“Some like it hot!”: The role of emotion and identity in interpreting and responding to diversity as a strategic issue.

S. C. Schneider, P. Garcia-Prieto Chevalier and V. Tran

Although the business case for diversity has been well established, efforts to recognize diversity as a strategic issue and to implement diversity initiatives have often been thwarted. We consider diversity to be a strategic issue as it can have an important impact on organizational performance (Ansoff, 1980). However, the response to diversity as a strategic issue is subject to interpretation on the part of both decision-makers and those concerned with the implementation of those decisions. We argue that diversity is a “hot issue” because of its potential to evoke strong emotions. The cognitive antecedents which determine these emotions are, in fact, similar to those that lead to interpretation of strategic issues as threats or opportunities. This may help to explain how emotions are linked to strategic issue interpretation, to the decisions taken, and the likely responses to those decisions. We propose that individuals’ salient identities can influence how diversity as a strategic issue and diversity initiatives are interpreted in ways that elicit specific emotions and different categories of emotion. These emotions in turn will lead to behaviors, such as resistance or support for this issue and the proposed initiatives. Implications for leadership are discussed.
Centre Emile Berheim Working Paper

“Some like it hot!”: The role of emotion and identity in interpreting and responding to diversity as a strategic issue.

Susan C. Schneider
HEC University of Geneva
40 blvd. Pont d’Arve
CH1211 Geneva
SWITZERLAND
Susan.Schneider@hec.unige.ch

Patricia Garcia-Prieto Chevalier
Solvay Business School
Universite Libre de Bruxelles
Av. F.D. Roosevelt 19
CP 145
1050 Brussels
BELGIUM

Veronique Tran
ESCP-EAP
Ave de la Republique 79
75009 Paris
FRANCE

CEB Working paper
ABSTRACT

Although the business case for diversity has been well established, efforts to recognize diversity as a strategic issue and to implement diversity initiatives have often been thwarted. We consider diversity to be a strategic issue as it can have an important impact on organizational performance (Ansoff, 1980). However, the response to diversity as a strategic issue is subject to interpretation on the part of both decision-makers and those concerned with the implementation of those decisions. We argue that diversity is a “hot issue” because of its potential to evoke strong emotions. The cognitive antecedents which determine these emotions are, in fact, similar to those that lead to interpretation of strategic issues as threats or opportunities. This may help to explain how emotions are linked to strategic issue interpretation, to the decisions taken, and the likely responses to those decisions. We propose that individuals’ salient identities can influence how diversity as a strategic issue and diversity initiatives are interpreted in ways that elicit specific emotions and different categories of emotion. These emotions in turn will lead to behaviors, such as resistance or support for this issue and the proposed initiatives. Implications for leadership are discussed.
“Some like it hot!”: The role of emotion and identity in interpreting and responding to diversity as a strategic issue.

Diversity has become a “hot topic.” Company websites (Singh & Point, 2004), the business press, numerous articles in high level academic journals, and even most recently management conferences devoted to the theme (e.g. European Academy of Management, EURAM, 2008) attest to its growing importance. During the last 10 years the number of academic articles on diversity has soared by more than 110% over the previous decade (Web of Science, 2007). The argument for diversity has been put forth: legal compliance; better access to markets; and enhanced problem solving, creativity, innovation, and learning (Cox, 1993; Thomas & Ely, 1996). It seems that “the business case” has been accepted, at least in rhetoric if not in reality. Some companies such as IBM go as far to consider diversity to be its HR strategy (Thomas, 2004).

Yet despite this apparent acceptance, and even best intentions, efforts to address “diversity” are often thwarted. Research has demonstrated the difficulties of implementing diversity initiatives in both the private sector (Kidder, Lankau, Chrobot-Mason, Mollica, & Frideman, 2006; Roberson & Stevens, 2006) and the public sector (Soni, 2000). Furthermore, the results of empirical studies of the impact of diversity on performance have been equivocal (see meta-analysis Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt & Jonsen, 2008). We argue that diversity is a “hot topic” not only because of the reality of changing workforce demographics and the rhetoric of the business case, but also because diversity elicits emotions that can influence decisions to invest time and resources at the management level and to implement diversity initiatives within the organization. These emotions are triggered by identities that are made salient in addressing diversity as a strategic issue and may help to explain the possible responses to diversity initiatives.

We consider diversity to be a strategic issue in that it may have a significant impact on organizational performance (Ansoff, 1980). Although diversity appears to be recognized as an important strategic issue for some companies, it may fail to get the attention and
resources necessary to adequately address the issue. In European companies, diversity may be written off as “an American thing not relevant in Europe” as it is often defined in the U.S. in terms of “race and gender”. A recent survey of the top 500 Swiss companies showed that compared to the U.S. -- where 75% of the top 500 Fortune companies have implemented diversity -- only 30% had clearly stated diversity policies and 71% of those were international companies with headquarters outside of Switzerland (Filler, Liebig, Fengler-Veith & Varan, 2006). And although “managing demographics” has been declared as one of the top HR issues in Europe, according to a recent study by the Boston Consulting Group, “diversity management” is considered as neither urgent nor important.¹

Most recently, efforts to authorize a study to measure diversity and discrimination in France were resisted based on laws prohibiting the collection or treatment of personal data that can identify employees based on differences in ethnic origin or religion. The law was originally created to protect minorities by not stating religion on identity cards which had led to the ease of rounding up Jews for extermination during WWII. It now interferes with knowing the amount of representation of minorities within organizations and the degree of discrimination. According to a petition launched by SOS Racisme,

“Autoriser de telles statistiques ethniques conduit à renforcer une vision ethnicisante du monde et offre une prétendue caution scientifique aux stéréotypes racistes qui continuent malheureusement de travailler de l’intérieur la société française. » (To authorize such ethnic statistics leads to reinforcing an ethnicized vision of the world and offers a scientific justification of racist stereotypes which continue, unfortunately, to work in French society.)²

This creates problems in developing appropriate diversity strategies, or according to Carole Da Silva, Director of the Association to Encourage Professional Integration,

¹ BCG/www.eapm.org, 2007
“Comment peut-on résoudre un problème sans l’avoir au préalable identifié et mesuré?”
(How can you resolve the problem without having identified or measured it?).3

Senior executives may ask, “Why do we need diversity? We have been very successful without it.” The dominant majority often does not see the need or believe the rationale despite the mounting evidence of the potential impact of demographic changes, such as an aging population, increasing numbers of women and minorities in the workforce, and lack of specific skill sets. Thus diversity is rejected or denied as potentially having a significant impact on organizational performance. Similar denials such as “we have no competition”, or that “these new technologies are irrelevant” have led to the demise of several companies (see Schneider & Shrivastava, 1988). Efforts to address the issue may also be met with resistance from the very minorities that are targeted to benefit due to concern that they are or would be seen as being treated differently (Marshall, 1984) and/or for fear of stigmatization (Heilman, Block & Stathatos, 1997).

We argue that the reason why diversity as a strategic issue may be denied/ ignored and diversity initiatives resisted is that it is “hot,” i.e. generates strong emotions that are linked to identities (e.g. organizational, see Dutton & Dukerich, 1991, Pratt & Dutton, 2000). These emotions and identities need to be taken into account in the process of identifying and responding to diversity as a strategic issue or in implementing diversity initiatives. And while other strategic issues may generate emotions because of their importance to the goals of the company (e.g. developing new technologies or growing competition can generate pride or anxiety), the reactions to diversity seem to be more emotionally charged. We argue that diversity as a strategic issue is “hotter” (elicits more emotions) than other issues because it makes salient individual and group identities. Understanding how these identities may elicit different emotions, we may be better able to predict the potential responses to this issue.

Responses to diversity as a strategic issue can be considered at the organizational, group as well as individual level. For example, the decision to consider diversity as a strategic

3 Ibid.
issue and to devote time and resources to developing initiatives is taken at the top management team, often considered as a proxy for the organizational level of analysis (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Here, individual interpretations and responses of members of the top management team as well as group dynamics are likely to influence whether or not to consider diversity as a strategic issue, and to invest resources and develop policies. Specific diversity initiatives aimed at implementing a diversity strategy, such as equal opportunity employment or diversity training, can also be appraised and reacted to by different individuals and well as different groups (e.g. departments or hierarchical levels) throughout the organization.

Diversity initiatives are designed to reduce discrimination and unequal treatment of employees belonging to “target groups” (e.g., women, migrants, minorities, stigmatized groups, etc.) and to enhance employee diversity. These practices are often the result of equal employment opportunity and affirmative action programs and legal policies initiated at the national level. These include actions that give preferential treatment to target groups (e.g., selection decisions that take into account demographic quotas in addition to merit), compensatory actions (e.g., training and career guidance designed to help minorities), hiring policies (e.g., the use of “minorities” in recruiting and advertising), and actions that eliminate discrimination (e.g., transparency in remuneration policies to eliminate discrepancies between men and women). Researchers have devoted considerable attention to the psychological antecedents of responses to adopting diversity initiatives in the workplace at the individual, group and organizational level (for a review of psychological research see Crosby, Iyer, Clayton & Dowing, 2003; also see publications by the American Psychological Association, 2003, and the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, 1996).

We argue that diversity is a “hot” strategic issue because it makes salient specific identities that evoke specific emotions and consequent behaviors. Thus it is important to understand how different identities evoke specific emotions in interpreting and responding to diversity as a strategic issue and to diversity initiatives and why these emotions are evoked. By understanding how these identities influence interpretations and
emotions, we can better anticipate the behavioral reactions to diversity as a strategic issue and diversity initiatives. Finally, we explore the role of leadership in interpreting and responding to diversity as a strategic imperative.

**Interpreting and responding to diversity as a strategic issue**

Much of the literature on strategic issue diagnosis has explored cognitive and behavioral aspects, i.e. interpretation and response to strategic issues (Dutton & Duncan, 1987; Daft & Weick, 1984; Gioia & Chittepeddi, 1991; Schneider, 1994). Interpretations of threat or opportunity, for example, are considered to be based on appraisals of issues as being positive/negative, a potential loss/gain, and of the degree of control (Dutton & Jackson, 1987). These interpretations are thought to lead to different behaviors: allocation of top management attention and resources, internal versus external focus (Milliken, 1990), information search and risk taking. For example, Tversky and Kahneman, (1974) have argued that interpretations of loss may result in more risk taking behavior. Staw, Sandelands and Dutton (1981) argued that interpretations of threat lead to greater centralization of decision making, restricted flows of information, and reliance on well established routines (“threat rigidity”). Interpretation and response to strategic issues may also be influenced by factors at different levels of analysis: individual (e.g. position in the organization, Dutton & Ashford, 1993); group (e.g. demographic composition of top management teams, Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Hambrick, Cho & Chen, 1996); organizational structure, ideology and resources (for a review see Denison, Dutton, Kahn & Hart, 1996), and even national culture (Schneider & DeMeyer, 1989).

Affect has also been found to influence strategic issue interpretation and risk taking behavior (see Seffrin, Panzano & Billing, 2000). For example, a good mood was found more likely to induce an interpretation of opportunity and to lead to lower levels of risk taking (Mittal & Ross, 1998). Conversely, interpretations of strategic issues as threat or opportunity can lead to emotional reactions such as fear/anxiety or excitement. These reactions can “spread” (be contagious) throughout the top management team as well as the organization (Barsade, 2002; Bartel & Saavedra, 2000). Furthermore, the degree to which affectivity is shared among top management team members can influence strategic
decision making (Barsade, Ward, Turner & Sonnenfeld, 2000). But the nature and role of affect, mood and emotion in interpreting and responding to strategic issues, such as diversity, is not yet well understood. In this paper, we focus on emotions, as specific emotions may provide important clues to predicting behaviors such as investing time and resources in addressing diversity as a strategic issue and support or resistance to diversity initiatives taken.

Dutton and colleagues have previously argued that certain strategic issues have the potential to evoke strong emotions, defined as “hot”, and to activate a wide range of both individual and organizational responses (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Pratt & Dutton, 2000). In their research, the presence of “the homeless” in the cases of the Port Authority and local library evoked emotions in both customers (disgust) and employees (shame). Furthermore it created a gap between the employees’ organizational identity (how we see us) and the image held by stakeholders, here customers (how they see us). This gap and the accompanying emotions led to questioning the organizational identity: “Who are we: a social service (public) or a transportation agency (private)? What is our role? What is our responsibility?” In this way, the question of organizational identity influenced the interpretation and level of emotion expressed with regard to this issue as well as the sense of ownership and subsequent actions taken:

“…instead of acting simply as initiators of sense-making by serving to signal an ‘interruption’ in continuing organization action (...) emotions also facilitate the ongoing sense-making process by becoming linked to the interpretation of issues via identities” (Pratt & Dutton, 2000, p.34).

Brickson (2000) has argued, based on the work of Brewer and Gardner (1996), that organizational identity orientations (personal, collective or relational) in demographically diverse organizations can have a differential impact on cognition, affect, and behaviors of both minority and majority group members. She argues that personal and collective identities will enhance stereotyping and

---

4 Emotions are considered to be a dynamic process, of brief duration (Ekman & Davidson 1994) that is specific to an event/object (Lazarus, 1991) which has a clear cause (Forgas, 1991) with specific behavioral implications (Frijda, 1986; 1994; Scherer, 1984; 1996; Ketelaar & Clore, 1998).
negative affect whereas relational identity (based on interpersonal interaction and roles) will promote better integration of diversity, considered to be positive rather than to be minimized.

More specifically, in organizations which have a more collective (group) identity orientation, majority group members are more likely to see minority group members as the out-group, and thus experience hostility and prejudice, and engage in behaviors of discrimination and exclusion. The minority groups in turn perceive themselves as marginal and under threat, experience low self esteem and job dissatisfaction, have constrained interaction with the majority group members and behave in ways that may confirm behavioral stereotypes. Efforts at managing diversity in these organizations may make some progress but are inconsistent, discussions about diversity tend to be suppressed, and while the negative side effects of diversity may be avoided, the potential promises are not achieved.

In contrast, in organizations that encourage relational (interpersonal) identities, majority group members see minority group members as unique, experience more empathy and positive affect, and behave in ways that are less discriminating. Minority group members are more likely to perceive themselves as integrated and valued, experience positive self esteem and comfort, have better interaction with members of the majority group, and better performance. Here diversity management progresses in ways that can minimize the interpretation of diversity as a threat and maximize the potential for opportunities.

We argue that diversity as a strategic issue is “hot”, i.e. may evoke strong emotions, as it may be interpreted as a threat or opportunity through the lens of personal, group, and/or organizational identities. In some ways, at the organizational level, all strategic issues may be considered to be “hot” by definition, as the primary function of emotion is to signal important events (Frijda, 1986). However, diversity as a strategic issue may be “hotter” (evolve more emotional intensity) than other issues and be experienced differently by individuals and groups throughout the organization as a function of the
identities which become salient. By triggering these identities, diversity as a strategic issue may become a “hot potato” or “too hot to handle,” and diversity initiatives may end up being denied, avoided or resisted. While much of the discourse, academic as well as practitioner, casts diversity in a negative light in terms of its potential impact on performance and on how to overcome resistance (Brickson, 2000), the emotions triggered can also be positive such that diversity is embraced as encouraging learning and innovation (Thomas & Ely, 1996).

At the group level, diversity initiatives which target specific groups, such as women or ethnic/racial minorities, may evoke emotions such as shame or pride and provoke behaviors of resistance to or support of these initiatives among the very population they are trying to help (Garcia-Prieto & Mackie, 2007). Emotions such as guilt or anger may be evoked for others (dominant majority) provoking behaviors of support or resistance. The intensity (“hotness”) of these emotions will depend on the degree to which the individual identifies with the targeted social group (Garcia-Prieto, 2004; Mackie, Devos & Smith, 2000). As members of teams and organizations have multiple identities, certain identities become more or less salient depending on the specific context and/or strategic issue presented (Garcia-Prieto, Bellard & Schneider, 2003). In this paper we argue that the salience of a given identity will influence the interpretation of diversity as a strategic issue and diversity initiatives which in turn will elicit specific emotions and behavioral responses as shown in figure 1.

Cognitive appraisal theories of emotions
Cognitive appraisal theories of emotions can help explain how and why different emotions are evoked with regard to strategic issues and make predictions regarding likely behavioral responses. According to cognitive appraisal theories of emotions (Frijda, 1986; Scherer, 1984; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985), interpretation and emotional responses are tightly linked, i.e. emotions are determined by the cognitive evaluation or appraisal of
an event that is personally relevant.\textsuperscript{5} In this way there may be many possible emotional reactions to the interpretation of diversity as a strategic issue. According to Scherer (2001), emotions are determined by several cognitive (antecedents) appraisals, the first one being relevance detection which involves the detection of novelty (in the sense of suddenness, familiarity, and predictability) and intrinsic pleasantness (as an innate or permanently acquired quality) of an object or event as well as rudimentary assessment of its pertinence or importance for the individual's momentarily dominant goals/needs.

The issue of diversity may be appraised as more or less familiar or not terribly surprising to organizational members. In Europe, for example, the very concept of diversity as a strategic imperative and diversity initiatives have often been introduced by U.S. multinational companies in compliance with world wide policies. This is less likely to be the case in European based companies which may be more locally embedded. Nevertheless, the diversity charter established in France in 2006 and the diversity initiatives proposed by the European Union are making diversity a more familiar issue. Furthermore, given the degree to which the society at large is pluralistic, members of different national companies may interpret diversity as something positive or intrinsically pleasant (Cox, 1993, Triandis, Kurowski & Gelfand, 1994). On the other hand, it may be interpreted in companies as a threat in countries where nationalism is increasing due to economic or political concerns.

The second, implication assessment determines the potential consequences of an event for the individual. It involves the attribution of causal agency and responsibility, the estimation of the discrepancy from prior expectations and the probability of alternative outcomes, as well as, most importantly, the assessment of how conducive or obstructive the events are for the individual’s needs, interests, goals, and immediate plans. In the case of diversity, efforts to promote women and minorities, for example, can be interpreted as conducive to personal interests and goals of the targeted groups, or as obstructive to the

\textsuperscript{5} It has been proposed that the appraisal of relevance detection often operates unconsciously and automatically, and determines the level of attention devoted to the event. Implication assessment, coping potential determination and normative significance evaluations may require more complex cognitive processing due to more elaborated schema processing, conceptual reasoning, or comparison with internal and external standards.
expected career paths of the white/male dominant majority. Recent outbreaks of violence in some countries attest to the appraisal of foreigners as responsible for taking away jobs and for the current negative economic situation. For example, certain political parties in Switzerland target foreigners as responsible for criminal activity. Promoting women to higher level positions can be appraised as responsible for jeopardizing the bread-winning roles of men in society. Or diversity may be considered as something not relevant to current organizational concerns (Jonsen, et al., 2008).

The third, coping potential determination appraises how much the event or its outcomes can be influenced or controlled by the individual and how easily the individual can adjust, adapt to or live with the consequences of the event. In the case of diversity, this may reflect the targeted minorities’ sense of being able to adapt to the corporate culture, to integrate in informal networks, and to be seen as competent. According to recent studies, minority women were often concerned as being seen as “too ethnic” (Hewett & West; 2005). Furthermore, women who are promoted to top management positions often are expected to be more communal or nurturing rather than agentic (i.e. taking care versus taking charge) and evaluated accordingly (Eagly & Carli, 2003, 2007; Catalyst, 2006).

Finally, there is normative significance evaluation of the extent to which an event falls short of or exceeds the individual’s internal standards, such as personal self ideal (desirable attributes) or internalised moral code; or perceived external standards, such as norms or demands of what constitutes desirable and obligatory conduct. Again, in the case of diversity, emotional reactions to women in the workforce may be a reflection of societal norms regarding working mothers or more generally the role of women in society. In addition, diversity initiatives can be appraised in terms of personal or societal norms of “fairness” or justice (Roberson & Stevens, 2006).

In effect, these cognitive antecedents, with the exception of the latter regarding norms, are quite similar to those mentioned previously that result in interpretations of strategic issues as threats or opportunities, i.e. positive/negative, loss/gain and control. Thus, the
argument can be made that specific emotional reactions to diversity issues stem from
cognitive appraisals/interpretations of diversity which are shaped by individual, group or
organizational identities. This implies that in the same organization two persons can
interpret diversity issues and initiatives differently and have different emotional and
behavioral responses. If one person evaluates a decision taken with regards to a diversity
initiative (e.g. affirmative action policy) as important but as obstructing the achievement
of his needs and goals, and to have consequences that he can control, he may feel anger.
If another other person was to evaluate the same diversity initiative as important but as
obstructing the achievement of her goals, and as having consequences that are difficult
control, she may feel anxiety. In this sense, there are as many emotions that can be
evoked by the same diversity issue as there are different cognitive appraisals. Behavioral
consequences of emotions are expected to vary depending on the specific emotion felt
(Ekman & Davidson, 1994; Frijda, 1994; Scherer, 1994). In the next section, we will
outline the ways in which specific emotions may result from interpretations or appraisals
of diversity as a strategic issue which in turn may influence behaviors such as denying its
importance/relevance or investing necessary resources, and supporting or resisting
diversity initiatives.

**Cognitive appraisals of diversity: Specific emotions, specific behaviors**
Interpretations of diversity as a strategic issue and diversity initiatives can result in a wide
array of emotional responses. Discrete emotions can be grouped along dimensions of goal
conduciveness (positive/negative valence) and coping potential (control/power) (Scherer,
2005) as shown in figure 2.

See Figure 2: Emotion wheel

The sixteen emotions represent those most frequently studied in the field. These emotions
can be then further grouped in four categories: achievement emotions, approach
emotions, resignation emotions, and antagonistic emotions (Scherer & Tran, 2001; Tran,
2007). Given that emotions have specific behavioral consequences (Frijda, 1986), being
aware of these behaviors might help us better predict reactions to diversity initiatives,
such as denial or investing resources at the top management level and support or
opposition for initiatives throughout the organization. It should be noted that positive
emotions do not necessarily lead to positive behaviors, and conversely negative emotions do not necessarily lead to negative behaviors.

**Antagonistic emotions** include anger, contempt, envy, and disgust. For example, anger may result from appraisals of diversity as negative, harmful to one’s goals and interests (for example the hiring or promotion of someone “diverse”), as unfair and unjust, but with consequences that one thinks one can control (for example by blocking the hiring or the promotion). Because anger has been associated with status/power (Tiedens, 2001), it is more likely to be an expected reaction of the dominant majority. Thus one might also expect that those in the dominant majority may feel contempt, envy or disgust for those that are seen as promoted based on affirmative action initiatives. Antagonistic emotions can be expressed through verbal or symbolic aggression (e.g. “mobbing,” outcasting or humiliation, see Izard, 1991) or by passive aggressive behaviors (i.e., resisting the diversity issue by counter-implementing or ignoring it, see Scherer & Tran, 2001).

These emotions may also occur when people in low status groups or targeted minorities are made to feel inferior or humiliated, having been harmed, morally or physically, and that the cause of this harm is unfair (Scherer, 1984), for example having been denied access to a job or to a promotion because of their status or identity group. Antagonistic emotions can also have positive implications, such as helping individuals gain self-confidence and the right amount of energy to achieve their goals. They can also reinforce group cohesiveness around common objectives or values (Tran, 2007). These emotions could give the group the necessary motivation or courage to express its claims or points of view, and also to take action.

**Resignation emotions** include guilt, shame, fear and sadness which may occur in situations when people suffer some kind of a personal or professional loss (Scherer, 1984), loss of self-esteem or negative self-evaluation (Lewis, 1993, Tangney, 1999). These emotions result from appraisals of diversity as negative, harmful to one’s goals with consequences over which one has little control, for example fear of job loss or not being promoted, for majority group members. Research has shown that, for the dominant
majority, diversity training can evoke emotions, such as guilt which may cause resistance (Jackson, 1999; Steward, Wright, Jackson & Jo, 1998). Dominant majority feelings of guilt (e.g., white guilt in the U.S.) has been linked with opposition for diversity initiatives such as affirmative action (Iyer, Leach & Crosby, 2003; Swim & Miller, 1999).

For minorities or target groups shame could result from concern of being seen as being promoted for group membership rather than competence. There is evidence that certain minority groups (e.g., U.S.-Born Hispanic Americans and African Americans) are more likely to believe that affirmative action practices can lead to stigmatization of target groups as “incompetent” (Kravitz & Klineberg, 2000; Heilman, Block & Lucas, 1992, Heilman, Block & Stahatos, 1997). Also minorities might experience fear of retaliation from dominant group if diversity initiatives seem to give an unfair advantage (e.g; women refusing to use flexible work time which is only proposed to working mothers). Sadness responses to diversity initiatives are much more likely to be expected from the minority or target group as sadness has been associated with low status (Tiedens, 2001).

Resignation emotions may lead to learned helplessness, passive resistance, loss of motivation and reduced efforts. In this way, the potential benefits of diversity may not be realized by members of the minority group due to avoidance, escape, withdrawal and apathy (Lazarus, 1991), potentially leading to turnover (voice or exit, Hirschmann, 1970). These emotions may explain denial of diversity as a strategic issue and passive resistance to implementing diversity initiatives.

Resignation emotions can also have positive implications, such as carefully assessing, revisiting decisions to improve them, or preventing people from harming others. For example, the dominant majority may experience guilt as having had privileges that the others have not had or shame for past harmful behaviors thereby encouraging reparative actions (Tangney, 1999). For the minority group members, these emotions may enhance group conformity, the reinforcement of social bonds, and the request for others’ support (Paez, Asun, and Gonzalez, 1995).
Approach emotions include surprise, interest, hope and relief. These emotions result from appraisals of diversity as something positive with consequences over which one has little control (for example, opportunity to work with different nationalities, but not sure how). Surprise encourages being alert and stimulated to cope with new and sudden events. Interest in diversity may reinforce the links between people (Izard, 1991) and can promote cohesiveness in diverse teams, or larger diverse groups within the organization or community. For example, L’Oréal France established partnerships with suburban communities to foster socio-economic diversity. Here minority and targeted groups may react with relief and hope as finally having better opportunities for hiring and promotion.

Approach emotions motivate individuals toward the acquisition of new information and new competencies; they are associated with intellectual curiosity and energy, and with expanded effort when necessary. Research in affect and decision-making has demonstrated that if individuals are interested and motivated, and if they consider the task as personally relevant to them or to their group, they will engage in thorough, systematic, and effortful analysis of the situation (Isen, 1993). Thus these emotions would most likely result in behaviors supporting diversity initiatives, or enhancing teamwork by encouraging curiosity and creativity thus stimulating innovation and problem solving (Milliken, Bartel & Kurtzberg, 2003). Approach emotions may also have negative implications, such as scattered attention and/or energy as team members’ interests may be poorly aligned, or when multiple diversity initiatives are implemented at the same time.

Achievement emotions include pride, elation, joy, and satisfaction. Diversity triggers achievement emotions when it is appraised as something positive, beneficial to one’s goals (attending a series of training programs or working with new colleagues) with consequences over which one think one has control (being able to chose which programs or having some margin of maneuver in the set-up of a diverse team). Minority groups might feel pride and joy for being recognized for hiring and promotion and elation to have the opportunity to demonstrate competence. Majority members might also feel
proud of the diversity initiatives endorsed by their company, for example as being named as the best place to work for women and minorities.

Achievement emotions may induce exuberance (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989; Izard, 1991), enhance flexible thinking, creativity, and openness (Frijda, 1986, Isen & Baron, 1991) but also encourage patience and tolerance towards others (Kemper, 1991). These emotions would most likely lead to recognition and support of diversity and behaviors such as members of diverse teams wanting to be with each other, to utilize diversity to enhance creativity and problem solving, and to celebrate together their accomplishments. These emotions would lead to support for diversity initiatives as enhancing team or organizational identity. Achievement emotions may also have negative implications, such as becoming arrogant or complacent. Rejecting diversity at the top management team level, for example, may reflect overconfidence in their capabilities to make the optimal strategic decisions.

The emotions elicited by considering diversity as a strategic issue may also result in re-appraisal of that issue. Scherer (2001) proposes that appraisal process involved in the elicitation of emotions is reiterative, i.e. evaluations are being continuously made regarding the event/issue, the importance of specific goals or values and coping potential. Such re-appraisals are expected to bring about important changes in the nature and intensity of subsequent emotions.

Re-appraisal processes would seem particularly relevant for the understanding of how diversity issues may be re-interpreted. Diversity issues are highly likely to make individuals’ social identities salient (e.g. because they generally make references to social group membership), and a complete re-appraisal of an issue may take place, with changes in the importance of goals and values in the assessment of conduciveness, the assessment of coping potential (adopting a group rather than an individual perspective), and particularly the salience of specific internal and external standards that may become suddenly pertinent to the appraisal of the issue at hand. In this way appraisal and re-appraisal processes provide great behavioral flexibility, and an enhanced capability of
learning from experiences and adapting (Ellsworth & Smith, 1988; Lazarus, 1991b). For example, resignation emotions may promote a more realistic review of group objectives (Janis, 1989; “sadder but wiser,” Barsade & Staw, 1993) such that diversity issues which were first considered to be a threat could be re-appraised as an opportunity. Diversity may be reinterpreted as a business imperative, necessary to improve creativity and decision-making (as in the case of IBM, Thomas, 2004) and to respond more effectively to a diverse customer-base (as in the case of L’Oréal).

Thus cognitive appraisals of diversity as a strategic issue and of diversity initiatives can trigger different specific emotions such as anger, sadness, interest and pride and which can be further grouped in categories of emotions – antagonistic, resignation, approach, and achievement. Furthermore, specific behaviors such as support or resistance can be anticipated as a result of these emotions. It should be kept in mind that both positive and negative emotions can result in either support or resistance. In addition, these cognitive appraisals are shaped by the identities made salient by these issues and initiatives as will be demonstrated in the next section.

**Different identities, different reactions to diversity**

Reactions to diversity management initiatives have been found to vary as a function of whether one is a member of the “target group” and thus a potential recipient for these initiatives (e.g., a woman), or a member of a “non-target group” (e.g., a man) (c.f., see Heilman, Lucas, & Klapow, 1990; Kravitz & Platania, 1993; Turner & Pratkanis, 1994).

Consider, for example, proposing scholarships for the career advancement of women at university. Here we argue that even in situations when individuals are not “personally” touched by a diversity issue, they may experience emotions on behalf of others that are affected by it. Research on identity and emotion has demonstrated that when a victim of prejudice or harmful behavior is perceived to belong to same group as oneself (i.e., ingroup), one is more likely to feel either fear or anger on their behalf and the corresponding behavioral tendencies to withdraw or attack depend upon the degree of
identification with the ingroup (Yzerbyt, Dumont, Gordijn, & Wigboldus, 2002; McCoy & Major, 2003; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002).

Research has shown that ethnicity and gender group membership, in particular, can have a strong influence on whether diversity management initiatives are perceived positively or negatively, and whether initiatives are perceived as fair or unfair (Arthur, Doverspike, & Fuentes, 1992; Ayers, 1992; Doverspike & Arthur, 1995; Heilman, McCullough, & Gilbert, 1996; Konrad & Linneham, 1995; Singer, 1996). In the United States, several studies have shown that affirmative action initiatives receive more support from women (Kravitz & Platania, 1993; Tougas & Beaton, 1993; Tougas & Veilleux, 1992) and from African Americans and other ethnic minorities when compared with the White majority (e.g., Beaton & Tougas, 2001; Fine, 1992; Sherman, Smith & Sherman, 1983; Sigelman & Welch, 1991). Initiatives that target African Americans confront stronger resistance than those targeting women or disabled people (e.g., Kravitz & Platania, 1993; Smith & Kluegel, 1984).

Recent research has demonstrated different emotions and different behavioral reactions of majority versus minority group members to scenarios of hiring an ethnic minority under a diversity-based or a merit-based policy (Garcia–Prieto, & Mackie, 2007). Both majority and minority group members appraised diversity-based hiring decision as significantly more harmful and unjust, leading to feelings of anger or shame, and to stronger intentions to oppose the policy. Nevertheless, majority (white) participants appraised the hiring decision based on diversity as significantly more harmful and unjust, and reported greater anger. White majority group members also reported more envy than did minorities who reported more pride in the hiring decisions based on merit. For minority group members, shame mediated opposition to the diversity based hiring policy when appraised as harmful; for the majority group members’ opposition was mediated by anger. The intention to oppose the diversity based hiring decision was also found to be moderated by the importance of ethnic identity.
Thus diversity as a strategic issue and diversity initiatives can be interpreted and responded to differently as a function of the identities that are made salient by these very issues and initiatives. These identities influence the cognitive appraisal which elicits certain emotions and subsequent behaviors. Therefore, while the support or resistance of this issue/initiatives can be observed and the emotions sensed, what is most important is to be aware of the process of appraisal as it is being influenced by the identities made salient. The following section addresses implications for leadership.

Implications for leadership
Most case studies and popular literature addressing diversity have emphasized the importance of top management to initiate and support diversity policies. One example is Lew Platt, former CEO of Hewlett Packard, who in the early 1990s became a champion of diversity as a strategic imperative and of diversity policies, once he became a single parent and realized how difficult it was to manage a company and a family at the same time (Brimm & Arora, 1996). Other top executives embrace diversity as their daughters begin to join the professional work force and hit glass walls or ceilings. For others the reasons may be more ideological or driven by personal values, considering “diversity” as socially responsible. And for some there is a personal conviction that diversity is a strategic imperative. For whatever reason, recognizing diversity as a strategic issue, i.e. as potentially having a significant impact on organizational performance, must start at the top.

Thus, the first important implication is that leaders need to examine in what ways their own identities or group memberships (as a CEO, male, husband, single father, white, etc.) may be shaping their emotional reactions to diversity and with what behavioral consequences. For example, the identity as a single parent can trigger emotions such as frustration or anger at organizational policies that can interfere with theirs or others performance. This can result, for example, in supporting policies that help families. For others, having a non-working spouse can lead to problems relating to executive women with families. Furthermore, CEOs need to assess how the different identities of the top management team may be affecting their interpretation, emotion and behavioral
responses toward the diversity issue. Or how their identity as CEO may influence the expectations of others. A recent study in the U.S. investigating the importance of sixteen organizational values as ranked by the CEO and top management team (TMT) members found that “tolerance of diversity” was ranked 15th by both. TMT members however considered that “tolerance for diversity” would be ranked 16th by the CEO (Ward, Lankau, Amason, Sonnenfeld, & Agle, 2007).

The second implication is that top management teams need to closely examine in which ways their multiple identities are shaping whether they interpret diversity as a threat or as an opportunity and the emotions and behaviors that may get elicited. TMT need to recognize the ways in which their own diversity (beyond visible demographic diversity) acts as a lens for whether diversity actually reaches the strategic agenda. Furthermore, because there may be visible differences among members of the TMT, it should not be assumed that those visible differences reflect a diversity of opinions, or represent, for example, the minority viewpoint (e.g. the woman’s perspective) (Garcia-Prieto, Bellard & Schneider, 2003). The emotional reactions can provide an important clue as to which identity is being made salient, and thus help predict the response to the issue. For example, professional (lawyer) or functional (finance) identity may be more salient than a minority group identity. This may lead to emotional reactions by others who feel, for example, that women who make it to the top are not necessarily helpful to other women. Ely (1994) has demonstrated that law firms with fewer women at the senior or partner level created more competitiveness among junior women lawyers, and more negative evaluations of the senior women.

Some scholars argue that the diversity debate has moved beyond issues of legal and moral obligations to become an inevitable reality, both inside and outside of today’s organizations (Kwak, 2003), and that already by the mid-1990s, the penalty for not embracing diversity was serious (Carnevale & Stone, 1994; see Jonsen, 2008). If diversity does not obtain the attention and resources necessary it will only get “politically correct lip service.” More dramatically, ignoring or denying diversity as a strategic issue may prove hazardous to organizational health and longevity. Denial or rejection of
diversity as a potential strategic issue may reflect excessive pride, narcissism (hiring and promoting people in our own image), a sense of entitlement as the dominant coalition, which can be detrimental to effective strategic decision making in general. It may signal being less open to new ideas, and not willing to explore new paths and possibilities that could be harmful to innovation and learning. This should provide a wake-up call to top management or at least their board of directors.

Thus the identity of the dominant majority must be called into question to understand how it may provide blinders or impact strategic thinking. Previous work by Hambrick et al. (1996) and Bunderson & Sutcliffe (2002) has shown how different types of diversity, such as educational or functional background, can influence the speed and magnitude of strategic decisions.

Initiatives designed to promote diversity will be met with resistance or support based on the emotional and behavioral reactions at the top. Remaining a constant item on the agenda of executive meetings sends a signal to senior managers of its strategic importance: “it’s hot!” The question remains, what kind of hot? Thus, a third implication of this paper for leaders to pay close attention to what type of “emotions” they are signalling when they communicate about diversity. As we have described in this paper different emotions may act as obstacles or drivers for successful implementation. For example top management may signal “hotness” through emotions of fear and anxiety (for example by expressing fear of lack of compliance with law, or expressing anxiety of how majority employees might react, etc); or through anger (for example expressing anger that only 8% women in the company make it to the top), and/or pride that the company is succeeding in attracting more women.

Leaders also must call for a careful review of the organizational and HR policies that might unintentionally discriminate against minorities by not considering the identities and emotions that may be triggered. For example, when HP’s efforts to recruit more women engineers were not successful, it was discovered that women responded to job advertisements when they had seven out of the ten criteria indicated as compared with
men who responded when they had three out of the ten criteria (Brimm & Arora, 1996). Even more so, leaders need to evaluate how the organizational context can promote different organizational identity orientations that can impact the nature of the discussion and progress regarding diversity management (Brickson, 2000). For example, focusing on performance and competition will promote personal identity orientation that encourages stereotyping minority group members and the pursuit of self interest while relational identity orientation promotes differentiating or personalization of minority group members as well as empathy/concern. These different orientations, as discussed earlier, have implications for how majority and minority group members may interpret and respond to diversity initiatives. Furthermore, it can provide insight into how majority and minority group members’ cognitions, emotions and behaviors can subtly interact to create self fulfilling prophecies, such as reinforcing stereotypes, and impair performance.

Research on stereotype threat suggests that expectations of being competent or not (white men can’t dance, women can’t do math) can also subtly influence performance (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007; Steele & Aronson, 1995). This may explain why women and minorities end up in certain positions in organizations (e.g. in staff roles: IR, HR, PR, or CSR) because they are considered to be “good with relationships” or can better represent minority interests. These positions may not provide the challenges or visibility that are necessary for development and career advancement (Meyerson & ). For example, expectations that women want families or cannot be expatriated to certain countries may interfere with international postings, which in some companies, such as Nestle, are considered necessary for career advancement. Thus women are not given the opportunities to demonstrate their competence. Self verification theory also predicts that minorities might be more attuned to negative feedback undermining their sense of competence (c.f. Swann, 1983; Higgins, 1987). This generates anxiety which can then interfere with performance confirming their sense of incompetence.

Leaders must also recognize that despite best intentions, their efforts are not always perceived as helpful to those targeted. Minorities may react with anger or shame to being treated “specially.” For example, women promoted to top management positions are
often exposed in uncomfortable ways to greater scrutiny and different expectations, or the “glass cliff effect” when women are promoted to precarious positions (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Research on role incongruity theory has also shown that women in male dominated environments are perceived as doing much better or much worse when compared with men (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Other research shows that the very behaviors that led to promotion (acting like a man, i.e. manager) are now evaluated negatively (as not being nurturing, not conforming to role) (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Thus identities made salient by diversity initiatives can become a “double edged sword”, “damned if you do, doomed if you don’t” (Catalyst, 2005). Another study has shown that 42% of minority women and 34% of minority men professionals felt constrained to look, sound and act like white male executives (Hewett & West, 2005). Feeling the need to become like the dominant majority and to suppress one’s identity can lead to emotional burnout (Hochschild, 2003) and indeed undermine the reasons for promoting diversity, for example, to encourage different perspectives.

A fourth implication is that leaders should be attentive as to how diversity will be interpreted and emotionally reacted by others. Thus they need to recognize what identities are pertinent for employees in a given context (gender might not be part of diversity initiatives in all companies or not all the time), what emotions may be associated by different employees to diversity issues, and what behavioral responses might be expected. They need to be sensitive to the different emotions such as frustration, apathy, or anxiety that may signal which identities are being called into play.

Leaders need to check their implicit biases and to be aware of how their behavior may undermine their intentions (Banaji, Bazerman & Chugh, 2003). For example, spending more time supervising minority candidates in order to be helpful and to ensure their success, may lead to a sense of not being seen as competent (“Set up to fail syndrome,” Manzoni & Barsoux, 1998). At the same time, they need to be able to directly discuss performance issues without being afraid of being “politically incorrect” (Ely, Meyerson & Davidson, 2006). Other efforts may also be experienced in ways not intended: Inviting minority employees to meet with minority group customers may cause anger, due to a
sense of being “used” for purposes of marketing leading to resentment; trying to promote a “gay friendly” environment by bringing up issues related to sexual orientation in casual conversations at work may be seen as inappropriate intrusion to private concerns causing anxiety or distrust (see Sucher & Gordon, 2007, HBS cases).

As noted by Dick and Cassell (2002: 972) “resistance, as it is used in the diversity literature, implies that those wishing to change the status quo through diversity initiatives are correct and those who, for whatever reason are opposed or indifferent to such initiatives are wrong”. Thus a major idea explicit in the management literature is that one can and should overcome resistance to diversity initiatives through changes to organizational culture and human resource practices (Dass & Parker, 1999). This approach, according to Stewart, Crary & Humberd (2008), might undermine exactly what it is trying to accomplish by silencing the voices of those who might resist, as it does not in fact represent “minority opinions” that might be political or religious based (e.g. pro- or anti-abortion, gay rights, etc.). They argue that leaders may be juggling what Kegan and Lahey (2001) refer to as “competing commitments” insofar as they want to be inclusive yet maintain power and status, and majority privilege or more subtly to reconfirm their own value systems. Leaders have to be able to demonstrate being open to all voices, even those they may reject on moral grounds based on their own personal values. It is through the leader’s ability to be open to these voices that models the ability to embrace diversity.

As we demonstrated in this paper, paying attention to emotions, both positive and negative, can provide an important source of understanding reactions to diversity as a strategic issue and to diversity initiatives. Emotions evoked and the subsequent behaviors can send strong signals that leaders have to learn to express and decipher in themselves and others. There is an abundant literature, both academic or managerial, that describes the virtues of emotional intelligence: the importance for leaders to understand express and decipher their emotions and those of their subordinates; to display the appropriate amount of emotions to appear authentic; or to be able to get the best out of collaborators by reading anticipating or reading their emotions (i.e. emotional intelligence, Goleman,
However, managing emotions (one’s own and others’) at the individual level is not enough. Leaders also need to build the emotional intelligence of groups (Druskat & Wolff, 2001) and have the ability to read collective emotions (even at a distance) to better manage strategic change (Sanchez-Burks & Huy, 2007). In the case of implementing diversity initiatives in different parts of the organizations or on a global basis, it is important to understand the identity issues that may be triggered locally so as to better anticipate the reactions and to perhaps tailor those initiatives to be more relevant in that context.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, we argued that the reason why diversity as a strategic issue may be denied/ignored or diversity initiatives resisted is that it is “hot,” i.e. generates strong emotions (Dutton & Dukerich 1991, Pratt & Dutton, 2000). These emotions need to be taken into account in the process of identifying and responding to diversity as a strategic issue or diversity initiatives. The study of the cognitive antecedents of “hot” issue interpretation, and of the consequences of the emotions evoked on future behaviors may greatly assist organizations in their efforts to better understand, anticipate and minimize difficulties associated with their implementation.

We also argued that diversity is a “hot” strategic issue because it makes salient specific identities that evoke specific emotions and consequent behaviors. Thus it is important to understand how different identities evoke specific emotions in interpreting and responding to diversity as a strategic issue and to diversity initiatives and why they are evoked. By understanding how these identities influence interpretations and emotions, we can better anticipate the behavioral reactions to diversity as a strategic issue and diversity initiatives. Finally, we proposed a few implications for the role of leadership in interpreting and responding to diversity as a strategic imperative.

The behavioral consequences of emotions on strategic issue interpretation and response should provide a rich agenda for future research. If strategic issues mobilize important resources in organizations (Mintzberg, Raisinghani & Théorêt, 1976), they require
mobilizing people’s minds and hearts for implementation. Although perhaps more easily observable by practitioners, this remains to be empirically tested.
FIGURE 1

The role of identities and emotions in interpreting and responding to diversity
Figure 2

The Emotion Wheel

© K.R. Scherer and V. Tran, with the support of the Gottlieb Daimler and Karl Benz Foundation
REFERENCES


