



SEINÄJOEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU  
SEINÄJOKI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

Piia Luopajarvi

---

## **Supporting Diversity Management through DEIB Awareness**

Case Study for a Public Organization in Finland

Master's Thesis

Spring 2025

Master of Business Administration,  
International Business Management IBM23



SEINÄJOKI UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

## Thesis abstract

Degree Programme: Master of Business Administration, International Business Management

Author: Piia Luopajarvi

Title of thesis: Supporting Diversity Management through DEIB Awareness

Supervisor: Emilia Kangas

Year: 2025

Number of p.s: 61

Number of appendices: 3

---

Diversity has been an important element in organizational management, internationally, since the 1960s. In recent years, research has expanded from an emphasis on diversity alone to the broader framework of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB). This shift has highlighted the importance of employees' experiences—specifically, the need to feel included, valued, and to be part of a group.

Previous studies challenge traditional hierarchical management approaches and highlight the benefits of inclusive leadership styles. Diversity initiatives contribute to this shift by enhancing organizational knowledge and awareness in this area.

This study is a case study focusing on Group Managers at a Finnish public organization. It examines the level of DEIB awareness and challenges they face in managing diversity. The end goal for this research was to lay the ground for new supportive educational materials for DEIB implementation.

The foundation of the research was laid by examining several theoretical frameworks, including Critical Management Studies, the Diversity Management Theory, and the Bias Theory. These perspectives provided a good foundation for the qualitative study, which was conducted through a survey and two sets of interviews.

The findings indicate that while participants possessed a fundamental awareness of DEIB concepts, their depth of understanding, or how to put the concepts in action, varied a great deal. The perception of the key benefits and challenges of diversity management for this group also showed variation, which is an indication of the fact that all of them could benefit from more awareness, especially on the practical side.

<sup>1</sup> Keywords: diversity, equity, Inclusion, belonging, diversity management

SEINÄJOEN AMMATTIKORKEAKOULU

## Opinnäytetyön tiivistelmä

Tutkinto-ohjelma: Master of Business Administration, International Business Management

Tekijä: Piia Luopajarvi

Työn nimi: Monimuotoisuuden johtamisen tukeminen DEIB-tietoisuuden avulla

Ohjaaja: Emilia Kangas

Vuosi: 2025

Sivumäärä: 61

Liitteiden lukumäärä: 3

---

Monimuotoisuus, eli diversiteetti, on ollut tärkeä elementti organisaatioiden johtamisessa, kansainvälisesti, 1960-luvulta lähtien. Viime vuosina diversiteettitutkimus on laajentunut monimuotoisuuden painottamisesta laajempaan monimuotoisuuden, tasa-arvon, osallisuuden ja yhteenkuuluvuuden (DEIB) viitekehukseen. Tämä muutos on korostanut työntekijöiden kokemusten merkitystä – erityisesti tarvetta tuntea itsensä osalliseksi, arvostetuksi ja ryhmään kuuluvaksi.

Aikaisemmat tutkimukset haastavat perinteiset hierarkkiset johtamismallit ja korostavat inklusiivisten johtamistyylien hyötyjä. Monimuotoisuuteen liittyvät aloitteet edistävät tätä muutosta lisäämällä organisaation tuntemusta ja tietoisuutta tällä alueella.

Tämä tutkimus on tapaustutkimus, joka keskittyy suomalaisen julkisen organisaation esihenkilöihin. Tutkimus tarkastelee heidän DEIB-tietoisuutensa tasoa ja haasteita, joita he kohtaavat monimuotoisuuden johtamisessa. Tutkimuksen päätavoitteena oli luoda pohjaa uusille työssä tukeville DEIB-oppimateriaaleille.

Tutkimuksen teoreettinen viitekehys luotiin tarkastelemalla useita eri teorioita, kuten kriittistä johtamistutkimusta, monimuotoisuuden johtamisen teoriaa ja teoriaa ennakkoluuloista. Nämä näkökulmat tarjosivat hyvän perustan laadulliselle tutkimukselle, joka toteutettiin kyselyllä ja kahdella haastattelukierroksella.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että vaikka osallistujilla oli perusymmärrys DEIB-käsitteistä, ymmärryksen syvyys ja ymmärrys käsitteiden käytäntöön viemisestä vaihtelivat suuresti. Tämän ryhmän käsitykset monimuotoisuuden johtamisen keskeisistä hyödyistä ja haasteista vaihtelivat myös, mikä osoittaa, että kaikki voisivat hyötyä paremmasta tietoisuudesta, erityisesti käytännön puolella.

<sup>1</sup> Asiasanat: monimuotoisuus, yhdenvertaisuus, osallisuus, yhteenkuuluvuus, diversiteetti johtaminen

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Thesis abstract .....	2
Opinnäytetyön tiivistelmä .....	3
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	4
Pictures, Figures and Tables .....	6
Terms and Abbreviations .....	7
1 Introduction .....	8
1.1 Background and aim of the thesis .....	9
1.2 Research question, objectives and overlay matrix .....	9
2 Theoretical framework of Managing diversity.....	11
2.1 Critical management studies (CMS).....	12
2.2 The Evolution of Diversity Management.....	13
2.3 DEIB in a workplace .....	14
2.3.1 Benefits of DEIB.....	16
2.3.2 Challenges of DEIB initiatives .....	19
2.4 Understanding and embracing Diversity in management.....	20
2.5 Navigating cognitive landscapes in management.....	23
2.5.1 Biases .....	23
2.5.2 Prejudice and stigmas.....	26
2.6 Diversity in Finland .....	26
2.6.1 Diversity in Finnish workplaces .....	27
2.6.2 Diversity legislation in Finland.....	28
3 Introduction of the case organization .....	30
3.1 Personnel in case organization .....	30
3.2 Equality and Non-Discrimination plan of case company.....	33
3.2.1 Current state of equality .....	33
3.2.2 Steps in the plan .....	35
4 Methodology.....	36
4.1 Research approach.....	36

4.2	Methods of Data collection .....	37
4.2.1	Survey.....	38
4.2.2	Interviews.....	38
4.3	Ethical and privacy issues .....	41
4.4	Method for Analysis.....	41
4.5	The Research process .....	42
5	Findings.....	44
5.1	Survey.....	44
5.1.1	Challenges and benefits in workplace diversity.....	44
5.1.2	Essentials in Leadership of a diverse teams .....	46
5.1.3	Knowing the basics .....	48
5.1.4	Theory into practice .....	49
5.1.5	Need of Support and training .....	50
5.2	Interview.....	52
5.2.1	Interview of the equality-group .....	52
5.2.2	Interview of foreign Tax Administrations .....	53
6	Discussion.....	57
6.1	The Current state of the DEIB knowledge.....	57
6.2	Benefits and challenges of DEIB adaptation in case organization .....	58
6.3	DEIB adaptation in the case organization .....	58
6.4	Mapping out the DEIB implementation among neighboring countries .....	59
6.5	Adding awareness through educative material.....	59
6.6	Limitations .....	60
7	Conclusion .....	61
	BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	62
8	Appendices .....	68

## Pictures, Figures and Tables

Figure 1. Theoretical framework of this thesis. ....	11
Figure 2. Benefits of DEIB, based on O'Donovan. ....	17
Figure 3. Systems of Inclusion. Based on Ferdman. ....	22
Figure 4. The FTA organization. ....	31
Figure 5. Development of the average age of FTA personnel. ....	31
Figure 6. FTA's job satisfaction index. ....	32
Figure 7. Gender distribution in FTA. ....	34
Figure 8. Process chart of the phases of the research. ....	43
Table 1. Overlay matrix. ....	10
Table 2. Countries participating in the study. ....	40
Table 3. Thematic approach adapted from Naeem et al (2023). ....	42
Table 4. Challenges of diversity in a workplace according to the respondents. ....	44
Table 5. Benefits of diversity in a workplace according to the respondents. ....	46

## Terms and Abbreviations

<b>CMS</b>	Critical Management studies
<b>DEI</b>	Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
<b>DEIB</b>	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging
<b>FTA</b>	Finnish Tax Administration
<b>FIOH</b>	Finnish Institute of Occupational Health

## 1 Introduction

Diversity is an increasingly significant factor in organizations, both globally and locally. In Finland, growing immigration rates have led to a notable demographic shift. According to Statistics Finland (2024b), by the end of 2023, 558 294 individuals in Finland spoke a foreign language as their native language, meaning that one in ten Finns speaks a foreign language. This development underscores Finland's cultural diversity and introduces new challenges for managing diverse staff, including within the public sector. As a result, traditional hierarchical management approaches must evolve, requiring leaders to adopt new skills and strategies.

O'Donovan (2018) acknowledges that diversity is not only cultural, nor merely what one sees or hears, but a multifaceted concept encompassing a broad spectrum of visible and non-visible characteristics that often emerge only through deeper interpersonal connections. A key challenge lies in effectively managing individuals with diverse backgrounds, attributes, and perspectives. This is particularly difficult for those who are unaccustomed to recognizing and addressing such differences.

Previous research highlights the challenges in implementing diversity management strategies, the biggest obstacle very often is the resistance to change (Garrick et al., 2024; Lahti, 2014, p. 67; O'Donovan, 2018, p.13). In order to make an impactful change, practically everything from recruiting to retention strategies need to be re-thought. Contemporary management theories critique traditional, one-size-fits-all hierarchical approaches, advocating instead for inclusive leadership that emphasizes empowerment, equity, and social justice. By implementing a top-down diversity management strategy and securing the commitment of senior management, organizations can reap significant benefits, improved employee retention, reduced absenteeism, and higher job satisfaction as an example (O'Donovan, 2018, p. 20).

According to Karlsted and Mennala (2024), highlighting Diversity initiatives in an organization is essential for several reasons. For a business to grow, it must stand out; to stand out, it needs innovation and fresh ideas; and to foster innovation, it requires a diverse workforce with varied skills. For the workforce to perform at their best, employees must

feel included and connected to the company's vision and greater purpose. Achieving this requires a firm commitment to inclusivity, with leaders who understand how to lead in an inclusive manner.

## **1.1 Background and aim of the thesis**

The case study organization in this thesis is a public sector organization that has recently raised the need for deeper Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) awareness in their organization. While initial steps have been taken as part of their Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan, further efforts are required. This study was initiated to assess DEIB awareness among group managers, serving as a foundation for educational material proposal, to help the managers develop a solid foundation on DEIB insights needed to lead a diverse workforce equitably, and foster inclusion and a sense of belonging among employees.

## **1.2 Research question, objectives and overlay matrix**

The research question of this thesis is:

**What are the challenges and prospects of managers' Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) adaptation in the case organization?**

The specific objectives derived from the research question are as follows:

O1: To map out the current state of DEIB knowledge in the case organization.

O2: To identify the benefits and challenges of DEIB adaptation for managers in the case organization.

O3: To investigate the prospects of managers' DEIB adaptation in the case organization.

The overlay matrix (Table 1) pinpoints the chapters that are discussing around each specific objects.

Table 1. Overlay matrix.

Research objectives	Theoretical framework (chapter)	Research findings (chapter)	Interview questions	Survey questions
O1: To map out the current state of DEIB knowledge in the case organization.	2.4, 2.5	5.1.1, 5.1.2, 5.1.3, 6.1		1,4,6,8,9,10
O2: To identify the benefits and challenges of DEIB adaptation for managers in the case organization.	2.3	5.1, 6.2		2,3,4
O3: To investigate the prospects of managers' DEIB adaptation in the case organization.	2.4, 2.5	5.1.4, 5.1.5, 5.2, 6.3	Appendix 2 Q 1,2,3,4 Appendix 3 Q 1,2,3,4	9,10,11,12



## 2.1 Critical management studies (CMS)

According to Akella (2018), Critical Management Studies (CMS), formed in the 1990's (Malin et al., 2010), seeks to challenge the traditional management theories, values, and assumptions. Malin et al. (2010) emphasize that CMS fosters open discussion around the often-unquestioned beliefs that shape mainstream management thinking. Alvesson and Willmott (2003, p. 3) describe CMS as "inclusive, pluralistic movement" among diverse critical approaches.

At its core, according to Malin et al. (2010), CMS critically examines traditional management practices to expose and address systemic discrimination, exploitation, and inequities within organizations. It aims to empower employees by reducing the harm, frustration, and suffering caused by such practices. By analyzing power dynamics, control mechanisms, politics, gender inequalities, and other organizational behaviors, CMS challenges the legitimacy of practices often justified in the name of efficiency, effectiveness, and profitability. Instead, it advocates for more equitable workplace practices that prioritize inclusivity, empowerment, and social justice (Akella, 2008).

In essence, according to Akella (2008), CMS emphasizes the need for moral commitment in the practice and profession of management. It encourages leaders to create ethical, fair, and inclusive environments while remaining mindful of systemic biases. Through ongoing debates on diverse management orientations, CMS continuously seeks better approaches that align with its vision of equity and justice in organizations.

This thesis focuses on a specific branch of management within the broader scope of CMS: **Diversity management.**

## 2.2 The Evolution of Diversity Management

The historical overview shown on this chapter demonstrates briefly how diversity management has evolved from addressing legal compliance to becoming a strategic, multifaceted approach to fostering equitable and inclusive workplaces.

According to Karlsted and Mennala (2024, p. 26), many people are unfamiliar with DEI terminology and may find it intimidating. Morukian (2022, p. 2) states that understanding and implementing DEI initiatives demands an awareness of how history has influenced our experiences of the world and a balance of strategy and storytelling.

### From 1960's to 2020s'

The history of diversity management has its roots all the way back in the 1960s in U.S., a period marked by societal movements and legal changes that prohibited workplace discrimination, primarily focusing on race-related issues (Nkomo 2013, p. 581; Kratz, 2024; Morukian, 2022, pp. 7–8). By the 1970s and 1980s, as more women entered the workforce, the concept started to expand into gender and eventually beyond gender and racial issues to welcoming a wider range of diversity, including ethnic, religious and LGBTQ+ (Kratz, 2024; Morukian, 2022, p.910).

According to Nkomo (2013, p. 584), the 1990s marked a pivotal shift in research of diversity and broadening of areas to study. Scholars examined topics like the benefits of diversity in business, experiences of different racial and ethnic groups, workplace diversity, LGBTQ+ identity, global diversity, and new critical perspectives.

Between 1990s' and early 2000s was a period of professionalization of diversity management, with job titles like "Chief Diversity Officer" becoming more common (Nkomo, 2013, p. 584; Morukian, 2022, p.12). More organizations started recognizing the significance of embracing diversity and the risks of neglecting it, and the terms like "multiculturalism" and "cultural competence" to describe the skills required to lead diverse teams and organizations, were introduced (Morukian 2022, p.12). The 2000s was also the beginning of the rise of social media (Edosomwan et al., 2011), which enabled everyone to share their opinions about all things in their work to a wide audience (Morukian 2022, p.15). According

to Morukian (2022, p.14), in the early 21st century the growing popularity of research and books on corporate culture change and leadership expanded awareness and appreciation of concepts like emotional intelligence and empathy. Studies on neuropsychology, unconscious bias, and implicit associations began appearing in diversity training, offering new insights into how our brains are wired for prejudice and automatic judgment.

The 2010s were shaped by powerful social movements like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter, which highlighted social injustices within professional environments (Morukian 2022, p.14). At that time also businesses realized that reflecting societal diversity in their workforce was essential for competitiveness and success. Diversity efforts expanded to include multicultural marketing, community engagement, and inclusion training (Kratz, 2024).

According to Richmond (2022), the 2020s brought further transformation, driven by the global pandemic. The shift to remote and hybrid work has brought DEI challenges in the workplace to light. Before the pandemic, leaders often overlooked remote employees' contributions and career aspirations due to their physical absence from the office. Now, there is a growing awareness of this gap and increased appreciation for remote workers, who are often just as productive—if not more—than their in-office counterparts.

### **2.3 DEIB in a workplace**

According to O'Donovan (2018, p. 1), diversity, at its core, refers to differences. These differences manifest in various ways—some are visible, such as gender, skin colour, age, race, or physical ability, while others are less apparent, such as neurodiversity, religion, or sexual orientation. Diversity can be challenging because it is subjective, shaped by how individuals perceive and categorize others as similar to or different from themselves. Diversity is also selective, context-dependent, and relative. Certain characteristics, such as cultural background or physical abilities, are often emphasized more than others. Furthermore, diversity is not an inherent trait of an individual but rather becomes relevant when viewed in relation to their environment.

Although diversity encompasses many dimensions, much of the existing research focuses on a limited scope, typically gender and ethnicity (Jackson & Joshi, 2011, p. 655). This

narrow focus often overlooks the broader range of diversity dimensions that could impact workplace dynamics. Additionally, diversity alone does not necessarily result in positive outcomes (Hedayat, 2020). Studies suggest that achieving benefits from diversity requires complementary factors such as inclusivity, thoughtful management, and proactive efforts to value the unique perspectives of employees across various demographics (Ferdman et al., 2013; Hedayat, 2020).

According to Schreane (2021, p. 2), creating a compassionate organizational culture is key to leveraging diversity effectively. Such a culture encourages employees to feel valued, included, and treated with respect, enabling them to contribute innovative solutions to business challenges. Compassion involves embedding equality, inclusion, and kindness into the organization's core principles and practices at all levels. While equality and inclusion are distinct concepts, they are interconnected and often enhance one another within compassionate workplaces.

Schreane (2021, p. 4) points out that equity provides individuals with the specific resources or support they need to achieve fairness. Equity naturally arises in workplaces that actively embrace diversity, inclusion, and equality, serving as a byproduct of effective diversity management.

A fundamental human need is the sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Morukian, 2022, p. 4). Yeoman et al. (2019) remark that individuals with strong social connections tend to experience greater emotional well-being, life satisfaction, and improved mental and physical health. Conversely, loneliness or exclusion can lead to negative outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and feelings of anger or shame. Chamorro Premuzic and Berg (2021) remind that as adults spend a significant portion of their lives at work, job or career's meaning and purpose significantly impact an individual's overall well-being. Employees who feel a sense of belonging—through alignment with organizational values and the freedom to express their identities—perform better, demonstrate higher engagement, and experience greater job satisfaction. These findings underscore the importance of fostering belongingness in the workplace.

O'Donovan (2018, p. 2) states that belonging is not a static or universal experience. Employees can feel simultaneously included and excluded, depending on the context. For instance, an individual may feel a strong sense of inclusion within their immediate team but less so within the broader organization. This dynamic nature of inclusion highlights the ongoing effort required to cultivate an inclusive culture. Even organizations committed to diversity and inclusion may unintentionally leave individuals feeling excluded. Thus, promoting inclusion demands continuous attention and adaptability at all organizational levels.

According to O'Donovan (2018, p. 19), organizations are encouraged to foster a culture that promotes open communication between employees and managers. Since inclusion is a subjective experience, employees are the most qualified to provide insights into what inclusion truly means within the organization.

### **2.3.1 Benefits of DEIB**

Forbes' Expert panel (2022) noted that with the recent focus on racial justice and equality in the world, many businesses have renewed their commitment to diversity initiatives. However, for these initiatives to be effective, they stress the need to require support across the entire organization. Employees are more likely to engage with diversity efforts when they understand the potential advantages, making it essential for company leaders to communicate these benefits to their teams. Figure 2 highlights some of the most important advantages of implementing DEIB practices within an organization.

O'Donovan (2018, p. 6) states that financial health is a priority for every organization, and implementing diversity initiatives can significantly enhance this aspect by fostering a workplace where employees feel valued and supported. When employees experience psychological safety and engagement, absenteeism decreases, and retention improves. On the other hand, a lack of psychological safety leads to high costs associated with absenteeism, turnover, and the recruitment, onboarding, and training of new hires.

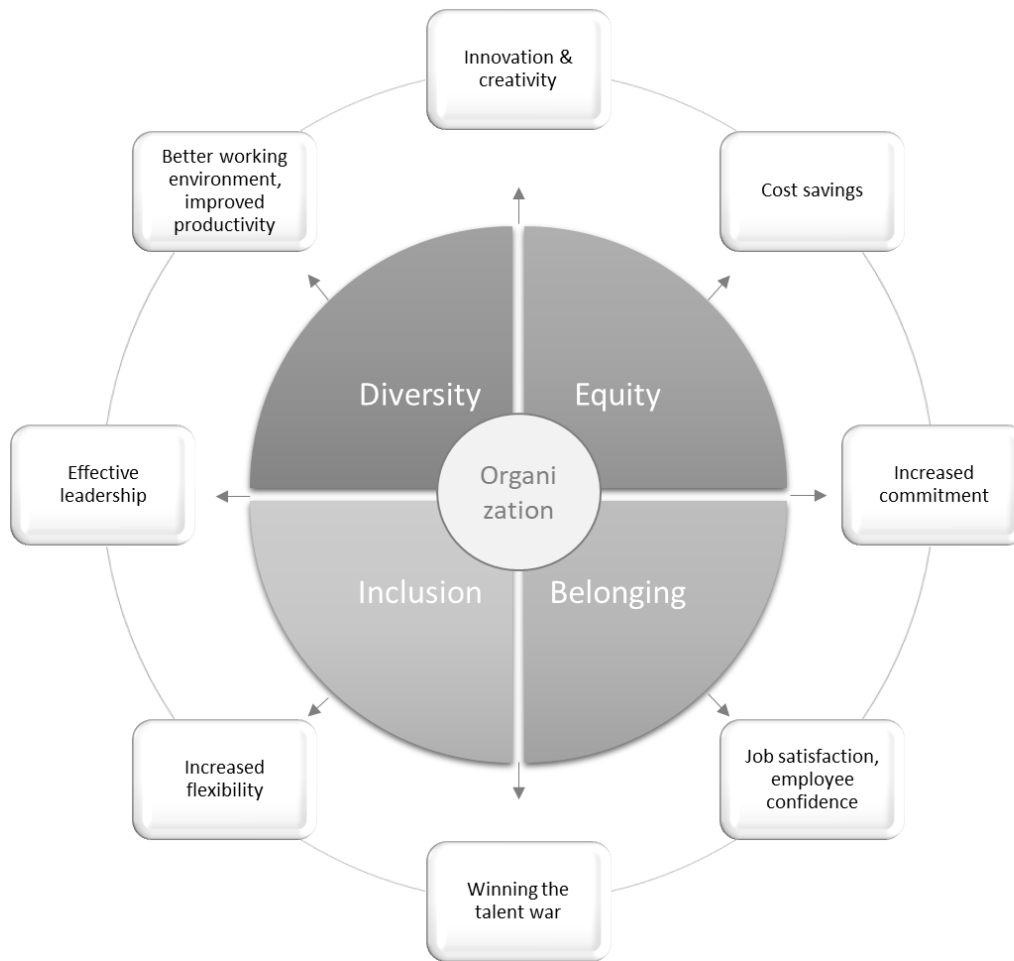


Figure 2. Benefits of DEIB, based on O'Donovan (2018).

A key benefit of DEIB according to O'Donovan (2018, p. 6) is its ability to attract and retain top talent—often referred to as "winning the talent war." Inclusive workplaces that respect and value individual contributions become highly appealing to prospective employees, offering a sense of belonging and opportunity (Tessema et al., 2023). According to Lahti (2014, p 57) and O'Donovan (2018, p. 7) even the current employees are more likely to feel more committed to stay with an organization where they feel appreciated, supported, and empowered to thrive. This not only reduces turnover costs but also enhances the company's reputation as an employer of choice, strengthening its ability to recruit and retain the best talent in the industry (O'Donovan, 2018, p. 7).

O' Donovan (2018, p. 10) stated that when employees feel valued, treated fairly, and given equal opportunities, their performance improves, ultimately benefiting the organization. Conversely, unfair treatment of even one team member can negatively affect the whole team morale, collaboration, and productivity. By prioritizing fairness and inclusion,

organizations create environments where everyone can perform at their best, driving collective success (Lahti, 2014, p. 66).

A diverse workforce brings together individuals with varied perspectives, backgrounds, and ways of thinking, enriching the organization with fresh ideas and innovative solutions (O'Donovan, 2018, p. 7). Research consistently shows that diverse teams are more creative and effective at problem-solving than homogenous teams (Lahti, 2014, p. 56). According to O'Donovan (2018, p. 8) beyond enhancing team performance, diversity initiatives also foster impactful leadership. Diverse leaders, drawing from their own varied experiences, are often better equipped to connect with and relate to a diverse workforce, promoting a sense of empathy and understanding. According to Lahti (2014, p. 57) representation in leadership has profound effects on employee engagement and satisfaction. When employees see leaders with shared backgrounds or experiences succeeding, it inspires confidence in their own potential and fosters a deeper sense of commitment. This dynamic strengthens both individual and organizational growth.

Additionally, according to O'Donovan (2018, p.13) diversity management enhances organizational flexibility and adaptability. By supporting diverse employees and embracing inclusive practices, organizations often transition from rigid, standardized approaches to more fluid and responsive systems. This adaptability enables quicker and more cost-effective responses to environmental changes.

O'Donovan (2018, p. 13) also stresses the need for organizations to prioritize flexibility, such as family-friendly policies, work-life balance initiatives, career breaks, or job-sharing, which are better equipped to address challenges like skill shortages or economic downturns. These policies help retain talent while navigating uncertainties. However, workplace cultures that emphasize presenteeism can limit the uptake of flexible arrangements. Employees may fear that utilizing these options could harm their career prospects, undermining the potential benefits of such initiatives.

### 2.3.2 Challenges of DEIB initiatives

According to O'Donovan (2018, p. 11), managers implementing diversity initiatives (diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging) presents a range of challenges for managers and organizations. Managers today face sensitive issues that were less prominent or even nonexistent in the past, particularly within previously homogeneous workforces. Despite their critical role in driving diversity strategies, many managers receive insufficient training or support. As a result, they often take a reactive approach, focusing on basic compliance rather than proactively striving for the broader benefits of diversity. This lack of preparation and engagement hinders the effectiveness of DEIB initiatives, especially when top management fails to actively support and prioritize these efforts. Without visible commitment from leadership, diversity initiatives are unlikely to succeed, as they require sufficient allocation of human, financial, and technical resources (Tessema et al., 2023).

A major obstacle in advancing DEIB initiatives is resistance to change (Garrick et al., 2024; O'Donovan, 2018, p. 13). Embracing diversity requires organizations to reevaluate deeply ingrained practices and beliefs, including how they perceive others and how business is conducted. This can be uncomfortable for individuals and teams, as change often brings uncertainty. Successfully managing diversity involves revising recruitment and retention strategies and fostering a culture that values and accepts differences. While this process can be challenging, it is essential for promoting innovation and creating an inclusive and adaptive workplace.

While the benefits of DEIB, such as cost savings and enhanced organizational performance, are well-documented, implementing these initiatives can also incur significant costs (O'Donovan, 2018, p. 12). O'Donovan also enlists that expenses may include legal compliance measures, employee training programs, policy updates, and infrastructure improvements. Some costs, such as upgrading accessibility or purchasing specialized software, are one-time investments. However, ongoing expenses—such as hiring diversity specialists, providing continuous training, and maintaining support systems—can place a recurring financial burden on organizations. Despite these challenges, such investments are crucial for fostering an equitable and inclusive workplace.

Another challenge, according to Sharkey and Barrett (2017, p.15), lies in the potential for diversity initiatives to unintentionally backfire. For example, when organizations prioritize diversity goals, there can be a perception among some employees that hiring decisions are based on meeting quotas rather than selecting the most qualified candidates. This perception can undermine team cohesion and morale. Furthermore, new hires who feel they were chosen for reasons other than their qualifications may experience insecurity or defensiveness, leading to higher turnover rates (O'Donovan, 2018, p. 15). Such outcomes can offset the potential benefits of a diverse workforce and result in additional costs for the organization.

## **2.4 Understanding and embracing Diversity in management**

According to Ferdman (2013, p. 8), diversity brings significant benefits to organizations, but only when accompanied by changes in behaviors, group norms, and organizational practices that ensure individuals feel valued, respected, and included across all identity groups. While diversity has the potential to enhance creativity, innovation, and organizational performance, its effectiveness depends on how it is managed. If diversity is treated as a long-term strategic initiative, its advantages become more pronounced. However, when approached as a compliance-driven project, it risks backfiring. Effective implementation requires integrating diversity into the HR strategy and securing strong support from top management (Lahti, 2014, p. 56).

Not all forms of diversity are equal in their impact, Jackson and Joshi (2011, p. 653) remind that organizations must recognize that some forms offer greater benefits, while others may pose challenges requiring careful management. They also emphasize that the distribution of personal attributes among team members directly affects how teams' function and perform. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for leveraging diversity effectively.

The commonly held notion of treating others as you wish to be treated is challenged by O'Donovan (2017, p. 17), who argues that this approach can unintentionally impose one's personal values on others. Instead, fostering true inclusion requires recognizing and respecting the unique perspectives and needs of individuals. To achieve this, O'Donovan (2018, p. 3) advises organizations to actively and consistently monitor inclusion efforts,

ensuring employees feel valued and supported, even during transitions between teams or departments.

### **Building Effective Diversity Strategies**

According to Tessema et al. (2023), to achieve meaningful progress in diversity initiatives organizations should establish clear, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-bound goals. These benchmarks not only provide a roadmap for advancement but also help identify areas needing improvement. However, it is crucial to understand that diversity alone does not guarantee positive outcomes. The context in which diversity is implemented plays a pivotal role. According to Gassam Asare (2023), A well-managed team benefits from diversity, while poor management fosters conflict, harming cohesion and effectiveness.

Lahti (2014, p. 20, 56) stresses that an organization must remain open to fresh perspectives, as familiarity with workplace dynamics can limit innovative thinking. Encouraging new viewpoints, even at the risk of occasional friction, is essential for fostering creativity and driving progress.

### **Inclusion: psychological experience**

Inclusion is ultimately about perceptions (Ferdman, 2013, p. 23). It is defined by whether individuals feel included, which varies across contexts, personal experiences and perceptions, and what happens around the individual (Figure 3) (Ferdman, 2013, p. 23; Mor Barak et al. 2016). Inclusion refers to how effectively organizations and their members connect with, engage, and leverage people from diverse backgrounds. The essence of inclusion lies in the psychological experience of individuals, often shared collectively. This experience is shaped by the actions of those around the individual—such as coworkers and supervisors—by the individual's own attitudes and behaviors, and by the broader values, norms, practices, and processes within their organizational and societal context. Therefore, inclusion can manifest as an individual or group experience, a set of behaviors, a leadership approach, a collection of shared norms and practices, or as a value at the personal-, group-, organizational-, or societal level (Ferdman et al. 2013, p. 4).

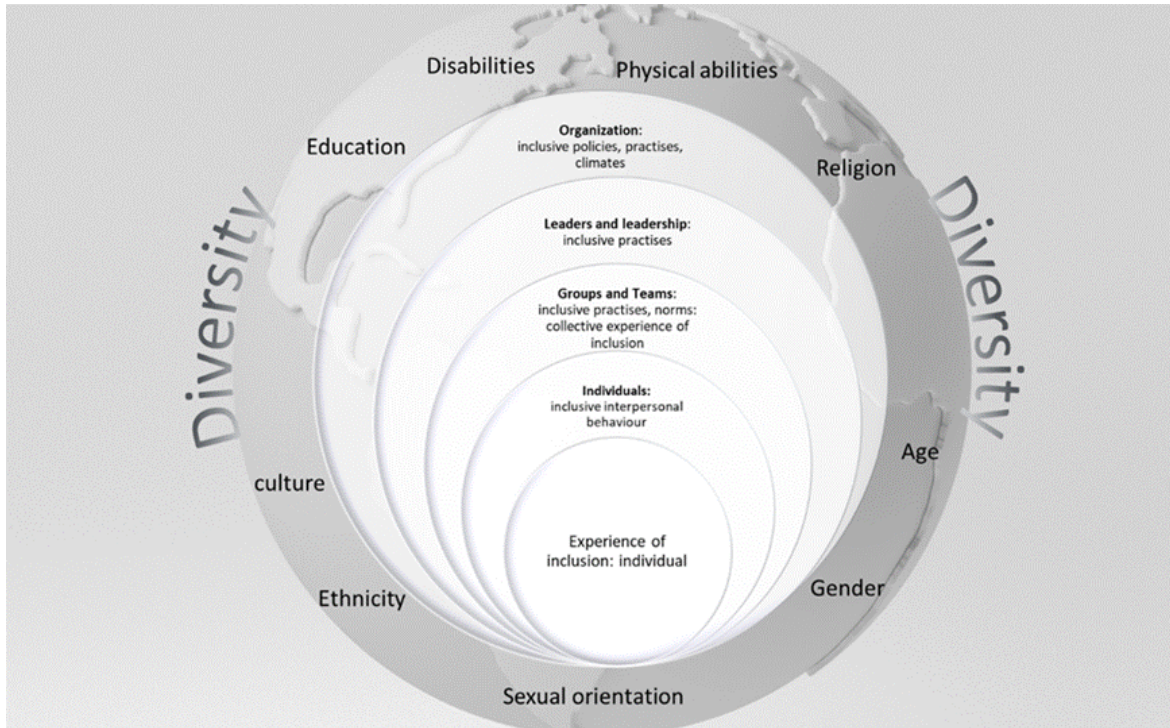


Figure 3. Systems of Inclusion. Based on Ferdman (2013, p. 17).

Ferdman (2013, p.11) stress the importance of promoting inclusion with the aim to eliminate negative behaviors such as prejudice, discrimination, and oppression while fostering a positive vision for a more equitable and inclusive workplace.

### **Moving from Diversity to Inclusion**

While reducing bias is a critical step in creating inclusive environments, it is insufficient on its own (Hayles, 2013, p. 62). Organizations must take additional steps, such as recognizing diverse identities, building competencies, fostering safety, and implementing comprehensive inclusion strategies. Sharkey and Barret (2017) advocate for shifting the focus away from diversity programs that can be perceived negatively and instead emphasizing inclusion. Diversity, they argue, is a natural aspect of human nature and should be celebrated rather than seen as a problem to solve.

Building a culture that fully embraces and includes all participants is essential for creating a future-proof organization (Ferdman & Deane, 2013, Preface and Acknowledgements). By prioritizing inclusion as the cornerstone of DEIB efforts, organizations can achieve not

only equitable workplaces but also unlock the full potential of their workforce (University of Pennsylvania, 2023).

According to Huhta and Myllyntaus (2023), the effectiveness of all diversity initiatives depends on understanding root causes, setting clear goals, ensuring committed leadership, creating context-specific solutions, and continuously monitoring progress to adapt as needed. Tailored approaches that align with an organization's unique challenges have the greatest impact.

## **2.5 Navigating cognitive landscapes in management**

Obstacles to navigating the cognitive aspects of management can include biases, stereotypes, prejudices, and stigmas (Gibson, 2022). The great news is that according to leading experts in neuroscience, the brain can be consciously rewired (Sharkey & Barret, 2017, p. 16).

According to Gibson (2022), fighting stereotypes at work requires everyone to work together. Leaders need to understand that they have the power to create strategies that reduce unfair power differences in the company. Gibson states that with the right tools, any business has the possibility to fight the negative effects of stereotypes and make sure that people from all backgrounds, including people of color, younger generations, and those from disadvantaged groups, have a say in making long-lasting, positive changes.

### **2.5.1 Biases**

Bauer and Sarro (2021) point out that cognitive biases significantly impact managerial decisions, shaping how leaders perceive and interact with their teams. Biases are mental shortcuts, automatic, unconscious responses that influence our judgments and behaviors. While biases are inherent to all humans, they can present challenges in the workplace, particularly in fostering diversity management initiatives.

## Understanding the Roots of Bias

Sharkey and Barret (2017, p. 16) highlight unconscious bias as a key reason for the underrepresentation of minorities and the persistent gender pay gap. These biases originate from our brain's primary function: ensuring safety. Neuroscientific studies reveal that the brain instinctively detects potential threats, often interpreting differences in appearance, customs, or behavior as risks. This evolutionary mechanism, while designed for survival, contributes to implicit biases in modern settings (Sharkey & Barret, 2017, p. 109).

## Types of Biases in the Workplace

According to Sharkey and Barret (2017, p. 110), biases manifest in various forms within professional settings, each influencing decision-making, and interpersonal dynamics. Bias formation is shaped by environmental factors and the brain's reliance on past experiences. For instance, our reactions—like braking at a red light—often occur instinctively. Similarly, the brain stores narratives from personal and cultural histories, which can unconsciously influence how we perceive others, even when the original context is no longer relevant.

Bauer and Sarro (2021) acknowledge that research over the years has identified various biases affecting decision-making and interpersonal interactions. This paragraph highlights some of the common biases. Bauer and Sarro (2021), explains that **similarity bias**, also known as **affinity bias** (Turnbull, 2016, abstract), leads individuals to favor those who share similar traits or backgrounds, often reinforcing "ingroup" and "outgroup" dynamics. Turnbull (2016, abstract) also describes this bias as "mini me-syndrome". Turnbull (2016, p. 49) describes **confirmation bias** as causing people to seek information that validates their existing beliefs, which can result in overlooking diverse talent. According to Bauer and Sarro (2021), **experience bias** stems from the assumption that one's perspective is universally applicable, limiting the ability to understand differing viewpoints. According to them **safety bias** prioritizes avoiding losses over pursuing potential gains, often leading to cautious decision-making. Sharkey and Barrett (2017, p. 116), acknowledge **distance bias** being a bias that favors inputs or opportunities that are physically or emotionally closer, potentially disadvantaging remote or less familiar team members.

One of the most pervasive biases is **stereotyping**, according to Casad and Bryan (2016). Turnbull (2016, p. 52) explain that it involves attributing generalized traits to individuals based on their group membership, for instance assuming all tall Black men are athletes or expecting women to prioritize family over career. These stereotypes misrepresent individuals and reinforce systemic inequalities. Stereotype threat, a phenomenon where individuals fear confirming negative stereotypes about their group, can significantly affect workplace dynamics. This threat often leads to decreased performance, difficulty in integrating personal and professional identities, and heightened stress. For instance, women or minority employees in non-diverse environments may struggle to reconcile their identities, resulting in reduced career aspirations and mental health challenges (Casad & Bryan, 2016).

### **Mitigating Bias in Management**

Addressing cognitive biases requires conscious effort and systemic interventions, according to Casad and Bryan (2016), they explain that education and awareness initiatives can help employees and leaders recognize and understand their biases. Inclusive practices, such as structured hiring and promotion processes, play a critical role in mitigating the influence of biases. Organizations, even those with less diverse workforces, can articulate clear diversity philosophies and demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity. Creating environments where individuals feel free to express their authentic selves without fear of judgment is essential for counteracting stereotypes and fostering equity.

Garrick et al (2024) point out that leadership in today's evolving workplace requires not only recognizing biases but actively working to counteract them. The widespread presence of unconscious bias shapes decision-making, sustains underlying prejudices, and complicates the creation of inclusive workplaces, affecting employee satisfaction, team collaboration, and organizational harmony.

As Sharkey and Barret (2017, p. 188) eloquently state:

As leaders, your company and career can be wiped out by change. Or you can ride the wave. But there's a third alternative. You can be the wave.

### 2.5.2 Prejudice and stigmas

According to Chanlat and Özbilgin (2017, p. 133), prejudice assigns positive or negative values to stereotypes, influencing behaviors such as friendliness or avoidance. While obvious stereotypes are less accepted, subtle ones still influence interaction.

According to Chanlat and Özbilgin (2017, p. 340), research shows that implicit bias (also known as unconscious bias) rises from distinction between in-group and out-groups, where individuals tend to favor those similar to themselves and “mark” (stigmatize) others perceived as different. They explain that these biases lead to rejection, negative stereotypes, and discrimination, often driven by seeing others as less individual (depersonalization) and less valuable (devaluation). Such mechanisms harm those targeted while reinforcing existing social hierarchies and systemic inequities. Moreover, they state that the effects of prejudice and stigma extend deeply into self-perception and identity. Stigmatized individuals may internalize negative stereotypes, resulting in reduced self-esteem and a conflicted sense of identity. They explain that these dynamics are particularly evident in workplaces, where minority employees often feel undervalued or excluded. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive understanding of the psychological roots of stigma and proactive efforts to foster inclusive environments that mitigate its impacts.

Hayles (2013, p. 64) stress the fact that it is vital to emphasize the importance of fostering positive interactions to reduce prejudice. When individuals observe leaders and colleagues engaging positively with diverse groups, it can shift their attitudes and reduce bias. Promoting such interactions in both workplace settings and media representation can help build more inclusive organizational cultures.

## 2.6 Diversity in Finland

In Finland, the conversation about diversity has mainly concentrated on addressing the skills shortage, and with a good reason (Huhta & Myllyntaus, 2023, p. 16). According to Statistics Finland (2024a), Finland's population is expected to grow only if immigration rates remain as they are. To maintain population growth, Finland needs about 40,000 to 50,000 immigrants per year. At the end of year 2023 there were 5 603 851 citizens in Finland and 372 973 of them were foreign citizens (Statistics Finland, 2023).

Huhta and Myllyntaus (2023, p. 16) enlightens that Finnish workplaces are already diverse and are expected to become even more so, but it has not been like that for long. It wasn't until the 2010s that issues of inequality and equality became common subjects in Finnish news and everyday conversations. Gradually conversations about equality have grown in Finland, along with actions to promote it. For instance, Finland got the Equal Marriage Act in 2017, and the Trans Act was renewed in spring 2023.

### **2.6.1 Diversity in Finnish workplaces**

The Diversity Barometer, a survey, that has been conducted four times 2007, 2011, 2016, and 2020 by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (Työterveyslaitos 2020), reflects HR professionals' views on various aspects of diversity, including age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, family status, disability, language, religion, and beliefs (European Commission, 2020).

The diversity barometer found in 2020 that organizations in Finland are slightly more diverse than homogenous nowadays, and that the benefits of diversity are considered greater than the challenges. Many organizations aim to further increase diversity (European Commission, 2020; Työterveyslaitos 2020).

According to European Commission (2020), the barometer findings indicate a positive shift in attitudes towards diversity in Finland over the past decade. In 2020, HR professionals believe that diversity is more accepted, and transparency is more encouraged within their organizations compared to 2011. They are also more supportive of promoting work-related migration.

The key recruitment-related findings according to European Commission (2020) on the 2020 Barometer reveal that one in ten respondents experienced discrimination in their organization, primarily based on ethnic or national background and gender. Nearly a third of organizations had adopted non-discriminatory recruitment practices, such as anonymous recruitment, recruiter training, and clearer guidelines. Additionally, about one in ten respondents had tried anonymous recruitment, mainly to address age and gender bias, with less focus on ethnic or national background.

The Barometer highlights a growing interest in anonymous and fair recruitment in Finnish workplaces, states European Commission (2020). Many organizations are integrating diversity considerations into their hiring processes, and respondents express a desire for further focus on this issue. The study, conducted via a web-based survey in early 2020, included 250 HR professionals.

### **2.6.2 Diversity legislation in Finland**

According to the Finnish Institute of occupational health, FIOH, (n.d.) the Finnish legislation forbids discrimination in employment, recruitment, and job advertisements. Employers in Finland are required to address any instances of discrimination. Furthermore, they must actively and systematically promote gender equality, fair treatment, and non-discrimination of employees by enhancing working practices and conditions.

The Finnish Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014) outlines the following grounds for discrimination: age, origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, political activity, trade union activity, family relationships, health status, disability, sexual orientation, and other personal characteristics. Additionally, the Act on Equality between Women and Men (609/1986) prohibits discrimination based on gender, gender identity, and gender expression. Discrimination related to gender, such as pregnancy, is also prohibited.

According to FIOH (n.d.), in Finland, it is mandatory to draw up non-discrimination and gender equality plans if the workplace has regularly at least 30 employees. Many workplaces conduct these plans together as one single plan, as this is allowed. The Act on Equality between Women and Men (Section 6a) specifies the content requirements for a gender equality plan. In contrast, the Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014), effective from 2015, does not detail the contents of a non-discrimination plan as explicitly. Nevertheless, the plan must be based on an evaluation of workplace equality and include essential measures to enhance non-discrimination.

FIOH (n.d.) reminds that smaller companies, with fewer than 30 regular employees, are still required to promote equality and non-discrimination, even though they aren't required to have written plans. The law mandates that the gender equality plan must be updated

every two years, and employees should be informed about the plan and its updates. FIOH (n.d.) states that most workplaces legally required to create a gender equality plan have done so. However, research shows that many employees are unaware of these plans and the equality efforts at their workplaces. Therefore, more effort should be made to communicate this information to staff.

The Non-discrimination Act (1325/2014) effective from 2015, does not specify how often the non-discrimination plan should be updated. Nevertheless, FIOH (n.d.) point out that it's recommended to update it at least every three years or alongside the gender equality plan, especially if the plans are combined. It is also advisable to inform employees about these updates. The law also details who is entitled to be informed about the employer's measures to promote workplace equality upon request.

According to Huhta and Myllyntaus (2023, p. 20), an interesting fact is that despite the legislation requiring the plan, according to a study conducted in 2022 covering 2,065 companies, only 68 percent of those with more than 30 employees had an equality plan in place. The findings also reveal that many companies create plans just once and fail to update them.

### **3 Introduction of the case organization**

Finnish Tax Administration, FTA (2024a), is a government run organization responsible for collecting around 95% of taxes and tax-like fees in Finland. Its mission is to ensure the correct amount of taxes is collected in a timely manner to support public services. Each month, the taxes collected are distributed to entities that provide these services, such as the government, local authorities, social insurance institutions, and other organizations.

FTA (2024a) serves both individual taxpayers and businesses, aiming to assist customers in managing their tax matters independently and accurately, primarily through the MyTax electronic service channel. The organization's sustainability efforts are rooted in their statutory responsibilities and strategic objectives, significantly impacting on financial sustainability. Integrating sustainability is essential to organization's goals of delivering a positive customer experience, maintaining fair taxation, and securing tax revenue.

The primary task of the Finnish Tax Administration (2024a) is to implement taxation correctly and on time, thereby ensuring the funding of societal functions.

#### **3.1 Personnel in case organization**

At the end of the year 2023, the Finnish Tax Administration (2024b) had 5,315 employees ranging from taxpayer advisors to various types of specialists, and numerous managers and directors across different units. The FTA with its personnel is divided into 3 main units and several smaller units (Figure 4).

The main units are the Taxation Unit, the Customer Relations Unit, and the Product Management Unit. Tax offices and customer service are part of the Taxation Unit, which employs majority of the staff, 4,165 people. The organization operated 2023 in 56 locations across the country.

## Finnish Tax Administration organization

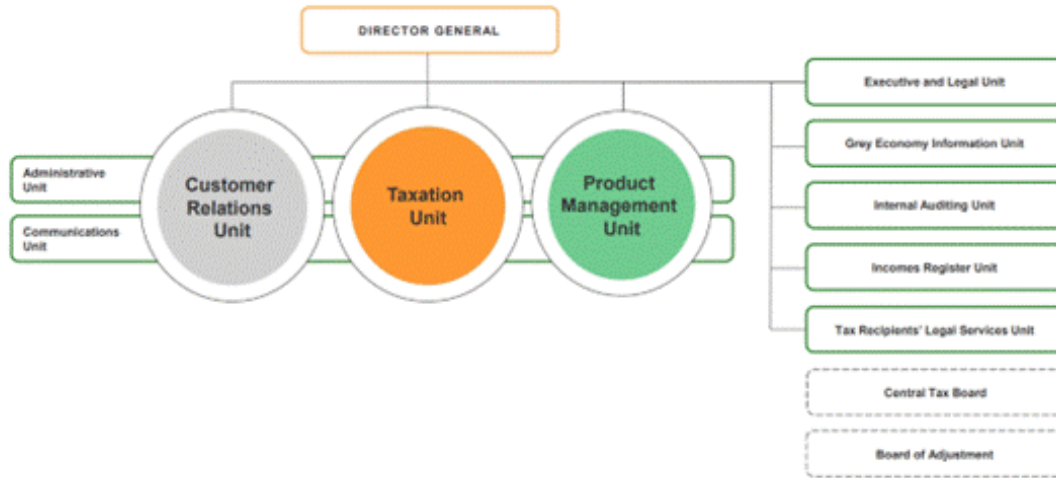


Figure 4. The FTA organization (Finnish Tax Administration, 2024d).

When looking at the age distribution figure of FTA (2024b) in Figure 5, the average age of the Tax Administration’s personnel was 45.6 in 2023. Which has decreased notably since

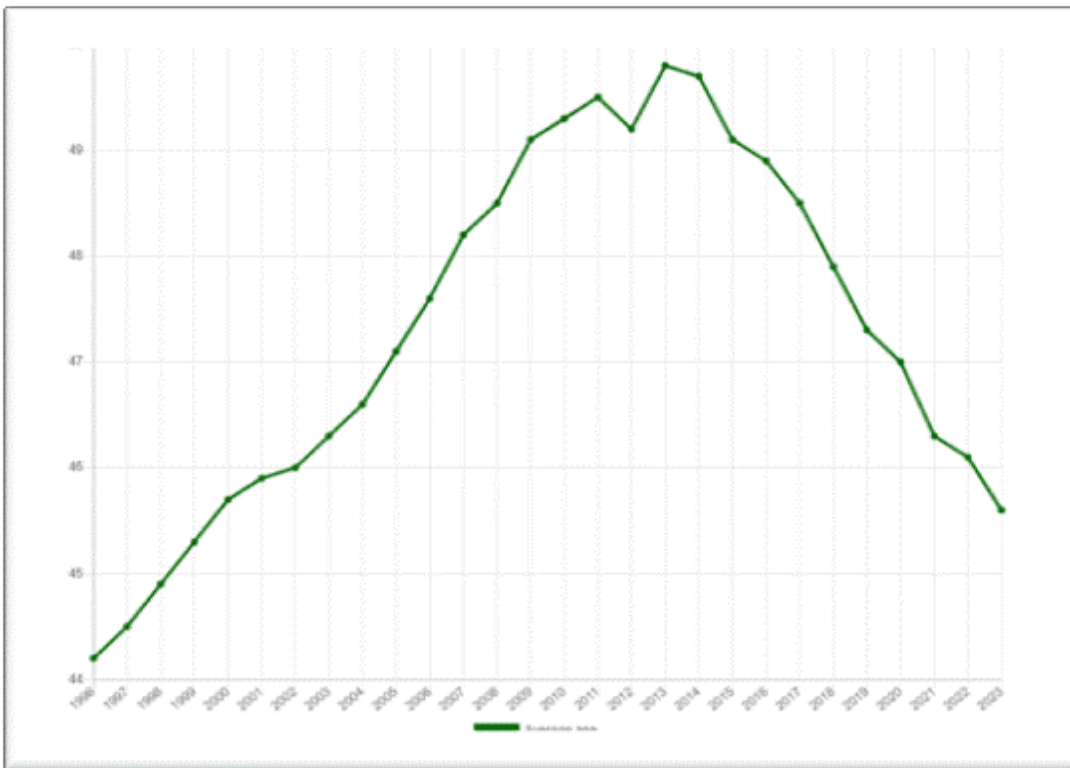


Figure 5. Development of the average age of FTA personnel (Finnish Tax Administration, 2024b).

2013, reversing a decades-long trend of an aging workforce. By 2022, the average age is close to levels seen in the 1990s, likely reflecting changes in recruitment, retirement, and workforce management strategies.

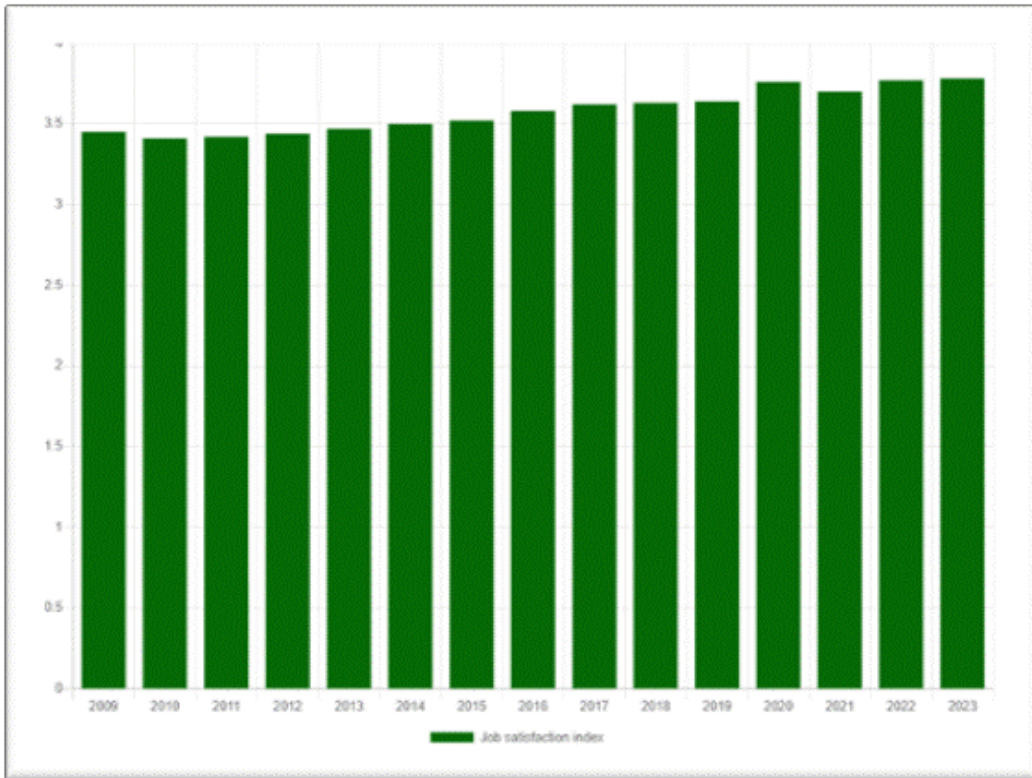


Figure 6. FTA’s job satisfaction index (Finnish Tax Administration, 2024b).

Figure 6 is showing satisfaction rate of people working in the Tax Administration (2024b). In 2023 the rate was 3.78 out of 5, almost the same as 2022. The “happiness”-trend has been ascendant since 2016, and the rate has been going up steadily, with 2023 being the best year so far. Other indication of a happy staff is the average number of sick leave days per annual work unit. According to FTA (2024b) in 2023 this was 9.6 days, compared to 11.0 days in 2022, representing the lowest level observed over a longer period, excluding the pandemic years.

FTA also assesses gender pay disparities using the equal pay index (Verohallinto, 2023). Fair compensation is effectively maintained for roles with comparable levels of responsibility. Any minor differences in pay at the same responsibility level are explained with performance-based salary components, which can vary significantly between workers.

## **3.2 Equality and Non-Discrimination plan of case company**

As a Finnish organization employing more than 30 people, FTA is required by law to create equality and diversity plans for its personnel, which it has been successfully doing since 2011 (M. Lovio, personal communication, March 4, 2025). Additionally, FTA has a separate functional plan for customer equality and diversity, which is excluded from this thesis.

According to Verohallinto (2023), the purpose of the FTA's Equality and Non-Discrimination Plan is to outline goals that enhance equality and non-discrimination, as well as to evaluate the success of the previous plan's objectives. The Tax Administration's equality and non-discrimination strategy aims to support the diversity of staff and ensure that all employees can develop and utilize their skills to meet future needs. This aligns with the organization's strategic personnel goals.

The plan (Verohallinto, 2023) details the measures the Tax Administration will take to promote diversity, equality, and inclusivity among its staff. These measures are integrated into the daily operations of the organization. If harassment, discrimination, or other violations of equality are detected, they are, according to the plan, addressed immediately.

### **3.2.1 Current state of equality**

The progress of gender equality and overall equality within the organization has been assessed through annual employee job satisfaction surveys, VMBaro (Verohallinto, 2023). According to FTA (2024c) the 2023 survey resulted a score of 4.30 out of 5 which shows a positive perception in gender equality, the same direction has been ever since 2016. This suggests the workplace is increasingly seen as equitable, but ongoing efforts may still be needed to maintain and enhance these perceptions further.

According to FTA (2024c) the personnel feel that the workplace equality has improved. in 2023 VMBaro statement "equality is realized in my work community" received an average rating of 4.16 out of 5, compared to of 3.6 out of 5 from 2016.

According to Verohallinto (2023), examining the distribution of men in across various personnel sub-groups (Figure 8) reveals that men are underrepresented in officer roles (19%), among experts (37%), and as group managers (25%). However, the proportion of men and women is nearly equal within the group of directors.

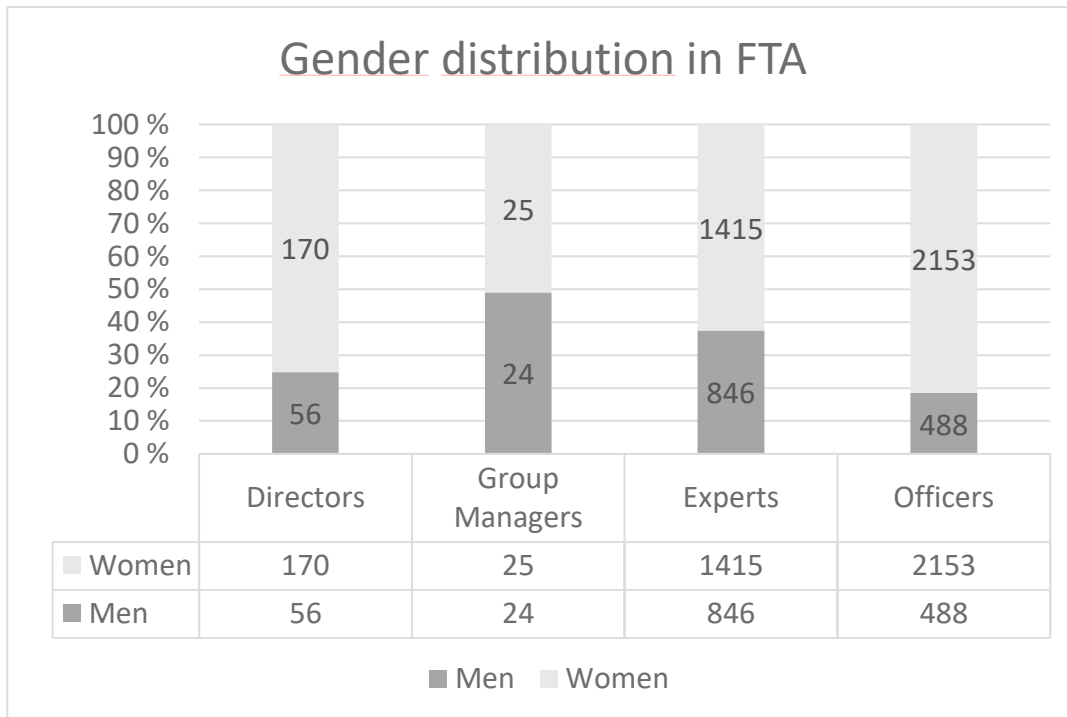


Figure 7. Gender distribution in FTA (Verohallinto, 2023).

The salary of FTA worker is formulated of 2 parts: task-specific salary and the personal salary component based on performance (Verohallinto, 2023). The personal salary component is 20% of the task-specific salary, when the person's work performance meets the expectations of the task and the goals set for the person.

According to Verohallinto (2023), the pay-equality of FTA has no significant differences among men and women, the biggest difference can be explained with the fact that at lower levels there are women who have had long careers and have gained bigger personal salary components and men who have just started. In high expertise-levels the differences can be explained with special expertise and being leading experts of the field.

All of these results indicate that equality and the staff's perception of overall equality in the workplace is at a commendable level.

### 3.2.2 Steps in the plan

Adding awareness in DEIB-matters is a part of Finnish Tax Administration's Equality and diversity plan of 2023–2025 (Verohallinto, 2023). According to the plan, FTA has already taken some important step in diversity related matters over these few years according to the plan, including:

- Transforming most of the job titles in into gender-neutral form.
- Starting anonymous recruiting with a trial in the fall 2022 and 2 years later, in fall 2024 taking it into use with all the recruits.
- Improving the opportunity for native speakers of Swedish to receive essential information related to work, safety and employment conditions in their native language. A coordination group has been formed in 2023 and so far, a lot of the documents and intra-sites have been translated into Swedish, but the work is still ongoing.
- Establishment of the Equality Group in fall 2023, comprising nine members from various Tax Administration units. The group's mission is to systematically and sustainably promote diversity, inclusiveness, and equality, raise awareness, identify and address existing or potential barriers, and collaborate with other units. Their work includes proposing improvements and monitoring the effectiveness of implemented measures.
- Creation of staff-led support groups to provide a safe space for open communication. The first group, "Rainbow Network," was established in fall 2024, with more groups planned for the future.

The work of the Equality group is on-going and as part of their goal to raise awareness is this thesis, along with the end-result, an educative material proposal for managers.

## 4 Methodology

This study is a case study focusing on diversity management within a specific public organization. Its objectives are to assess the current level of managerial knowledge regarding diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB), identify the challenges managers face in managing a diverse workforce, and explore the potential for adapting DEIB practices within the organization.

This section details the research approach and methods used in the study, providing a rationale for their selection, and explaining how they contribute to addressing the research objectives.

### 4.1 Research approach

Kananen (2013, p. 27) describes a research approach as a "philosophic umbrella" that encompasses data gathering, analysis, and interpretation methods typical of the chosen approach. The chosen approach for this study is **qualitative research** using a **case study**-strategy. Kananen (2015, p. 34) explains that qualitative research is suited to exploring complex phenomena and answering the question, "What is this about?". Data is gathered through methods such as observation and interviews, enabling a deep understanding of the subject in collaboration with research participants. Unlike quantitative research, which relies on predefined, precise questions, qualitative research is more flexible, allowing the exploration of phenomena that are not yet fully understood. As knowledge about the phenomenon grows and explanatory insights emerge, it becomes possible to formulate more specific questions, similar to those used in quantitative studies.

A case study focuses on analyzing one or more cases, with its main goal being to define, examine, and resolve them (Eriksson & Koistinen, 2014, p. 4). According to Simons (2009, p. 18), the case study approach is inclusive and reaches diverse audiences. By employing qualitative methods, it captures the perspectives of participants and stakeholders, involves them in the process, and reflects various interests and values within the program. Issue-centered case study reports, which incorporate naturalistic observations and interview data

while using participants' own language, provide findings that others can understand and apply to make informed decisions.

The choice of the qualitative method for this study is based on its suitability for addressing the research problem. Quantitative data, which often relies on numerical or countable answers (Kananen, 2013, p. 31), would not provide the depth of information needed for this research. According to ten Have (2004, p. 15) qualitative research, by contrast, aims to describe and understand phenomena, offering meaningful interpretations rather than seeking generalizations.

## 4.2 Methods of Data collection

This study employed two primary methods for data collection: **a survey and interviews**. These methods were chosen to complement each other, providing both breadth and depth to address the research objectives effectively.

According to Pulliam Phillips et al. (2013), self-administered surveys and questionnaires are widely used due to their numerous advantages. They enable the collection of large amounts of data from many respondents. Compared to interviews, focus groups, and some observational methods, they are the most cost-effective survey tool. Once developed, they can be easily distributed to all respondents, requiring only a plan to manage response rates. Additionally, they are more time-efficient to develop and administer than other research methods. Respondents also tend to spend less time completing a questionnaire than participating in interviews or focus groups, making them more likely to engage. While no method guarantees completely objective responses, a well-designed and properly administered self-administered questionnaire can produce highly reliable data.

Ten Have (2004, p. 16) explains that interviewing is the most widely used method in qualitative social research. Unlike the structured and standardized approach typical of quantitative research, qualitative interviews are more flexible and open-ended. Researchers often prepare a list of topics or questions to guide the conversation, introducing them in a systematic or more natural manner. Respondents may be asked specific questions or encouraged to speak at length on one or more topics. These interviews can take place one-on-

one or in a group discussion setting, offering significant variation in style and execution. This approach allows researchers to gather substantial, relevant information efficiently, without waiting for the phenomenon of interest to occur naturally. Instead, the interaction can be designed to prompt the emergence of insights during the interview itself. For many qualitative researchers, interviews are the most intuitive and practical method for structuring their studies.

#### **4.2.1 Survey**

A survey was selected as a practical and efficient method for reaching a larger group of respondents, particularly because the target group—over 40 managers—was experiencing a busy period during the research. Conducting individual interviews with all potential participants was not feasible, as the questions required significant reflection and analysis of respondents themselves. The survey allowed for the collection of diverse responses in a single format, offering the flexibility to include multiple question types in it.

The primary focus of this survey was to explore respondents' understanding and personal approach to DEIB values in the workplace, assessing their knowledge of fundamental concepts, and examining the impact of diversity and inclusion on organizational culture and team dynamics. It also evaluated leadership skills, particularly in fostering inclusion and supporting diverse teams. One of the main goals of this survey was to identify training and development needs.

The survey was conducted anonymously using Microsoft Forms. It was open for 1.5 weeks and it was sent to 41 people. The survey (Appendix 1) was distributed via email as a link containing predominantly open-ended questions to encourage detailed and thoughtful answers. This approach ensured that even under time constraints, meaningful data could be gathered from a group.

#### **4.2.2 Interviews**

Interview styles vary widely, but their defining characteristic is that the researcher organizes sessions where participants share their thoughts and experiences in response to the

researcher's initiative and for their benefit. In this way, interview data have an "experimental" nature, as they would not exist without the research project (ten Have, 2004, p. 16).

In this study, interviews were used to gather more nuanced and in-depth qualitative data from smaller, focused groups. While similar questions could have been included in the survey, interviews provided the opportunity to delve deeper into participants' thoughts through real-time interaction, clarifications, and follow-up questions.

### **Group A: Equality Team Members**

Individual interviews were planned with three members of the equality team within the case organization. The purpose was to identify weaknesses in DEIB awareness among managers and assess the current state of DEIB-related education provided to them.

The interviews, which were held on in Microsoft Teams meetings, followed the same protocol, asking the same 4 questions (Appendix 2).

1. Have you recognized specific matters to be educated about DEIB for FTA managers?
2. Is there existing training about DEIB-matters to managers?
3. Are there certain DEIB-subjects that need repetitive training from time to time?
4. What form of educative material would serve this purpose the best?

Each, recorded interview, lasted around 30 minutes and was transcribed afterwards using Microsoft Word transcription feature.

## Group B: Representatives from Neighboring Countries

Individual interviews were planned with representatives from several neighboring countries. The focus was on mapping their thoughts and progress in implementing DEIB initiatives and gathering best practices/tips/recommendations on DEIB implementing process.

Eventually 2 countries were reached. First interview was held with Teams and the second was changed, due to time-constraints, from video-interview into e-mail interview on. Both interviews had the same questions (Appendix 3).

1. How do you see the role of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) in Tax Administrations now and in the future? What do you see that are the challenges & benefits?
2. What is the current status of DEIB knowledge in your organization?
3. What steps have been taken in your organization to increase DEIB knowledge?
4. Do you have any tips/best practices/recommendations to share about adding knowledge in DEIB matters?

The questions were sent to participants beforehand to allow preparation for the interview. The Teams interview was recorded and later transcribed with Microsoft Word transcription-feature.

Table 2. Countries participating in the study.

Respondent	The country of the respondent
1	Norway
2	Estonia

### **4.3 Ethical and privacy issues**

According to Wiles (2012, pp. 22–23), by understanding the guidelines, approaches, and frameworks of ethical decision-making, including ethical principles, professional standards, and legal regulations, researchers can critically assess and justify their ethical choices.

Ensuring ethical conduct and maintaining participant privacy were prioritized throughout this study. For the survey, all participants were signed up voluntarily and knew what the survey was about, they were also informed about its anonymity before responding. Also, the data collection tool, Microsoft Forms, was configured to ensure no identifying information was collected from respondents.

Participation in the interviews was entirely voluntary, with interviewees signing up willingly. At the start of each interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the interview, assured that their names would not be used in the final report, and notified about the recording and transcription process. No sensitive data was requested or collected through any of the research methods. The identities of the interviewees remain confidential, known only by the researcher and a support person within the case organization.

### **4.4 Method for Analysis**

The method of analysis used for the survey and interview of the equality group members was thematic analysis, which is according to Naeem et al (2023) a qualitative research approach for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within a data set. Thematic analysis involves key steps such as coding the data, searching for recurring themes, refining those themes, and presenting the findings. According to Naeem et al (2023) this approach allows for the systematic breakdown of data into smaller, meaningful units, making it easier to recognize commonalities and key insights. Additionally, the principles of thematic analysis are closely aligned with those of other qualitative methods, offering flexibility and clarity in analyzing qualitative data.

The process began with a thorough review of the entire dataset. By ensuring the data was well-organized and for clarity and coherence it needed to be imported into Excel. Next (Table 3), patterns were identified with finding keywords, and similar data points were grouped

into codes, which emerged naturally during the analysis rather than being pre-determined. Initial themes were then generated from the coded data and gradually refined into the final selected themes.

Table 3. Thematic approach adapted from Naeem et al (2023).

Statements/Quotations	Keywords	Codes	Initial themes
<i>"I would like to <b>understand diversity</b>"</i>	understand, diversity	Unawareness	Need of awareness
<i>"I sometimes <b>assume things that I should not, and things come out wrong</b>"</i>	assume, things come out wrong	Unconscious bias	Need of awareness

In this study, the analysis was primarily driven by the research data itself, meaning the findings were derived directly from the study rather than relying on previous research, which was only referenced in the conclusion.

The purpose of the data received in the second interview set (neighboring countries) was not to analyze the answers itself that deep, but to map out the situation of the case organization in the DEIB implementation between the neighboring countries and to use the answers as reference in planning the educative material.

#### 4.5 The Research process

The research process of this study involved multiple phases. Figure 9 illustrates the sequence of these phases and their corresponding analyses. Three distinct research-phases were employed, each followed by a separate analysis. The findings were documented in the Findings section and summarized in the Conclusion.

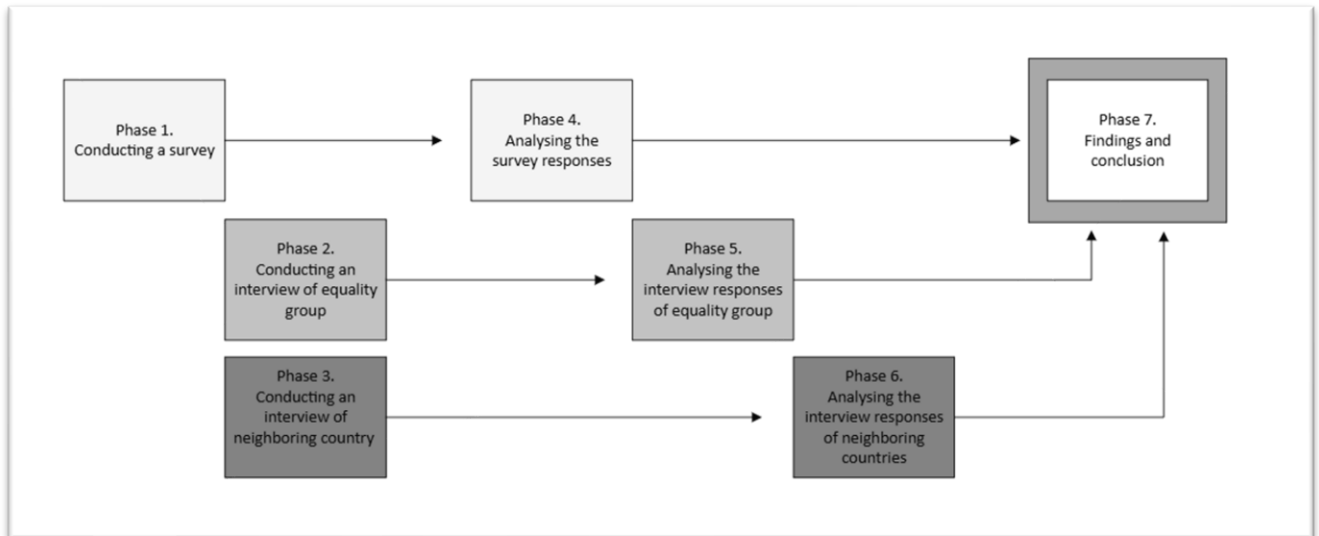


Figure 8. Process chart of the phases of the research.

## 5 Findings

### 5.1 Survey

#### 5.1.1 Challenges and benefits in workplace diversity

A significant portion of respondents acknowledged encountering challenges related to diversity in their workplaces, ranging from young employees work life-skills to ingrained ways of thinking and acting by the managers themselves.

"Perhaps mostly with very young employees, that is, some may have direct shortcomings in work-life skills. Sometimes one has almost had to take on a parental role instead of a supervisor role. Generally, supervisory work needs to be adjusted according to the age, background, etc., of the individuals"

"I have not always been able to take into account the diversity of my team members, such as sexual orientation, in my work as a supervisor. Regarding this, for example, I have, due to inadvertence and thoughtlessness, assumed that my team member's partner is of the opposite sex, although this may not necessarily be the case. The challenges have therefore primarily been related to my own, established patterns of thinking and behavior."

These challenges are summarized and illustrated in Table 4.

Table 4. Challenges of diversity in a workplace according to the respondents.

<p><b>Interpersonal dynamics</b></p>	<p>Differences in age, priorities, viewpoints, and learning styles were cited as key factors. For instance, some employees prefer visual explanations, while others learn better through auditory methods. Younger workers were noted to sometimes lack essential work-life skills.</p>
<p><b>Supervisory and organizational factors</b></p>	<p>Respondents highlighted that supervisors' thinking, behavior, and communication habits can contribute to challenges. Additionally, organizational policies often aim to standardize working styles, which may suppress individuality.</p>

<b>Tolerance and inclusion</b>	While there is frequent discussion around promoting tolerance, respondents noted a lack of tangible actions in daily workplace practices.
<b>Specific Diversity-Related issues</b>	<p><u>Religion</u>: Issues such as reluctance to take orders from female supervisors or difficulties finding a prayer space in the office.</p> <p><u>Health</u>: Instances of employees using health conditions as a pretext to avoid work.</p> <p><u>Language</u>: Misunderstandings arising from language barriers, and at times, deliberate exploitation of language limitations in uncomfortable situations.</p>
<b>Practical and structural challenges</b>	Managing the intersection of health and performance expectations, addressing pay equity concerns, and balancing diverse needs in a way that supports inclusivity without compromising organizational efficiency.

### Benefits of Diversity

Respondents highlighted numerous benefits associated with diversity in the workplace.

“The freshness of the atmosphere, the richness of diversity, and creativity. The employees’ atmosphere is more tolerant, and they better understand different, non-normative aspects when not everyone is forced into the same mold. The good reputation of the workplace increases when the work community consists of diversity”

"Productivity improves when each individual feel valued for who they are."

These benefits are summarized and illustrated in the Table 5.

Table 5. Benefits of diversity in a workplace according to the respondents.

<b>Richness and Innovation</b>	Diversity fosters multifaceted thinking and innovation. Fresh ideas from younger employees complement the experience and expertise of seasoned workers, creating a balance that supports organizational growth.
<b>Enhanced Group Dynamics</b>	Changes in team composition, particularly in environments with high turnover, often lead to noticeable shifts in dynamics, with new perspectives energizing the group.
<b>Tolerance and understanding</b>	Embracing differences leads to a more tolerant and understanding workplace atmosphere. Homogenous environments, by contrast, were seen as less creative
<b>Alignment with society</b>	Diverse teams reflect the surrounding community, bringing complementary strengths to different areas and driving organizational progress.
<b>Productivity and employer branding</b>	Valuing individuals as they are boosts productivity and strengthens the organization's brand and employer image
<b>Flexibility and resilience</b>	Experienced employees bring stability and adaptability during periods of change, providing reassurance to the team.

### 5.1.2 Essentials in Leadership of a diverse teams

Analyzing of the answers showed that many respondents provided thoughtful and nuanced answers, demonstrating an understanding of the key concepts of diverse leadership such as equality and fairness, empathy and active listening, cultural competence and trust-building.

“Fairness, equality, and open-mindedness. It is essential to understand that not everyone thinks or acts the same way, and this should be considered in leadership as well.”

Responses like "building trust related to diversity," "guiding tasks based on different strengths," and "acting as a role model for inclusivity" suggest that many respondents understand practical ways to implement theoretical concepts. This indicates some familiarity with the demands of leadership in a diverse workforce.

Several responses mention challenges such as "addressing inappropriate behavior," "sensing weak signals," or "ensuring equal opportunities while considering individual needs." This suggests an awareness of the complexities involved, a key trait of informed thinking.

“Recognizing weak signals, emotional intelligence, and the ability to be present—both physically and mentally. The skill of listening.”

Many responses align with well-documented leadership competencies, including emotional intelligence, situational awareness, and adaptability, which are critical for managing diverse teams.

“The ability to understand the diversity of the work community and adapt one's leadership style so it accepts the diversity.”

When asked what the respondents actually do in terms of diversity leadership in their own-work, a notable portion of respondents highlighted their focus on prioritizing diversity during recruitment.

“For example, in recruitments, I have aimed to consider diversity when selecting individuals. Not everyone needs to be of the same age group or have the same educational background. Diversity must, of course, also be taken into account in everyday work. I treat everyone equally”

“In recruitment situations, I strive to consider and offer jobs to people of different ages and genders, as diversity in the work community is a richness. It is important to see how this specific individual can enrich the group's skills, understanding, and work culture.”

Several managers stressed the importance of understanding their team members by learning about their thoughts, working styles, and personal challenges. Others pointed to the need for clear and respectful communication, with an emphasis on adapting to individuals'

backgrounds and maintaining professionalism even when faced with strong opinions. A few respondents described tailoring actions to suit individual circumstances, allowing team members to leverage their strengths while ensuring alignment with organizational goals.

Many respondents emphasized general leadership principles such as equality, fairness, and empathy in their responses, but fewer provided specific strategies or frameworks. This suggests an understanding of what leadership in a diverse workforce entails but shows a potential gap in how to implement it effectively. The varying responses highlight both active engagement with diversity management and areas where greater consistency and focus could enhance leadership approaches. Some leaders demonstrate strong awareness, while others may benefit from further development in navigating the complexities of diverse teams.

### **5.1.3 Knowing the basics**

The very basic knowledge about diversity as a concept was obvious among respondents. They all referred to diversity as differences of people, at least in a very generalized and visible level.

“My team consists of employees of very different ages—new, enthusiastic workers, parents of young children, and, at the other end of the spectrum, experienced professionals who have seen it all and have more time. These factors must be considered in daily work to ensure smooth collaboration and efficiency.”

Equality as a term was well-known among respondents, particularly in the context of fairness, respect, and equal opportunities. However, there was some variation in how deeply respondents articulate their understanding, with some providing more comprehensive and workplace-specific insights than others.

“Gender or age does not affect job tasks or career advancement.”

“Everyone has an equal right to perform work that matches their skills, take on challenging tasks, participate in various workgroups according to their expertise, develop their skills, and receive support in their work.”

When asked about inclusion and belonging, the responses suggest that most participants have a general understanding of inclusion and belonging, with many articulating these concepts in a nuanced way. However, there was also some variation in the depth and precision of their answers, indicating that while the terms are broadly understood, there may be opportunities for further education or discussion to ensure a shared and comprehensive understanding of these important workplace concepts.

“A person feels like they belong to a group.”

“Every employee (including managers) has the right to belong to a group, participate in shared activities, and, hopefully, be involved in decision-making according to their role. Inclusion means caring for every member of the work community. A sense of belonging fosters psychological safety and the right to be oneself within the workplace. It embodies the spirit of "no one is left behind" and teamwork. Inclusion and belonging are everyone's responsibility, not just that of management.”

All in all, the respondents' knowledge level of DEIB concepts seems foundational but varied. This variation suggests that while there is an awareness of DEIB principles, there are opportunities for further education and deeper understanding to ensure a comprehensive and shared knowledge across the board.

#### **5.1.4 Theory into practice**

When analyzing the responses of a question of how to add inclusiveness and belonging I found out that many responses showed practical, actionable strategies, which indicate a strong grasp of how to foster inclusiveness and belonging. These respondents appear confident in their ability to apply these principles.

“Inclusion can be enhanced by having one-on-one conversations with individuals to help them find their place in the group. Discussing their strengths and what they can contribute to the team fosters a sense of belonging. Strengthening group cohesion requires a broader group of people, and working together and engaging in discussions can help build a stronger sense of unity. Of course, trust is also essential to ensure meaningful conversations that truly enhance the feeling of belonging.”

“By involving everyone and acknowledging them in a way that suits their personality. By expressing gratitude—this is, in my opinion, one of the most important things. Thanking people for their work towards a shared goal and recognizing their contributions, making them feel needed by the group. By valuing each person just as they are.”

Some responses focused on abstract concepts like "psychological safety" or "group formation" without elaborating on specific methods. While these respondents understand the importance of inclusiveness and belonging, their responses lack actionable steps.

“Psychological safety and trust in the workplace community are important. Everyone has the right to be themselves. Investment in the group's interaction and discussion is essential.”

A few responses focus on challenges rather than solutions, which might suggest limited confidence or understanding of how to overcome these issues. Additionally, some respondents gave very brief or vague answers, or explicitly stated they could not address the question in detail. It appears that most respondents demonstrate a good understanding of how to add inclusiveness and belonging in their groups. However, the depth and clarity of their approaches vary great deal.

### **5.1.5 Need of Support and training**

The responses highlight a mix of perspectives regarding the need for skills, support, and education related to diversity and equality. Many respondents feel that these topics are not discussed enough in the organization, with some describing the current engagement as superficial or infrequent.

“In this subject, I feel that I have not yet received any training in the current organization—perhaps because this is something that we are only now beginning to truly address. I hope these matters will be clarified to ensure that all of us in leadership roles have the same understanding of the issue and how it should be reflected in our management.”

While some respondents believe they already possess the necessary knowledge or have recently received training, others identify clear gaps in their understanding or emphasize the need for practical guidance. Suggestions include learning how to support diverse

individuals, particularly those with unique needs like neurodiversity, and gaining practical tips for addressing diversity in real-world scenarios. Concrete examples, case studies, and actionable training are viewed as more impactful than generic presentations or theoretical discussions.

“I'm not quite sure how to put it into words, but I would like to better understand diversity. When there are, for example, people in the group who have concentration difficulties for one reason or another, I would like practical tips on how I can help or support them in their work. We are not doctors, and we don't need to be, but teachers, for example, are trained to work with different types of people. There can be many kinds of diversity, and it would be good if we could better consider it. Therefore, as a manager, I seek to gain more knowledge about diversity (starting with the types of diversity) and how to better lead and support different individuals.”

Several respondents express a desire for proactive support mechanisms, as existing resources often only become available when challenges arise. There is also an emphasis on creating a shared understanding of diversity and leadership across the organization to ensure consistency in approach. Some respondents point out that the homogeneity of their work environment limits the focus on these issues, highlighting the need for deliberate organizational efforts to integrate diversity and equality into everyday practices. They suggest that HR professionals or external experts could play a more active role in facilitating informed discussions and training sessions.

“We talk very little about diversity and equality among managers. It would be beneficial to hold some HR sessions led by someone knowledgeable about these topics (ideally with practical examples) ...”

Overall, the responses suggest an awareness of the importance of diversity and equality but reveal varying levels of experience and preparedness. While some feel adequately equipped, others indicate a need for more structured support, practical training, and ongoing dialogue to translate awareness into effective leadership practices. This indicates that foundational understanding exists but can be significantly enhanced through targeted initiatives and a more proactive, integrated approach.

## 5.2 Interview

### 5.2.1 Interview of the equality-group

#### Recognized needs for DEIB education

All respondents provided similar answers, emphasizing the need to start with the basics, explaining what DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging) means and how it impacts their work.

“For example, a typical middle-aged white male heterosexual person with no injuries or disabilities might not know how it feels to be a part of minority and what kind of things they face from day to day in their lives. When you have understanding of what someone is experiencing it is easier to be their manager and support them in their work”.

A general observation within the organization is that attitudes toward DEIB are positive. None of the respondents were aware of any DEIB-related training currently being offered to managers.

#### Need for repetitive training

There was general agreement that DEIB training should be an integral part of every manager's basic induction program. Once foundational knowledge has been established, ongoing training on specific DEIB topics should be provided regularly. This approach would enable managers to continuously deepen their understanding and effectively integrate DEIB principles into their leadership practices.

“If everyone receives basic-level training, there's no need to repeat the same information every year. However, the foundational knowledge could be deepened at regular intervals with new themes related to the same topic. Training on this subject should be included as part of a manager's basic induction.”

One respondent also noted that a previous challenge in training the manager has been the big turnover-rate among managers, people come and go.

## **Type of Educational Material needed**

All respondents agreed that the material should not be purely passive, lecture-based content that participants can simply read at their convenience and move on. One respondent emphasized the importance of ensuring engagement, suggesting that participation tracking mechanisms, such as entry markings, are essential to verify that individuals have interacted with the material. Several ideas were proposed to enhance the attractiveness and engagement of the educational content for participants:

“There could be gamification-like parts to it”,  
 “there could be situations that needed reactions”,  
 “there could be a test to see what participants learned from it”,  
 “there could be concrete real-life examples”.

Common opinion was that the material needs to be practical not theoretical.

### **5.2.2 Interview of foreign Tax Administrations**

#### **Critical role and impact of DEIB in Tax Administrations**

Both countries’ responses highlight the critical role of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in shaping organizational culture and its growing importance in the future.

One respondent noted that while the organization aims to foster a supportive environment for employees, there is concern that DEIB does not currently receive the focus it deserves. A lack of knowledge and understanding creates barriers, with discussions often skewed towards equality rather than the broader DEIB framework.

“It does not have the focus it should have. And I think it’s about knowledge. It is difficult to understand something you don’t have knowledge of. I also think we talk more about equality than diversity”.

It was also pointed out that looking ahead, demographic shifts, such as an aging population, a multigenerational workforce, and a growing number of immigrants and foreign employees, will further increase the need for DEIB initiatives.

“While official language establishes certain boundaries, there is a possibility that the organization will have a greater number of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. All of this underscores the growing importance of DEIB in the future”.

One respondent emphasized that the organization must adapt to these changes by balancing the boundaries set by official language requirements while also integrating individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. They also stressed that meeting the expectations of younger professionals will be essential for attracting and retaining top talent.

“Young professionals will choose organizations that reflect their attitudes and values, and you will not be competitive if you don't meet those requirements”.

Ultimately, according to one respondent, embracing DEIB will not only enhance competitiveness but also build trust within the organization and strengthen its relationship with the broader community.

### **Benefits and challenges**

The responses emphasized both the benefits and challenges of embracing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in the workplace. On the positive side, DEIB offers organizations a competitive advantage.

“This will result in a more diverse range of ideas and perspectives, leading to more informed and well-considered decisions. A more satisfied workforce with a greater sense of belonging”.

According to one respondent a tolerant and inclusive corporate culture strengthens the employer brand, simplifies recruitment, and builds trust with communities, fulfilling social responsibilities and contributing to a better society.

However, significant challenges remain, particularly in overcoming systemic and structural barriers, unconscious biases, and stereotypes. Both respondents also highlighted leaders' engagement in the process.

“The challenge will be to ensure that our leaders fully comprehend the significance of DEIB.”

It was underlined that he increased diversity in the workplace demands that leaders possess deeper knowledge of managing diversity, understanding different cultures, and navigating group dynamics.

One respondent stated that while some knowledge exists, it is unevenly distributed, leaving gaps in leadership readiness. Addressing these gaps requires a deliberate focus on equipping leaders with the skills and awareness needed to harness the benefits of DEIB while managing its complexities effectively.

### **State of DEIB Knowledge**

The responses varied greatly in asking the state of the DEIB knowledge in their organization, which can also be a result of the methods of interviewing. One response stated that awareness of concepts is high, other admitted there is still a lot of work to do in this area, a lot of knowledge gaps and bringing the DEIB concepts into action.

“We have the possibility to improve a lot and to see the connection between different topics”.

Both countries have laws that prevent discrimination and focus on equality which is a good starting point in bringing DEIB concept into action.

### **Steps Taken to Enhance DEIB Knowledge**

For one country, addressing this topic within their organization, presents challenges, particularly in reaching out to management and staff. Consequently, they have not yet implemented many concrete steps. However, they have made significant progress over the years in promoting gender equality and reducing pay disparities. Their recruitment process includes specific steps to ensure fairness, and recently, they have also marked Pride, which has contributed to a greater understanding and increased awareness.

For the other country, in HR, they collaborate closely with leaders and managers,

providing support on all matters related to their people. Through ongoing dialogue, they monitor the internal climate of teams, including DEIB, and facilitate the identification of solutions when necessary.

“We are monitoring the gender pay gap within the organization and across comparable positions. We conduct a commitment and satisfaction survey on an annual basis. Additionally, we have queries pertaining to equity, inclusion, and belonging. We are currently analyzing the results and developing a plan of action for the upcoming year based on these findings”.

### **Recommendations for Enhancing DEIB knowledge**

One respondent stressed the need for clear communication because it allows to gain the necessary knowledge to work effectively in this context.

“We believe that the most effective way to gain insight into the DEIB situation within our organization is through open dialogue”.

The other respondent underlined the recognition from top management.

“The most important thing is recognition from the top management. It’s much needed to enable to get results. It needs to be part of the organization’s culture”.

The respondent also explained that there are various ways to accomplish this, but the most effective approach is likely incorporating it into the management program and general employee training.

## **6 Discussion**

One of the objectives for this research was to understand what the current state of DEIB knowledge in the case organization is, to recognize the knowledge gaps. Second objective was to identify the challenges and benefits of workplace diversity for managers of the case organization, in what areas do they need help with. The third objective was to investigate the prospects of managers' DEIB adaptation in the case organization, assessing current practices, identifying gaps, and exploring needs. The goal on it was to evaluate the "readiness" of managers for DEIB integration and to propose ways to enhance their adaptability and effectiveness in fostering an inclusive workplace.

Although this study focused on managers within a single public sector organization, the trend of growing diversity in Finland and the following increase of need for awareness indicates that further research on this topic will be valuable in the future.

The key results of this study and suggestions for the future are discussed in the following sections under headings named after the objectives of this study. Two additional sections were added to this chapter; 6.4 to discuss about mapping out the DEIB implementation among neighboring countries and 6.5 to create a plan for the educative material based on this research.

### **6.1 The Current state of the DEIB knowledge**

Overall, the level of knowledge about the basic concepts of diversity management and what is needed from a leader of diverse workforce appeared to be solid in this group of managers, though it varied significantly among respondents. Some clearly had substantial experience in this area, while others were beginners in their learning journey.

The responses were generally strong on the "What" but lacked depth in addressing the "How." This suggests that practical training in diversity management is necessary to deepen understanding and equip managers with the skills to implement these concepts in their roles.

Ferdman and Deane (2013, Preface and Acknowledgments) emphasize the substantial advantages of diversity to organizations but note that its impact depends on fostering inclusive behaviors, adapting group norms, and implementing organizational practices that make individuals across all identity needs a continuous effort, especially on how it's managed.

## **6.2 Benefits and challenges of DEIB adaptation in case organization**

All respondents were able to identify benefits of workplace diversity, though the number and depth of responses varied. This suggests a foundational understanding of its advantages exists among leaders. However, the differences in detail and insight indicate that while respondents recognize the benefits, their level of comprehension and articulation differs. This highlights an opportunity for further education to ensure a more consistent and in-depth understanding across all participants.

When it comes to challenges, responses varied significantly. Some respondents had not yet encountered any challenges, often due to working in a relatively homogeneous environment. This suggests that for some, diversity-related challenges remain an unfamiliar area, emphasizing the need for broader awareness and preparedness in diverse workplace settings.

Huhta and Myllyntaus (2023) emphasize that the success of diversity initiatives relies on identifying underlying causes, establishing clear objectives, securing dedicated leadership, implementing context-specific solutions, and continuously tracking progress for necessary adjustments. The most effective strategies are those tailored to an organization's specific challenges.

## **6.3 DEIB adaptation in the case organization**

There is a strong interest among participants in expanding their knowledge and skills in diversity management, reflecting a genuine eagerness to engage with the topic. Alongside this enthusiasm, there is a clear desire for increased awareness and structured opportunities to explore these issues further. Additionally, respondents emphasized the importance

of periodically reviewing biases and decision-making processes to ensure fair and equitable workplace practices.

Biases, stereotypes and prejudices are some of the greatest challenges in management (Gibson, 2022). According to Casad and Bryan (2016) reducing prejudice is not a quick fix but a continuous process of education, engagement, and systemic change. By addressing implicit biases and fostering genuine connections across differences, organizations can create environments where every individual feels valued and included.

#### **6.4 Mapping out the DEIB implementation among neighboring countries**

The importance of DEIB initiatives was recognized in both neighboring countries that participated in this study. Equality serves as a central theme, with a strong commitment to expanding diversity initiatives.

When comparing the DEIB implementation phases that each country has taken, based on the gathered data, Finland appears to be slightly ahead having taken more concrete steps. These include anonymous recruitment, adopting gender-neutral job titles, establishing a coordination group of Swedish-speaking staff, and forming an Equality Group to raise awareness, address workplace diversity issues, and monitor the effectiveness of implemented actions.

#### **6.5 Adding awareness through educative material**

Smith and Bagshaw (2004, p. 147) highlight the need for organizations actively committing to diversity by reassessing their goals, expanding their networks, and adopting innovative strategies to address bias. However, they believe that the key to success lies in training and development—both in enhancing decision-makers' skills and prompting managers to reflect on their own actions. Without this crucial element, organizations may struggle to turn their diversity policies, procedures, and objectives into meaningful action.

After analyzing the study results from the managers perspectives into the interviews of the equality group members, it became evident that the educational material for the

organization should be delivered in a course format. Given that the organization is already utilizing the Moodle platform, this suggestion was straightforward.

Moodle is a Learning Management System (LMS) designed to offer educators, administrators, and learners a robust, secure, and integrated platform for creating personalized learning environments. Its widespread adoption has made it the world's most widely used learning platform (Moodle, 2024).

Moodle offers numerous advantages, such as flexibility and customization options (Moodle, 2024). In this case, it allows for the creation of hoped gamification features, building case scenarios to prompt reactions, and incorporating a final test at the end. By integrating the Moodle course within the organization's existing HR system, it would be possible to track the number of course participants and ensure the course is actively utilized.

## **6.6 Limitations**

There are a few limitations to this study that need to be acknowledged.

Firstly, the timing of the research coincided with one of the most turbulent periods in the organization's history. This was also the busiest time for many managers, as they were involved in ongoing change negotiations—the first in the organization's history—and were simultaneously preparing for potential layoffs of their employees due to production-related reasons. These circumstances impacted both the number of responses received and the availability of participants for the research.

Secondly, the educational material planned, as a result of this research, was not implemented prior to the completion of this thesis. So, no feedback on its effectiveness was collected. Such feedback would have been valuable for evaluating the material's impact and identifying areas for improvement.

These limitations highlight the need for further research to validate and refine the training material. Future studies should focus on gathering feedback to ensure the material effectively meets managers' needs in managing a diverse workforce.

## 7 Conclusion

This thesis provides an overview of diversity management, examining its history and the benefits and challenges of it, digging the complex cognitive aspects of the field. While diversity management is often most prominent in international companies and organizations, its significance is increasing in national companies/organizations as well due to rising immigrations rates. Understanding and managing differences is becoming more essential in fostering inclusivity in all sectors.

According to Huhta and Myllytaus (2023, p. 25), in Finland, a pervasive fear of failure presents a significant barrier to advancing diversity efforts. Learning about diversity often involves navigating between comfort and discomfort, as it requires confronting biases and rethinking entrenched perspectives—tasks that are both challenging and transformative.

For an organization to excel in diversity management, it must move beyond the fear of failure and embrace mistakes as part of the journey. Courageous steps are needed to foster greater awareness of cultural differences, create an environment of acceptance, and highlight the benefits of diversity. While maintaining a homogeneous team may appear efficient, it ultimately limits opportunities for innovation, learning, and long-term growth.

The case organization is in the early stages of integrating Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) principles into its operations, marking a promising step forward. At this stage recognizing both the importance and challenges of diversity management is crucial, as is equipping managers with the foundational knowledge and support needed for success. Increasing DEIB awareness fosters understanding and inclusion while also enhancing the organization's ability to adapt and thrive in a diverse environment. Addressing these challenges requires strategic planning, continuous education, and strong leadership support. Organizations should view DEIB not merely as a compliance requirement but as a strategic initiative that, when effectively managed, can drive innovation, growth, and long-term success.

According to Kratz (2024), organizations will remain dedicated to diversity efforts, because they are recognizing that diverse representation is a growing reality, today employees expect fair treatment, and a sense of inclusion is essential for their optimal performance.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abdali Soosan Fagan, H. (2021). *Becoming Inclusive: A Worthy Pursuit in Leadership*. Information Age Publishing, Incorporated.
- Act on Equality between Women and Men 1986/609.  
[https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1986/en19860609\\_20160915.pdf](https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1986/en19860609_20160915.pdf)
- Akella, D. (2008). A reflection on Critical Management Studies. *Journal of Management & Organization*, 14(1), 100–110. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5172/jmo.2008.14.1.100>
- Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (2003). *Studying management critically*. Sage Publications.  
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446220030>
- Bauer, T., & Sarro, E. (2021). *The Five Biggest Biases Holding Workers Back*. Neuroleadership institute Finland. <https://neuroleadership.fi/wp/blog/the-five-biggest-biases-holding-workers-back/>.
- Baumeister, R., & Leary, M. (1995). The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497–529. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>
- Casad, B. J., & Bryant, W. J. (2016). Addressing Stereotype Threat is Critical to Diversity and Inclusion in Organizational Psychology. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7(8).  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00008>
- Chamorro-Premuzic, T., & Berg, K. (2021). Fostering a Culture of Belonging in the Hybrid Workplace. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2021/08/fostering-a-culture-of-belonging-in-the-hybrid-workplace>
- Chanlat, J., & Özbilgin, M. (2017). *Management and diversity: Thematic approaches*. Emerald Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/S2051-233320160000004002>
- Edosomwan, S., Prakasan, S., K., Kouame, D., Watson, J., & Seymour, T. (2011). The History of Social Media and its Impact on Business. *The Journal of Applied Management and Entrepreneurship*, 16(3).  
<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=3f00eb1fdb5086f48583f04da28363b9199401fd>
- Eriksson, P., & Koistinen, K. (2014). *Monenlainen tapaustutkimus*. Kuluttajatutkimuskeskus.

- European Commission (2020). *Finland: Diversity Barometer 2020: Focusing on recruitment practices and multiculturalism*. [https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/library-document/finland-diversity-barometer-2020-focusing-recruitment-practices-and\\_en](https://migrant-integration.ec.europa.eu/library-document/finland-diversity-barometer-2020-focusing-recruitment-practices-and_en)
- Expert panel, Forbes (2022). *15 Key Benefits of DEI To Communicate With Team Members*. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2021/05/19/15-key-benefits-of-dei-to-communicate-with-team-members/>
- Ferdman, B., M. (2013). The Practice of Inclusion in Diverse Organizations: Toward a Systemic and Inclusive Framework. In B. M. Ferdman, & B. R. Deane (Eds.), *Diversity at Work: The Practice of Inclusion* (pp. 3–54). John Wiley & Sons. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781118764282.ch1>
- Ferdman, B., Booyesen, L., Gallegos, P., Hartel, C., Mor-Barak, M., Nishii, L., & Wasserman, I. (2013). Inclusion at Work: Practices and In-sights. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 2013(1), 16783-16783. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5465/AMBPP.2013.16783symposium>
- Ferdman, B., M., & Deane, B., R. (2013). Preface and Acknowledgements. In B. M. Ferdman, & B. R. Deane (Eds.), *Diversity at Work: The Practice of Inclusion* (xxi). John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118764282>
- FIOH, Finnish Institute of occupational health (n.d.). *Statutory perspective on non-discrimination and the promotion of gender equality*. <https://www.ttl.fi/en/learning-materials/diversity-and-inclusion-expert-organization/diversity-and-inclusion-what-and-why/statutory-perspective-on-non-discrimination-and-promotion-gender-equality>. Retrieved 6.12.2024.
- Finnish Non-discrimination Act 1325/2014. <https://www.finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/2014/en20141325.pdf>
- Finnish Tax Administration (2024a). *Vero.fi - The Finnish Tax Administration in brief*. <https://www.vero.fi/en/About-us/finnish-tax-administration/finnish-tax-administrations-year/the-finnish-tax-administration-in-brief/>. Retrieved 7.12.2024.
- Finnish Tax Administration (2024b). *Vero.fi – Key Figures in 2023 - Personnel*. <https://www.vero.fi/en/About-us/finnish-tax-administration/finnish-tax-administrations-year/key-figures/personnel/>. Retrieved 7.12.2024.
- Finnish Tax Administration (2024c). *Vero.fi - Sustainability footprint*. <https://www.vero.fi/en/About-us/finnish-tax-administration/finnish-tax-administrations-year/sustainability-footprint/>. Retrieved 2.1.2025.

- Finnish Tax Administration (2024d). *Organization of the Finnish Tax Administration*. [https://www.vero.fi/contentassets/8da58226b2334e6e9f9c2746874ada03/organisaatiok\\_aavio-en.pdf](https://www.vero.fi/contentassets/8da58226b2334e6e9f9c2746874ada03/organisaatiok_aavio-en.pdf). Retrieved 7.12.2024.
- Garrick, A., Johnson, D., & Arendt, S. (2024). Breaking Barriers: Strategies for Fostering Inclusivity in The Workplace. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 14(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i2/20799>
- Gassam Asare, J. (2023). *What Do You Do When Your Diversity Efforts Lead To Greater Conflict*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/janicegassam/2020/01/17/what-do-you-do-when-your-diversity-efforts-lead-to-greater-conflict/?sh=23d0022744c6>.
- Gibson, K. (2022). *How to Overcome Stereotypes in Your Organization*. Harvard Business School. <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/how-stereotypes-affect-an-organization>.
- Hayles, R. (2013). Communicating About Diversity and Inclusion. In B. M. Ferdman, & B. R. Deane (Eds.), *Diversity at Work: The Practice of Inclusion* (pp. 55–90). John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118764282.ch2>
- Hedayat, M (2020). *Diversity is not enough*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/mursalhedayat/2020/06/30/diversity-is-not-enough/>.
- Huhta, M., & Myllyntaus (2023). *Monimuotoisuus työelämässä. 100 keinoa kasvattaa organisaation vetovoimaa*. Alma Talent.
- Jackson, S., & Joshi, A. (2011). Work team diversity. In S. Zedeck (Ed.), *APA Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Volume 1, Building and developing the organization* (pp. 651–686). American Psychological Association. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/12169-020>
- Kananen, J. (2013). *Design research (Applied action research) as thesis research*. JAMK University of Applied Sciences.
- Kananen, J. (2015). *Kehittämistutkimuksen kirjoittaminen käytännön opas*. JAMK, Jyväskylän Ammattikorkeakoulu.
- Karsted, A., & Mennala, H. (2024). *DEI työelämässä, opas inklusiivisuuteen*. Helsingin seudun kauppakamari.
- Kratz, J (2024). *The Little Known History Of DEI And Why It's Critical To Its Survival*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/juliekratz/2024/12/29/history-of-dei-why-it-matters-for-the-future/>
- Lahti, L. (2014). *Monikulttuurinen työelämä – Hyväksi ihmiselle, hyväksi bisnekselle*. Sanoma Pro Oy.

- Malin, V., Aaltio, I., & Takala, T. (2010) Organisaatioiden ja johtamisen kriittinen tutkimus. *Liiketalouden aikakauskirja*, 2010(4). <https://lta.lib.aalto.fi/2010/4/>
- Moodle (2024). *About Moodle*.  
[https://docs.moodle.org/405/en/About\\_Moodle#:~:text=Moodle%20is%20a%20Learnin%20Management,WCAAG%20.1%20Level%20AA%20accreditation](https://docs.moodle.org/405/en/About_Moodle#:~:text=Moodle%20is%20a%20Learnin%20Management,WCAAG%20.1%20Level%20AA%20accreditation). Retrieved 1.2.2025.
- Mor Barak, M. E., Lizano, E. L., Kim, A., Duan, L., Rhee, M., Hsiao, H., & Brimhall, K. C. (2016). The Promise of Diversity Management for Climate of Inclusion: A State-of-the-Art Review and Meta-Analysis. *Human Service Organizations, Management, Leadership & Governance*, 40(4), 305–333.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2016.1138915>
- Morukian, M. (2022). *Diversity, equity, and inclusion for trainers*. Association for Talent Development.
- Naeem, M., Ozuem, W., Howell, K., & Ranfagni, S. (2023). A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22, 1–18.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231205789>
- Nkomo S., M. (2013). Inclusion: Old Wine in New Bottles? In B. M. Ferdman, & B. R. Deane (Eds.), *Diversity at Work: The Practice of Inclusion* (pp. 580–592). John Wiley & Sons. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/9781118764282.ch22>
- O'Donovan, D. (2017). Inclusion: Diversity Management 2.0. In C. Machado, & J. Davim, (Eds.), *Managing Organizational Diversity: Trends and Challenges in Management and Engineering* (pp.1–28). Springer. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54925-5\\_1](http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54925-5_1)
- O'Donovan, D. (2018). Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace. In C. Machado, & J., P. Davim, (Eds), *Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource Management. Management and Industrial Engineering* (pp.73–108). Springer.  
[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66864-2\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-66864-2_4).
- Pulliam Phillips, P., Phillips, J. J., & Bruce, A. (2013). *Survey Basics*. Association for Talent Development.
- Richmond, J. (2022). Six Ways To Make Your Hybrid Work Environment More Inclusive. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbesbusinesscouncil/2022/06/10/six-ways-to-make-your-hybrid-work-environment-more-inclusive/>
- Schreane, K. C. (2021). *Corporations compassion culture: Leading Your Business toward Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*. Wiley.

- Sharkey, L., & Barrett, M. (2017). *The Future-Proof Workplace: Six Strategies to Accelerate Talent Development, Reshape Your Culture, and Succeed with Purpose*. John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated.
- Simons, H. (2009). *Case Study Research in Practice*. SAGE.
- Smith, B., & Bagshaw, M. (2004). *Training for diversity*. Emerald Group Pub.
- Statistics Finland (2023). *11vv - Väestö kansalaisuuden, iän ja sukupuolen mukaan, 1990-2023*. [https://pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/fi/Maahanmuuttajat\\_ja\\_kotoutuminen/Maahanmuuttajat\\_ja\\_kotoutuminen\\_\\_Maahanmuuttajat\\_ja\\_kotoutuminen/maakoto\\_pxt\\_11vv.px/table/tableViewLayout1/](https://pxdata.stat.fi/PxWeb/pxweb/fi/Maahanmuuttajat_ja_kotoutuminen/Maahanmuuttajat_ja_kotoutuminen__Maahanmuuttajat_ja_kotoutuminen/maakoto_pxt_11vv.px/table/tableViewLayout1/). Retrieved 8.12.2024.
- Statistics Finland (2024a). *Net immigration at current levels would maintain population growth*. <https://stat.fi/julkaisu/cln1i9lg94af80bw1rxn0njfg>. Retrieved 6.12.2024
- Statistics Finland (2024b). *Väkiluvun kasvu suurin lähes 70 vuoteen*. <https://stat.fi/julkaisu/cln1i2dtgwknt0cut9yem67se>. Retrieved 5.1.2025
- TalentAlly (2023). *What's the Difference? DEI vs EDI vs DEIA vs DEIB vs JEDI*. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/whats-difference-dei-vs-edi-deia-deib-jedi-prodivnet/>
- ten Have, P. (2004). *Understanding Qualitative Research and Ethnomethodology*, SAGE Publications, Limited.
- Tessema, M., Hulback, T., Jones, J., Santos-Leslie, R., Ninham, K., Sterbin, A., & Swanson, N. (2023) Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: History, Climate, Benefits, Challenges, and Creative Strategies. *Journal of Human Resource and Sustainability Studies*, 11(4), 780–794. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jhrss.2023.114044>
- Turnbull, H. (2016). *The illusion of inclusion: Global inclusion, unconscious bias and the bottom line*. Business Expert Press.
- Työterveyslaitos (2020). *Monimuotoisuusbarometri*. <https://www.julkari.fi/handle/10024/140584>.
- University of Pennsylvania (2023). *DEI in the workplace: Why it's important for company culture*. [https://lpsonline.sas.upenn.edu/features/dei-workplace-why-its-important-company-culture?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://lpsonline.sas.upenn.edu/features/dei-workplace-why-its-important-company-culture?utm_source=chatgpt.com).
- Urch Druskat, V., & Wolff, S. B. (2001). Building the Emotional Intelligence of Groups. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2001/03/building-the-emotional-intelligence-of-groups>.

Verohallinto (2023). *Verohallinnon henkilöstöpoliittinen tasa-arvo- ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelma 1.7.2023 - 30.6.2025.*

Wiles, R. (2012). *What are qualitative research ethics?* Bloomsbury Academic.

Yeoman, R., Bailey, C, Madden, A., & Thompson, M. (2019). *The Oxford Handbook of Meaningful Work.* Oxford University Press.

## 8 Appendices

### Appendix 1 The Survey

#### Monimuotoisuus, yhdenvertaisuus, osallisuus ja yhteenkuuluvuus (DEIB)

26. tammik. 2025

Kyselyn tarkoituksena on kartoittaa esihenkilöiden DEIB-osaamisen nykytilaa. Isot kiitokset sinulle vastaamisesta.

\* Pakollinen

1. Miten monimuotoisuus näkyy työssäsi esihenkilönä? \*

Monimuotoisuus

2. Oletko kohdannut työssäsi haasteita monimuotoisuuteen liittyen? \*

Kyllä

Ei

3. Jos olet, niin millaisia haasteita?

4. Mitkä ovat mielestäsi monimuotoisen työyhteisön hyödyt organisaatiolle? \*

5. Miten itse huomioit monimuotoisuuden työssäsi? Haluatko kertoa jokin esimerkin? \*

6. Mitä yhdenvertaisuus työyhteisössäsi mielestäsi tarkoittaa? \*

Yhdenvertaisuus

7. Onko Henkilöstön tasa-arvo ja yhdenvertaisuussuunnitelma sinulle tuttu? \*



Kyllä

Ei

8. Miten määrittelet osallisuuden ja yhteenkuuluvuuden termit? \*

Osallisuus ja yhteenkuuluvuus

9. Miten koet, että esihenkilö voisi lisätä osallisuuden ja yhteenkuuluvuuden tunnetta ryhmässään? \*

10. Mitä taitoja pidät tärkeänä monimuotoisen työyhteisön johtamisessa? \*

11. Millaisia taitoja, tai millaista tukea/koulutusta, monimuotoisuuteen/yhdenvertaisuuteen liittyen toivoisit saavasi? \*

12. Onko jotain mitä haluaisit vielä sanoa yhdenvertaisuusasioihin (DEIB) liittyen? Vapaa sana.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Interview questions for equality group members:**

1. Have you recognized specific matters to be educated about DEIB for FTA managers?
2. Is there existing training about DEIB-matters to managers?
3. Are there certain DEIB-subjects that need repetitive training from time to time?
4. What form of educative material would serve this purpose the best?

## **Appendix 3**

### **Interview questions for the neighboring countries:**

1. How do you see the role of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) in Tax Administrations now and in the future? What do you see that are the challenges & benefits?
2. What is the current status of DEIB knowledge in your organization?
3. What steps have been taken in your organization to increase DEIB knowledge?
4. Do you have any tips/best practices/recommendations to share about adding knowledge in DEIB matters?