

RSAEM

RESEARCH SEMINAR IN APPLIED ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

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MORE THAN JUST WINDOW DRESSING: FOSTERING AGE DIVERSITY IN TEAMS THROUGH PRO DIVERSITY COMMUNICATION

(With Oriana de Saint-Priest)

To promote diversity and inclusion, organizations frequently use diversity communications, for example diversity statements that highlight the value of diversity and work in diverse teams. Considering the current demographic ageing and continued discrimination against older workers, many organizations explicitly include age or generation in their communications, for example underlining the benefits of working in age-mixed teams.

We suggest that diversity communication is more than just window dressing but may effectively foster diversity by signaling clearly what is valued and desirable in the organization. In four experimental studies, we investigate the impact of pro age diversity statements on age diversity in newly constituted teams, its underlying processes, and potential unintended consequences, i.e., decrease of team diversity on other dimensions than age. We found consistent evidence that pro age diversity statements increase age diversity in teams. For example, in the incentivized studies, participants were 35% more likely to choose an older teammate into a larger team when there was a diversity statement, compared to when there was not. In fact, in the absence of a diversity statement, older teammates were hardly ever chosen. Our research also shows that the positive impact of diversity statements is primarily due to an increased salience of the desirability of work in diverse teams. Importantly, pro age diversity communication did not reduce the diversity of the final team in terms of personality or gender.

Results of this research are encouraging for both research and practice struggling to identify diversity initiatives that effectively influence behavior and increase the representation of under-represented groups in organizations.