



# DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN FRANCE

## ISSUES, SKILLS AND CAREERS

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in collaboration with Anaïs COULON



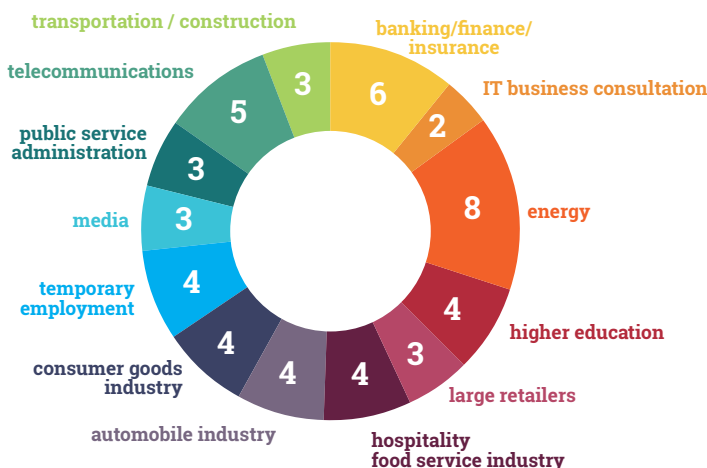
Large private and public workplaces in France have set up departments dedicated to diversity initiatives since the mid-2000s. In doing so, they have aligned their practices with those that originated in the United States and spread throughout numerous other countries over the last two decades. This has happened within a context of the globalization of managerial categories and the reinforcement of national anti-discrimination standards.

While diversity management has been widely studied, few works have focused on workplace diversity officers. **What is the profile of the diversity managers working in businesses established in France? What are their career paths, motivations, day-to-day activities, hopes and career perspectives?**

As the leading organization of diversity managers in France, the Association Française des Managers de la Diversité - AFMD (French Association of Diversity Managers) asked sociologists Laure Bereni, PhD, a faculty member at CNRS (French National Center for Scientific Research), and Dorothee Prud'homme, PhD, Head of Research at the AFMD, to conduct a research study to answer these questions. **The report is based on a series of 53 face-to-face**, in-depth interviews with current and former diversity managers, which were conducted in 2015 and 2016.

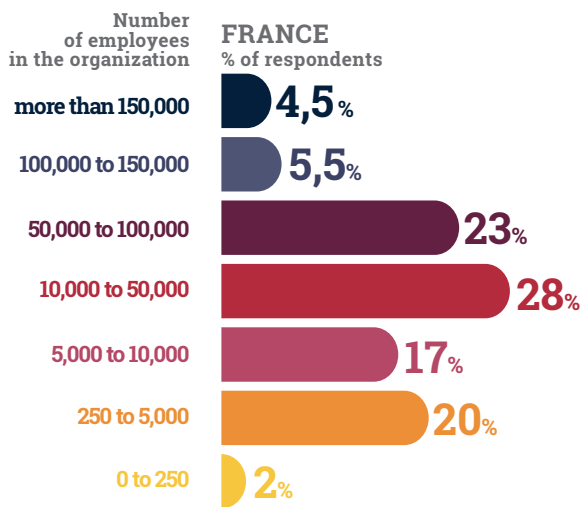
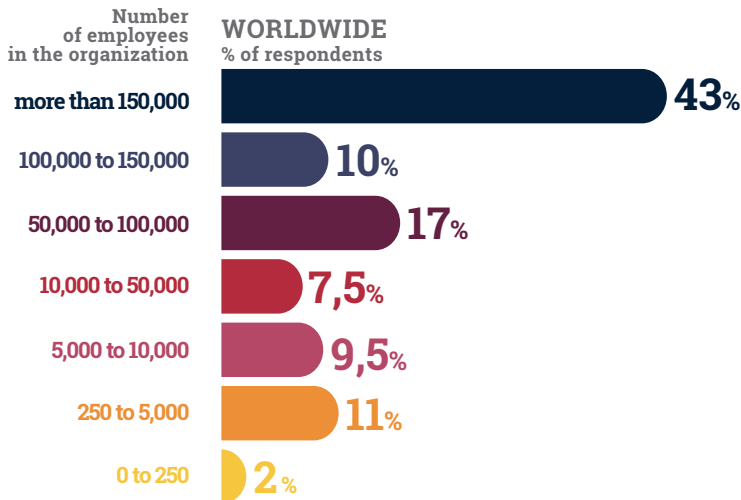
Semi-structured interviews were designed to capture the social characteristics and trajectories of these diversity practitioners as fully as possible, not only including their daily professional practices, but also their personal perceptions of their work, the challenges and obstacles that they encounter daily while working to achieve their goals, the means of action at their disposal and the tactics that they employ to overcome organizational resistances, the value and meaning that they assign to their atypical role, as well as the way in which they incorporate it into their career path. Since the sample was mostly put together using the AFMD's membership files with an emphasis on full time diversity managers, the majority of the respondents work in large private sector businesses whose headquarters are usually in the Parisian region. A wide variety of sectors are represented there.

Employment sectors in which respondents work or worked towards promoting diversity



Source: AFMD 2016 qualitative survey, n=53

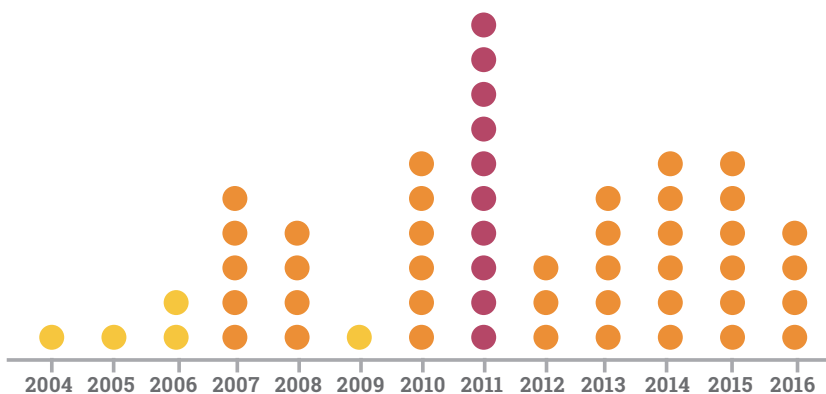
### Staffing levels of the organizations in which respondents work or worked as diversity managers



Source: AFMD 2016 qualitative survey, n=53

The diversity managers interviewed have held their positions at different times over the course of the last ten years: **while 26 “pioneers”, most often appointed before 2010, have defined the scope of the field and established the foundations of organizational diversity policies, 27 “successors” have taken over positions whose boundaries had already been relatively defined.** 40% of those interviewed were no longer engaged in their diversity management role at the time of the interview; their testimonies are therefore further removed from the job itself and provide insights into the career perspectives of diversity practitioners.

### Respondents' employment start dates



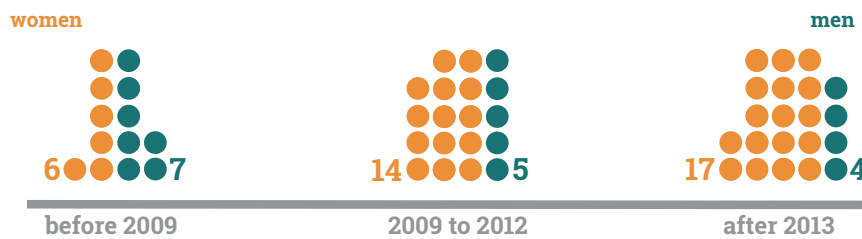
Source: AFMD 2016 qualitative survey, n=53

The research shows **the wide variety of organizational positions that fall under the umbrella of “diversity”**. The prestige, the pay and the clout that it offers vary greatly depending on the organization and the career profile of the person who has been chosen to perform the work: the entry-level diversity specialist, “lost in the organizational chart”, and the most senior diversity director who has access to networks within the organization and has the ear of upper management have nothing in common.

Beyond this variety of positions, the report brings to light certain recurring traits and allows **a composite sketch of diversity practitioners working within large, France-based companies to be outlined**.

**While diversity managers are most often women** (70%), they are slightly less overrepresented in our sample than they are in HR positions (in France, women occupy 77% of HR positions). However, the study reveals a growing number of women over the course of the last few years as the field becomes more institutionalized: 80% of those interviewed who had started in their positions after 2013 are women.

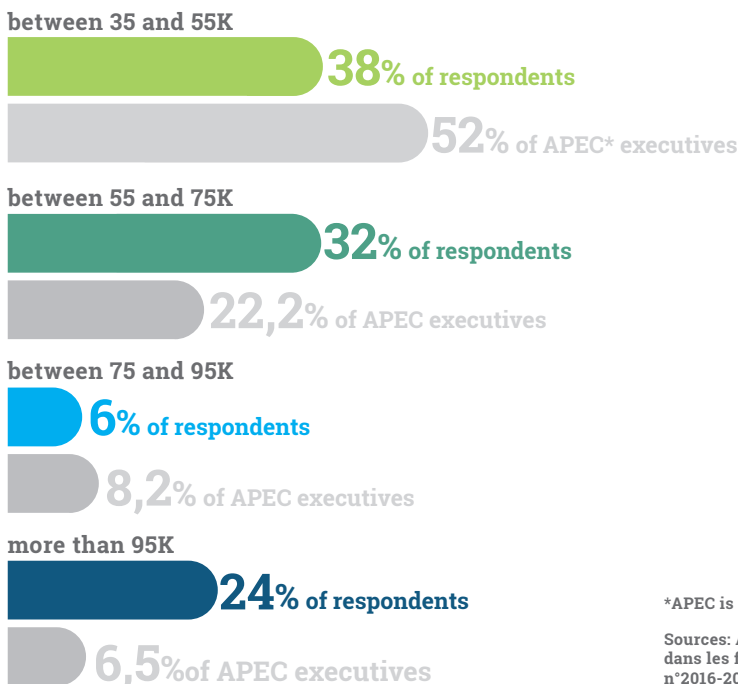
**Distribution of respondents by employment start date and sex**



Source: AFMD 2016 qualitative survey, n=53

Diversity managers are, **on average, older than the population of HR executives** because they often move into that position in the last third of their careers (47% of those interviewed are older than 50). They are also **better paid on average than HR executives**, with disparities between men and women which reflect in part differences in age and career type.

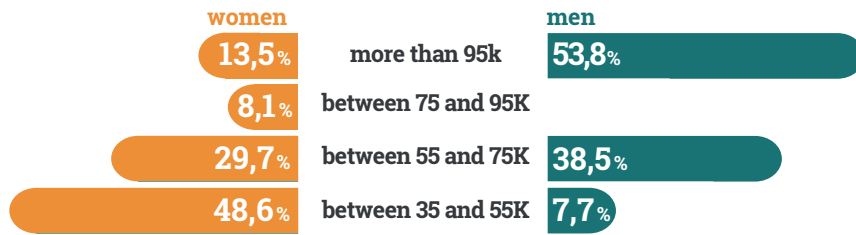
**Yearly gross salary (paid in 13 installments)**



\*APEC is an organization for the employment of managers in France

Sources: AFMD 2016 salary survey, n=51 and Apec, « Les salaires dans les fonctions cadres édition 2016 », *Les études de l'emploi cadre*, n°2016-20, septembre 2016, p.6

Distribution of respondents' gross annual salary (over 13 months) by sex



Source: AFMD 2016 salary survey, n=51

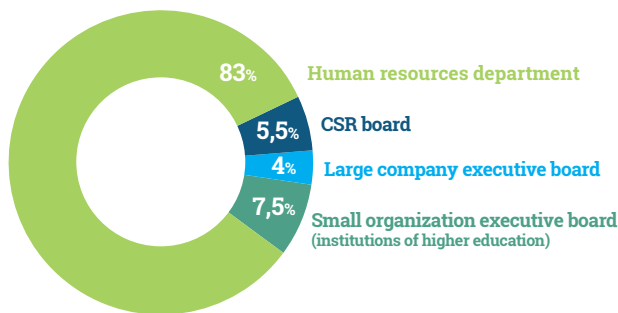
They are largely white and **rarely of immigrant descent**. They also **mostly come from upper middle-class families** and are **highly educated**.

The diversity managers interviewed perform their work at the headquarters of the company where, generally, they already worked for some of their career. **87% of them were already working in the organization where they were appointed**, with an average seniority of 10 years. They come **mostly from HR positions** (37% of those interviewed), or other “support” functions, such as communications. 40% of the research participants worked in operations before becoming diversity managers (this was the case for 53% of the men interviewed).

At the time that they started their diversity role, they only had a vague idea of what diversity entailed. **They learned on the job, mostly through contact with their peers, in professional associations**. After several years of experience in the position, they prefer to label themselves as project managers rather than as experts on the topic of diversity.

83% of the diversity managers interviewed are **attached to HR departments**, and the most common position amongst them is **“two reporting lines below the Chief Human Resources Officer”**. Only 4% of the interviewees report directly to the board of directors of a large corporation. Diversity managers can nonetheless have occasional contact with upper management.

Respondents' direct reporting lines



Source: AFMD 2016 qualitative survey, n=53

**They often do not have a team** and rely on a network of diversity “correspondents” and “ambassadors”. They devote a significant amount of their time to **“talking about diversity”**: explaining, arguing, communicating, both internally and externally, about this topic.

Respondents' level of responsibility



Source: AFMD 2016 qualitative survey, n=53

The diversity programs that they put into place reflect the priorities of the most assertive French public policies on equality, beyond the 33 or so anti-discrimination legal grounds: **they focus mostly on equality between men and women and the integration of disabled workers.**

**Diversity managers work in “project mode”.** They must put different departments of their organization into action in the absence of any hierarchical power and therefore show a fair amount of inventiveness, diplomacy, and perseverance.

**Key competencies for diversity managers**

(% of subjects who chose this response (a maximum of 6 responses were possible))



Source: AFMD job and skills survey, n=129

Moreover, they describe **their daily lives like an obstacle course**, faced with colleagues who perceive diversity as a question of secondary importance and their mission as an imposition on their routine activities.

But they describe their work as **intellectually “stimulating” and meaningful**, which leads them to stay in the field much longer than they would in more traditional fields (5 years, on average, for those interviewed).

**Elements most likely to increase the appeal of the diversity function to the respondents (a maximum of 3 responses were possible)**



Source: AFMD job and skills survey, n=129

For their next career move, they envision either **returning to fields that are tied to HR or the CSR department** of the same workplace, or **leaving the organization in order to continue their work in the field of diversity**, in the non-profit sector or as consultants. As for now, **the opportunities for continuing down the same career path as a diversity manager in another large organization remain limited** - organizations still prefer to recruit in-house professionals or managers who have no prior knowledge of diversity matters.

Diversity managers consider their work to be necessary, all while hoping that it will not remain so in the future, when they hope their work will be taken over by all the organization's employees.