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Title of the proposal: Diversity and Creativity in Teams. How Leaders and Group Members Manage the Inherent Paradoxes.

Abstract

Creativity is a strongly context related, collective, and collaborative task across multiple boundaries that are of immaterial and material nature. Numerous factors play a role for the emergence of creativity. Leadership styles and diversity have undoubtedly an impact on team creativity. Creative teams face many process inherent paradoxes which leaders and members need to balance and overcome together. According to the observations and research findings discussed in this chapter, effective management of diversity for creativity requires a “humble leadership” style as well as different communication competencies and strategies. This book chapter provides theoretical and practical insights for those responsible for diversity management in creative teams, based on two empirical studies conducted between 2019 and 2022. Competencies and strategies are presented that may help leaders and teams navigate through highly dynamic, paradoxical interaction processes and, thus, to turn their diversity into a creativity asset. In addition, a glimpse of the Team Creativity Navigator® (TCN) is offered, which is a new assessment and development tool that supports leaders' and team members' learning processes for inclusive, creativity enhancing collaboration. As such, our chapter is an empirically-based conceptual contribution with the objective of providing practitioners (and researchers) with insights into appropriate strategies to boost creativity in diverse teams.

Key Words: Creativity, Diversity, Teams, Paradox, Innovation, Leadership

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Introduction

The innovation landscape has become a global, complex network of relationships among people with different backgrounds, values and needs, who collaborate in real and virtual contexts. The diversity of team members as well as the growing virtual collaboration open new opportunities for turning innovative ideas into value (Larson & De Church 2020). At the same time, they raise numerous organizational, relational, managerial, technical, and methodological questions (Chompunuch, Ribiere & Chanal 2019; Hundschell, Razinskas, Backmann & Hoegl 2021). Organizations, managers, leaders, and teams are thus faced with a considerable challenge. Our argument in this chapter is that leaders (as well as their employees) need strong communication and diversity-related competencies to succeed in their innovation tasks (Stalder 2022).

The goal of this book chapter is, on the one hand, to provide useful knowledge for those responsible for diversity management in creative teams. On the other hand, we identify and discuss the competencies and strategies that may help leaders and teams navigate through highly dynamic interaction processes which involves dealing with paradoxes that are inherent in diverse teams performing creative tasks. We conclude by presenting a new assessment and learning tool, which can contribute to enhancing leaders' and teams' competencies for inclusive collaboration.

The questions addressed in the chapter are the following:

- Which are the key dimensions of team creativity?
- What is the relationship between diversity and creativity?
- How can leaders and teams turn diversity into a creativity asset?
- Which communication competencies and strategies are important?
- How can these competencies be enhanced in practice?

The structure of the contribution is as follows. First, we illustrate the key dimensions relevant for team creativity. Second, we define the key concepts related to our topic: creativity, innovation, leadership, and diversity. In a third step, we have a deeper look at the paradoxes leaders and team members deal with in their interactions and innovation work. We then outline the first results of an ongoing research project aiming at identifying those communication strategies that help leaders and teams turn diversity into a creativity asset (Study A). A matrix illustrating the strategies leaders and team members can use for influencing the creative process in their collaboration is presented. In addition, we give a synopsis of the key competencies that are needed for enhancing the diversity-creativity relationship in teams. We finally offer a glimpse of the Team Creativity Navigator®, an assessment and development tool that supports leaders' and team members' learning processes for inclusive collaboration (Study B). To conclude, we summarize the competencies and strategies that can help innovation leaders and their teams navigate through the paradoxes that are inherent in their social interactions for creativity.

1. Dimensions of Team Creativity

Researchers have identified many dimensions that are relevant for the emergence of team creativity. Chompunuch et al. (2019), for instance, conducted a systematic literature review on the concept of team creativity. From the 77 analysed papers, they identified a total of 15 dimensions that are important for team creativity:

- Team diversity
- Team longevity
- Transactive memory system
- Team creative efficacy

- Psychological safety
- Creative thinking styles / problem solving
- Creative motivation
- Team mental models
- Individual creativity
- Team cohesion
- Team reflexivity
- Task and goal interdependence
- Conflict management
- Creative leadership style
- Climate for creativity and innovation

Leadership styles and diversity are among these 15 key dimensions for team creativity. They have undoubtedly an impact on team creativity, which is crucial for organizational viability and success. Before we have a closer look at the leadership and diversity dimensions of team collaboration for creativity and innovation, it is important to define these key concepts and specify their relationship.

2. Creativity and Innovation

Creativity and innovation are interconnected concepts. They are generally considered highly dynamic, emergent and multidimensional phenomena (Anderson, Potocnik & Zhou 2014), which need strong individual and collective competencies to unfold their expected entrepreneurial – and social – benefits. Creativity is often understood as the first phase of innovation, as the idea generation phase, whereas innovation is considered as the implementation process of those ideas (cf. e.g., Hotz-Hart & Rohner 2014). However, from a more process-based perspective, creativity is actually involved in all stages of the innovation process. Overall, innovations can be seen as possible operationalizations of an individuals' or groups' creativity. In a nutshell, creativity and innovation are integral parts of the same process of generating valuable novelty. Accordingly, Anderson et al. (op. cit.: p. 1298) suggest an integrative definition of creativity and innovation:

“Creativity and innovation at work are the process, outcome, and products of attempts to develop and introduce new and improved ways of doing things. The creativity stage of this process refers to idea generation, and innovation refers to the subsequent stage of implementing ideas toward better procedures, practices, or products. Creativity and innovation can occur at the level of the individual, work team, organization, or at more than one of these levels combined but will invariably result in identifiable benefits at one or more of these levels of analysis”.

In our work, we adopt a social constructivist and interactionist perspective on creativity. Our focus lies in the diversity-creativity relationship at a team level. The theoretical framework, the methodology, the data collection and analysis we use in our research projects are essentially built on the two following definitions. For Plucker & al. (2004, p. 90):

“Creativity is the interaction among aptitude, process, and environment by which an individual or group produces a perceptible product that is both novel and useful as defined within a social context”.

Palmer (2016) has broadened this definition. She has not only studied and integrated Plucker et al.'s work, but also other experts' views (namely Barron 1955, Amabile 1988, Feist 1998, Simonton 1999 and Sternberg & Lubart 1999). In the conclusions of her book on work-related creativity diagnostics, she defines creativity as:

“the interaction between intelligence, expertise, personality traits, and motivation as individual dispositions with process stage dependent demands and environmental conditions by which an individual or group produces a perceptible product that is both novel and useful as defined within a social context” (Palmer 2016, p. 366).

Team creativity processes are highly complex, non-linear, and dynamic. These processes need goal orientation, collaboration, coordination, negotiation, and decision taking. The leadership topic is missing from the definitions of creativity, although it is a crucial aspect of it.

3. Humble Leadership for Team Creativity

Following Kaudela-Baum, Holzer and Kocher (2014), we understand leadership as an interactive process of shaping the *relationship* between leaders and followers. Ciulla (2014, p. XV) states that “leadership is not a person or a position. It is a complex moral relationship between people based in trust, obligation, commitment, and a shared vision of the good”.

According to the Innovation Leadership Special Interest Group of the International Society for Professional Innovation Management (ISPIM), leadership is not only about relationship. In the particular context of creativity and innovation, it is “a practice to inspire and enable people, teams, organizations, and networks to create and innovate. It involves the full innovation cycle with attention to exploration and exploitation, from concept to market” (Jensen, Kaudela-Baum, & Sheffield, 2023, Chapter 1). This practice moreover focuses on the implementation sustainable innovation processes with a long-term perspective to create value in today's global and digitally connected environment.

For Jordans, Ng'weno and Spencer-Oatey (referring to the Global Leadership Fellows Programme by the World Economic Forum 2019) leaders are required today “who have the vision and values, the character and competence, to shape the future while also balancing the polarities between short- and long-term goals” (Jordans et al., 2020, p. 22). We need:

“dynamic, engaged and driven individuals who possess a high degree of intellectual curiosity and service-oriented humility, ... entrepreneur[s] in the global public interest with a profound sense of purpose regardless of the scale and scope of the challenge” (Jordans et al. 2020, p. 22).

We consider leadership as an “art”; its task is to envision, connect and build relationships, accept shifting roles, inspire, motivate, persuade (see also Stalder 2022). And its importance is vital when it comes to the management of diversity. For inclusive, effective collaboration in teams, at the center of this art are “relationships”. According to Schein and Schein (2018, p. 3), it is key to build “personal cooperative, trusting relationships as in friendships” while also taking into account feelings and emotions.

In our view, and according to our research on communication behaviour in multicultural, -disciplinary, and -national teams, leadership is strongly people, relationship, and context related. It is “emergent”, “contingent”, and “shifting”. Our observations are in line with Schein & Schein's definition:

“leadership is wanting to do something *new* and *better*, and getting others to go along. This definition applies as much to senior executives developing new strategies, new purposes, and new values as it does to a group member down in the organization suggesting a new way of running a meeting or improving a process to drive better results. Both the word *new* and the word *better* remind us that

leadership always refers to some task that can be improved and to some group whose values and culture will ultimately determine what is better.

[...] What is new and what is better will always depend on the context, the nature of the task, and the cultural values that are operating in the group or organization that is doing the work. What we [...] label as “good or effective leadership” thus always begins with someone perceiving a new and better way to do something, an emergent leader” (Schein & Schein 2018, p. 2).

This consideration of the leader-follower relationship highlights the importance of openness, flexibility, and the need for humility on the part of leaders in managing diversity and team creative processes, and beyond. Depending on the team composition and process status, leadership changes can occur situationally. Schein & Schein differentiate leader-follower relationships along a continuum of “levels of relationship” which includes four levels:

- Level -1: Total impersonal domination and coercion;
- Level 1: Transactional role and rule-based supervision, service, and most forms of “professional” helping relationships;
- Level 2: Personal cooperative, trusting relationships as in friendships and in effective teams;
- Level 3: Emotionally intimate total mutual commitments.

The ways the world is changing make the authors believe that we need new models of leadership based on more personal Level 2, and sometimes even Level 3, relationships and group processes.

According to Schein and Schein (2018, p. 11),

“to make organizations more effective, to lead what has increasingly come to be labelled “culture change” or “transformation”, the relationship between the emergent leader and the organizational followers who will implement the changes has to become a more personal and cooperative Level 2 relationship. [...] Level 2 personal, open, and trusting relationships have to be developed throughout workgroups to facilitate cultural transformations and build the innovative capacities that the VUCA¹ world will require”.

The authors advocate, indeed, for “humble leadership”. We fully share Schein & Schein’s view. Leadership in creative teams composed of members with different cultural allegiances is a matter of relationship. It is a strongly context related, collective, and collaborative task across multiple boundaries that are of immaterial and material nature. In our view, team creativity processes need “humble leadership” and the effective management of diversity requires it. It is the “art” of establishing and maintaining solid relationships across physical and mental borders (Stalder, 2014b), short- and long-term.

4. Visible and Invisible Diversity

We live and work in an interconnected, globalized world. Nowadays, workforces are characterized by a multitude of identities, backgrounds, experiences, and they continue becoming more heterogeneous

¹ VUCA : Acronym for Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous.

(Mor Barak & Travis 2013, Roberson 2019). Thus, workplace diversity is a fact, as is the need to know better how to handle it inclusively.

4.1 Definition of Diversity

The term of “diversity” refers to the 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, degrees, etc.) (Wieviorka 2008). According to Roberson (2019, p. 2) diversity refers to “any compositional differences among people within a work unit”. Diversity leads us to consider others as similar or different from ourselves.

Diversity has *visible* and *invisible* dimensions (Milliken & Martins 1996, Becker & Seidel 2006, Roberson 2019). Among the visible, often referred to as demographic or *surface-level diversity* (Harrison et al. 1998 and 2002), count, for example: age, gender, nationality, or ethnic origin. Surface-level diversity subsumes “innate differences among people that are reflected in their physical features and/or easily assessed” (Roberson 2019, p. 3). Among the hidden, also called “*deep-level diversity*” (Harrison et al. 1998 and 2002, Torchia et al. 2015), are personality and values (culture, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) on the one hand, and knowledge, skills, and attitudes on the other.

As we have seen in section 1 of this chapter, diversity is one dimension, among others, that impact on team creativity. Here below we shed more light on the effects of diversity on team creativity.

4.2 The Diversity-Creativity Relationship in Teams

There is considerable heterogeneity in research on the diversity-creativity relationship in teams. It is a challenge to get a clearer picture of the conditions that help turn diversity into a creativity asset. According to Page (2017), the “diversity bonus” depends on the type of diversity, on the individuals who form a team, the team’s culture, the task, and each process stage working on the task. Various conditions and moderators shape diversity’s effects on team creativity. First, researchers agree that diversity does not lead automatically to creativity (van Dijk, van Engen, & van Knippenberg 2012; Knippenberg & Hoefer 2018):

“The range of effects for the diversity-creativity relationship suggests that organizations seeking creativity from teamwork cannot simply rely on diverse team compositions; they will also have to create the conditions conducive to reaping the benefits of diversity in team creativity” (van Knippenberg & Hoefer 2018, p. 53).

Second, many individual, social, and contextual factors have an influence on the diversity-creativity relationships. According to research, depending on these factors, diversity can have positive, negative, or no effects on team creativity. Indeed, various literature reviews show that diversity is a double-edged sword (Williams & O’Reilly 1998, van Knippenberg & Schippers 2007, Carter & Phillips 2017 or van Knippenberg & Hoefer 2018, Hundschell et al. 2021).

Third, extant research reveals two main conditions that are at stake in the diversity-creativity relationship: *information-elaboration processes* that help creativity in teams, and *social-categorization processes* that may hamper it (van Knippenberg & Hoefer 2018, Hundschell et al. 2021). On the one hand, different people know different things: “more diverse teams will be able to draw on a greater and more diverse pool of task-relevant information, knowledge, and perspectives” (van Knippenberg

& Hoever 2018, p. 43). Diversity may thus “function as an informational resource that stimulates team performance” (ibid.). On the other hand, diversity, and the perception of “difference” may lead to social categorization processes of the type “I” versus “you” and “us” versus “them”. These processes impact on group members’ readiness and motivation to communicate and collaborate with dissimilar others. Social categorizations can result in stereotypic beliefs that may impact negatively on team creativity. The consequences are complex social dynamics among individuals with unique, multifaceted identities who interpret and act in every specific interaction setting according to their (self-)perception, their motivations, goals, feelings, experiences. Prejudices and stereotypes, behaviour of exclusion versus inclusion, information retention versus contribution, personal engagement versus disengagement further complexify the social interactions in diverse teams. Team leaders and members need strong self-knowledge, mutual respect, and humility to listen to each other, share their perspectives, and co-create novel solutions. We would add to this that there is also the need for tolerating paradoxes and ambiguity, and making the most of them.

5. Creativity Inherent Paradoxes that Teams Need to Manage

Paradoxes are part of the creative process. Creative teams face many paradoxes in their work (Cropley 1997). This is primarily due to the fact that creativity and innovation processes involve a plethora of activities that are very different from each other (i.e., heterogeneity in the range of tasks) and appear contradictory when considered together (Bledow et al. 2009).

5.1 Product: Novelty and Usefulness

One of the most obvious paradoxes can be located between the two basic characteristics of creative products, as postulated by the standard definition of creativity (see e.g., Amabile 1983): novelty and usefulness (Miron-Spektor, Erez & Naveh 2011). While the novelty and usefulness of ideas were previously often studied together as part of a unidimensional construct of creativity, more recent research has shown that the two elements - especially in the evaluation process - often compete with each other and also arise from opposing but nevertheless closely interrelated processes. For example, the newer an idea is, the more it is associated with uncertainty about its feasibility and practical usefulness. Moreover, particularly useful ideas are often those that build on existing solutions and existing knowledge and thus cannot be classified as “completely” new. This illustrates that the novelty and usefulness of ideas can be in conflict with each other and that there is often a trade-off relationship between them (Miron-Spektor & Erez 2017).

5.2 Process: Divergent and Convergent Thinking

As per definition, creativity refers essentially to thinking aimed at generating new ideas. The process involves different styles of thinking that, on closer inspection, can seem contradictory but nonetheless essential for achieving creative performance: divergent and convergent thinking (Cropley & Cropley 2008, Bledow et al. 2009). These two thinking styles are of different importance at different stages of the creativity process. For example, when it comes to generating new ideas, team members need to be able to *think divergently*, which means breaking away from what is old and familiar to find unexpected, novel answers, of which there are potentially many. In contrast, when it comes to evaluating new ideas in terms of their usefulness or feasibility, for example, *a convergent style of thinking must be pursued*, which allows teams to find the suitable answer (Cropley 1997). The

inherently paradoxical nature of creativity, according to Miron-Spektor and Erez (2017), is thus reflected in the fact that individuals and teams who perform creatively must experience and reconcile contradictory yet interrelated processes, goals, thoughts, identities, and perspectives.

5.3 Experience: “Immersed Detachment”

When it comes to creative experience, Glăveanu (2018) refers to a “root paradox”, which he calls “immersed detachment”: the deep immersion of the creator(s) in their work and, at the same time, the need for taking distance to adopt new perspectives. He describes “immersed detachment” as:

“a paradoxical state of simultaneous hyper-connectivity and disconnection that enables creativity and represents [...] its distinctive sign. [...] By having creators pay attention to their context, it allows them to pick up on possible resources for creativity, as they appear. At the same time, by adding a reflective difference, it opens new possibilities for acting in the given situation.” (Glăveanu 2018, p. 2)

We are social and cultural beings, which both constrains and frees our thinking and actions. Understanding this paradox and those addressed here (among many other) can have wide-ranging benefits at theoretical and practical levels. They help us understand that creativity depends at once on individuals and society, uniqueness and sameness, continuity and difference. People also need individual and collective space and time, not only at the organizational level, but also on the team and interactional levels. Team members, in a meeting for co-creation, need time to think, to mature their ideas, to formulate and to share them.

6. Intermediate Synthesis

The review of the literature on creativity and diversity paints a complex picture regarding their relationship. The double focus on novelty and utility, in the case of creativity, and surface and deep level, in the case of diversity, make it imperative to develop nuanced frameworks when it comes to diversity management for creativity. These frameworks need to take into account the issue of leadership and the many paradoxes of creativity.

Team leaders and members are not only challenged at the “macrolevel” of their collaboration (such as arranging time and space in their organizations) but also on the “microlevel” of their interpersonal communication in their team meetings, where they exchange and elaborate mutually on their ideas. Most importantly, they need to understand how these many levels and factors of influence play out in practice, i.e., in the communication processes between team members, and team members and leader(s). In the next section, we move from theory to practice. We present an ongoing research project that provides useful results for managing the diversity-creativity relationship in teams.

7. From Theory to Practice: Diversity Management for Creativity (Study A)

The ongoing digitization and globalization of professional relationships and collaboration, the fact of growing diversity in the workplace as well as its impact on creativity and innovation, explain that there is strong interest from management theory and practice regarding the diversity-creativity relationship (Paulus, van der Zee & Kenworthy 2016, van Knippenberg & Hoeve 2018, Hundschell et al. 2021). As stated earlier, diversity does not lead automatically to creativity. Team members need specific

communication competencies and strategies to turn their diversity into a creativity asset and then turn their creative ideas into value. There is still little scientific and empirically grounded knowledge on the communication behaviour teams can adopt to take full advantage of their diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

We are currently conducting a research project that investigates communication behaviour in diverse teams and pursues, among other, the goal to identify the strategies that help people use their deep-level diversity for creativity. There are first outcomes that give useful insights for practice, discussed as follows.

7.1 Research Design

The research design of the project is empirical and qualitative. For a deeper understanding of diversity management for creativity in teams and for identifying communication strategies that help people use deep-level diversity for creativity, we have collected video data of teams partaking in the “InnoGame©”. We have developed a Conceptual Model (CM) that serves as an analytical framework for the analysis of this data, which has been transcribed and analysed by means of video-based interaction analysis (e.g., Mondada 2005, Stalder 2010, 2019a, 2019b).

The InnoGame© is a group activity we have been using since 2014 for the purpose of training students and practitioners in team and innovation management across multiple boundaries (experience, identity, language, culture, discipline, space, time, resources...) (Stalder 2019a or 2019b, Stalder, Nussbaum, et al. 2022). It is a practice game, and its nature is competitive. During this game, the participants design, construct (with paper sheets and in 3-D), name, and pitch an innovative piece of office furniture. There is a time limit for each of the four stages. The teams are filmed. Their qualitative results (prototype in 3-D) are rated in plenary. Each group is also rated on its resource management (material, time), and gets a quantitative result. In addition, after completing the tasks, each team member fills in a questionnaire on the team’s dynamics, strategies, and performance. The goal of this data is to validate and substantiate the results gained through interaction analysis (i.e., data source and method triangulation, Denzin 1978). This approach allows us to compare the teams’ performance and to discover good practices. From 2014 to June 2022, 36 groups (consisting of 5 participants each) participated in this team exercise. The dataset consists of more than 18 hours of video material.

Teams engaged in creative tasks essentially face two major challenges. On the one hand, they need to navigate constructively through divergent thinking phases (cf. section 5.2), which are particularly important in the idea generation processes. On the other hand, there is the challenge of handling convergent thinking phases and building consensus, which is the *conditio sine qua non* for agreeing on a common idea and for implementing it. For deeper understanding of diversity management for creativity in teams, it is key to investigate those episodes in which teams appear to diversify perspectives. On the other hand, it is also important to look at phases in which group members “seek unity” and are engaged in consensus building, since this is needed for deciding on *the* idea to implement. Nevertheless, creativity is not a linear, but a most interactive and iterative process. There are also transition zones where divergence in convergent thinking can be found and vice versa. Figure 1 hereafter illustrates the Conceptual Model used for the video data analysis:

[Insert Fig. 1 here]



Fig. 1: Conceptual Model for Video Data Analysis (RCSO DiversityCreaTool 2022)

So far, we have fully transcribed the videos of 14 teams: 6 who achieved outstanding results, 4 who achieved average results, and 4 who got below average results. Using these transcripts, we have started with first cycle coding of sequences using process coding and causation coding (Saldana 2013) while looking for similarities and differences in team interactions and, most importantly, team communication strategies. For the second cycle of coding, we used our CM and applied axial coding to categorize the codes while also identifying relationships between those categories (Strauss & Corbin 1998, Saldana 2013). To find a consistent coding frame and to ensure validity, the research team collectively reviewed the results in various workshops (investigator triangulation, Denzin 1978). The results of these workshops (i.e., final coding frame, key definitions, and coding rules) were then used for the revision of all coding, ensuring a uniform procedure was applied leading to comparability in and robustness of the results.

7.2 Matrix of Strategies that Influence the Creative Process in Teams

Based on the research design presented before, a first set of communication strategies has been identified that help leaders and team members turn their diversity into a creativity asset. The matrix in Figure 2 gives an overview of the findings.

[Insert Fig. 2 here]

		Creative Process		
		Inducing or Directing towards Divergence	Inducing or Directing towards Convergence	
Collaboration Process	Promoting Dialogue and Inclusion Focus on others (e.g., colleagues)	<i>Example:</i> Asking other team members to come up with and to share totally new ideas and possibilities (inviting, opening B)	<i>Example:</i> Asking team members to focus on an existing idea and to think of ways for implementation (inviting, closing B)	Effect: Making use of diversity for creative outcomes
	Inhibiting Dialogue and Inclusion Focus on self (e.g., the leader)	<i>Example:</i> Interrupting an ongoing ideation process by stipulating totally new ideas (dominant, opening B)	<i>Example:</i> Vehemently holding on to an idea even though others have expressed strong doubt about it (dominant, closing B)	Effect: Containing the effects of diversity for creative outcomes
		Goal: Producing new ideas and, therefore, shifting away from existing ideas	Goal: Focusing on an existing idea and its development and implementation	© RCSO DIVERSITYCreaTool 2022 (IME, HEIG-VD, HES-SO – NUJ)

Fig. 2: Communication Strategies for Guiding Creative Processes in Diverse Teams

On the one hand, we observe that, in the specific context of the Innogame©, leaders emerge in and from team interaction. On the other hand, the data shows that there is an abundance of ways by which individuals can influence the creative performance of their teams – positive and negative.

Our analysis reveals two different styles of influence: one that promotes dialogue and inclusive collaboration, and another one that inhibits dialogue and fosters exclusion. By adopting a certain type of behaviour (dominant vs. inviting & opening vs. closing), team members can, on the one hand, systematically guide the collaboration process (i.e., influence the level of participation of other team members by inhibiting or promoting dialogue and inclusion), while, on the other hand, steer the direction of creative processes (i.e., inducing or directing towards divergence or convergence).

As these two approaches are not mutually exclusive (i.e., they can be combined in various ways), four overarching strategies to guide creative processes in diverse teams can be identified: “Promoting Dialogue and Inclusion”, “Inhibit Dialogue and Inclusion”, “Inducing or Directing towards Divergence”, and “Inducing or Directing towards Convergence”. The appropriateness of these strategies is, however, contingent on the situational context in any given team and, most importantly, on the phase within the creative process they find themselves in. If, for example, a team has already produced a large number of ideas without having discussed their respective advantages or disadvantages, it might be useful to turn towards a more convergent approach while, at the same time, promoting dialogue (i.e., applying an inviting-closing interaction and communication approach). In contrast, if a team is fixed on or even stuck in only one idea and has difficulties to explore the possible, it might be good to take the lead by applying a divergence inducing strategy (i.e., applying a dominant-opening interaction and communication approach), and, thus, inhibiting dialogue for a certain time. Our analysis reveals a tendency that, depending on the stage of the creativity process, leadership should play a more or less strong role in team interaction.

8. The Need for Intercultural Communication Competencies and the Team Creativity Navigator®

The theoretical considerations and the research outcomes presented before confirm that diversity as such is not, on its own, a creativity booster. Neither is it a type or attribute that enhances creativity in a team. The success of turning diversity into creativity depends, above all, on the participants' competencies to engage with each other in their interactions (Gilson et al. 2013, Stalder et al. 2022) and to deal with paradoxes that are inherent in the creative process they co-construct. Diversity management for creativity needs people who appreciate difference, know how to make sense of it, and how to use it to generate useful novelties (see also Glăveanu & Beghetto 2017). In our view, diversity management for team creativity needs strong intercultural communication competencies. The goal of the last section is, on the one hand, to make explicit the nature of these competencies; on the other hand, we present the Team Creativity Navigator® (TCN), a new assessment tool that helps teams further develop their collaboration competencies for contributing effectively to their organizations' innovation endeavours.

8.1 Intercultural Communication Competence: an Asset for Diversity-Creativity Relationships

Intercultural communication competence is not just the concern of managers and leaders, but of all the members of an organization. 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, p. 63).

Competent behaviour goes hand in hand with good self-awareness and cultural awareness². It has an individual and a collective dimension. According to Le Boterf (op. cit.: p. 67): "To act competently is to know how to interact with others; one cannot be competent alone". According to Chen and Starosta (1996, p. 358-359):

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

In theory, there are many different lists of interculturally 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 limit ourselves to highlight the aspects we consider to be the most important ones. They are illustrated in Figure 3 hereafter:

² 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). 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" (Stalder & al. 2020 or Stalder 2022 for more information on the culture concept in the team management context).

[Insert Fig. 3 here]

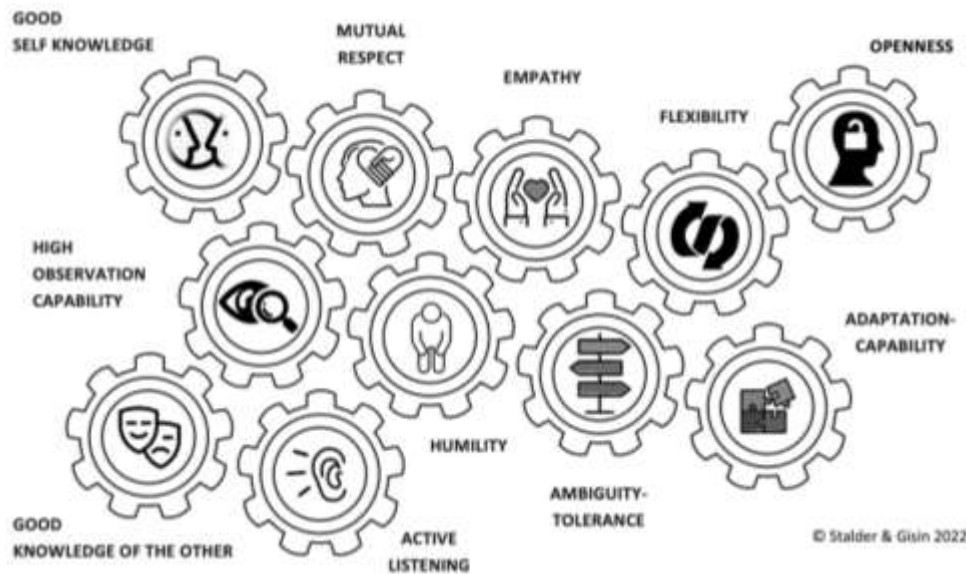


Fig. 3: Relevant Characteristics for Interactions Between People from Different Backgrounds

These competencies are crucial in diverse teams where members need to co-construct common ground, negotiate their participation roles, and express as well as defend their individual points of view. Intercultural situations can be problematic as they may trigger uncertainty, confusion, or conflict. 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 competencies and if teams are led in a self-conscious and culturally aware way, they broaden horizons, set learning processes in motion, and can contribute to the promotion of creativity and innovation.³ As stated earlier in this chapter, strong personal relationships, based on openness, sincerity, and trust, are key factors for successful collaboration among team members with different experiential and cultural backgrounds. According to our readings, observations, and findings, the humble leadership style, which takes also into account feelings and emotions, is a most promising approach to enhance collaboration across multiple boundaries, be they of surface- or deep-level nature.

³ In our research, beyond the project presented in this chapter, we explore - by conducting interviews, field observation, qualitative and quantitative film analysis - how managers and leaders in international, -cultural, and -disciplinary settings experience their work context and what strategies they use to interact with their colleagues in their teams. Over the years, we have compiled an extensive set of strategy descriptions that are used in the international, -cultural, and -disciplinary professional environments.

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" (see e.g., Stalder 2010, 2016, 2019a, 2019b or 2022; Stalder, Nussbaum, & al. 2020 or 2022).

8.2 The “Team Creativity Navigator®” (Study B)

To conclude, we offer a glimpse of a tool that can contribute to a positive approach to diversity, to the promotion of intercultural competencies, and thus to team creativity (see also Stalder 2022, Stalder & Gisin 2022).

The Team Creativity Navigator (TCN) is a new assessment and competence development tool for leaders and teams. It is articulated around the following question: are we creative and innovative in our team? The TCN has been developed by HSLU, HEIG-VD, and seven private companies as part of a project supported by Innosuisse (Swiss Agency for Innovation Promotion)⁴. It has been scientifically validated by applying it in different innovation-oriented organizations located in Switzerland. The TCN evaluates, among other dimensions, the degree of diversity and the quality of cooperation in a team. The tool is based on the self-assessment by the team members. It has the form of an online questionnaire coupled with a team-specific report. It allows for comparison with other teams who take the assessment (benchmark).

The TCN covers all 15 dimensions (Chompunuch et al. 2019) relevant to team creativity. For practical reasons, these 15 dimensions have been grouped into five overarching dimensions: Idea Generation, Diversity, Environment, Collaboration Culture, and Vision & Goals. Each dimension includes sub-factors that have proven significance for team creativity and can provide a source of orientation for targeting development efforts and interventions.

Team creativity is assessed to get an impression of which creativity-stimulating dimensions are particularly pronounced in a team, and which are less so. As Goller and Bessant (2017) aptly put it, “teams are made, not born”. Every group is composed of individuals, bringing in their unique personalities and specific experience, and together, each team carves out and negotiates a characteristic culture of cooperation through the interaction of its members. Each team is thus characterised by both unique strengths and potential for development with regard to its creativity.

The results of the assessment reveal which dimensions affecting creativity are already well-established in a team and in which aspects there may be need for action. This is motivated by the wish to get a sense for the facilitating factors or “enablers” that strongly influence the creativity of a team and, specifically, to understand how each dimension – such as diversity, cooperation culture, or idea generation – is represented in the team. Cultures and competencies are not static; they change. The report therefore reflects a snapshot in time. Every team has its unique strengths and areas for development; with the TCN, teams can get to know both better.

In a nutshell, the TCN measures the state of team creativity. The results in the team-specific report, underpinned with visual elements and coaching questions, promote reflection and the (further) development process of team creativity. Finally, the TCN also allows for tailor-made training seminars for team leaders and group members⁵.

⁴ 32312.1 IP-SBM «Organisationale Kreativität – eine handlungsorientierte Toolbox» (Organizational Creativity – An Action-Oriented Toolbox).

⁵ More information on the TCN can be found under <https://heig-vd.ch/rad/instituts/iide/management-interculturel/diversite-creativite-et-innovation-creativity-navigator>. In the Innosuisse project 32312.1 IP-SBM the partner consortium has not only developed the TCN but simultaneously two further assessment tools for a) creativity in the whole organization (Organizational Creativity Navigator®, OCN) and b) individual creativity (Individual Creativity Navigator®, ICN). More information on the OCN and ICN can be found under & <https://www.hslu.ch/de-ch/wirtschaft/institute/ibr/kompetenzen/unternehmensentwicklung-fuehrung-personal/cc-ufp-unternehmensentwicklung/cc-ufp-innovation/creativity-navigator/>.

9. Conclusion

As we have shown throughout this chapter, team creativity is a multi-layered process. The literature currently points to more than 15 dimensions that need to be considered when assessing and promoting team creativity, ranging from the diversity of team members, motivation, vision, risk affinity or communication culture to aspects such as cohesion among team members and the prevailing leadership and conflict management styles. Leaders and teams have not only to deal with these dimensions, but also with many paradoxes that are inherent in creative processes. Good personal relationships among team members are the essence for sustainable creativity in culturally diverse teams. In today's hybrid, world-spanning, highly dynamic and complex work environments, innovation project leaders need much ambiguity tolerance, openness, and flexibility to succeed in their tasks. We found the "humble leadership style" (section 3) to be particularly beneficial for turning deep-level diversity into team creativity.

The two models presented in chapters 7.2 (i.e., leadership communication strategies for guiding creative processes in diverse teams) and 8.2 (i.e., the Team Creativity Navigator) originated from different research projects (i.e., Study A and B). Nevertheless, they are directly connected to each other and can be used in combination to fully benefit from their complementarities. Essentially, the two models focus on different aspects or levels relevant for team creativity: While the TCN is a model covering the key factors to promote team creativity, the matrix on the leadership communication strategies focuses mainly on the role of communication to fully capture the value of diversity in teams – which is one core dimension of the TCN.

To conclude, effective diversity management for sustainable creativity and innovation in teams demands humble, flexible leaders who are able to build strong, trusting interpersonal relationships. Drawing on their (self)observation capability, reflexivity, and differentiated communication competencies (directing towards divergence or convergence according to the interaction and creativity process stages), innovation leaders succeed in constructing, together with their team members, respectful and inclusive collaboration cultures. According to our findings – which will be further corroborated by playing the Innogame© and by using the TCN in diverse teams (working in both, face-to-face and in virtual settings) – it is this type of collaboration culture that helps making the best of deep-level diversity for creativity in innovation contexts.

The matrix of strategies to influence the creative processes in team interactions (Figure 2 in section 7), the development of leaders' and all team members' intercultural communication competencies (Figure 3 in section 8.1), and the Team Creativity Navigator (section 8.2) can contribute to further enhance innovation leaders' and their teams' collaboration skills, which are required to effectively innovate – i.e., move from ideas to value – in the ever-changing environment they are working in. May the theoretical knowledge, the figures, and the tools presented in this chapter serve as sources of inspiration for tackling the diversity-creativity process inherent paradoxes.

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