

## Chapter 4.8

# Diversity and Internationalisation: A New Core Competence for Research Managers?

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### Abstract

In this chapter, the authors outline some of the history of the role of diversity in research and research management, how this has changed and the consequences it has for a workable definition of diversity. We describe the benefits and challenges when working with diversity as research managers and administrators (RMAs) in international research producing organisations (RPOs). The challenges differ in different parts of the world which brings new complexities to navigate. It is shown how the agendas of internationalisation and diversity do not always work well together due to cultural and political perspectives in areas including race, age, gender identity, sexual orientation and other characteristics. The authors suggest how ‘Cultural Intelligence’ (CI) can be used as a frame for RMAs working with diversity and internationalisation both in a pre- and post-award phase and outline some specific steps and initiatives RMAs can take to create equitable and inclusive research and research environments based on their practical experience in the sector.

*Keywords:* Diversity; internationalisation; cultural intelligence; culture; research culture; gender

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## Introduction

Internationalisation has, in many ways, become the new normal in research and research management. RPOs recruit from a global labour market, and undertaking international collaborations and/or facilitating mobility is required by many research funders. Parallel to this is an increasing focus on diversity. For many years, the concept of diversity in Europe has been associated with gender and linked to the underrepresentation of women in academia, whereas it is primarily associated with race in the USA. More recently, the definitions of diversity have come to encompass other characteristics as well as gender and race, including people's sexual orientation, gender identity, age, religion, ethnicity, physical ability and neurodiversity, among others.

Ultimately, the successful implementation of the concept of diversity depends on creating a culture of inclusivity. In this chapter, we will show how notions of diversity and internationalisation often work as a double-edged sword. This is particularly the case when inclusive cultures and practices in different parts of the world can clash as a result of different personal characteristics being treated differently. Can you have an inclusive international research environment when working across cultures?

Questions of diversity within RPOs have, until recently, been primarily within the remit of Human Resources (HR) departments. Alongside the emergence of diversity initiatives since the 1980s, the idea of a shared academic culture has continued to develop. This culture, which promotes the idea of uniformity and orderliness within academic practice, has relied heavily on bibliometrics as the key tool for assessment of researchers' success. This approach has put women at a disadvantage because women have traditionally been expected to undertake caring responsibilities and are less likely to have published and been cited (Sewell & Barnett, 2019). Another study has also shown that women are cited less frequently than men across disciplines (Chatterjee & Werner, 2021). Bibliometrics are a blunt tool and can't take account of a researcher's personal attributes and other factors that may impact on publication rates, citations, and careers.

Across the globe, approaches to diversity and shared global academic cultures have been slowly changing. This is a result of a range of factors including new requirements from funders who are requiring a greater focus on diversity issues within research teams and the research they fund, more social minority groups are becoming vocal about the difficulties they face within academic careers and we have also been witnessing an increased voice from the Global South, rightfully insisting on for equity in research collaborations. While these demands are leading to change, we recognise that research is not conducted in a vacuum. Universities are part of national cultures that legally and culturally define their operational context. Responding to global challenges, including making global research collaborations work, must be undertaken within these national contexts.

These rising tensions present a new set of expectations and demands for RMAs. The future successful RMAs will need to have a clear understanding of different approaches to create inclusive cross-cultural consortia, recognise the positive potential of gender and diversity in assessing proposals, and managing cross-cultural international projects which may include researchers with different personal characteristics. As such, successful management of a diverse and inclusive research culture within RPOs will require the awareness and effective management skills of RMAs taking care of various aspects of the research enterprise, ranging from pre- and post-award to compliance, ethics, and integrity, among others.

In this chapter, we will define diversity, show how diversity and internationalisation create challenges for RMAs on different levels, show how different personal characteristics can present challenges cross-culturally, and present a theoretical framework that can be used for creating an inclusive culture in both research management and

research collaborations which RMAs support. The latter is based on the authors' extensive experience delivering consultancy support across international RPOs, predominantly in Europe and the UK.

## **Definition**

RMAs working at RPOs operate within specific national legislative frameworks which impact how diversity is understood in each context. Because of this, it is difficult to define the concept across the whole RPO sector globally. We offer two different definitions which encapsulate the breadth of diversity within research. Narrowly, as defined by the Collins English Dictionary, diversity<sup>1</sup> can be understood as a notion involving 'the deliberate inclusion in a group or activity of people who are, for example, of different races, genders, and religions'. More often, however, definitions of diversity have a greater scope; for example, 'a range of faces in the organisation – people from different demographic groups, such as race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, religion, and nationality' (Ely et al., 2001). When thinking about diversity in an international context, we believe it is beneficial to keep the definition broad and include additional attributes such as social class and neurodiversity. By doing this, we recognise the breadth of people's experience and reflect more recent discourses that recognise that diversity is complex and personal characteristics can impact academic careers and working relationships in ways not previously well understood. An example of this is social class and how RPOs remain elite institutions while recruiting from and engaging more broadly with local communities and economies (Grant, 2021). RPOs need to take into account the impact of social class within their staff, student, and community bases, adding further complexity to any definition of diversity.

In practice, working with diversity often has a 'negative' point of departure, understood as policies to avoid discrimination, where the discrimination occurs due to belonging to a social group based on gender, race, sexual orientation, etc. (Antonji & Blank, 1999, Colella et al., 2012; Collins, 2015).

While these definitions have a place, we prefer definitions that conceptually spring from 'diversity', as this focus on initiatives trying to ameliorate the negative effects of discrimination and initiatives trying to capitalise on the benefits of heterogeneous groups (Striebing et al., 2022) while still taking contextual nuances including power and status into account (van Dijk & Van Engen, 2013; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). The authors would suggest a definition that is less static and would apply van Dijk et al. (2017) when defining research on diversity as needing to take into account that '... members of different social groups are likely to be perceived and approached differently because of their membership in a given social category [...] and, in part as a consequence, may behave differently' (p. 518).

This definition moves the attention from the marker (nationality, sexual orientation, etc.) to how these markers are perceived, approached, and their impact on behaviour. This move from cultural essentialism opens for a wider discussion on how to work with these social groups which allows for a more practical and positive approach.

## **Importance**

Within the Global North, many private sector industries and companies have embraced the notion of diversity, inclusion, and equity. Businesses have recognised that despite

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<sup>1</sup> Collins English Dictionary – Diversity – Accessed 13 February 2023.

the financial investment needed to ensure diversity is fully integrated into their workforce, product development, and marketing, undertaking this work is good for business with Page (2019) describing how diversity in the workforce and diverse thinking improves profitability.

In contrast, the idea that diversity is valuable for research has not been widely accepted with moves towards more inclusive research environments being driven by policymakers and funders and not RPOs themselves. *Invisible Women* (Perez, 2020) popularised how the lack of a female perspective skews research and society, sometimes to the extent that solutions are dangerous for women. Face and voice recognition and AI examples have also shown how monocultural research and development groups can produce problematic products for different minority groups (Constanza-chock, 2018; Sun et al., 2020). It reveals a tremendous potential for societal challenges that are not addressed or only partly addressed by the established and current approaches to research.

Finally, understanding cross-cultural issues is critical for implementing an inclusive culture in research management. It is a specialisation many business schools offer, and essential to many international companies. Several business books are published each year exploring this topic. *The Culture Map* (Meyer, 2016), among many others, helps business leaders acquire skill sets that navigate culture's complexities when working in different parts of the world, see also Lewis (2018), Livermore (2013), and Caligiuri (2021). Yet, these skills are not considered nor practised as part of basic training for researchers or research managers, even though the increasing internationalisation of research necessitates RMAs to have cross-cultural skills. Evidence from private industry and research into academic collaborations has highlighted a range of potential benefits for universities and RMAs working for RPOs (Page, 2017) explaining both the benefits and the challenges in making it work while distinguishing between correlation and causality.

- A more diverse academic staff pool could lead to new and alternative perspectives providing greater depth and quality to research. Evidence shows that publications from diverse authors are cited more highly and published in higher-ranking journals (although this does, of course, feed into the drive towards bibliometric recognition, but this remains the system we operate in, and it may motivate researchers and universities to engage in diversity if they see this as an outcome).
- There are research areas and societal challenges that remain unsolved as they have not been explored and analysed from the perspective of all stakeholders.
- Better management and outcomes from international research collaborations if diversity is understood as navigating differences in national cultures and is considered a skill in research leadership and for RMAs.
- When people can bring their authentic selves to work, they are more likely to be productive, leading to better research. Inclusive, diverse, and psychologically safe environments enable people to be their authentic selves.
- Talent comes from all backgrounds. To attract the best researchers, we need to create research cultures where they thrive and recognise that personal characteristics can add much-needed new perspectives. A diverse base of RMAs will support the creation of inclusive research cultures.

Despite this, in our experience, academia has remained hesitant. This hesitancy has not stopped change altogether with some research funders taking proactive steps to improve gender within their own organisations, their funding portfolios, and their

approach to research. The European Research Council (ERC) provides an interesting case in point.

### ***Europe and Diversity: A Case Study***

The ERC has been at the forefront of frontier and innovative research across Europe for over 15 years. It provides significant levels of funding to academic researchers to undertake groundbreaking frontier research over a number of years. Following the ERC's (2020) recent history, it is possible to track how the treatment of diversity, and gender equality, has changed in European research. The changes made were primarily designed to increase opportunities for women and underrepresented groups. Some of these changes include:

- In 2007 and 2010, the ERC changed eligibility criteria to extend the time to apply for grants following the birth of a child.
- By 2014, a model CV template was included to make comparisons between candidates fairer.
- In 2015, the care of a sick relative enabled an extension of scheme eligibility.
- Unconscious bias training and awareness raising for evaluators were introduced.
- 2017 saw the introduction of equal opportunities or gender balance incentive costs being made eligible within schemes.
- Extensions to unconscious bias training were made over the next two years with more people included.
- In 2020, the ERC held an event on gender dimensions in frontier research and their gender equality plan now requests that applicants address questions of gender and sex in research design.

This evolution of activities within the ERC demonstrates the direction of travel which is reflected across other parts of the globe. Within Europe, the introduction of gender equality plans has underpinned this. Despite this, some in the research management community, including the institutions they work for, remain hesitant to tackle questions of diversity, despite funders and policymakers providing a clear direction of travel in that direction. In the following section, we will cover some of the main reasons for this institutional hesitance and define some of the challenges for RMAs working with the topic.

## **Challenges**

The main reason for the hesitation seems to be the politicisation of 'identity politics' and 'political correctness', and RPOs tend to shy away from politics to maintain their perceived independence (Grant, 2021) and to position themselves to receive government research funding. While this approach may make sense to many in the sector, it can leave staff from minority backgrounds without belonging and inclusion as institutions tread the same paths they always have. This has resulted in a monoculture within the sector that many minority groups have found alienating. This insistence on neutrality and adherence to research monocultures can have a negative impact on research.

In recent years, the value of bibliometrics has been contested, and the 'Agreement on reforming research assessment' launched in Europe (COARA, 2022) has already had an impact on funders, policymakers, and research-producing institutions at the time of writing, as they sign up for this process. The intention behind the agreement

is a broader perspective on research assessment and research impact beyond publications, and one of the principles of the agreement is ‘Diversity, inclusiveness and collaboration’ (p. 4), which indicates that there is an awareness of the importance of diversity and a desire to value it.

We look forward to following the process and the research to ascertain whether the agreement can harmonise the incentive structures from the many different players in the field: public and private RPOs, public and private funders, publishers, rankers, etc. As the European Commission is part of the agreement, the authors expect the agreement to impact Horizon Europe and with its global reach this could have a wide ranging impact.

While there are structural causes for monoculture as described above, there are also causes related to us as individuals. Whether we like it or not, we are all, to some extent, governed by biases and stereotypes. We have ingrained ideas of others (stereotypes) that can be based on our cultural background or personal experiences, and we prefer some traits over others (biases) again based on cultural background and personal experiences. The biases and stereotypes help us navigate a busy workday; if we are unaware of them and accept them without challenging ourselves and our beliefs, we will likely continue to choose what is easy and familiar, leading to our everyday actions supporting the monoculture (Banaji et al., 2016).

Assessment, biases, and stereotypes can become a little abstract. But we should remember that sometimes the challenges of diversity and internationalisation can be very tangible and have real life consequences for our colleagues. An example we often use is if a PhD student who is a member of a research team is openly gay and is part of an international consortium, and a workshop is to be held with a consortium member from a country where being gay is illegal, what is the PhD student supposed to do? Who guides them? Whose responsibility is it to find a solution? And if the PhD student decides travelling there is too dangerous, how can we guarantee this will not impact their career negatively? And if we can’t – is research and research management then just for the select few?

There could be many other examples, but the point is to show that while there are many commonalities between internationalisation and diversity, the two agendas don’t necessarily go hand in hand very well.<sup>2</sup>

## Diversity Around the World

Emerald Publishing released a report in 2020 called *The Power of Diverse Voices*. It is based on a survey sent to 132,241 researchers in 202 countries, with 1,055 responses from 99 countries. Here we will refer to the prioritised parameters of diversity in different parts of the world as described in the report. The report asked respondents to choose what ‘societal issues’ impact someone’s ability to pursue an academic research career. The options available were: ageism older, class, disability, gender, poverty, race, religion, and unemployment.

Participants chose the three biggest barriers of the above mentioned, see [Table 4.8.1](#).

<sup>2</sup>A particular challenge that we often pay too little attention to is indigenous people and culture. There has been some attention to decolonialising the curriculum, but the ideas of decolonisation and respect for and interaction with indigenous people should become a greater point of attention in an increasingly globalised world. While there are no perfect solutions, readers with an interest in this field, can look towards Canadian and Australian research funders that have worked with both including the challenges generally and special programmes for indigenous people (Simpson, 2004; Yunkaporta, 2019).

Table 4.8.1. The Societal Issues that Impact People's Ability to Pursue an Academic Research Career.

Region	Largest Barrier	Second Largest Barrier	Third Largest Barrier
North America	Race (83%)	Gender (59%)	Poverty (56%)
Latin America	Poverty (79%)	Unemployment (47%)	Gender (45%)
UK	Race (69%)	Poverty (69%)	Class (61%)
North and Western Europe	Race (71%)	Gender (56%)	Disability (50%)
South and Eastern Europe	Poverty (53%)	Gender (52%)	Race (50%)
Middle East, Northern Africa, and Sub-saharan Africa	Poverty (71%)	Unemployment (68%)	Gender (46%)
Asia	Poverty (61%)	Religion (47%)	Class (45%)
Australasia	Race (76%)	Disability (48%)	Ageism (47%)

Source: Based on *The Power of Diverse Voices* (Emerald Publishing, 2020, p. 11).

This shows how important the cultural, financial, societal, and political context is for what we consider important. It is not clear why a certain topic, for example, gender, is not present in Asia (the only region where religion is in the top three barriers); is it because the problem is considered solved, or considered irrelevant, or just inferior to other problems? This might suggest an area for research. No matter the reason, it shows the complexity of working with equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) globally and the need for future investigation so we can promote more equity in research, and research administration. Even the UK and the two regions within continental Europe show differences in barriers and, therefore, what the priorities for EDI work might be. Given this, RMAs cannot project what is considered important in their own country and institution as being relevant globally when working with diversity and internationalisation in a research proposal or project.

A survey like this is, of course, only a snapshot in time. The survey was completed in March 2020, just before the Black Life Matters protests, following the unlawful killing of George Floyd (*The Power of Diverse Voices*, p. 4). The picture could have been very different if the survey had run a month or two later. The Emerald survey also didn't include Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ+) as an option which the authors, as openly gay men, would have liked to have seen, given the highly politicised nature of LGBTQ+ inclusion (or exclusion) globally. It would have offered a different perspective again. Nonetheless, the survey highlights the complexity of barriers within research careers, and the breadth of factors highlights the importance of not reducing a person to one identity.

## CI – A Frame for Working with Diversity and Internationalisation

Above, we have shown how diversity in an international research setting is not only complex but also structural in nature. Some challenges relate to policies, strategies, and recruitment procedures, but it also shows how this is a challenge in the daily life of RMAs which makes supporting internationalisation and diversity a core skill in the development of the RMA profession.

Many are aware of the challenges and want to make a difference. The main problem we meet as consultants is not a lack of understanding the problem or will to do something, but a lack of tools to move forward. For that, we wish to finish the chapter with a framework for navigating diversity and internationalisation. All challenges and situations cannot be covered, but these are principles that can help RMAs in their daily work.

While a person should not be reduced to their nationality, gender, sexual identity, race, or other defining elements, we believe a productive approach to work with diversity and internationalisation is using the frame of ‘CI’, as this recognises the structural element of culture and how it forms us individually and as communities. Culture in this context can be understood as the culture that forms us as part of a country, race, religion, sexual orientation, etc. We belong to different groups (including research disciplines, and as such the concept can also be used for interdisciplinary research), and that forms how we see the world and behave. The terminology is widely used, for example, in anthropology and business studies (Earley, 2002; Earley & Soon, 2023) including some of the business literature mentioned above.

One of the mistakes people often make when working with culture is to understand it as an unchanging essence inside us (Plum et al., 2008). But culture is better considered as a filter for understanding ourselves and the world around us, guiding our actions and interactions with others (Plum et al., 2008). Culture is something we do together, and so it changes with time, context, and participants. And as an action, it can be challenged and changed. Respectfully challenged, but challenged.

As such CI creates a frame for understanding, communicating, and creating a shared culture.

Plum et al. (2008, p. 19) defines CI as:

the ability to act appropriately in situations where cultural differences are important, and the ability to make yourself understood and to establish a constructive partnership across cultural differences. Cultural intelligence is judged on the results of the encounter, not on the participants’ intentions or thoughts. An intelligent result of a cross-cultural encounter is the creation of a shared understanding across all the participant cultures – an understanding which will enable the parties to get on with their work.

The final part of the definition is important, as it underscores that culture is not our destiny, it is a part of us that can be negotiated in collaboration with others so that we can all focus on doing our job no matter our cultural background.

Two important aspects for RMAs to consider are that the first responsibility is to make yourself understood, and second that CI is judged on actions and results, not good intentions. This leaves RMAs with a clear role and responsibility of driving organisational change bottom-up when supporting research projects both pre- and post-award. RMAs and researchers can take action by making their own cultural background understood. Often we tend to look into other cultures and want them to change to what we consider ‘normal’ or ‘professional’ without acknowledging that our own culture could be what blocks a fruitful collaboration. And the demand for actions over good intentions forces us to translate the intentions into tasks that the minority group considers valuable and meaningful. By moving beyond policy and into daily work RMAs become a key player in developing a CI organisation.

Plum et al. (2008) describe three elements of CI:

- *Cultural engagement*: The emotional and motivational aspect. Not only to learn about others but more importantly to allow oneself to change. How do we handle a difficult situation where we realise that many of the emotions and reactions in the room are defined by culture?
- *Cultural understanding*: Understanding both one's own culture and the culture of minority groups and international collaborators, including the intersectional implications. This includes understanding that what we consider strange about the behaviour of others, they find as normal as we find our own behaviour. And vice versa.
- *Intercultural communication*: This is the ability to turn off our cultural autopilot when interacting with others. It is thinking twice before talking and using more cautious terms, and it is making an extra effort in making oneself understood and going the extra mile to understand others. It is gaining a wide perspective on any situation as a practical way to develop a shared culture of actions, language and behaviour.

This is not to say that CI is easy. Things rarely are when human beings are involved. But understanding culture as action and individuals as containing multitudes of cultures when defining culture broadly gives us different tools and approaches to activate when supporting an international consortium. This helps RMAs support researchers when the communication breaks down in the application process (does everybody have the same idea of what a deadline is? What a meeting is? Saying yes or no to a task?), or managing a project with a large, diverse international team where certain researchers clearly do not thrive and things are going wrong. Or less dramatically if things are okay, but one just wants to make things a little better for minority groups and ensure that all perspectives in a project are heard. The frame allows us to explore the other perspectives, challenge the status quo respectfully, and make room for new ideas, roles, and voices to be activated in research teams, research support offices, and the research itself.

The focus in CI is on the team and collaboration and not the research itself, and as such it will not solve challenges around gender analysis in research proposals. However, CI will lead to broader representation in different ways, and a culture where persons from a minority background can voice their perspectives and these perspectives are taken seriously. CI is a way to learn to think beyond one's own perspective and recognise the importance of a gender analysis or diversity analysis in research. A full gender analysis is more complex, but acknowledging the need is a starting point, particularly at a time when the requirement is new and many researchers and RMAs are struggling to include this in research proposals.

CI creates a set of principles that can define the actions needed in the specific contexts described above. That is not to say that there are no practical advice or steps that can be taken now, but the challenge is that there is no one-size-fits-all solution in this field.

Finally, it is important to remember that many of these steps, tools, and dynamics are as useful for RMAs as for researchers. Representation matters at all parts and levels of RPOs and we want the creative and impactful benefits of diversity everywhere. This is an area that needs more research on barriers to enter the profession, career paths, and the importance of developing relevant services that match the needs of the organisation and the surrounding society.

## **Conclusions**

The role of diversity in research has changed over time and what is considered the most important challenge varies from country to country. The global differences combined

with differences in culture and behaviour makes diversity and internationalisation difficult to make a success within an international work setting like RPOs.

Diversity and internationalisation are a question of developing the content of the research, the team, and the consortium and the patterns of collaboration among researchers and RMAs across national culture, race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender identity, age, physical ability, social class, religion, and other factors of identity and cultural belonging.

While dealing with all these factors as one complicates the challenge even further, it also helps in analysing and understanding the challenges and thus to provide an inclusive solution to make diversity and internationalisation work. This is particularly important as the two agendas don't necessarily go hand in hand and might even in some cases work against each other.

Creating inclusive environments ensures RPOs can attract the best researchers at all levels no matter their background; that researchers and RMAs can thrive and conduct the best research and support; that new perspectives are added reflecting all of society ensuring broad societal impact; that international projects are well-functioning collaborations and not parallel silos with a shared acronym.

CI is a set of principles and tools that creates a useful frame for working with diversity and internationalisation. The definition of culture as something we do together and not a constant essence of a person makes it possible to challenge and work with culture as something we create and hence we can develop and change the culture of a research group, institute, or international consortium. This inclusive definition of culture also allows you to consider national cultures and the cultures of minority groups at the same level and to navigate them in parallel when creating a culture for everybody. By using CI, the research itself may not change but it helps to create an inclusive research environment that appreciates diversity and is open to new perspectives. CI helps to create a mindset that analyses a proposal through a lens of not just one facet of diversity but includes an intersectional perspective.

Terms like EDI in research easily become abstract and vague concepts. Therefore, it is important to transform the CI frame into tangible steps, tasks, and principles to guide one's work.

RMAs mainly discuss diversity in research, but as diversity benefits research it also benefits RMAs and it is as important to implement the CI frame in research management and administration.

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