

Inclusive Leadership Event DUFAS/CFA Society Netherlands

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Look at this compass here.

An instrument that keeps course, even when visibility becomes cloudy and an instrument that does not move with every headline but continues to steer on fixed principles.

As supervisors, we use it every day to keep focus on what matters. In a world that is becoming increasingly complex, such a compass is not a luxury.

Let me start right away: murky and complex — that's the world in which you operate. Technologically, socially, geopolitically — it all shifts all the time.

A compass is therefore not a nice thing to have. A compass is a need to have. Diversity is such a compass. Diversity helps us navigate complexity, especially when decisions involve values, uncertainty, or competing interests. It brings relevant perspectives in a world shaped by different experiences and expectations.

So, Diversity is not a decoration. It is a strategic steering tool. That's why today I'm diving into three questions that I hear more and more often:

1. How does diversity relate to reputational risk?
2. What does diversity mean for customer focus?
3. And how do we deal with reporting and accountability?

Before I dive into the content, let's first manage expectations. This will not be a checklist. No row of boxes to tick. Nor is it an attempt to capture diversity in a spreadsheet.

What I do hope is that my words today are an invitation. An invitation to think strategically about diversity. Because as a supervisor, we don't see diversity as something you tick off, but as a strategic asset you can deploy. Not a compliance theme, but a quality issue.

Before we go any further, I think it would be good to give the word 'diversity' a little bit of flavour. Because to be honest: it is one of those terms that is easily used, but not always sharply defined.

For me, diversity is about differences. Differences in perspective, background, experience and identity. About whom is at the table — but also about who is being heard. It is about gender, ethnicity, age, education, and neurodiversity. But also, about thinking styles, career paths and life experience. Diversity is therefore not only who you are, but also how you perceive things.

It's not a social frill. No decoration for the annual accounts. It is strategic asset. Because in an industry that needs to assess risk, to understand societal expectations, and to serve clients with diverse profiles, a monoculture is not a style — it's a risk.

Diversity helps organize dissent. To recognize blind spots. And in the end, it leads to better decisions.

Not just smarter on paper, but choices that people understand, support, and feel connected to—whether they're colleagues, customers, or part of the wider community.

Before I talk about you, let's take a look behind the scenes. How are we faring at the AFM?

For us, diversity is not an afterthought, but a precondition for good supervision. We are building an organization in which people with different backgrounds and perspectives work together to make sharp judgments.

And in a tick the box exercise we could be proud: in terms of gender (40% women at all levels), pay gap (non existent), cultural background (in line with Dutch society), disciplines.

However, this is not a guarantee for success. Think of the UK political arena: diversity all over, but almost exclusively educated at Oxbridge.

Diversity will only pay off if you invest in inclusion, in fostering diverse perspectives, in asking staff to bring their atypical experiences to the table. Not to shy away from discomfort.

This does not happen automatically, it requires investment in leadership and work culture. And no, I don't dare to say here with my hand on my heart that we are there. For the simple reason that diversity is not an end station, but a process. But we persevere. We measure, we reflect, we learn. This requires active commitment. About room for difference. About dialogue.

And about the ability to learn from different perspectives. That applies to us as a supervisor — and to you.

Diversity versus reputational risk

Then to the three questions I mentioned at the beginning. Numero uno: diversity and reputation.

Diversity is sometimes approached as a reputation issue. Something that has to be done, because it is expected by society. A checkbox in the ESG report, a paragraph in the annual report, a photo on the website with just enough variation.

But those who see diversity primarily as reputation issue are missing the point — and missing the opportunity. Diversity is not a PR tool. It is a source of resilience. Especially in decision-making, risk assessment and governance.

Because as mentioned earlier, asset managers operate in an environment that is becoming increasingly unpredictable.

Geopolitical uncertainty, technological acceleration, social pressure on sustainability and transparency — it all comes at the same time.

In such a context, one-track thinking and acting is not style. It is a strategic risk.

Organizations that use diversity strategically — not as a backdrop, but as a base — are better able to avoid blind spots. They are more likely to recognize where assumptions are wrong, where risks are underestimated, and where customer needs are shifting. Diversity increases the capacity to contradict, to nuance, to ask the right questions at the right time.

And that is not an abstract ambition. This touches on the core of asset management:

- a. In investment decisions, diversity helps to break down bias. Think of groupthink in strategic allocation, or underestimation of non-traditional risks such as climate impact or social instability.
- b. In risk assessment, diversity increases the ability to recognize signals that fall outside the dominant perspective. For example, when assessing reputational risks in emerging markets.

- c. In governance, diversity strengthens internal supervision. Boards and committees with different backgrounds and thinking styles complement each other better, question each other more sharply, and correct where necessary.

Diversity is therefore not a reputational risk. It is a way to reduce reputational risks not by managing the image, but by strengthening the content. And yes, diversity can feel uncomfortable at times. It challenges routines, surfaces tensions, and asks for reflection. But that discomfort is part of its value. Because real resilience doesn't come from avoiding friction. It comes from learning through it.

For asset managers, this means that diversity must be strategically embedded in the core processes. Not only in HR policy, but in investment committees, risk teams, customer interaction and product development. It requires leadership that gives room for difference. And structures that can take advantage of that difference.

As a supervisor, we see it as our task to support that movement. We see diversity not as a peripheral issue, but as a driver of sound governance, better risk judgment, and long-term value creation. Diversity is not an end in itself. It is a means to perform better, to protect better, and to connect better with society.

Diversity and customer focus: relevance as a strategic capability.

Then today's second point: diversity and customer focus

The customer population is changing dramatically. Millennials, Generation Z — and soon Generation Alpha — have different expectations of financial services than their predecessors.

They are digitally skilled, socially engaged, and used to transparency, customization, and direct interaction. They ask questions about sustainability, inclusion and impact. And choose not only on returns, but also on values.

For you, this means that customer focus is no longer just about product quality or distribution efficiency. It's about the ability to connect to a broader customer reality — a reality that's more diverse, dynamic, and demanding than ever.

Diversity in teams is not a nice-to-have. It is a strategic necessity. Organizations with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and life experiences are more likely to recognize what moves customers. They have a better understanding of what is going on — and can translate that into relevant services. And no, it's not just about representation — although it is important. It's about relevance. About the ability to speak with, and listen to, customers who think differently, live differently and choose differently. Diversity increases cultural sensitivity, empathy and creativity within organizations. And that is reflected in better customer interaction, better product development and better positioning.

For you, that means:

- a. In product development: diverse teams design investment products that align with a variety of client values — from impact investing to Islamic finance, from climate-conscious portfolios to generational strategies.
- b. In communication and distribution: diversity helps to tailor language, tone and channel to different customer groups. Think of younger investors who get in via digital platforms, or customers who value transparency about social impact.
- c. In customer trust: customers recognize themselves more quickly in organizations that understand their world.

Diversity contributes to credibility, authenticity and loyalty — especially in a time when trust is no longer self-evident.

In short: if you want to serve the customer of tomorrow, you will also have to build the organization of

tomorrow. This requires more than recruitment on diversity. It requires inclusive decision-making. About room for difference in strategy development. And about leadership that not only tolerates diversity but activates it.

As a supervisor, we see this movement as an opportunity — and as a task. Hopefully you feel the same way that customer focus is a core value in the sector. But customer focus without diversity? That is a missed opportunity!

Diversity and reporting: from accountability to change

Let's start with what's going well. Transparency around diversity is increasing. More and more asset managers are reporting on team composition, targets, inclusion policies and progress. That's a positive development. It shows that the topic is being taken seriously and that there's a growing awareness of its relevance.

But there is a risk.

When reporting focuses mainly on numbers — who is at the table, how many, what percentage — it can become superficial. We often see lots of figures, but little insight into how decisions are made or how diverse perspectives are actually used. And when diversity becomes mainly a compliance item, it risks losing its strategic value. Because numbers alone don't tell the full story. A team with 40% women may look good on paper, but if everyone thinks the same, you've built a well-organized echo. As Korzybski said: "The map is not the territory." What's written in reports doesn't always reflect how diversity works in practice, in culture, in leadership, in decision-making.

And that brings us to the current challenge. In today's international climate, especially in the US, DEI policies are under pressure. Reports are being challenged, companies are called out, and the public debate is becoming more polarized. That can make it harder to stay the course and may lead to hesitation or overly cautious communication.

So what's the way forward?

If we want diversity reporting to be meaningful — not just visible, but valuable — we need to move beyond counting and start understanding. That means shifting the focus: From who is present, to how decisions are made. From representation to activation. From numbers to nuance. Reporting needs to be smarter, sharper and above all: more strategic. How do you organize dissent? How do you use difference in investment policy and product development? How do you ensure that diverse perspectives are not just included, but shape outcomes?

Diversity is part of the 'S' in ESG. Anchor it in your broader story about social impact, governance and labour policy. That makes it more credible also internationally. And: learn from each other. Which indicators work? How do you measure inclusion? What helps in investment committees or client teams?

In this way, reporting becomes more than a mandatory exercise. It becomes a flywheel for improvement and for collective learning. As a supervisor, we follow these developments closely. Not to standardize identity, but to understand where diversity works and where it still stalls.

Because diversity is not (just) an ideology. It is a strategic response to a changing world.

And reporting? It's not justification after the fact. It's an invitation to better governance, better decision-making and an organization that not only looks good on paper, but also works well in practice

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the beginning of this speech, I talked about diversity as a compass. An instrument that gives direction in a landscape that is becoming increasingly complex — technologically, socially and geopolitically.

We all need a compass these days. But a compass that only points inward loses its course! Diversity helps calibrate, so we can navigate with clarity, relevance and resilience.

We have explored three strategic lines today:

1. Diversity as a source of resilience in decision-making and risk assessment. Not as a reputation shield, but to avoid blind spots and increase quality.
2. Diversity as a condition for customer focus in a changing society. Not only who is at the table, but who is heard, understood, and served.
3. Diversity as part of accountability and reporting. Not as an obligation, but as an invitation to reflect, improve, and connect. Especially now, in an international arena in which the debate is sharpening.

As a supervisor, we will continue to put this theme on the agenda.

My appeal to you is: use the compass. Not only in policy, but in practice. Not only in reporting, but in culture. Not only in words, but in choices.

Because in a world that demands more and more from financial institutions — in transparency, in relevance, in social anchoring. Diversity is not a luxury. It defines destiny.

Thank you.