

# 'Marriage diversity' a must-have for rock bands to businesses

April 16 2018, by Caroline Brooks

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Credit: Michigan State University

The rock n' roll lore says that once a bandmate gets married, the party's over for the group. But recently published Michigan State University research says that the blended mix of married and unmarried bandmates improves creativity, innovation and collaborative thinking (and, that the same goes for working professionals).

For decades, research proved that [diversity](#) - in terms of age, race and gender - brought new talents and perspectives to a group. Yet, "lifestyle diversity," such as living situations or marital status, has not been closely studied; that is, until now.

"To address this research gap and bring awareness of lifestyle differences to the diversity conversation, we examine an important and relevant type of lifestyle diversity, marriage diversity, which is timely given the increasing number of single people in the global workforce," said Don Conlon, Gambrel Family Endowed professor of management and chairperson for the Eli Broad College of Business' department of management.

To dig into marital diversity and its influence on a group's success, Conlon and Karen ETTY Jehn of the University of Melbourne looked at two very different types of groups: punk/new wave rock bands and MBA students.

"Because they represent an unusual context and differ in so many ways from groups based within organizations, musical groups may provide insights missed in traditional organizational studies," Conlon said. "By looking at vastly different groups - one driven by creativity and musical talent and the other by more traditional business measures of success - we hope to see that this form of diversity benefits all groups."

For rock bands, Conlon measured both the creative success and popular success of 84 bands. The rock spectrum included bands that successfully released albums between 1967 and 1992, including the Ramones, the Pretenders and U2. Conlon noted the [marital status](#) of each member, and whether it changed over time. The bands' creative successes were measured through analysis of album reviews in Rolling Stone magazine and British equivalent Trouser Press, and popular successes were measured by each album's highest position on the Billboard 200 chart.

"What we found was that marital diversity facilitated both critical and popular success for bands that were later in their careers. So, the more time they spent working together, the more having a blended mix of people helped their musical success," Conlon said.

Using more traditional group modeling, Conlon performed a similar analysis on MBA students at an Australian University. Here, he looked at 73 MBA student teams performing a semester-long consulting project in a class. Marital diversity was more impactful on the groups' performances toward the end of the semester, after they'd spent a considerable amount of time working together, which mirrored the findings on bands.

Conlon's research suggests that marital differences can provide creativity, complementary resources, support and information for group members from which to share and benefit. Because marital differences are unlikely to provoke conflict in a group, what it brings to the [group](#) will be productively shared and applied to the task - whether that is creating music or consulting on a project.

Lifestyle diversity, or at least when classified as marital diversity, is generally positive for a breadth of groups, research says. This is impressive considering the substantial differences across the two groups. The rock bands were together for years, if not decades, whereas the MBA teams existed only for 12 weeks, Conlon explained.

"Different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives associated with different life situations and choices may help the members engage in deeper information processing and more divergent thinking, allowing for more creative and exciting end products and popular [success](#) with the public," he said.

**More information:** Karen A. (Etty) Jehn et al, Are Lifestyle

Differences Beneficial? The Effects of Marital Diversity on Group Outcomes, *Small Group Research* (2018). [DOI: 10.1177/1046496418755920](https://doi.org/10.1177/1046496418755920)

Provided by Michigan State University

Citation: 'Marriage diversity' a must-have for rock bands to businesses (2018, April 16) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-04-marriage-diversity-must-have-bands-businesses.html>

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