

# The relationship between difference and (in)equality: *implications for business schools*

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# Flow of the argument...

Different perspectives on justice and difference : justice is about more than equal freedoms...

The relationship between injustice and difference



'Difference' in business schools?

Implications

# Morally objectionable inequality: *addressing the blindspots*

- The Rawlsian 'freedom' principle: all have equal freedom as long as they do not encroach on others' freedoms > **negative rights** rather than positive duties

- The Rawlsian 'difference' principle: inequalities are acceptable if it benefits even the lowest in society > can lead to **simplistic 'invisible hand' arguments, perpetuates unjust system**

- Rawlsian 'access' principle assumes that institutions and positions are open to all > not realistic in current business school contexts (I will explain...)



# Typical thinking about difference: learning from the long tradition of feminism

(Elizabeth Grosz, 2005)

Comparative perspective	Constitutive perspective
Egalitarian feminism: People are the same	Feminisms of Difference: Different individuals have unique traits and capacities
All people are the same because of some ideal of the human	People complement each other > reciprocity
Equal dignity, human rights etc	Differences function diacritically

# Problems with both these representations of difference

- In option 1: Difference is plotted as the relationship between two terms, mediated by third abstract term, i.e. an ideal of the human/abstract human rights

OR

- In option 2: Essentialist perspective make it impossible to see the differences and multiplicities that lie within terms, between them, and beyond them
- The alternative: Equality is not about people being the same, nor being different puzzle-pieces in a whole BUT about it is about *allowing differences to shape new ways of being*

# Difference in business schools: *the reality and the potential*

## The current reality

- ‘One-size-fits-all’ MBAs turn out consultants or banking execs
- Rankings and accreditations have criteria that perpetuate one simplistic idea of human purpose
- Disciplinary silo’s persist
- Distance between business schools and corporate reality persists
- Business education often excludes material on the political economy and global governance
- Talent management in African academe
- The business school’s business model: Student fees... but then MOOC’s and such...

## The potential

- Social entrepreneurship’s and social innovation’s rise in business schools worldwide
- Accreditation agencies start to acknowledge the importance of difference (AACSB – mission-driven) and even rankings acknowledge the limits of their criteria
- Sustainability agenda gained traction: Africa leads on the convergence between ethics, governance and integrated reporting
- Experiential learning is getting traction
- Africa is a priority globally


# Injustice in business schools is...

- Ignoring different ways of thinking about **human purpose**
- Ignoring different ways of thinking about **business purpose and business school purpose**
- Blocking the **transformative power** of difference in terms of innovation and sustainability

Can business schools help fight inequality?  
Yes but only if it is....

A different business school  
committed to equality despite,  
and maybe precisely *because* of  
*difference*





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