

## Work Team Diversity and Work Team Performance

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### Abstract

Factors that affect work team performance are the main topic of numerous research works that bring understanding of how teams can operate effectively in a constantly changing environment. The focus of this paper is on the relationship between work team diversity and team performance. The aim is to evaluate the influence of various work team diversity categories and characteristics on team performance. The research is executed on the sample of more than 940 sales work teams within international corporation with the global presence. Performance of sales work teams is measured by achieved revenue on country level and consequently consolidated in a form of global performance ranking. Linear regression is used to analyse the impact of work team diversity characteristics on team performance. The results confirm that team performance is influenced by gender, national, and mother tongue diversity of team members, but also by seniority and stability of work team. Team size and job specialization seem to be without any significant impact on team performance.

**Keywords:** team diversity, team performance, work team structure, inclusion, ethical behaviour

**JEL Classification:** J16, L25, M14

### 1. Introduction

Diversity of work teams has attracted significant interest of institutions with a goal to attract the most talented candidates on the labour market and to retain employees with high potential. Innovation process benefits from wide knowledge base and from team members with various background. In this respect, companies often build multidisciplinary research teams to boost scientific development that can shorten time to market and fill existing gaps (Martinez et al., 2017). The outcome of prior studies focused on diversity of work teams has not confirmed the consistent results. The impact of work team diversity on company operations is different, from negative to neutral to positive. (Jackson and Joshi, 2004).

The transformation of markets towards globalization has been significant issue for companies from the very beginning of the twenty-first century. The global economy of today is created by companies based on the knowledge, that prefer employees with diverse education, experience and with specific competencies to collaborate and to produce new know-how that improves the performance of the company (Tenkasi and Boland, 1996). Modern companies are formed by various work teams. In this context, determinants of the performance of work teams

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are the scope of numerous scientific research that bring value to understanding how work teams achieve high performance and efficiency in the environment that is the subject of continual change (Dreu, 2002).

Organizations are currently trying to be as effective as possible. They need to do more with fewer people. However, people who come from different cultures often have different values, different motivations, work styles, lifestyles, and family roles (Lynch, 2017). To manage an increasingly diversified workforce, organizations must promote respect for individual differences and the individual identity of employees. The way how to achieve this goal is called diversity management (Byrd et al., 2018). The basis of this concept is the diversity that exists in society naturally. If in today's world, organizations face diversity challenges in many areas such as demographic changes in the workforce and customer populations, combined with globalized markets and international competition, then the key to a success in this area is strategic diversity management on the leadership level supported by HR department (Kreitz, 2008).

Diversity management can be defined as a managerial philosophy of respecting and valuing heterogeneity in an organization with the goal of improving performance (Hudson, 2017). According to Torres and Brussels (1992) diversity management can be described as an approach that allows diverse work teams to reach their full potential under equal working conditions, where no category of employees is privileged or discriminated against. The implementation of diversity management indicates that diversity and inclusion are an important topic for the company. A proactive diversity management approach applied by an organization can bring positive results by creating social relationships with employees from different minority groups. In addition, the impression that the company cares about diversity and inclusion have the potential to form an emotional connection with the company, with a consequent positive effect on job satisfaction and turnover intention of ethnic and other minorities (Otaye-Ebede, 2019).

In the current economic environment, stage of globalization and increasing workforce diversity, many companies, especially multinational corporations, have made a decision to take proactive stance in managing diversity and inclusion (D&I). According to Rosinski (2022), promoting D&I is increasingly recognized as a societal imperative, and many organizations are implementing D&I policies and practices. Primary goals of D&I are to combat prejudice and discrimination against certain groups of people and to promote equal opportunities. Supporting this attitude and behaviour is important sign of ethical behaviour of companies and in a time of increased attrition, it's also the way how companies can retain talents and increased the productivity of work teams (De Smet et al., 2021). Importance of inclusion, in a sense of ethical behaviour of companies, is also in the synthesis of cultural differences and promotion unity in diversity. The true outcome is not only about people feeling welcomed and respected. They should feel that their different viewpoints are seen as an opportunity rather than a threat. They feel included and can thrive, to the benefit of all parties and stakeholders. The highest form of diversity and inclusion is about tapping into and utilizing our unconscious potential for diversity individually and collectively. This concept can be put into practice especially by coaching work teams to eliminate cultural blind spots and unlock the hidden cultural potential of teams. A seemingly homogeneous work team could still be viewed as diverse and heterogeneous, although in an implicit and broad sense (Rosinski, 2022).

Interesting point of view on diversity and team performance can be found in the study executed by Luring and Villeseche (2019), in which they analyse the relationship between diversity attitudes and the performance of gender diverse teams. The study was executed on a sample of 1085 academic teams and results confirm that positive diversity attitudes are correlated with the performance, and that such positive diversity attitudes are more effective when team gender diversity is high than when it is low. This study also supports direct relation

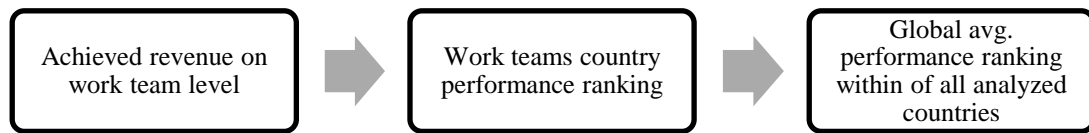
between openness to diversity and the performance of gender diverse teams. Choi, Sung and Zhang (2017) in their study look at the effects of workforce diversity on internal processes and performance at the organization level not only from gender perspective, but also from hierarchical position, age, and education diversity dimensions perspective. Data for their research were collected from 256 Korean manufacturing companies. According to their results, hierarchical position diversity is negatively related to employee satisfaction and competence, therefore negatively impacting also operational performance. On the other hand, education, gender, and age diversity results into positive influence on employee satisfaction, innovative climate, and employee competence, which increase operational efficiency and the innovation in the company.

As there are various diversity categories that are the subject of scientific studies, there are also multiple methods measuring the impact of diversity on the performance depending on the company level point of view. Research focused on board diversity appears to focus mainly on stock metrics, which reflect investors' perceptions of a company's value and ability to generate future cash flow. On the contrary, diversity-performance research on top management level primarily uses performance measures that indicate a company's ability to generate profits from a given portfolio (Hamann et al., 2013). Between studies examining the impact of managerial and work team diversity on the performance, there is greater variability in the performance measurement methods used. Comparable to stock and return indices, measures of market growth, such as change in sales, revenue, and market share, and which reflect changes in company size, are leveraged (Weinzimmer et al., 1998).

## 2. Aim and methods

The aim of the research is to evaluate the effect of various diversity categories and team characteristics on work team performance. The focus is also on the type of the relationship between selected diversity dimensions and the performance of work team. Analysed diversity categories and team characteristics are *Gender diversity*, *National diversity*, *Mother tongue*, *Seniority*, *Team stability*, *Team size* and *Job specialization*. The research sample consists of more than 940 sales work teams within international corporation with the presence all around the Globe. As the intention for the research was not to limit the scope to a certain country or geographical region, 940 sales work teams in the scope are covering previously identified 39 countries, that represent each geographical region of the world (Europe, Americas, Africa & Oceania, Asia).

The data for the research were obtained from the internal reporting of the analysed international corporation. Metric *Team performance* was created based on the information contained in *sales performance report*. This report contained achieved revenue (in USD) of the company for the fiscal year 2020 on the level of sales work teams. By revenue, in this context, is meant sales turnover from products and services of the company. Revenue (sales turnover) is selected as performance metric in our research because it is standardly used as a KPI (key performance indicator) in analysed company to measure and evaluate the performance of sales work teams and it is also used in scientific studies focused on the workforce diversity and performance relationship as one of the main financial KPIs on work team or company level (e.g. Roberson and Park, 2007; Herring, 2009; Van der Walt et al., 2006). Based on the revenue of sales works teams within each country in scope was created country performance ranking of sales work teams. By consolidation of all country performance rankings of work teams was constructed global performance ranking, where the sales work team on the top of the ranking achieved the highest average performance globally in fiscal year 2020, while the team on the bottom of the ranking achieved the lowest performance (Figure 1).

**Fig. 1** Construction of team performance metric

Source: Own research

Another analysed company internal data set applied in the research was *employee profile report*, which contained various information about all company employees. From this report were selected all available information about employees, that are part of those sales work teams that were, in the previous step, included in the research sample from *sales performance report*. Based on the review of the available data about team members in scope, were determined seven work team diversity categories and characteristics (*Gender diversity*, *National diversity*, *Mother tongue*, *Seniority*, *Team stability*, *Team size* and *Job specialization*). The selection of analysed diversity categories and characteristics was determined and limited by data availability about identified employees in scope from *employee profile report*.

Category *Gender diversity* on a range from 0% to 100% quantifies the proportion of female representatives in the work team. Variable *National diversity* on a range from 0% to 100% quantifies the percentage of various nationalities of employees in the work team. Category *Mother tongue* express the number of different first languages spoken by team members. Variable *Seniority* on a scale from 1 to 10 quantifies average work experience of employees within the work team. Score 1 is representing graduate positions with minimum required experiences, while score 10 represents the most senior positions of team members, who are not on managerial positions. The number of years that are employees part of the same working team is expressed by variable *Team stability*. Category *Team size* measures the numbers of employees within the work team, while from the research sample were excluded work teams with less than five team members. Variable *Job specialization* express how many different work areas are represented in the work team. Variables operationalization used in the research is summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1** Variables operationalization

Variable (Diversity Category)	Coding	Quantification
Gender diversity	G_D	1: 0% (work teams without any female team members) 2: 1% to 20% 3: 21% to 40% 4: 41% to 60% 5: 61% to 100%
National diversity	N_D	1: 0% (nationality of all team members is the same) 2: 1% to 20% 3: 21% to 40% 4: 41% to 60% 5: 61% to 100% (nationality of each team member is different)
Mother tongue	M_T	1: 1 mother tongue 2: 2 mother tongues 3: 3 mother tongues 4: more than 3 mother tongues
Seniority	S	1: up to 6 score rating (including) 2: 6 to 7 score rating (including) 3: over 7 score rating
Team stability	T_S	1: up to 2 years (including) 2: 2 to 3 years (including) 3: 3 to 4 years (including) 4: over 4 years

Team size	T_S	1: 5 to 7 team members 2: 8 to 9 team members 3: 10 to 11 team members 4: more than 11 team members
Job specialization	J_S	1: 1 job specialization 2: 2 job specializations 3: more than 2 job specializations

Source: Own research

The impact of selected diversity categories and team characteristics on team performance was analysed by linear regression. The independent variables in the linear regression model were work team diversity categories and characteristics (*Gender diversity, National diversity, Mother tongue, Seniority, Team stability, Team size* and *Job specialization*). The dependent variable in the model was *Team performance*. The linear regression functional form is as follows:

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_1 + \beta_2 x_2 + \beta_3 x_3 + \beta_4 x_4 + \beta_5 x_5 + \beta_6 x_6 + \beta_7 x_7 + \varepsilon_i$$

where:

$Y_i$  – Team performance (dependent variable)

$x_1$  – Gender diversity;  $x_2$  – National diversity;  $x_3$  – Mother tongue;  $x_4$  – Seniority;  $x_5$  – Team stability;  $x_6$  – Team size;  $x_7$  – Job specialization ( $x_1$  –  $x_7$  independent variables)

### 3. Results

The analysis of the impact of work team diversity and team characteristics on team performance was executed on the sample of more than 940 sales work teams. Most of the work teams (70%) in the research sample consist of team members with the same nationality, while only 5% of work teams has more than 60% of team members of different nationalities. 71% of analysed teams have all team members with the same job specialization, on the other side, team members from more than 3 types of the jobs have only 9% of teams. From the size of the team perspective, no category is significantly dominating, but most of the teams (29%) have from 8 to 9 employees and 23% of teams from 10 to 11 team members. It is important to mention that work teams with less than 5 team members were excluded from our research sample. 20% of teams have no female team members, most of the teams (33%) have up to 20% of female team members and only 4% of teams have more than 60% of women in the team. Majority of teams (77%) consist of team members speaking the same mother tongue and only 8% of teams have team members with more than 4 different mother languages. Approximately half of the teams in the research sample consist of mid-senior members, while 20% of teams consist of relatively junior employees. Only 11% of work teams have team members working together in the same teams for more than 4 years (on average) and 37% of teams have team members working together between 2 and 3 years (on average).

**Table 2** Characteristics of research sample

Job Specialization	%	National Diversity	%	Gender Diversity	%
1 job specialization	71%	0% (nationality of all team members is the same)	70%	0% (no female team members)	20%
2 job specializations	20%	1% to 20%	7%	1% to 20%	33%
3 and more job specializations	9%	21% to 40%	12%	21% to 40%	27%
Seniority	%				
Up to 6 (incl.)	20%	61% to 100%	5%	60% to 100%	4%
6 to 7 (incl.)	51%	Mother Tongue	%	Team Stability	%
Over 7	29%	1 language	77%	Up to 2 years (incl.)	34%

Team Size	%	2 languages	10%	2 to 3 years (incl.)	37%
5 to 7 team members	24%	3 languages	4%	3 to 4 years (incl.)	18%
8 to 9 team members	29%	4 and more languages	8%	Over 4 years	11%
10 to 11 team members	23%				
12 and more team members	24%				

Source: Own research

The impact of selected diversity categories and team characteristics on team performance is analysed by linear regression. The independent variables in the linear regression model are work team diversity categories and characteristics (*Gender diversity*, *National diversity*, *Mother tongue*, *Seniority*, *Team stability*, *Team size* and *Job specialization*). The dependent variable in the model is *Team performance*. Used linear regression model can be considered as suitable for testing of this type of relationship as, according to ANOVA results, the model significance is less than alpha (0.05). ANOVA results overview can be found in the table below.

**Table 3** ANOVA results overview

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Regression</b>	5614891.52	11	510444.68	7.10	0.00
<b>Residual</b>	68113028.47	948	71849.19		
<b>Total</b>	73727920.00	959			

Source: Own research

Used linear regression is statistically significant but explains only 8% of the variability of the dependent variable. The variability of the dependent variable *Team performance* is also influenced by other not known factors i.e., factors that are not part of this research. Regression model statistics are summarized in table below.

**Table 4** Linear regression statistics summary

	Value
R	.276
R Square	0.076
Adjusted R Square	0.065
Std. Error of the Estimate	268.047

Source: Own research

According to the results of the research, not all analysed work team diversity categories and characteristics have significant impact on team performance. *Team size* and *Job specialization* don't have any significant impact on team performance, while the rest of the analysed variables (*Gender diversity*, *National diversity*, *Mother tongue*, *Seniority* and *Team stability*) seem to have positive effect on work team performance i.e., the higher value of variable the higher team performance (Table 5).

**Table 5** Results of linear regression

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard Coefficients	p-value	t-stats
	b	Std. Err. of b			
<b>Seniority</b>	-50.70879	13.69867	-0.12720	0.00023 ***	-3.70173
<b>Gender Diversity</b>	36.38509	8.37888	0.14605	0.00002 ***	4.34248
<b>Team Stability</b>	27.27898	10.24108	0.09644	0.00786 **	2.66368
<b>National Diversity</b>	44.83699	15.88818	0.19315	0.00487 **	2.82203
<b>Team Size</b>	7.83065	8.37540	0.03094	0.35005	0.93496
<b>Job Specialization</b>	-8.97209	14.05950	-0.02079	0.52353	-0.63815
<b>Mother Tongue</b>	-75.53910	20.70739	-0.24991	0.00028 ***	-3.64793

Note: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001; R<sup>2</sup>=0.176.

Source: Own research

#### 4. Discussion

Positive effect of work team diversity on team performance confirmed by our research is in line with previous studies within this area of research explaining that diversity of team members makes the work team more variable, which creates more flexibility in responding to changes in the external environment. It also brings different viewpoints that can support creative problem-solving attitudes, multiply innovation and creativity, which can in consequence result to improved performance (Allen et al., 2004; Hubbard, 2011; Page, 2019; etc.).

Looking specifically on positive impact of gender diversity on team performance, revealed by our research, it is in line with previous studies focused on this topic (e.g., Frink et al., 2003; Herring, 2009; Richard, Ford, and Ismail, 2006; etc.). Positive effects of gender work team diversity on the performance were also confirmed by previous studies analysing this relationship on different company levels. Studies performed by Carter et al. (2010) and Smith et al. (2006) were focused on board of directors and board committees, and both revealed positive relation of board or committee gender diversity to firm performance. Dwyer et al. (2003) analysed team gender diversity on management company level and according to the results of their study gender diversity is positively related to performance in companies with a stronger growth orientation or clan organizational culture, while it is negatively related to performance in organizations with a stronger adhocracy culture. Frink et al. (2003) focused on gender diversity and performance relationship on employee level. Their research consisted of 2 studies. Study 1 confirmed U-shaped relationship between gender team composition and organization performance i.e. performance increases with greater diversity up to 50% female representation and decreases with further increases in diversity. Study 2 suggests that some industries might not be able to take advantage of gender composition and firm performance relationship. This could be the case of light and heavy manufacturing industries, where it is likely that the most important skill sets are based on physical attributes, such as strength, endurance, or dexterity. In this work environment, it is very likely that reliance on these attributes overrides any other benefits that may be produced by a gender-diverse environment.

Positive influence of national diversity on team performance, according to the results of our research, was also confirmed by a similar study performed by Gonzalez and DeNisi (2009), who proved positive effect of racial and ethnic diversity on firm performance under a condition of supportive diversity climate. Impact of nationality, as observable, and functional background, as non-observable, diversity characteristic, on team effectiveness and team performance was also the subject of the study by Zoogah et al. (2011), performed on the sample of 109 team members, 44 team leaders and 34 alliance executives involved with 44 strategic alliance teams in 15 companies. In this study, authors also tested the influence of team coordination on the relationship between team diversity and team performance. According to their results, team diversity itself does not have direct impact on the team outcome, but this relationship is determined by team processes. When comparing the results of this study with the findings of our research, we can conclude that they are just partially in line. Our research also did not confirm significant impact of job specialization (functional background) of team members and team performance, but on the contrary, our findings confirmed the significant positive relation between nationality diversity and team performance. In this respect, it is important to notice, that our paper does not analyze the influence of team coordination on team diversity-performance relationship.

Impact of team tenure (team stability), work experience (seniority) and education on company performance were analysed by Carpenter (2002). This study was conducted on a sample of 247 large and medium-sized companies in the Standard & Poors (S&P) industrial index and confirmed positive effect of all 3 analysed diversity categories on performance, which supports the results of our paper in the context of team stability (tenure) and seniority (work

experience) of team members. As the results of our paper, research executed by McIntyre et al. (2007) also confirmed tenure (team stability) as diversity dimension with significant impact on performance. Their study explored correlations between tenure diversity, age and company value, and found an inverted U-shaped relationship, such that low and high levels of diversity on each dimension were associated with lower levels of performance while moderate levels of diversity were associated with higher performance.

Our findings, that team size i.e., number of team member, does not have significant impact on team performance, do not confirm the results of previous studies focused on this diversity category as most of these studies are confirming the influence of team size on team performance (e.g., Hoisl et al., 2017; Mao et al., 2016; Wheelan, 2009).

## 5. Conclusion

Based on the results of our research, we can conclude that work team performance is influenced by team diversity structure. Increased performance is achieved by work teams with higher share of female team members and more diverse teams from nationality and mother tongue perspective. Higher seniority of team members and stability of work teams are also positively contributing to team performance. In this context, our first recommendation to policy makers is to focus on these diversity aspects and characteristics when constructing work teams to achieve their higher performance. The second recommendation is to implement active diversity management and, in this respect, to create collaborative and inclusive working environment to leverage all potential benefits of workforce diversity. Our study did not prove the impact of the team size and job specialization of employees on team performance.

One of the limitations of our study is that analysed diversity dimensions explain only 8% of variability of dependent variable *Team performance*, therefore the result of our research should be approached with due caution. In this respect, our recommendation for future research is to focus on another work team diversity dimensions, which are not part of this research, but have significant impact on team performance. Another limitation that also needs to be considered is that our study was performed in one international corporation on a sample of sales work teams, so the results could be different for other type of the company or for work teams operating in different function. Resulting recommendations for the future research from this limitation is to evaluate work team diversity and performance relationship in another type of the company and to focus on the work teams in different functions than sales department.

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