

Avoiding demographic cliques build stronger team

9 January 2014

Cliques make team players less altruistic. That is the finding from a study of teams in business and not-for-profit organizations published this month in the *European Journal of International Management*. The study has implications for management of teams when measures of diversity including gender, ethnic origin and other demographic factors are considered.

Pinar Acar of the Department of Business Administration, at Middle East Technical University, in Ankara, Turkey, explains how multinational collaborations, greater awareness of gender issues and other factors have given rise to increasingly diverse teams within organizations. It is therefore important to understand how demographic differences between [individuals](#) in those organizations might affect team building, empathy and altruism between members. And, from the shareholder or stakeholder perspective, how the formation of cliques might undermine efficiency and efficacy.

Acar surveyed 221 individuals from 13 diverse teams from 28 countries and looked at how the efficacy of the teams is affected by the formation of demographic sub-groups by individuals within the teams. The main obstacle to efficacy that emerges is that if individuals form sub-groups, or cliques, within a team based on seeking out those from a similar demographic background then they are less likely to be altruistic towards the team. Whereas those individuals who identified most strongly with the team were likely to use their discretion to help the team as a whole. Fundamentally, it seems it is not individuals seeing themselves as different from the stereotypical team member but simply their identifying with other members who are similar that gives rise to this behaviour.

"Team effectiveness, in part, is based on individual members' display of cooperative, helpful behaviours extending beyond formal job requirements," explains Acar. If this effectiveness

is being undermined within any organization then interventions at the management level that preclude the formation of cliques while at the same time encouraging diversity and awareness of diversity issues should lead to stronger teams.

"Leaders of diverse teams should be aware that affective identification with the team is a significant trigger of benevolent behaviours on the part of individual members," says Acar. "Thus, leaders of diverse groups should engage in behaviours that would increase members' affective identification with the group," she concludes.

More information: F. Pinar Acar. "Social identification and altruism in diverse teams" in *European J. International Management*, 2014, 8, 55-72. [DOI: 10.1504/EJIM.2014.058484](https://doi.org/10.1504/EJIM.2014.058484)

Provided by Inderscience

APA citation: Avoiding demographic cliques build stronger team (2014, January 9) retrieved 17 September 2019 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-01-demographic-cliques-stronger-team.html>

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