

# Comparing cultural diversity perspectives among public service employees in the Netherlands in 2008 and 2018

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The Netherlands' national government (Rijksoverheid) is an example of a large public organization that strives to recruit and retain employees from different cultural groups, and aims to reap the benefits of workplace diversity. Research has shown that a major predictor of the effectiveness of diversity policy and interventions is the diversity perspective of employees, i.e. which outcomes they associate with cultural diversity in their work environment.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The present study compares public servants' diversity perspectives in two similar independent samples, from 2008 ( $n = 1,617$ ) and 2018 ( $n = 2,024$ ), using the Benefits and Threats of Diversity Scale (BTDS; Hofhuis *et al.*, 2015).

**Findings** – Results show that in 2018, employees of the Netherlands' national government perceived more benefits of diversity for gaining insight about and access to different groups within society. Additionally, contributions of cultural diversity to creativity and innovation within teams are reported significantly more often in 2018 than in 2008.

**Originality/value** – The findings may be of interest to diversity scholars, since data on changes in cultural diversity perspectives across time are rare, and the paper provides a unique comparison of measurements at two time points, one decade apart, within the same organization.

**Keywords** Workplace diversity, Public administration, Diversity perspectives, Diversity attitudes

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

An increasing number of organizations recognizes the necessity for effectively dealing with cultural diversity in the workplace (Plaut, 2010). Human resource management (HRM) professionals can draw from a myriad of policies, interventions, and tools aimed at increasing workplace diversity, and reaping its benefits for their organization. In a recent review, Homan (2019) explains that diverse groups possess a greater pool of information, perspectives and ideas, and that by exchanging, processing and integrating this knowledge, diverse workgroups can outperform homogeneous groups (e.g. Dahlin *et al.*, 2005; Ely and Thomas, 2001; Kearney and Gebert, 2009). However, it has become apparent that cultural diversity may also have negative effects on workgroup functioning, for example due to categorization of team members into cultural subgroups, anxiety regarding intercultural interactions, or miscommunication and conflict as a result of cultural differences (e.g. Hofhuis *et al.*, 2014; Van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2004). One of the goals of diversity management, therefore, is to maximize the potential benefits of diversity for the organization, while simultaneously attempting to minimize potential threats.

Studies show that diversity management initiatives are not always effective in reaching desired outcomes (e.g. Kochan *et al.*, 2003; Thomas and Plaut, 2008). One of the factors that



influences their success is the set of expectations that employees have regarding the outcomes of cultural diversity, also termed *diversity perspectives* (Ely and Thomas, 2001; Podsiadlowski *et al.*, 2013). These perspectives can be positive (e.g. “I believe cultural diversity provides added value to the organization”), negative (e.g. “I think that cultural diversity is a threat to the productivity of the organization”) or a combination (Hofhuis *et al.*, 2015; Homan, 2019).

The present paper presents a comparison of diversity perspectives among two representative samples of employees from the same large organization – the Netherlands’ national government – that were collected ten years apart, in 2008 and 2018. Diversity perspectives were operationalized using the *Benefits and Threats of Diversity Scale* (BTDS; Hofhuis *et al.*, 2015), which distinguishes between five positive and four negative perceived diversity outcomes. The results presented below show how average scores on these perceived outcomes have evolved within this organization, across ten years. The findings may be of interest to diversity scholars, since data on changes in cultural diversity perspectives across time are rare, and the paper provides a unique opportunity to compare measurements that were conducted one decade apart. Furthermore, the information provided below may help HRM professionals in the Netherlands’ public sector, or similar contexts, implement more effective interventions towards reaching workplace inclusion and positive diversity outcomes.

#### *Cultural diversity perspectives in organizations: a brief overview*

Scholars have studied organizational diversity perspectives for several decades. In their seminal work, Cox and Blake (1991) were among the first to list the potential benefits that diversity may have for organizational performance, including the notion that diversity brings a competitive advantage. Over the years, this belief in value-in-diversity has been uncovered as a major determinant of inclusion, well-being and job outcomes of cultural minority employees (Hofhuis *et al.*, 2012, 2016b; Leroy *et al.*, 2021; Van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2013). When the value-in-diversity belief is present, organizations are more likely to adopt a multicultural approach towards diversity, explicitly enabling minority members to maintain and display their cultural heritage in the workplace (Boehm *et al.*, 2014; Cho *et al.*, 2018; Dwertmann *et al.*, 2016).

A broader approach was taken by scholars who, in addition to positive attitudes, also focused on resistance to diversity in organizational perspectives. For example, in contrast to multiculturalism, some organizations choose to actively ignore or downplay the presence of cultural differences among employees – often termed the colorblind approach – based on the premise that this will lead to more equal treatment of cultural groups (Stevens *et al.*, 2008). Previous research shows that minority members are generally less supportive of this approach (Jansen *et al.*, 2016; Plaut *et al.*, 2009), that communicating colorblindness may have a negative impact on diversity outcomes and attitudes (Sommier *et al.*, 2019), and that it may even be an indicator of racial bias (Offermann *et al.*, 2014; Richeson and Nussbaum, 2004).

Additionally, Dass and Parker (1999) specifically mentioned a resistance perspective, indicating that organizations can also view cultural diversity as a threat. Podsiadlowski *et al.* (2013) found that in order to counteract this sense of threat, some organizations choose to reinforce homogeneity, and actively resist diversity management initiatives. It speaks for itself that such perspectives reduce the sense of inclusion that minority members experience, particularly those who choose to maintain their cultural heritage in the workplace, and may negatively impact the effectiveness of diversity management initiatives (cf. Thomas and Plaut, 2008).

#### *Benefits and threats of diversity scale (BTDS)*

In 2008, a qualitative study examined Dutch public servants’ expectations regarding cultural diversity outcomes in their daily work, identifying five positive and four negative diversity outcomes that were prevalent in this context (see Hofhuis *et al.*, 2015 for a detailed

description). These findings were subsequently used to develop a new instrument to measure employee diversity perspectives, the *Benefits and Threats of Diversity Scale* (BTDS). The BTDS was a valuable contribution to instruments available to researchers at the time because it is able to identify positive and negative diversity perspectives independently, and measures different types of perceived diversity outcomes on separate subscales (Hofhuis *et al.*, 2015).

The benefits of cultural diversity included in the BTDS are *Image of social responsibility*, which reflects the attitude that cultural diversity in the workplace leads to a positive image of the organization regarding its social responsibility and attention to equal opportunities (cf. Jonsen *et al.*, 2021); *Job market*, which reflects the benefits of cultural diversity for an organization's position regarding recruitment and retention of employees (cf. Andriessen *et al.*, 2012; Hofhuis *et al.*, 2014); *Social environment*, which reflects the attitude that presence of different cultural groups in a department is "fun" and leads to a more inspiring and comfortable work environment; *Understanding groups in society*, the ability of diverse organizations to gain insight about, and access to different groups within society, thus being able to better understand stakeholders and markets (cf. Morven and Cunningham, 2019), and *Creative potential*, the notion that cultural diversity leads to more effective idea generation, increasing learning opportunities, knowledge sharing, and problem-solving potential of teams (cf. De Dreu and West, 2001; Hofhuis *et al.*, 2016a; Nakui *et al.*, 2011).

The perceived threats included in the BTDS were mainly categorized using dimensions from intergroup threat theory (ITT; Rohmann *et al.*, 2006; Stephan and Stephan, 2000). They include *Realistic threat*, a perceived threat to individual career perspectives, power or status within the organization; *Symbolic threat*, the notion that established beliefs, values and symbols within the organization are threatened as a result of incorporating different cultures in the workplace; *Intergroup anxiety*, a sense of fear or insecurity resulting from (anticipated) interaction with members of different cultures, potentially leading to miscommunication, embarrassment or conflict. Additionally, a fourth threat was included, termed *Productivity loss*, which refers to the perceived threat to the quality of the work of a team or department, e.g. due to language problems, possible tension between colleagues or the sense that culturally diverse teams are more difficult to manage.

Since its development, the BTDS has been successfully used in a number of different contexts. For example, a study on perceptions of diversity in political parties in Germany confirms that the BTDS subscales are independent, and that respondents can see diversity as positive, negative or both at the same time (Ehrke *et al.*, 2020). In a study among employees in multinational organizations in Austria, the threat subscales of the BTDS are reported to correlate with colorblindness, whereas the benefit subscales are shown to relate to other measures of perceived value-in-diversity (Podsiadlowski *et al.*, 2013). A study in Japan shows that employees who have experience abroad display higher scores on the benefits-scales of the BTDS, which in turn facilitates diversity management and fosters inclusion (Orsini, 2020). Overall, the BTDS is shown to be a useful and robust instrument for examining employee diversity perspectives in different contexts.

#### *Diversity perspectives in the Netherlands' public service*

The Netherlands' national government (*Rijksoverheid*), which employs approximately 110,000 public servants, is a good example of a large organization that has traditionally strived to recruit and retain employees from different cultural minority groups (Groeneveld, 2011; Hofhuis and Van 't Hoog, 2010). It is important to note that in this particular context, cultural minority groups are defined through migration background rather than nationality or citizenship status. An individual who is a first- or second-generation migrant (based on their place of birth and those of their parents) is considered a cultural/ethnic minority member (CBS, 2018).

During the past decade, views on cultural diversity in this context may have been influenced by societal, political as well as organizational developments. Earlier research suggests that

positive diversity perspectives are becoming more common in Dutch society (e.g. Heres and Benschop, 2010). A more recent study shows that in the way Dutch organizations communicate with their stakeholders, diversity management is often framed as a moral or ethical obligation, and the value-in-diversity perspective has been steadily gaining ground over the past two decades (Hofhuis *et al.*, 2021). This may have been the result of an overall increase in cultural diversity in Dutch society across these years, which in turn has been correlated with more positive diversity attitudes in the general public (Németh *et al.*, 2020). However, other developments, such as the global economic crisis in 2008, the resurgence of right wing nationalism in Europe, the influx of refugees from the Middle Eastern region, and the general increase in political polarization of Western societies, have all been reported to have a negative impact on diversity attitudes, reducing the prevalence of multicultural and value-in-diversity perspectives among the general population (e.g. Korteweg and Triadafilopoulos, 2015; Meer *et al.*, 2015).

Meanwhile, the Netherlands' government itself has often revised its diversity management policies to reflect changes in political representation, as well as developments in societal attitudes (see Groeneveld and Verbeek, 2012 for an overview). In the early 2000s, the organizational diversity strategy was aimed at recruitment of members of specific underrepresented groups, such as Turkish, Moroccan, and Surinamese and Antillean minorities (*Doelgroepenbeleid*). Since then, we can identify alternating periods in which diversity officers in the public service formulated more multicultural diversity strategies (*Integraal Diversiteitsbeleid*) focusing on inclusion and openness towards all types of individual differences, as well as periods in which diversity was not a political priority. Whenever diversity policies are explicitly mentioned in policy documents, promoting value-in-diversity appears as the main argument for implementing diversity management in the Netherlands' national government (Ashikali and Groeneveld, 2015a).

What remains unclear, however, is how the perspectives of *employees* have evolved over time. On the one hand, it could be expected that the common organizational focus on value-in-diversity, as well as the popularization of positive diversity attitudes in organizational communication, may have led to employees' internalizing these positive perspectives, thus leading to an increase in perceived benefits of diversity. Conversely, government employees are also citizens of the wider society, and as such may display similar downward trends in multiculturalist values, and an increase in perceived diversity-related threats that are found in general societal and political discourse. Through the present study, we hope to provide insight into which of these expectations may hold most merit.

#### *The present study*

In 2008, the BTDS was administered to a representative sample of employees at the Netherlands' national government (Hofhuis *et al.*, 2015). In 2018, a decade after the initial development and first large scale measurement of the BTDS, the opportunity arose to repeat this study in the same context, using the same methods and measures. Ensuring close replication allowed for a direct comparison of diversity perspectives in the same organization across ten years [1]. The present study may be valuable to diversity scholars, since such comparisons across longer time scales are rare, and may provide new insights into the question whether diversity perspectives of public service employees have followed the positive trends that are reported in organizational communication (Hofhuis *et al.*, 2021) or whether they are more reflective of increasingly negative diversity attitudes expressed in the media and political discourse across this same period (Meer *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, diversity perspectives may have a profound impact on the type of diversity interventions that may be successfully implemented in a specific organization (Thomas and Plaut, 2008). Therefore, the information presented here may help HRM professionals in the Dutch public

service to identify opportunities for new diversity management and policies, and examine whether their focus on value-in-diversity across recent years has been effective.

## Method

### *Sample and procedure*

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For the 2008 measurement, a random sample was selected of employees in the Netherlands' public service, who were working at the level of policy officer or higher (salary scale 10 or above). These are employees who, through their respective field of expertise, contribute to researching, developing, and implementing public policies. Support staff were not included in the sample. A digital invitation with a link to an online survey was sent by the personnel administration. Participation was voluntary; no compensation was given. In total, 1,617 respondents completed the survey [2]. At the time, no information was provided to the researchers on the precise number of employees that was recruited, so no response rate could be calculated. However, similar studies in this context, using the same recruitment method, generally report a response rate of 30–40% (e.g. [Ashikali and Groeneveld, 2015a](#); [Hofhuis et al., 2014](#)). The dataset that was used in the present study included 54% men, age range was 22–68, and 91% were highly educated, meaning they possessed a diploma comparable to a bachelor's degree or higher. Descriptions of the total workforce of the Dutch public service in 2006 ([POMO, 2007](#)) show that at that time, the target population of national government employees of salary scale 10+ consisted of 60.6% men, of whom 87% were highly educated. Thus, the sample used in this study was sufficiently representative of the target population in terms of these variables.

In longitudinal comparisons, it is essential to match the sampling strategy and procedures across different time points. Therefore, in 2018, the study was replicated as closely as possible, using a similar random sample of employees in the position of policy officer and higher, taken from the administration of the personnel department, and an invitation was sent out by e-mail. In total, 2024 respondents completed the questionnaire. Anonymized data were transferred to the researcher, who was responsible for data cleaning and preparation. The sample included 45% men, age range was 23–70, and 91% of respondents were highly educated. As above, records from the Netherlands Central Bureau of Statistics (as defined by [De Groot and Vrielink, 2020](#)) show that with regard to gender and education level, the sample is sufficiently representative of the target population (52% men; 90% highly educated).

### *Measures*

In both samples, the digital invitation included a link to an online questionnaire on cultural diversity in the workplace, which contained the Dutch-language version of the BTDS ([Hofhuis et al., 2015](#)). This instrument consists of four items per dimension, 36 items in total, all rated on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted for both samples, using MPlus 7.4 ([Muthén and Muthén, 2015](#)). All items predicted the latent variable corresponding to their intended subscale. No covariances were added between individual items. For the 2008 sample, the intended structure of the BTDS displayed a good fit with the data ( $X^2(558) = 3118.337$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ; CFI = 0.923; TLI = 0.913; RMSEA = 0.05, 90% CI [0.051; 0.053]; SRMR = 0.05). Factor loadings ranged from 0.59 to 0.88, which indicates all items predict their subscale as intended. For the 2018 sample, the intended structure of the BTDS again displayed a good fit with the data ( $X^2(558) = 3754.846$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ; CFI = 0.932; TLI = 0.923; RMSEA = 0.05, 90% CI [0.052; 0.055]; SRMR = 0.07). Factor loadings ranged from 0.51 to 0.89, which again indicates all items sufficiently predict their intended subscale. [Table 1](#) provides reliability and average variance extracted for all subscales in both measures.

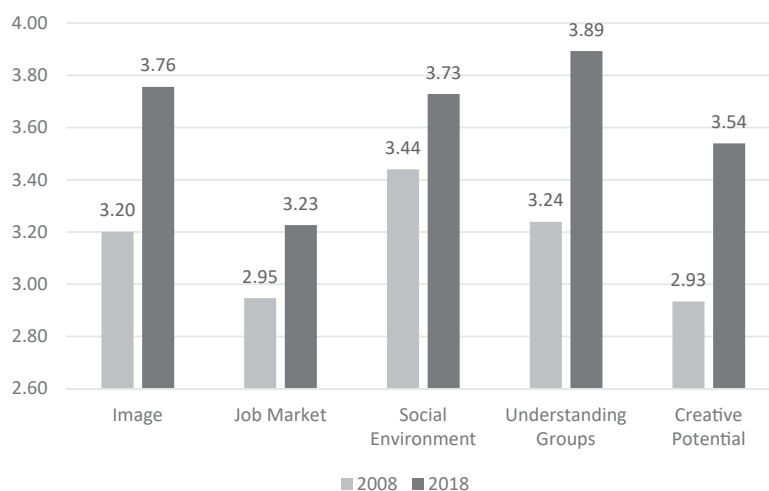
## Results

Figures 1 and 2 provide a comparison between the mean scores on the subscales of benefits and threats of diversity, respectively, at the two time points. Due to the large sample sizes, even relatively small differences between mean scores resulted in small  $p$ -values. Therefore, it is more useful to assess the relative shifts across the two measurements using effect sizes, as calculated for a comparison between independent samples (Cohen's  $d$ ; Cohen, 1988; Fritz *et al.*, 2012).

Figure 1 shows the scores on the five dimensions of benefits, for both time points. In 2008, the benefits of diversity for the *Social environment* were perceived most strongly, followed by *Image of social responsibility*, and *Understanding groups in society*. *Job market* and *Creative potential* were perceived less often at that time. When comparing these with scores in 2018, the most prominent increase is seen for the dimensions *Understanding groups in society* ( $M_{\text{dif}} = 0.65$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.81$ ) and *Creative potential* ( $M_{\text{dif}} = 0.61$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ;  $d = 0.76$ ). Public servants in the Netherlands perceive significantly more benefits of diversity for the productivity and effectiveness of their organization in 2018. We can therefore conclude that overall, the value-in-diversity perspective is much more recognized than ten years before. Furthermore, we also see a strong increase in the notion that having a diverse workforce

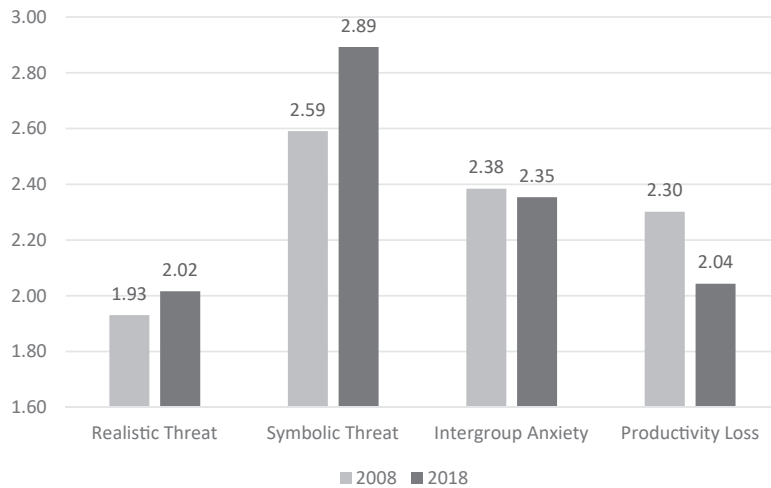
Subscale	# of items	2008		2018	
		$\alpha$	AVE	$\alpha$	AVE
<i>Benefits</i>					
Image of social responsibility	4	0.81	0.53	0.85	0.58
Job market	4	0.79	0.51	0.79	0.52
Social environment	4	0.84	0.57	0.84	0.57
Understanding groups in society	4	0.90	0.68	0.83	0.55
Creative potential	4	0.87	0.61	0.89	0.63
<i>Threats</i>					
Realistic threat	4	0.89	0.63	0.91	0.70
Symbolic threat	4	0.77	0.50	0.76	0.50
Intergroup anxiety	4	0.89	0.64	0.89	0.63
Productivity loss	4	0.87	0.62	0.87	0.62

**Table 1.** Reliability (Cronbach's alpha) and average variance extracted (AVE) of BTDS subscales in 2008 ( $n = 1,617$ ) and 2018 ( $n = 2,024$ )



**Figure 1.** Mean scores on benefits of cultural diversity, as perceived by public servants in 2008 ( $n = 1,617$ ) and 2018 ( $n = 2,024$ )

**Figure 2.** Mean scores on threats of cultural diversity, as perceived by public servants in 2008 ( $n = 1,617$ ) and 2018 ( $n = 2,024$ )



increases the organization's *Image of social responsibility* ( $M_{\text{dif}} = 0.56; p < 0.001; d = 0.70$ ). It appears that employees find it more important that the public service shows itself to be a responsible employer through having a diverse workforce. Finally, the benefits *Job market* ( $M_{\text{dif}} = 0.28; p < 0.001; d = 0.35$ ) and *Social environment* ( $M_{\text{dif}} = 0.29; p < 0.001; d = 0.36$ ) display the smallest, yet still significant, increase in mean scores.

Figure 2 shows the mean scores on the four threats of diversity in 2008 and 2018. When looking at the different threats individually, we see a similar pattern at both time points, with *Symbolic threat* being most perceived, followed by *Intergroup anxiety*, *Productivity*, and *Realistic threat*. However, it is clear that the perceived *Symbolic threat* appears to have increased the most between the time points ( $M_{\text{dif}} = 0.30; p < 0.001; d = 0.38$ ). In 2018, employees of the Netherlands' government are reporting higher threat to the organizational norms and values as a result of cultural diversity than in 2008. Another interesting difference is that the dimension *Productivity loss* displays a lower score ( $M_{\text{dif}} = -0.26; p < 0.001; d = 0.33$ ), which means respondents are less likely to see cultural diversity as a threat to productivity, in line with the findings reported above. Finally, the perceptions regarding the dimensions *Realistic threat* ( $M_{\text{dif}} = 0.09; p < 0.001; d = 0.11$ ) and *Intergroup anxiety* ( $M_{\text{dif}} = -0.03; p < 0.001; d = 0.04$ ) do not seem to have changed much between 2008 and 2018. Taken together, these findings confirm that the public servants in the 2018 sample are more likely to perceive value-in-diversity.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the mean scores of the perceived threats are all much lower than those for the benefits. We should be careful in interpreting these findings, since social desirability may have played a role in answering these particular subscales. However, the overall differences between perceived benefits and threats are quite substantial, and the gap has widened significantly between 2008 and 2018. This means that in the second measurement, benefits of diversity are all reported much more strongly than even the highest scoring of the threats of diversity. Together, these findings could be interpreted as another indication that diversity perceptions of public servants have become more positive over the past ten years.

## Discussion

### Overview of findings

The present paper provides a comparison of average scores on the nine dimensions of the BTDS (Hofhuis *et al.*, 2015) between two representative samples of employees of the Netherlands'

national government (Rijksoverheid) in 2008 and 2018. Based on the data presented here, it can be concluded that in 2018, public servants reported significantly higher perceived benefits of diversity for gaining insight about, and access to different groups within society, as well as for a potential increase in creativity and innovation within teams. This suggests that employee attitudes have aligned with the organization's more recent diversity management strategy, aimed at inclusion and promoting value-in-diversity. There also appears to be a noteworthy increase in the reported benefits of diversity for organizational reputation, which follows the positive trend of this type of perspective in organizational communication across different sectors in the Netherlands (Hofhuis *et al.*, 2021; Jansen *et al.*, 2021).

Regarding perceived threats of diversity, only minimal differences are found between the two time points. Most noteworthy is an increase in reported symbolic threat, meaning that public servants are more likely to perceive a threat to existing organizational norms and values, as a result of cultural diversity. This is not surprising, considering the increased prevalence of antidiversity discourse in Dutch society (e.g. Berning *et al.*, 2019; Meer *et al.*, 2015), and a more pronounced societal preference for assimilation of migrant groups, as opposed to integration (cf. Bourhis *et al.*, 1997). However, the perceived threat of diversity for organizational productivity is lower, which prompts the question whether the perceived change in organizational norms and values might actually be viewed as a positive effect as well. More in-depth research, specifically taking into account the underlying discourse of diversity management, and expected outcomes of organizational change would be needed to answer this question.

Put together, it appears that diversity perspectives of employees in the Netherlands public sector appears to follow country-wide trends regarding an overall increase in reported value-in-diversity beliefs in organizations (Heres and Benschop, 2010; Hofhuis *et al.*, 2021). Negative diversity attitudes, which have been more prominent in societal and political discourse, are only reflected in a moderate increase in perceived symbolic threat as a result of workplace diversification, but do not seem to have inhibited the perceived positive diversity perspectives. These findings also confirm earlier reports that positive and negative diversity perspectives should be considered independent dimensions, and should also be measured as such (Ehrke *et al.*, 2020; Hofhuis *et al.*, 2015).

#### *Limitations and future research directions*

The main limitation of the study presented here is that comparisons are made between two independent samples, meaning the individuals who participated at the first time point were not the same as those who participated at the second time point, ten years later. This means no conclusions can be drawn on the development of diversity perspectives on the individual level. However, since both samples are shown to be sufficiently representative of the target population, as well as similar in age, gender and education level, it is reasonable to conclude that the reported shifts are a reliable indicator of organizational-level developments within this particular context.

Furthermore, the characteristics of the two samples that were used in this study have an impact on the type of questions that could be answered. For example, only public service employees with a position of policy officer or higher were included, which means education level is generally high. It is unknown whether employees in other parts of the organization, such as support staff, share the same perspectives, and would show a similar trend across time. Additionally, previous studies have shown that diversity attitudes and reactions to diversity policies may differ between cultural groups (Ashikali and Groeneveld, 2015b; Hofhuis *et al.*, 2012). It would be interesting to examine whether majority and minority employees may follow different trajectories with regard to the development of diversity perspectives.

Finally, an important opportunity for future research lies in the fact that no data were collected on the underlying reasons why respondents perceived these benefits and threats of diversity differently across time points. For example, although value-in-diversity beliefs



appear to be more commonly reported in 2018, more studies are needed to understand exactly how these relate to actual diversity initiatives (Podsiadlowski *et al.*, 2013) or organizational communication regarding diversity (Heres and Benschop, 2010; Hofhuis *et al.*, 2021). The same could be applied to perceived threats. Although they appear relatively stable between the two time points, an increase in symbolic threat was reported, which may have been the result of societal and political discourse (e.g. Meer *et al.*, 2015). As explained above, more research is needed to test whether this is indeed the case.

#### *Practical implications*

Earlier studies have shown that the success of diversity interventions may be in part contingent on their alignment with employee perceptions regarding the outcomes of diversification (Dass and Parker, 1999; Hofhuis *et al.*, 2016b; Kochan *et al.*, 2003). The findings presented above thus provide a direction for HRM professionals in the Dutch public service, and related organizational contexts. Since the value-in-diversity perspective appears to be more prevalent among employees, interventions aimed at increasing the benefits of diversity may be more effective, and activities to promote a more positive diversity climate (e.g. Dwertmann *et al.*, 2016) may lead to more positive outcomes than they would have ten years prior. Simultaneously, diversity management policies should not ignore the perceived symbolic threat, which also appears to be reported more often. It is essential that HRM professionals and diversity officers in this sector pay close attention to employee resistance, give a voice to concerned employees, and approach the management of cultural diversity as an opportunity for positive change (Ely and Thomas, 2020; Thomas and Plaut, 2008).

#### **Conclusion**

In sum, the present paper presented evidence for the positive development of diversity perspectives among public service employees in the Netherlands' national government, in the period between 2008 and 2018. An important benefit is that the presence of positive diversity perspectives also increases effectiveness of further interventions and policies aimed at reaching positive diversity outcomes in this or similar contexts.

#### **Notes**

1. A preliminary version of the results presented in this paper has previously been published in a Dutch-language research report commissioned by the Netherlands Ministry of Internal Affairs and Kingdom Relations, authored by Hofhuis and Van Drunen (2019).
2. A subsample of this dataset was used to validate the BTDS, as reported by Hofhuis *et al.* (2015).

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