

The Influence of Cultural Diversity in North and South China on Team Performance

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Abstract: *This research studies the influence of cultural diversity in north and south China on team performance. It is hypothesized that more cultural diversity in south and north China will lead to the worse team performance. To examine the hypothesis, a discussion task on a hot social issue topic will be carried out. As for the result, it is predicted there will be two kinds of patterns for the relationship between cultural diversity in north and south China and team performance. The first one is the degree of cultural diversity in a team might lead to either better or worse team performance. The second one is that the relationship is not linear. It is believed there will be a certain degree of cultural diversity for the best team performance. But this prediction still need more follow-up research.*

Keywords: *Cultural diversity; North and South China; Intra-national cultural variation; Team performance*

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that the cultural diversity in global workforce is increasing. Meanwhile, more culturally diverse teams have emerged in the university as increasing students choose to go abroad for their further study.

Over the past decades, a number of researches on relationship between cultural diversity and team performance have been carried out. From the negative perspective, cultural diversity makes social process in the team more difficult. First, according to similarity attraction theory, people are willing to work with those who have similar values, beliefs and attitudes[1]. Also, social identity and social categorization theory suggest that individuals tend to be categorized into specific groups by themselves and they will show ingroup bias to their own group members[2]. From the positive perspective, cultural diversity in the team will help to provide more information and creativity to the whole team. According to information processing theory, people in the diverse team can get access to those with different backgrounds, networks, and skills, which helps to improve the team outcome even though team members might face more difficult team interaction problem[3]. Stahl and his colleagues reconciled past results and proposed that teams will be affected by cultural diversity through process gains and losses related to increased divergence and decreased convergence[4].

From the perspective of team member goal orientation, Pieterse and her colleagues explained the diversity-performance relationship. They proposed that cultural diversity is more negative for team performance with higher performance avoidance orientation and lower learning approach orientation[5].

Cultural diversity which is mentioned in most researches is country-based. However, intra-national cultural variations can be as important as cross-national ones[6-7]. We found researches on relationship between intra-national cultural diversity in north and south China and team performance can barely be seen. There is no denying that there are a variety of culture differences between south and north China. A study shows that major psychological differences exist within China, and that wheat-growing northern China is less holistic-thinking and interdependent than the rice-growing south[8]. And MA Xinran and his colleagues proposed that when defining north and south China, cities on the dividing line between north and south should be excluded for reducing the subjective and objective ambiguity of dividing line. They also proposed that collectivism in southern China is stronger than northern China, and the reason for the result might be the constant movement of Chinese traditional culture system represented by Confucianism, to southern China [9]. Therefore, it is believed that cultural diversity in north and south China might have some influence on team performance when southerners and northerners are in the same team.

In the research, an online group discussion will be held to test the performance of teams with different degrees of cultural diversity in south and north China, and many undergraduates and experts will be invited to watch the videotape of online discussion for evaluating the team performance. I think that this work can fill the gap in the research field of relationship between team performance and intra-national cultural diversity in China.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

105 male and 105 female undergraduates from Chinese universities will participate in a group discussion task. Taking into account of the influence southern and northern culture integration might have, participants should be local undergraduates in the local universities (eg. southerners in the south universities). For the sake of relieving the influence topic controversy might have on the discussion, participants will be selected from the volunteer undergraduates getting the similar score on topic controversy in the pretest. To control that participants have similar capability to function effectively in culturally diverse settings, we will use the SFCQ scale [10] Ang and her colleagues tested and modelled to test every volunteer's culture intelligence and choose those undergraduates getting the same score as the qualified participants in the discussion task.

2.2 Procedure

First, volunteer undergraduates will attend a pretest, in which they need to answer a Likert scale (from 1 to 7) questionnaire for discussion topic and participant selection, which consists of a series of "agree" or "disagree" questions on some currently hot social issues, culture intelligence and some demographic information, including gender, age, grade, major, university location, hometown and phone number.

When answering the "agree" or "disagree" questions, those volunteers will express their opinions (agree or disagree) and explain reason, and they also need to score these questions from 1 to 7 to evaluate the degree of topic controversy. We will choose the question which is moderately controversial and also can lead to a full discussion as the final discussion task topic.

After pretest, 6 participants including 3 males and 3 females, will be assigned into a small group and we will set 7 different proportions of southerners and northerners in each small group, including 0 to 6, 1 to 5, 2 to 4, 3 to 3, 4 to 2, 5 to 1 and 6 to 0. To ensure the final result will be as representative and general, 7 small groups with different proportions will be arranged as one big group and there will be 5 big groups, which means there will be 35 small groups in total to conduct the discussion task.

Then participants will be informed to have an online group discussion on a hot social issue topic from the questionnaire they did before. The discussion will be had on QQ platform with camera off and voice changer on, which will avoid the influence of team member familiarity on team performance [5]. Every small group will have 45 minutes to have 3 rounds of discussion. In the first round, every participant will be suggested to spend 2 minutes and 30 seconds answering the question by "agree" or "disagree", and explain the reason. Then in the second round, they will do brainstorming and have a full discussion to achieve an agreement for the whole team. Also they need to leave some time to prepare the team final report. After discussion, team members will do the final report to us, which should contain the opinion (agree or disagree) and explanation for it. The whole discussion will be recorded and the top five teams will be prized.

2.3 Measurement

60 ordinary college students and 10 experts will be invited to watch the videotape of discussion to evaluate every small team's performance through a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely). The team performance evaluation includes evaluation of quality of interaction and final report.

For quality of interaction evaluation, 60 college students and 10 experts will do their rating in terms of conflict, communication effectiveness, satisfaction, social integration and creativity [4]. Each 12 students and 2 experts will evaluate seven small groups with different proportions of southerners and northerners in a big group. Then scores from different evaluators will be added up as a small group's

score for quality of interaction.

For final report evaluation, only 10 experts will do their rating in terms of the degree of innovation and the depth of idea in the final report. Every 2 experts will evaluate seven small groups in a big group. Then we will add up scores from these two experts as a small group's score for the final report. And the final score will be the sum of quality of interaction and final report score.

3. Result

The first predicted pattern of our result is that cultural diversity of north and south China is linearly correlated with team performance. In this pattern, the first possible result is that more cultural diversity of north and south China will lead to a worse team performance, which is consistent with our hypothesis. Contrary to first one, another predicted result is that more cultural diversity of north and south China will lead to a better team performance. The final result depends on which will have a stronger influence on team interaction process, more conflict and less communication effectiveness supported by similarity attraction theory and social identity and social categorization theory, or more information and creativity supported by information process theory. If the negative influence on team performance outweighs the positive one, more cultural diversity of south and north China will lead to a worse team performance. In the experiment, teams with 3 southerners and 3 northerners will have the worst performance. And as MA Xinran pointed out, collectivism in southern China is stronger than northern China[9], therefore, we believe that teams with 6 northerners will have the best performance. When the positive influence on team performance outweighs the negative one, more cultural diversity of south and north China will lead to a better team performance, which means that teams with 3 southerners and 3 northerners will have the best team performance.

Another predicted pattern of result is that cultural diversity is not linearly correlated with team performance. In the context of north and south China culture, more information and creativity caused by cultural diversity will lead to a better team performance even though cultural diversity will result in some team interaction problems, such as more conflict and less communication effectiveness. Therefore, teams with a moderate cultural diversity will have the best team performance. We believe there is a certain degree of cultural diversity maximizing the positive influence and minimizing the negative influence to achieve a great balance. And this certain degree of cultural diversity still needs more future research.

4. Discussion

This research explores the relationship between cultural diversity of south and north China and team performance. Besides the linear relationship between them, we also propose that there might be a certain degree cultural diversity balancing the positive and negative influence for the best team performance. This research contributes to providing the source of intra-national cultural diversity in north and south China and the research direction of the certain degree of cultural diversity for a better team performance.

Also, we acknowledge several limitations. The first limitation is that our result might not be true of cities on the dividing line of north and south China. Because in this research we use the definition of south and north China MA Xinran and his colleagues proposed[9], which ignores where cities on the dividing line of north and south China belong in. The result also might not be true of other groups except undergraduates because all participants in our discussion task are undergraduates. And the team discussion process in the workforce is different from that in the university.

What is more, we can not avoid the impact culture integration between south and north China might have on participants and final results. Internet and population flow in China make culture communication and integration easier, so there will be different cultures surrounding every individual. For example, southerners will be influenced by some popular northern culture in the daily life. People will be reshaped by their surroundings, thus it is unavoidable that culture integration will have some impact on participants.

Finally, we can not get rid of the influence participant's individual difference will have on the team performance. Participants' individual abilities have significant influence on the quality of final report and team interaction. For example, participants acquiring more information might have a better understanding of the discussion topic, and participants with better communication skill will perform

better in terms of quality of interaction. However, in our experiment, we can not ensure that the average ability of each team is at the same level, so the limitation of measurement needs further improvement.

5. Conclusion

In this research, it is hypothesized that more cultural diversity in south and north China will lead to the worse team performance. For examining this hypothesis, 105 male and 105 female Chinese undergraduates will be invited to participate in a group discussion task after a pretest, and 60 ordinary college students and 10 experts will be asked to watch videotapes of the group discussion for evaluating performance of every group. Finally, whether the score of team performance and the degree of north and south China cultural diversity are correlated or not will be tested by data analysis. One of predicted patterns of result is that cultural diversity of north and south China is linearly correlated with team performance, and the result will be that more cultural diversity in north and south China will lead to a worse or better team performance. Another predicted pattern is that cultural diversity of north and south China is not linearly correlated with team performance, and in the circumstance it is believed that teams with a moderate cultural diversity in north and south China will have the best team performance when advantages and disadvantages of cultural diversity are taken into account in all directions.

This work can fill the gap in the research field of relationship between team performance and intra-national cultural diversity in China. And for the future research, the impact of culture integration on the relationship between culture diversity and team performance is a great direction. Besides, how to get rid of the influence of individual difference as much as possible when evaluating the team performance will be a tough but significant problem.

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