Preface

When team members' values differ: The moderating role of team leadership

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ABSTRACT

Integrating theory and research on values, diversity, situational strength, and team leadership, we proposed that team leadership moderates the effects of values diversity on team conflict. In a longitudinal survey study of national service teams, we found significant, but opposite, moderating effects of task-focused and person-focused leadership. As predicted, task-focused leadership attenuated the diversity–conflict relationship, while person-focused leadership exacerbated the diversity–conflict relationship. More specifically, task-focused leadership decreased the relationship between work ethic diversity and team conflict. Person-focused leadership increased the relationship between traditionalism diversity and team conflict. Team conflict mediated the effects of the interactions of leadership and values diversity on team effectiveness.

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Introduction

In recent decades, as the workplace has grown increasingly diverse and the use of work teams has grown increasingly common, numerous scholars have investigated the effects of team diversity on team processes and performance (for reviews see Jackson, Joshi, & Erhardt, 2003; Mannix & Neale, 2005; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Relatively few consistent findings have emerged from this research. Rather, the effects of team diversity on team outcomes, and even the effects of specific types of team diversity on team outcomes, vary considerably from study to study (e.g., Bell, 2007; van Knippenberg, de Dreu, & Homan, 2004; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). To make sense of the array of findings, reviewers of the literature have called for: (a) greater care in conceptualizing, and differentiating among, types of diversity (e.g., Harrison & Klein, 2007; McGrath, Berdahl, & Arrow, 1995); (b) greater attention to the diversity of deep-level team member attributes, such as values and attitudes (e.g., Dose & Klimoski, 1999; Harrison, Price, Gavin, & Florey, 2002; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007); and (c) further exploration of the processes and contextual factors that may mediate and moderate, respectively, the effects of diversity on team outcomes (e.g., Joshi & Roh, 2007, 2008; van Knippenberg et al., 2004; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Heeding these calls, we investigated the effects of team values diversity – a form of deep-level team diversity – on team effectiveness, hypothesizing that team conflict mediates and team leadership moderates the effects of team values diversity on team effectiveness.

Values are foundational for human behavior and identity (Dose, 1999). They are "generalized, enduring beliefs about the personal and social desirability of modes of conduct or 'end-states' of existence" (Kabanoff, Waldersee, & Cohen, 1995, p. 1076). They guide individuals in deciding how they "'should' or 'ought' to behave" (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998, p. 354) and "convey what is important to us in our lives" (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003, p. 120). Team members whose values differ markedly may thus hold different assumptions and expectations about one another's behavior, making it difficult to achieve consensus and to collaborate and coordinate with one another (Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Kirkman & Shapiro, 2005). In short, team conflict may increase, and team effectiveness decrease, as a consequence of team values diversity.

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Despite the central role that values play across multiple facets of individuals' lives, few researchers have investigated the effects of values diversity on team effectiveness and the team-level processes that may mediate such effects. Fewer still have examined the contextual factors that may moderate the effects of values diversity on team outcomes. Contextual factors are critical, we argue, shaping the strength of the situation (Meyer, Dalal, & Hermida, 2010; Mischel, 1973, 2004) and thus the extent to which individual differences, such as individual values, guide and predict individual behavior within a situation or setting (Bardi & Schwartz, 2003). One likely determinant of the strength of a team setting, and a focus of our research, is the team leader's behavioral style.

Building on the fundamentals of leadership theory and research (e.g., Fleishman, 1953; House, 1971), we argue that leaders who are high in task-focused leadership create a strong situation that restricts team members from expressing their individual values, and lessens the extent to which values diversity yields team conflict. Leaders who are high in person-focused leadership, in contrast, legitimize individual team members' perspectives, creating a weaker team situation that frees the expression of team members' values and increases the likelihood that team values diversity begets team conflict. Because team conflict may impair team effectiveness (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003), the interactive effects of team leadership and team values diversity may have important consequences not only for team conflict, but for team effectiveness as well. We thus propose a mediated-moderation model, in which team conflict mediates the effect of the interaction of values diversity and team leadership on team effectiveness.

Our research contributes to the literature in four key ways. First, we move beyond demographic diversity to examine the effects of values diversity in teams. Little studied in prior research, values diversity may divide a team, fostering team conflict and inhibiting team effectiveness, our results suggest. Second, we highlight the complex and nuanced nature of team values diversity. Our findings illustrate that the effects of team values diversity on team effectiveness are mediated by team conflict and depend not only on specific team leader behaviors but also on the specific values that separate team members. Third, we contribute to a nascent body of research examining the moderating effects of team leadership on the diversity–team effectiveness relationship, proposing and documenting that leader behaviors may either exacerbate or attenuate the detrimental effects of values diversity in teams. And fourth, our findings stimulate new questions and ideas for theory-building and research on team diversity.

Team values diversity and team conflict

To situate the study of team values diversity within the larger team diversity literature, we draw on McGrath et al.'s (1995) typology. McGrath et al. distinguished four types of deep-level diversity: diversity (1) of task-related knowledge, skills, and abilities; (2) of values, beliefs, and attitudes; (3) of personality and cognitive and behavioral styles; and (4) of group and/or organizational status. Whereas diversity of task-related knowledge, skills and abilities may enhance a team's creativity (van Knippenberg et al., 2004), and status diversity may lead to power inequities (Harrison & Klein, 2007), diversity of values may affect "the level of attraction and respect among members, ease of communication, and degree of overt conflict in the group" (McGrath et al., 1995, p. 25). Unless team members' values are associated with team members' task-related knowledge, skills, and abilities, the primary consequences of team values diversity are likely to be negative; team values diversity leads to tension and conflict and thus poor coordination

within a team (Jehn, Chadwick, & Thatcher, 1997; Jehn & Mannix, 2001).[1]

An interrelated set of theoretical arguments – each of which suggests that differences make it difficult to anticipate others' actions and coordinate behavior – lends credence to the argument that team values diversity is positively related to team conflict. Similarity-attraction theory suggests that team members who share similar values are likely to find it easy to collaborate with one another (Byrne, 1971; Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999). According to Byrne (1971), people feel pleasure when they interact with others who hold similar values, opinions, and beliefs. Team members may, conversely, find it unpleasant to interact with others with markedly different values. Social categorization and social identity theories (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggest that people use cognitive categories to distinguish themselves and similar others (the in-group) from dissimilar others (the out-group). In a team whose members' values are deeply divided, team members may fail to develop a shared team identity and sense of belonging. Instead, they may identify with their in-group, united in their opposition to the out-group whose members' values counter their own (Gaertner, Dovidio, Nier, Ward, & Banker, 1999). And, finally, cognitive information processing models suggest that people whose values are similar interpret events similarly (Meglino & Ravlin, 1998). Shared interpretations and priorities enhance people's ability to understand and anticipate one another's behavior, reducing uncertainty and cognitive strain. Interactions between team members whose work-related values differ substantially may thus be confusing, stressful, and disjointed.

Despite the clarity, persuasiveness, and intuitive appeal of these theoretical arguments, studies of the effects of values diversity in teams have yielded inconsistent conclusions (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). On the one hand, and in line with the conceptual arguments described above, Jehn and her colleagues (i.e., Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Jehn et al., 1997) found that team values diversity, measured using the Organizational Culture Profile q-sort procedure, was positively related to team conflict. On the other hand, Harrison et al. (2002) did not find a significant relationship between values diversity, measured as the extent to which students believed that their university courses allowed them to fulfill certain values, and team social integration. Kirkman and Shapiro (2005) examined diversity with respect to four different values and found limited and inconsistent effects of team values diversity on team processes and outcomes. One type of values diversity – determinism diversity – was significantly, positively related to members' ratings of team cooperation and of productivity; a second type – doing-orientation diversity – was significantly, negatively related to members' ratings of productivity (Kirkman & Shapiro, 2005). Together, the inconsistent findings regarding the effects of values diversity on team processes and outcomes suggest that further analyses of the effects of values diversity are war-

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[1] In presenting our conceptual framework and hypotheses, we focus on team conflict as a whole – that is, we do not distinguish among task conflict (conflict about the content of the group's work); procedural conflict (conflict about how the group completes its work); and relationship conflict (emotional, interpersonal conflict) (Jehn & Bendersky, 2003). We have made this choice for three reasons. First, values diversity may engender conflict of all three types. Differences in values may, for example, lead team members to disagree: (a) about which tasks are priorities and which goals are reasonable; (b) about who (e.g., low status or high status team members) should do what, when (e.g., how quickly); and/or (c) about styles of work and communication (e.g., team members may see one another as lazy slackers or, conversely, as control-freak over-achievers). Second, the three types of conflict tend to co-occur, as spillover of one types of conflict ignites conflict of another type (Simons & Peterson, 2000). Indeed, measures of the three constructs are typically highly correlated, frequently exceeding .80 (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003), especially when data are aggregated to the team level of analysis (Ostroff, 1993). And, third, the research evidence does not support the prediction of differential effects of task and relationship conflict on performance (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003).