

GWO stream September 2023 for: Imagining Decolonizing Knowledge Exchanges: Embracing the JEDDII Way (Justice, Equity, Diversity and Decolonization, Inclusion & Indigenization).

Infusing JEDDII principles into certification: national practices and global challenges

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Gender equality and diversity remain one of the key challenges of our time across societies, organisations, sectors and countries (United Nations, 2019); with global level movements (such as #MeToo and HeForShe) working across nations and sectors to advance gender equality. One pressing macro level intervention often encompassed at national level is the certification of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) efforts. EDI certification is an area of growth recently documented with no fewer than 113 certification and award schemes across Europe and beyond (Nason and Sangiuliano, 2020) which is often driven by benchmarking and competition (especially at organisational level).

Certification processes have become integral to academic and professional domains globally, serving as benchmarks of expertise and knowledge. In the context of decolonization, certification can play a pivotal role in recognizing diverse perspectives, promoting inclusivity and most importantly listening to, valuing and being informed by Indigenous knowledges (Battiste, 2002; 2008). This *Gender, Work and Organization* stream seeks to delve into the possibilities and challenges of infusing JEDDII principles into certification practices.

Even though there is no shared understanding regarding the terminology used, we define certification as those schemes that assess organisations at multiple points in time, with an element of “renewal”. Single-point assessments are considered an “award”. In higher education, several certification schemes exist such as the Athena SWAN and Race Charter Mark (UK and Ireland, and various iterations in Australia, US, Canada, Brazil). Other schemes target higher education and beyond such as the

Total E-Quality award (Germany) and the Label Diversite (France) (see Tzanakou et al.,2021; Tzanakou et al.,2020). Global certification and award schemes across sectors recognise organisations committed to EDI, such as Catalyst and EDGE certification. Stonewall has global reach recognising LGBT+ inclusion's best practices in the Stonewall Global Workplace Equality Index. Finally, the UNDP Gender Equality Seal for Public and Private Enterprises, created under the United Nations Development Programme, focuses on private business and public administration, however this has been primarily focused in Latin America (Nason and Sangiuliano, 2020).

There are benefits and challenges that such certification schemes entail for advancing equality, diversity, and inclusion. While there are diverse formats, understandings and goals amongst different types of certification and award schemes, certification efforts increasingly set inequalities as a structural issue shifting policies and activities from “fixing individuals” into “fixing the system”. Furthermore, certification - depending on design and how it is organised - has the potential to provide a continuous and dynamic monitoring of progress (or lack thereof) and change towards equality.

There are caveats associated with certification, as it may not always lead to meaningful and sustainable structural and cultural change (Ahmed 2007; Ovseiko et al., 2017; Tzanakou, 2019; Tzanakou and Pearce, 2019; Zippel et al., 2016). Some organisations may engage in performative activities (Ahmed, 2007), seeing certification as tick-box exercises devoid of genuine commitment, and often marginalised groups bear the administrative burden (Tzanakou, 2019; Tzanakou and Pearce, 2019; Ovseiko et al., 2017). Moreover, certification may prioritise easily quantifiable indicators over context-specific evaluations, potentially reinforcing existing power structures (Garforth and Kerr 2009).

Whilst certification can be considered a neoliberal practice (driven by benchmarking and metrics) and could be co-opted towards meeting business and political interests ('pinkwashing' in Saba (2023); Shafie (2015)), it can also provide opportunities to collectively organise against neoliberal practices and offer leverage in changing workplaces (Tzanakou and Pearce, 2019) especially if it is infused with JEDDII principles which critiques pinkwashing as an approach that does not engage with

equality for Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, in alignment with the coloniality of knowledge, certification as a practice flourishing in the West, can be considered a colonial practice imposing a particular way of thinking around how organisations should be addressing inequalities (Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Imas and Weston, 2012). In this stream we are keen to question how certification sustains colonial practices. Are accreditation bodies themselves 'equal' or do they constitute inequality regimes (Acker 2006)? Do they reproduce the cultural values that EDI seek to overturn? To challenge such oppressive structures, the terms of “inclusion and diversity” need to be explored in the accreditation bodies themselves, paying attention to localized contexts and cultural specificities.

Studies focused on analysing and evaluating gender equality and diversity initiatives in higher education have been growing, but they are often limited to single case studies, drawing predominantly on Race Charter Mark (Campion and Clark, 2022; Henderson and Bhopal, 2022) and Athena SWAN in the UK (Ovseiko et al., 2017; Tzanakou and Pearce, 2019; Ovseiko et al., 2020; de Aguiar et al., 2022; Yarrow and Johnston, 2023) and Ireland (O'Connor and Irvine, 2020; Drew, 2022) and Australia (Nash et al. 2021). Beyond HE, there is a growing number of studies on diversity management initiatives that have shown ineffectiveness of EDI efforts. In a recent special issue Saba et al. (2021, p.765) identify three reasons: limited understanding and skills in the design and implementation of EDI programmes; resistance to EDI efforts driven by concerns of dominant group members relinquishing power and privilege; and lastly complexity of task and reluctance to acknowledge biased attitudes within systems and individuals foster indifference towards EDI initiatives.

Can certification as a macro-level intervention address some of these challenges especially if it is developed with the view to build capacity and expertise within organisations, not just have an assessment role? Could certification be re-imagined to provide constructive feedback, offer knowledge and skills that will assist organisations in curbing resistance and develop initiatives that can collectively bring together stakeholders and value different knowledges to enact organisational change? What potential avenues and challenges would certification face if it is informed by JEDDII?

This stream aims to further these debates by exploring certification as part of macro-level considerations and how they interact with meso- and micro-level considerations. Scholars have emphasised how context matters and how we need to look at micro-meso-macro levels and their interaction (O'Connor and Irvine, 2020; Ní Laoire et al., 2021) to understand better how EDI efforts are interpreted, framed, implemented and enacted (Ní Laoire et al., 2021) to support change. O'Connor and Irvine (2020) suggest that change is most likely to be leveraged when EDI measures are driven at all levels (macro-meso-micro). Similarly, beyond higher education diversity interventions need to be designed and implemented in relation to the respective national, institutional and cultural context (Georgiadou and Syed, 2021; Kollen, 2019)

Only a small number of studies provide a better understanding about how certification is operationalised within organisations and how this operationalisation might shape or change certification. We know little about the strengths, challenges and impact of certification to date and there have been no attempts to look at certification from a decolonial lens. Limited efforts have been undertaken to compare them (Tzanakou et al. 2021) and we still know little about what works (Bohnet, 2016) and what could lead to meaningful and sustainable structural and cultural change.

This stream has the following objectives:

- To examine existing certification models and their alignment with JEDDII principles.
- To explore strategies for decolonizing certification processes, making them more equitable and inclusive.
- To highlight success stories and best practices in incorporating Indigenous knowledge into certification frameworks.
- To discuss the potential impact of decolonized certification on knowledge exchanges and academia.

Given the emerging state of the field, this stream invites papers that generate theoretical insights, empirical findings, and evidence-based recommendations on how organisations can effectively tackle the challenges arising from managing EDI

within and across different country contexts with a JEDDII lens. Potential topics include but are not limited to:

- How can certification be developed by learning from Indigenous knowledges?
- How is meaningful consultation with Indigenous people embedded in certification?
- To what extent can certification mitigate challenges of standardisation in relation to binary classifications?
- What are the challenges of implementing macro level interventions at organisational level?
- How do cross-national and cross-sectoral interventions be framed and gain recognition within organisations?
- How does context influence how macro level interventions will be operationalised?
- How are different identities and expressions addressed in organisational efforts driven by macro level interventions? To what extent do we see a priority/ranking of diverse identities?
- How do sectoral, organisational and/or individual factors interact with macro level interventions?
- What are the lessons learnt drawn from existing certification and award schemes? What caveats should we be aware of?
- How can certification balance between standardisation and context specification?
- How can certification be leveraged towards enacting sustainable and meaningful change towards advancing equalities? How can we disrupt potential co-optation, pinkwashing and box ticking exercises?
- Which theoretical frameworks can we use to understand and theorise how macro level interventions affect diversity and organisational change?
- How can business theories extend recommendations for macro level interventions inc. certification?
- How can different research methods help to understand evaluation of macro level interventions, what works and what might not work?

Call for abstracts:

Abstracts of approximately 500 words (excluding references) must be submitted to the GWO 2024 submission system hosted by FourWaves. The link is available on the [GWO conference 2024](#) website as of November 6th, 2023. No independent abstract submissions (i.e., an abstract submitted to someone's personal email) will be considered for acceptance or presentation at the conference. Stream convenors will be conducting a blind review process and redirecting abstracts to the GWO organising committee for consideration in the open stream if and when appropriate. The abstract itself should then not have any author details to ensure this blind review process. Abstract formatting specifics are available in the submission system. Abstracts are due by December 22nd, 2023, with decisions on acceptance to be made by stream convenors by the end of January 2024. No extensions to this deadline will be possible as some participants will need time and justification documents to secure visas to attend the conference onsite.

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