

Diversity and Team Creativity

Principles and methods for collaborating in innovation contexts.

Team creativity is fundamental to business success, and diversity is an important dimension of it. This white paper sheds light on the topic and presents methods to promote collaboration.

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Diversity and Team Creativity?

Principles and methods for collaborating in innovation contexts.

The innovation landscape today is made up of global, complex networks of relationships between people of diverse backgrounds, values, and needs, collaborating in real and virtual contexts. Such diversity creates new opportunities. Simultaneously, however, it raises numerous questions for management. Creativity and intercultural competence are in demand, they belong to the future skills.

«Diversity generally has a positive impact on team creativity».

(Amabile & Kurtzberg, 2001)

The following questions are addressed in this white paper:

- In which way are team creativity, diversity, and intercultural competence to be understood?
- What impact does diversity have on team creativity?
- Which competences are of particular importance for diversity to have a positive impact on team creativity?
- And finally, which methods are suitable for further developing these competences in a business context?

This white paper is aimed at highlighting the impact of diversity on team creativity and the competences that are helpful in using diversity as an opportunity. In addition, methods are presented here that support managers and team members to further develop their intercultural competences. These competences assist in dealing constructively with diversity so that it has a positive impact on collaboration, creativity, and innovation processes in work settings.

To begin with, we will define the theoretical concepts: creativity, innovation, diversity, and intercultural competence. We then proceed to a selection of methods that can be used to promote the intercultural competences of team members, and thus creativity as well as innovation development.

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1 Creativity and Intercultural Competence

Creativity and intercultural competence belong to the future skills. They are becoming increasingly important in our globalised world, which is more and more being dominated by virtual forms of cooperation. Diversity in the business context is a fact. As communication technologies and possibilities are rapidly evolving, diversity is becoming increasingly diversified and complex. It poses major challenges for teams and management. In the next chapter, we describe our understanding of the key concepts that form the basis of this paper: creativity, innovation, diversity, and intercultural competence.

2 Creativity, Innovation and Diversity

2.1 Creativity and Innovation

Creativity and innovation are essential for sustainable business success. Companies and organizations are confronted with major challenges that can only be solved by working together in teams.

«I truly believe that no one ever creates success alone. Everyone needs a positive team with supportive people at their side».

(Gordon 2007: IX)

Teams are not only essential because they bring together a diverse mix of skills and backgrounds, but more importantly, because working as a team creates results that are not achievable by an individual alone.

Creativity and innovation are closely connected. Creativity is often understood as a preliminary stage to innovation, as a phase of idea generation. Innovation on the other hand is the process of implementing these ideas. Anderson & al. (2014: 1298) propose the following integrated definition of creativity and innovation:

“Creativity and innovation in the workplace are the process, outcome, and the products of attempting to develop and implement new and improved ways of operating. The creativity phase of this process refers to the generation of ideas, and innovation addresses the subsequent phase of translating ideas into better processes, practices, or products. Creativity and innovation can occur at the level of the individual, the working team, the organization, or several of these levels together, but always result in identifiable benefits at one or more of these levels of analysis”.

In this white paper, we use Palmer's (2016) definition of the concept of creativity. The author has consulted many publications by experts in creativity research (namely Barron 1955, Amabile 1988, Feist

1998, Simonton 1999, Sternberg & Lubart 1999, and Plucker & al. 2004a or 2004b). According to Palmer (2016: 366), creativity is to be understood as:

“The interaction of intelligence, expertise, character traits, and motivation as individual dispositions with process stage-dependent requirements and environmental conditions through which an individual or group produces a noticeable product that is both novel and useful in a given social context”.

The core of creativity is the "interaction" of people from different backgrounds, experiences, perspectives, and motivations who live and work together in specific contexts. Team creativity is more than the sum of individual creativity; it is a very complex process. Numerous dimensions and subordinate factors play a role.

Chompunuch & al. (2019) have undertaken a systematic literature review of the concept of team creativity. Out of the 77 papers analysed, 15 important dimensions of team creativity emerged (see Figure 1). These include diversity.

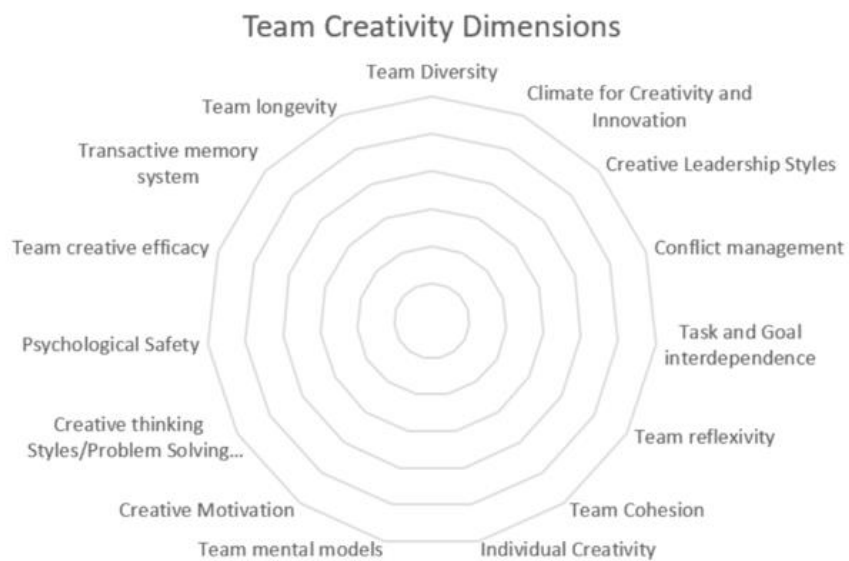


Figure 1: Team Creativity Dimensions according to Chompunuch & al. (2019: 12)

We will look at the concept of diversity in the next chapter and shed light on the impact of diversity on a team's creativity.

2.2 Diversity

2.2.1 Definition

The term diversity refers to the wide variety of human profiles that exist within a society (based on country of origin, region, neighbourhood, culture, religion, age, gender, physical appearance, disability, sexual orientation, education, etc.) (Wieviorka 2008).

Diversity has visible and invisible dimensions (Milliken & Martins 1996 or Becker & Seidel 2006). Visible diversity, often referred to as demographic or surface-level diversity, includes, for example: age, gender, nationality, or ethnic origin. The hidden, deep-level diversity (cf. Torchia & al. 2015) includes personality and values (culture, religion, sexual orientation, etc.), as well as knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

2.2.2 Impact

Research generally suggests that diversity has a positive impact on team creativity (see e. g. Amabile & Kurtzberg 2001 or Milliken, Bartel, & Kurtzberg 2003). However, not every kind of diversity, in every context, in every process phase or for every work content and step is beneficial. It is a double-edged sword (Carter & Phillips, 2017). Diversity also brings with it the potential for conflict.

«Diversity is a double-edged sword in organizations»

(Carter & Phillips, 2017)

According to the meta-analysis of Bell & al. (2011), the most influential aspects of diversity are not demographic but of a psychological nature (e. g. personality, values, and skills). It is not the superficial, visible diversity that matters, but the hidden, profound one.

The "diversity bonus" according to Page (2017), depends on both, the type of diversity, and the task at stake; idea generation is one thing, and idea implementation is another. The author notes that:

"Diversity bonuses occur most frequently in teams of cognitive employees engaged in non-routine tasks"
(op. cit.: 7).

While a diverse team composition seems to offer an advantage in generating a wider range of original and useful ideas, experimental studies (see e. g. Harvey 2013) suggest that such advantages disappear once the team must decide which ideas to select and implement, presumably because diversity hinders consensus.

Conflicts arising from diversity can be mitigated if team members are interculturally competent. Individuals need to be able to put aside their individual, selfish agendas to cooperate with others. This is all particularly important when teams are diverse, as it can be more difficult for team members to

see things from the perspective of other members, have empathy and deal with their own conscious and unconscious biases.

For Glăveanu & al., difference is placed at the heart of the creative process (Glăveanu 2014; Glăveanu & Gillespie 2015; Glăveanu & Clapp 2018). The question, nevertheless, is how exactly difference and diversity can be cultivated within interactions in a variety of settings.

Our own research (e. g. Stalder 2019a, 2019b or Stalder & al. 2020) suggests that diversity is positively associated with the variety of perspectives, the production of original ideas, and with creative outcomes of great economic and social value. Our initial findings also suggest that linguistic diversity counts among the factors that have a positive impact on team creativity - depending on the process levels and the tasks set. Another interesting finding, which has not yet been substantiated, suggests that the team's own positive perception of its creative abilities is a moderator that has a strong impact on team creativity.

The impact of diversity on team creativity, therefore, depends on many distinct factors: the individual prerequisites (attitude and conduct), the type of task, the process phase, the awareness of diversity, and, above all, the positive appreciation of it among the team members and in the group as a whole. From our viewpoint, the history of collaboration and the jointly shaped culture as well as the climate of cooperation are decisive for a positive impact of diversity on creativity in work settings. This requires above all a high level of intercultural competence, both on the part of management and employees. The description of this competence is the focus of the next chapter.



3 Intercultural Competence

Cultural complexity in a professional context is no longer an exception, but the rule. We are all increasingly in contact with people of diverse backgrounds, experience, education, expectations, perspectives, value definitions and interpretations. In such an environment, intercultural competence is of crucial importance. Promoting it among managers, leaders and team members is a basic prerequisite for sustainable – social, political, economic, and ecological – success.

Effective intercultural management that also drives team performance requires a global identity and openness to cultural diversity (Ang et al. 2006; Shokef & Erez 2008, Fotso et al. 2018, Abadir & al. 2019). The ability to take global perspectives and create collaborative cultures is key for people in management and leadership roles (Gandolfi 2012; Reiche, Bird, Mendenhall & Osland, 2017). And, according to Armstrong (2020:1) “the leaders of the future will have to lead with intercultural competence and with the ability to facilitate this development of competence in others”.

What is meant by intercultural competence? To answer this question, we will first briefly look at the concepts of "culture" and "interculture".

3.1 Culture and Interculture

In our social environments – professional and private – there are many different "cultures", i.e. different forms and ways of communicating, living together, and working together. "Culture" can be understood in a broad or narrow sense. Narrowly, culture refers to artistic products or achievements. In this perspective, it is often reduced to a national or ethnic affiliation. The broad understanding of the concept of culture – which we refer to here – is based on the research of North American anthropology (e. g. Sapir 1921, Kroeber 1952, Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1952, Hall 1976). Further references considered here are the work of Cuhe (1996), Wicker (1997), Rivera (2000), Giordano (2003 & 2008), Kilani (2009), or Pretceille (2012).

Cultures, as we understand them, are forms of organization that we individuals and groups negotiate in our daily interactions, and thus co-construct (Gohard-Radenkovic & Stalder 2013), to make it easier for us to live and work together.

An "interculture" is a culture “under construction”, it’s an "in-between culture". Beneke (1995) describes the concept as the emergence process of new cultures in contact situations. It is a kind of "physical and psychological space" in which individuals with different affiliations and experiences meet and negotiate common forms of organization, i. e. cultures (Stalder & al. 2020, Stalder & Agbobli 2021). In an Interculture, the structures, rules and norms are not yet consolidated.

"Intercultures" or "interculturality" are still mainly associated in practice with national or linguistic affiliations and seen as problems. There are numerous publications on this topic on the market, mainly based on quantitative, comparative studies. The best-known representatives of this quantitative

approach include Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), Hofstede (e. g. 1980 or 2001), Trompenaars (1994), House et al. (2004), Schwartz (2011), Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2012) or Meyer (2014). As another reference, the “Globe Project” can be added here. These pieces of research have led to a set of "dimensions" (Hofstede 2020) or "scales" (Meyer 2014) of cultural values and conducts that managers and employees should consider when interacting across national borders. These publications raise our awareness of the different expectations of people of other nationalities. On the other hand, we must warn against hasty stereotyping and generalisations. People are different. We do not always behave in the same way. Therefore, there are no ready-made recipes for communication and cooperation between people who have grown up in other cultures. Every person, every group has its own particularities. Interactions always take place in specific social, historical, political, economic contexts. Qualitative, situation-specific, and interaction-analytical research based on field observations and "thick descriptions" (Geertz 1973) do more justice to this fact (e. g. Chevrier 2003, d'Iribarne 1989, Chanlat 1990, Mutabazi & Pierre 2008, Stalder 2010, 2013, 2016, 2019, 2022).

Intercultural communication situations can indeed be problematic. People moving on the intercultural stage are on new, uncertain ground. Familiar strategies do not work. Different paths must be explored and taken together. But intercultural encounters also have many exciting aspects: If they are perceived positively, if people have the necessary competences and if teams are led in a self-conscious and culturally aware way, they broaden horizons, set learning processes in motion, and promote creativity and innovation.

«Employees in certain cultures may be particularly hesitant to ask questions, provide feedback, or openly disagree with their superiors»

(Edmondson & Lei, p. 8, 2014)

Intercultural communication situations require specific skills; such situations can easily lead to uncertainty, misunderstandings, and conflicts. The participants are on uncertain terrain. Their social construct is not consolidated. This means that we only know each other superficially and insufficiently. Therefore, we do not really know what we may expect from each other. Intercultural competence facilitates the negotiation process of our living and working together.

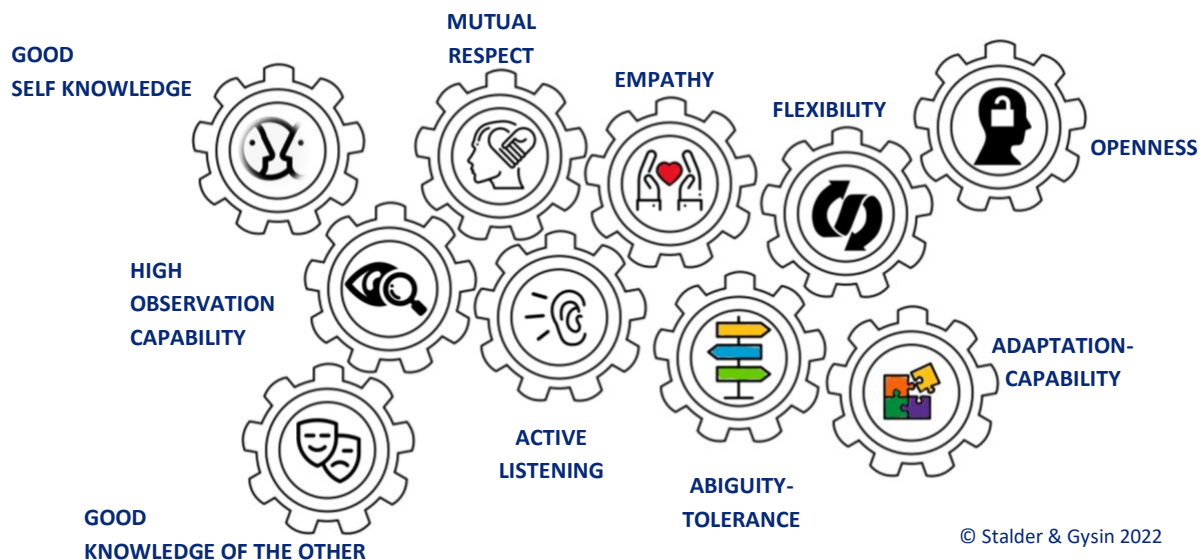
3.2 Intercultural Competence

So intercultural competence is not just the concern of managers and leaders. It involves all of us. Competence is the combination of knowledge, ability and will (Le Boterf 2010). Being competent means knowing what to say and do to whom, when, where, and how (Le Boterf 2010: 63).

Competent behaviour goes hand in hand with good self-awareness and cultural awareness. It has an individual and a collective dimension. According to Le Boterf (op. cit.: 67): "To act competently is to know how to interact with others; one cannot be competent alone". According to Chen & Starosta (1996: 358-359):

"[...] intercultural communication competence can be understood as the ability to negotiate cultural meanings and to perform appropriately effective communicative behaviours that recognise the multiple identities of stakeholders in each environment".

In theory, there are many different lists of intercultural relevant characteristics for successful interactions between people from different backgrounds (e. g. Ruben 1976; Triandis 1977; Fritz, Möllenberg & Chen 2000; Deardorff 2006; Keup 2010; Bolten 2018 or Stalder 2022). We highlight what we consider to be the most important ones in the chart below:



These competences are crucial in intercultural contexts where team members have not yet consolidated their culture. As mentioned earlier, intercultural situations can trigger uncertainty, confusion, or conflict. Managers, leaders, and team members need to work together to build trust and thus psychological safety.

3.3 Strategies for Collaboration in Intercultural Contexts

In our qualitative research (interviews, field observation, film analysis), we explore, among other things, how leaders in international, -cultural, and -disciplinary settings experience their work context and particularly what strategies they use to interact successfully with their colleagues and their teams. Over the years, we have compiled an extensive set of strategy descriptions that managers use in their professional environment (see e. g. Stalder 2010, 2016, 2019a, 2019b or 2022).

The strategies described by our interlocutors range for example from "being attentive", "questioning oneself", "expressing interest", "being open", "self-control", "finding a common language", "team training", "making expectations explicit", "paying attention to status and role", "defending territory" to "finding consensus" and "using humour".

We also agree with Toth (2020): intercultural communication competence starts with self-awareness, open-mindedness, and flexibility. Managers, leaders, and team members must be able to identify a variety of norms and to change perspectives. Intercultural competence begins where individuals and groups succeed in applying the Platinum Rule (by T. Alessandra, quoted in Toth, 2020: 9) "Do unto others as they would like to be done on them" instead of the widespread Golden Rule "Do unto others as you would like them to do on you".

«Do unto others as they would like to be done on them»

(T. Alessandra)

4 Methods for Promoting Intercultural Competence

To conclude, we present some methods that can contribute to a positive approach to diversity, the promotion of intercultural competence and thus team creativity (see also Stalder 2022):

- Deal with our own identity and with our own values and value systems to become (even) more aware of them,
- Address the identity and value systems of team members and the group as a whole,
- Work together on the team identity and on the – individual as well as collective – visions,
- Work together as a team to shed light on creativity performance and potential as well as working on self-awareness,
- Practice and encourage active listening and questioning,
- Offer and cultivate psychological safety (trust, mutual respect, readiness to take risks and make mistakes),

-
- Be interested in and open to the identities and value systems of others.

Finally, under point five, we suggest a selection of possible actions that can contribute to the development of intercultural competence and the promotion of collaboration in heterogeneous teams.

5 Recommendations

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Recommendation 1



Team Creativity Navigator® (TCN)

The Team Creativity Navigator (TCN) is a new assessment and competence development tool for teams and leaders.

The TCN is scientifically proven. It evaluates, among other dimensions, diversity, and the cooperative culture in the team. The tool is based on the self-assessment of team members and takes the form of an online questionnaire coupled with a team-specific report. It was developed by HSLU, HEIG-VD, and seven private companies as part of a project supported by Innosuisse (Swiss Agency for Innovation Promotion). In summary, the Team Creativity Navigator can be used for:

- Assessment of creativity in teams,
- Identification of strengths & fields of action,
- Assessment of team culture and atmosphere,
- Development of a creativity culture for the team and individual levels,
- Combination possibility with specific innovation challenges,
- Solution-oriented, tailor-made training seminars (for team and project managers).

In the framework of the above-mentioned research project, not only the Team Creativity Navigator® was developed. The partner consortium has simultaneously designed two further assessment tools for a) creativity in the whole organization (Organizational Creativity Navigator®) and b) individual creativity (Individual Creativity Navigator®).

For any further inquiries and/or for testing the Team Creativity Navigator® - as well as the Organizational Creativity Navigator® and the Individual Creativity Navigator® - please contact pia.stalder@heig-vd.ch / pia.stalder@bfh.ch

Recommendation 2



InnoGame

The InnoGame (Stalder 2019a and 2019b, 2020) is a management competence development tool for collaboration in an interdisciplinary, -cultural, -national context. Teams are given a company-specific innovation challenge, put into competition, and

filmed. The results are evaluated quantitatively and qualitatively and discussed in the team.

Recommendation 3



Plastic Mediation (PM)

Plastic mediation (PM) (Stalder, 2014, 2019, 2020) is an effective method for developing intercultural communication skills. It is used in individual and team coaching. PM is a creativity technique. It is based on all kinds of materials and artifacts. The participants present complex working situations, adopt new perspectives, and work out pathways to solutions.

Recommendation 4



Mentoring for Executive Leadership and Teams

Mentoring can be used to effectively promote the intercultural competences of managers and team members. Company mentors are specialists and managers who work in the business context as consulting, coaching, and training experts. Identified company mentors have specific skills that can contribute to the development of intercultural competence: Observing, questioning, active listening, and supporting change processes (individual and group).

See also <https://www.bp-mentor.ch/berufsbild/>

Recommendation 5



Global DISC – ICQ

Global DISC is a tool offered and used by ICQ-Global licensed mentors (mentoring understood as consultancy, coaching and training) to promote intercultural competence. It enables us to better understand how personality type and cultural background influence our conduct and communication style. It supports the development of our self-knowledge - values, needs, norms, conduct, preferences (work, living together, etc.) ... - and our ability to work with others who have different backgrounds in terms of experience, education, and culture. Global DISC - developed by Csaba Toth (2020ff) - consists of: a) an online questionnaire, b) a personal report (for reflection and learning), c) the "Quest", an interactive coaching application that aims to expand the users' "comfort zone" and improve behavioural flexibility and reflection.

See <https://icq.global/intercultural-disc/> and do not hesitate to get in contact with us: pia.stalder@heig-vd.ch / pia.stalder@bfh.ch, csaba@icq.global

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