Q3. Diversity is fashionable, but is it valuable?

INTRODUCTION

Recent practice has seen, in a generalised sense, a growing trend, or 'fashion', of diversity programmes, framed as both a moral imperative as well as a strategic advantage. It must, however, be examined whether these diversity programmes are effective in distributing access to opportunities across sectors.

This paper shall argue that diversity has the potential to legitimate, efficacise, and improve economic and social systems. However, the desirability of diversity-driven outcomes is not absolute; one must be cautious in *how* diversity is integrated into institutional contexts, given the risk of divisiveness. Diversity alone cannot necessarily generate better outcomes in collective representation of minority groups, and must be appropriately paired with shared purpose, structural fairness, and broader institutional inclusivity. In exploring this, this paper shall (i) evaluate whether diversity is empirically valuable or morally justified, (ii) examine whether unity or diversity is more efficient for collective action and decision-making (and where a productive balance resultantly lies) and (iii) consider the merits of a meritocratic system as against diversity-driven inclusion.

I. EMPIRICAL TESTABILITY

It may be contended that the abstract and prima facie untestable character of diversity means that it is immeasurable, such that one is unable to empirically measure and quantify both the level of diversity within a given cohort, as well as the effect or 'value' of said diversity. In this sense, we may probe the very project of determining if diversity is 'valuable', given that such an abstract concept cannot be attributed value in any meaningful sense. Though the process of implementing diversity is capable of evaluation, the outcomes of diversity are challenging to measure without comparative analysis of multiciplicitous circumstances and data groups (Shade). However, this view neglects the growing body of research around organisational psychology and corporate performance that demonstrates the measurable advantages of diversity.

We might look to empirical studies in the field of corporate decision making, given the greater availability of empirical evidence as regards the effect of staff diversification as well as the centrality of economic diversity-representation to broader socioeconomic outcomes (Hughes), as a springboard for examining diversity on a broader scale.

Studies offer robust empirical support proving that firms with more diverse leadership consistently outperform their less diverse counterparts, when comparing profitability (McKinsey). This strongly suggests that diversity can yield tangible benefits to corporate outcomes. Moreover, diverse groups typically engage in more meticulous information processing and are better equipped to circumvent the drawbacks of 'groupthink' (Phillips et al.). Excluding diversity in work settings would potentially hold back the performance of

employees, but also decision-making quality and problem-solving efficiency. In complex corporate environments, having a wide range of perspectives engenders more adaptive and rounded solutions towards making corporate decisions. Moreover, on a social level, diversity reflects the communities that it serves, and avoids conformity by accepting rather than resisting heterogeneity. Whilst groupthink suppresses critical thinking and discourages dissent, attenuating the capacity of sociocorporate bodies to identify and thus resolve potential problems, diversity facilitates and sustains systems of divergent perspectives, providing a comprehensive aggregate account that is more institutionally sophisticated and, by the very nature of diversification, resistant to singularised flaws.

While diversity can be empirically tested to a certain extent. It is necessary to clarify that there are multiple dimensions to assess whether diversity is valuable, which need to be specifically determined. Diversity is not merely valued as an abstract or moral ideal, but rather considered as a comprehensive concept that encompasses various aspects, including: empirical value i.e. that there are measurable impacts in improving work performance, decision quality, and ensuring effiency; social value, i.e. contributions to justice, representation, and inclusiveness/social adhesion; cognitive value, i.e. expanding the scope of perspectives, promoting innovation/learning/creativity, and fostering robust collective reasoning.

II. BALANCING UNITY WITH DIVERSITY

Proceeding on the assumption that diversity is, at least to a limited extent, capable of meaningful discussion and empirical examination, we might consider whether diversity programmes and initiatives produce positive outcomes in practice.
The relative efficiency of unity versus diversity in collective action and decision-making depends on the context, with each offering distinct advantages.

On one hand, unity fosters shared trust and social cohesion, enabling smoother coordination and faster consensus. When group members operate from a common understanding or cultural framework, it can reduce friction and create a sense of belonging that motivates collective effort. However, an overemphasis on unity can lead to homogeneity of thought, where dissenting perspectives are excluded. This kind of uniformity risks producing flawed or short-sighted outcomes, often resulting in groupthink and uncritical assumptions. This deviates from the multiculturalist demands when making political decisions that require addressing diverse cultural groups.

However, diversity introduces a wide range of perspectives, experiences, and problem-solving methods that can enrich collective decision-making. It challenges dominant forces and blind status quo, leading to the creation of robust solutions. Consequently, diversity only promotes decision-making under certain circumstances. If the focus is centred on individual identity differences, group cohesion and the decision-making process would instead be fragmented or slowed. Therefore, neither unity nor diversity is inherently more

efficient or effective. The most effective action often is when diverse viewpoints are operationalised within a shared structure.

Diversity, when effectively managed, can introduce productive friction that strengthens collective decision-making and outcomes. Philosopher Sandra Harding argues that individuals from marginalised backgrounds offer socially situated knowledge from lived experience, and it exposes the blind spots of dominant groups and institutional structures (Harding). Robin Ely and David Thomas claim that diversity strengthens productivity only when it is with inclusivity, where individuals from underrepresented groups feel safe to express their perspectives and challenge prevailing assumptions (Ely). Economist Scott Page provides empirical support, demonstrating that diverse groups, even when composed of less individually skilled members, often outperform homogeneous expert teams due to the wider range of cognitive frameworks they apply to problem-solving (Page). Similarly, political philosopher Christian List, beyond the Condorcet Jury Theorem, implies that diverse and independently reasoning groups are statistically more likely to reach correct decisions than uniform ones (List). However, for these benefits to be fulfilled, diversity must be centred toward a shared objective. Otherwise, we risk devolving into an atomised identity-based system. This way, diversity is not automatically valuable, but it only becomes so when embedded within structures that cultivate deliberative inclusion and collective purpose.

While diversity can enhance institutional performance and collective reasoning, its value relies on how differences are managed. When identity becomes the endpoint rather than a means of enriching shared deliberation, diversity risks becoming divisive rather than generative. The challenge is not to erase differences, but to structure collaboration so that varied perspectives contribute to a common purpose. Cognitive diversity yields innovation and superior outcomes only when it is channelled through coordinated group processes (Page). Similarly, productive friction must be guided by inclusive leadership and equitable participation. Otherwise, identity-based subgroups may work at cross purposes, undermining group cohesion (Ely). In this light, the most valuable diversity is that which expands our frame of thinking while maintaining a commitment to collective problem-solving. The goal is not a homogenised consensus, but a synthesis. This balance point affirms that diversity is not inherently valuable, but conditionally so: it requires intentional design, inclusive norms, and a shared sense of purpose to transform difference into strength.

III. MERITOCRATIC IDEALS

Meritocracy essentially refers to individuals who hold power being determined based on their talent, effort, and performance. It is from the idea that merit promotes efficiency and just outcomes by assigning roles to those most capable of fulfilling them. However, in practice, meritocracy often fails to account for structural inequalities that warp access to opportunity. A truly fair system must recognise unequal starting points and seek to eliminate systemic group disadvantage (Harding; Anderson). Without this recognition, the “merit” being rewarded may simply be a way of showcasing inherited advantages. If a person lacks the resources and chance to realise their capabilities, a merit-based system becomes unjust by

default (Sen). Furthermore, meritocracy could turn out to be a source of moral elitism, meaning it fosters a sense of entitlement among the most successful while ignoring the arbitrary role of birth circumstances (Sandel; Rawls). Thus, while meritocracy appears fair, it often reinforces existing hierarchies unless complemented by methods capable of correcting socioeconomic inequality.

In contrast, diversity, when defined beyond superficial identity traits, can serve as a more just and expansive measure of value. The core of diversity lies in systematically bringing underrepresented groups into institutions to increase democratic legitimacy and effective responses, which is meaningful to an institution's overall performance. Diversity does not mean discarding standards for measuring one's ability, but rather measuring the possibility of contributing different social perspectives. Approaches for diversity in programmes such as DEI, affirmative actions, and quotas can be seen as "fashionable" choices for institutions seeking to demonstrate inclusivity - they categorise candidates by factors that seem symbolic or tokenistic. While these programmes aim to address underrepresentation, they often disproportionately benefit the most privileged within marginalised groups, which could unintentionally turn out to be preferential. Gender quotas, for instance, tend to favour highly educated, middle- to upper-class women, doing little to uplift impoverished women. This creates a vertical stratification and competition within a given represented group, where elite voices are dominant and spread more, while inequality is weakly addressed. In addition, empirical research on quotas has barely evaluated the effects of minority quotas on minority representation. Standalone policy actions risk reproducing hierarchies within identity categories rather than abolishing them. A more effective approach would thus involve tandem quotas or mixed quotas, which include integrating minority quotas with national gender quotas or party gender quotas (Hughes). Another approach would be to include policies that involve increasing equal skills across heterogeneous groups. Particularly, focus on providing opportunities when identity is flexible, and offering skill cultivation when identity is fixed (Fryer; Loury). By designing policies that address overlapping disadvantages, institutions can go beyond tokenised diversity.

Specifically, quotas are in place to ensure representation, which entails consideration of the tension between descriptive representation and substantial representation, relevant to the selection of the diversified or talented. Descriptive representation (relevant to diversity) encourages representatives with lived experience of exclusion or marginalisation can better understand the needs and priorities of their community, and be chosen. These pioneer representatives from marginalised groups serve as a symbol of empowerment, affirming to others in their community the possibility of upward mobility. Conversely, substantive representation is about acting for constituents, not necessarily being like them. The key is the outcome. However, representatives who do not resemble a community may struggle to earn trust or inspire political engagement. Additionally, it can be challenging to draft attainment policies that effectively demonstrate the best interests of a group. Thus, without descriptive representation stemming from diversity, certain issues, such as women, racial minorities in office, may be overlooked, misunderstood, or deprioritised (Mansbridge). In this competition of equality or efficiency, descriptive representation could act as a basis for substantive

representation, ensuring policy outcomes. This relationship between the two representations is also the case for diversity versus meritocracy. Any significantly underrepresented groups, with the help of well-designed policies, could greatly increase the possibility for a more heterogeneous group to be elected. Hence, it is a false dichotomy to treat diversity and merit as binary opposites. They can coexist and reinforce each other, so ultimately, diversity could reevaluate how to define excellence in meritocracy.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while diversity, at times, is regarded as fashionable, without proper design and conscientious application, it fails to effect real change; the value of diversity is conditional upon how it is utilised. However, diversity programmes nonetheless herald genuine potential in implementing and facilitating long-term change when handled with appropriate care. Indeed, there is limited empirical evidence regarding diversity in politics in particular. Still, diversity's usefulness is authenticated in many relevant fields. A re-evaluation of performance is needed, given that realising the value of diversity relies on rejecting the false dichotomy between diversity-driven admission/hires and meritocracy; diversity could act as a basis for polishing selection in meritocratic processes, and meritocracy could enhance the effectiveness of diversity.

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