

Diversity and Creativity in Teams

Diversity and creativity are important, emerging issues in the study of teams and team-work. Recent research in diversity has focused on the issue of dissimilarity and its effect within the team itself. This is often studied based on social identity theory and self-categorization theory. Later in the chapter, we specifically address the issue of multicultural diversity in upper echelons, or top management teams, in the global workplace. Creativity concerns new and/or dissimilar ideas or ways of doing things within teams. Novelty and innovation are creativity's companions. Though creativity is developed in some detail in Chapter 10, we treat it briefly here in the context of teams.

6 Discuss diversity and creativity in teams.

Dissimilarity

We defined diversity in Chapter 1 in terms of individual differences. Recent relational demography research finds that demographic dissimilarity influences employees' absenteeism, commitment, turnover intentions, beliefs, work group relationships, self-esteem, and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).⁶³ Thus, dissimilarity may have positive or negative effects in teams and on team members. Racial dissimilarity may also impact the extent to which team members communicate with each other and develop a sense of group identity.⁶⁴ Structural diversity can enhance team performance.⁶⁵ Though value dissimilarity may be positively related to task and relationship conflict, it is negatively related to team involvement.⁶⁶ This highlights the importance of managing dissimilarity in teams, being open to diversity, and turning conflicts over ideas into positive outcomes. With the U.S. population becoming increasingly diverse, odds are high that employees will be working in multicultural team's right here in the United States.

Functional background is one way to look at dissimilarity in teams. One study of 262 professionals in 37 cross-functional teams found that promoting functional background social identification helped individuals perform better as team members.⁶⁷ Another study of multifunctional management teams in a *Fortune* 100 company found evidence that functional background predicted team involvement.⁶⁸ Finally, in a different study of 129 members working on twenty multidisciplinary project teams, informational dissimilarity had no adverse effects when member task and goal congruence were present.⁶⁹ Where there was incongruence, dissimilarity adversely affected team identification and OCBs.

Creativity

Creativity is often thought of in an individual context rather than a team context. However, there is such a thing as team creativity. In one study among fifty-four research and development teams, creativity scores were partially explained by aggregation processes across people and time.⁷⁰ The investigators concluded one must that is important to consider aggregation across time as well as across individuals when one is attempting to understand team creativity. In another study of creative behavior, a Korean electronics company found that individual dissimilarity in age and performance as well as functional diversity within the team positively affect individual employees' creative behavior.

Some think that the deck is stacked against teams as agents of creativity. Leigh Thompson disagrees and suggests that team creativity and divergent thinking can be enhanced by increasing diversity in teams, brainwriting, training of facilitators, changing membership in teams, electronic brainstorming, and building a playground.⁷¹ These practices can overcome social loafing, conformity, and downward norm setting in teams and organizations. Team members might exercise care in timing the insertion of their novel ideas into the team process so as to maximize the positive impact and benefits.⁷²