Chapter 2

GARNERING THE BENEFITS OF CONFLICT: THE ROLE OF DIVERSITY AND STATUS DISTANCE IN GROUPS

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ABSTRACT

The ability of groups to benefit from cognitive conflict (that is, differences in information, knowledge, and opinions) can be a critical source of competitive advantage. In this chapter we focus on how diversity and status affect conflict in groups. Despite an evolution of more nuanced approaches to the study of the effects of diversity on conflict, there is still ambiguity in the literature. We first review some of the recent literature on diversity as it relates to conflict and the process of sharing unique information in groups. We then suggest that consideration of the status distance among group members may further clarify these investigations. We argue that the characteristics that contribute to diversity are often imbued with different status cues, leading group members to differentially value their members and their contributions. We discuss and consider the implications of status distance for leveraging the benefits of cognitive conflict and capturing the unique perspectives that any group member holds in a group.

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly, organizations use groups to bring together individuals who have differing knowledge, information, and perspectives (for example, Schneider and Northcraft, 1999). This effort is based on the belief that the sharing of unique perspectives creates the potential for groups to create new ideas and solutions that no

one group member could have created on his or her own. However, the process of integrating this differing knowledge can result in increased disagreement and conflict. The conflict literature has recognized that not all types of conflict are created equal. Functional or cognitive conflict captures a group's willingness to discuss the pros and cons of alternatives, consider multiple viewpoints and perspectives, or question the evidence used to make decisions (Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1995). This cognitive conflict can be beneficial to group decision making on nonroutine tasks when it is distinguished from dysfunctional or relationship conflict, which can undermine group performance (see chapter 1, this volume).

In any given group, cognitive conflict can become intertwined with relationship conflict (Simons and Peterson, 2000) and prevent groups from benefiting from the unique perspectives present. The challenge that managers face is to create a context in which the explicit elaboration of unique information, knowledge, and opinions allows each group member's perspectives to be heard and integrated into the group discussion without jeopardizing the social integrity of the group (Van Knippenberg, De Dreu, and Homans, 2004). The presence of different information, opinions, and viewpoints in and of itself is not enough to engender benefits for group performance. For real benefits to accrue, group members must be willing to elaborate on the information and opinions they possess and integrate those varying viewpoints during the discussion. Throughout this chapter, as we discuss cognitive conflict, we couple it with the process of information elaboration (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004), and we believe cognitive conflict can only be functional when group members are willing to state, consider, and integrate the multiple perspectives present into the group discussion.

To get differing perspectives on the table in the first place, managers often begin by creating diverse groups. According to Williams and O'Reilly (1998), diversity exists in a group when individuals use any number of different attributes to tell themselves that another member is different (p. 81). Thus diversity can come in many different forms. There are major distinctions between informational diversity (which captures the extent to which a group is characterized by individuals who bring differing information, opinions, and perspectives to the group) and social-category diversity such as differences in race/ethnicity, gender, or country of origin (Jehn, Northcraft, and Neale, 1999). Social-category diversity is often used as a proxy for the informational diversity that is sought. This practice is based on the belief that people representing different social groups will bring differing information and perspectives to the table (Phillips, 2003) and thus again foster beneficial cognitive conflict for the group. Capturing these theoretical benefits of social-category diversity is easier said than done.

Traditionally, researchers have used social-categorization theory and the similarity/attraction paradigm to argue that in groups having social-category diversity, the knowledge exchange process is thwarted by intergroup rivalries (see Williams and O'Reilly, 1998, for review). Social-category diversity leads to greater relationship conflict in groups (Pelled, Eisenhardt, and Xin, 1999), decreased communication

(Zenger and Lawrence, 1989; Hoffman, 1985), greater stereotyping, and discrimination in some cases (Stephan and Stephan, 1985). We suggest that an additional layer of complexity permeates interactions in groups with social-category diversity—one in which the social categories represented diverge in the status they are afforded and consequently affect the way in which unique knowledge contributions are offered to and perceived by the group. We argue that imposing a status-distance lens in considering the interactions within groups with social-category diversity may be helpful for researchers and managers alike as we look for additional levers and tools that will allow for the management of these complex group task environments.

Here we use a diversity lens to review and integrate the research on information sharing and conflict. These three bodies of work—group diversity, information sharing, and conflict—have generally developed separately, yet important connections between them may lend unique insight into understanding the role of conflict in groups. We also introduce a missing factor, that of status, and develop the concept of status distance as one that is determined by group, organizational, and societal factors. We consider how status distance affects the amount of cognitive and relationship conflict in groups. In doing so, we limit our discussions to groups that are characterized by some level of social category and presumably informational diversity. We develop specific propositions about how the status distance between members of groups will affect the type and level of conflict experienced and how that is likely to affect subsequent performance and interactions within small decision-making groups.

RECENT INSIGHTS ON DIVERSITY, CONFLICT, AND INFORMATION SHARING IN GROUPS

In general, diversity research has often yielded inconsistent results. On the one hand, diversity tends to trigger these social categorization and similarity/attraction processes that can hinder communication, decrease group cohesiveness, and lead to higher levels of dysfunctional conflict, making it difficult for groups to benefit from their differences in perspective (for example, Ely and Thomas, 2001; Jackson, Joshi, and Erhardt, 2003; Pelled et al., 1999; for extensive reviews see Williams and O'Reilly, 1998; Milliken and Martins, 1996). On the other hand, diversity has the potential of benefiting group performance (especially when creativity or nonroutine tasks are involved) because of the breadth of knowledge and perspectives thought to accompany diversity. According to this perspective, called the information/decision-making perspective by Williams and O'Reilly (1998), diverse groups have a larger pool of resources, and because they need to reconcile conflicting viewpoints they may process task-relevant information more thoroughly and generate more creative and innovative ideas and solutions (Ancona and Caldwell, 1992; Bantel and Jackson, 1989; De Dreu and West, 2001; Sommers, 2006). Some studies have indeed found that informational diversity can increase cognitive conflict (Jehn et al., 1999; Pelled et al.,

1999) and improve performance and innovation (Bantel and Jackson, 1989; Cox, Lobel, and McLeod, 1991; Jehn et al., 1999; Pelled et al., 1999).

According to Williams and O'Reilly (1998) and other reviews of the literature (for example, Jackson et al., 2003; Milliken and Martins, 1996) the one source of diversity that has most often yielded positive effects on group performance outcomes is functional background, typically thought of as a form of informational diversity. The overall evidence suggests that although functional diversity, in which group members represent different functional groups in the organization, can lead to lower cohesion (Ancona and Caldwell, 1992), the knowledge, perspective, and informational differences that accompany functional-background diversity generally benefit the performance of such teams. In this case, the differences in functional background are often accompanied by the promise of task-relevant knowledge, perspectives, and informational differences that then benefit the group through the cognitive conflict that is generated (Jehn et al., 1999; Pelled et al., 1999). However, differences in functional background can also trigger social categorization effects with people responding negatively to members from other functional backgrounds. The terminology differences, differences in priorities, and differences in perspective in functionally diverse groups may make it difficult for their members to communicate and build cohesion, and these differences can lead to detrimental relationship conflict as well. In fact, for many groups the distinction between cognitive conflict and relationship conflict is difficult to isolate (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003), so functionally diverse groups could theoretically be even more prone to problems than groups whose diversity falls along other dimensions.

However, there are several reasons why functional background (which is also a social category) might more consistently lead to beneficial cognitive conflict for a group than other types of social-category diversity (that is, explicit differences in social-category membership such as race/ethnicity, gender, and country of origin) (Jehn et al., 1999; Pelled et al., 1999). In this chapter, we use these functionally diverse groups as a model to develop a better understanding of the moderators that might contribute to the success of teams that have social-category diversity. In other words, why are functionally diverse groups able to benefit from their informational differences even though functional diversity may also trigger social-categorization processes that can be detrimental for the group? What factors might allow groups that have other types of social-category diversity to benefit from the knowledge and perspective differences that they, too, might possess?

THE EXAMPLE OF FUNCTIONALLY DIVERSE GROUPS

First, functionally diverse groups often benefit from *congruence,* or an explicit alignment between their social-category distinctions and task-relevant information that other types of diversity may be less likely to engender. Congruence occurs when group members' expectations about who will agree with or support whom

during the group discussion are actually met (Phillips, 2003; Phillips, Mannix, Neale, and Gruenfeld, 2004; Phillips and Loyd, 2006). Individuals expect socially similar others to agree with them more on task-relevant and task-irrelevant issues than socially dissimilar others (for example, Allen and Wilder, 1979; Chen and Kenrick, 2002; Phillips, 2003; Phillips and Loyd, 2006; Phillips et al., 2004). Because group members expect differences in knowledge or opinion to emerge from individuals who are socially dissimilar, they are more likely to give consideration to the unique perspectives put forth by such individuals than to those contributed by socially similar individuals (Phillips, 2003; Thomas-Hunt, Ogden, and Neale, 2003). For instance, in a group composed of two engineers and a marketing person, the two engineers are expected to agree with one another during the task discussion, and the marketing person is expected to have a different perspective. When the congruence is maintained—the engineers contribute similar information and the marketing person contributes different information—group members are best able to focus on the task and to benefit from their differences in perspective (Phillips, 2003; Phillips et al., 2004). Furthermore, group members are more likely to elaborate on other members' task-relevant information (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004) as they each understand the importance of their contribution to the group setting. Consequently, it is not surprising that functionally diverse groups most easily leverage their cognitive diversity, because there is an expectation that each member will contribute his or her particular identifiable area of expertise (Stasser, Stewart, and Wittenbaum, 1995).

These expectations of agreement are also relevant in groups in which the social-category differences appear to be irrelevant for the task at hand (Phillips, 2003). Phillips (2003) highlighted the social category of geographic location instead of functional background and found that even when this salient social category was irrelevant for the decision to be made, groups benefited more from different perspectives about the task (that is, different individual opinions about the best decision) when the unique perspectives came from people who were socially different from, instead of similar to, the others in the group (that is, when congruence was maintained). This work suggests that both functionally diverse groups and those characterized by less task-relevant social distinctions can benefit more from their underlying informational diversity when people who seem explicitly different from one another in social category actually fulfill expectations and express knowledge, perspectives, and information that are indeed different from the knowledge, perspectives, and information of others (also see Phillips et al., 2004, and Thomas-Hunt et al., 2003, for further evidence for the benefits of congruence).

BALANCE THEORY AND DIVERSITY

The theoretical basis of this empirical research is grounded in Heider's (1958) balance theory, which argues that people are motivated to maintain their social ties (common

social identity) with similar others and feel the need to reconcile differences of opinion if socially similar others are in disagreement. Group members would rather agree than disagree with socially similar others, so they are likely to adjust their affective and behavioral responses to the group to restore balance between the social and task-relevant differences within the group (Crano and Cooper, 1973; Heider, 1958; Newcomb, 1961). Balance can be restored in a group in two ways. The first way is ultimately detrimental to group outcomes because it involves the suppression of information and opinions in an effort to restore balance and agree with similar others. Increased conformity to socially similar rather than dissimilar others (Asch, 1952; Abrams, Wetherell, Cochrane, Hogg, and Turner, 1990; Phillips and Loyd, 2006) is a robust effect and has been supported by other research on group dynamics such as the work on groupthink (Janis, 1982). In relation to our initial example, if one engineer disagrees with the other engineer in our three-person functionally diverse group, she or he may diminish the importance of the opinion, or question the strength of the opinion, or voice themselves less confidently in an effort to restore expectations and positive feelings toward the similar other (Phillips, 2003; Phillips et al., 2004).

Ironically, Phillips and Loyd (2006) and Phillips, Liljenquist, and Neale (2005) found that when task-relevant differences of opinion are present in a group—because of this same desire to restore balance and regenerate a positive tie with the socially similar other—groups that have some level of social-category diversity may actually outperform those that have no social-category diversity at all (that is, homogeneous groups). Group members are more likely to elaborate on their perspectives in the diverse environments and delve more into the task in an effort to understand the unexpected constellation of agreement and disagreement (Phillips and Loyd, 2006). Moreover, the engineer who experiences the most incongruence (that is, agreement with a dissimilar other and disagreement with a similar other) feels less supported and validated during the group discussion but helps the group work toward a solution that includes all members' information and perspectives (Phillips et al., 2005). This second way of restoring balance increases the discussion of differing information and knowledge instead of suppressing it and benefits group performance when the discussion of that information is critical. This work suggests that social-category diversity (even when it is not explicitly related to the task) can be beneficial for teams in which unique information and opinions need to be shared in the group (also see Antonio, Chang, Hakuta, Kenny, Levin, and Milem, 2004; Sommers, 2006). Recent research by Sommers (2006) shows that racial diversity in jury decision making can be beneficial, as it changes the behavior of those in the majority, allowing them to express perspectives and consider information and alternatives that they otherwise would readily dismiss or ignore in homogeneous settings. Social-category differences trigger expectations that informational and opinion differences may be present in groups and *legitimate* the expression of unique knowledge, perspectives, and information (Phillips, 2003; Phillips and Loyd, 2006; Phillips, Northcraft, and Neale, 2006; Thomas-Hunt et al., 2003; Van Knippenberg et al., 2004; Van Knippenberg

and Haslam, 2003). This work is consistent with past work on ways to remedy conformity pressure and groupthink—by introducing diversity that releases members' loyalties to and need for support from the group members (for example, Turner and Pratkanis, 1994; Turner, Pratkanis, Probasco, and Leve, 1992).

Moreover, this recent research on the effects of diversity on group process and performance—especially considering situations in which group members clearly have unique information and opinions to share with one another—leads to a very different conclusion than past work, which suggested that social-category differences can only be harmful to the group process (for example, less communication and cohesion, more detrimental conflict) and performance. This recent research suggests that, in fact, embracing social-category differences may actually help rather than hinder the performance of groups. Further support of this phenomenon is derived from work that finds that a team culture can reduce the relative consideration given to a social outsider's unique information (Thomas-Hunt, Chow, and Neale, 2005). When individuals are told to primarily see themselves as part of the team rather than as unique contributors, unique contributions may be devalued and potentially even generate disdain for the contributing member, particularly when the contributing member is from a different social category. Ideally, groups will possess a clear common goal or purpose and a belief that the diversity among individual members will be an asset in achieving the stated goal (Van Knippenberg and Haslam, 2003). For functionally diverse groups, compared with groups characterized by other types of social-category differences, this belief may be easier to develop given the nature of the tasks that cross-functional teams work on. In many of these groups, the belief may generally be held that each of the different functional groups is indeed needed to achieve the overall goals of the group. Moreover, it may be easier in functionally diverse groups to identify the nature of each group member's unique contribution given the different functional expertise each member brings.

Thus, part of believing that diversity in the membership of a group will foster beneficial cognitive conflict and be an advantage to group performance hinges on recognizing that individual members' possess unique knowledge that is useful to the group. However, social-category distinctions frequently signal more than simply that members are different from one another. They are frequently laden with expectations that members from certain categories are better than others. So the challenge presented by most other types of social-category diversity in groups (for example, race, gender, age, tenure differences) is not solely driven by the fact that members are different. Instead, it is critically important to consider the fact that many social-category differences, even including functional differences in organizational settings, are assigned value, and members' performance expectations are calculated based on the social categories into which they are grouped. Consequently, the more distance there is between the value imputed to any one group member A's social-category memberships and other group members' social-category memberships, the lower the likelihood that group members will expect and elaborate on useful contributions of knowledge from

member A. It is also likely that diminished expectations of A's contributions will result in fewer contributions from A, as we know that individuals' behavior in groups is largely driven by the expectations that others hold of them (Troyer and Yount, 1997). We refer to the difference in value assigned to members of a group as the level of *status distance* in the group (for similar construals of status distance, see Pearlin and Rosenberg, 1962; Poole, 1927) and argue that the status distance between members often obscures the unique contributions that individuals are poised to make.

A STATUS-DISTANCE LENS

The concept of status distance has its roots in work dating back to Simmel (1908) and Bogardus (1925), who argued that one could measure the social distance between subgroups in society. Social distance focused on the degree to which people were willing to interact with (for example, work with, live near, marry) members of different racial or ethnic groups. It has generally been used to understand whether people will voluntarily interact with individuals who are more distant from them in status (Blau, 1977; McPherson and Smith-Lovin, 1987). Its heavy emphasis on voluntary social interaction instead of instrumental interactions for the purpose of accomplishing a common goal makes it difficult to adopt the concept of status distance wholesale to the small work group setting. However, the concept of tolerated social closeness exacted by social distance has obvious implications for interactions in small groups in which there is social-category diversity.

According to status-characteristics theory, status reflects one's relative standing in a group and determines one's ability to contribute to and be listened to in a task group (Berger, Cohen, and Zelditch, 1972; Berger, Ridgeway, Fisek, and Norman, 1998). Status hierarchies naturally develop in small group settings, and some researchers (for example, Overbeck, Correll, and Park, 2005) have recently argued that a certain level of status sorting must occur in groups for individuals to successfully interact; not all group members can be high status. Most of this work has focused on the differences in value (for example, more or less value) associated with possession of particular characteristics (gender, race, motherhood, physical attractiveness), but it has not empirically considered how the magnitude of difference (that is, the degree of differentiation) in values imparted to members' characteristics affects the interaction pattern in the group. More recently, researchers have found that the degree of difference in value afforded to members' status characteristics affects the amount of influence members exert within groups (Foddy and Smithson, 1996). Therefore, we agree that group members are sorted into a status hierarchy that guides behavior. However, we contend that across diverse groups, the actual status distance between individuals in those groups may vary. That is, two groups that have the same diverse composition may have different levels of status distance. This difference in status distance has essentially been an omitted variable in past diversity studies.

The recent research that finds social-category diversity beneficial to group per-
formance largely considers diversity derived from social categories that are afforded
relatively equivalent levels of status in their environments (Phillips, 2003; Phillips et
al., 2004, study 2). Those examining racial diversity have done so in jury or discus-
sion contexts in which all persons' inputs and opinions about the decision are equal-
ly weighted, which may be one means of reducing status distance (Antonio et al.,
2004; Sommers, 2006). When people see social-category diversity, they assume that
informational diversity will accompany it. Based on this supposition, it follows that
individuals in groups with social-category diversity will be more likely to expect
informational differences to exist and will probe for such differences, integrate them
into the discussion, and potentially make better decisions (Phillips et al., 2005).
Whereas the work does not explicitly discuss status distance, the teams studied reflect
the dynamics of those organizational groups (for example, cross-functional teams)
that are often assembled with the implicit assumption that each representative pos-
sesses knowledge or expertise needed by the team to succeed in attaining its goal. In
these instances, the level of status distance between members may be sufficiently low
to allow them to share unique information and engage in the kind of cognitive con-
flict and elaboration of unique information that leads to improved group perform-
ance. At the same time, the level of status distance may minimize more detrimental
forms of conflict that emerge from misunderstandings about individuals' intentions
(Amason and Schweiger, 1994; De Dreu and Weingart, 2003; Jehn, 1995).

In many instances, groups are assembled and the skills, abilities, and knowledge
base of the membership are not known. Furthermore, even when information is pro-
vided about members' areas of expertise, the value implicitly associated with their
social categories often overshadows members' claims of expertise (Hollingshead and
Fraidin, 2003). Consequently, the same social-category differences that diversity
researchers hope will foster the elaboration of task-relevant information may also be
accompanied by status differences that hinder the exchange and integration of
unique knowledge, perspectives, and information in groups. Clearly these status dif-
ferences may be so detrimental that the benefits of the diversity cannot be garnered.

The long history of work on status expectations in small groups has found that
some social-category differences that are societally imbued with value, such as gen-
der, may influence group knowledge integration processes by affecting the contribu-
tion of unique knowledge and the consideration it receives by other group members
(for example, Berger, Fisek, Norman, and Zelditch, 1977; Ridgeway, 1987;
Thomas-Hunt et al., 2003). Groups vary in the amount of status distance they
afford to the same characteristics. Furthermore, the same characteristics may be
assigned different status values in different contexts for the same group (Pearlin and
Rosenberg, 1962). In most group contexts, men are generally perceived as having
much higher status than women (that is, they are perceived as more competent)
(Ridgeway, 2001), whereas in other contexts, men and women are perceived to be
relatively equal in status (Heilman, Martell, and Simon, 1988; Nieva and Gutek,

1980). In an environment in which men and women are perceived to be equals, a lower status distance among the group members should result in more equal contributions and consideration of all group members' ideas and knowledge. As researchers try to study the influence of status distance on groups, the appropriate measurement tools must be developed. Since status distance is inherently a dynamic concept and is affected by interactions among individuals in groups, it may be important to assess the status distance at multiple times in the life stage of the groups.

DETERMINANTS OF STATUS DISTANCE

We now address the question of how some groups develop greater status distance among their group members than others. When individuals enter task groups, several factors may be used to help signal the status of each individual. We will consider three factors—one's social characteristics, to which societal or organizational worth is attributed; one's relative organizational position, such as manager or subordinate; and one's local task knowledge or well-known expertise about the task. A woman may have less status than a man because of societally conferred status, but there may be a decrease in the status distance between them if she is his boss in the organization. To the extent that organizational and local task sources of status reinforce the societal source of status, the status distance between individuals will increase. So in a group with a male who has superior status and has the expertise, the status distance between the male and female group members will be heightened. The ability of the female group member to contribute unique knowledge, perspectives, and information, thereby influencing the group, will be hindered by the greater status distance (Ridgeway, Johnson, and Diekema, 1994). In contrast, if the initially conferred societal status distinction is not reinforced by organizational and local task status, then the status distance among the groups' members will be diminished (Pugh and Wahrman, 1983). Ideally, when there are cross-cutting sources of status, the expectations held for each member will equalize, allowing the group to benefit from the unique knowledge, perspectives, and information of the full membership.

The status distance present in a group may also be affected by the broader organizational structure and context. For instance, the social-category membership of a group's leader may signal how much that particular characteristic is valued and afford greater status to other members who share that category membership. Organizations with more female leadership, for instance, may garner more valuable contributions from their lower-level female members (compare Ely, 1994). In this case, the status distance between men and women throughout the entire organization may be affected by the presence of women in the upper echelons (for example, Baron, Mittman, and Newman, 1991; Ridgeway, 1988).

We now turn to more explicitly discuss the effect of a group's status distance on its conflict, elaboration of information, and group performance.

STATUS DISTANCE, CONFLICT, AND PERFORMANCE

Our consideration of the impact of status distance on group functioning is largely informed by status characteristics theory. The premise of status characteristics theory is that power and prestige orders within interacting task groups are based on the performance expectations held of individuals (Berger et al., 1972; Berger et al., 1977; Berger, Rosenholtz, and Zelditch, 1980). Within such groups, individuals defer to those members for whom the highest performance expectations are held, giving such individuals more opportunities to participate and influence group decisions. Performance expectations are initiated based on the status of personal characteristics possessed by group members that over time in society have become associated with certain levels of task competence (Berger et al., 1977; Ridgeway, 2001). Status characteristics have been divided into two categories: those that provide *specific cues* (such as math aptitude) or information about task competence on a well-specified domain and those that provide *diffuse cues* (for example, race/ethnicity, age, physical attractiveness, gender) or more generalized information about potential ability or performance across a wide array of activities.

Much of the empirical work grounded in status characteristics theory has focused specifically on how gender affects the way in which individuals are treated within groups. This body of work has found that group members often hold lower performance expectations for women than men (Berger et al., 1980; Lockheed and Hall, 1976; Meeker and Weitzel-O'Neil, 1977) and give women fewer opportunities to participate than men (Meeker and Weitzel-O'Neil, 1985; Ridgeway and Berger, 1986). Furthermore, in our own work we found that both women and men held lower performance expectations for women than for men on a male-typed task and that women with expert knowledge were less influential within their groups than were other women and men (Thomas-Hunt and Phillips, 2004). The lack of influence of women with expert knowledge resulted in the lower performance of groups in which the most expert member was a woman relative to those in which the most expert person was a man.

More generally, when low expectations of performance are held for a collaboration partner, violations of behavioral expectations have a more detrimental effect on the consideration that a partner's ideas are given (Sheldon, Thomas-Hunt, and Proell, in press). Specifically, Sheldon et al. (in press) examined collaboration partners who were perceived to have delayed within a task-related exchange; the researchers found that those partners were only viewed less favorably and exerted less influence within their collaborations when they were perceived as having low status. High-status delayers were actually more influential than high-status nondelayers. These findings suggest that low- and high-status group members are treated differently within groups. When individuals are members of social categories for which low performance expectations are held, they are given fewer opportunities to deviate from the norms, express dissenting perspectives, and influence group outcomes. Consequently,

the lower an individual's status is relative to other group members, the less consideration and elaboration that their contributions will be given. For cognitive conflict to be beneficial to group functioning, group members must be willing to elaborate on the task-relevant knowledge and insights that they possess (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). This elaboration means engaging in discussion with and seriously considering the perspectives of others as a group decision is reached.

So, holding constant the absolute amount of diversity present in groups (that is, the capacity of all of the groups to have cognitive conflict or differences of opinion and perspective arise), it will be important to consider the impact of status distance.

The following propositions summarize the role of status distance in diverse groups.

> **Proposition 1: Diverse groups that have greater status distance among members will experience lower levels of cognitive conflict (that is, task information elaboration) relative to diverse groups that have lower status distance among members.**

Social-role theory posits that individuals adjust their own behaviors according to their understanding of what is expected from them based on their role in society, and status-characteristics theory focuses on the way group members are treated as a function of their status (Eagly, 1987). Bodies of work on both of these theories have focused on the effects of gender on individuals' experiences in task groups, concluding that women and men behave differently (Carli, 1991; Eagly, 1983; Eakins and Eakins, 1978) and are treated differently in interactions (Berger et al., 1977; Carli, 1991; Ridgeway and Diekema, 1989). These differences in behavior may contribute to misattributions of people's intentions and increase dysfunctional conflict in groups. For example, compared to men, women are less likely to interrupt (Argyle, Lalljee, and Cook, 1968; Eakins and Eakins, 1978; Mulac, Wiemann, Widenmann, and Gibson, 1988), are less likely to gain the floor after interrupting (Zimmerman and West, 1975), and are more likely to hedge (Crosby and Nyquist, 1977) and use disclaimers (for example, Hirschman, 1973). Finally, low-status individuals, unlike high-status individuals, do not take full advantage of the structural power that they possess (Proell and Thomas-Hunt, 2005). In an investigation of resource-allocation behavior, women paired with men and individuals who had less experience than their partners retained fewer resources for themselves than women paired with other women, men paired with anyone, or individuals who had more experience than their partners (Proell and Thomas-Hunt, 2005). All of this work suggests that differences in behavioral and interaction norms between high- and low-status members in groups may breed dysfunctional conflicts that detract from knowledge sharing and integration.

Furthermore, within groups in which the status distance is significant, the potential exists for low-status members to withhold contributions that may cause other group members to further question their usefulness to the group. Their lack of engagement and contributions may lead to the perception that lower-status individuals are social loafers and may further the negative attributions about their competence, increasing interpersonal tension within the group. Contributing knowledge, however, may not remedy the perceptions of low-status members, as the lower expectations held for them may lead other members to devalue or ignore their contributions altogether. This response again may frustrate the ignored members and increase all group members' perceptions of relationship conflict within the group. Relationship conflict, defined by Jehn (1995) as conflict in interpersonal relations that are not directly related to the task, is highly correlated with cognitive conflict, which is conflict related to the content of the task itself (De Dreu and Weingart, 2003). The genesis of relationship conflict in task groups may be rooted in this task-related process of knowledge contribution and integration. A lack of respect for the contributions of lower-status individuals is likely to contribute to this problem (see chapter 8 in this volume). This cycle may become a self-fulfilling prophecy that further diminishes the group's ability to benefit from the unique perspectives possessed by all group members. Furthermore, in groups that have higher status distance, the negative social categorization effects that accompany social-category diversity may be even stronger, creating an us-versus-them mentality that is detrimental for relationships among group members.

Proposition 2: Diverse groups that have greater status distance among members will experience higher levels of relationship conflict relative to diverse groups that have lower status distance among members.

In summary, not only may a high status distance contribute to more harmful conflict within a group, but the more beneficial form of cognitive conflict that captures the elaboration of information discussed previously may never emerge. The diminished willingness of low-status members to contribute their knowledge and the dismissal of that which they do contribute reduces the likelihood that groups characterized by high status distance will be confronted with and will consider different perspectives and opinions. A lack of task information elaboration and increased relationship conflict should in turn negatively affect group performance.

Proposition 3: Diverse groups that have greater status distance among members will ultimately perform worse than diverse groups that have lower status distance among members. This status-distance/performance relationship will be mediated by cognitive and relationship conflict.

Moreover, if societal, organizational, and local status expectations reinforce one another, increasing the status distance in the group, the barriers between subgroups are likely to widen (Lau and Murnighan, 1998, 2005). Work on faultlines in diverse groups may be particularly relevant for understanding this phenomenon. As fault-lines grow deeper in diverse groups, they constrain interaction across the subgroups, decrease trust, and make it more difficult for group members to work together. Moreover, group members are less likely to seek each other out for social support, and the benefits of being together in a group will become more and more elusive. Because of this, not only is the effectiveness of the group in jeopardy, but group members' satisfaction and desire to remain a part of the group may also be compromised. Thus, our final proposition is:

> **Proposition 4: Diverse groups that have greater status distance among members will report lower satisfaction and desire by members to remain in the group than will diverse groups that have lower status distance among members.**

CONCLUSION

Thus, the same social-category differences that diversity researchers hope will foster cognitive conflict and the elaboration of task-relevant information may also be accompanied by status differences that reduce the confidence and assertiveness of certain members and hinder the exchange and integration of unique knowledge, perspectives, and information in groups. Status distance captures the extent to which a status hierarchy exists that reinforces a lack of interaction, communication, and cohesion among members from different subgroups. Interaction is promoted by low status distance or by situations in which individuals have more proximate status, and teams should thus be more likely to benefit from the task-relevant differences that may accompany their heterogeneity. An examination of diversity without a consideration of status hierarchies within groups (for example, Berger, Conner, and Fisek, 1974; Blau, 1977; Ridgeway, 1982) inherently fails to capture the true dynamics of such contexts (for example, Chatman and O'Reilly, 2004). Recent research on diversity in groups, like that on self-verification (Polzer, Milton, and Swann, 2002; Swann, Milton, and Polzer, 2000) and the integration-and-learning perspective (Ely and Thomas, 2001), points to possible ways to diminish the status distance among members of diverse groups. The group and organizational contexts are going to be critically important in neutralizing the societally based status expectations that are slow to change. Thus, organizations and managers must work on developing a sense of respect for each individual contributor and the value that each brings to the group (see chapter 8, this volume). This will ultimately allow groups to garner the benefits of cognitive conflict and avoid the misattributions that lead to relationship conflict in groups.

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