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Prior to Vol.4 iss.1, this journal was published under the title *Global Advances in Business Communication*.

Recommended Citation

Kolodziej-Smith, Renata () "Diverse Workgroup Dynamics: Is It Possible to Improve Intercultural Workgroup Communication?," *Global Advances in Business and Communications Conference & Journal*: Vol. 9, Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.emich.edu/gabc/vol9/iss1/2>

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Diverse Workgroup Dynamics: Is it Possible to Improve Intercultural Workgroup Communication

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The last decades have witnessed a rapid demographic change in the United States, and consequently the increase of people of diverse nationalities and ethnicities in the workplace (McKinsey Global Institutes, 2010; Brown & Stepler, 2015)). Furthermore, since the complexity of work tasks has increased many companies have reorganized their work processes from individual to group oriented (Katzenbach & Smith, 2015; Park, Lee, Westerman, & Guan, 2019).

Major findings suggest that group composition (culturally homogenous vs. culturally diverse) influences group processes and outcomes, e.g. tension and conflict, with heterogeneous/diverse groups experiencing more tensions than homogenous groups (Oetzel, 2005). In addition, diversity was found to be associated with higher turnover in group membership and lower group member cohesiveness (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Cultural diversity may lead to less effective communication and bring tension and power struggles because of different communication styles, especially in the beginning stages of group formation (Cox, 1994). However, research also shows that diverse groups develop higher quality solutions (McLeod, Lobel, & Cox, 1996; Watson, Kumar, & Michaelsen, 1993, Oetzel, 2005) and have heightened quality of ideas compared to homogenous groups (Rodriguez, 1998; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007).

Much of the existing research about diverse group teams comes from management and psychology scholars (e.g., Burlison & Mortenson, 2003; Chen & Chung, 1994; Law, Wong, Wang, & Wang, 2000; Li & Chi, 2004; Ma, 1992; Ma & Chuang, 2001; Seo, Miller, Schumidt, & Sowa, 2008; Tsui & Farh, 1997; Xin, 1997). However, the focus is rarely on communication behavior, which is particularly compelling considering the processes of communication in culturally diverse groups influence interaction between group members, which in turn shapes group dynamics and consequently group outcomes (Oetzel, McDermott, Torres, & Sanchez, 2012; Stohl, 1993; van Dick, van Knippenberg, Hagele, Guillaume, & Brodbeck, 2008; Wiseman & Shuter, 1994). One of the very few but promising and comprehensive theories that addresses the importance of communication behavior in diverse work groups is Oetzel's Effective Intercultural Workgroup Communication Theory (EIWCT, Oetzel, 2005). The major premise of the theory is that cultural aspects, particularly individualistic and collectivistic characteristics of group members, manifested by ingroup/outgroup, self-construals and face-concerns characteristics of group members, influence the communication processes (interaction climate) within a workgroup and consequently impact the outcomes of the group, i.e. task and relational effectiveness and satisfaction of group members. The theory, though theoretically promising, was recently tested by Oetzel et al. (2012) with inconclusive results.

One possible reason for the lack of support of some hypotheses may lie in Oetzel's (1995, 2005) operationalization of diversity. Specifically, individuals' self-construals were assessed dichotomously as either independent or interdependent based on the individualistic-collectivistic dimension. In addition, face variables were used to capture group members interactions. Based on existing research (Fiske, 2004; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998), the present study proposes that diversity may be more accurately captured using relational models instead of face variables, and horizontal/vertical individualism/collectivism instead of self-construals.

Definition of Culture and Cultural Diversity

The concept of culture can be defined in many ways and consequently applied differently (Lustig & Koester, 2005). Organizational communication and intercultural communication scholars have attempted to provide a comprehensive definition, however the attempts still remain problematic as suggested definitions are overly vague (Vodosek, 2003). In the organizational communication field, particularly through its interpretive perspective, culture has been studied through organizational metaphors, rituals, stories and artifacts (Eisenberg et al., 2007). From the behavioral and post-positivistic perspectives, however, culture and its influence on the organization have been studied by analyzing groups' and individuals' communicative behaviors (Gudykunst & Bella, 2002). Even within this approach, differentiation between specific groups is necessary as it determines the subject of the study, e.g. ethnic groups, age groups. For instance, GLOBE's (2004, 2007) and Oetzel's (2005, 2012) studies primarily focused on ethnicity within work groups, while other researchers investigated able-bodied/disabled groups' communication (Braithwaite, Waldron, & Finn, 1999), gender communication (Edwards & Hamilton, 2004), or intergenerational communication (Williams & Garrett, 2002) outside the workplace. The paradigm focus has shifted from examining communication within different cultures to first defining the culture or group and then studying communication characteristics and patterns as an effect.

A conceptualization of culture, proposed by Triandis (1995), and currently widely accepted in the social sciences will be used in this study since it focuses on human behavior and consequently on group communication behaviors. This conceptualization emphasizes the social and psychological aspects. Culture emerges in interaction. As people interact, some of their ways of thinking, feeling, and behavior are transmitted to each other and become automatic ways of reacting to specific situations. The shared beliefs, attitudes, norms, roles, and behavior are aspects of culture. (1995, p. 4)

Triandis' (1995) definition of culture is employed in the current study as it appropriately complements the focus on people's communication behaviors as related to their upbringings. From this perspective, culture at the macro level is treated as a system of values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms, while at the micro-level culture is manifested in behavioral practices of its members. In this sense, organizational/corporate culture is treated as the moderator or the situational context that further shapes people's communicative behaviors affected by their

belonging to different national, ethnic and racial groups. The micro-level is the focus of the current research.

Furthermore, cultural diversity has been defined as “representations, in one social system, of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance” (Cox, 1993, p. 6). This conceptualization of cultural diversity includes surface-level characteristics, such as sex and ethnicity and deep-level diversity, which emphasizes components that result from cultural socialization such as values, self-conceptions, and attitudes (Harrison, Price, Gavin, & Florey, 2002). Deep-level characteristics explain the mechanisms behind people’s behaviors while surface-level characteristics help to categorize people belonging to certain groups thus providing the context. (Oetzel, 1998; Shachaf, 2008; van Dick et al., 2008). I believe that in order to capture the complexity of human interactions it is important to analyze them based on both cultural diversity characteristics of surface- and deep-levels.

In this study, surface-level characteristics (ethnicity) is based on GLOBE’s clusters (House et.al., 2004), while deep-level is represented by relational models and horizontal/vertical individualism/collectivism. I provide definitions of theoretical concepts used in this study below.

Definitions of Theoretical Concepts and Hypotheses

Task and Relational Group Effectiveness and Satisfaction

Through extensive interviewing, group dynamics researchers have identified eight characteristics common to effective teams: (a) a clear, elevating goal; (b) a results-driven structure; (c) competent team members; (d) unified commitment; (e) a collaborative climate; (f) standards of excellence; (g) external support and recognition; and (h) principled leadership. However, the above models of group effectiveness privilege one particular view of how groups should work by emphasizing work/task outcomes over relational outcomes (Oetzel, 2005). Bales (1950) along with other group scholars recognized a long time ago that there are two fundamental, interrelated dimensions to task-oriented groups: a task dimension (productivity of the group) and a social or relational dimension (cohesiveness of the group). Hofstede (1991) noted that people from individualistic cultures focus primarily on the task dimension whereas people from collectivistic cultures focus on the relational dimensions first with the task dimension as secondary. Oetzel and Bolton (1997) empirically tested whether certain individuals prefer a particular dimension of group effectiveness over another. They found that group members with independent self-construals (individualistic cultures) focused more on task effectiveness while members with interdependent self-construals (collectivistic cultures) focused more on relational effectiveness. The relevance of these two dimensions is clear when cultural diversity is considered.

The variable of relational outcome in Oetzel’s (2005) EIWCT is essential because understanding the relational nature of interaction will enhance understanding of diverse group processes and their outcomes. Specifically, it will help aid in explaining whether a group member values being satisfied with the interpersonal interaction within the group more and to

what extent or whether his/her focus is on the results of the group work and the productivity with less regard for the group members' relations.

Interaction Climate

Group communication plays a mediating role and affects group outcomes. Group communication labeled by Oetzel (1995) as "interaction climate" is characterized by cooperative conflict resolution, respectful communication, consensus decision-making, and participation, referring to the general "tone" of the group's interactions. Communication processes then are the medium through which individual differences in group composition affect group outcomes (Oetzel, Burtis, Chew, Sanchez, & Perez, 2001).

Tjosvold, Sasaki and Moy (1998) examined several components of interactions between 29 Japanese workers in two Hong Kong organizations. They found that a cooperative goal pursuit of group members rather than a competitive approach led to open discussion, open discussion resulted in productive work, and productive work resulted in commitment and satisfaction from the workers. In addition, Oetzel (2001) found that the perceived level of cooperation, respect, and participation are associated with group members' task and relational effectiveness and satisfaction.

Relational Models

Relational model theory (RMT; Fiske, 1991, 1992, 2004) provides a comprehensive picture of diversity in workgroup interactions because of its focus on the mechanism of building interactions and relations among individuals in groups rather than individual interactions. RMT argues that people utilize mental models for interacting with others, generating social action, understanding and evaluating others' social behavior, as well as coordinating, planning, encoding, and remembering social interaction. In other words, the theory focuses on how individuals make sense of their social environment and why individuals use certain relational models in a given social context. Groupwork is one example of such a social context. According to this theory, there are four fundamental forms of relating and interacting: communal sharing, authority ranking, equality matching, and market pricing. Cultures vary in the degree to which these models are triggered for group members.

1. *Communal sharing model* - individuals organize relationships in terms of collective belonging or solidarity. Members of a group are treated as equivalent elements of a bounded set, and individual distinctiveness is ignored. Group members seek unanimity, try to speak with one voice, and make decisions by consensus. They also pool resources and do not distinguish who contributed what.
2. *Authority ranking* creates an ordinal ranking among persons or social goods. For instance, more senior people may be given priority in promotion decisions, or the decision of a manager might have precedence over the decision of one of the subordinates.

3. *Equality matching* is characterized by reciprocity and balanced exchange and is manifested in turn-taking and democratic voting.
4. *Market pricing* organizes social relationships in terms of ratios, where the ratio may concern monetary value, utility, efficiency, effort, or merit. Decisions are made by group members who contribute the most in terms of ratios.

Vodosek (2003) argues that the more different the relational model used by group members is, the more frequently the group would experience conflict, i.e., the more challenging the interaction climate. In some groups, relational models used by group members differ significantly, for instance market pricing from communal sharing. These predictions were partially supported in terms of relational outcomes, (i.e. the more different the RMs, the less positive the relational outcome), however, they were not supported in terms of task outcomes (Vodosek, 2003). Even though relational models theory was applied in business research (Vodosek, 2003, 2009), organizational studies (Sondak, 1998) and psychology (Haslam, 1995; Haslam & Fiske, 1999), it has not been used in intercultural communication research to evaluate group members' communicative behaviors. Vodosek (2003) argued that in workgroup dynamics, members might share one relational model while being dissimilar with others. This ambiguity affects the dynamics of harmonious and/or conflict groups as well as tension-ridden groups. For instance, Japanese group members display authority ranking and communal sharing relational models while U.S. employees manifest market pricing but also maintain authority ranking relational models (Vodosek, 2009). Therefore, even though Japanese and U.S. employees have very different cultural backgrounds (Japanese are collectivistic while Americans are individualistic), they both share many common characteristics reflected in the authority ranking relational model.

There is a limited number of research applications of relational models in the organizational context. Sheppard and Sherman (1998) used relational models theory to develop their concept of trust in organizations. They proposed that each relational model is associated with the development of trust along two dimensions: shallow/deep and dependence/interdependence. The depth dimension relates to the importance, range, and number of contacts between individuals, while the interdependence refers to the degree to which the parties' behaviors are contingent upon one another. In a dependent relationship one person depends on the other, but not vice versa, while in an interdependent relationship both parties depend on each other. Sheppard and Sherman proposed that market pricing and equality matching are characterized by shallow dependence between the individuals while authority ranking, and communal sharing are characterized by deep interdependence. The deeper the interdependence, the more trusting are the relationships that develop and consequently the higher the ratings of group interaction climate, member satisfaction and ratings.

Taking into account individual group members' preference of the relational model used in group interaction, the next step is to test the relationship of relational models to the individual group member's perception of group interaction climate, group effectiveness and the satisfaction with the group. The following hypotheses were thus tested based on the above arguments:

H1: Greater endorsement of individual use of relational models of communal sharing is associated with

- a) higher ratings of the group interaction climate.
- b) higher ratings of the group member satisfaction.
- c) higher ratings of the group effectiveness.

H2: Greater endorsement of individual use of relational models of authority ranking is associated with

- a) higher ratings of the group interaction climate.
- b) higher ratings of the group member satisfaction.
- c) higher ratings of the group effectiveness.

H3: Lower endorsement of individual use of relational models of market pricing is associated with

- a) higher ratings of the group interaction climate.
- b) higher ratings of the group member satisfaction.
- c) higher ratings of the group effectiveness.

H4: Lower endorsement of individual use of relational models of equality matching is associated with

- a) higher ratings of the group interaction climate.
- b) higher ratings of the group member satisfaction.
- c) higher ratings of the group effectiveness.

Horizontal/ Vertical Individualism/ Collectivism

Since the most problematic issue with the widely used individualism/collectivism model is that the construct is treated as a dichotomous or categorical variable, some researchers have attempted to expand it. Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk and Gelfand (1995) introduced the concept of horizontal and vertical I/C. In horizontal and vertical I/C (Singelis et al., 1995; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998) both individualism and collectivism may be horizontal (emphasizing equality) or vertical (emphasizing hierarchy). Thus, the I/C dimension and an equality/hierarchy dimension are orthogonal. In their study of Korean and U.S. participants, Triandis and Gelfand (1998) found that even though Korea is considered a collectivistic culture and the U.S. is considered an individualistic culture, participants from both of these cultures share many characteristics. Particularly, the four categories, HI, VI, HC, and VC, which were previously found in the U.S.'s individualist culture, were also found in Korea's collectivist culture, meaning that in addition to ethnic background each individual's self-construal plays a significant role.

Triandis (1995) and Triandis and Gelfand (1998) argued that there are at least four defining attributes of individualism and collectivism: (a) the definition of the self, which can emphasize personal or collective aspects and can be independent or interdependent (Markus & Kitayama, 1991); (b) personal goals that can have priority over in-group goals or vice versa; (c) an emphasis on market pricing (rationality) rather than communal sharing (relatedness) - (concepts from RMT, Fiske, 1992), and (d) the importance of attitudes and norms as determinants of social behavior. According to Triandis and Gelfand (1998), the most important attributes that distinguish different variations of individualism and collectivism are relative emphases on horizontal and vertical social relationships. In other words, horizontal patterns assume that one's self is more or less like every other self. In contrast, vertical patterns consist of hierarchies, and one's self is different from other selves. Horizontal collectivism (HC) is a cultural pattern in which the individual perceives self as a part of an in-group. The members of the in-group are expected to be very similar to each other, and the self is interdependent with the others. Equality, in terms of the group status, is very important in this cultural pattern (Singelis et al., 1995). In vertical collectivism (VC) the individual perceives the self to be an aspect of an in-group membership but unlike horizontal collectivism, the members of the in-group are different from each other and some have more status than others. The self is still interdependent but different from the self of others and inequality, in terms of the status in-group, is accepted in this pattern (Singelis et al., 1995). Therefore, even though individuals display collectivistic preferences their vertical features might take precedence and consequently impacting lack of focus on interaction climate or group outcomes. In horizontal individualism (HI) an autonomous self is expected, but individuals hold a more or less equal to others. The self is independent but the same as the self of others. Finally, in vertical individualism (VI) an autonomous self is also expected but unlike in horizontal individualism, individuals see each other as different, and inequality is expected. The self is not only independent but also different from the self of others. Competition is a very important aspect of this cultural pattern (Singelis et al., 1995). Triandis (1995) indicated that the U.S. and France might be good examples of vertical individualism, Sweden and Australia horizontal individualism, India and Greece vertical collectivism, and the Israeli kibbutz model horizontal collectivism.

Triandis, Kurowski and Gelfand (1994) suggest that horizontal and vertical individualism/collectivism dimensions could be considered as the antecedent to relational models because culture shapes the choice of the relational model used by an individual. In some cases, the model is implied and choice does not exist. Fiske (1991, 1992) argued that the way people use the four relational models is culturally learned. Triandis, Kurowski and Gelfand (1994) and Vodosek (2003, 2009) documented an empirical relationship between the constructs of horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism and Fiske's relational models (see Figure):

	Individualism	Collectivism
Horizontal	Equality Matching Market Pricing	Equality Matching Communal Sharing
Vertical	Authority Ranking Market Pricing	Authority Ranking Communal Sharing

Figure Relational models and horizontal and vertical I/C (Triandis et al., 1994).

The frequency of using certain relational models by individuals should be carefully observed as they may be represented by continuous degrees. Earley (1997, 1998) expanding on Triandis et al.'s (1994) assumptions, suggested that communal sharing is the dominant relational model in horizontal collectivism, market pricing in vertical individualism, authority ranking in vertical collectivism, and equality matching in horizontal individualism. The following hypotheses are offered based on the relations between horizontal/ vertical individualism/ collectivism constructs and their possible connections with interaction climate, perception of group effectiveness and group satisfaction:

H5: Greater endorsement of vertical individualism is associated with

- a) lower ratings of the group interaction climate.
- b) lower ratings of the group member satisfaction.
- c) lower ratings of the group effectiveness.

H6: Greater endorsement of vertical collectivism is associated with

- a) lower ratings of the group interaction climate.
- b) lower ratings of the group member satisfaction.
- c) lower ratings of the group effectiveness.

H7: Greater endorsement of horizontal individualism is associated with

- a) lower ratings of the group interaction climate.
- b) lower ratings of the group member satisfaction.
- c) lower ratings of the group effectiveness.

H8: Greater endorsement of horizontal collectivism is associated with

- a) higher ratings of the group interaction climate.
- b) higher ratings of the group member satisfaction.
- c) higher ratings of the group effectiveness.

Interaction Climate as the Mediator

Communication processes that constitute group interaction climate are the medium through which individual differences and diversity in group composition affects group

outcomes of task and relational effectiveness and satisfaction (Oetzel et al., 2001). Oetzel argued that interaction climate fully mediates the influence of diversity on the outcome. In his study Oetzel (1995) found that communication behaviors that constitute group interaction climate influence groups' tasks and relational outcomes. Cox (1994) and Watson and Michaelson (1988) found that communication process difficulties manifested in high levels of conflict and tension, power struggles, lack of cooperation, lack of respect for group members, and inequality in turn-taking, interfered with group productivity. Cox (1994) and Watson et al. (1993) found that culturally heterogeneous groups have less effective communication interaction processes than culturally homogenous groups. Based on these findings and assumptions the following hypotheses are proposed:

H9a: Relational models (communal sharing, authority ranking, market pricing, equality matching) are expected to relate to group satisfaction through their relationship to interaction climate.

H9b: Relational models (communal sharing, authority ranking, market pricing, equality matching) are expected to relate to group effectiveness through their relationship to interaction climate.

H10a: Horizontal collectivism, horizontal individualism, vertical individualism, and vertical individualism are expected to relate to group satisfaction through their relationship to interaction climate.

H10b: Horizontal collectivism, horizontal individualism, vertical individualism, and vertical individualism are expected to relate to group effectiveness through their relationship to interaction climate.

Method

Participants

To test the hypotheses data from employees working in groups in various organizations was collected. I used the Qualtrics panel data collecting service, an official online survey software solution available for use by faculty, staff and students at my institution. Data was collected from individual full-time employees who have worked in diverse (based on ethnicity and race) workgroups for at least one year. The questions asked about employees' ethnicity cluster (GLOBE), their perceived group's interaction climate, their cultural characteristics (H/I, H/C, V/I, V/C), the choice of relational models used while working in groups, their satisfaction with the group, and their perception of group effectiveness. Individual group members were asked to complete an online survey. In order to participate in the study employees had to meet the criteria of being employed full-time, working in a diverse group for at least one year, and base their responses on experience from one specific group.

The sample (N=155) used for hypotheses tests had the following characteristics: 58% of the respondents were male and 42% were female. In terms of race, 72% identified themselves as

Whites, 14% as African Americans, 8% as Asians, 1% as American Indians or Alaska Natives, 1% as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders, and 5% as Others. In terms of ethnicity (GLOBE clusters), 61% identified themselves as Anglo group, 8% as Latin Americans, 6% as Germanic, 5% African, 4% Eastern European, 4% South East Asian, 3% Confucian, 2% Latin European, 1% Middle Eastern, 1% Nordic, and 6% Others. 73% of respondents spent more than 3 years working in the same group. 52% worked in groups with 4-10 members while 30% in groups with more than 10. 39% of respondents worked in companies with up to 100 employees, 24% in companies of 100 to 500 employees, 14% in companies of 500 to 1000 employees and 23% in companies employing more than 1000. 19% of respondents provided IT as type of industry they work in, 13% - healthcare, 12% - education, 5% - automotive, and remaining (2-3% for each category) indicated a wide variety of types of industry as their employment place: real estate, finance, retail, construction, manufacturing, public administration, entertainment, customer service, business, consulting, landscaping, transportation, restaurant, marketing, mining, logistics, security, and telecommunication.

Measures

Horizontal and vertical individualism collectivism (H/V I/C)

Horizontal and vertical I/C were measured with Triandis and Gelfand's (1998) 16-item scale that was adapted from the *Horizontal and Vertical Dimensions of Individualism and Collectivism Scale*, developed by Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk and Gelfand (1995). Psychometrics of this scale are reasonable with horizontal individualism (HI; $\alpha = .67$), vertical individualism (VI; $\alpha = .74$), horizontal collectivism (HC; $\alpha = .74$), and vertical collectivism (VC; $\alpha = .68$). Such reliability scores are considered high for scales in intercultural research. HI was based on four items, for example: "I often do my own thing." VI was based on three items, for example: "When another person does better than I do, I get tense and aroused." HC was based on four items, for example: "The well-being of my coworkers is important to me." VC was based on four items, for example: "It is important to me that I respect the decisions made by my groups." Items were answered on 9-point scale, where 1 = *never*, and 9 = *always*. Items within each scale were summed and the mean determined. Thus, each respondent had a score on each combination.

Cronbach's alphas for this sample were as follows: horizontal individualism ($\alpha = .80$), vertical individualism ($\alpha = .79$), horizontal collectivism ($\alpha = .76$), and vertical collectivism ($\alpha = .75$).

Relational models

The preference of relational models was measured using Vodosek's (2009) 16-item Relational Models Scale adaptation of Haslam and Fiske (1999) and Haslam (1994, 1995) measure of relational models. Vodosek (2009) reported Cronbach alphas for communal sharing, .60, authority ranking, .78, equality matching, .74, and market pricing, .68 (Fiske, 2004). To

assess the relational models considered desirable, respondents were asked to indicate how often a particular statement should be true in an ideal group. Communal Sharing (CS) was measured with four items, for example: “The group makes decisions together by consensus;” and “Group members share many important responsibilities jointly without assigning them to one group member alone.” Authority ranking (AR) was measured with four items, for example: “One of the group members directs the work of the group, the other group members pretty much do what they are told to do;” and “One of the group members makes the decisions and the other group members generally go along.” Equality matching (EM) was measured with four items, for example: “Group members typically divide things up into shares that are the same size;” and “The group makes decisions by a simple majority vote.” Market pricing (MP) was measured with four items, for example: “Group members divide things up according to how much they have paid or contributed;” and “Group members make decisions according to the ratio of the benefits they get and the costs to them.” The response scale for each item was a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1= *none of the time* to 5= *always*. To determine the preference of relational model used, participants’ mean score for each relational model was determined – the highest mean indicated the preference for the particular relational model. Cronbach’s alphas for these scales in the current sample were strong: communal sharing ($\alpha = .77$), authority ranking ($\alpha = .78$), equality matching ($\alpha = .83$), and market pricing ($\alpha = .82$).

Group satisfaction (relational outcome)

Measurement of group satisfaction utilized Oetzel’s (2001) 6 item scale, which was an adaptation of Canary and Spitzberg’s (1987) measure of group satisfaction. The Cronbach alpha for this scale was .90 (Oetzel, 2001). Respondents were asked to think of their most recent workgroup experience and respond to items about that experience. Sample scale items are: “I am extremely satisfied with our group’s outcomes;” “I have confidence in the members of my group;” “I like working with my group;” and “My group performs at an excellent level.” The variable of group satisfaction was measured using a Likert-type self-report questionnaire. All responses were measured on a five-point scale (5=*strongly agree* to 1=*strongly disagree*). Cronbach’s alpha in this sample was .91). Participants’ mean score on the scale was used in subsequent analyses.

Group effectiveness (task outcome)

Participants judged the effectiveness of their group by responding to the 7- item scale of workgroup effectiveness, which was Oetzel’s (2001) adaptation of Canary and Spitzberg (1987) measure of group processes. Oetzel reports a Cronbach alpha of .80. Sample items include: “I was extremely satisfied with the group outcomes;” “I am confident that our performance during the activity was satisfactory;” “We shared the work equally;” and “All of our members were prepared.” All responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale (5=*strongly agree* to 1=*strongly disagree*). Cronbach’s alpha in this sample was .84. Participants’ mean score on the scale was used in subsequent analyses.

Interaction climate

Measurement of group interaction climate utilized the 23-item scale from Oetzel (2001), which was an adaptation of Watson and Michaelson's (1988) group- style description and Canary and Spitzberg's (1987) measure of communication competence. The scale was chosen because the measures contain items that specifically describe communication behaviors (i.e. equal participation, consensus decision making, and cooperative conflict) that occur during a group interaction. Cronbach alpha for Oetzel's (2001) scale was .88. Sample items from this scale are: "An atmosphere of trust exists in our group;" "Everyone in our group participates in achieving our goals;" "We listen to each other;" "We use empathy among members;" "We handle conflicts well in my group;" and "My group members listen to people with different perspectives." Participants indicated their degree of agreement with each statement using a five-point scale (5=*strongly agree* to 1=*strongly disagree*). In this sample Cronbach's alpha was .84. Participants' mean score on the scale was utilized in subsequent analyses.

Analytic Approach

I used structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze the data and test the hypotheses using the analytic software AMOS (Analysis of a Moment Structures). SEM allows simultaneous analysis of all the variables in the model instead of separately assessing them. In addition, SEM includes factor analysis and assesses the measurement model. Furthermore, while using SEM, measurement error is not aggregated in a residual error term, therefore research data is measured more accurately. SEM has been applied to a variety of research problems because of these reasons (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables

As shown in Table 1 the relational model with the highest mean was Equality Matching ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .88$); the model with the lowest mean was Market Pricing ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.05$). The cultural dimension with the highest mean was Vertical Collectivism ($M = 7.44$, $SD = 1.22$) and the dimension with the lowest mean was Vertical Individualism ($M = 5.62$, $SD = 1.86$). Mean Interaction Climate was 3.73 ($SD = .56$) and was above average. The mean Group Satisfaction ($M = 4.13$, $SD = .78$) was very high and the mean Group Effectiveness score ($M = 3.68$, $SD = .77$) scores was above average.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Study Variables (N = 155)

Variable	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Relational model			
Communal sharing	1.40 to 5.00	3.48	.76
Authority ranking	1.00 to 5.00	3.00	.92
Equality matching	1.00 to 5.00	3.58	.88
Market pricing	1.00 to 5.00	2.83	1.05
Cultural dimension			
Horizontal individualism	1.50 to 9.00	7.18	1.51
Vertical individualism	1.25 to 9.00	5.62	1.86
Horizontal collectivism	3.75 to 9.00	7.14	1.31
Vertical collectivism	2.50 to 9.00	7.44	1.22
Interaction climate	1.79 to 5.00	3.73	.56
Group satisfaction	1.20 to 5.00	2.07	.78
Group effectiveness	1.14 to 5.00	3.67	.77

Results

Results for the Structural Models

Direct effects. The resulting direct effects structural model had acceptable fit (Table 2). The model accounted for 32% of the variance of interaction climate and 87% of the variance of group performance. The findings reveal, however, that only five path coefficients were statistically significant.

Table 2

Unstandardized and Standardized Path Coefficients for the Proposed Direct Effects Structural Model

Path	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	
Equality matching to interaction climate	.12	.09	.15	1.24	
Market pricing to interaction climate	-.13	.06	-.21	-2.09	*

Horizontal individualism to interaction climate	-.14	.07	-.40	-1.94	
Vertical individualism to interaction climate	.10	.07	.26	1.45	
Horizontal collectivism to interaction climate	-.12	.13	-.25	-.93	
Vertical collectivism to interaction climate	.42	.19	.65	2.18	*
Equality matching to group performance	.02	.07	.02	.27	
Market pricing to group performance	.20	.05	.27	3.91	***
Horizontal individualism to group performance	-.06	.06	-.13	-.97	
Vertical individualism to group performance	.12	.06	.26	2.14	*
Horizontal collectivism to group performance	-.15	.10	-.25	-1.46	
Vertical collectivism to group performance	.23	.16	.30	1.49	
Interaction climate to group performance	.97	.11	.80	8.68	***

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Indirect effects. The resulting structural model had close-to-acceptable fit, because not all indices reached their acceptable criterion. For example, the acceptable criterion for the TLI and CFI is .95 – but the model TLI and CFI values were .92 and .93 respectively. However, as shown in Table 3, the GFI and RMSEA were acceptable; and the TLI, CFI, and SRMR were close-to- acceptable. Therefore, the model should be considered as acceptable as the whole (Brown & Cudeck, 1993; Hu & Bentler, 1999). The model accounted for 34.1% of the variance of interaction climate and 71.5% of the variance of group performance. The findings reveal, however, that only two path coefficients were statistically significant.

Table 3

Unstandardized and Standardized Path Coefficients for the Proposed Indirect Effects Structural Model

Path	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>	
Equality matching to interaction climate	.11	.10	.15	1.19	
Market pricing to interaction climate	-.10	.06	-.16	-1.62	
Horizontal individualism to interaction climate	-.16	.08	-.43	-1.95	
Vertical individualism to interaction climate	.12	.07	.30	1.60	
Horizontal collectivism to interaction climate	-.16	.14	-.33	-1.09	
Vertical collectivism to interaction climate	.47	.21	.74	2.21	*
Interaction climate to group performance	1.03	.10	.85	10.66	***

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Testing for Mediation

To test the mediating effect of interaction climate, bootstrapping procedures were conducted ($N = 5000$ samples). As suggested by Kline (2011), a variable is deemed a mediator when the following criteria are met: the independent variable significantly predicts the mediator; the mediator significantly predicts the dependent variable; and the indirect effect is statistically significant but the direct effect is not statistically significant. Bootstrapping procedures were conducted to determine the significance of the direct and indirect effects.

As shown in Table 3 earlier, equality matching, market pricing, horizontal individualism, vertical individualism, horizontal collectivism did not significantly predict interaction climate. Therefore, the first criterion for mediation was not met. Because these constructs did not meet this first criterion, the mediating effect of interaction climate on these constructs and group performance will not be further evaluated. Only vertical collectivism significantly predicted interaction climate, $\beta = .74, p < .05$. Thus, this construct met the first criterion for mediation. Interaction climate also significantly predicted group performance, $\beta = .85, p < .001$. Therefore, the second criterion for mediation was met. Finally, the indirect effect of vertical collectivism on group performance was statistically significant but its direct effect was not significant. As such, the third criterion for mediation was met. Therefore, interaction climate fully mediated the relationship between vertical collectivism and group performance.

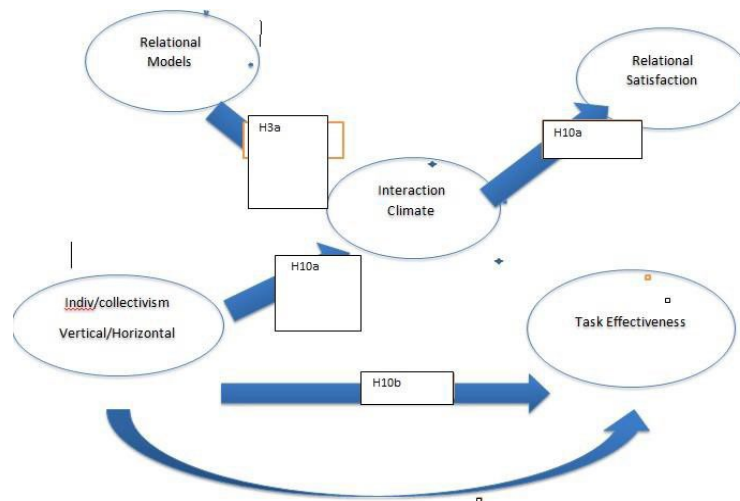


Figure Tested model with significant relationship paths.

Practical Implications

Culturally diverse groups pose a challenge to their members and their leaders. Research suggests that cultural diversity, if not managed well, might bring tensions, conflicts, and unfavorable group outcomes. Group members and managers tend to be unprepared for the differences that employees from varied cultural backgrounds bring to the workplace (Barsade, Ward, Turner, & Sonnenfeld, 2000; Riordan, 2000). However, research also shows that if managed well, diverse work groups bring more valuable solutions and creativity to the workplace as compared to homogenous work teams (Rodriguez, 1998; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Thus, they bring the competitive advantage to organizations.

Many scholars claim that cultural background is a crucial factor determining how individuals approach work with groups and work generally. Hofstede (1991) noted that people from individualistic cultures focus primarily on the task dimension whereas people from collectivistic cultures primarily focus on the relational dimensions and then focus on the task

dimension. The finding of this study reveals that vertical collectivism connects to interaction climate while vertical individualism connects to group performance.

This study demonstrates that individuals vary in the degree to which they display/endorse horizontal/vertical and individualism/collectivism. They also differ in terms of the extent of use of specific relational models in a group context, and these differences are likely linked to individuals' cultural backgrounds. Of particular note are the findings that vertical collectivism was found as a cultural characteristic endorsed most frequently. Taking into account fact that at least 70% of respondents come from Euro-American cultural background (61% - Anglo, 8% - Germanic, Nordic – 1%), this result might be quite surprising and indicating a cultural shift. Furthermore, it is important to notice that relational model of market pricing, characteristic for competitive and individualistic cultures, was found to be endorsed the least frequently in this study.

Lack of knowledge about, or appreciation for these “unseen” differences might bring tension and discontent to group members as well as difficulties with managing work teams in diverse workplaces. More broadly, the organization may miss opportunities to capitalize on these differences in ways that could enhance creativity and performance. Based on the evidence from this study, in companies where group work is prioritized, employees might be evaluated based on their relational models or cultural dimensions preferences to find a particular grouping of individuals with compatible relational models. This would enhance the likelihood of effective cooperation in work group in terms of interaction climate. It is possible to find members who have the same relational model preferences but come from different cultures, thus their different perspectives and resulting creativity of heterogenous group composition would not be eliminated. From another perspective, group members could be educated about the differences among them, what it means for their preferences and ways of communicating, and ways to capitalize on these differences to enhance quality interaction and outcomes.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations of this study. As explained earlier, the current study was conducted only at the individual level and furthermore study participants were not in the same group together. Thus, the data that was gathered reflected only individual perception rather than the experience of all members working in the same group. Vodosek (2003) emphasized the importance of examining both individual and group level results so there is no bias in perception, i.e. group level results would provide information on how particular group performed as a whole which might be different than individual perception of the group member.

Of note is that all measures were self-report, reflecting perceptions of outcomes and interactions rather than the actual or objective outcomes and interactions. Ideally, in addition to the individuals' responses, observations of communication behavior should be included for example, group supervisor ratings of group interaction, effectiveness, and satisfaction. The measures of relational models, cultural dimensions, and group performance were self-reported in

this research, and since this study focused on individuals' perceptions of group- work they are adequate. It is, however, important to indicate that additional observations would bring more objective measures, thus enhancing the practical value of this study and the potential of implementation in work settings. The first design of this study included this measure, however, due to the difficulties in obtaining actual workgroups as the subject of study, the self-reported individual- level measures were used, which made outside evaluations of behaviors difficult. Given this study focused only on the individuals' experience in groups rather than on individuals working together in a group, this was not possible.

Future research needs to build in additional "objective" assessments of communication behaviors in groups as well as their outcomes both relationally and in terms of task accomplishment and quality. In addition, even though this study investigated group features, it reflected an individual's perspective of their group's behavior. The main purpose of this study was to critique and reconceptualize Oetzel's (2005,) EIWCT. The theory was originally tested on three levels: individual, group, and multi-level (examining both levels simultaneously) but only on the individual level in this study. Future research should address this limitation by gathering data from established workgroups to ensure the analysis on the group and multi-levels.

Furthermore, since the main focus of this study was to consider the connection of diversity of group members to group interaction and performance, a larger pool of participants with more diverse backgrounds would provide more comprehensive understanding of factors influencing interaction in intercultural work groups. In addition, gathering information regarding the diversity of each participant's group, might be critical in addressing these questions. These factors should be considered in future research.

Finally, even though SEM analysis is the analytic approach of choice when multiple relationships are being examined, it proved to be a challenging tool in this study because it eliminated variables of communal sharing and authority ranking, restructured interaction climate, combined group effectiveness and group satisfaction into one variable of group performance, and restructured all the measures. Consequently, some of the hypotheses could not be tested. Future research needs to consider the strengths and challenges of different analytical techniques.

Conclusion

The current study proposed that relational models and horizontal/vertical individualism/collectivism may more completely and accurately capture diversity dimensions than face-concerns and self-construals because they are considered more contextual and closely related to group interactive behaviors (Fiske, 2004; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Even though not all hypotheses were supported, several variables were significantly correlated with the tested outcomes, i.e. interaction climate, group satisfaction and group effectiveness. Specifically, the relational model of market pricing, and the cultural dimensions of vertical collectivism and

vertical individualism were significantly related to some outcome variables. Study findings suggest that the use of at least one of the relational models (market pricing) in a given situation, and cultural dimensions of vertical collectivism and vertical individualism might be influential in terms of explaining group members' perception of interaction climate, and perception of group satisfaction and effectiveness. These findings do not contradict Oetzel's (2012) study results of the EIWCT testing but rather reconceptualize the theory by adding new dimensions of relational models and horizontal/vertical individualism/collectivism concepts as indicators of culturally conditioned group behaviors.

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