

# ECED 2018: Day 2 - Diversity

---

Motivation:

Huey, Louie and Dewey are the three nephews of Donald Duck. They are very much alike, and they symbolize, that often we replicate ourselves in appointments and promotions for different positions in our institutions. If Huey, Louie and Dewey are performing and doing the job as requested – all is good. Or is it? It is as good as we could predict, but it is not as good as it could be, because we have not tried to find new, disruptive or innovative ways for solving the job. So, what can we do? We can try to find, appoint or promote somebody who is different and can inspire and produce results that surprise us, and take things to the next level. We can diversify. Diversity is a source of new potentials. It is a source of innovation. The question is: **How good are we at diversifying and obtaining new results or finding new ways of doing things in academia – and benefitting from diversity in an intended way?**

There are many Hueys, Louies and Deweys in our institutions. There are many clever people in our institutions – both amongst our students and amongst our staff. Obviously and quite reasonably, there is the question of gender (equality). In many situations, we are at an even balance of 50-50. There are many reasons for this, and progress is made all the time – sometimes slowly. **How can we achieve full potential, given the fact that we have too small a representation of women amongst our staff, faculty, and students?** Gender equality in universities of science & technology remains a persistent problem. Further, it might be viewed as the overture of the full field of diversity.

Diversity can be understood as one of many categories coming from issues dealing with race, religion, disabilities, nationality, culture, political observation and so on. When dealing with diversity the risk is to focus too much on it, as a problem, as something that is making us different, as a problem which much be handled. **How can we turn diversity away from being a complication and rather focus on what it can give us in potential outcomes, results or products that we could not have obtained without diversity?**

Basically, we should look for talent and talent in any way, shape or form as it can be represented in a human being. Talent can indeed be represented in many ways – or disguised in many ways by diversity. We must be blind to how the disguise can fool us and make us over-look the talent. *Here we are challenged with bias.* Bias is a subconscious predetermination on how something is, not always as obviously silly as – excuse the bad example – “blonds are stupid”. There can also be a bias in groups of excellent engineers – mono-cultural technocrats - thinking that the best technological solution should always have maximum success and forgetting that consumers’ assessments depend on more than technology, forgetting that there are other types of languages, e.g. provided by a psychologist, an artist or a sociologist. Just think about the mobile phone business and Nokia versus Apple.

In some places the definition of marginalized groups, such as maybe black people or native people, aboriginals and so on lead to measures of *affirmative action*. Or in the case of gender, sometimes the issue of unbalanced gender leads to rules or legislations that dictate quotas. All this is probably necessary but it cannot excuse us from looking at the real target, which is how diversity can help us achieve higher goals. Accepting diversity can give the true talent and capability or capacity of a person a chance to develop and blossom. Diversity can often be the reason for special abilities in people, but we must definitely make sure that

diversity does not deny anybody the chance to fulfill his or her capabilities in some context or another. People with a handicap can often be much more creative in solving unforeseen obstacles than others, because they repeatedly experience problems, which are overseen by other people, who are not bothered by the lack of attention to special needs.

This is what this session is about – to analyze issues of diversity and 1) to make sure we do it in a proper way that gives everybody and every relevant but possibly weird ideas a chance and 2) to do it, not for the sake of correctness, but because our institutions need it and can benefit from it. We need to build on diversity and we need to benefit from the fruits that diversity can give us in academia and in our student cohorts as we all strive at becoming better and doing things better in research and education.

We have to look at the way we organize ourselves, how we systemize our institutions, how we describe them, how we talk amongst each other and how we behave in order to facilitate and in order to accommodate diversity and to bring each talent to bloom. It does not mean that we cannot be who we are. It only means that we should be aware of our biases, be able to compensate for our biases and to treat others with due respect.

The diversity agenda is relevant in a range of different areas within our institutions. Here are a few:

- Job announcements
- Promotion criteria
- Student recruiting
- Criteria for acceptance for studies
- How we talk amongst ourselves and describe ourselves
- How we explain and describe student courses and classes in the catalogues
- How we act and what we say as leaders
- How do we welcome weird solutions and disruptive ideas?
- How tolerant are we for other cultural or conceptual ways of thinking?
- How quickly do we jump to conclusion and interpretations of unfamiliar designs?
- How often do we ask an extra question instead of disregarding something as nonsense?