that there would be enough intrinsic motivation within the department to work on diversity and inclusion collectively is also evident from the remark Sheila made during a conversation about the diversity and inclusion program.

> Sheila: I had expected that people would be much easier and more open to the idea of learning and acquiring skills having to do with diversity and inclusion.

As discussed in the paragraph above, the participation in diversity and inclusion initiatives organized by the diversity and inclusion team remained low. The remark made by Sheila, describes a setback in

the implementation process. The diversity and inclusion team also discussed the reasons and possible solutions for this low level of participation. The topic that reoccurred during these discussions was the voluntary nature of the initiatives organized by the diversity and inclusion team.

> Sheila: How do we get more time? Reflecting costs time, learning costs time, and practicing costs time. Everything costs time but..
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> Bo: But there are no consequences, sorry, but what I think the problem is. Is that there aren't any consequences.
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> Sheila: Yes
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> Bo: It is all without obligations. You know, and then a manager can say that they find diversity and inclusion important, and that people must do it, but now if no one gets mad or no consequences are given for not participating… For example, you don't get any raise in salary this year, yeah I am just giving a random example. But then nothing is going to happen. Then people can say that they think it is a must but there are no consequences in place when nothing is happening.
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> Sheila: Yes, so you think participation should be managed?
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> Bo: Well, it is a possibility, it is just my idea at the moment.

Low levels of participation are a significant issue for the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program within the department. Although multiple levels within the department express their support for a diversity and inclusion program, this, does not seem to turn into any significant action. During a meeting between Sheila and Martijn, the director of the domain in which Sheila's department falls, they discussed the need for a more top-down approach.

> Sheila walks into the room with roles of big paper, 'I made a presentation on these flipboards, to guide me through what I want to say' she mentions to me when she sees me. I notice from the way she moves that Sheila is quite nervous and excited for this meeting. We are at the Stopera building. The Stopera is an impressive building located in the city centre of Amsterdam. This building houses both the Dutch national opera and ballet, and the city hall of Amsterdam. The meeting is with Martijn, the director of the domain under which Sheila's department falls. It will be the first time that I will meet Martijn and from what I understood of Sheila, he is the

head of the domain under which their department falls and the person to which the head of department, André, must justify his decisions.

We walk to one of the rooms in which we also held a dialogue session a few weeks ago. It is a big room with an oval table around which ten people can sit. Sheila sets up the flip-overs on the wall. Saira walks into the room. I did not expect her to be at this meeting. Saira is one of the diversity professionals with whom Sheila occasionally works together. Sheila had asked Saira to attend the meeting as a neutral figure from outside of the municipality. According to Sheila it would be helpful if Saira could moderate and guide the conversation and maybe step in with some advice. I know Sheila initiated this meeting to talk with Martijn about the current situation of the implementation and to see how he would like to go further from here. At that moment Martijn and another lady, whom I later understood was his secretary, walk into the room. He greets everyone warmly with a nod and a smile and sits in front of me, Sheila and Saira. I had expected a totally different person. The man in front of me came across as friendly and calm. Martijn was a white, skinny man around his mid-forties, he dressed smartly and wore a white blouse with a light pink sweater over it which he immediately took off while seating on the chairs in front of us. I had expected an older, imposing-looking man who does not show any interest in the subject of diversity and inclusion, yet the opposite seemed true. Martijn seemed very sympathetic for what Sheila and Saira had to say.

Both Sheila and Saira had done their introductions and explained why we were here today while Martijn attentively listened while leaned back in his chair. Sheila had explained to Martijn that I was an Anthropology student observing conversations about diversity and inclusion. He responded positive to my attendance by saying ‘good job!’ while giving me a warm smile and a nod of approval. Sheila explained the current situation of the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program and the obstacles she came across during this process. Twenty minutes into the conversation Sheila hesitantly cut to the case and asked Martijn if he was committed to enforce participation in diversity and inclusion initiatives. I saw on Sheila’s face she did not know which answer to expect.

Martijn did not directly answer this question. He mentioned that if the department is much more diverse in terms of employees that participation then also goes more automatically. ‘That is where I need help’ is what he remarks while emphasizing his words with both hands moving towards his chest. He follows up by saying that he knows that he does not always succeeds in doing this himself. I notice from the way Sheila frowned her forehead that this was not the answer she had hoped for. Martijn moves on by saying that at the start of the diversity and inclusion program he anticipated a bottom-up approach. He additionally remarked that ‘the voluntary approach was not enough anymore’. According to Martijn, it was necessary at the start of the diversity and inclusion program to get everyone onboard, and he believed that this would not be accomplished by making diversity and inclusion something obligated. He

> mentioned that he wanted people to see for themselves why diversity and inclusion were necessary for the organization. Martijn follows up by saying that the importance is now seen within the organization and that it therefore is the right moment to also support the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program from the top of the departments.

Through a conversation with the municipal domain director Martijn, Sheila wanted to figure out if there is a possibility of managing the participation of diversity and inclusion initiatives. Sheila is not in the position to decide on what department directors and managers should or should not do. However, she has the responsibility to implement the diversity and inclusion program. A top-down approach, therefore, requires authority of a municipal director, who can manage the course of diversity and inclusion of every department director and their teams. During this conversation, Martijn, acknowledges the need for a top-down approach, yet he also expresses that he needs help to create a more diverse department in order to fuel participation. It implies that he sees the solution for fostering diversity and inclusion within his municipal domain, in the recruitment of underrepresented colleagues. This also says something about where Martijn considers the responsibility and commitment towards diversity and inclusion to be. He believes that the addition of employees, who deviate from the current employees, to the organization, will fuel participation in diversity and inclusion initiatives. The meeting with Sheila and Martijn ends with the agreement that Sheila will be invited to a conversation between Martijn and all the department directors to talk about their needs regarding diversity and inclusion. This again implies that Martijn does not necessarily perceives the department directors to be responsible for the commitment towards diversity and inclusion within the organization. By wanting to discuss with the department directors their needs regarding diversity and inclusion, Martijn prioritizes their opinions above that of the diversity and inclusion team and the bigger diversity and inclusion missions. The invite to Sheila could imply that Martijn sees it as the responsibility of the diversity and inclusion team to do something with the input discussed during that conversation.

In the academic literature on diversity management a similar complex relation between diversity practitioners and leaders of organizations is discussed. “Statements of commitment by leaders can matter insofar as they challenge the presumption that diversity is the responsibility of diversity practitioners, or of the bodies of those who are seen as different” (Ahmed 2007: 253). When leaders of organizations talk about diversity and inclusion then the responsibility of putting action into place to aim for diversity and inclusion shifts to a more collective terrain. Diversity and inclusion practitioners, like Sheila, are often the ones to repeat the terms and are thus seen as responsible for achieving diversity and inclusion. What happens then is that it becomes an individual’s commitment, however, if a director or manager repeats these terms then it more easily becomes a collective commitment which makes more action possible. We can conclude that how words like diversity and inclusion circulate and if they are taken up, hence also very much depend on who repeats these terms (Ibid.).

Diversity and inclusion as a separate task

In the previous paragraph I discussed the question of who in the organization is considered to be responsible for committing to diversity and inclusion. I also argued that the voluntary nature of the organized diversity and inclusion initiatives led to low levels of participation. Yet the question of why a significant number of employees does not participate in the organized diversity and inclusion initiatives remained. I therefore felt the necessity to expand my research beyond the perspectives of the committed group of employees whom I came across multiple times, to gather the perspectives of the people who were not present at these diversity and inclusion initiatives. Through a survey, I was able to gain more perspectives on how people experienced the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program so far. This survey, which was set out to the whole department, received 95 responses.

The survey results showed that the diversity and inclusion program was seen as something approached separately, instead of it relating to relevant projects and processes of the daily work of employees. To the survey question 'What remarks do you have on the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program?' respondents answered the following: 'Make this subject [Diversity and Inclusion] a permanent topic in all work meetings', 'Diversity and inclusion should be concentrated more concretely to the work we do', 'I would like to know more about diversity and inclusion if I can integrate that in my work', 'Don't approach it as a separate task', 'What do we understand under diversity and inclusion? In my opinion, we should not position it as a goal in itself, but as a precondition to do our jobs better'. One respondent answered: 'Let's first help and support the Amsterdammer instead of scrutinizing the colour of the bow around the package.' Although I do not have any other information on the person who left this remark, I interpret it as saying that the job one does in the department should be the focus, instead of debating about who that job does. This remark shows that not all employees automatically link the focus on diversity and inclusion with improving the performance of the service given to the Amsterdammers.

The connection or rather the disconnection experienced by some employees between diversity and inclusion as a subject and the work processes and projects of employees, was a topic of discussion during several interviews. During an interview, David, who was regularly present at diversity and inclusion initiatives, explained what according to him caused this disconnection.

> David: So, I think the moment you connect diversity and inclusion to work processes, it also becomes more part of your work. I think a lot of people just think: 'During my work, I do my job and at home, I am who I am'. Diversity and inclusion do not fit for many people in their work processes because they don't work for HR and they don't hire people. Then they are like 'I just do my mobility things or my energy transition work'. Those people might wonder what diversity and inclusion have to do with their job. If that person is not personally affected by things that are related to diversity and inclusion, then they are like 'why should I focus on this subject when I am doing my job?!' I have heard colleagues say: 'Why should I have to be

occupied with those kinds of subjects, just because the new director is woke?' [David laughs] So if they can connection diversity and inclusion to the job they do, because that connection is there, then it also becomes relevant for those people. If they realize this, then they can do their job, because that is what they are good at, whatever that is, for instance, designing roads, then diversity and inclusion become part of that job, then you can also make an impact.

I think a lot of colleagues also think 'What can I do about this subject?' During the organized initiatives this stays vague. If the diversity and inclusion team would make clear how people can do something with diversity and inclusion while doing their job, then it also is a lot more fun to focus on this subject instead of only having difficult conversations about a subject that for many does not feel as connected to their jobs. Many people are not aware that the decisions they make are determined by their identity and life experiences. Often these decisions are presented as logical choices, rationally made.

David furthermore explains that as a young man with a mixed ethnic background, he comes across issues that have to do with diversity and inclusion regularly. For him, it is something he has experiences personally, and therefore he is also aware of how his way of thinking affects the decisions he makes. That does not mean that he already knows everything about diversity and inclusion, but for him, the necessity and relevance of integrating this subject into everything he does in his work is very clear. David also explains that although he believes many of his colleagues find this subject important and some definitely see the connection with their job, they do not prioritize it because for them it is an 'extra'. If these colleagues and their work are not assessed based on the competence of diversity and inclusion, then other tasks become more important because they do determine their job performance.

David: There is a huge gap. Look, you don't get evaluated on if your product or service is inclusive or diverse. We get three performance reviews a year. I don't know if you are familiar with this. During these reviews, we discuss with our manager, or someone who is leading the project, what our goals are for that year. If you do something well, you get recognition for that and if you did not meet certain goals then you get a difficult conversation. That is basically it. But in these conversations, nothing is discussed about diversity or inclusivity or meeting goals that are in line with these subjects. However, during these conversations, your work is assessed. So technically, the kind of work you do depends on the subjects or competencies that your manager assesses you on. These assessments determine if you get a raise in salary, if you get promotion, or if you are fired due to bad performances

Rebecca: Yes, I understand. So, at the moment the diversity and inclusion program is practically voluntary when it comes to participation because it is approached from bottom-up. Do you think it would work if your manager would assess your work on criteria having to do with

diversity and inclusion? Would you then make more time during your work to, for example, participate in diversity and inclusion initiatives because you are assessed on it?

David: Definitely, so for me personally not really because I am already quite invested in these diversity and inclusion initiatives, but I think that it would definitely work. Now, these Socratic Design dialogues are also part of your review. I notice that a lot of colleagues now do their training and moderate these conversations. I do it as well. People work on those things because they can make time for it, and they can justify it to their manager. If you also assess diversity and inclusion as a criterion then you can say: 'Yes I make time for these kinds of initiatives a half day a week because they are part of my year goals', otherwise it seems, in the eyes of your manager, more like a hobby. Then it is like, first finish the things that you must finish to meet your year goals, and then you might have some time left for these extra things.

According to David, despite the broad support within the department for the diversity and inclusion program, the low level of participation can be allocated to the organizations lack of considering diversity and inclusion as competency or assessment criteria. During an interview with people that I had not seen at any diversity and inclusion initiatives, I asked why they had not been present at these sessions.

Daniel: I have seen such diversity and inclusion initiatives come by, yet, every time I wasn't able to participate because I don't have a lot of time left. I find that a shame because it really is a subject close to my heart.

Rebecca: Yes, I understand

Daniel: If it was obligatory to participate then, yeah, then it would be more a priority for me to go. Then I must make time for it.

In a different interview, Yolanda, a manager, explains that she has the feeling that people participate in diversity and inclusion initiatives as something they do next to their regular job. When asked the question of why she did not participate in the organized sessions, she responds with an answer similar to Daniel's answer.

Yolanda: So, I consider myself to fall in the category of people who are aware of the fact that diversity and inclusion are important subjects to consider, however, I have to make time for it. Once, I had to cancel a session on diversity and inclusion because I got infected with Corona, but I also cancelled another session because something else came by which was more urgent,

it was more important for me to be there. Uhm maybe that is something to think of when organizing these sessions. Maybe to make the urgency of these sessions higher?

Rebecca: Mhh

Yolanda: With the current sessions that are hosted I just don't know what the desired outcome is when we all come together. What do we then deliver? Or what are we going to do or learn? I really need to know what concrete results come out of these initiatives.

These answers reflect David's explanation on the lack of attendance and apparent commitment. Many employees seem to experience the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program as something disconnected from their daily work processes. This is significant because the diversity and inclusion team aims to make this connection clear through the organization of various initiatives. Two factors are mentioned that possibly obscure this link between focusing on diversity and inclusion as a subject and improving the performance of one's job. The first factor, described by David, has to do with someone's intrinsic motivation. According to him a person of colour or someone who deviates from the norm is confronted by the negative effects on a day-to-day basis that occur when diversity and inclusion are not considered in the organizations or services provided to people. This motivation to participate then becomes a personal motivation because assumingly you are also the one to benefit from the developments that come out of these initiatives. Whereas, for many of David's colleagues, the urgency to focus on diversity and inclusion is less high because they do not experience and are thus less aware of what negative effects, the lack of attention to diversity and inclusion in policy making, can cause.

The second factor that can be identified from this paragraph, is that awareness is not always enough to drive people to action. David describes that his personal motivation is enough to get him to make time to participate in these diversity and inclusion initiatives. For other colleagues, however, there is not enough personal motivation to do so, the action and participation thus become dependent on other incentives. As mentioned by Daniel and Yolanda, diversity and inclusion sessions are seen as an extra. This shows that when the organization or managers do not consider diversity and inclusion as a criterium on which they assess your work, or do not frame it as a goal on which your work performance depends, then employees accordingly do not see it as an integral part of their job, regardless how the diversity and inclusion team frames it to be in their program.

Conclusion

This chapter started with the premise that the implementation of diversity and inclusion programs frequently faces obstacles during the process of translating policies and programs into actions. One of which is the lack of commitment in organizations to diversity and inclusion. According to Ahmed (2012: 114), a pitfall that occurs is that organizations make institutional commitments in documents, as

mission statements and desired goals, which make it seem to tick the boxes of an organization that commits to diversity and inclusion. However, these institutional commitments are merely effective unless they are put into action (Ahmed 2012: 140). Diversity and inclusion teams, such as the team of Sheila, are therefore assigned, by their department, to put the program into action in order to achieve the diversity and inclusion goals of the organization. As described in this chapter, the lack of commitment in the organization that made the presence of a diversity and inclusion team necessary, seems to accordingly impede the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program by the assigned diversity and inclusion team. The implementation of the diversity and inclusion program requires commitment of the whole department (Ibid.). Organized diversity and inclusion initiatives only seem to attract a small group of people who feel responsible and thus become responsible for the organizational commitment to diversity and inclusion. Adding employees, who deviate from the current employees, frequently referred to as 'diverse' employees, to the organization, is by multiple people considered as a solution for the organizational commitment to diversity and inclusion. We thus see that people who are generally considered to be 'diverse' or as the ones embodying diversity e.g., people of colour, are also implicitly considered to be responsible for diversity and inclusion within the organization (Ahmed and Swan. 2006: 98). However, these are the people who already face inequalities and injustice compared to the norm within the organization, which makes it even more difficult to bring about change. If we take the words 'diversity' and 'inclusion' we also see that it can block action and that the diversity and inclusion team strategically move around these terms in attempts to make their approach to diversity and inclusion appealing to as many colleagues. Simultaneously Sheila repeatedly uses the business case argument to persuade colleagues into committing to diversity and inclusion. However, these strategical attempts do not bring about the intended participation with and commitment to the diversity and inclusion program. For Sheila diversity work becomes spending a lot of time on identifying the people who are willing and committed to speak up about diversity and inclusion (Ahmed 2012: 31). In some respects, there is a gap present between how the diversity and inclusion team envisioned the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program, and how it was experienced by the employees of the department. Despite the efforts of the diversity and inclusion team to connect the diversity and inclusion program to primary work processes, many employees still mention how they experience a disconnect between the initiatives organized and their own work processes. Employees who do not voluntarily participate in diversity and inclusion initiatives explain that their participation seems to depend on whether they expect it to have a significant effect on their job performance. For those employees, the relevance or benefit needs to be explicated in terms of how it concretely affects job performance. Meaning that diversity and inclusion should also be taken up as a criterium in performance reviews to possibly be recognized as an improvement of one's performance.

For the diversity and inclusion team the lack of authority and means to make diversity and inclusion a priority, impedes implementing an effective diversity and inclusion program. The responsibility for committing to diversity and inclusion thus becomes allocated to either the people who

deviate from the norm or the diversity and inclusion team. As long as collective commitment within the department is not required and prioritized by the organization, then the responsibility for committing to diversity and inclusion will likely remain on the shoulders of individuals like Sheila.

Chapter 3: Defining and discussing diversity and inclusion

According to Ahmed (2012), words like diversity and inclusion can be shared as questions if their meaning is not decided on in advance. This means that by bringing the terms, diversity and inclusion into conversations or actions, it simultaneously guides these conversations and actions without having filled in where they should guide to. The concepts of diversity and inclusion do not directly refer to something tangible, but they shape, through the circulation of these words, a community that learns and follows its point (Ahmed 2012: 81). People who are part of the circulation of the words diversity and inclusion thus collectively shape its direction. If we want to understand why it is so difficult to implement an effective diversity and inclusion program, we therefore must understand where conversations about diversity and inclusion go, what they entail, and how they are understood by variously positioned people. Hence, I will examine, in this chapter, how employees define and negotiate diversity and inclusion.

In the previous chapters, I attempted to describe the diversity and inclusion program and the implementation process of this program within the department. So far, I mainly focused my analysis on the trajectory of the diversity and inclusion team and the obstacles or challenges they face during this process. I discussed various initiatives that embody the diversity and inclusion program in practice and reflected on the initial objectives and the outcomes as perceived by the diversity and inclusion team.

Over the course of this chapter, I will zoom in on the narratives and perspectives that are present during diversity and inclusion sessions. How do various people within the department define diversity and inclusion? What does that say about people's understanding of diversity and inclusion and how does that affect the conversations about this topic and indirectly the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program? I will follow the pointers of diversity and inclusion to discern where this leads me and what that means for the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program.

A broad approach to diversity

'Diversity' as a word proves to be both effective and ineffective when used in a diversity and inclusion management context. 'Diversity' does not bear a single definition, which leaves room for it to be 'defined' in ways that could work for many people and organizations. The multivocality of the term 'diversity' as argued before, is strategically used by the diversity and inclusion team to increase the support within the organization for diversity and inclusion programs and policies. However, that this term leaves room for people to 'define' it in ways beneficial for them, can also become problematic and even 'block action' (Ahmed: 2007). In Chapter One I argued that the framing of diversity as a form of 'happy talk' is one of those ways that obstructs the efficiency of the term when used for diversity and inclusion management purposes. 'Diversity' can address a wide variety of social differences which, according to Vertovec (2012), has led to 'diversity' becoming 'ambiguous, multivocal and banal'. Despite these characteristics, 'diversity' has become a part of people's everyday understanding. This

means that the definition of diversity is believed to be a matter of 'common sense' (Ibid.). However, how organizations describe and use this term in their documents might not be the way employees define it and how they use it in the conversations that emerge within the work environment.

In Chapter One, I explored how the diversity and inclusion program of both the municipality at large and that of the department define 'diversity' and 'inclusion'. I additionally established that both seem to have a different approach to the term 'diversity'. Whereas the municipal diversity and inclusion program refers to specific social categories that are perceived as underrepresented within the organization, the department diversity and inclusion program mainly uses 'diversity' to refer to different characters, thoughts, or experiences that shape an individual. The different ways in which 'diversity' and 'inclusion' are defined can cause confusion in the conversations about these topics.

Throughout my research, both 'diversity' and 'inclusion' have been called *containerbegrippen*, catchall terms, multiple times by various people. Yet what these terms refer to or how people define them was rarely discussed in the conversations about diversity and inclusion. As previously mentioned, at the start of the implementation, the diversity and inclusion team of the department conducted an inquiry among their colleagues on diversity and inclusion. One question asked was 'How would you define diversity?'. The answers given by the group of employees who took part in the inquiry caught my attention. Many had given several characteristics from which individuals could deviate from each other, i.e., 'Various opinions, beliefs and ideas', 'various norms and values', 'various educational levels', 'various skills', 'various political views'. What I found striking is that none of the employees referred to differences in social categories such as gender, 'race', ethnicity, sexuality, or ability, when talking of diversity. For me, 'diversity' had stood for the differences between different social categories and the fact that there is not a clear dominant group who merely fits into the current white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied norm. However, I learned that how I had understood the concept of 'diversity' is not the definite understanding of the term in practice. By talking about 'diversity', I had assumed that the other person was talking about the same type of 'diversity'.

That my assumptions about the term 'diversity' did not resonate with other people became evident during an interview, which I did with Omar, an employee of the department. Omar described himself as one of the longest working employees in the team and said that as one of the oldest in his team, he had sometimes felt a difficulty connecting with his younger colleagues and their way of working. I met him after one of the dialogue sessions. I was interested in his perspective because during that session he had briefly mentioned something about his upbringing as a person of colour, but also clearly remarked that he felt it was no excuse for any of the disadvantages that he had faced during his life. Halfway through the interview, I asked Omar if he had noticed that the necessity of becoming a diverse organization had become higher in the last couple of years. Omar responded:

> Omar: Yes, by diverse I however, don't mean women or something, or sexuality or *allochtonen* [a person who at least has one parent that is born outside of the Netherlands]. I mean much

more than that. That there are people who have also worked in different departments or people who might be a bit older than the rest. So not only young people in the organization like we have now. So in terms of diversity it is not so much about the *allochtoon* and the *autochtoon* [a person with parents both born in the Netherlands] or homosexuality or such debates, but it is more uhm people with certain experiences of having worked at different departments versus young people straight from universities.

Rebecca: Okey, and how would you describe the current composition of people within the department?

Omar: Well, that is mainly a composition of young people straight from universities and on top of that, some senior people that have worked for the municipality for a longer period. So I would say, there are all these young professionals, some of them also have management functions and then there is André, me and another person. So mostly young, new, people who just graduated from university.

I experienced, during this interview with Omar, that conversations about diversity and inclusion can easily lead to miscommunication. At the start of the interview, like with most of the interviews that I conducted, I had not asked my respondent how they define diversity and inclusion because it often resulted in predictable or socially desirable answers that do not necessarily match the use or understanding of the term by that person in practice. I had anticipated my questions to reveal my respondent's perception of the concepts of diversity and inclusion. However, in the interview with Omar, I had not understood that he referred to employees' work experience when talking about the diversity within the organization. When Omar specifically pointed out he was not talking about certain social categories but that he was talking about ages and working experience was the moment that the conversation became substantive. Before this, we had primarily misunderstood each other, which made it impossible to conduct a constructive conversation.

A similar miscommunication happened during one of the focus group sessions with a group of employees who regularly turned up at diversity and inclusion initiatives. During this focus group a committed group of people discussed how to take diversity and inclusion further within the department This group comprised around ten people and later during the conversation André, the head of the department, joined to listen. A few employees were talking about the recruitment of new colleagues. Sheila explained that some knowledge is more appreciated than other forms of knowledge and that certain experiences which people live through can also be beneficial for their work. She argued that diversity and inclusion should play a central role in the recruitment of new employees. André responded by saying:

> André : I want to make one small remark to clarify. I think this conversation goes beyond the indicators that are generally mentioned i.e., origin, cultural background, etc. I also mean someone's educational background. That we are all highly educated people with a lot of money who make certain decisions, is what I find problematic because we make those decisions without the people who live in poverty therefore it is also about diversity in terms of thinking. (…) So, we must search for diversity and not only the general indicators which we use on our lists. It is also about the different networks, how we attract people from different social classes but also people with different mindsets, maybe that is even more dominant than talking about diversity in terms of skin colour. To put it very bluntly.

The examples described above show that conversations about diversity and inclusion could vary substantially in terms of their content depending on the interpretation someone has of the term's 'diversity' and 'inclusion. André made this remark because he felt the conversation was leaning more towards 'diversity' in terms of 'origin, cultural background or skin colour' without it being explicitly mentioned during the conversation, while he had a different kind of 'diversity' in mind.

Contrary to my understanding of the term 'diversity', multiple employees seem to have a broader understanding of the term. Bouchallikht en Papaikonomou (2021) argue that a broad definition of 'diversity' is often preferably used by organizations or managers in the Netherlands. This broad definition of 'diversity' refers to differences in character traits or ways of thinking. According to them, a broad definition is more convenient for organizations because it is easier to achieve (ibid.). However, as discussed in previous chapters, this can become problematic, as it is a definition that does not challenge and tackle issues that are tied to social inequalities. This definition additionally poses another obstruction in the conversations concerning diversity and inclusion. When 'diversity' refers to all differences in individual character traits, it becomes even more difficult to distinguish what the conversation is about. As described in the interview with Omar, his use of 'diverse' referred to working experience and age, which is a different conversation when we compare it to André's use of the term which referred to the difference in the educational background in relation to the class of income and difference in the mindset someone has. The frequent use of the term seems to make 'diversity' a clear-cut topic of which its meaning is considered obvious to all people. Nevertheless, through miscommunication, it becomes discernable that 'diversity' in practice can take multiple shapes.

'The diverse'

At the end of the focus group, described in the previous paragraph, André mentioned another interesting point about 'diversity'. His remark, however, implied an again different definition of 'diversity' than the former mentioned broad interpretation of 'diversity'.

André: There is another dilemma concerning diversity and inclusion. I have had a conversation with Mohammed [a newly elected member of the board of directors from the specific domain under which the department falls] about this. He mentioned that he is a bit annoyed by diversity policy and programs. After all, he felt he was constantly selected for management functions because he happens to have a diverse background. Mohammed mentioned that in his interviews, he is constantly asked if he can be an ambassador for diversity. So, I jokingly replied that no one had ever asked me to be an ambassador for diversity during a job interview, that has never been a topic. I find that quite absurd, even though he is much more competent in many respects than I am. And I mean that. In my interviews it is more about competency and in his interviews, it seems to be about diversity and inclusion. I find it very confusing and I think many people feel uncomfortable about this and feel uncomfortable discussing this issue.

The instance that André describes, is another example of how people can perceive 'diversity'. Here 'diversity' is understood to be embodied by an individual, a person that deviates from the current norm.

André mentions that he feels uncomfortable with this definition of 'diversity' and does not want to approach 'diversity' in this way within his department. Throughout my research within the department, I did however come across this use of 'diversity' multiple times. During conversations or written in documents: 'people with a diverse background' was frequently mentioned, or 'how do we include the diverse colleague?'. In these examples, 'diversity' had stood for those who are perceived as 'different' or those who look 'different' (Ahmed 2012: 33). This use defines 'diversity' as something that can be added to the organization. When 'diversity' is seen as a characteristic that can be embodied by an individual, then 'diversity' also becomes the responsibility of that person because that person is considered to carry out the diversity of the whole team (Bouchallikht amd Papaikonomou 2021). Tokenism emerges when organizations symbolically attempt to express an image of inclusivity by recruiting or presenting a person who is considered to convey that image of 'diversity'. As a result, those people that are considered 'diverse', experience enhanced visibility and social isolation which, is accordingly counter-effective for their experience of inclusion (King et al. 2010).

A matter of positionality and identification

It is a Tuesday afternoon in January and the freshness of the new year, 2022, is still in the air when I walk from the metro station to the Stopera building.

I enter the building and walk in the direction of the room where the dialogue session takes place when I bump into Sheila. I ask her how she has been: it is the first time I see her after the Christmas holiday. Sheila seems very excited about today's session. The dialogue session will be moderated by two people: Anna and Juliette. Sheila and I enter the room where Anna and Juliette are busy rehearsing their sentences and setting up their laptop with a video to prepare for the dialogue session. The session will be hosted in two rooms, one of which is a

cosy room with three lounge chairs, a comfy-looking beanbag, and a couch facing a screen hanging in the middle of the wall.

It is five minutes past one, and me, Sheila, and the moderators are all set for the dialogue session. I am seated on the lounge chair between Sheila and Anna. The list of today's participants contained ten people, yet Sheila mentions, to her disappointment, that she already received some last-minute cancelations. She remarks that fewer participants than expected might turn up, meaning that only one moderator would be necessary. Juliette and Anna decide that Juliette will be the moderator for today and that Anna will take part in the dialogue as a participant. At that moment, a blond girl dressed in a white blouse, flared denim jeans, and trendy sneakers, hesitantly walks into the room. 'I am here for the dialogue session,' she says in a questioning voice, as if she is not sure if she is in the right place.

Ten minutes later, we are still with the four of us. Merel, the girl who had signed up for the dialogue session, had only started working for the department in November. She was seated next to Anna on the couch. They seemed to get along, and they were chatting about the fact that they felt they already knew each other. 'Maybe from college?' Anna asked. Sheila was checking her phone for more cancelations but eventually decided that it was time to start the dialogue even though only one person had shown up.

Like the previous dialogue session that I attended, we started with a video from the program director of Masterplan South-East, a lady born in Surinam talking about her experiences of being a black woman. She explains that in her past and also because of her job, she has come across what she calls a 'white setting', i.e., environments made up exclusively by white people, where she had a hard time discovering and developing herself. In this video, she explains why diversity and inclusion are so important and that these dialogue sessions are meant to explore your own and each other's assumptions.

After the video, Merel notes that it amazed her how well this lady was able to articulate her experiences related to diversity and inclusion. Sheila responds by explaining that as a person of colour you must explicate your position as 'the other' to the setting you are in, that it becomes something automatic because it is expected from you. In my head, I agree with what Sheila said because I immediately recall the many occasions when I had to explicate my 'otherness' to people in similar white settings. For Merel, this did not seem to trigger any thoughts, and her attention was already caught by the next video that was played of André, who in this video explains what he believes diversity and inclusion are all about and why he thinks this is so important.

After the introduction videos and Juliette's explanation of Socratic design dialogues and the rules during these conversations, she asks us about the assumptions we have about ourselves. Sheila and I had decided to also participate in the dialogue because the group would otherwise be too small. Anna starts by talking about her youth and how she assumes she must

> do everything by herself without asking for any help. She explains where she thinks this notion comes from. Merel is next; she does not seem very comfortable and explains that she is not quite sure what Juliette or the others expect from her and where this session will go. She remarks that this in itself might be an assumption about herself. She has the feeling that she always needs to know everything and adds that this is also the case for this session. Merel moves on to explaining that at the moment she does not know where this conversation might go and that she feels she might not be able to add something relevant to the conversation in relation to the topic diversity and inclusion. 'I'd rather listen', she says.

Merel's response was not exceptional. Her hesitation and insecurity in sharing her experiences and thoughts in a dialogue session about diversity and inclusion was something I had seen before during another dialogue session. These dialogue sessions were initiatives organized by the diversity and inclusion team. The people joining these sessions all voluntarily did so and often joined other sessions regarding diversity and inclusion. Even though the people who took part in these dialogue sessions were already very much onboard and committed to diversity and inclusion, there still seemed to be some mechanisms present in conversations that blocked them from becoming in depth and constructive.

Another Socratic design session that I had attended, before the one described in the excerpt above, was a session with six participants, including Sheila and me as the observer. The moderator, Lidia, had started this session with an assignment to think of a case that you had experienced in which diversity and inclusion were a subject. After five minutes of preparing an example, Jelle was the first participant to share his case. He, however, seemed uncomfortable sharing something. "I am sorry, but I have thought about it, and maybe I have something, but I rather listen to the others first. I want to know how they interpret this before I say something," he said. After his remark, Lidia decided to move on to the other cases and when the last person explained their example, she returned to Jelle, who was ready to share his case.

> Jelle: In 2017 I worked for a contractor where I did not feel at home. Which is weird because I am the norm. When I started working for this team, I immediately felt a sense of belonging. I wondered if it was inclusion that I was experiencing. I am not sure if I felt at home here because I fit in that type of bubble or because this team is just really inclusive. Maybe it is because this team coincidentally fits the bubble that I am already in. I wonder when you are inclusive and when something feels inclusive to you.

During that session, it struck me that when Jelle was asked to start the dialogue with an example, he had passed his turn. I interpreted his reaction as a sign of discomfort. Like Merel, he seemed uncomfortable having to talk about his own position within the subject of diversity and inclusion amidst people that are regarded as 'diverse' and not as the norm.

A month after the dialogue session, I interviewed Jelle because I wanted to have a one-to-one conversation with him about diversity and inclusion and the dialogue session. During that conversation, I asked whether he felt safe enough to express all his ideas and assumptions, hoping he would clarify his first reaction during the dialogue session.

Rebecca: During the dialogue session, did you feel as if you were able to share everything? You were, of course, in the presence of colleagues, and you work closely with some of them. Did you, at that moment, feel that you were able to be open and honest about your opinions and assumptions?

Jelle: Uhm, yeah, I guess that in general, I have that feeling. I have to think about how I can best formulate this... No, yeah on the one side I am confident enough to say that I do, but, I also notice that I am very conscious about how I say certain things and what I do or do not mention. I think that it is more about… not necessarily because they are my colleagues, I mean, I do feel very safe in the group that was present during the dialogue and in general I feel safe with my colleagues. I think it is more about… Mhh I am not sure, I am just a very direct person who says whatever comes up. Often in a conversation like this, about diversity and inclusion, I am very unsure of what my position is. Do you get what I mean?

Rebecca: Yeah

Jelle: I mean, sometimes it feels wrong towards myself to… I mean I am a chit-chatter; I tend to always keep talking, but I have the feeling that when a conversation is about a topic like this that it is not always the right moment to talk but more a moment to listen. On such an occasion I am a bit quieter than I normally am, not so much because I don't have the feeling that I can't say anything, but more because I have the feeling that I must hold myself back. It is not like I wanted to say something about how I used to be discriminated against due to my red hair or something. It is not like I don't dare to say something but more like, is it my place to say what the solution is and which way to go? So yeah, I think I find that difficult.

Rebecca: But why do you think it is not your place to say something about this topic? What makes you think that?

Jelle: Yeah, uhm that is a good question. [pauses for a few seconds and glances around the room]. We are going into depth here now, aren't we? [starts laughing] Uhm, I think it depends a bit on the context. I often have conversations about this topic with family members and if I hear something that I disagree with, then I do think it is my place to say something about that.

> If it is about a conversation within a group like this [Referring to the group present during the dialogue session], because in a group like this I might be the person who is the most privileged, then I think, how am I, in my position going to explain or argue that I have an explanation about how difficult it is or what the solution may be for this issue. I believe that a big part of the solution is that I or people like me, who on many occasions believe that they already hold the solution, just keep their mouth shut for once. So maybe me not saying something is because I believe that the solution is exactly to shut my mouth in these kinds of situations. In a conversation like the one we had during the dialogue session, I think I was very cautious, and not necessarily because it was difficult for me to talk about this topic, but because in my opinion being humble at that moment is more important than giving the right answer.

Jelle outlines his thoughts when he enters a conversation about diversity and inclusion with people he regards as less privileged. The confrontation with his own privileges makes him hesitant about his position, which results in him withdrawing from the conversation at first. Furthermore, he states that remaining silent in his opinion is an act of humility, whereas, in a conversation with people who he does not consider as less privileged, e.g., family members, he does not feel the necessity of being humble. Jelle thus foregrounds the question of who has the right to speak about diversity and inclusion. This, according to him, depends on the extent to which a person is regarded as privileged or not.

I interpreted Jelle's response as a logical reaction to debates on 'woke' behaviour and how the norm should position itself in respect to the subject of diversity and inclusion. Becoming 'woke' means becoming aware of social inequalities and notions of white privilege, it is often used as a term by white people to express their support as allies in movements such as BLM (Black Lives Matters). Allyship takes shape in the way that allies, i.e., white people, are willing to speak of the real issues that other white people cannot or find too uncomfortable to do (Hess 2016). 'Woke', however, has also gained a lot of criticism since white people amplify their own voice in a context of black struggle (Ibid.) This is precisely what Jelle explains when he talks about 'I or people like me, who on many occasions already believe they hold the solution', which he tries to avoid by his act of humility.

During this dialogue session, the case of Guus was used to further discuss the topic of diversity and inclusion. Guus similarly related the difficulty of talking about personal experiences concerning the subject of diversity and inclusion, to his discomfort with his position of him embodying the norm.

> Guus: I find it difficult to share an experience concerning diversity and inclusion. I hear many interesting stories, but I don't recognize them. I am hundred percent *kaas*, [cheese, a common term to describe a white Dutch person], I don't know these types of identities and experiences of exclusion that some of you explain. I represent the norm. I think that people who embody the norm often talk about trying to do a good job. That is not what I am aiming for here with this case, but it is the only case that comes to mind right now.

> I used to work with a colleague a few years ago, a woman. In a conversation with a man from the municipality, I noticed that he was only talking to me. I tried to direct the conversation toward my partner, who knew far more about that topic, but I noticed that he did not want to involve her in the conversation. I saw that she felt neglected and disappointed. At that moment, I felt powerless and did not know what to do and how to position myself.

Guus similarly articulates the struggle he faces when asked about a personal experience having to do with diversity and inclusion. Although he does not withdraw from the conversation, he does note that because of his position as a representative of the norm, being '100% cheese', he has trouble bringing up such experiences because he does not experience them himself. He also illustrates in his case his uncertainty about his position when confronted with a situation in which someone is excluded based on being a woman.

I asked Jelle during the interview what he thought of the case brought up by Guus which we talked about during the dialogue session?

> Jelle: It was very recognizable. I identified with the case mentioned by Guus. I don't think I experienced something like that in such a position, but I did very much understand it. What do you do in a situation like that? What is the right thing to say? Does it help to say something or is that an extra way of showing your privileges and therefore says more something like 'you can't do it on your own, so I'll save you' yeah, I thought that was really interesting.

Although Guus' case was used as the starting point during that dialogue session, not everyone could identify and felt as triggered by the case as Jelle. This became clear during the interview with David, who also joined the dialogue session that day.

> Rebecca: What did you think of the Socratic design session and what were your expectations before the session?

> David: Well, I had expected it to go a little more in-depth. I just think it was very superficial. Like.. all the answers were very socially acceptable, and it did not hurt or anything. They always say that conversations about diversity and inclusion are uncomfortable and that they tend to cause friction. It just did not do that. It was all like, happy conversations and everyone agreed. I just know for sure that everyone has very different opinions. We could have gone into much more depth. That is what I expected and hoped.

> Rebecca: Why do you think the conversation went in this direction?

David: I think it is because of a few things. First of all, because of the case that we discussed. There were also some more personal cases brought up in which a person described a first-hand experience having to do with exclusion. The case that Guus brought in was more like a second-hand experience. He observed a situation in which someone, in his opinion, was being excluded, but of course, his observations are all just assumptions. We don't know how that lady felt, we don't know what the reason was that the man did not seem to direct his attention to her. It was about how to act in a situation like that, it did not directly address experiences of exclusion or discrimination. Therefore, this case was less personal and emotional than, for example, Sheila's case or Fatima's case, or my case about the feeling of in-betweenness and never totally fitting in. In these types of conversations, it is also about exploring what it does to someone and also possibly identifying parallels with your own experiences and behaviour and that you are confronted by that.

I tried to mention that. I work closely with Fatima and there were some occasions where I noticed people excluded her from conversations and during the dialogue, I wanted to explore what her perspective was on that. The conversation, however, led to the case of Guus again, which was a shame because it wasn't that interesting. It was mainly about the interaction of two people from a long time ago whom no one besides Guus had ever met. Maybe the wrong questions were asked also.

According to David, the dialogue session did not have the desired result. He felt it remained quite superficial due to the impersonal character of the case that was brought in and was used for this particular dialogue. He also noted that the experiences that addressed exclusion and or discrimination in a more straightforward manner were not used or explored during this dialogue session.

Cheyenne, who participated in a different dialogue session, similarly mentioned to me the lack of depth in these types of conversations. After the third dialogue session, I walked with her to the cafeteria and asked her what she thought of the dialogue session that we had just attended.

Cheyenne: To be honest, I do not feel that comfortable sharing all my experiences concerning diversity and inclusion in a setting like this. I just don't see any diversity in the moderators who lead these types of conversations. I, therefore, don't go into depth because I don't know if that person can understand me and can relate to what I am saying. Besides that, why should I always show my vulnerable side if other people don't do it?!

The remark made by Cheyenne about the lack of diversity when it comes to the moderators of these dialogue sessions until then had not caught my attention. These moderators, who are also employees from the department, followed the Socratic design training and are thus skilled in leading these dialogues. However, as Cheyenne mentioned, no moderator was a person of colour, and none of the

moderators seemed to express having experienced any form of discrimination or racism. For these reasons, Cheyenne had not felt comfortable enough to elaborate on sensitive topics, as she felt these moderators would not identify with or understand her painful experiences as a person of colour. In her response, I could also sense a certain frustration at having to be the one person who, unlike other colleagues, must reveal her vulnerable side. This contrasts with Jelle's perspective, who felt that, as a privileged person, he had to remain humble and take a step back to create room and listen to people that deviate from the norm.

Dialogue sessions on diversity and inclusion thus avoided sensitive topics and experiences. Two main factors seemed to impede conversations from becoming in depth and personal, which can be distinguished from the perspective of multiple participants. Firstly, some employees, like Merel, Jelle, and Guus, express the difficulty they have with positioning and expressing themselves as people close to or representative of the norm, in a dialogue session about personal experiences related to diversity and inclusion. An explanation for this could be the remark that Sheila made to Merel, when Merel expressed that she was amazed by how well the lady on the video could articulate her experiences related to diversity and inclusion, during the dialogue session described in the field notes. Sheila had mentioned that as a person of colour you are used to being expected to talk about and explain your position as 'the other' and your differences in relation to the norm, the white able-bodied heterosexual male.

This resonates with the theory of double consciousness articulated by eminent sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois. According to Du Bois (1903: 2), black people and people of colour are forced to see themselves from two perspectives. There is the perspective from the unique self, which every other person has, and the perspective from which they see themselves through the eyes of the outside world, i.e., the white people occupying that world. This double consciousness explains the ability and habit of people of colour to reflect on their position, which makes it also easier to do so in a dialogue session, as mentioned in this paragraph.

This double consciousness does, however, not mean that those reflections are always shared in conversations or that this immediately leads to in-depth and constructive dialogues. This can be explained by a second factor described by David and Cheyenne. The lack of representation or support by either the participants or the moderator in these dialogue sessions similarly impedes the possibility of elaborating on sensitive and painful experiences. In a group where there is not a lot of diversity, it can seem as if diversity is an individual characteristic, and therefore one person is held accountable for carrying out the diversity of the group. Both factors, the discomfort and inability of the norm group and the lack of representation and the sense of implicit responsibility directed towards the group of people that deviate from the norm, prevent conversations from going into depth on the subject of diversity and inclusion and from linking it to the painful subjects of racism, discrimination, and unequal power dynamics.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I followed the pointers to which conversations about diversity and inclusion would lead me to understand how that possibly affects the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program. At the beginning of this chapter, it became apparent how difficult it is to have a productive conversation about diversity and inclusion if people misunderstand each other without even knowing they do. As I had frequently observed, and experienced firsthand during my interview with Omar, people talk about diversity and inclusion with their own definition in mind, often without explicitly mentioning this definition beforehand. The two examples described in this chapter show two different interpretations of the term 'diversity' and indirectly of the term 'inclusion'. These examples convey that in conversations about diversity and inclusion, the characteristics or aspects that could be referred to when using the terms 'diversity' and 'inclusion' can strongly diverge. However, because of the frequent and normative use of these terms, the topic is not considered to need any further explanation (Vertovec 2012: 21). Hence, when these employees discuss these terms in practice, it is evident that they are not as definite and comprehensible as they seem.

Additionally, I discussed that dialogue sessions and conversations are seen as solutions by the diversity and inclusion team to commit to the program and thus to diversity and inclusion. We have seen that these conversations, despite the commitment and good intentions of the employees who participate, do not bring about the change in thoughts, assumptions, and views that the diversity and inclusion team envisioned. As mentioned by a few of the participants from the dialogue sessions, conversations on diversity and inclusion repeatedly remained superficial and unproductive. Besides the risk of misunderstanding each other during these conversations due to the multivocality of the terms 'diversity' and 'inclusion', we have also seen that the extent to which someone personally benefited, by focusing on the subject of diversity and inclusion in their work, seems to determine one's involvement in initiatives related to the diversity and inclusion program. People that consider themselves to be or be close to the norm, have difficulty with reflecting, and discussing experiences having to do with diversity and inclusion. This makes participation in these conversations difficult and uncomfortable. At the same time, how people, that consider themselves to deviate from the norm, express their experiences regarding the subject of diversity and inclusion, accordingly, depends on if they feel understood and supported. Feeling understood and supported seems to be determined by the person leading the conversation and how participants express themselves in these conversations. The way employees thus position themselves in relation to the subject of diversity and inclusion, determines their response to the topic. We can conclude that the dialogues organized by the diversity and inclusion team, require more effort and expertise of how to facilitate a safe space where people who are positioned differently can become vulnerable, and where conversations about diversity and inclusion can become productive.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, we have seen that the municipality of Amsterdam expresses statements of commitment and support for the topic of diversity and inclusion. However, we have also seen that this yet, has not led to combat structural inequalities and to achieve the goal of becoming a diverse and inclusive organization. Therefore, this thesis attempted to answer the question: **Why is it so difficult to implement an effective diversity and inclusion policy or program?** To answer this question, I presented a number of insights from the implementation process of the diversity and inclusion program from a department of the municipality of Amsterdam. I explored multiple perspectives, i.e. those of the municipal diversity and inclusion team, the department diversity and inclusion team, and the managers and employees of the department, who were all involved with the implementation process.

In academic literature on diversity and inclusion, we have seen that implementations of diversity and inclusion programs mainly deal with three issues. Firstly, the framing of diversity and inclusion programs that include forms of 'happy talk' that obscure the sources of the problem making it even harder to combat. Secondly, aims of diversity management often become a practice of ticking the boxes of formulated goals or measurements while staying far from the issues that need to be challenged. Besides that, the people that are made responsible for diversity and inclusion often do not have the authority and or means to bring change to the whole organization. Thirdly, the multivocality of the terms 'diversity' and 'inclusion', which allow it to spread through various different audiences and contexts, yet leads to misunderstandings and confusions.

I structured the three empirical chapters along the lines of those reoccurring challenges in academic literature. I first focused my analysis on the formulation of the diversity and inclusion program and the reasons for implementing this program, to understand how this framing affects the further implementation of the program in practice. In the second chapter, I took a closer look at the aims and organization of the department-specific diversity and inclusion team and how they put their program into practice. Furthermore, I looked at how this accordingly influences who within the department becomes responsible for committing to diversity and inclusion. In the third chapter, I examined dialogues on diversity and inclusion to discern how diversity and inclusion are defined and discussed by various positioned employees.

In Chapter One, we have seen that the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program in the municipality is motivated by both the business case motives, such as improving the performance of products and services executed by the municipality, and the social justice motives, such as being a representation of the Amsterdam workforce. The presence of these apparent contradictory motivations proves Ahmed's (2007: 242) point that in the framing of the diversity and inclusion program the multivocality of these words is strategically deployed to make it appealing for different audiences. Diversity and inclusion as terms thus leave room for organizations to define and frame it in ways that

work for them. However, we have also seen that there is a significant difference between the approach of the municipality at large and the approach of the department towards becoming a diverse and inclusive environment. The municipality operates from the notion that the current situation needs to be fixed through quotas and goals expressed in numbers and percentages. The diversity and inclusion team from the department operates from the notion that diversity and inclusion are beneficial to the operation of the department, which translates into their contribution of public goods. The department is convinced that, to become diverse and inclusive, intrinsic motivation needs to be stimulated by innovating and challenging employees' views, thoughts, and assumptions. In the diversity and inclusion program of both teams, the emphasis is on the assumed solutions without scrutinizing the initial problem. Forms of 'happy talk', such as in the framing of certain mission statements, motivations, and positive aims, dissociate the diversity and inclusion program from the sources of the problem, making it even harder to combat. The initiatives and conversations on diversity and inclusion in practice, which are seen as solutions to achieve diversity and inclusion within the department, encompass similar forms of 'happy talk' and recourse to arguments on equality and individualism, that deny structural inequalities and hierarchies. We have thus seen that the dissociation from the initial problems is also present in practice, during the implementation of the diversity and inclusion program within the department.

In chapter two, I described that the diversity and inclusion team of the department implemented the program with the idea that every employee has intrinsic motivation to commit to this subject. Through ethnographic research on the actions that took place during the implementation, I, however, distinguished that intrinsic motivation only seems present among a small group of employees. The organized initiatives, therefore, do not function effectively because the participation is insufficient. Collective commitment, according to Ahmed (2012), is necessary to enable systemic change within the organization. In this chapter, we have, however seen that in the department 'diverse' employees, people who deviate from the norm, are generally considered being responsible to the commitment of diversity and inclusion, even though, they only make up a small amount of the employee base of the department. Additionally, we have also seen that the terms 'diversity' and 'inclusion' are strategically deployed by the diversity and inclusion team to appeal to as much colleagues as possible. Yet, these attempts do not seem to fuel any further participation. Employees instead mention they experience the diversity and inclusion program, due to its voluntary character, as something separate from their work processes. Within the department diversity and inclusion are not considered to be competencies or criteria that can influence an employee's job performance, which consequently does not require or stimulate any further commitment to diversity and inclusion. These factors thus determine that the organizational commitment to diversity and inclusion depends on individuals who feel or are considered to be responsible for committing to diversity and inclusion, even though they do not have the authority or means to require or prioritize collective commitment within the department.

In chapter three, I zoomed in on the organized initiatives and dialogues on diversity and inclusion within the department. In the diversity and inclusion program, dialogues sessions are framed

as a solution that bring change in thoughts, assumptions, and views of employees to eventually foster diversity and inclusion within the department. Despite the commitment and good intention of some employees that participate, we have seen that different definitions of 'diversity' and 'inclusion' can lead to miscommunications about these concepts in conversations. The diversity and inclusion fatigue and the normative use of these terms, cause employees to assume its definition while they rarely give the actual interpretation of these terms during such conversations. Next to that, the way employees position themselves in relation to the subject of diversity and inclusion also determines their response to the topic. We have seen that employees who consider themselves to be part of the norm, tend to feel uncomfortable in conversations about diversity and inclusion and accordingly find it difficult to discuss or to reflect on their experiences concerning this subject. On the other hand, employees that are considered to 'be diverse' and who identify themselves as deviating from the norm, feel obliged to commit to diversity and inclusion by sharing their personal experiences. Yet, whether these employees allow themselves to be vulnerable during these conversations by sharing their experiences, depends on if they feel understood or supported by people leading the conversations or the people participating in these conversations. We have seen that these divergent responses from differently positioned employees currently lead to superficial and unproductive conversations. It means that for these conversations to become productive, the diversity and inclusion team needs to put more effort in and gain more expertise on how to facilitate a safe space for differently positioned employees within these conversations.

To answer the question of why it is so difficult to implement an effective diversity and inclusion policy or program, we can thus conclude that the factors in the implementation process that make this so difficult concern the framing and implementation of these programs as discussed in academic literature. I would argue that the main obstruction encompasses 'happy talk', both in the formulation and in the enactment of the diversity and inclusion program. From academic literature on diversity management, it can be determined that the effectiveness of these programs and policies lies within the balance that diversity management can keep, between coming across as friendly and accessible, while addressing real-life embedded issues concerning social injustice, racism, discrimination, and exclusion. Nonetheless, it can easily tilt towards one side of the scale. Which I have demonstrated to be the case within this department. Additionally, I argued that the position someone has regarding the topic of diversity and inclusion also very much determines how they engage with the diversity and inclusion program and what they accordingly need from it. The emphasis on assumed solutions and the embracing of a considerable range of 'differences' leaves limited room for the organization to scrutinize and challenge the existing structural inequalities, wherein lies the actual problem and difficulty of implementing an effective diversity and inclusion policy or program. Diversity and inclusion thus not only function as a solution for organizations but simultaneously can become a problem in itself.

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