

Call for Abstracts

Regaining Legitimacy and Impact of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI): Rethinking EDI Research and Practice through Critical Self-Reflexivity

**Critical Management Studies beyond the Academy? 30th June – 2nd July 2027,
Lancaster University**

Session type: In-person only

Convenors:

Janet Zhangyan Johansson, *Associate Professor (Docent)*, Department of Management and Engineering, Linköping University, **Sweden**, *She/Her*; janet.johansson@liu.se

Eva-Lena Lundgren-Henriksson, *Associate Professor*, Department of Management and Organization, Hanken School of Economics, **Finland**, *She/Her*; eva-lena.lundgren-henriksson@hanken.fi

Suvi Heikkinen, Management and Leadership, *Associate Professor (Docent)*, Jyväskylä University School of Business and Economics, **Finland**, *She/Her*; suvi.s.heikkinen@jyu.fi

This track explores the current legitimacy crisis of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) research and practice inside and beyond the academy. In a climate of social outrage and political contestation, EDI initiatives are increasingly challenged, restricted, or rolled back across national, political, and organisational contexts. This backlash makes it urgent for critical scholars not only to defend EDI, but also to rethink its conceptual foundations, institutional purposes, and practical effects.

Although EDI principles have become institutionalised through organisational policies, HR practices, ESG reporting, leadership programmes, and public governance, they are also criticised as performative, managerialised, depoliticised, or disconnected from lived experiences of inequality and exclusion. These concerns resonate with Ahmed's (2006, 2012) critique of the non-performativity of diversity and anti-racism work and with critical diversity scholarship demonstrating how diversity discourses and even well-intentioned initiatives may depoliticise inequality, obscure organisational power relations, reproduce

exclusion, and overlook marginalised individuals' experiences as important sources of knowledge (Zanoni et al., 2010; Romani, Holck, & Risberg, 2019; Plotnikof et al., 2022; Johansson & Wickström, 2023; Johansson & Lindström Sol, 2022).

Responding to the conference theme of Critical Management Studies beyond the Academy, this track asks how EDI research and practice might regain legitimacy, relevance, and transformative potential through critical self-reflexivity. Rather than assuming EDI to be inherently progressive, emancipatory, or impactful, we invite critical examination of how EDI knowledge is produced, translated, institutionalised, resisted, and reworked across academic, organisational, policy, activist, and community settings.

We foreground critical self-reflexivity not as an individual exercise in moral introspection, but as a collective critical practice. Inspired by Foucauldian understandings of power/knowledge and subject formation, Bourdieu's reflexive sociology, feminist epistemology, and reflexive qualitative methodology, we understand critical self-reflexivity as the practice of examining how researchers' positions, concepts, methods, and institutional conditions shape knowledge production (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018; Bourdieu, 2003; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Cunliffe, 2003, 2016; Foucault, 1972, 1980; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991; Pillow, 2003; Rose, 1997). In EDI research, this means asking not only how inequality is studied and critically analysed, but also how academic incentives may unintentionally obscure substantive issues and reproduce the very exclusions such research seeks to challenge.

The critical self-reflexivity proposed here is directed particularly at critical scholars ourselves. It should be translated into epistemological and methodological reflexivity by examining the consequences of the very epistemic activities through which we seek to challenge workplace inequality. Beyond recognising external political attacks on EDI, we also need to consider how resistance, scepticism, or rejection may be shaped by the forms of knowledge production in which EDI scholars and practitioners themselves participate.

A Foucauldian framing directs attention to the relationship between knowledge, power, and subject formation (Foucault, 1972, 1980). This is particularly relevant in contemporary academia, where neoliberal standards of excellence, built on narrow definitions of "worthy" research, increasingly push scholars towards standardised forms of publishing and recognised publication outlets on institutional "lists" (Butler & Spoelstra, 2014, 2020).

CMS scholars should therefore reflect on the extent to which our engagement with EDI research is shaped by neoliberal incentives and the marketisation of academia, and what implications this has for ourselves, our academic communities, and EDI research more broadly. The challenge is not only to critique institutional constraints, but also to reconnect with alternative motivations for doing EDI research: ethical responsibility, collective care,

methodological experimentation, and a commitment to producing knowledge that can meaningfully challenge inequality.

We particularly invite feminist approaches to critical self-reflexivity that understand knowledge as situated, relational, embodied, and shaped by intersecting power relations (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989). We direct attention to inequalities within research processes, including the distribution of voice, epistemic authority, recognition, emotional labour, vulnerability, and responsibility. Drawing on feminist epistemology, intersectionality, care ethics, and postcolonial and decolonial perspectives, we invite reflexivity that highlights dialogical, collective, and accountable to those involved in and affected by EDI research.

We also invite scholars to think beyond organisational boundaries and engage reflexively with how EDI is shaped across cultural, political, historical, and policy contexts. EDI has developed differently across regions. In the United States, it has been closely connected to civil rights, affirmative action, and racial justice struggles, while in Europe and the Nordic region, equality work has often been shaped more strongly by gender equality, welfare universalism, anti-discrimination law, and social cohesion. These trajectories have produced important equality gains, but also specific blind spots. In Europe, and particularly in Nordic countries, colour-blind approaches to equality may make race, racialisation, whiteness, ethnicity, and coloniality difficult to name and address, even within institutions strongly committed to equality (Lundström & Teitelbaum, 2017).

These differences invite critical reflection on what can be learned across contexts, but also on the risks of transferring EDI concepts uncritically from one region to another. How do different histories and policy traditions shape what forms of inequality become visible or obscured? What might US, European, Nordic, and other contexts learn from each other about race, gender, disability, class, migration, coloniality, and intersectionality? We encourage contributions that use cross-regional and culturally situated perspectives to rethink EDI knowledge, practice, and impact.

We welcome contributions that examine the politics of EDI knowledge production, the managerialisation of EDI, the translation of critical concepts into organisational tools, the relationship between EDI scholarship and practice, and the possibilities for more reflexive, relational, intersectional, and transformative forms of EDI engagement.

The track welcomes traditional papers as well as panels, reflexive interventions, practitioner–academic dialogues, and experimental formats. Its aim is to create a space for asking what EDI has become, whose interests it serves, how it travels between theory and practice, and

how critical scholarship might contribute to more meaningful and socially responsible EDI work beyond the Academy.

Possible Topics for Submissions

Indicative topics include, but are not limited to:

1. The legitimacy crisis and rollback of EDI
Critical reflection on how EDI scholarship and practice have responded to political backlash, organisational retreat, and public scepticism.
2. Critical self-reflexivity in EDI scholarship
How our concepts, categories, assumptions, positions, and institutional locations shape what EDI makes visible, obscures, or reproduces.
3. Feminist, intersectional, and decolonial reflexivity
Situated knowledge, embodiment, affect, relationality, care, coloniality, and the limits of single-axis approaches to inequality.
4. The non-performativity and managerialisation of EDI
How diversity statements, metrics, business cases, ESG reporting, and standardised interventions may transform structural inequalities into administratively manageable problems.
5. Neoliberal academia and EDI knowledge production
How publication incentives, journal rankings, funding systems, academic careers, and institutional definitions of “worthy” research influence the questions we ask and the knowledge we produce.
6. Researcher complicity, responsibility, and accountability
How EDI scholars may unintentionally reproduce exclusion through research design, authorship, citation, collaboration, representation, and dissemination.
7. Power and inequality within research relationships
Epistemic authority, voice, consent, vulnerability, emotional labour, reciprocity, and responsibility in relations among researchers, participants, practitioners, and communities.
8. The travelling and translation of EDI concepts
How EDI frameworks move across US, European, Nordic, Global South, organisational, policy, activist, and community contexts, and what may be distorted or lost in translation.

9. Representation, participation, and epistemic inclusion

Tokenism, the burden of representation, decision-making power, and the difference between being present, being heard, and being able to influence.

10. Relational, care-based, and affective approaches to EDI

Vulnerability, interdependence, attentiveness, responsibility, responsiveness, embodied knowing, and collective practices of “caring with.”

11. Methodological experimentation and knowledge co-production

Participatory, collaborative, ethnographic, autoethnographic, arts-based, dialogical, and activist approaches that challenge conventional EDI research practices.

12. Reconstructing EDI beyond critique

Alternative theories, methods, institutional arrangements, pedagogies, and practitioner–academic collaborations that can strengthen EDI’s legitimacy, relevance, and transformative potential.

Across these themes, criticality remains central. We particularly welcome contributions that turn critical reflexivity toward EDI scholarship itself by examining not only what is problematic within organisations and institutions, but also how our own theories, methods, categories, collaborations, and academic practices may distort or misinterpret the phenomena we study and reproduce the very inequalities and exclusions we seek to challenge.

The abstracts should be approximately 500–1,000 words, including references. They may also include visuals where relevant to the submission. Abstracts should be submitted via email to the stream organisers.

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Romani, L., Holck, L., & Risberg, A. (2019). Benevolent discrimination: Explaining how human resources professionals can be blind to the harm of diversity initiatives. *Organization*, 26(3), 371–390.

Rose, G. (1997). Situating knowledges: Positionality, reflexivities and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography*, 21(3), 305–320.

Zanoni, P., Janssens, M., Benschop, Y., & Nkomo, S. (2010). Unpacking diversity, grasping inequality: Rethinking difference through critical perspectives. *Organization*, 17(1), 9–29.

Convenor Information:

The organisers of this track all share an interest in EDI research and critical management studies. Dr. Johansson’s research specializes in ethics, business ethics, gender studies and the intersections of gender, equity, diversity, and inclusion within organisational contexts. She has led several empirical research projects on gender equality, equity, diversity, and inclusion, resulting in numerous journal publications.

Dr. Johansson’s work focuses particularly on EDI research and institutional practices. As an ethnic East Asian academic working within the Swedish academy, she actively reflects on and mobilises her subjective position as a minority scholar in both her research and institutional engagement. This positionality informs her critical and reflexive approach to

studying how EDI is understood, practised, and institutionalised in organisational and academic settings. Alongside her research, Dr. Johansson currently holds an institutional responsibility as an Equity Lecturer at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Linköping University. On this post, she leads activities related to DEI efforts, with particular attention to enhancing the quality of university teaching in relevant areas. Her research emphasises feminist care ethics and their application to socially sustainable organisational processes, including human resource management, leadership practices, employee well-being, and equity strategies. Her work contributes to advancing theoretical, methodological, and practical approaches to DEI in organisations. Dr. Johansson's scholarship has been published in leading journals such as *Gender, Work & Organization*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Human Relations*, *Leadership* and *Management Learning*.

Dr. Eva-Lena Lundgren-Henriksson has an interest in identity, polyphony, dialogue, and issues related to the neo liberalisation of academia and exploring such through autoethnography and critical dialogue with the academic self. Her work has for example been published in *Management Learning*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Long Range Planning*, *Industrial Marketing Management*, *Journal of Organizational Change Management* and *Scandinavian Journal of Management*.

Dr. Suvi Heikkinen acts as a co-leader in the research group Organisational Ethics, Leadership and HRM (ETHOS), and her work has been published in journals like *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Gender, Work and Organization*, *Organization and Environment*, *Scandinavian Journal of Management* and *International Journal of Human Resource Management*.

Dr. Janet Johansson and Dr. Suvi Heikkinen are currently co-editing, together with Andreas Diedrich, the volume *Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Nordic Context: Perspectives, Practices, and Pathways*, to be published by Palgrave Macmillan in April 2027. The volume brings together 18-chapter contributions from scholars across the Nordic region and beyond, offering critical, multidisciplinary, and self-reflexive perspectives on the current state and future development of EDI research and practice. This editorial project provides a strong foundation for the proposed track, as it directly engages with questions of EDI legitimacy, critical reflexivity, practical relevance, and transformative impact. By inviting broader scholarly and practitioner audiences into reflexive discussions on EDI, Johansson and Heikkinen aim to foster more meaningful, applicable, and socially responsible research within and beyond the academy.