

# The Influence of the Normative Gender Binary in Diversity Management: Including Gender Diversity in Human Resources

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**Abstract**—Human resources, especially diversity management, play a significant role in the recruitment, retainment, and management of transgender and gender diverse individuals in organisations. Although, the inclusion of transgender and gender diversity as part of gender identity diversity has been mostly neglected within the diversity management practice and research. One reason is cisnormative gender binarism that limits inclusive diversity and human resource management which leads to the exclusion and discrimination of transgender and gender diverse employees. This qualitative multi-method research found three stages of diversity management to engage with transgender and gender diversity in the organisational context: intuitive, reactive, and proactive. While the influence of cisnormative gender binarism and the awareness of transgender and gender diversity varies between these three forms, the application of the queering approach to diversity management could increase the inclusion of gender identity diversity beyond the gender binary.

**Keywords**—Cisnormativity, diversity management, gender binarism, transgender, gender diversity.

## I. INTRODUCTION

DIVERSITY management, as a substantial element of human resource management, aims to secure the economic benefit that assumingly comes with a diverse workforce. Consequently, diversity managers focus on the protection of employees and securing equality measurements to assure organizational gender diversity. Gender diversity as one aspect of diversity management seems to adhere to gender binarism and cisnormativity. Workplaces are gendered spaces [1], [2] which are echoing the binary gender-normativity presented in diversity management, sold under the label of gender diversity. While the expectation of diversity management implies the inclusion of a multiplicity of marginalized groups, such as transgender and gender diverse people, in current literature and practice, the reality is curated by gender binarism and cisnormativity.

Diversity management generally refers to the planned and systematic responsibility ‘by organizations to recruit, retain, reward, and promote a heterogenous mix of employees’ [3]. Although, the economic benefit for organizations [4], [5] seems to continuously be the main focus of diversity management. Diversity management can be characterized as a facet of human resource management with the inherent task to

secure diversity concerning recruitment, talent management, workforce planning as well as learning and development opportunities.

The consideration of diversity encouraged by the business case limits the address of matters for a diverse workforce [6]. Working mainly towards the employers’ interest could potentially risk the loss of employee satisfaction and engagement as transgender and gender diverse specific matters are overlooked. Hence, productivity, innovation, and profitability could decrease as diversity management limited to the cisnormative gender binary hurts all organizational stakeholders as it should be argued in the following.

This paper includes a literature review discussing the relation between diversity management and cisnormative gender binarism as well as the beneficial application of the queering approach to increase inclusion of transgender and gender diverse employees to human resource management. After introducing the methodology of the research project, findings from transgender and gender diverse perspectives regarding diversity management as well as the assessment of organizational and management personnel on gender identity diversity are presented as three stages of diversity management. The discussion of the results demonstrates the influence of cisnormative gender binarism on diversity management and the improvement of such by applying a queering approach to research and practice. The paper concludes by naming limitations of the research and future research as well as summarizing the significance of gender identity diversity as part of authentic diversity management.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Transgender and gender diverse individuals are experiencing one of the highest extents of discrimination, stigmatization, and exclusion in employment [7]. Additionally, considerations of gender identity diversity in the organizational context by diversity and human resource managers are limited to either a more generic Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) agenda [8], [9] or the equality agenda of women [4] in the workforce. Köllen [4] stated that diversity management and diversity research adhere to a cisnormative gender binary and miss the opportunity to increase awareness and inclusion for gender identity diversity beyond the binary of woman/man and female/male. Consequently, transgender and gender diverse matters are overlooked or considered in a minimalistic fashion.

Cisnormativity and gender binarism are two dominant

social norms subjected to diversity and human resource management. Cisnormativity reflects the understanding of only two existing gender identities – woman and man – which are consistently aligned with the sex assigned at birth – female and male [10]. Hence, transgender identities that reflect the gender affirmation of the opposite sex assigned at birth such as female-to-male and male-to-female or gender diverse identities which are gender identities beyond the binary of sex and gender, are excluded and even socially punished [11]. Gender binarism norms the understanding of gender limited to the dualism of woman-man [12] that excruciates any gender expressions beyond or between the gender binary linguistically or physically. Within the literature of diversity management studies, gender diversity and gender identity diversity are mainly understood within the cisnormative gender binary as these papers exemplify: [13]-[15]. Diversity management and human resources could overcome such limitations of the cisnormative gender binary by extending their inclusiveness to transgender and gender diverse individuals in the organizational context.

Diversity management includes the recognition and the management of diversity by applying processes of inclusion. Kirton [16] states that ‘diversity is defined as concerned with recognizing the value of differences and managing them for commercial advantage, while inclusion is concerned with the processes that incorporate differences within business practices.’ The assignments of diversity management extend the primary aim of recruiting a diverse workforce by the even more critical task of managing and maintaining [17] gender identity diversity in the organizational context. Ozturk and Tatli [7] stressed that ‘gender identity diversity [is] a key blind spot in human resource management (HRM) and diversity management research and practice.’ Hence, gender identity diversity needs to be critically unpacked from a theoretical and practical perspective [18] by learning more about the experiences and matters of transgender and gender diverse individuals.

Organizational and management literature demonstrated the relation between diversity management or human resources along with transgender and gender diverse individuals. Van de Cauter et al. [19] stated five topics that influence the relation between transgender and gender diverse employees and human resource management: binary thinking, negative career implications, support, implications of policies, as well as knowledge of transgender and gender diverse issues. These aspects have further influence on the career development of transgender and gender diverse individuals and lead to ‘turnover, compromising, and accommodating for less through education, by going the extra mile at work, or being a model employee, being absent from work, or being unemployed.’ [19] Consequently, diversity management and human resources could increase transgender and gender diverse inclusion by modelling an inclusive practice for the employees [20].

Not all organizations have the luxury of a separate diversity management section in their human resource portfolio. Smaller organizations do not even have a human resource

portfolio as tasks like recruitment and personnel management are part of the leadership group. Effective diversity management installed via diversity policies has been proven to increase staff retention and motivation; lower recruitment costs; improve employer image as well as expand the accessibility to the talent pool [21]. Furthermore, specific benefits rise from effective diversity management and human resources for the individual such as feeling valued and recognized, job satisfaction, better career opportunities, increased morale and trust in employer, less stress and conflict between work and family commitments, as well as respect for differences [22].

Diversity management is attentive to the big six identity categories of diversity: ethnicity, religion, age, disability, gender, and sexual orientation [23]. Bendl et al. [24] asserted that ‘the term “diversity” is usually conceptualized along different demographic dimensions, which are considered fixed and establish social and functional differences between individuals or groups.’ Consequently, diversity management is limited to the fixed and established cisnormativity and gender binarism through to the construction of sex-gender dualism. Although, the queer perspective to diversity management can identify existing power structures of social norms that otherwise lead to further discrimination of transgender and gender diverse individuals. Hence, existing gender stereotypes and prejudices can be problematized to increase the inclusion of transgender and gender diverse employees in the workplace.

Bendl et al. [23] state that ‘queering is especially well-suited for unpacking the diversity management discourse and its implicit assumptions about identity because it strives to deconstruct the functions of binary categories in different contexts and hierarchical social structures.’ The queering approach represents a critical dismantling and disrupting of demographic categories and normative knowledge [25]. Queering diversity management shall not lead to a gender identity neutrality or replacement of the gender binary with another binary such as cis/trans or trans binary/gender diverse. Queering diversity management aims to reflect on existing power structures and apply normative knowledge. Via the dismantling of the taken-for-granted conception of gender, it offers the opportunity to deconstruct, reconstruct and extend the knowledge about gender identity diversity. Consequently, interviews with transgender and gender diverse individuals offered such dismantling reflexivity on the understanding of diversity management within the cisnormative gender binary framework. These insights have been applied to the assessment concerning the awareness of gender identity diversity of practitioners working in diversity, human resources, and personnel management.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The research consisted out of a qualitative multi-method approach. Two studies have been conducted to interrelate the transgender and gender diverse-specific work experiences with the organizational awareness regarding gender diversity. The first study consisted of 22 semi-structured, online

interviews with transgender and gender diverse participants from diverse cultural, demographic, and occupational backgrounds. The second study conducted a photo-elicited, open-ended questionnaire with organizational and management personnel of diversity management, human resources, and career development to evaluate their awareness of gender diversity and inclusion in the organizational context. Researcher-conducted photos were developed and guided by insights from the previous interviews with transgender and gender diverse participants which represented various enablers and barriers of their work experiences and career development. Most of these enablers and barriers could be directly influenced by diversity managers and human resource personnel if they could identify the relation to gender identity diversity.

Both studies have been analysed via critical grounded theory to identify organizational power structures and social norms. The critical grounded theory approach aligns with the principles of critical diversity studies that critiques unequal power structures in organizational context [26] and encourages the empowerment of marginalized groups such as transgender and gender diverse employees. Additionally, a critical grounded theory approach allowed emancipation of the participants' voices. The data analysis has been a two-cycle process to identify specific actions, processes, and patterns concerning gender identity diversity concerning diversity management. Memo-writing has been a vital part of the analysis from the beginning of the first study. Findings regarding diversity management and human resources concerning transgender and gender diverse identities follow.

#### IV. FINDINGS

The interviews with transgender and gender diverse individuals gave insight into the relation of diversity management as well as human resources and cisnormative gender binary by exposing three stages. If an organization has existing diversity management or human resource department, it can be characterized as intuitive, reactive, or proactive regarding gender identity diversity.

Before elaborating the three characteristics, it should be mentioned that the absence of diversity or human resource management led to discriminatory and exclusive behaviour being unrecognized or unaddressed as well as diversity and inclusion initiatives or communication unattended as Taiga Tagish, one of the transgender and gender diverse interview participants, explained: "and there were no well-established HR systems, and there was a culture of tolerating (or at least not recognizing) inappropriate behaviour." Hence, the existence of diversity management and human resources in itself can increase the awareness of inclusion for transgender and gender diversity.

If diversity management or human resource exists, it can be characterized as intuitive by applying the tick box approach which implies that a minimum of actions is provided, or it may end with lip service. Such confines could emerge from limited knowledge about transgender and gender diverse identities which led to frustration for one of the interviewees

Ann as it should go beyond the inherent job qualifications of diversity and human resource managers: "if you work in HR and you don't know about transgender and non-binary issues, and gender diversity, it is like, 'are you keeping up with the human resources industry?'" The lack of knowledge can increase the risk of discrimination and risk for transgender and gender diverse employees as there is publicly certain compliance with diversity and inclusion but limited to the cisnormative gender binary. Nathan expressed this danger: "I worked in organizations that will spouse the rigor of inclusion, but it is just to tick a box and actually, all the people administrating the policy are straight and they don't consult with staff, and they don't care. And those organizations are sometimes worse because you might accept the job with an organization thinking that it is an organization that has diversity and inclusion policies and then you been still discriminate against in the end." Furthermore, it demonstrates that transgender and gender diversity are a separate matter of gender identity diversity and the high influence of cisnormative gender binarism on diversity initiatives.

Diversity management can also be characterized as reactive which represents human resources as the law enforcement of the organization. Human resources and diversity management seem to be reliable when transgender and gender diverse staff members need reinforcement regarding anti-discrimination policies such as JJ, another interview participant, said: "if they keep doing it [misgendering] and it is malicious then I might have to go and talk to the manager or HR" and Lailoken's Daughter expressed: "I went and had a talk in person with them [a colleague] and 'please, don't call me by that name again, otherwise we are going to have talks in HR because it is not ok'." Unfortunately, human resources and diversity management seem to be rather loyal to the employer which could lead to a lack of support for transgender and gender diverse employees as the interviewee Sam elaborated: "HR was not really for the employees, they were very much for the employers so." Mostly, there are no effective systems or structures in place to support transgender and gender diverse employees while gender affirmation in the workplace results in reactive and targeted approaches that could be perceived as punishment for other team members as Taiga Tagish explained: "and/or people who have on their team someone who is coming out or transitioning, and HR made them go to this training to kind of introduce them to the issues and show them what is appropriate behaviour and what's not ... that kind of approach seems very reactive and prescriptive, almost like punishment." Hence, transgender and gender diversity initiatives are rather an add-on to gender identity diversity than holistically considered. Additionally, transgender and gender diverse individuals could become the diversity hire due to their distinctiveness to the cisnormative gender binary.

Lastly, diversity management and human resources can be characterized as proactive which serves the purpose of building bridges between employer, employee, and other stakeholders. Furthermore, diversity management invests dynamic effort to showcase the organizational value of diversity which attracts transgender and gender diverse

employees as the interview participant Charlie explained: “making an actual point of showcase diversity shows people, ‘Do apply, do try to get a job here. We are welcoming, we are ready for you, just come in.’ I think employers shouldn’t assume that we are giving them the benefit of the doubt, because why would we?” Reduction of tokenism and an overall increase of inclusion could be achieved by recruiting employees who value diversity, inclusion, and equality including required skill sets than primarily on the representation of gender identity diversity. Tyler, a transgender and gender diverse participant of the interviews, described that one of their interview questions for a job has been about their positioning regarding diversity as the organization highly values diversity. The vital organizational value of diversity has resulted in a positive experience of Tyler’s gender affirmation: “it really mattered to people and HR that it went well, they would actively put a lot of effort into making sure they did everything right and smoothly.” A proactive diversity management balances between the individuals’ needs and uniqueness, as well as the organizational standard support taking responsibility for the organizational practices while the gender affirmation is in process. Such reflectiveness has the benefit to avoid organizational cisnormative gender binarism reinforced through diversity management and human resources.

The open-ended photo-elicited survey with organizational and management personnel showed examples of all three forms of diversity management. The intuitive level of the tick box approach for diversity management is represented through the limitation of understanding gender identity diversity beyond

the cisnormative gender binary as this example illustrates: “Gender diversity means gender within the workplace is representative of the wider community. 50/50 minimum. It means that there is no such thing as woman’s work or men’s work.” A rather reactive approach of diversity management is represented via this response: “There is currently no org[anization] wide understanding of trans\* and gender diversity - it is considered and approached on an individual basis.” It showcases that there are no fundamental structures in place to support transgender and gender diverse employees. Also, an individual approach can be beneficial it might leave all responsibility to the transgender and gender diverse employees for their organizational inclusion. An example of the proactive - bridge-building approach shows in this response: “We are on a journey as it relates to improving our consultation and engagement with our trans and gender diverse staff. We have made significant inroads with relation to this, particularly with our gender affirmation policy and guidelines - however – there’s more to be done, in particular with relation to embedded forms and processes which subscribe to the gender binary.” They seem to be aware of the influence of cisnormative gender binarism by reflecting on its embeddedness in organizational structures and processes.

#### V. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The discussed findings of the three stages of diversity management – intuitive, reactive, and proactive – are summarized in Table I and further discussed in the following.

TABLE I  
 THREE STAGES OF DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

	Intuitive	Reactive	Proactive
Approach	Tick box	Law enforcement	Bridge-building
Actions	Minimum of actions Lip service	Targeted actions Employer loyalty	Holistic actions Flexible balance
Awareness of transgender and gender diversity	Separate matter to gender identity diversity Lack of knowledge	In addition to gender identity diversity Resulting in diversity pick and tokenism	Inclusion in gender identity diversity The overall value of diversity, inclusion, and equality
Cisnormative gender binarism	Highly influential via lacking reflection	Reflection and correction through transgender and gender diverse employee engagement	Conscious reflection and elimination of influence by various stakeholders

Previously, the five topics stated by Van de Cauter et al. [19] that influence the relationship between transgender and gender diverse employees and diversity as well as human resource management have been introduced. The five topics are binary thinking, negative career implications, support, implications of policies, as well as knowledge of transgender and gender diverse issues. These topics, combined with the findings of this research, showcase how the influence of cisnormative gender binarism and awareness of transgender and gender diversity lead to different levels of quality for diversity management and human resources. The support including implications of policies demonstrates the current stage and approach or variety of actions the diversity management can provide. Intuitive diversity management can have negative consequences for transgender and gender

diverse individuals’ career development as they might get overlooked for promotion [18], [27]. Alternatively, reactive human resources could recruit transgender and gender diverse people to increase the representation of organizational diversity but not be equipped to provide a safe, fair, and/or comfortable work environment for rising gender identity diversity. The limited knowledge and skill set of reactive human resource managers could result in negative implications for the career development of transgender and gender diverse employees and furthermore for their well-being [28] and health. Consequently, the awareness of transgender and gender diverse issues is the basis to create an inclusive work environment where diversity and equity are valued in an organization, and also be expected to be respected by employees working within that organization. The supported

value of diversity by all organizational stakeholders has as a consequence that binary thinking or cisnormative gender binarism is reflected on and approached for an inclusive change by everyone. Hence, the inclusion of gender identity diversity is not merely the responsibility of diversity management or human resources.

The queering approach has been suggested as an attempt to correct the limitations of cisnormative gender binarism on diversity management. Moreover, the queering approach [29], [30] may support the development of diversity management to become proactive by building bridges between different power structures and reflecting on organizational norms and values. The queering approach could guide a reflection of existing cisnormative gender binarism inwoven in organizational structures, spaces, communication, and processes. The queering approach accounts for a flexible and extensive style that would support the development of proactive diversity and human resource management.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The qualitative multi-method research showed a lack of knowledge about transgender and gender diverse matters within the profession of diversity management and human resources. The semi-structured interviews with transgender and gender diverse individuals from various backgrounds and occupations in Australia exposed missing considerations of transgender and gender diverse experiences in the inclusivity and gender equity of various workplaces. Even if practitioners consider transgender and gender diverse matters under gender diversity, the practical execution is limited to gender binary structures and cisnormative actions as the photo-elicited questionnaire with diversity managers, human resource officers, and personnel management demonstrated.

The three stages of diversity management – intuitive, reactive, and proactive – have not been tested or validated. The stages of diversity management emerged from the semi-structured interviews with transgender and gender diverse individuals as well as the open-ended, photo-elicited questionnaires targeted at diversity management, human resources, career development and management personnel. Future research could explore the significance of the three stages of diversity management. Furthermore, the relationship between awareness and inclusion of transgender and gender diversity as well as the influence and persistence of cisnormative gender binarism in organizational context could be of interest for exploration.

Diversity management should approach a broader source of informed practice by extending their business focus to the knowledge of humanity studies. Humanity studies could include diversity, queer, or gender studies to increase the inclusivity of marginalised groups such as transgender and gender diverse people. Furthermore, the definition of gender diversity should be extended beyond the gender binary and cisnormative experience. People may lose trust in diversity management as a supportive ally of marginalised employees if the understanding of inclusivity is limited to a gender binary and cisnormativity value system that misrepresents the

richness of gender identity diversity.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article and furthermore declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication.

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