THE VICIOUS AND VIRTUOUS FACETS OF WORKFORCE DIVERSITY

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Abstract

Diversity, a key reality of our everyday work lives, can provoke two different outcomes. The virtuous outcome is when diversity enhances a group’s ability to be cohesive and productive. The vicious outcome is when diversity detracts from a group’s ability to create something that is greater than the sum of its parts. This paper adopts a process perspective to explore how these two outcomes arise. First, it explores conditions under which workforce diversity enhances group cohesion and productivity. Next, it examines mechanisms that drive a group’s evolution over time and suggests how group interactions can initiate vicious and virtuous cycles. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

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Diversity has the potential of bringing out the best and the worst in people. Some people value and cultivate diversity; others detest and discourage it. Organizations find themselves caught in the middle trying to balance the benefits of increased productivity and new ideas on the one hand and the costs of conflict and dissatisfaction on the other. As a result, two questions gain importance: Which facets of diversity lead to group cohesion and productivity? and, What are the dynamics that unfold from diversity?

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The basic thesis of this paper is that group cohesion and productivity are affected by diversity in two interrelated work arenas—the technical arena, comprised of task-related skills and knowledge; and the institutional arena, comprised of work-related values. We propose that diversity of skills in the technical arena can lead to positive outcomes and diversity of values in the institutional arena can lead to negative outcomes. The interaction of these two dimensions can result in a group becoming either cohesive and productive or fractious and unproductive. We label the dynamics that lead to these outcomes as being vicious and vicious cycles, respectively.

The paper is organized as follows. Beginning with a brief review of the literature on diversity, we suggest that groups are more likely to be cohesive and productive if they have diverse skills in the technical arena and similar values in the institutional arena. We then adopt a process perspective to explore the mechanisms that increase or decrease diversity in these two arenas. Identification of these mechanisms provides a way to appreciate how vicious cycles are created and how process interventions can shape a group’s evolution toward a virtuous cycle. In conclusion, we consider the implications of our process model for theory, research, and practice.

Facets of Workforce Diversity

On the negative side, researchers have found that diversity generates higher turnover rates because it inhibits the development of strong affective ties among group members (Jackson, Brett, Sessa, Cooper, Julin, & Peyronnin, 1991; O’Reilly, Caldwell, & Barnett, 1989; Wagner, Pfiefer, & O’Reilly, 1984). Stereotyping is another deleterious consequence of diversity (Jackson, Stone, & Alvarez, 1993; Kanter, 1977a, 1977b). Jackson et al. (1993) suggest that diversity makes social identities more salient, thereby triggering stereotyping as personal identities become submerged.

In addition to examining the outcomes of diversity, researchers have explored its antecedents. These include changes in: (1) the global competitive environment, (2) the workplace, and (3) society (e.g., Johnston & Packer, 1987). For instance, globalization, a characteristic of about seventy percent of all U.S. firms, requires sensitivity to different cultural patterns and value systems. In the workplace, workforce composition has changed over time and now includes a greater proportion of older workers, white women, people of color, and immigrants. Changing societal values on diversity also create challenges for organizations as they attempt to meet diverse employee requirements, provide a prejudice-free workplace, and deal with issues such as sexual harassment.

Jackson, May, and Whitney (1995) propose a framework that links antecedents with consequences of diversity. They suggest that elements of diversity affect mediating states, such as cognition, affect, status, and power, leading to certain short- and long-term behaviors. Short-term behaviors include communication, social influence, and management of human resources. These behaviors, in turn, affect long-term behaviors, such as task performance and interpersonal relationships.

In contemporary environments characterized by rapid change and complexity, distinctions between antecedents, consequences, and mediating states begin to blur. In such environments, diversity (or the lack of it) grows exponentially to result in further diversity or similarity. In the process, group interactions lead to a set of dynamics where groups are fractious and unproductive or to a state where they are cohesive and productive. These dynamics are illustrated in Schelling’s (1978) description of how segregation might occur. In spite of active efforts to intermingle people of different races into residential neighborhoods.

We label the dynamics leading to a fractious and unproductive state as representing vicious cycles and the dynamics leading to a cohesive and productive state as representing virtuous cycles. These dynamics are difficult to manage unless constituting processes are explicitly identified and

Literature on Workforce Diversity

Researchers have looked at diversity from several disciplinary perspectives. Those who have studied it in the marketplace have explored how product variety can enhance consumer welfare (e.g., Friedman & Friedman, 1980). Others, who have studied cultural diversity, have explored the effect of dissimilar values, norms, and beliefs on group cohesion and conflict (e.g., Bruslin, 1981; Triandis, 1984). At a more microlevel of analysis, researchers have examined how diversity leads to different perceptions about group phenomena resulting in the formation of in-groups and out-groups (e.g., Ferdinand, 1992; Kanter, 1977a, 1977b).

Common to these different perspectives is an appreciation that diversity can have both positive and negative outcomes. On the positive side, for instance, heterogeneous teams have been found to bring multiple perspectives to tasks, and as a result, outperform homogeneous teams in generating ideas (Ficke, House, & Kerr, 1976; Hoffman, 1979; McGraw, 1984). Similarly, diversity of functional backgrounds of top-management teams has been associated with organizational innovation (Bantel & Jackson, 1989; Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1990).
proactively shaped. Moreover, groups find it difficult to break the cycles that constitute these vicious and virtuous end states once they are in them.

The diversity literature has stopped short of exploring these dynamics. We argue that a process perspective is required to understand how groups characterized by diversity can create vicious or virtuous cycles. Adopting such a process perspective offers new insights on how we can manage (or not manage) diversity.

Toward a Process View of Workforce Diversity

There are many perspectives on process. One perspective examines “snapshots” at different points in time to document how an entity changes. This approach is well illustrated by diversity research that describes changes in workforce demographics over time (e.g., Bolick & Nestlethor, 1988; Johnston & Packer, 1987). The conclusion of this body of research is that diversity, once a latent possibility, is now upon us and that we must confront diversity, indeed exploit it, if we want to survive in this complex dynamic world.

Several process researchers suggest that this first perspective should be extended by identifying mechanisms that drive changes in the snapshots over time (e.g., Pettigrew, 1985; Tsoukas, 1989; Van de Ven, 1992). The basic premise here is that we might be better able to shape the evolution of an entity if we appreciate the mechanisms that drive it. In the diversity literature, for instance, globalization, competition, and proactive programs such as affirmative action have been identified as some of the mechanisms that have increased workforce diversity.

The second view on process examines interrelationships between mechanisms that drive a phenomenon (Tsoukas, 1989). These interrelationships help us understand how these mechanisms together constitute a system. That is, the whole behaves like a complex system with feedback loops and interdependencies that cannot be managed neatly. Illustrative of such a perspective is Jackson et al.’s (1995) work above.

Based upon such a systems perspective is another view of process. This view explores how vicious and virtuous cycles are created. Vicious and virtuous cycles are situations where deviations in one mechanism amplify the other successively through feedback loops. Schelling (1978) provides one such example of a deviation amplifying loop: “Hearing your car honk, I honk mine, thus encouraging you to honk yours more insistently” (p. 14).

One reason that these dynamics initiate vicious or virtuous cycles is that they are interactively complex (Petrow, 1984). That is, not only are there many mechanisms that drive the system, but these drivers are highly interconnected with one another. The presence of many drivers increases the complexity of the system, while their close relationship renders the system unstable. Small changes in one variable result in large, unanticipated, deviation-amplifying changes at the system level (Sterman, in press).

Workforce diversity dynamics have the same characteristics as the interactively complex systems that have been explored in other disciplines. There are several mechanisms that drive the dynamics of a diverse group, and these mechanisms are tightly coupled. For instance behaviors (exit and voice), affect (trust or distrust), and perception (of equity or inequity) are three mechanisms that interact with each other to drive diversity dynamics into vicious or virtuous states. Moreover, small deviations in any of these mechanisms can quickly drive the group to a state where members become locked into a “self-sealing” system (Kanter, 1977b, p. 249). That is, group members might find themselves locked into a set of dynamics that they are powerless to control even if they knew of its existence. Exploring how and why these vicious and virtuous cycles might arise from diversity is the key to understanding how diversity can be managed, particularly when it has the potential to polarize diverse groups and harm productivity.

In subsequent sections of this paper, we will provide a framework that can be used to explore vicious and virtuous cycles that emerge from workforce diversity. We will first identify which diversity dimension can lead to positive outcomes and which dimension can lead to negative outcomes. Based on these observations, we will offer a simple typology of groups and suggest that many contemporary groups have the dual potential of evolving toward a vicious or a virtuous state. Next, in our attempt to build a process theory of diversity, we will explore mechanisms that increase or decrease diversity in groups and therefore the outcomes of diversity. We begin with exit and voice as two manifest behavioral mechanisms that influence the outcomes of diversity. We then demonstrate how these behavioral mechanisms interact with other latent mechanisms (affect and cognition) to drive the group toward a vicious or a virtuous state.
Facets of Workforce Diversity

Nonaka, & Takeuchi, 1985). Indeed, as many researchers have argued (e.g., Ashby, 1960; Morgan, 1986), internal diversity must match the external diversity of the environment. Thus, diversity of skills has the potential of creating a group where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

However, the realization of benefits derived from diversity of skills in the technical arena depends upon the similarity of work-related values in the institutional arena. A similarity of work-related values in the institutional arena creates an opportunity for the institution of common rules, norms, and beliefs that form the basis for stable expectations required for group cohesion and productivity. Indeed, similarity of values fosters common objectives, group identity, acceptance of member roles, and a set of shared understandings concerning individual and group performance (Carroll, 1986; Fulkerson & Schuler, 1992; McClure & Foster, 1991). However, to the extent that these work-related values are different and in conflict with one another, misunderstandings and conflicts inevitably arise as a result of dissimilar expectations.

Thus, once we begin exploring the impact of diversity in the technical and institutional arenas on group cohesion and productivity, we see two different outcomes: Diversity in the technical arena has the potential for yielding positive outcomes; and diversity in the institutional arena has the potential for yielding negative outcomes. For a group to be cohesive and productive, therefore, diversity of skills in the technical arena must be matched with similarity of work-related values in the institutional arena. More formally stated:

**Proposition 1**: A group is more likely to be cohesive and productive to the extent that group members have diverse task-related skills and similar work-related values.

Several conceptual and empirical pieces of work lend support to this basic proposition. For instance, Olson (1969) suggested that groups are more likely to be cohesive and productive if “People are socialized to have diverse wants with respect to private goods [skills] and similar wants with respect to collective goods [values]” (p. 151). Jackson et al. (1995) observed that tolerance for task-based conflicts in decision-making teams may be present when team members are homogeneous in terms of some non-task attributes. At the organizational level of analysis, this view is substantiated by Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) who demonstrated that differentiation and integration together have the potential to yield more favorable organizational outcomes.
Once stated, Proposition I above seems obvious—almost a truism. However, in practice, we find it very difficult to create groups that are likely to be cohesive and productive. This difficulty arises in part because of an inherent tension in the formation of many groups in contemporary environments, where efforts to benefit from diversity in the technical arena automatically lead to diversity in the institutional arena. For instance, to access diverse skills, temporary groups may be formed by bringing together people from different departments, organizations, or countries. These groups are typically used in organizations with quality circles, special task forces, or problem-solving teams. The formation of such groups increases diversity in the institutional arena as group members bring in different work-related values. Indeed, these types of temporary groups are becoming very common, with increasing pressures to develop new products rapidly, threat of overseas competition, and demand for quality.

Such a diverse group has the potential for being either cohesive and productive or fractious and unproductive. Diverse skills, when brought together in some meaningful way, can generate positive outcomes. However, as we stated earlier, conflicting values render it difficult for group members to meaningfully integrate their diverse skills. Team members may end up working at odds with one another without a common purpose, leading to a situation where the whole is less than the sum of its parts.

We label a group characterized by diversity in both technical and institutional arenas as an uneasy alliance, as it has the potential for evolving to a state where the group is cohesive and productive or to a state where the group is fractious and unproductive as seen in quadrant 1 of Figure 1. This figure also depicts three other types of groups. Consistent with Proposition I, quadrant 2 represents a group that is cohesive and productive at the skill level, with little diversity of values. We label such a group as an easy alliance. Quadrant 3 represents a group characterized by lack of diversity in both technical and institutional arenas. We label such a group as an unproductive alliance. In this type of group, similarity of skills in the technical arena may at best reduce productivity (as there is no division of labor), and at worst, may lead to conflict over a common pool of resources.

Despite such an unproductive arrangement in the technical arena, group members might still be cohesive because they have similar work-related values in the institutional arena. A hypothetical example of such an unproductive arrangement is a group of male salesmen with similar ethnic backgrounds, each possessing very similar skills and earning sales commissions from a common pool of resources. Quadrant 4 represents a group character-
There are clearly some boundaries and limitations to the theory that we offer here. First, our focus is on self-managed work teams (those that form and disband voluntarily with no supervision). We do not explore the dynamics that might unfold in other types of groups. Second, we focus on those groups that may be characterized as being in a state of uneasy alliance. Groups starting from a different quadrant in Figure 1 may exhibit different dynamics because of their initial starting conditions; we do not explore these issues in this paper. Third, in developing our theory, we focus on work-related values and not on larger cultural differences. However, we submit that our arguments could potentially be extended to the effect of cultural differences on work group cohesion and productivity.

**Diversity Drivers**

The basic elements of our framework used to explore the dynamics that emerge from diversity are outlined in Figure 2.

Most researchers suggest that a process perspective requires an appreciation of the mechanisms that shape the evolution of an entity over time (e.g., Pettigrew, 1985; Tsoukas, 1989; Van de Ven, 1992). This statement, when applied to our framework (Figure 1), suggests that mechanisms such as behaviors, affect, and cognition that increase or decrease the level of diversity in the technical and institutional arenas will drive a group in an uneasy alliance to one or the other quadrants depending upon which diversity dimension is amplified or decreased. For instance, in the institutional arena, mechanisms that decrease the diversity of values have the potential of driving an uneasy alliance toward an easy alliance. In the instrumental arena, mechanisms that increase the similarity of skills have the potential of driving an uneasy alliance toward a fractious alliance. Operating together, these mechanisms have the potential of driving an uneasy alliance toward an unproductive alliance. Stated in the form of an extension to Proposition 1:

*Proposition 2: Mechanisms that maintain or increase diversity of skills and those that bridge or decrease diversity of values will render a group more cohesive and productive.*

**Voice mechanisms.** Voice is one of the behavioral mechanisms that affects the outcomes of diversity (Hirschman, 1970). Voice mechanisms, such as regularly scheduled meetings and other forums for communication, provide people the opportunity to express concerns, raise problems, seek clarification, and provide solutions. Consequently, these mechanisms help people
learn about differences that exist between groups and reduce the possibility of
group members negatively viewing differences in values. As Jackson (1992)
suggests, voice mechanisms can be used to surface issues, exchange points of
view, and discuss possible alternatives for resolving differences that might
threaten the ability of people to work together effectively. Lacking effective
voice mechanisms, differences in values have the potential of creating different
perceptions about phenomena, negative views about out-groups, and
conflict between group members.

Several companies have successfully used appropriate voice mecha-
nisms to manage diversity. For instance, at Digital Equipment Corporation,
employees defuse misunderstandings due to differences in values across
departments through small-group dialogue (Walker & Hanson, 1992, p. 120).
Other corporations, like Xerox and PepsiCo, have found that encouraging
group dialogue through caucus groups enhances employee involvement in
their efforts to manage workforce diversity (Fulkerson & Schuler, 1992;
Sessa, 1992). Voice mechanisms essentially help in creating common ground
and common bonds among diverse employees (Gottfredson, 1992).

Exit mechanism. Exit (or entry) is a second mechanism that affects the
outcomes of diversity (Hirschman, 1970; Olson, 1969). Olson (1969) pointed
out that a group will more likely regenerate itself by continually changing
the constitution of its members, a process known as churning. By doing this,
groups can acquire and divest skills as required, thereby creating a process
that is conducive to learning and group regeneration.

Indeed, such a churning of skills is the hallmark of many temporary
teams that include product development and top-management teams.
Chaganti and Sambharya (1987) found that organizations competing on the
basis of new product development tend to have a large proportion of outsiders
in their upper echelons. Churning has been found to have beneficial effects on
top-management responsiveness to environmental shock (Murnmann &
Tushman, 1994). Finkelstein and Hambrick (1990) found that teams, where
top managers had short tenures, pursued novel strategies. In contrast, teams,
where top managers had long tenures, experienced negative outcomes includ-
ing escalation of commitment, risk aversion, and restriction on information
processing.

Challenges in managing voice and exit. Actions that encourage voice
and exit are important for group cohesion and productivity. However, there
are two challenges in managing a group with these behavioral mechanisms.
First, excessive voice and exit can be deleterious for group cohesion and
productivity. In excess, voice overloads a communication system, thereby
reducing its power to act as a means to bridge diverse value systems. More-
over, excessive voice might detract from a group’s ability to accomplish its
tasks in the technical arena. Similarly, excessive exit or entry can prevent a
group from developing a stable, shared value system in the institutional arena.

The second challenge is managing a diverse group becomes apparent in
our discussion above, pertaining to the negative impact of exit and entry
behaviors on value stability, and their positive impact on the reconstitution of
skills. It suggests that the very mechanisms that affect diversity in one arena
can also affect diversity in the other (see Osiow, 1969, for a detailed discus-
sion of this point). In particular, exit and entry, while maintaining and enhanc-
ing the diversity of skills in the technical arena, also result in enhancing
diversity of values in the institutional arena.

Just as exit and entry can simultaneously lead to positive and negative
outcomes in the two different arenas, so too can voice. Specifically, while
voice mechanisms provide members an opportunity to learn about each
other’s value systems, they can also reduce the diversity of skills in the
technical arena through mimetic learning, that is vicarious learning or obser-
vation and emulation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Miller, 1990; Van de Ven
& Walker, 1984). Regenerating skills through churning, therefore, might
appear to be an attractive alternative. However, as we have already pointed
out, churning itself increases diversity of values in the institutional arena,
thereby destabilizing the group.

These trade-offs can be managed by choosing the level of productivity
and value stability required for each project and by building in practices to
compensate for the unintended consequences of voice and entry. For instance,
programmed tasks that require regularity might be accomplished by groups
where there is not much entry and where members have been socialized to
have similar values. Fine-tuning of skills can be accomplished through
training programs. In contrast, non-programmed tasks that are changing
continually may be accomplished by fostering periodic entry and exit of
group members. Potential disruptions that entrants may create in the institu-
tional arena may be reduced by instituting programs to socialize newcomers.

Interactions that Create Vicious and Virtuous Cycles

Although these trade-offs can be managed, true challenges from diver-
sity arise from our inability to manage more complex interdependencies
between behaviors, such as voice and exit and other latent mechanisms that
drive diversity dynamics. In combination with these latent drivers, the pre-
sence or absence of voice or exit can lead to a virtuous or a vicious cycle.
The diversity literature reveals two such latent mechanisms—cognition and affect (Kanter, 1977a; Triandis, Hall, & Ewen, 1965). Diverse perspectives that emanate from different value systems can give rise to misunderstandings and conflict. Similarly, feelings of trust and distrust are central to group cohesion and productivity, which in turn are related to the behaviors of exit and voice. Together, cognition, affect, and behaviors create a complex system that has the potential of evolving toward a vicious or virtuous cycle.

To understand the constitution of these dynamics, consider a group where voice mechanisms have not been established. As we noted earlier, different value systems foster different perceptions about how group events are interpreted, how relationships are valued, and how inputs and rewards are measured. When confronted with such a situation, the absence of appropriate voice mechanisms prevents members from clarifying their inputs and rewards. Consequently, the absence of voice mechanisms can result in fostering a sense of inequity among group members.

To the extent that exit is also not possible, perceptions of inequity will lead to a reduction of work inputs. We label such an outcome as partial exit; that is, members are physically present but reduce their contributions. Partial exit enhances perceptions of inequity and a sense that some might be getting a free ride through the efforts of others. Such a cycle is all the more possible in the absence of voice.

Perceptions that group members might be getting a free ride, along with an inability to voice concerns and clarify issues, can also foster a feeling in the group that their peers are behaving opportunistically. This feeling can be amplified at early stages of group formation when stable expectations for behavior and interactions have yet to be established. Under these conditions, members with different skills and values might develop diverse expectations and psychological contracts (Rousseau & Parks, 1992), that when seemingly abrogated, enhance feelings of distrust.

Distrust and perception of inequity can polarize group members into in-groups and out-groups, within their own subcultures. Such polarization can destroy whatever meaningful voice there is between subgroups. Polarization also results in partial exit as members reduce contributions to the group while pursuing subgoals. In this way the loop is closed, thereby creating a set of dynamics that is detrimental to group cohesion and productivity.

This discussion only illustrates the type of dynamics that group members might experience in their interactions as they stumble into a vicious cycle. As process researchers have noted (e.g., Mohr, 1982), there are several different ways by which end states can be reached. Consequently, in articulat-

Proposition 3: Absence of voice and exit mechanisms increases the likelihood of initiating a vicious cycle.

What initiates a divergence of perceptions? Culbert (1970) argues that group members must first explore what integrates them before they can be comfortable exploring what divides them. In other words, group members are more likely to perceive their differences to be a threat if their interactions are initially anchored on differences in value systems rather than differences in skills. In the absence of voice, a vicious cycle is more likely to be initiated if a group initially directs its attention on value differences in the institutional arena, while ignoring the benefits of their interdependence in the technical arena.

Proposition 4: A vicious cycle is more likely to be initiated if a group’s interactions are initially anchored on differences in value systems rather than differences in skills.

In contrast, group members are more likely to see the benefits of collaborating with one another if their interactions are anchored on diversity in the technical arena. A recognition of the benefits of collaborating with one another creates a context in which members can institute voice mechanisms that allow them to explore differences and create similarities in the institutional arena. Moreover, voice helps members develop a sense of the worth of their own skills in relation to those offered by others and the whole. Such an appreciation alleviates feelings of inequity that arise when experts from different professions come together. Moreover, the goodwill that prevails during these initial stages, in combination with a recognition of the benefits of interacting with others possessing diverse skills, can create an environment where distrust, while being latent, is muted. To the extent that exit is possible, if voice fails, disgruntled members leave the group, thereby reducing partial
Discussion and Implications

Our discussion on workforce diversity began with two questions: Which facets of diversity lead to cohesion and productivity? and, What are the dynamics that unfold from diversity? Our subsequent discussion reflects the complexity surrounding workforce diversity dynamics, wherein several mechanisms interactively drive groups in different directions. Indeed, this interactive complexity creates a system where groups might unintentionally initiate vicious or virtuous cycles.

Exploring these cycles, Masuch (1985) noted: “Vicious cycles lead an absurd existence since everyone should avoid deviation-amplifying feedback. Yet, once caught in a vicious cycle, human actors continue on a path of action that leads further and further away from the desired state of affairs” (pp. 22-23). Similarly, referring to such vicious cycles, Kantor (1977b) observed: “It is hard for a person to break out of the cycle once begun” and that these “self-perpetuating, self-sealing systems . . . can be broken only from [the] outside” (p. 249). It is for this reason that external intervention is required to break a vicious cycle.

Interventions

Although external intervention is required to break a vicious cycle, managers frequently intervene with solutions that exacerbate the problem they are supposed to alleviate. This is because these interventions essentially are one-shot attempts to adjudicate between group disputes and to impose solutions—what we label as variance interventions. These are interventions that dictate end outcomes to be accomplished without specifying the means by which such outcomes might be realized. In contrast, process interventions are attempts to shape the unfolding dynamics by influencing the underlying forces that drive the process. In other words, process interventionists appreciate that sometimes the means to accomplish end outcomes are as important, if
not more so, as the outcomes themselves. Often, those caught up in a vicious cycle are unable to identify and implement the means to change their end outcomes.

Weick (1979) offers one perspective as to why managers frequently intervene with variance solutions to solve a process problem. He stated: "Most managers get into trouble because they forget to think in circles. Managerial problems persist because managers continue to believe that there are such things as unilateral causation, independent and dependent variables, origins, and terminations" (p. 86). Indeed, this variance problem is exacerbated in the context of diversity, a term that seduces us to think in variance terms. In its rawest form, diversity is manifest primarily in the form of statistics that are most amenable to capture similarities and dissimilarities that we look for. Yet the outcomes of interactions between heterogeneous people only emerge through complex processes.

Affirmative action illustrates a variance intervention used to address a process problem, viewed in the form of statistical imbalances in the workforce. Affirmative action in hiring or, at best, in promotions provides opportunity for entry but little else. Managers institute an affirmative action program and then await its results (Thomas, 1992). The reason that such initiatives can be undone, according to Thomas, is that affirmative action programs are artificial, whereas challenges from diversity require continuous attention and effort. To handle the vicious cycle of statistical imbalances, managerial interventions must be processual. By this we mean process tools are necessary for addressing the challenges groups might encounter as group dynamics unfold. Accordingly, attention to managing diversity requires opportunities for training and skill development and for growth and experience that will position a minority member on the fast track. These changes are not possible without a change in the attitude of people and the promotion of a culture that appreciates diversity. In their current form, interventions such as affirmative action programs can lead to a perception of reverse discrimination, fueling the vicious cycle between inequity, distrust, and conflictual behavior.

Weick (1979) provides an example of a process intervention that can be used to break a vicious cycle once it has already taken hold. Recognizing that vicious cycles are created by the presence of a number of variables interacting closely with one another (a facet that Perrow [1984] labels as representing interactive complexity), Weick suggests that these variables should be decoupled. By doing this, the interactive complexity that creates vicious cycles is alleviated, rendering the system more manageable. For instance,
nal intervention might help the group articulate a common value system that binds their future task activities.

Implications for Research

To conduct research that explores processual aspects of diversity, we recommend a design that is inductive and flexible, in order to benefit from the learning that occurs through observation. Our model and its associated vocabulary are only valuable in initiating the research. We recommend such a research design because process research must be able to capture dynamics as they unfold. As data on several groups are accumulated, theory must be shaped even as it is tested provisionally—a process that Glaser and Strauss (1967) label as analytic induction (see also Platt's [1964] work on strong inference). Over time, as evidence on different groups accumulates, it will be possible to tease out differences in dynamics that distinguish groups that are cohesive and productive from those that are fractious and unproductive.

This research design implies the following concrete steps. First, it is important to adopt a longitudinal approach. Following Poole's (1983) work, the researcher should be able to track mechanisms that increase or decrease diversity in the technical and institutional arenas and examine the effect of these changes on cohesion and productivity. Second, the researcher needs to examine whether the developmental patterns that constitute virtuous cycles differ from those that constitute vicious cycles. To accomplish this objective, the researcher needs to track the constructs that we have offered in this paper. These constructs include the presence or absence (and type) of voice and exit. Tracking affect and cognition will require periodic self-reports from group members based on a questionnaire given to them. Such a questionnaire, by its very nature, will be intrusive, as it will serve to sensitize group members to certain issues.

The most intrusive approach will be to engage in action science (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985). This is an approach that is essential for understanding the effect of managerial intervention on diversity dynamics. We maintain that process interventions are required to address process problems, and that variance interventions might exacerbate the very problems that they are designed to alleviate. Action-science research will be able to address this.

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Conclusion

The metaphor of the melting pot has frequently been used to evoke positive images about environments that foster diversity. However, implicit in the use of this metaphor is an inadequate appreciation of the vicious facets associated with diversity when one group tries to assimilate another. As Kihlborn (1990) suggests, assimilation represents the domination of one culture over others, not the melting of many. Indeed, this very assimilation process can polarize different social groups and harm productivity, thereby detracting from a group's ability to harness the benefits from diversity (Gottfredson, 1992).

Recognizing this weakness in the melting pot metaphor, Gottfredson (1992) suggests a salad as a metaphor that captures both the benefits and challenges of diversity. The salad, as a metaphor, is more appropriate than the melting pot because a salad preserves the diversity and integrity of its ingredients. At the same time, the appeal of a salad is enhanced or diminished by how it is mixed. It is precisely this processual aspect that lends diversity its allure. Whether or not a group benefits from diversity depends upon the processes that unfold.

References


Selected Research on Work Team Diversity


Directions for Further Research

Marian N. Ruderman
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The papers in this book add to a small but growing field of research on diverse teams. They contribute to the literature by providing systematic ways of looking at the dynamics of diversity in the context of work teams. When we issued the call for papers, we hoped to locate studies that would identify the causes and processes that explain and predict the benefits and liabilities of diversity within work teams. What we found were studies that demonstrated small, and usually dysfunctional, effects of diversity. Evidence of the benefits of diversity appears to be scarce.

One explanation for the lack of positive consequences associated with diversity is that the field studies were carried out in organizations in which diversity was not actively managed. None of the organizations studied prepared their teams to deal with their own diversity. The teams studied often were functioning in the context of a single dominant culture, receiving little support for accessing the diverse perspectives of members. It takes more than simply putting a diverse group together to realize the benefits of diversity (Cox, 1993). Future research needs to take differences in organizational support for diversity into account.

A related area for further research is to look at interventions for reducing the feelings of discomfort associated with diversity. Progress has been made in the laboratory in this regard (Brewer, 1995) and there are examples of successful interventions from the field (Armstrong & Cole, 1995; Katz & Miller, 1993). Nevertheless, we have little systematic knowledge about the principles of successful intervention. Additional research in organizational settings is necessary to understand how to reduce these dysfunctional reactions to diversity. Toward this end, Raghuram and Gauri suggest mechanisms that might be of use in enhancing group process in diverse groups.

Some of the papers in this book provide guidance for the leaders of diverse teams. The work of James, Chen, and Cropanzano; Mayo, Meindl, and Pastor; and Gelfand, Kuhn, and Radhakrishnan suggests that looking at diverse teams from the leader's perspective is a fruitful area for research. These papers further suggest that managers can do well by taking the values of their direct reports into account when communicating and designing