

*Full Length Research Paper*

## **Diversity of the workforce: voices from the field**

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Accepted 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2013

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**The object of this study was to analyze whether organizational policies that aim at stimulating workforce diversity are effectively implemented. We developed a case-study at a multinational company in the technology sector, referred to as HIGHTEC, in order to compare the organizational discourse and policies to how the employees perceive them. We did a documental research into HIGHTEC's diversity-related policies, which were submitted to content analysis. Eventually, we did interviews with minority and non-minority employees, transcribed and examined them using discourse analysis. The main results showed that, although corporate discourses are translated into organizational policies, their effectiveness is extremely limited due to employees' ingrained prejudices, permissiveness at the management level, and the lack of a collective sense of diversity. Minorities and non-minorities have shown prejudiced and discriminatory attitudes towards each other, evidencing how difficult it is for them to respect their differences. Although policies give them a specific role in the process, managers show an explicit or concealed prejudice, thus undermining policies' effectiveness. Indeed, there is a dissonance between diversity discourse and practice, and when it comes to workforce diversity, people are more inclined to accept ethnic, social and gender differences, but resistant to accept different sexual orientations.**

**Key words:** Diversity, culture, policies, gender differences, sexual orientations, minorities

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Historically, organizations have been analyzed as aseptic entities in which individuals coexist in a functional and neutral way in order to pursue common economic objectives (Tudorescu et al., 2010). Nevertheless, this model ignores the fact that individuals of distinct psychographic segments, and with different life styles coexist in the workplace and, not rarely, as they face discrimination they opt to remain silent and hide themselves behind the wall of professional impersonality. In fact, for a long time, the academy has separated the study of work and diversity (Kurowski, 1999, Leek; et al. 1992, Mee, 1954) since the scholars have assumed that the nature of work is not affected by gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation (Ragins 2012, Stoker, 2012, Barron, 2009; Bhadwaj et al. 2008). Nevertheless, partly due to the view that the inclusion of historically discriminated

minorities (Galvin, 2006; Davidson, 2012) and the democratization of some countries (Voronov, 2005), the issue of diversity has been consolidated in the academic and corporate agenda throughout the world (Blake-Beard et al. 2008).

Scholars have been focusing on the impact of the workforce heterogeneity in the workplace (Cañas; Sondak, 2011); whereas the corporations have been concerned with how to manage people of different origins, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, religious beliefs or physical limitations (Anand and Winters, 2008)), and respond to institutional pressures to harmonize profit with social justice (Robins and Coulter, 1998; Turnbull et al., 2010). As a strategic response to these pressures many firms have adopted diversity equality policies, quite often disregarding the cultural

differences among the countries where they operate. This is the case of a North-American technology enterprise HIGHTECH (pseudonym), which, in the mid-1990s, implemented the same diversity policy in the US and in all its subsidiaries located in more than 100 different countries.

The experience of having worked at HIGHTECH's main office and also in one of its subsidiaries has instigated the investigative question of this research: how effective has the implementation of policies that seek to stimulate diversity been? The fact that the author has worked in this company, as his own experiences were taken into account, configures this study as auto ethnographical (Alvesson, 2007).

In fact, this daily and close contact with the company has facilitated the access to HIGHTECH's documents, employees and support groups, especially in the headquarters. On the other hand, emotional involvement with HIGHTECH forced us to distance ourselves from the object being studied (bracketing); thus following Bourdieu's guidance (2007) not to mistake the subjectivity of the researcher (our judgments) with the subjectivity of the research objects (individuals, sociocultural systems).

In fact, this study has sought to analyze:

- a) The organization's diversity policy, according to its discourse, verifying its implicit and explicit precepts and propositions;
- b) Benefited minority employees' perceptions regarding this policy's effectiveness;
- c) Non-minority employees' attitudes in relation to the organization's diversity policy.

This research is justified because, although there has been an increasing score of studies on diversity management (Cañas and Sondak, 2011; Calás and Smircich, 1992), a gap on how they are dealt in different cultural perspectives still persists (Freitas and Dantas, 2010). Besides, our discussion examine diversity in terms of its formulation versus actual practice in organizations; thus, we give empirical support to Cañas arguments that formal organizational orientations concerning respect to fellow employees, who do not share the same psychodemographic traits, do not suffice if disrespectful behaviors are not curbed and punished (Cañas, 2011).

We understanding that deepening the discussion of diversity in the cultural arena will result in more effective organizational practices and it may also lead to suggestions that will result in improvements in the employees' quality of life. Besides this introduction, the article is divided into six sections. The second section introduces the corporate discourses and the issue of

legitimacy, followed by a discussion of the complex nature of diversity in the organizational environment. The fourth section presents the methodology used in the research. This is followed by analyses of company and minority and non-minority discourses, which precede a discussion of the study's findings and some final considerations.

### **Corporate discourses and the issue of legitimacy**

Besides disseminating a coherent and univocal view of the organization and its actions, corporate discourses acquire characteristics that enable them to be raised to the category of strategy, as well as constituting communication actions that, at least a rhetorical level, represent a process of organizational engineering that aligns the company with what is most modern (Saraiva et al., 2004). This movement is not new but its current level of sophistication reveals tendencies that highlight differences between the modernity of the discourse and the conservative nature of practices.

In general, corporate discourses – in the plural, because they act at multiple levels and on different fronts – divulge a new view of the organization (Heloani and Capitão, 2011), dealing with aspects that are both dissimilar and complementary, in the weaving of a view of citizenship (more than of the employee), and the community (more than of the company), in order to assure legitimacy. This quest for legitimacy by adopting organizational practices has systematically been discussed by various theoretical currents (James, 2011; Saraiva, 2011), including neo-institutionalism, who affirm that companies adopt practices to legitimize themselves, for example, in the eyes of the market (Lounsbury and Crumley, 2007), customers (Wailes and Michelson, 2008) and other audiences that offer a “seal of approval” regarding organizational actions, in a rigid sustenance-seeking process that involves submitting strategies to institutionalized agents (Barbosa, 2011; Cavedon, 2011).

In the perspective adopted in this article, the ultimate objective of the discourses – which configure organizational practices at the ideological level – is the adherence of employees to a project that precedes them, although it intends to be independent of them. It thus possesses a traditional essence due to the fact that it does not question the established capitalist order, but, at the same time, presents itself as humanized and contemporary. The cooperation which the company intends to obtain from employees is based on ideas such as democracy, pro-activity and transparent communication – which have only recently been more widely incorporated into the management discourse (Scherer and Pallazo, 2007).

In fact, discourses are disseminated throughout the organization with the aim of constructing a new reality, surpassing quotidian capitalist limits, and transforming it into a space of affects, to be “loved” by the employees (Dupuis, 2009). It is up to the latter to devote themselves with ever greater perseverance to the quest for professional recognition, doing more than is prescribed, while the organization’s role is to note and observe the extra effort and to provide the promise of a return. What is not said is that, although the employees’ affective involvement is encouraged, impersonality predominates in management practices (Chanlat, 2004). Indeed, the most dedicated employees may become “discardable” if they do not deliver the expected results. Management practices are at variance with discourses because they preserve the instrumentality of administration, “the armed arm of the economy” (Aktouf, 2004), linked to performance.

The discourses are particularly ambiguous in relation to diversity. In their quest for social legitimacy through investments in non-discriminatory practices, organizations qualify themselves to be perceived as more socially responsible than others that do not adopt the same stance (Wailles and Michelson, 2008). However, it is important to consider the effectiveness and consequences of pro-diversity corporate discourses. Effectiveness refers to the intensity with which policies designed to establish equal opportunities among individuals from socially discriminated segments are practiced (DeWayne, 2011). The consequences are the effect of the adoption, or non-adoption, of these measures, given that legitimacy is threatened when individuals do not believe in these policies owing to lack of opportunities for advancement and recognition.

### **The issue of diversity in organizations**

Possibly due to their technically-oriented idealized concept, organizations seek to adopt a homogeneity perspective in their quotidian activities, dealing with their employees as if differences could disappear under the formality of hierarchical positions (Mage and Galinsky, 2008). In a certain sense, they assume that individuals separate their personal characteristics and interests from their professional ones, subordinating the former to the latter in the organizational environment (Hassard et al., 2013). The limitations of this standpoint have arisen by the identification of competing rationales within the organization, showing that there are no cleavages between who the individuals are and their professional roles and demands (Lenardi et al., 2011).

Initially, the idea of workforce diversity’s being a relevant issue was challenged by some scholars. They

questioned if the hegemonic view of individual differences had any influence on the organizations’ environments and their results whatsoever. After this initial criticism, the academy began to investigate the issue of diversity management as an instrumental way of transforming a social concern into a quest for results; thus, the object of study became how to optimize exchanges of information regarding experiences, values, attitudes, and the apprehension of new approaches, stimulating creativity, flexibility, innovation and change, as well as improving the decision-making process.

Nevertheless, on the other hand, a diverse workforce can reduce integration and social contacts, weaken ties of loyalty with work colleagues and the organization, besides leading to conflicts and communication problems, given that many employees find it intolerable to be obliged to coexist with individuals who have distinct identities.

Diversity, in essence, is related to respect for individuality and its recognition, the way individuals perceive themselves – their visible and invisible identities. Individuals tend to classify themselves and others into categories, thus affecting human interactions, in a process that involves stereotyping and even stigmatizing others. It is relatively common for individuals that belong to minorities to be discriminated against. In fact, there are empirical evidences that blacks (Fleury, 2000), people with facial deformations (Edwards and Watson, 1980), physically disabled (Centers and Centers, 1963), obese (Harris et al., 1983), homo and bisexuals (Silva, 2006), as well as blind people (Scott, 1969) are stigmatized.

Stigma is a socially constructed phenomenon that has severe negative effects on its victims (Thompson et al., 2004), given that it is grounded in an asymmetric relation that confirms attributes that are considered to depreciate a person or social group. Stigma per se differentiates and distinguishes, with separation and a relational property at its core. It exists when the properties of something or someone are related comparatively; therefore, the perception of stigma reduces the expectations of others and may signify abnormality, miserliness or even physical or mental incapacity (Goffman, 1963).

### **METHODOLOGY**

In this research our idiosyncrasies were articulated with the object itself; i.e., there is no distance between the subject and the object (bracketing), or epistemological rupture, given that, on the contrary, it is the very inclusion of his or her point of view that enables the object to be apprehended. We believe that the construction of reality is based upon personal experiences and an individual cannot be dissociated from his or her world (Heidegger, 1997). This *Weltanschauung* has positioned the researchers not merely as observers of the phenomenon, but as agents that interpret their

own experiences, the interviewees' speeches, gestures and expressions, and HIGHTECH's documents, fully aware that the act of interpretation involves a specific analytical process, not just an opinion.

The data was collected from HIGHTECH's documents (employee manuals, intranet, manager training guides, home page) and through interviews with employees and visits to the company. In order to grasp their perceptions, we opted for the ethnography method and its interpretationist paradigm of social reality. Ethnography leads researchers to the field to seek for the interaction with people, necessary information. In the present study, as one of the researchers has worked in the company for the past decade, this study can also be considered as autoethnographic (Alvesson, 2003). Despite all the emotional involvement with the object, we sought to be impartial when capturing and analyzing the data.

The fieldwork started in October 2006 and it was concluded in 2012. Our first intention was to merely compare minority to non-minority employees who work in Brazil. Eventually we enlarged the sample of interviewees and included some individuals who work in the headquarters as well. Given the research's qualitative approach, in which representations of the subjects are more important than the absolute number of interviews (Gaskell, 2002), we decided to use an intentional non-probabilistic sample; thus, we have interviewed 57 employees in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo offices, and also 31, in Texas. These individuals were in average 34 years old, they were all graduated and had worked at the company for around 5.7 years; 27 of them were managers, and the others were analysts. All the employees interviewed in Brazil were native Brazilians; whereas, 9 of those who were interviewed in Texas were legal residents in the US, but originally from the UK, Germany, Mexico or Guatemala. As social identities are concerned, 32 employees who work in the subsidiaries, and 19 of those who work in Texas, identified themselves as minority members (blacks, women, homo or bisexuals, handicapped or Jews).

The interviews were semi-structured and divided into 4 sections: the first focused on the interviewees' categorical data, the second on their identity and insertion in society, the third on their career path and, finally, the fourth on the work environment in the company. This research has been conceived as part of a Ph.D. thesis and, during this 5-year period, notes were taken and interviews were made; unfortunately, not all of them were allowed to be recorded. But those were as well as the notes that had been tape-recorded were transcribed and subjected to the discourse analysis method, in order to apprehend not only the message, but also explore its meaning; what was said and how it was said, what is explicit or implicit, as well as the language used and the dimensions emphasized (Putnam and Fairhurst, 2001). This technique was used to study the real use of language by real speakers in real situations, with language anchored in a context, able to produce transphrastic units (Stati, 1990), which furnished evidence of the use of language for social, expressive and referential purposes (Schiffrin, 1994, p.39). In fact, discourse analysis makes it possible to apprehend verbal and non-verbal enunciations as communicative behaviors, constituent elements of the identity of a group, seen as a community of speech. As they express discursive ideological persuasion strategies, the research analyzed the following aspects:

- a) The relation between the discourses' explicit and implicit contents (implied and presupposed);
- b) Silencing, themes on which the discourse silences;
- c) Lexical selection, or the discourse's formal elements;
- d) The construction of characters, mobilized according to discursive

intentions;

- e) Selection of intra-discourses which deal separately with the views of the company, minorities and non-minorities,
- f) Inter-discourses, discursive enunciations that are distinct from the enunciators' discourses.

In order to validate the data, the data collected has been triangulated: the official documents, observations, and the interviews. During the process involving the construction of the research based on the original script, questions of another nature arose obeying the organization's internal logic, and these were apprehended through direct observation.

## RESULTS

### What the organizational discourse has to say

HIGHTECH is a North American company and it is clear that most of its diversity in the workplace policies are strategic responses to institutional pressures, especially those imposed by the federal laws prohibiting discrimination and harassment in the workplace based on certain characteristics. As a matter of fact, these laws have evolved to include prohibitions against various types of conduct based on certain characteristics throughout the years.

The legal environment in the US changed with the passage of the Equal Pay Act, in 1963 and the Title VII of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in employment related matters. Eventually, new amendments occurred, and Title VII was expanded in 1967 with the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), 29 United States Code, Sections 621-634; in 1974, with the Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act, 38 United States Code, Section 201; in 1978 with the Pregnancy Discrimination Act; and in 1990, with the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act), United States Code, Section 12101. In 2009, President Obama extended benefits to some gay federal employees, and based on case law and trends such as an increasing number of jurisdictions recognizing and legalizing same-sex couples unions and marriages, in many countries, sexual orientation has emerged as a new social issue.

HIGHTECH's formal diversity policies have also evolved and, currently, it enables interpretations to be made regarding its encouragement of diversity:

*(01) "HIGHTEC has been demonstrating a continuous commitment to people and fair employment practices. As HIGHTEC has been growing and expanding its activities throughout the world, its workforce has become more diversified, thus helping the company to achieve its full potential. Recognizing and developing each person's talents provides HIGHTEC with new ideas".*

Fragment (01) initially reveals an explicit theme: a “commitment to people and fair employment practices”. This discourse associates labor force diversification with the worldwide expansion of the company’s activities, confirming Cox’s view (1994) regarding the instrumental use of diversity. But was this policy effectively practiced before the expansion? There are no discursive indications that the workforce had been diversified prior to the expansion, a situation which reveals to be inconsistent with the commitment to fairness.

Also noteworthy is HIGHTEC’s instrumental view of its employees. Their talents are recognized and developed in order to help “the company achieve its full potential”. The following discourse fragment (02) explicitly expresses the notion that recognition is exchanged for organizational results: the continuous commitment to people is thus submitted/thus conforms to a strictly capitalist logic (Aktouf, 2004):

*(02) “The company benefits from the creativity and innovation that results when HIGHTEC has different experiences, perspectives and cultures working together. This is what drives invention and high performance at HIGHTEC. We believe that a diversified and well-managed workforce expands HIGHTEC’s knowledge base, skills and intercultural understanding, which thus enables us to understand, relate and respond to changes in our customers’ diversity, connecting them to the power of technology. Our overall commitment is reflected in our philosophy of diversity and inclusion”*

Fragment (02) reveals the company’s view on diversity and it reinforces the idea that the organization benefits from the differences (Aranha et al., 2006), since “this is what drives invention and high performance at HIGHTEC”. So the company, explicitly, associates workforce diversity to the ability to fulfill customers’ expectations and suggesting a logic that is not guided by a genuine social concern, but by a desire to legitimize itself before the market (Lounsbury; Crumley, 2007) and its customers (Wailes; Michelson, 2008) through the instrumental use of this discourse (Saraiva et al., 2004). HIGHTEC also states that:

*(03) “a diversified and highly productive workforce constitutes a sustainable competitive advantage that differentiates HIGHTEC, because a work environment that values differences motivates employees to give their best; therefore, to a diversified workforce is a means to win the market”.*

This discourse fragment (03) explicitly sees diversity as a “source of sustainable competitive advantage” which enables the company to be “a winner” in markets around

the world. The word “win” suggests the existence of a combat rationale, in which the company associates victory to diversity, which becomes a tool to help HIGHTEC defeat its competitors by its employees’ adherence to the organizational project (Sennet, 1999).

HIGHTEC’s support policies and practices are based both on the following set of values, which include a strong belief that all employees should be treated with dignity and respect:

*(04) “Here we do not discriminate against any employee or job candidate due on account of race, beliefs, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, identity and gender expression, nationality, disability, age or veteran status. Our policy is to comply with all locally and nationally applicable legislation regarding non-discrimination and equal opportunities”.*

According to this fragment (04), HIGHTEC’s support policies and practices are based on equality, equal opportunities and affirmative action. The words “dignity and respect” are mobilized explicitly and are associated with the non-differentiation of employees or job candidates and the observance of non-discrimination and equal opportunity-related legislation. What is stated to be company policy is in fact simply a legal obligation, a requirement, which must be met for a company to operate in a given territory, or otherwise be in violation of the established legal order. Thus, it is not a question of corporate policy but a response to institutional pressure in order to make operations possible. When HIGHTEC transforms a legal obligation into a strategy, it implies that observing legislation is the company’s strategic decision, but it remains silent regarding the policy’s non-strategic character.

All HIGHTEC managers have leadership responsibilities regarding diversity and inclusion, including the creation of a better work environment for its customers, employees, suppliers, commercial partners and shareholders. HIGHTEC highlights the specific responsibilities in relation to diversity and inclusion and for results obtained as part of their work performance:

*(05) “(...) Attract, develop, foster and retain a diversified workforce in order to serve our increasingly diverse customers and to conquer global markets, labor markets, and communities throughout the world.*

*(...) Create a better work environment to achieve top performance, (...) encouraging and motivating every employee to contribute to their full potential.*

*(...) Familiarize themselves with leadership, (...) integrating diversity, inclusion, equal opportunities and affirmative action policies and practices into their main daily business responsibilities.*

*(...) Execute the company's commitment to diversity, equal opportunities and affirmative action by observing the following behavior and actions: play an active role in monitoring and developing women, colored people, minorities, people with veteran status and the disabled, support the company's commitment to small businesses owned or operated by women, colored people and the disabled".*

The role of management in fostering diversity and inclusion is explicit in discursive fragment (05): create a "better work environment", suggesting a preoccupation that no obstacles should be allowed to stand in the way of the results. The implicit assumption is that diversity is treated as a potential problem which is resolved by the inclusion of minorities. This is the reason why inclusion and diversity targets are included in assessments of HIGHTEC managers' performance, from which one may infer that diversity is fostered at the management level, so that employees can be engaged in the pursuit of profit (Sennet, 1999). Once again this evidences the ambiguity of diversity policies aimed at assuring market legitimacy (Lounsbury; Crumley, 2007) and as a way of projecting a more socially responsible image than that of competitors (Wailes; Michelson, 2008). Diversity is attracted, developed and promoted in order to serve HIGHTEC's increasingly diverse customers and to conquer global markets, labor markets, and communities all over the world, given that differences are harnessed for the development of the business, encouraging and motivating every employee to contribute to their full potential and engagement with the aforementioned organizational project.

Another issue evidenced in this discursive fragment is the company's commitment to diversity by maintaining economic relations with small businesses owned by minorities. Rather than fostering diversity, this policy in fact constitutes disguised discrimination, as people are afforded different, not equal treatment, given that these organizations are not targeted by HIGHTEC policies on account of their competence but because they are owned by minorities. This is somewhat inconsistent with the diversity encouragement discourse as it constitutes an act of charity (benevolence towards minorities) rather than one of inclusion (equal treatment of the different), which is a policy that does not serve the interests of minorities, who share the same organizational space but in different geographic territories, who speak for themselves in the next section.

### **The Viewpoint of the Minorities: Similarities and Differences**

Researching diversity in the workforce is a challenge

and a risk, because categorize individuals in terms of gender, race, sexual orientation may lead us into the trap of the essentialist thinking. Indeed, categorizing people – or ask them to do so and categorize themselves – may result in their essentialization; i.e., making the assumption that a set of characteristics is the essence, the nature, of all members of a group. In fact, essentialism is damaging because it "encourages individuals to immediately attribute their colleagues' thoughts and behaviors to their demographic category membership"(Mir & Mir, 2013). In fact, those employees, who identified themselves as members of any minority, tended to highlight their social identity by their group's characteristics.

Nevertheless, all the individuals interviewed perceived HIGHTEC's diversity stimulating policies as limited. No matter what minority they belong to, the accusations are similar:

*(06) "the discourse is very nice, but there are no black managers" (black employee).*

*(07) "People talk such a lot about diversity policy here in the company, but my partner does not have the same rights as my friends' wives: health plan, life insurance, sabbatical" (homosexual employee).*

Discursive fragments (06) and (07) illustrate inter-discursiveness, when a discourse that is different from the enunciator's is enounced by him or her. The explicit "discourse" character is mobilized in the discursive fragment (06) as a contradiction. Although it is "all very nice", an implicit presupposition of formality and an explicit one of irony, "there are no negro managers or directors", suggesting that the social ascension of these minorities is problematic. Fragment (07) mobilizes the company's discourse, implicitly implying that it is in fact divulged but not effective, as homosexual and heterosexual couples do not receive equal treatment. Notwithstanding, we perceived a difference between the American and the Brazilian realities. Although the complaints were the same, in the US, we did find black managers. It seems that, despite the organizational policies, HIGHTEC has failed to achieve racial balance within its executive teams. Apparently the company has revolving doors for talented minorities. It is quite successful to attract and recruit the best – after all the brand is very respected worldwide – but in the daily corporative life, these professionals get angered, frustrated and either leave or become mired in middle management.

Despite belonging to different minorities, the testimonies highlight the contradictions between the discourse's propositions and organizational practice. As

regards prejudice at HIGHTEC, the positions are different:

*(08) The funny thing is that two Jewish employees, one of whom was a woman, made homophobic comments and no-one said anything; in fact, no-one ever says anything; people sometimes access the company's diversity site and joke about faggots and dykes (...) I get very angry, but I keep quiet (homosexual employee)*

*(09) "To be seen as a good professional, women have to be twice as good as men, (...) in my case as I'm blond (...) and even worse, divorced. You think there's no prejudice anymore? Men look on separated women as easy prey". (female employee).*

In the case of discursive fragment (08), the employee, by highlighting the character "Jewish", insinuates that minorities are not expected to show any kind of prejudice, it happened and no one was punished. This confirms the stigma, in which the individual shoulders the burden of being discriminated against for what he is, in silence. The discursive fragment (09) highlights another form of discrimination. Through the character "woman" – who has to be "twice as good as a man", referring to the fact that she is blond and, "worse, divorced" and then asks the interviewer: "do you really think there's no prejudice anymore?" – she experiences three kinds of discrimination in her daily professional life: on account of her gender, marital status and physical characteristics.

Both in the US and in Brazilian offices, we found out that when it comes to diversity policies, people are more likely to accept the ethnic, social and gender, but they are more resistant to the diversity of sexual orientations. This may be explained because over the centuries, homosexuality has been seen as a crime (by the State), a sin (by the Religions), and a disease (by Science until the 1970's). The scenario is even worse in Brazil, where in a sexist society, we still observe, almost, a total exclusion of gays and lesbians in the media, ads; it still prevails the assumption that homosexuals are futile, immoral and, therefore, do not need or want to get married and have children; and, furthermore, the inclusion of homosexuality is still a compulsory issue when discussing AIDS, but it is neglected when the topic is human rights, for example. Homophobia has been historically and socially constructed in Brazil, and it lies in the construction of masculinities since childhood (specific games, social spaces), it permeates the cultural life in lyrics, literature, movies and soap operas.

In order to handle discrimination, the members of minorities adopt various tactics:

*(10) "Is there any prejudice? I don't know, I don't think*

*so, because if there is I denounce it and the asshole will get screwed, but sometimes you hear jokes about miserly Jews (...) this pisses me off" (Jewish employee).*

*(11) "I'll denounce the first one that makes a Nazi joke...you can be sacked for that" (Jewish employee).*

*(12) "I'm not going to accuse them because I end up suffering the consequences. You never know what they can do to me afterwards (...) what the parent company and HR say is very different from our day-to-day lives" (homosexual employee).*

Fragments (10) and (11) express a reaction to discrimination. The employee of Jewish origin says that if discriminated against she will denounce it publicly, refusing to accept discrimination, in a stance that is different from the enunciator of discourse (12), in which the employee, a homosexual, silences fearing reprisals ("You never know what they can do to me afterwards"). The implicit presupposition is that worldwide HIGHTEC policy is at variance with what happens on a daily basis in the offices where the interviewees work. On the other hand, fragments (13) and (14) show another kind of stance in relation to discrimination, characterized by a kind of resignation:

*(13) "I know that to be accepted one has to be one of the boys. It's funny how my work colleagues treat me like a man (...) it's part of the game (...) Brazilian men are very macho no matter where they work, whether in a Swedish, US company, or whatever. Here women drivers are still considered to be a public danger" (female employee).*

*(14) "(...) that's why I have to dress like this...really formal. Always in grey or black this suit makes me look professional, respected (...) they see me as a colleague not as a woman" (female employee).*

As it is impossible to be seen in any other way, the employee restricts herself to social practices that disguise differences. By being treated and letting herself be treated like a man, she manages to survive in an everyday macho environment which, in her opinion, reflects Brazilian society which is based on a male hegemony that despises women, stigmatizing them as mentally incapable gossips (Bourdieu, 2007). By adopting formal clothing that she doesn't like (lexical selections "I have to dress like this (...) this suit makes me look professional, respected (...) they see me as a colleague and not as a woman") the interviewee suggests that, in order to survive in the company, she denies her identity and adheres to the mainstream, succumbing to

discrimination.

In the case of fragments (15) and (16), the interviewee expresses his feeling of invisibility regarding the economic and social discrimination he suffers at HIGHTEC:

(15) *"I sometimes feel invisible, when they talk about trips to the USA, for example... they don't even include me in the conversation (...) they must think: let's not humiliate this poor wretch who will never have enough money to travel like us". (black employee).*

(16) *"(...) others make such a point of treating us well that it seems artificial". (black employee).*

An implicit presupposition of fragment (15), due to the use of the term "poor wretch", is that this employee's remuneration is lower than that of his peers, which is why he is not included in conversations about international trips. He thus feels "invisible", although he is treated in an excessively cordial way (16), reflecting discrimination and stigmatization (Goffman, 1963) that is more social than ethnic, given that the comments referred to remuneration that is incompatible with international trips.

Minority identity is an explicit theme in discursive fragment (17), in which the interviewee, independently of the policies adopted, is perfectly aware of his different condition:

(17) *"No matter what they say or do, since I was a child I've always known that I belong to a minority (...) tolerated rather than accepted (...) but here I know what my function is, what I have to do, what people expect of me". (Jewish employee).*

Fragment (17), spoken in a tone of resentment and resignation, shows the emptiness of the company's promises of respect (notably fragments 01 and 04), revealing the pain of an individual who, to survive, remains silence and hides behind his position and its demands (Irigaray, 2008). In general these interviews show the positioning of minorities in relation to attempts at corporate homogenization. Diversity stimulation policies do not appear to be adequately understood, because, rather than treating all people as equals they should perceive and treat differences equitably. It is not by ignoring asymmetries that people who are discriminated against will be integrated into organizations, but through the recognition that, by reflecting society's heterogeneity, differences in fact constitute a gain.

### **The voice of non-minorities**

HIGHTEC employees that are not benefitted by policies

aimed at stimulating diversity and inclusion clearly reveal contradictions between management discourses and practices:

(18) *"I'm not at all prejudiced, I just don't think that a faggot can be an engineer. How's he going to deal with the navies?" (male employee, heterosexual).*

(19) *"The company states very clearly that we can't have prejudice around here (...) but of course people always tell faggot jokes. After all these guys are very funny (...) jokes about blacks, women, Jews and Portuguese too...(...) it's not racism, it's just humor. In the parent company [in the USA] they have this political correctness thing; but here in Brazil? We have a great sense of humor and anything is an excuse to have some fun". (male employee, heterosexual).*

In discursive fragment (18) one can perceive a discriminatory discourse (which is quite explicit in the lexical selection "faggot") according to which sexual orientation prevents homosexuals from exercising professions that require competencies, such as leadership, that, according to stereotype, are perceived to be male (Bourdieu, 2007). In the following fragment it is recognized that the company does not accept prejudice, but humor is not considered to be discriminatory. The interviewee thinks that the prejudice displayed against homosexuals (invoked by the lexical selection "faggot") negroes ("black"), women ("woman"), Jews ("Jew") and people with intellectual limitations ("Portuguese", an allusion to intelligence) is "just humor", suggesting the need to politicize humor as a means of communication (Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995). The devaluation of women is the object of discursive fragments (20) and (21):

(20) *"Joana (fictitious name) is a very good professional, works like a man". (male employee, heterosexual).*

(21) *"The most difficult thing about working with women is when they enter the PMT phase (...) they become hysterical, (...) this is a place of work, there's no room for prissiness". (male employee, heterosexual).*

In fragment (20) there is a positive reference to the professional performance of the character Joana, but comparing her depreciatingly to a man, which reinforces Bourdieu's view (2007) that the corporate world is androcentric, a place where women have to be compared to men to confirm their quality. In fragment (21), the particularities of gender are depreciated by the interviewee, who uses the lexical selections "hysterical" and "prissiness" to refer to the female emotional state



during the period of pre-menstrual tension. The use of the lexicon “the most difficult thing about” implies that it is not easy to work with women. However, the discriminated also discriminate:

(22) *“I live in Ipanema where I must tolerate gays (...) I don't think it's a normal option, it can't be (...) but here in the company I don't know any. If there are any, they're very well hidden (sarcastic laugh)”. (female employee, heterosexual).*

In fragment (22) the interviewee reveals intolerance towards homosexuals by using the lexical selection “obliged to tolerate gays”. As she lives in an area of Rio where there are many establishments that cater to this audience, she must share this space with them, but does not accept them, as expressed by “I don't think it's a normal option, it can't be”, implicitly understood to constitute a value judgment on sexual orientation. Moreover, her sarcastic laugh suggests that there are gays at HIGHTEC but, as sexual orientation is an invisible social identity, they hide behind their professional roles, no matter price what they have to pay for this survival strategy (Irigaray, 2008).

HIGHTEC faces considerable challenges regarding the implementation of policies aimed at stimulating diversity. Mainly in light of the fact that one of its directors positions himself in the following fashion:

(23) *“Here we respect all differences, despite the difficulties (...) it's expensive to have female employees, they get married, have children, stay away from work for 4 months (...) as for negroes, it's hard to find one with a good education. It's not my fault nor the company's. It's Brazil's social reality, isn't it? [When asked about gay employees] look, as far as I know we don't have any, except for the bambi (laughing) a cleaner [outsourced]”. (male director, heterosexual).*

The use of the lexical selection “we respect all differences, despite the difficulties”, is a clear indication of the problems involving the company's non-discriminatory policy. The following sections of the same discourse, however, clearly evidence discrimination: “it's expensive to have female employees, they get married, have children, stay away from work for 4 months”, an explicit allusion to maternity leave and the fact that women have a double (and in some cases a triple) workday. And continues: “as for negroes, it's hard to find one with a good education”, indicating that equality criteria determine entry to HIGHTEC as long as the candidates have an educational level that meets the needs of the job, a meritocratic perspective regarding education that is written into the Brazilian Federal Constitution. However,

as most negroes come from public schools their education is compromised, thus hindering their professional development – which, in HIGHTEC's specific case constitutes a justification for not hiring a candidate. Discourse fragment (23) shows explicit discrimination against homosexuals, through the use of the lexicon “bambi” referring to a homosexual who works in the company. Once again, humor is used not only as an instrument of communication, but also to discriminate. How can one expect effective implementation of diversity policies in this company when a director uses a discourse that is offensive and discriminatory towards minorities?

## DISCUSSION

Based on considerations regarding institutional pressures for the adoption of practices that are legitimate from a market and customer perspective, this article's main contribution involves the analysis of the effectiveness of organizational policies from multiple points of view (company, minorities and non-minorities). Although multinational company management is pointed out as a model to be followed by other organizations, formalization is a necessary but insufficient condition for effectiveness. Cases like those of the organization analyzed in this article suggest that diversity policies may merely constitute cleverly crafted corporate discourses that are ideologically intended to seek employee adherence, project socially responsible images and gain the admiration of the market and consumers.

The formalization of these policies, which may even be successful in general terms, especially in the eyes of those that are not directly affected, does not imply effective implementation. In the specific case of diversity, there are variables that displace the problem beyond the formal sphere, such as the deep-rooted prejudices of hegemonic segments and the minority groups themselves regarding difference. Add the impunity of discriminatory behaviors and this results in organizations that, although governed by formal policies, do not practice them on a daily basis. If this is true in the case of the diversity policies studied here, it is also appropriate to question the effectiveness of the implementation of codes of ethics, social responsibility, environmental and quality policies and other formal organizational instruments. To what extent do organizations in fact prioritize and put their policies into practice?

In response to this question, it may be supposed that everything that has a direct effect on attaining results constitutes a priority. And this suggests issues that could be the object of new studies: to what extent is something that has been formalized really effective? Is it necessary to formalize what is ethically desirable? Does non-

formalization exempt social actors from ethical practices? These questions show the extent to which the organization is permeated by social dimensions, taking the discussion, based on a case like the one analyzed in this article, beyond the sphere of economics and leading to a reflection on the space that effectively exists for differences in organizations. To what extent is the silence of minorities, in the name of a supposedly neutral and clearly hegemonic organizational production dynamic, a secondary matter? Is this only a concern when it interferes with results? How legitimate is the discourse regarding the importance of people for organizations? These questions undoubtedly show that it is essential to put a critical analysis of the implementation of diversity policies on the research agenda.

### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this study we analyzed whether policies that aim at stimulating diversity in Brazilian subsidiaries of a multinational company are effectively implemented. The data obtained from research into official documents and interviews with minority and non-minority employees was examined using discourse analysis. The main results showed that, although corporate discourses in the company are translated into organizational policies, their effectiveness is extremely limited due to employees' ingrained prejudices, a certain permissiveness at the management level and the lack of a collective sense of diversity. Minorities and non-minorities show prejudiced and discriminatory attitudes towards each other, evidencing how difficult it is for them to respect their differences. Although policies give them a specific role in the process, managers show an explicit or concealed prejudice, thus undermining policies' effectiveness in these units. In the offices observed, there is a dissonance between diversity discourse and practice.

The invisibility that some minorities complain about may simply be a consequence of interiorization of stigma. The "invisible" segments probably hide to keep their jobs, remaining silent about discriminations and excluding themselves from themes that may highlight differences. This study presents the proposition that, despite having their rights recognized, the members of minorities interviewed at HIGHTEC do not exercise them in accordance with prevailing world policies. This may be due to fear of reprisals, political disarticulation, a lack of successful examples and other consequences of the distance between diversity discourses and practices.

The study's findings lead one to question to what extent the company's policy was a response to institutional and political rather than effectively social pressures. The company's discourses associate these policies with

economic results, which gives the lie to a genuinely social interest in differences. Indeed where there is no specific regulation, economic and social demands are catered to separately (Irigaray, 2008). A proposition derived from this study is that, due to the lack of external control, the units analyzed do not observe their policies, which function more as principles than as socially committed practices.

This research's implications are relevant for organizations, academia and society as a whole. With respect to academia, one would hope that researchers will redouble their efforts to better understand the case's social dynamics, especially those involving the individuals who are silenced by discriminatory discourses and practices in organizations. To what degree is this process covered up and what are its psychological, social, organizational and economic consequences? In the case of companies, understanding the formulation and implementation of organizational policies is related to the comprehension of a role that goes beyond the economic sphere. Aspects such as work relations, ethics, difference and legitimacy demand more than the mere formalization of intentions. The implications of this study for society involve its role in the monitoring of organizations and their practices. The investigation of these implications constitutes a research agenda that may include the social functions of humor, the costs of discrimination, as well as any advances in the aspects highlighted in this article, which may include studies based on statistics.

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