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TITLE: Learning with Differences: Exploring the role of Affective diversity on Team Learning

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ABSTRACT

TITLE: Learning with Differences: Exploring the role of Affective diversity on Team Learning

SUMMARY

In the present context, work teams are being predominate adopted in organization with their underlying merits of diverse skill set and abilities leading to better performance. When talking about team performance, team learning is one of the critical factor that can influence the overall team performance. Team learning requires the active participation of members with adequate information sharing and knowledge transfer, which is largely affected by individual member characteristics. Affective disposition is one such individual trait that can differentially influence the team members leading to affective diversity in a team. Further, the affective dispositions are expressed as positive and negative and are associated with different learning motivations. Hence, this developmental paper makes an attempt to explore the relationship between affective diversity and team learning.

Keywords: Affect Diversity, Affective Heterogeneity, Team learning, Group Affect.

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing emphasis on 'affective revolution' has led researchers and practitioners to appreciate the role of employee affect and its implications on attitude, behavior, and various outcomes in organization (Barsade & Gibson, 2007). Scholars have extensively studied affect at individual level (Kaplan et al., 2009) with scant attention on group affect and its outcomes (Barsade & Knight, 2015).The influence of affect in a group is more complex owing to the distinct traits, values and attitudes of members, thereby, contributing to the affective diversity in the group (Barsade et al., 2000). Affective diversity is defined as, "the configuration of affect across group members that is not shared, nor held in common, by members of a group or team" (Barsade & Knight, 2015: 24). The concept is rooted in the dispositional affectivity as it is an integral part of an individual's personality (Ng & Sorenson, 2009).

Organizations are increasingly relying on work teams to bring in new ideas through shared knowledge and resources (Sundstrom, De Meuse, & Futrell, 1990). Thus, composition of individuals with respective distinctive affective personalities leads to the affective diversity in a team. When we talk about diversity, team diversity plays a crucial role in team learning and performance (Sun, Teh, Ho, & Lin, 2017). Learning refers to the process of acquiring knowledge through experience which further shapes one's behavior (Savelsbergh, van der Heijden, & Poell, 2009).At an individual level, learning comprises of experiences, thinking , involvement and generalizations (Johnson & Thomas,2007) serving as a building block to enrich organizational capacity (Remmen, & Lorentzen,(2000). Learning at a collective level or 'team learning' incorporates frequent communication, knowledge transfer, experimentation, and codifications among the members to gain collective work skills (Gibson & Vermeulen, 2003; Kayes, Kayes & Kolb, 2005).

Studies have examined the effect of diversity at the group level for organizational learning (Driver, 2003) but literature is silent on the influence of affective diversity on team learning. Research has reported the role of dispositional affect (either PA or NA) in predicting attitudes and behavior of employees (Qiu & Scherwin, 2014). Being conceptually rooted in the dispositional affect, affective diversity may follow similar lines. Added to this,, affect, being a deep level diversity characteristic, is likely to influence team compositions, thereby, impacting the team processes and outcomes (Barsade & Knight, 2015).Hence, this paper is an attempt to explore the relationship between affective diversity & team learning.

TEAM LEARNING

Team learning is a critical team behavior that drives the performance of individuals (Cardy, 2002; Edmondson & Nembhard, 2009). For our study, we will be basing our arguments on the definition of team learning as proposed by Van der Vegt & Bunderson (2005) which regards team learning as the "activities by which team members seek to acquire, share, refine, or combine task-relevant knowledge through interaction with one another"(p. 534). According to the review by Williams & O'Reilly (1998), the psychological attributes plays an influential role in shaping the perception of differences among team members and the way team members work together with diverse set of knowledge, skills and abilities. Evident research have reported the relationship between social & psychological characteristics with team learning (Gibson & Vermeulen, 2003; Lau & Murnighan, 2005). Affect being a psychological attribute and expresses as dispositional affectivity (positive & negative) in individuals may influence the team processes. Hence, it would be interesting to examine the role of positive & negative affective diversity on team learning.

AFFECTIVE DIVERSITY & TEAM LEARNING

We would like to root our argument in the theoretical underpinnings of achievement goal motivation as it is imperative for behavior science research with regards to emotions and learning (Elliot, 1999; Elliot & Thrash, 2002). Achievement goal is defined as the objective of getting involved in the task to experience and achieve the pre-defined goal by an individual (Maehr, 1989). On the basis of the definition of competence, various researchers have classified achievement goals into two categories with differing labels such as ego involvement and task involvement (Nicholls, 1984), performance goals and learning goals (Dweck, 1986), performance goal and task mastery goal (Ames & Archer, 1987) and approach-avoidance goals (Elliot, 1999). Various achievement motivation theorists argued that the two different categories of motivation follows a different set of competence with regards to affect, cognition and behavior (Elliot, 1999). Drawing upon this, we can assert that both approach and avoidance motivation can have divergent set of affective competence in individuals that can influence learning in an affective diverse team. For our study, we will follow the approach-avoidance classification of achievement motivation owing to their distinction with respect to valence and the respective behavioral tendencies.

In Approach motivation, the behavior of an individual is directed by the possibility of a positive or a desirable event while in avoidance motivation, the behavior is directed by the possibility of negative or undesirable event (Elliot, 1999). Various studies have reported approach-avoidance motivation as a base for distinct individual differences (Gray, 1994; Carver, 2006) including affective disposition approaches, wherein the positive and negative affect are expression of approach and avoidance temperaments respectively (Elliot & Thrash, 2002). Moreover, we know that the behavior has certain action tendencies which are defined by the personality of an individual (Carver, 2006). Adding to this, in another study, the bipolar dimensions of approach-avoidance were argued to have their own affective experiences generated by their linkages of affective loop with approach or avoidance behavior (Carver and Scheier, 2004). The author's further suggested that the affective expression of approach behavior will range from elation to depression while of avoidance behavior would range from fear to relief to serenity. This is analogous to the expression of affective diversity with regards to trait positive affect and trait negative affect. Extending this finding to a team level, we put forth that learning being a behavior at a team level appears a reasonable gap to examine the relationship of it with affective diversity. Hence, we propose,

Proposition 1: Affective diversity is associated with team learning.

POSITIVE AFFECTIVE DIVERSITY & TEAM LEARNING

Carver et al. (2000) characterizes approach individuals as, "highly engaged in the pursuit of whatever incentives arise" (p. 107). These individuals are expected to act immediately, are excited about opportunities and have an active participation in social events (Gray, 1994a; 1994b).This study can be extended well to an affective diverse group with trait positive affect, which is characterized with high energy, excited and confident individuals Adding to this, research has found that individuals with high dispositional positive affect are likely to have approach motivation (Elliot & Thrash, 2002). Relevant support to this came from the study by Gable (2006) reporting that approach motivated individuals actively access the environment (of all possibilities and opportunities) and effectively carry out their responsibility by interacting with others and gaining varied experiences and opportunities. Moreover, individuals with high dispositional positive affect, the approach motivation were found to have greater incorporation of information, knowledge transfer with better decision making abilities (Levin et al., 2010). Another study reported the association of individual dispositional positive affect with team learning (Qiu &

Scherwin, 2014).At a team level, evident research reported that team members who were high in dispositional positive affect get more involved in team process thereby contributing to greater team learning (D'Zurilla, 2011). Thus, building upon this, we can assert that an affective diverse team with trait positive affect will be driven from approach motivation thereby leading to greater team learning.

Proposition 2a: Positive affective diversity will be positively associated with team learning.

NEGATIVE AFFECTIVE DIVERSITY & TEAM LEARNING

On the other hand, avoidance individuals are one who, are fixed on the possibility of threats or dangers in the environment" (Carver et al., 2000, p. 107). According to broaden and build theory, negative affect narrows the individual's attention (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005), leading to hostile, non-cooperative and less collaborative behavior (Allred, Mallozzi, Matsui, & Raia, 1997; Tiedens, 2001). Various other studies also reported that negative affectivity is negatively related to constructive problem solving and positively related to dysfunctional problem solving (Chang & D'Zurilla, 1996; D'Zurilla et al., 2011; Elliott et al., 1994). This suggests that an affectively diverse group with trait negative affect will witness issues in collaboration, effective problem solving and will avoid active participation. This can relate to the avoidance goal motivation perspective which characterizes the avoidance temperament comprising of neuroticism (Carver et al., 2000; Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991), negative affectivity (Watson, 2000), anxiety and behavioral inhibition (Gray, 1982). The behavior of an avoidance oriented individual is directed by possibility of negative and unpleasant events (Elliot, 1999) and same may be extended in context of an affectively diverse group with trait negative affect. Drawing upon the previous arguments, we can say that a negatively affective diverse group will have team members with negative dispositional affectivity which can narrow the team scope for the available resources and limit attention to available information. This will further lead the team to face issues in coordination and active participation leading to poor team learning. Thus, we propose,

Proposition 2b: Negative affective diversity will be negatively associated with team learning.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

This study intends to adopt a quasi-experimental design to study the relationship between affective diversity and team learning. We plan to use a group learning task for the team to work upon to assess the association of affective diverse team and its influence on team learning.

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