Diversity in goal orientation, team reflexivity, and team performance

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ABSTRACT

Although recent research highlights the role of team member goal orientation in team functioning, research has neglected the effects of diversity in goal orientation. In a laboratory study with groups working on a problem-solving task, we show that diversity in learning and performance orientation are related to decreased group performance. Moreover, we find that the effect of diversity in learning orientation is mediated by group information elaboration and the effect of diversity in performance orientation by group efficiency. In addition, we demonstrate that team reflexivity can counteract the negative effects of diversity in goal orientation. These results suggest that models of goal orientation in groups should incorporate the effects of diversity in goal orientation.

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Introduction

Much of the behavior at work is goal-directed. Accordingly, differences in goal orientation – preferred goals in achievement situations (Dweck, 1986; Dweck & Leggett, 1988) – have been shown to exert a powerful influence on individual behavior and performance at work (e.g., Payne, Youngcourt, & Beaubien, 2007; Porath & Bateman, 2006). Given that teams and workgroups are often the primary unit of organization (DeShon, Kozlowski, Schmidt, Milner, & Wiechmann, 2004; Kozlowski & Bell, 2003) and the abundant evidence for the influence of goal orientation at the individual level, the question arises how goal orientation plays out in a group context. Only recently researchers set foot in this underdeveloped area (LePine, 2005; Porter, 2005), showing that mean levels of goal orientation affect group member attitudes and behavior. However, the shift from the individual level of analysis to goal orientation as a factor in team composition introduces another dimension yet unexplored in goal orientation research – diversity in goal orientation (i.e., differences between team members in goal orientation). In view of the evidence that diversity on a host of dimensions affects group process and performance (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998), it is important for our understanding of goal orientation in teams to also study the influence of goal orientation diversity. Moreover, in view of the evidence that main effects are unable to capture the effects of team diversity (van Knippenberg &

Schippers, 2007), we develop our analysis of diversity in goal orientations so that we are able to identify a moderator of its influence – team reflexivity (West, 1996).

Thus, we contribute to the literature in several important ways. Our main contribution lies in the demonstration of the importance of goal orientation diversity for team performance. We, thereby, further develop the goal orientation framework as well as extend research in diversity in at least two ways. By integrating insights from research in socially shared cognition with more traditional perspectives on diversity we extend research in diversity conceptually (cf. van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Furthermore, our findings suggest that diversity in individual differences more proximal to behavior in achievement settings may be more influential than the personality factors most often studied in this area (i.e., the Big Five; Bell, 2007). Finally, by identifying team reflexivity as a moderator of the relationships between goal orientation diversity and group performance we both substantiate the shared cognition perspective underlying our analysis and point to a moderator variable that provides clear opportunities for the management of goal orientation diversity.

Goal orientation

Goal orientation is a predisposition to adopt and pursue certain goals in achievement contexts (Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Payne et al., 2007; VandeWalle, 1997). In this respect, a distinction is made between learning orientation and performance orientation (Dweck, 1986). Learning and performance orientation differ in the standards used to evaluate competence. Learning orientation

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makes use of an absolute or intrapersonal standard (i.e., improve own past performance) and performance orientation draws on normative comparisons (i.e., outperform others; Elliot & McGregor, 2001; Elliot & Murayama, 2008). Goal orientation is mostly seen as a relatively stable trait that may be influenced by situational characteristics (Button, Mathieu, & Zajac, 1996; Murayama & Elliot, 2009). Although learning and performance orientation were originally seen as opposing poles (Dweck, 1986), researchers have argued that individuals often have multiple competing goals (Button et al., 1996). Indeed, research has shown that learning orientation and performance orientation are best portrayed as separate and largely independent dimensions[1] (Button et al., 1996; Payne et al., 2007). Thus, people can be high (or low) in both learning and performance orientation.

Goal orientation has received a tremendous amount of attention of researchers at the individual level (Payne et al., 2007), but research has only recently started to explore effects of team composition in goal orientation on team functioning. Studies have shown that mean levels (i.e., the average of individual members' goal orientation) of both learning and performance orientation are related to team functioning as evident in relationships with such concepts as team efficacy, backing-up behavior, team commitment, and team adaptation (LePine, 2005; Porter, 2005). However, these studies of mean level effects were unable to establish a relationship between team composition in goal orientation and team performance.

Previous studies of goal orientation in teams have essentially extrapolated hypotheses at the individual level to the team level, taking mean goal orientation as the team-level analogue of individual goal orientation. While the rationale for this approach is clear and supported by both research in goal orientation (DeShon et al., 2004) and research in individual differences in teams more generally (Barrick, Stewart, Neubert, & Mount, 1998; Bell, 2007), a focus on goal orientation in teams also introduces a dimension that has no analogue at the individual level of analysis: differences in goal orientation between team members – goal orientation diversity. The effects of diversity in goal orientation have been disregarded so far. In sharp contrast with this lack of attention, there is an abundance of evidence that diversity on a variety of dimensions ranging from demographic to individual differences may affect group process and performance (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). This literature, especially in combination with literature on sharedness and diversity in group members' task representations and task mental models, clearly hints at the possibility that diversity in goal orientation influences group performance (Marks, Zaccaro, & Mathieu, 2000; Mohammed & Ringseis, 2001; van Ginkel, Tindale, & van Knippenberg, 2009). This suggests that to develop our understanding of the role of team composition in goal orientation, we need to pay attention to goal orientation diversity. As noted in the previous, trait learning and performance orientation are best portrayed as independent dimensions instead of as opposing poles. Accordingly, the study of diversity in trait goal orientation revolves around diversity in each dimension of goal orientation.

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[1] Goal orientation research has also adopted a subdivision between performance prove and performance avoid orientation – the former reflecting the disposition to prove one's competence, the latter reflecting the disposition to avoid displaying incompetence (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996; VandeWalle, 1997). As different goal orientations are orthogonal, however, they can be studied without necessarily incorporating all dimensions (cf. Bunderson & Sutcliffe, 2003). Consistent with the original formulation of goal orientation theory (Dweck, 1986) and with previous research on team composition in goal orientation that was the direct inspiration for the current study (LePine, 2005; Porter, 2005), we focused the present analysis on the primary distinction between learning and performance orientation (an issue we revisit in "Discussion").

Diversity in goal orientation

Diversity in goal orientation may be classified as concerning deep-level diversity (e.g., personality and individual differences, attitudes and values; Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). One of the major perspectives within the diversity literature, the social categorization perspective, sees diversity as a potential source of 'us vs. them' distinctions, where dissimilar others are categorized as 'outgroup'. This may disrupt group process and performance. While such categorizations are not limited to demographic categories, they are more likely for categories for which individuals hold well-developed stereotypes (Fiske, 1998), which is a condition that would seem highly unlikely to hold for deep-level differences in goal orientation. The social categorization perspective thus seems less suited to understand the influence of goal orientation diversity.

The similarity/attraction perspective holds that individuals are more attracted to similar others. As a consequence, people in teams are more willing to collaborate with others similar to themselves and as a result interact more smoothly with these others, rendering homogeneity more conducive to group performance than diversity. The similarity/attraction perspective should readily apply to deep-level similarities and differences (Byrne, 1971), which suggests that diversity in goal orientation disrupts group performance by reducing the quality of team member interaction (i.e., communication and coordination). This prediction is well aligned with findings of positive relationships between deep-level similarity and communication and interaction in teams (Harrison et al., 1998; Mohammed & Angell, 2003).

The information/decision making perspective, in contrast, points to the potentially positive effects of diversity. Starting point for this perspective is the notion that differences between team members may be associated with valuable task-relevant differences in knowledge, expertise, and perspectives, which may expand the available information in diverse teams. While such differences in task-relevant knowledge are unlikely to be limited to functional dimensions of diversity (van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004), they may be less prevalent for deep-level diversity and accordingly may only play a relatively modest role in the effects of goal orientation diversity. Moreover, a more recent integration of the different perspectives on diversity (van Knippenberg et al., 2004) suggests that social categorization and similarity/attraction processes may disrupt elaboration (i.e., exchange and integration) of diverse information and perspectives. This suggests that similarity/attraction processes associated with goal orientation diversity would render it less likely that groups would benefit from any task-relevant insights associated with diversity in goal orientation.

The social categorization, similarity/attraction, and information/decision making perspectives are the main perspectives on work group diversity and performance (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Yet, there is another perspective on deep-level diversity in particular that is typically not recognized as a perspective on diversity (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007): the socially shared cognition perspective. Interestingly and importantly, we propose that this perspective is the most relevant to understand the influence of goal orientation diversity. Research in socially shared cognition puts group members' mental representation of the task and the team center-stage in understanding team performance (DeChurch & Mesmer-Magnus, 2010; Marks et al., 2000; Mathieu, Heffner, Goodwin, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers, 2000; Mohammed, Ferzandi, & Hamilton, 2010; van Ginkel & van Knippenberg, 2008). Guiding principle here is the proposition that members' mental representations of the task and the team guide team member behavior in group interaction and group task performance. Task representations (Newell &