Is diversity good or bad for teams?

Bertolt Meyer, Marinus van Driel, Carsten Shermuly, Meir Shemla

27 June 2011 – Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute
Teams are the most common form of organisational collaboration (Salas et al., 2008)
Diversity: Differences on any attribute that may lead to perceiving someone as „different“

- “Diversity refers to differences between individuals on any attribute that may lead to the perception that another person is different from self” (van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004, p. 1011).
- Diversity becomes more important as more organisations employ more heterogeneous individuals, e. g.:
  - Demographic change (age)
  - International mobility (ethnicity)
  - Gender equality
Looking at several differences simultaneously: Diversity Faultlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colour:</th>
<th>2 x red, 2 x blue</th>
<th>Colour:</th>
<th>2 x red, 2 x blue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shape:</td>
<td>2 triangles, 2 squares</td>
<td>Shape:</td>
<td>2 triangles, 2 squares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size:</td>
<td>2 x small, 2 x large</td>
<td>Size:</td>
<td>2 x small, 2 x large</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- If we only look at one attribute at a time, these two teams have the same level of diversity
- These two teams differ in their diversity faultline strength: 0.33 vs. 1.00
- Faultlines are associated with decreased satisfaction and performance (Thatcher & Patel, in press).
- Can we overcome the negative effects of faultlines?
Faultlines in context: What if team members see value in diversity (and like the task)?

Meyer & Schermuly, in press
Institute of Psychology

Results: Faultlines have a positive effect if team members see value in diversity (and like the task)

Task Motivation -1 SD

Task Motivation +1 SD

Meyer & Schermuly, in press

27 July 2011

Bertolt Meyer: Is diversity good or bad for teams?
The effect is mediated by the elaboration of task-relevant information

\[ \beta_a = .41^* \]

\[ \beta_c = .51^* \quad \beta_c' = .37^* \]

95% CI: 0.23; 98.46

Meyer & Schermuly, in press
Faultlines over time: Can stronger faultlines lead to more positive outcomes over time than weaker ones?

- Diversity faultlines could lead to problematic effects at the beginning, but could foster team learning over time (e.g., Brodbek & Greitemeyer, 2000)
- Test of this assumption in 84 diverse military training groups (N = 1133, 13.1 trainees per group) where learning was measured over time
- Sample was diverse with regard to race (32 Asian, 578 Black, 114 Hispanic, 13 Native American, 345 White), gender (721 male, 368 female), and other attributes
- Focal area of training: Behavioral change associated with challenging interactions brought about by group diversity
- Assessments of students’ behaviors associated with course objectives: Ratings (0-100) at three equally spaced time points by three raters (the two trainers and one outside assessor) on five scales
- Faultline strength Fau (Thatcher, Jehn, & Zanutto, 2003) computed over available social categories
A three-level growth model of the impact of faultlines on training performance over time

- Hypothesis: Strong faultlines are associated with a lower intercept and a higher slope in test performance than weak faultlines

- ICC(1) of test scores in classes = .09, \( p < 0.001 \), ICC(2) = 0.79: Multilevel modeling warranted

van Driel, Meyer, & McDonald, 2011

27 July 2011 Bertolt Meyer: Is diversity good or bad for teams?
Random Coefficient Growth Modeling in R (Bliese, 2009) reveals the proposed effect
Can leadership lead to the positive effects of group diversity?

- Transformational leadership: A leadership style that transforms followers’ attitudes and values, thereby creating sustainable change among team members (Bass, 1998)

- One facet of transformational leadership: Individualized consideration: attending to followers needs
  - "pivotal concept" (Avolio & Bass, 1995, p. 201) in transformational leadership
  - Individual consideration is a person-focused behaviour (Burke et al., 2006)

- Individually considerate leadership could help prevent conflicts in diverse teams and thus enhance team performance
Institute of Psychology

Hypothesized causal structure: IC reduces conflict in diverse teams, which decreases performance

Meyer & Jehn, in preparation

27 July 2011  Bertolt Meyer: Is diversity good or bad for teams?
Field study reveals the interaction of gender diversity and task conflict on team performance

- In teams with more women than average, task conflict is detrimental for team performance.
- Thus, gender-diverse teams require low levels of conflict for high performance.

Meyer & Jehn, in preparation
Individually considerate leadership reduces conflict in gender-diverse teams

- Task Conflict
  - Individualized consideration
  - Gender Diversity
  - Task Conflict x Gender Diversity

- Team Performance

R² = .22
R² = .16
R² = .24

Bertolt Meyer: Is diversity good or bad for teams?
Meyer & Jehn, in preparation

27 July 2011
Conclusion: Is diversity good or bad for groups? It depends.

- The effect of group diversity on team and individual outcomes depends on group members’ perceptions and on group processes:
  - If group members see value in diversity and are motivated for the task at hand, salient diversity (faultlines) is beneficial for team performance (Study 1)
  - Salient team diversity (faultlines) can have negative short-term effects but positive long-term effects (Study 2)
  - Individualized considerate leadership can help reduce conflict in (gender-) diverse teams and therefore contribute to team performance (Study 3)
  - Further research should shed more light on antecedents and consequences of diversity beliefs and diversity perceptions
Outlook: Antecedents of diversity beliefs; stereotypes & status; diversity & leadership

- Study of the antecedents of diversity beliefs in school children with Social Network Analysis (analysis completed)
- Study on the interaction of team diversity, diversity beliefs, task stereotypicality, and status (paper submitted)
- Leadership & Trust: Which observable micro-level leadership behaviors (speech & body language) bring about the positive effects of leadership?
Thank you very much for your attention!
bmeyer@sozpsy.uzh.ch


