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**Diversity in companies: towards more equity?**

Master's thesis presented by

**Lucile DE WULF**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to explain how diversity in companies can lead to more or less equality between candidates. During this study, we will see the theoretical side of it, and then a practical study will be made in order to find an answer to this problematic.

In the theoretical part, concepts of diversity will be detailed and diversity management will be explained. Through a deep analysis of Walter Benn Michaels's book, the controversial idea that diversity can lead to inequalities emerged and is questioned. Then, for the second part, three companies from different countries (Canada, Belgium and France) have accepted to answer a questionnaire on the affirmative action concept. This concept is at the center of this thesis because it highlights the controversial side of increasing diversity through a way of discrimination. Finally, I aim to show the similarities and differences in the practices of affirmative action between countries, by analyzing this survey's answer. We will see in this chapter that the stakes for companies are not always the same, depending on the cultural and historical context of the country itself.

Diversity is now at the center of company's strategies, and it must be fully understood in order to be successfully managed. It can be a real competitive strength if it is implemented for the right reasons. However, some progress and improvement should be made so diversity and equality become the core of the company policy.

**Keywords:** diversity, equality, affirmative action, human resources management, economic equality, cultural equality

## **Résumé**

Ce mémoire contribue à expliquer comment la diversité en entreprise peut conduire à plus ou moins d'égalité entre candidats. Pendant cette étude, nous verrons d'abord l'aspect théorique, puis une étude concrète sera menée dans le but de trouver une réponse à la problématique.

Dans la partie théorique, les concepts de diversité seront détaillés et le management de la diversité sera expliqué. Au travers une analyse de l'œuvre de Walter Benn Michaels, l'idée controversée que la diversité peut mener à plus d'inégalité émerge et sera questionnée. Puis, pour la partie expérimentale, trois entreprises de pays différents (Canada, Belgique et France) ont accepté de répondre à un questionnaire sur le concept de la discrimination positive en entreprise et son impact sur la diversité et l'égalité. Ce concept est au centre de ce mémoire car il met en lumière le côté controversé de l'augmentation de la diversité par une pratique discriminante. Pour finir, je souhaite montrer les similitudes et différences de pratiques de discrimination positive entre pays, en analysant les réponses récoltées par le questionnaire. Nous verrons dans ce chapitre que les buts pour les entreprises ne sont pas forcément les mêmes, et que cela dépend fortement de la culture et du contexte historique du pays lui-même.

La diversité est maintenant au centre des stratégies d'entreprises, et cela doit être entendu et compris pour être bien managé. Cela peut être un vrai avantage compétitif si elle est mise en œuvre pour les bonnes raisons. Cependant, des progrès et améliorations doivent être faits pour que la diversité et l'égalité deviennent le cœur des politiques d'entreprises.

**Mots-clefs** : diversité, égalité, discrimination positive, management des ressources humaines, égalité économique, égalité culturelle

***"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal".***

Martin Luther King Jr. August 28, 1963

***"It's hard being black. You ever been black? I was black once, when I was poor."***

Larry Holmes, heavyweight boxing champion, 1978

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Abstract

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## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the question of diversity is at the center of everything. It is present in economy, politics, societies. For some people, it can be frightening, for others it is a real richness, for others it is the fair representation of today's society. But there are still ongoing problems with diversity, and there is a certain number of factors that are typical from some social groups, and that can appear as disadvantageous or discriminatory, such as gender, ethnic origins, sexual orientation or age.

In order to fight against this unfairly biased tendency, some countries have settled policies for introduction of minorities in the everyday life, such as school or work. Indeed, a lot of measures including training, quotas, internships or social introduction policies have been established. They are meant to bring back the conditions, unfair at the beginning, of the equal opportunities.

A big part of these politics is called affirmative action policies. They express the idea of favoring minorities, ethnic as social, to give them the same chances as the main people.

In 2000, the think tank "Institut Montaigne" is created with the aim to reconcile competitive goals and social cohesion in companies. They have already published four reports on affirmative action and discrimination. The first one was written in 2004 by Laurence Mehaignerie and Yazid Sabeg<sup>1</sup>, and the goal is to show the positive impact of affirmative action on equal opportunities at work. They state that there is a real gap between French republican values and the reality of business in companies. This report led to the creation of the "Charte de la Diversité"<sup>2</sup>, a charter that companies can sign to show their will to act, in order to reflect at the best, the diversity of the French population in their effective. In 2015, this charter had more than 3,400 signatures.

Then, still in 2004, Laurent Blivet<sup>3</sup> wrote about discrimination in companies, and especially for executives. He stated that a lot of companies are reluctant to hire middle

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<sup>1</sup> SABEG, Y. and MEHAIGNERIE, L. (2004). *Les oubliés de l'égalité des chances*, Institut Montaigne

<sup>2</sup> BEBEAR, C. and SABEG, Y. (2004). *Charte de la Diversité*, IMS-Entreprendre pour la Cité

<sup>3</sup> BLIVET, L. (2004) *Ni quotas, ni indifférence : les entreprises et l'égalité positive*, Institut Montaigne

managers according to their skin color, name or ethnic origin, even if they deny themselves great opportunities and talented people on purpose.

In 2006 and 2009, Eric Keslassy<sup>45</sup> wrote about affirmative action in two very important topics: the link between democracy and equality and affirmative action. After studying the American model, he stated that the same patterns are developed in France: ethnic minorities are less and less represented in superior schools, patterns that limit the access to high-ranked jobs for these minorities. For him, this goes totally against the values of France, which promotes a lot equality, in the spirit of the French motto “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité”.

Diversity in companies is a change that some companies are still afraid of, and for some others, diversity is a challenge that will give them a competitive advantage and will be a real strategy. But there is a lot of minorities that are discriminated, on several levels: political, ethnical, ideological, social... More and more people defend diversity in companies, and want to increase it, to answer the French population's needs, which are changing in the same time as the population is changing. Companies should adapt themselves to stay competitive in this complex and diverse environment, including through affirmative action policies.

But there is the catch: how a practice of affirmative action, which is positive discrimination can re-establish equal opportunity? This paradox is at the center of the debate on affirmative action. Indeed, favoring some minorities over the main people is discrimination to the others. Is diversity really bringing more equality in companies? **If we look at diversity in companies and affirmative action, are we going towards more equity or more injustice?**

Three hypotheses have been set up:

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<sup>4</sup> KESLASSY, E. (2006). *Ouvrir les grandes écoles à la diversité*, Institut Montaigne

<sup>5</sup> KESLASSY, E. (2009). *Ouvrir la politique à la diversité*, Institut Montaigne



- Hypothesis 1: affirmative action sorts out equality and diversity problems in companies.
- Hypothesis 2: affirmative action doesn't sort out equality and diversity problems, it increases them.
- Hypothesis 3: affirmative action must be combined with other recruitment actions to result in more equality and diversity.

Using the funnel method (going from the general to the precise), we will first see equality, its definitions and its scope, to fully understand the concepts and notions used in France and in other countries. Diversity in companies will then be studied, as general, and then for human resources management, as an upstream work point of view and as a downstream work point of view. Finally, we will interpret Walter Benn Michaels's work and his vision of diversity against equality, how affirmative action has started and how it really works.

In a second section, a sample of managers and recruiters from three different companies will be analyzed through questionnaires about affirmative action and its place in their recruitment process. The choice of the investigation ground and the hypothesis will be explained, as the choice of the methodology.

In the third and last part, the results will be analyzed to validate or refute the hypotheses made before. What are the companies' point of view on affirmative action and its effects on diversity in companies? Do they deal with it? Do they have other means to increase diversity? The goal is also to compare their answers according to the countries, and to set limits to this research.

*The research question of this thesis requires pertinent theories about affirmative action and discrimination. The history of racism in the United States of America are highlighted to fully understand the phenomenon and its consequences.*

## **I. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **A. Definitions**

In order to fully understand the content of this study, we have first to highlight the subject and understand the different theories and works that have been done on discrimination, affirmative action, and equity.

#### ***a- Discrimination***

Discrimination is the fact of treating someone differently than other people, most of the time in a negative way, when they are in similar situations. There are different kinds of discrimination, but they all describe an unequal action towards subjects in the same situation. The discrimination can be meant, it can be chosen to disadvantage someone because of his age, his gender or his handicap for example. On the other hand, discrimination can also be unintended.

According to French laws, there are several discrimination criteria's. It can be discrimination on the base of gender, race, religion, disability, culture or sexual orientation.

The economics of discrimination started with Becker's book (1957)<sup>6</sup>. According to him, economics of discrimination can be divided in two models: The competitive model focused on individual behaviors that may include discrimination, meanwhile the collective model studied groups.

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<sup>6</sup> BECKER, G. (1957). *The Economics of Discrimination*, 1 University of Chicago Press

According to Plassard (1987)<sup>7</sup>, economic discrimination is "*when some individuals having a common distinctive characteristic seem disadvantaged, because of this common characteristic, regardless of their productive features*". This theory tries to explain the differences between individuals with the same economic features, who do not earn the same wages, for example.

Since Phelps (1972)<sup>8</sup> and Arrow (1973)<sup>9</sup>, most of the economic discrimination's analyses have been focused on the statistical theory of discrimination. The premise of this theory is that companies have limited information about the skills of their job candidates, which leads them to use visible characteristics such as gender or race to guess the productivity or suitability of candidates. The company will reduce the uncertainty, regarding the recruitment process, but can never be assured that the information is perfect, as it is referring only to some visual characteristics. The discrimination is then made based on bias, or by ignorance.

### ***b- Affirmative action***

Affirmative action, also called positive discrimination, is the principle of favoring people coming from a historically cultural disadvantaged group, who suffered discrimination or racism, to reestablish equal opportunities. For example, affirmative action can be used to fight ethnical, religious, sexual or social discriminations. According to Noblet (1998)<sup>10</sup>, "*such a principle, when really put into practice, as in the United States, presents itself as a passage from individual equal opportunities, to group results equality*". It has been imported from the United States in France about fifty years ago, and has been subject to several analyses and controversy. According to the American William Wilson

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<sup>7</sup> PLASSARD, JM. (1987). *Discrimination sur le marché du travail et information imparfaite*, Paris : Centre national de la recherche scientifique

<sup>8</sup> PHELPS, E. (1972). *The Statistical Theory of Racism and Sexism*, American Economic Association

<sup>9</sup> ARROW, K. (1973). *Higher Education as a Filter*, Journal of public economics

<sup>10</sup> NOBLET, P. (1998). *Egalité et discrimination positive, le cas de la France et des Etats-Unis*, Revue française des affaires sociales, n°4

(1987)<sup>11</sup>, the affirmative action had first a positive impact on diversity on the economy high-fliers, but finally, the question of equal opportunities was not solved. Therefore Walter Benn Michaels (2006)<sup>12</sup> distinguishes cultural equality and economical equality, and talks about "economic segregation" which reinforces the working-class marginalization.

In France, affirmative action has developed in employment, education and territorial economy (priority education area, sensitive urban area). It has three main differences with the American affirmative action: firstly, it is not a constitutional law procedure, it is more an experimental approach. Secondly, the criteria of selection for the persons who stands to benefit from it are exclusively socio-economical. Thirdly, the American way of doing implies a result's obligation which can be legally sanctioned, whereas in France, it is only an obligation of means. We can put forward two criticisms in France against affirmative action, on its principle itself, and on its practicality.

First, according to Borgetto (1999)<sup>13</sup>, it would be discordant with the republican principle of equality. This objection could be removed if affirmative action assumes a temporary nature, because French law tolerates advantageous policies inasmuch as they are based on common use. Affirmative action would also be a generator of negative effects, the main one being the stigmatization of individuals targeted by this approach. According to Wuhl (2002<sup>14</sup>& 2007<sup>15</sup>), affirmative action does not settle any rules enabling us to "*compare the fairness criteria and the economic effectiveness criteria*" in the choice of social action programs. Consequently, how can we choose between programs more or less fair, or more or less expensive? For example, in the case of integration into the professional world, should we favor an unemployed person less qualified, instead of those who are more qualified, knowing that the second option would probably lead us to a globally better

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<sup>11</sup> WILSON, W. (1987). *The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy*, University of Chicago Press

<sup>12</sup> MICHAELS, W B. (2006). *The Trouble With Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*, Metropolitan

<sup>13</sup> BORGETTO, M. (1999). *L'évolution récente du système de Sécurité sociale en matière de redistribution*, Recherches et Prévisions n°73, pages 45-51, Persee

<sup>14</sup> WUHL, S. (2002). *L'Égalité. Nouveaux débats*, PUF

<sup>15</sup> WUHL, S. (2007). *Discrimination positive et justice sociale*, PUF

economical result? If we choose the fair option by favoring the access of the less qualified individuals, should we institute a limit to this action if it doesn't produce the expected results? In practice, without explicit choice criteria, people working for social insertion usually choose efficiency over fairness.

Wuhl came up with this theory thanks to the work of the American philosopher John Rawls (1971)<sup>16</sup>. He is considered as the theoretician of affirmative action, although, the implementation differs from his principles of justice both in the United States and in France. His second principle of justice is meant to bring answers to the limits of French affirmative action. Indeed, in his first section focused on conditions leading to equal opportunities to professional and social status, this principle is based on the requirement of a structural action, beyond a simple wealth redistribution, in order to stimulate a real equal opportunity situation. In a second section, John Rawls's work led to a double dictate related to a public policy: on one hand, each politic should favor the fair over the efficient, giving priority to the most underprivileged group (rules fixing the relation between social justice and economic efficiency); on the other hand, this direction has a limit as it cannot be manifest as a socio-economical decline of that underprivileged group.

### ***c- Equal opportunities***

From the identical treatment of individuals and the absence of bias and preferences, arise equal opportunities. In a professional context, the aim is that the job should be offered to the most qualified candidate, without considering irrelevant factors such as gender, religion, disability, or sexual orientation. This notion of equal opportunities is nothing new, justice in politics is at the center of Plato's philosophy (380 BC)<sup>17</sup>. In *Republic*, he describes the Ideal City, and the role of the philosopher is to come up with rules to bring justice in the City. According to Denis (1966)<sup>18</sup> "*Plato insists on the necessity to establish luck equality; if there is a class of poor individuals, they will be a perpetual source of*

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<sup>16</sup> RAWLS, J. (1971). *A Theory of Justice*, Chapter 12, Harvard University Press

<sup>17</sup> PLATO, (380 BC). *Republic*, Nathan published in 2009

<sup>18</sup> DENIS, H. (1966). *Histoire de la pensée économique*, PUF page 28

*revolution. (...) We have to give up on the hope to reassemble a City where inequality of wealth prevails. (...) The fundamental aim according to Plato is to establish friendship between every Citizen. The true way, is the absolute community of goods, of women and child, because -between friends- everything is common."* For Denis, this program is probably too bold, and he suggests other solutions, less perfect but more realistic: *"This more accessible way is to institute friendship between citizens, allocate equal properties to them, and make them live an identical and frugal life. And as it is possible in spite of everything that inequalities arise, we will have to institute a tax system whom will ceaselessly tend towards reestablish economic equality."*

Equal opportunities want that the social status of individuals from a generation does not depend anymore on moral, religious, financial or social characteristics of the previous generation, but only for the use they can bring to the society. This view is a pillar of Rawls's theory of Justice as Fairness (1985)<sup>19</sup> *"supposing that there is a distribution of natural assets, those who have the same level of talent and capacities and who have the same wish to use them should have the same success prospect, this without take account of their initial position in the society."* Gordon Marshall (1998)<sup>20</sup> studied a lot Rawls's work and came up with this question: *"Does it demand that, however unequal their abilities, people should be equally empowered to achieve their goals? This would imply that the unmusical individual who wants to be a concert pianist should receive more training than the child prodigy."*

The Austrian philosopher Friedrich Hayek (1973)<sup>21</sup> has a different approach to equal opportunities. He thinks that equality in the face of the law should be prioritized. The economist Friedman (1962)<sup>22</sup> stands up for a similar position. According to him, we should embrace equality before the law, which is a pillar of liberal democracy, and an essential part of freedom. Patrick Savidan (2007)<sup>23</sup>, president of the Observatoire des Inégalités,

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<sup>19</sup> RAWLS, J. (1985). *Justice as Fairness*, Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol. 14 n°3 p 223-251, Princeton University Press

<sup>20</sup> MARSHALL, G. (1998). *Social Justice*, Oxford University Press

<sup>21</sup> HAYEK, F. (1973). *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, PUF

<sup>22</sup> FRIEDMAN, M. (1962). *Capitalism and Freedom*, University of Chicago Press

<sup>23</sup> SAVIDAN, P. (2007). *Repenser l'égalité des chances*, Hachette

highlights that an individual conception of equal opportunities does not allow to reach the objectives, but increases inequalities. In France, each ministry had its own approach on the question, until the creation of the law for equal opportunities in 2006. The creation of this law leads to the creation of a Ministry of Opportunities, and several actions were taken in fields such as employment or education. French companies understood the stake with equal opportunities in the current economical context.

Equality of opportunities is seen differently by people according to their own political orientation: Liberals argue about the criteria needed to guarantee equal opportunities. On the other hand, Conservatives consider it as inequality and disrespectful to tradition. The basic approach is limited to the public sphere and the fair and unfair is detailed in advance. This version is well expressed by Dr. Hirshberg (1917)<sup>24</sup>: *"There should be an equal opportunity for all. Each and every person should have as great or as small an opportunity as the next one. There should not be the unfair, unequal, superior opportunity of one individual over another"*. This point of view is also shared by the Friedmans (1980)<sup>25</sup>: *"No arbitrary obstacles"* should prevent someone to realize what they want to achieve, and that *"Not birth, nationality, color, religion, sex, nor any other irrelevant characteristic should determine the opportunities that are open to a person – only his abilities."*

The substantive equality of opportunity is slightly broader than the limited basic or formal equal opportunity, and it involves what is called indirect discrimination. The ways to achieve greater equality are criticized and qualified as unstable, especially in our society where great wealth disparities are present. This approach stands that some individuals are simply better placed than others to take advantage of opportunities. Following this approach, one should examine the candidates before they apply for a job position, and judge if they have equal abilities and skills, even before they are competing for the position. The equal opportunity concept has been criticized, because it makes assumption on the effects of genetics, or that social justice is way more complicated than mere equal opportunity.

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<sup>24</sup> HIRSHBERG, L. (1917). *What "Equal Opportunity to All" Really Means*, The New York Times

<sup>25</sup> FRIEDMAN, M & R. (1980). *Free to Choose: a Personal Statement*, Harcourt

## **B. Diversity**

Historically, the human diversity was described on the basis of physical differences, such as gender and "ethnicity". But there are more characteristics that need to be considered: language, culture, religion, disability, education, wealth, sexual orientation, etc... Each dimension of diversity can influence the individual's needs, their personal history and their opportunities, and it should be known and taken into consideration. Firstly, we will see diversity in companies in general, and then we will see how companies can act in favor of upstream and downstream diversity. We will finish with Walter Benn Michaels' point of view.

### ***a- Diversity in companies***

It is in a globalization context, at the end of the 90's, that diversity occurs in the workplace. Globalization allowed, not only a standardization of people's way of life, but it also points out the differences and showed us the economical and cultural wealth that companies can manage. The concept of diversity has always been a controversial subject, and no theory has yet been unanimously accepted. The debate about diversity, and even more ethnic diversity, is a difficult issue to handle. The big mistake one should avoid is to associate this concept to inferior population, and to avoid ethnocentrism vision.

In the workplace, diversity is an even more sensitive issue, hard to deal with, partly because no legal text clearly defines diversity. Diversity and discrimination are two distinct terms, but they are often linked to each other. Discrimination is a clearly defined concept, indicators have been settled to measure it, on the other hand, diversity is a blurry concept, hardly measurable. In companies, the goal is to limit discrimination while increasing diversity. Most of the companies based their diversity programs on ethnic and gender criteria, but nowadays companies must focus also on differences affecting small populations, such as sexual orientation or sexual identity. Indeed, even if these groups are not subject to direct discrimination, they live within a society that does not always recognize their existence, and where their values are not represented. Each company commits in its own way to increase cultural, ethnical and social diversity. If the aim of  
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diversity in companies is to decrease the exclusion of some individuals, the goal is also to set up human resources management policies, based on individual's skills enhancement. As Malcolm Forbes<sup>26</sup> describes it, "*diversity is the art of thinking independently together*". As we have seen, diversity in companies allows the upholding of equality, as being a driving force for innovation, as long as the company is willing to use human resources practices in this way.

Diversity maintains the link between people, and social cohesion, as implies the European Union motto: "*In varietate concordia*", meaning "united in diversity". But how to measure it in companies? Vernon Jordan<sup>27</sup>, an Afro-American businessman raises the difficulties of this measurement saying that: "*A lot of companies make diversity a part of the performance goals against which an executive gets paid. Just as you have to make a certain sales number, you have to make a diversity number to get your bonus*". Indeed, all management topics in companies usually rely on quantified objectives and numbered results. Hence, we need measurement tools and indicators to assess diversity. This is probably the main reason of the blurry feeling around the concept of diversity, as in France for example, ethnical census in companies is forbidden, to avoid communitarianism and stigmatization.

#### ***b- Upstream work: human resources management in diversity's service***

William N. Spencer (2015)<sup>28</sup> said "*The ideal of a society in which people do not suffer disadvantage from discrimination on grounds of supposed race, ethnicity, religion, sex, and sexual orientation is widely upheld as desirable in itself.*" Boosting diversity in firms means foremost to put forward equal opportunity and non-discrimination. It goes by the strengthening of parity, integration of young people, older persons or disabled people into the workforce, for example.

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<sup>26</sup> Malcolm Forbes (1919-1990) was the president and director of the American famous financial magazine Forbes.

<sup>27</sup> Vernon Jordan was a famous businessman from the United States of America, he told this in the 50's.

<sup>28</sup> SPENCER, W N. (2015). "*Equality*": *The American Way of Truth and Justice*, Xlibris Corporation LLC

The recruitment process of new employees is a decisive step to favor diversity in companies. Recruiters will have, consciously or unconsciously, a natural tendency to favor profiles like themselves, such as same schools, same origins, to limit the uncertainty of their choice. The tendency of social reproduction is often opposed to diversity in the recruitment process, and a constraint to the integration of new profiles that could enrich the firm.

From a European legal point of view, the article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union states that: *"Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, color, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited"*.

In France, the Haute Autorité de Lutte contre les Discriminations et pour l'Egalité (HALDE) is an administrative authority in charge of fighting the discriminations, providing and spreading information and promoting equal opportunities. If a company is accused of discrimination, it is exposed to a sentence as legal entity, just as the individuals who participated to the discriminatory action.

To fight discrimination, some good practices have been defined. Setting down quotas for woman and disabled people is one of the established practices in France. For example, in all companies of more than 20 employees, they should have at least 6% of disabled people in their staff. More recently, since 2011, firms of more than 500 employees must save 20% woman in board of directors. But the quota solution is controversial, because one can think that people are not hired for their competencies but only for the quotas. Same problem for the disabled people's quota: many companies choose to pay the fine instead of recruiting a disabled individual, even if the fine is far more superior to the minimum wage: the company would have to pay the disabled employee, the company would also have to pay for upgrading to standards the infrastructures, therefore they choose the more profitable way.

Another way to fight discrimination is the anonymous résumé. This practice puts individual's competences and skills forward, and aims to avoid discrimination in the recruitment process. The anonymous résumé looks like classical résumés but does not show any picture, names, address, gender, nationality, age and other personal information

of the candidate. The anonymous résumé allows the recruiter to free himself from bias that could be the origin of discrimination. Moreover, the use of anonymous résumés shows the candidates that equal opportunities is respected and is part of the firm's values. Nevertheless, for the interviews or trial periods, the anonymity dissipates and the discrimination's risks reappears.

### ***c- Downstream work: managing diversity***

The Giraffe and the Elephant fable, by R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., (1999) <sup>29</sup> perfectly illustrates managing diversity:

*"In a small suburban community, just outside the city of Artiodact, a giraffe had a new home built to his family's specifications. It was a wonderful house for giraffes, with soaring ceilings and tall doorways. High windows ensured maximum light and good views while protecting the family's privacy. Narrow hallways saved valuable space without compromising convenience. So well done was the house that it won the National Giraffe Home of the Year Award. The home's owners were understandably proud.*

*One day the giraffe, working in his state-of-the-art wood shop in the basement, happened to look out the window. Coming down the street was an elephant. "I know him", he thought. "We worked together at PTA committee. He's an excellent woodworker, too. I think I'll ask him in to see my new shop. Maybe we can even work together on some projects." So, the giraffe reached his head out the window and invited the elephant in.*

*The elephant was delighted; he had liked working with the giraffe and looked forward to knowing him better. Besides, he knew about the wood shop and wanted to see it. So, he walked up to the basement door and waited for it to open. "Come in, come in", the giraffe*

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<sup>29</sup> ROOSEVELT, T. (1999). *Building a House For Diversity: A Fable About a Giraffe & an Elephant Offers New Strategies for Today's Workforce*, Amacom

said. But immediately they encountered a problem. While the elephant could get his head in the door, he could go no farther.

“It’s a good thing we made this door expandable to accommodate my wood shop equipment”, the giraffe said. “Give me a minute while I take care of our problem.” He removed some bolts and panels to allow the elephant in.

The two acquaintances were happily exchanging woodworking stories when the giraffe’s wife leaned her head down the basement stairs and called to her husband: “Telephone, dear; it’s your boss.” “I’d better take that upstairs in the den”, the giraffe told the elephant. “Please make yourself at home; this may take a while.”

The elephant looked around, saw a half-finished project on the lathe table in the far corner, and decided to explore it further. As he moved through the doorway that led to that area of the shop, however, he heard an ominous scrunch. He backed out, scratching his head. “Maybe I’ll join the giraffe upstairs”, he thought. But as he started up the stairs, he heard them begin to crack. He jumped off and fell back against the wall. It too began to crumble. As he sat there disheveled and dismayed, the giraffe came down the stairs.

“What on earth is happening here?” the giraffe asked in amazement. “I was trying to make myself at home”, the elephant said.

The giraffe looked around. “Okay, I see the problem. The doorway is too narrow. If you’d take some classes there, we could get you down to size”. “Maybe”, the elephant said, looking unconvinced.

“And the stairs are too weak to carry your weight”, the giraffe continued. “If you’d to go to ballet class at night, I’m sure we could get you light on your feet. I really hope you’ll do it. I like having you here”. “Perhaps”, the elephant said. “But to tell you the truth, I’m not sure that a house designed for a giraffe will ever really work for an elephant, not unless there are some major changes.”

According to Roosevelt (1999), the elephant and the giraffe represent a "diversity mixture, which I have defined as a combination of individuals who are different in some

*ways and similar in other. It is in this collective mixture that true diversity lives".* This puts in contrast the society with the mainstream people and the others, the different ones. In this point of view, the others are what he calls diversity. In this story, the giraffe represents the mainstream individual, with his home, his rules, adapted to him. The other, obviously the elephant, is welcomed in the giraffe's house, but he can feel that he does not belong there and is an outsider, because the home was not built for elephants.

The fable of the giraffe and the elephant also illustrates three business practices that companies can put into practice to manage discrimination. Firstly, when the giraffe made changes to his door to let the elephant in, there is affirmative action: indeed, special actions are taken to correct inequalities. Secondly, we can see understanding differences, by focusing on relationships between people in companies. Indeed, the elephant and the giraffe seems to be friends and they wish to maintain this relation. Thirdly, when the visit took a disastrous turn, the giraffe suggested actions to the elephant in order to fix the problem, but the elephant turned the advices down, keeping his burden, and proposing that they should modify the giraffe's house. This is diversity management, they both want to create an environment accessible for everyone.

Diversity management is a downstream action to ensure diversity. But there are actions that can be taken to make the most of diversity in companies. These actions can be career management, training, performance assessment, wages management, conflict resolution, favoring motivation and communication. For each of these human resources actions, the goal is to adapt it to diversity management.

*“Michaels has written a bracing polemic that should quicken the debate over what diversity really means, or should mean, in academia and beyond.”—The New York Review of Books*

### **C. “Diversity against equality”, Walter Benn Michaels’ point of view**

Walter Benn Michaels, born in 1948, is a literature professor at the University of Illinois in Chicago. In 2006, he wrote *The Trouble with Diversity, How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*<sup>30</sup>, where he asserts that ethnic and cultural diversity conceal the real and drastic problem of economic inequality. According to him, diversity, culture, identity and race are concepts diverting attention from the real issue: the gap between rich and poor people. Walter Benn Michaels’s area of expertise is the conflation between race and culture, the politics about it.

#### ***a- How and why it all begin? The historical context***

In March 1961 in the United States of America, President John F. Kennedy was the first to use the term “affirmative action” in the Executive Order number 10925. It defines a government funded program to “*take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed, and employees are treated during employment, without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin.*” This Executive Order was followed in 1965 by his successor Lyndon B. Johnson’s Executive Order number 11246. This decree introduces the watchword “Equal Opportunity Employment”. This latest order leads to the creation of an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

In the United States, this enthusiasm for diversity came from the struggle against racism. It became important in the court case “Regents of the University of California v. Bakke”,

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<sup>30</sup> MICHAELS, W B. (2006). *The Trouble With Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*, Metropolitan

where the Supreme Court announced that the consideration of a candidate's race in the University of California cannot be considered as an acceptable practice, only in the case where it would serve "*diversity interests*". Racial diversity, as geographic diversity could be an objective of the admission policy of the University.

Following this case, two evolutions occurred. Firstly, the concept of diversity became deeply anchored with the concept of race, whereas before it had no links with races. Nowadays, Universities publish reports and rankings about the statistics of Afro-Americans, Latin-Americans and Asian-Americans present on their campus.

Secondly, while the concept of diversity was initially introduced to avoid historical problem of racism, the commitment to diversity became linked to the struggle against racism. Consequently, the anti-racism fight, often associated with "racial color blindness", was thought and linked to the wish of a diverse society. The theory of "*color consciousness*" appeared: instead of trying to treat people as if their race did not matter, the goal is now to recognize and celebrate their racial identity. Basically, the goal is not to make differences disappear, but to appreciate them.

Affirmative action was also important in the United States because of the history of the country itself, such as slavery or apartheid. In fact, there was a need to counterbalance the historic inequalities. For example, Jim Crow Laws, a succession of regulations present in the south of the United States, were one of the biggest elements of the racial segregation between 1876 and 1965. The name "Jim Crow" came from the song *Jump Jim Crow*, a caricature performed by Thomas Dartmouth, written in 1828. He was the first white immigrant to perform on stage, blackening his face and his hands. These laws distinguish citizens according to their racial affiliation and enforce a segregation in all public places, like schools or public transports. The facilities and equipment for Afro-Americans were way inferior to the other. Sometimes, these laws were part of the State constitution, as in Florida.

Some people tried to oppose to this law. For example, in 1890, the State of Louisiana voted a law to separate passengers on trains, the Separate Car Act. The "white", "black" and "colored" people had each equal but separate train car accommodations. The passengers had to use compartments dedicated to them, at the risk of paying twenty-five dollars fine, or going in jail for twenty days. The railroad employees had to ensure that the rules were

respected, otherwise they exposed themselves to the same sentence. A group of white, colored and black citizen made up an association, the “Citizen’s Committee” in order to withdraw the law. Homer Plessy was part of this group, he was a man of color and he was the one chosen to break the law to bring the problem in front of the court. He was an “octoroon” (of seven-eighth European descent and one-eighth African descent), and the presence of “colored blood” was not discernible. Though, for Louisiana’s law, he was black. On June 7, 1892, he bought himself a first-class ticket and boarded in the “white” wagon. The railroad company was aware of his ancestry and the purpose of his venue. As intended, he was asked to change railway car. He refused, and he was evicted of the train and arrested. His lawyers said the law denied him his rights under the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> amendments of the Constitution, providing equal treatment. After seeking a writ of prohibition, Plessy’s demand was rejected and he made an appeal to the Supreme Court. The decision was returned on May the 18th 1896, in disfavor of Plessy. After that, the judge John Marshall Harlan came down against the statement and said: *“I am of opinion that the state of Louisiana is inconsistent with the personal liberty of citizens, white and black, in that state, and hostile to both the spirit and letter of the constitution of the United States. If laws of like character should be enacted in the several states of the Union, the effect would be in the highest degree mischievous. Slavery, as an institution tolerated by law, would, it is true, have disappeared from our country; but there would remain a power in the states, by sinister legislation, to interfere with the full enjoyment of the blessings of freedom, to regulate civil rights, common to all citizens, upon the basis of race, and to place in a condition of legal inferiority a large body of American citizens, now constituting a part of the political community, called the ‘People of the United States,’ for whom, and by whom through representatives, our government is administered. Such a system is inconsistent with the guaranty given by the constitution to each state of a republican form of government, and may be stricken down by congressional action, or by the courts in the discharge of their solemn duty to maintain the supreme law of the land, anything in the constitution or laws of any state to the contrary notwithstanding.*

*For the reason stated, I am constrained to withhold my assent from the opinion and judgment of the majority.”*

Even if this declaration had no legal value, it started the dismantling of segregation. The effects of the ruling were direct: funding and supplies were made for the segregated

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schools. Other cases of rebellion against segregation became famous, such as Rosa Parks in 1955, when she refused to give up her seat to a white man on a bus. This act resulted in desegregation of the buses in the city. She became an icon of the Civil Rights Movements.

The “one-drop rule” was a historical principle of race classification used in the United States to assess if someone had African ancestors: one drop of "black blood" made you black. It became written in the law in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The principle of "invisible darkness" is associated to this rule: people were considered "black" even if they were white, blond with blue eyes. In 1865, the State of Florida passed a law stating the amount of black forebear needed to be defined as a "person of color": "*every person who shall have one-eighth or more of negro blood shall be deemed and held to be a person of color*".

In the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the law prohibited interracial weddings. The democratic politician George D. Tillman (1895)<sup>31</sup> said: "*It is a scientific fact that there is not one full-blooded Caucasian on the floor of this convention. Every member has in him a certain mixture of... colored blood...It would be a cruel injustice and the source of endless litigation, of scandal, horror, feud, and bloodshed to undertake to annul or forbid marriage for a remote, perhaps obsolete trace of Negro blood. The doors would be open to scandal, malice, and greed*". The sociologist Floyd James Davis (1991)<sup>32</sup> explains that the one-drop rule is still accepted by judges, people working on affirmative action, members of the Ku Klux Klan or even black activists. In France, such rule seems weird and we could ask ourselves why a "white" individual like Homer Plessy would consider himself as "black". The answer is quite simple: it is because America's laws consider him like this, because of this, he chose to be "black" and to get involved in the community.

***b- What is W.B. Michael's book about? Diversity and affirmative action as a solution?***

The goal of Michaels's book is to analyze actual USA affirmative action politics and to demonstrate the increasing gap between earnings. He explains the concepts of races,

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<sup>31</sup> TILLMAN, G. (1895). "*All Niggers, More or Less!*", The News and Courier

<sup>32</sup> DAVIS, FJ. (1991). *Who is Black?: One Nation's Definition*, Pennsylvania State University Press

diversity, multiculturalism and culture. He brings into opposition cultural equity and economic equity: "*we like the idea of cultural equality better than we like the idea of economic equality (and we like the idea of culture wars much better than we like the idea of class wars).*" According to him, people are focused on diversity and cultural equality, because recognizing the importance of the cultural inequalities does not cost anything. In contrast, recognizing the importance of economical inequalities would cost a lot in wealth sharing. He attacks firms, universities, the principle of meritocracy or political parties to show how they hide behind the diversity problems to avoid economic issues in the United States. According to him, they give up on the real inequality issues of the country, which is the "wealth gap". Rather than changing the economics and the wealth problems, politicians choose affirmative action, favoring minorities, instead of poor people, who are everywhere in the country and across the American population. USA seems to be more focused on its ethnic diversity image than on the real economic issues (inequalities between rich and poor), and on the advantages and privileges wealthy people have.

The problem denounced in the book is also the difficulties that underprivileged classes can face if they want to study as the rich people for example. It seems that having money is a sort of cultural difference. The author makes a nod to a conversation that happened between Ernest Hemingway and Francis Scott Fitzgerald on rich people. F. Scott Fitzgerald said "*the rich are different from you and me*", and Hemingway answered "*yes, they have more money*". In other words, rich people are not that different from you and me, the only difference is the amount of money they have, they are not a different type of human, as Fitzgerald implies. Michael denounces that wealth and privileges seem to be as a "race": something inherited and pass on from generation to generation.

Michaels makes a clear difference between the concept of "race" and "culture", on the base of genetics and scientific theories: everyone, or almost, has a mixed genetic legacy, and we all emigrate from somewhere. As Jared Diamond (1994)<sup>33</sup> observed, humans choose to see only the visible differences in order to create "races", such as the animals or plants who

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<sup>33</sup> DIAMOND, J. (1994). *Race Without Color*, Discover Magazine, November 1994 issue

look different are not from the same species. If one chooses to create races according to body chemistry, they will not be the same from those defined by the color of someone's skin. But for Michaels, America and its citizens have replaced in their minds the word "race" with "culture" and it became a social phenomenon. Michaels seems to be disappointed with the disconnection, between beliefs in race and scientific reality. The anthropologist Jonathan Marks (2006)<sup>34</sup>, wrote "*races, as natural divisions of the human species, are thus rather like angels. Many people believe in them, devoutly. They can even tell you what properties they have. But the closer you try to examine them to discover their real nature, the more elusive they become*". The reason why the concepts of culture and race have been mixed up is because for example, most of black people share the same culture, they like the same food, the same music, they do their hair the same way. But all the black people do not share it, and on the contrary, some white people share it. The conclusion is that there is culture, but the mistake to avoid is to create clichés. For example, if we say that all black people listen to rap and hip-hop music, and that's what makes them black, rap and hip-hop music become associated with black culture. If tomorrow, the only people listening to rap and hip-hop music would be white people, these types of music would be associated to white culture. These cultural criteria do not define a "race", or an individual. They have been brought by education and experience. If we call a certain culture "black culture", then what happens to white people who are into this kind of culture? Cultural attributes cannot be mixed with the concept of "race", they are two independent concepts.

For Michaels, the wicked effect of diversity is that it goes against equality, especially in the affirmative action process. Indeed, giving privilege to minorities and people who have been biased in the past, or who have suffered from discrimination, would crush the equality principles of education or employment. It would be a way to reestablish equal opportunities but to the detriment of equality at the beginning. Diversity would be opposed to equality, through affirmative action, even if the goal of affirmative action is to give more equality. This question is a vicious circle and it is hard to find an answer to it.

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<sup>34</sup> MARKS, J. (2005). *The Realities of Races*

One could object, after reading Michaels's work, that the main problem is economic gap disguised as a diversity problem. One could assume economic problems in America would be improved by more diversity, and reduce the gap between rich and poor. This is a short and very concise book; someone who does not agree or does not believe in the economic wealth gap in America, will not be persuaded, without a thorough explanation of the historical context explaining this gap.

The literature review allowed us to see that diversity is a sensitive subject, on which it is hard to reach an agreement on. However, through the years, we saw several concepts emerging, in order to favor diversity and promote it, in everyday life as in the workplace. Diversity is a differentiation factor and a way to improve performances in companies. Recognizing efficiency of diversity is one thing, adapting human resources policies and management practices is another. A good diversity management is communication and awareness to the employees and other members of the firm. For the companies, the goal is to fight inequalities and surpass clichés. In order to maintain equal opportunities, affirmative action principles have been applied in lots of companies and schools. All the previous points of view are theoretical. How the people in the recruitment sector are dealing with diversity?

## **II. RESEARCH METHOD**

Following the theoretical aspects, we will analyze if, in real life, diversity and affirmative action is effective in order to reestablish equal opportunities.

It is about finding the right approach to study our theme: what will be the more relevant method? How will we compare the theoretical parts with the reality of diversity in companies?

In a first chapter, we will see the choice of the investigation ground and the hypotheses made. In the second part, we will see the methods chosen to recover data, meaning explaining the choice between qualitative and quantitative method, the target audience, and how it has been realized.

### **A. Choice of the investigation ground and the hypotheses**

Collecting data is a delicate part of a study, because the answers will have to be useful for the analysis and the interpretation of the data. For my thesis subject, I wanted to work at first on the area of human resources management, which appeared to be fascinating to me. I am particularly attracted to the recruitment process: making contact with candidates, analyzing their profile and finding matches between their competencies, personality and the needs for the available position available is something I really like. Working with people from different areas, different backgrounds, different origins and therefore different ideas, is enriching us. In my different internships, I worked as a human resources manager assistant. My experiences with diverse individuals, as disabled persons, people from diverse countries and backgrounds, incited me to focus this thesis on diversity. I first wanted to question diversity from the viewpoint of employees. But doing it from the side of the recruiter seems more appropriated in the context, as the recruitment team are the ones "choosing" the diversity of their employees and that they are part of the strategic process to achieve diversity.

I focused my researches on three different firms: an international luxury hotel chain based in Belgium, an American recruitment agency based in Canada and an international firm in France.

In order to answer the problematic " Diversity in companies: towards more equality or more injustice?" I have established three hypotheses. Indeed, making hypothesis was a big step in the research process because the results of my study will allow me to confirm or refute some of them.

My hypotheses are the following:

Hypothesis 1: affirmative action sorts out equality and diversity problems in companies.

Hypothesis 2: affirmative action doesn't sort out equality and diversity problems, it increases them

Hypothesis 3: affirmative action must be combined with other recruitment action in order to result in equality and diversity

The first one will show us if affirmative action is known and practice by recruiters, and if it is a suitable way to resolve equality problems in companies.

The second hypothesis is made with the aim of showing that affirmative action is not seen as a good way to resolve equality problems, and why. It will also show us if discrimination is seen as an important issue in companies.

The last hypothesis will be essential to ascertain the recruitment actions that need to be established in order to guarantee equality in companies.

## **B. Method**

I had to choose between a quantitative method and a qualitative method, in other words, between the design of a questionnaire and the realization of an interview guide. Having thought about it, I decided to follow a quantitative method, and create a

questionnaire. Indeed, as it is a sensitive subject, the qualitative method seemed too hard to handle, as I did not want to influence my interviewees through variable open questions.

A quantitative method, based on an anonymous questionnaire, leaves interviewees totally free to answer, according to their company policy and thoughts. The questionnaire appeared to be also the most appropriate way to recover numerous data and process them. Finally, it was a better way because of its reliability, there is no variation in the questions, something that can happen during interviews.

### **C. Design of the questionnaire**

To verify my hypotheses, I designed a fourteen items questionnaire<sup>35</sup> to collect the necessary data to validate or refute them. The questionnaire includes multiple choice, open and closed questions and questions with prioritizing system.

My objective was to collect approximately thirty answers from the three companies, in order to have enough data to analyze. The survey is made and send through internet to the recruitment team of the firms and answers are treated anonymously.

I chose companies I had internship with, which are really different in size, activity and localization. The aim is also to see if the practices are different regarding the geographical area, and if diversity holds the same place.

The first company is a US recruiting agency, one of the leading of the American and Canadian Market. The people answering the survey are recruiting consultants and managers.

The second company is an international luxury hotel chain, based in Belgium. The survey was sent to three hotels of the group. As franchisees, there are still human-sized companies, with usually only one or two people in charge of human resources management.

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<sup>35</sup> See annex 1

The third company is an international cosmetic group based in France, with strong values on human resource policies.



*This third part has the aim to present the research results, compare and analyze them with our hypotheses. in order to validate or refute them.*

### **III. EMPIRICAL DATA**

In the first chapter, we will describe the collected data thanks to the questionnaire. In the second chapter, we will analyze these data through the hypothesis and between the three companies.

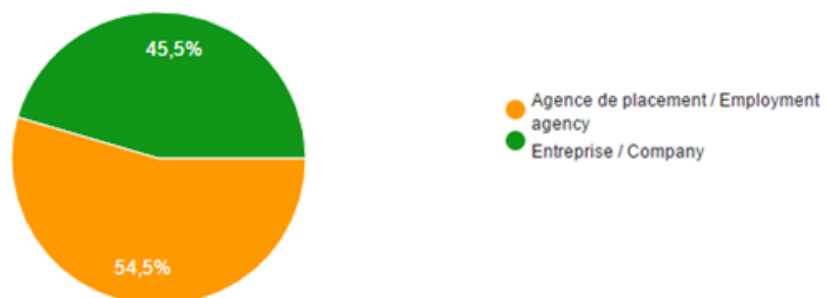
#### **A. Data collected**

This part will allow us to describe the data collected from the survey created. At first, the objective was to collect thirty answers. The main problem was the hotel chain: I did not have enough results from the human resources employees, because they were not numerous. I decided to extend the survey to the hotel managers who participate in the recruitment process. Finally, I recovered 22 answers, enough to analyze the data.

#### **Question 1: Do you work in a ...?**

Travaillez-vous dans/ Are you working in:

22 réponses



More than half of the answers (12) came from the Canadian employment agency and ten from the other two companies: six answers came from the Belgian hotel chain, and four answers from the international French company.

**Q 2: As a recruitment consultant, for you, diversity in companies is...**

The goal of this open question is to spot the key words and expressions used to describe diversity in companies, and what it means according to recruiting employees.

In 59% of the answers, the words "*wealth*", "*strength*" and "*resource*" were found.

In 45% of the results collected, the idea of differences popped out: they can be cultural, physical, linguistic and they are source of improvement for the company: "*the mixture of genders, cultures, generations, affiliations, all those differences allowing us to cross-reference data, knowledge, experiences, ideas, and therefore improving development and entrepreneurial innovation*".

In 18% of the answers transpose a "*challenge*" to overcome and 14% of the answers show that it is "*the representation of our society*" and "*usual*".

**Q3: According to you, what are the advantages and disadvantages of diversity within companies? (from 1 to 4 in order of importance, 1 being the most important)**

The answers show general trends of diversity assessment according to recruiting people.

Concerning the advantages, the most important one is "*creativity*" (10 quotes), followed by "*contribution of cultural differences*" (8 quotes) and "*sharing of knowledge*" (7 quotes).

The top three disadvantages are "*problems of comprehension and communication*" (8 quotes), "*no team spirit*" (7 quotes) and "*blockages and conflicts at work*" (5 quotes).

**Q4: On what criteria do you based on your recruitment process? (From 1 to 4)**

14 people have chosen the "*competencies*" as the first criteria to hire someone.

After that, 12 people recruit the candidates regarding their "*diploma*".

Thirdly, the "*place of residence*" comes into account, followed by the "*disability*", the "*age*" and the "*origins*".

**Q5: How do you decide between two candidates with equal expertise? (From 1 to 4)**

In order to decide between two candidates with the same competencies, recruiter's criteria are the diplomas (14 quotes), then the place of residence (8 quotes), followed by the gender (5 quotes) and the age (4 quotes). Six interviewees answered "*other*", and stating experience as a good way to choose between candidates.

**Q6: Do you have an affirmative action policy within your firm?**

Disposez-vous d'une politique de discrimination positive au sein de votre entreprise ? / Have you got an affirmative action policy within your firm?

22 réponses



The second part of the survey is more about affirmative action itself. The first question on this part is to see if those firms have an affirmative action politic in place. Half of the interviewees, belonging to the placement agency, confirm that their company possess an affirmative action policy. The two other companies do not seem to have such policy.

### Q7: If yes, how do you apply it during the recruitment process?

For those who answered YES to the previous question, we collected the results below.

Si oui, comment l'appliquez-vous lors du recrutement? / If yes, how do you apply it during the recruitment process?

11 réponses

By setting up quotas, regarding the rules of the parent company
NON, mais politique d'embauche ouverte, càd bloqué sur la motivation, les compétences, le savoir-être, nous embauchons beaucoup de travailleurs "étrangers", homosexuels...
We ensure equal opportunity policy to our candidates by using a key word detector in order to filter our resumes, we also verify it with our quotas
by respecting quotas imposed by the headquarters
I put the people from minorities in the spotlight when sending résumés to the clients
Use of Key Word detection, and respect of quotas made by the direction
respect of quotas
2 main way: the quotas we have to respect, the key word detection
quotas: we have to send to our client approximately 1 candidate /10 coming from a "minority" group
respecting the direction choices regarding the integration politics
QUOTAS!!

We can see, as there is only one company out of three who works with affirmative action policies, that: they use of quotas and of key words searching in résumé and motivation letters.

### Q8: What do you think of such a policy in companies?

Bound to happen : respect of the rules
Required, it develops a lot of motivation of the workers from different cultural backgrounds
Elle peut être intéressante pour l'image de l'entreprise
It should be REALLY adjusted to the company, not only for the notoriety
Je suis contre les politiques à discrimination positive car selon moi le fait d'avoir des incitant pour engager ces personnes discrimines les autres personnes
It is usual and should be in every company, it reflect the society we live in and reestablish equal opportunity
usefull and seems to work fine, but I am still scared that the people are only recruited to reach the numbers
Elle permet de les mettre en avant et de vraiment voir les différences
J'ai déjà aperçu une orientation sur le recrutement de jeunes cadres suite au souhait de la Direction d'inverser la courbe de la pyramide des âges.
Ce n'est pas discrimination positive qui est dangereuse mais plutôt la politique d'intégration qui en résulte: Qui dit différence, dit adaptation. Au moment d'une intégration, un nouveau collaborateur va rencontrer une équipe à laquelle il devra et s'adapter, et challenger le statut quo. Et vice versa, l'équipe devra et s'adapter et challenger le statut quo. Plus une entreprise possède des valeurs d'ouverture d'esprit et de tolérance, mieux une intégration est favorisée et moins la discrimination se ressent.
For me I apply it but it is STILL discrimination, and stigmatization of some social/ cultural groups.
Elle est nécessaire, l'entreprise doit jouer un rôle éducatif dans la société
Don't allow us to focus on the skills and experiences, because we have to first see if this candidate could fit in our monthly quotas...
Si elle permet de faire fonctionner l'entreprise de manière optimale, je suis pour. Sinon c'est inutile. Les entreprises n'ont pas toute besoin de multiculturalisme.
C'est une bonne chance mais un risque quelque part si les personnes recrutés ne sont pas dévoués au travail car ça aurait pour répercussions d'appuyer la "haine" envers leur catégorie de personnes (sexe, origines...)
Trop discriminatoire à mon gout
Fine but restrictive, have the feeling to place people for the numbers
used to it
Answer to the client's needs meanwhile working with our quotas
étrange, je ne connaissais pas ce système...
Je pense que la discrimination positive doit surtout s'appréhender dès l'accès à la formation
bien mais garde un coté discriminant
I think it close off avenues, I think we should not do it and keep all our options open

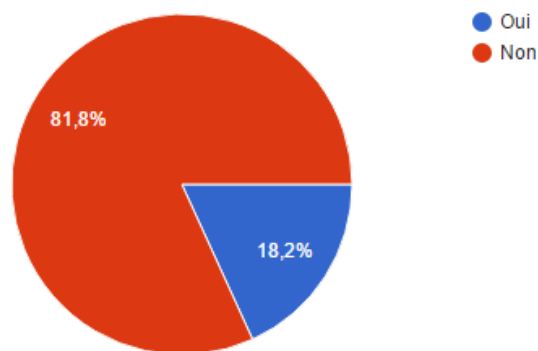
This question deals with affirmative action itself. A short answer was asked to see the feelings of recruiters towards such a policy: despite a global positive feeling to affirmative action, the discriminatory aspect of such policy appears in some comments.

**Q9: Do you think that affirmative action is the only way in order to re-establish equal opportunities between candidates?**

**Q10: Why?**

Pensez-vous que la discrimination positive est l'unique moyen de rétablir l'égalité des chances entre candidats? / Do you think that affirmative action is the only way in order to re-establish equal opportunities between candidates?

22 réponses



**Pourquoi? /Why?**

15 réponses

The results are quite clear: a large majority of the interviewees said no, and only four people said that it is the only way.

For those who answered to the question why, the main answer is because of the "*principle of discrimination that put forward differences, instead of making our minds in an impartial way*". Indeed, discrimination and stigmatization are denounced, even if it is known that the intention is good. Some others suggest helping the minorities with training and improve their social skills. Finally, some people say that it is a tool that can "*change awareness, slow and steady. Sadly, ways of seeing things doesn't change. Those kinds of politics shove common preconception, it open minds and allow people to see beyond the leap they hear every day*".

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**Q11: Would you be ready to hire someone from an Educational Priority Area or a Sensitive Urban Area? Why?**

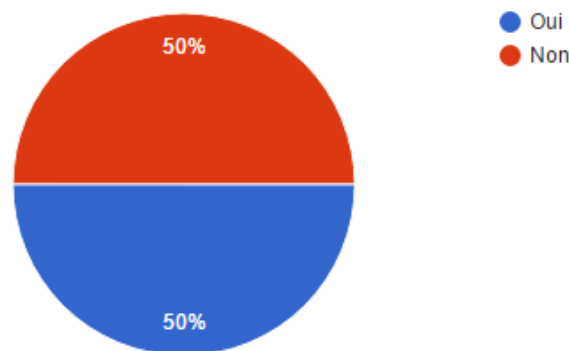
To this question, nearly everyone (21/22) answered yes, and justify their answer with words as "*merit principle*", "*if the candidate has the skills*", "*the motivation take precedence over everything else*", "*everybody deserve a chance*" and "*growing up in difficult conditions lead to more motivation to emerge greater, the company can be a social elevator*".

**Q12: Do you think that, in your company, with equal expertise, the candidates have all the same chances to be called in for job interview?**

The results to the question number 12 are quite clear. Half of the people do truly believe that, in their own company, with equal expertise, the candidates do not have the same chances to be called for a job interview.

Pensez-vous que, dans votre entreprise, à compétences égales, les candidats ont tous la même chance d'être convoqués pour un entretien d'embauche? Do you think that, in your company, with equal expertise, the candidates have all the same chances to be call in for job interview?

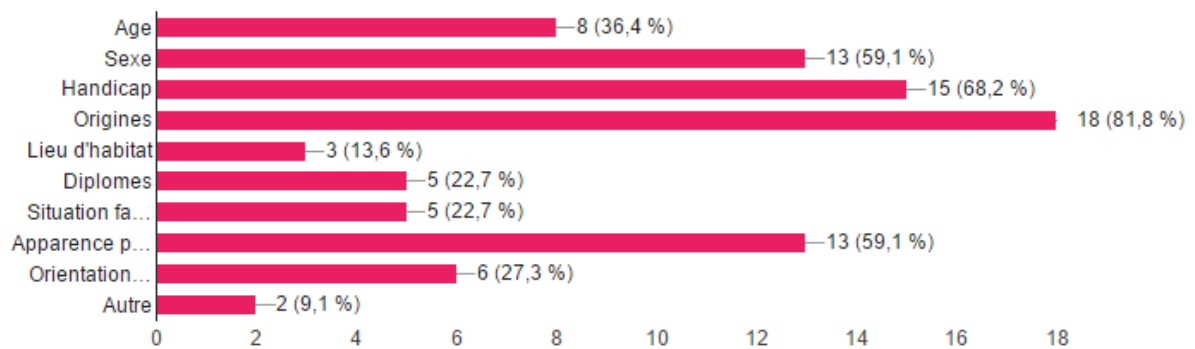
22 réponses



**Q13: According to you, on what criteria's the discriminate people are discriminate?**

Selon vous, sur quels critères les personnes discriminées le sont-elles ?  
/According to you, on what criteria's the discriminated people are discriminate?

22 réponses

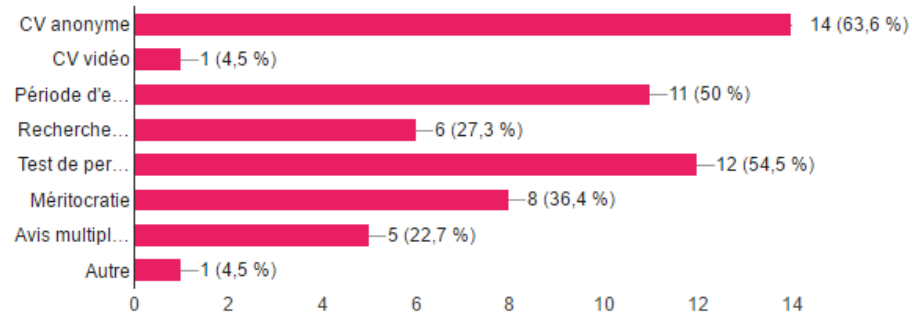


The first reason of discrimination is the origins (18/22), followed by disability (15/22), physical appearance (13/22) and gender (13/22).

**Q14: What would be, for you, the tools allowing a re-establishment of equal opportunities between candidates?**

Quelles seraient pour vous les outils permettant de rétablir l'égalité des chances entre candidats? What would be, for you, the tools allowing a re-establishment of equal opportunities between candidates?

22 réponses



The preferred tools in the list are the anonymous résumé (63%), the personality tests (54%) and the trial period (50%).



## **B. Analysis**

In order to know the point of view of human resources professionals on the topic of diversity and affirmative action in companies, we have send our survey to three companies: a recruiting agency in America, a hotel chain in Belgium and a French international company. Three different companies, three different countries, but one point of view, from the recruiting professionals. Once the survey answers came back, they were analyzed, similarities and differences were highlighted.

This section will interpret the result we have obtained previously. How can these elements can validate or refute our hypotheses? Let remind us what our hypotheses were:

Hypothesis 1: affirmative action sorts out equality and diversity problems in companies.

Hypothesis 2: Affirmative action doesn't sort out equality and diversity problems, it increases them

Hypothesis 3: Affirmative action must be combined with other recruitment action in order to result in equality and diversity

The objective here will be to compare the hypotheses to the reality in the workplace. We also want to find a meaning in those answers that could help us to answer to our problematic: **"diversity in companies and affirmative action, are we going towards more equity or more injustice?"**.

We will first see the differences between the firms, and how they broach the subject of affirmative action and diversity. It is an important point because we have seen in the theoretical part that both diversity and affirmative action were delicate subjects to handle, and hard to agree on. Then we will see why some companies are reluctant to use affirmative action to reduce the gap of inequalities and discrimination. The company culture and the communication about diversity will be discussed. Finally, we will put some aspect aside to refute some theories. Is affirmative action really a great solution to promote diversity in firms? How can companies encourage a positive-discriminatory process? Is it really allowing better results and performances to the companies?

*a- What is at stake?*

For the three companies, the bet is different. For historical reasons, affirmative action is more fixed in minds in the American continent than in Europe. It has a stronger overtone due to its discriminative history. Immigration is also more present in the Canadian multicultural society. For the recruiting agency based in Canada, diversity and affirmative action are a common practice. It is present a lot in the education system, and therefore is accepted by almost everyone. In Belgium and France, the historical background is more reflected with hard work, competencies, merit and equality. implementing a positive discrimination seems irrelevant: as one is supposed to fight against discrimination, how can one promote affirmative action?

The three companies are committed to diversity, but they do not have the same way to address it. Different policies are implemented, but not always acknowledged by everyone. In Europe, companies embrace changes of the society they live in and adapt themselves to it, whereas for the American company, it is clearly a question of numbers and quotas, and not a real conviction, according to the recruiters.

There is a limit using affirmative action to support diversity and reduce the discrimination. The three companies are conscious of the importance of diversity in the company, but the reasons why are different. Sometimes it is for the image, sometimes for the diversity of skills, or the performance. The main gap for the American placement agency comes from the requirement to use quotas to promote diversity. The answers show that several interviewees think that candidates may be recruited for the numbers and the quotas, instead of their skills. In European companies, affirmative action is not used and can be seen as a way to stigmatize once again minorities. They would rather give the opportunity to everyone, and choose the perfect candidate for the job, no matter where he or she comes from.

The company culture is also important: for the American firm, we clearly saw that they must respect the orders and procedures of the head quarters. On the other hand, the French and Belgium companies pore freely adapt their human resources management and create their own diversity inclusion program. Communication about diversity is also a big issue which will influence the answers. For Americans, diversity is a common issue and so affirmative

action became widespread in everyday life, because this is how it is communicated to the employees. It is the reflection of the society. In the French company, the diversity approach is genuine, but the idea to use a discriminatory policy to promote it is out of question. The merit principle, motivation and competencies are the key drivers of the recruitment process. In Belgium, for the hotel chain, this principle is less known and the recruitment is based on diplomas, skills and motivation only.

***b- Veracity and limits of the survey***

The answers of the questionnaire, even if they are few, clearly show some incoherence. For example, we have seen that 50% of the interviewees think that candidates, with equal skills, do not have the same chances to be called in for a job interview. We will therefore confront the results with our hypotheses.

**Hypothesis 1: Affirmative action sorts out equality and diversity problems in companies.**

We have clearly seen in question 9 that a clear majority of respondent (81.7%) do not think that affirmative action is the only way to re-establish equal opportunities between candidates. For them, affirmative action highlights differences and stigmatization, instead of promoting fairness and equality.

We can therefore refute the first hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 2: Affirmative action doesn't sort out equality and diversity problems, it increases them.**

Through the answers to the question 10, one could underline that affirmative action increases differences between candidates, and favors stigmatization. But we do not have a large enough sample to validate this, because only one company out of three really used the affirmative action process. It would take at least two different companies, using affirmative action policies, to have a better analysis of impacts on diversity within companies.

We cannot validate or refute this hypothesis, because we lack some information and details.

**Hypothesis 3: Affirmative action must be combined with other recruitment action in order to result in equality and diversity**

Only a minority of the respondents (18.2%) thinks that affirmative action is the only option to re-establish equal opportunities between candidates. The other part is totally against this idea. The respondents think that anonymous résumés (63%), personality tests (54%) and trial periods (50%) are required to favor equal opportunities between candidates. The survey results show that to insure diversity and equal opportunity, affirmative action should be combined with other tools, such as anonymous résumés, personality tests and trial periods.

The third hypothesis is consequently validated.

But we have to bear in mind that the individuals who answered the survey, even if they work within the human resource department or have part of their job related to recruitment, do not necessarily reflect the global view of the company.

*The conclusion presents our proposed answer to the research problematic. Diversity is now part of modern society, but the present situation is still embedded with old habits. Different methods are used in order to re-establish equal opportunities. There will also be discussed limitations of this study, and new opportunities will be highlighted.*

*“Strength lies in differences, not in similarities” — Stephen R. Covey*

## **CONCLUSION**

Driven by regulatory and productivity constraints, companies do not always know how to act with challenging subjects, such as diversity. We have seen a change in company policy that now encourages diversity within the workplace. This evolution tends to promote equal opportunities, and shows that discrimination is still present during the recruitment process. Companies nowadays want to balance inequality and comply with what society expects from professional organizations. Human resources management is the key to improve diversity in the workforce, and minority integration can be settled down to favor diversity and equality. Affirmative action, an American policy, has been exported to other countries and tends to favor minorities, formerly discriminated, to re-establish equal opportunities. It can be seen in school and work environments, and it is controversial because of its discrimination side.

**Affirmative action and diversity in companies: are we going towards more equity or more injustice?** This is what this thesis tried to analyze, and by combining theories and field survey, we can try to answer this problematic.

One can say that, in order to re-establish equal opportunities and favor diversity, companies have developed different human resources strategies to reach their goal. It is agreed that diversity is seen as a strength, a way to increase productivity and efficiency in industries, as well as cultural richness, and knowledge sharing. In order to reflect the diverse society, companies have to diversify as well.

The United States have introduced the affirmative action concept. This way to favor minorities to the detriment of mainstream candidates is strongly controversial. It however

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became common to use it in America, but a lot of companies in Europe seem reluctant to it because of its discriminatory character.

If the methods can be different, they are valid as long as they are based on truthful commitment. We have seen that the geographical situation of the companies and the historical background have an important impact on the vision and application of affirmative action. Indeed, America and its segregation history have led to accept a kind a discriminative way to re-establish equal opportunities. Human resources professionals in France and Belgium are more unwilling to apply these practices because they tend to recruit candidates according to their skills and motivation, even though discrimination is also present.

The first part of this thesis was the literature review. The goal was to discover and deeply understand diversity, discrimination and actions that can be taken to reduce the inequality gap.

These theories were checked through a field survey within three companies: a recruiting agency based in Canada (originally from the United States), a hotel chain in Belgium, and a French international company. The size and business activity of the three companies are different, as is their way to manage diversity. Globally, the companies do share the same idea that affirmative action is not the only solution to reduce inequalities and increase diversity. It would have been interesting to have more companies interviewed and most of all, not only one who works with affirmative action policy. Indeed, we could have seen other ways companies really implement affirmative action. Also, it would have been interesting to have the employee's point of view, to see if candidates have experienced affirmative action and what they think of its application. Their point of view and feelings would probably be different from human resources department.

What would also be interesting to focus on, is the idea of Walter Benn Michaels: cultural equality problems are hiding economic equality issues. We have seen that the solution could be to consider economic equity, rather than cultural equity, in order to re-establish equal opportunities. In fact, the discrimination would not be seen from a point of view of ethics, gender or sexual orientation but from a social class point of view. The real gap in society is not cultural, ideological or physical, it is the differences of lifestyle and social benefits between the rich and the poor people. This could be a good analysis to make, and it would help us to understand the real fears of society against diversity.

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I personally think that affirmative action could be a good solution only if it is temporary. For example, it should be applied to a company who wishes to increase a specific diversity (i.e. disabled person, Asian market conquest) and applied to its recruiting process for a define period of time. During this period, minorities would be favored. But once the specific diversity target is reached, human resource management should return to their usual recruiting way, without favoring any group any longer. I think diversity is a true advantage to companies, allowing them to adapt themselves better when it comes to a new market, to customers and to competition. But if it lasts, a real inequality feeling will reach the individuals unaffected by this policy, and create conflicts and tension between co-workers, and difficulties in the integration process of the beneficiary of this measure.

I also agree with Walter Benn Michaels's point of view. A real gap exists between rich and poor people, and it might be more frightening than cultural ones. Indeed, the difference between rich and poor does not have colors, gender or sexual orientation. I truly believe that the world would be more fair if the wealth was more equally spread, and if the two opposites would understand each other lives, thoughts and challenges. By putting oneself in someone else's place, we quickly realize the benefits and disadvantages we have, and we can therefore more easily adapt to changes.

But sometimes, countries, when they have a lot of pressure, find new minorities to discriminate. Sadly on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2017, in the state of Texas, America, the House of Texas voted a law that would prevent transgender students from using school bathrooms. A lot of people linked this proposal to Jim Crows' and the segregation laws that were applied in public bathrooms. *“White. Colored. I was living through that era ... bathrooms divided us then, and it divides us now,”* said Senfronia Thompson, an elected member of the House of Texas, *“America has long recognized that separate but equal is not equal at all.”*

Diversity is the key to understand and be in peace with today's quickly changing world. The future cannot be considered without diversity, even more in developed countries. Communitarianism is not a performance level anymore, we have to open our frontiers in order to make profits in a responsible way. Only diversity can help companies to reach their goals and become more competitive. But how can we act to make companies understand that sustainable diversity is the key to success?

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## ANNEX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

*Affirmative action is the fact of favoring, during the recruitment process, a group of people who historically suffered from systematic discrimination, with the aim of re-establish equal opportunities.*

**Q1: Do you work in a:**

Recruiting agency       Company

**Q2: As a recruitment consultant, for you, diversity in companies is:**

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Q3: According to you, what are the advantages and disadvantages of diversity within companies? (from 1 to 4 in order of importance, 1 being the most important)**

<i>Avantages</i>	<i>N°</i>	<i>Disadvantages</i>	<i>N°</i>
creativity		management problems	
contribution of the cultural differences		different cultures	
sharing of knowledges		legal requirements	
image of the company		comprehension and communication problems	
be in tune with its time		no team cohesion spirit	
answer to legal requirements		conflicts at work	
additional motivation			

**Q4: On what criteria's do you based on your recruitment process? (From 1 to 4 in order of importance, 1 being the most important)**

	Age
	Sex
	Disability
	Origin
	Competencies
	Accommodation location
	Diplomas
	Marital status
	Physical appearance
	Sexual orientation
	other:

**Q5: How do you decide between two candidates with equal expertise? (From 1 to 4 in order of importance, 1 being the most important)**

	Age
	Sex
	Disability
	Origin
	Competencies
	Accommodation location
	Diplomas
	Marital status
	Physical appearance
	Sexual orientation
	Other:

**Q6: Do you have an affirmative action policy within your firm?**

Yes

No

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**Q7: If yes, how do you apply it during the recruitment process?**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Q8: What do you think of such a policy in companies?**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Q9: Do you think that affirmative action is the only way in order to re-establish equal opportunities between candidates?**

Yes

No

**Q10: Why?**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Q11: Would you be ready to hire someone from an Educational Priority Area or a Sensitive Urban Area? Why?**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Q12: Do you think that, in your company, with equal expertise, the candidates have all the same chances to be call in for job interview?**

Yes

No

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**Q13: According to you, on what criteria's the discriminated people are discriminate?**

- Age
- Sex
- Disability
- Origin
- Competencies
- Accommodation location
- Diplomas
- Marital status
- Physical appearance
- Sexual orientation
- Other:

**Q14: What would be, for you, the tools allowing a re-establishment of equal opportunities between candidates?**

- Anonymous résumés
- Video résumé
- Trial period
- Searching for key words in résumés
- Personality tests
- Multiples opinions on the résumé
- Meritocracy
- Other:

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to explain how diversity in companies can lead to more or less equality between candidates. During this study, we will see the theoretical side of it, and then a practical study will be made in order to find an answer to this problematic.

In the theoretical part, concepts of diversity will be detailed and diversity management will be explained. Through a deep analysis of Walter Benn Michaels's book, the controversial idea that diversity can lead to inequalities emerged and is questioned. Then, for the second part, three companies from different countries (Canada, Belgium and France) have accepted to answer a questionnaire on the affirmative action concept. This concept is at the center of this thesis because it highlights the controversial side of increasing diversity through a way of discrimination. Finally, I aim to show the similarities and differences in the practices of affirmative action between countries, by analyzing this survey's answer. We will see in this chapter that the stakes for companies are not always the same, depending on the cultural and historical context of the country itself.

Diversity is now at the center of company's strategies, and it must be fully understood in order to be successfully managed. It can be a real competitive strength if it is implemented for the right reasons. However, some progress and improvement should be made so diversity and equality become the core of the company policy.

**Keywords:** diversity, equality, affirmative action, human resources management, economic equality, cultural equality

## **Résumé**

Ce mémoire contribue à expliquer comment la diversité en entreprise peut conduire à plus ou moins d'égalité entre candidats. Pendant cette étude, nous verrons d'abord l'aspect théorique, puis une étude concrète sera menée dans le but de trouver une réponse à la problématique.

Dans la partie théorique, les concepts de diversité seront détaillés et le management de la diversité sera expliqué. Au travers une analyse de l'œuvre de Walter Benn Michaels, l'idée controversée que la diversité peut mener à plus d'inégalité émerge et sera questionnée. Puis, pour la partie expérimentale, trois entreprises de pays différents (Canada, Belgique et France) ont accepté de répondre à un questionnaire sur le concept de la discrimination positive en entreprise et son impact sur la diversité et l'égalité. Ce concept est au centre de ce mémoire car il met en lumière le côté controversé de l'augmentation de la diversité par une pratique discriminante. Pour finir, je souhaite montrer les similitudes et différences de pratiques de discrimination positive entre pays, en analysant les réponses récoltées par le questionnaire. Nous verrons dans ce chapitre que les buts pour les entreprises ne sont pas forcément les mêmes, et que cela dépend fortement de la culture et du contexte historique du pays lui-même.

La diversité est maintenant au centre des stratégies d'entreprises, et cela doit être entendu et compris pour être bien managé. Cela peut être un vrai avantage compétitif si elle est mise en œuvre pour les bonnes raisons. Cependant, des progrès et améliorations doivent être faits pour que la diversité et l'égalité deviennent le cœur des politiques d'entreprises.

**Mots-clés** : diversité, égalité, discrimination positive, management des ressources humaines, égalité économique, égalité culturelle