



Diversity and Human Interaction: Exploring Interpersonal And Intergroup Dynamics

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Abstract

This conceptual paper explores the intricate synergy between diversity and human interaction from psychological, sociocultural, communicative, and organizational angles. While diversity can stimulate knowledge sharing, creativity, innovation, and group decision-making, it can also lead to stereotyping, intergroup anxiety, social categorization, communication difficulties, and interpersonal conflict. Based on Allport's Contact Hypothesis, Social Identity Theory, Self-Categorization Theory, Communication Infrastructure Theory, the Integration-and-Learning perspective, and Intergroup Dialogue approaches, the paper then proposes a multilevel socio-ecological conceptual framework for understanding the role of diversity in affecting interpersonal and intergroup outcomes. The framework also suggests that contextual diversity does not have an irreversible impact but is mediated and moderated by the quality of contact, communication, intercultural competence, social identity complexity, psychological safety, interpersonal congruence, and organizational climate. Nine research propositions are presented that outline the mechanisms by which positive intergroup contact, structured dialogue, inclusive communication, and recognition of diverse identities can lessen social distance, enhance trust, belongingness, and collaborative performance. The paper makes a unique contribution to diversity scholarship by refocusing the discussion from representation to communicative engagement and provides implications for the practice of organizations, educational institutions, and communities striving to make diversity work meaningfully and sustainably for the collective whole.

Keywords: Diversity, human interaction, intergroup relations, social identity, intercultural communication, psychological safety, inclusion, intergroup contact, collaborative outcomes, conceptual framework.

1. Introduction

In today's societies, workplaces, and educational institutions are rapidly transitioning in demographics. The ability to live in diversity and understand its relationship with human interaction has become a key issue for society. Past studies in this area have been based on Gordon Allport's classic contact hypothesis, which suggests that prejudice can be effectively reduced through direct contact with supportive conditions. However, a persistent research issue is that whilst the cognitive advantages of different perspectives can be enhanced, the socio-cultural disadvantages of social categorization, anxiety between groups, and communication 'faultlines' can be counterproductive, creating the 'diversity paradox' of decreased social trust (Broad et al., 2014). Researching this critical gap, this study chapter has two research goals: analyzing the dynamic psychological, neurological, and cultural mechanisms that govern interpersonal encounters, and suggesting structured, communication-oriented frameworks to achieve real inclusion (Verkuyten & Yogeeswaran, 2020). From a methodological perspective, a multi-level, social-ecological synthesis of empirical literature from social psychology, organizational behavior, neurobiology, and communication studies is used to track how macro-contextual structures shape micro-level individual cognitive representations and behaviors over time. The paper outline begins by conceptualizing the surface- and deep-level dimensions of diversity and their cognitive consequences, and then examines interpersonal dynamics, social identity theories, and biological substrates of group categorization to achieve these goals. Next, the roles of communication, empathy, and stereotypic biases in influencing group trust are explored, followed by Ely and Thomas's integration-and-learning perspective, Edmondson's psychological safety, the critical-dialogic approach of Intergroup Dialogue, and specific managerial and social policy implications for making the collaborative potential of human diversity a reality.

2. Concept Of Diversity And Human Interaction

Diversity in human interaction is a complex socioecological phenomenon that involves dynamic interactions between personal characteristics, environments, and the interrelated aspects of people's interactions with one another (Bond & Haynes, 2014). Diversity is differentiated by surface-level diversity (demographic, such as race, gender, and age) and deep-level diversity (values, beliefs, and self-conceptions developed through cultural socialization) (Oetzel et al., 2012). Social perceptions are initially based on surface-level characteristics, but with increased team longevity over time, deeper-level differences foster team cohesion (Kim et al., 2019). As people interact, two conflicting views of group functioning emerge: the information/decision-making view holds that dissimilar groups have more knowledge of the task and are, therefore, more creative, and the social categorisation/similarity-attraction paradigm argues that perceived dissimilarities lead to an automatic process of ingroup/outgroup categorization (Bond & Haynes, 2014). This categorizing process results in ingroup favoritism and outgroup bias, as people strive to maintain a positive self-image, which can be expressed in the workplace in the form of interpersonal conflict, reduced social integration, and subgroup faultlines such as linguistic group faultlines in multilingual teams. Allport's contact theory suggests that contact reduces prejudice under specific conditions: equal status, shared goals, cooperative exchange,

and institutional support; a supportive friendship potential that allows the disclosure of self. Importantly, studies show that threat perceptions and loss of trust may increase when there is no actual interaction between people in diverse neighborhoods or organizations, but the structure of interaction is still present. Additionally, the valence of contact is important: positive contact experiences are found to be longitudinally related to the development of generalized intercultural competence (ability to communicate appropriately in cross-cultural contexts), while negative contact is related to a decrease in both competence and outgroup trust (Verkuyten & Yogeeswaran, 2020). High intercultural competence is also a protective factor that reduces the likelihood of future negative interactions by assisting in avoiding and mitigating miscommunication and interpersonal conflict. Such interactions are also manifested physically in the regulation of interpersonal distance (IPD), where individuals' preferences for physical distance differ across cultures: collectivist cultures place significantly greater distances between ingroup and outgroup members than do individualist counterparts, whereas individualist cultures do not differ in distance between the two groups (Schmid et al., 2013). Moreover, individual differences influence these interactions; more prejudiced individuals with a high level of social dominance orientation (SDO) or right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) are more likely to avoid intergroup contact because they have heightened threat expectations, and positive contact stands to liberate the mind with respect to SDO, leading to less rigid, more open-minded orientations. Societies and organizations have adopted different diversity ideologies for managing these hard-to-handle contact situations—color-blind ideology disregards social categories and places assimilationist pressure and psychological strain on minorities, multiculturalism stresses differences and reinforces essentialist boundaries and stereotypes, and polyculturalism emphasizes the historical intertwining and influence of cultural groups. In either case, the policy paradigm of interculturalism focuses on dynamic intercultural interaction, community belonging, and identity fluidity, which are echoed in interdisciplinary science. At the individual level, repeated experiences of contextual diversity build social identity complexity (representation of multiple ingroup memberships in a non-overlapping manner) that decreases ingroup bias and social distance. Likewise, when others' appraisals match one's own self-views, self-verification leads to a better ability to express one's own attributes, which, in turn, contributes to better performance of creative tasks in the group. Similarly, high interpersonal congruence (matching others' appraisals with self-views) is conducive to the expression of one's own attributes, which leads to better performance of creative tasks within the group, where the members are different (Hargie et al., 2003). Structured interventions, such as intergroup dialogue (IGD), are designed with a critical-dialogic approach to move interactions that are polite and avoidant towards adversarial and collaborative alliances (Sorensen et al., 2009). This model of action is a series of four communication processes that collectively and fully intervene in the psychological transition to bridging differences and committing to collective action against systemic inequalities: appreciating difference, engaging self, critical self-reflection on power and privilege, and alliance building (Nagda, 2006).

3. Dimensions Of Diversity

There are multiple dimensions of diversity in human interactions, including visible, invisible, demographic, functional, and contextual dimensions that help people categorize themselves and others. At the primary level, researchers differentiate between diversity that is obvious and seen (surface-level diversity) and that which is internal or invisible (deep-level diversity), such as values, beliefs, self-conceptions, and attitudes that are a product of cultural socialization (Bond & Haynes, 2014). Categories that unfold onto the surface will be readily recognized and utilized immediately by perceivers to label social categories, while categories that are deep and not obvious will only become apparent after extended interaction. As the work group relationship gets deeper and team longevity increases, the salience of surface differences decreases, and deep-level characteristics such as similarity in workstyles, values, and beliefs become more important in affecting how well the team integrates and is cohesive (Bodenhausen, 2010). These characteristics can also be subdivided within organizations: sociodemographic dimensions are those that have historical roots in systematic prejudice or inequities in power, and task-related dimensions include background functions, educational training, or organizational tenure. In addition, there are dimensions of diversity that are more visible and less visible; for example, having a gender, color, or being of a different race are more easily visible and are instantly categorized, while dimensions such as sexual orientation, religious affiliation, and disability status are more invisible and must be engaged through conscious decisions around disclosure and access within the workplace (Bond & Haynes, 2014). The vitality of such dimensions might be locally located, that is, how people respond to diversity depends on the composition of the area and their expectations about the normal environment in which they live. Several scholars have developed different operationalizations of the spatial units continuum (from homogeneity to heterogeneity) to analyze contextual diversity. Instead of being defined as mere minority representation, researchers also assess variety (several groups in a context) and integration (how connected various groups are in a region), presenting evidence that the various operationalizations predict different intergroup outcomes, including the salience of implicit stereotypes or national exclusion (Oetzel et al., 2012). For example, when considering implicit weapon stereotypes, more diverse and integrated metropolitan areas are less stereotypical, while more diverse and integrated areas are less stereotypical with respect to national stereotypes of Asian Americans. Further, diversity can also be measured as a change over time and by using the majority group's expectations on what they believe ethnic minorities will look like in the future; a sharp or predicted rise in the percentages of minorities may lead to group-status threat, realistic threat, and implicit bias on the part of the majority group (Schmid et al., 2013). Importantly, there is no consistency between objective and subjective or perceived diversity measures. Perceived similarity or dissimilarity has instant causal effects on group processes because people want to maintain their self-views and seek others' self-verifying appraisals to promote interpersonal congruence. Diversity faultlines occur when several dimensions of diversity intersect (e.g., age, sex, and ethnicity). These barriers may cause the grouping to fracture into subgroups that are opposed to one another, exacerbating task or relationship conflict and information processing difficulties (Kalra & Szymanski, 2023). In addition, there are differences in language (more than one country) and regional differences (tongue variation), which may create dialect-based faultlines, language barriers, and status-related stigmas in teams. Across different environments, contact with

diverse social groups increases individuals' thinking about non-overlapping category structures. This exposure raises social identity complexity (the subjective representation of the multiplicity of in-group memberships of social identity). There are two components of social identity complexity: similarity complexity (perceived similarities in meaning) and overlap complexity (physical boundaries between categories). Higher social identity complexity is associated with lower provincial/ethnocentric in-group favoritism and social distance, showing that the structural complexity of a person's social identity has a direct impact on their tolerance of members of the out-group (Schmid et al., 2013).

4. Interpersonal Dynamics In Diverse Social Settings

Psychological, cultural, and communication processes influence interpersonal dynamics in various social contexts, which either build or maintain relationships or extend social inequalities. Intergroup anxiety, concerns about evaluation, and cognitive depletion are associated with direct encounters between different groups, which leads to intergroup perception problems and reduces the ability to understand each other's perspectives (Sorensen et al., 2009). This anxiety is expressed through unclear nonverbal communication, such as fidgeting, closed posture, and distancing (Sorensen et al., 2009). Same-group interactions give partners the benefit of the doubt, whereas cross-group interactions result in negative attributions for these anxious behaviors (if partners do not want to interact). These misunderstandings are detrimental to relationship development. Roommate research indicates that while cross-race roommates report less positive mood than their same-race counterparts in their relationships, they also report a decrease in intimacy-related behaviors, such as smiling. In addition, some people are involved in interactions with unequal motives: marginalized people are interested in power and systemic change, while the advantaged are interested in commonalities (West, 2011). This conflict between motivations leads to interactions that can be likened to two ships passing in the night, and with shared goals, prejudice has less impact. This conflict can be so extreme that people in two parts of a society, for example, avoid certain topics such as religion or politics, which results in a polite level of avoidability and harmony on the surface, but not in deeper disclosure or trust (West, 2011). This is echoed in virtual contexts where national diversity may make it more difficult for innovation to occur, and minor disruptions, such as a one-second audio delay, have more negative interpersonal attributions in cross-group than in same-group dyads. Researchers use instruments such as Team Circles in an online context to track interpersonal distance perceptions over time to detect subtle and immediate shifts, and to show that a decrease in outgroup team member interpersonal distance correlates with decreased outgroup prejudice. Deindividuation effects in these online forums lead to increased attractiveness towards group prototypes, whereas social information processing theory suggests that attractiveness is determined by the dynamism and likability of behaviors, independent of the group context. However, when an ingroup member acts in an undesirable manner, the threatened member undergoes a reclassification process, which involves disidentification from the group to get a distance from the undesirable target. Further, these encounters are influenced by individual differences: persons scoring high in SDO tend to avoid contact, whereas positive contact may be an agent of cognitive liberalization, decreasing SDO and encouraging more open cognitive styles over time (Kalra & Szymanski, 2023). In addition, cultural systems control bodily social interactions; collectivists have a much larger interpersonal distance to guard their body integrity in threat, while individualists select distance unrelated to group affiliation. Linguistic diversity also brings about social division because non-native accents may raise stereotypes of low competency, resulting in loss of status; regional dialect differences within domestic teams may also raise unexpected faultlines, resulting in group subdivisions (Wei et al., 2024). Groups should aim for high interpersonal congruence to deal with these destructive and problematic dynamics; this involves giving members self-verifying appraisals that affirm their individual self-views instead of making them deny their individual characteristics to fit into the group prototype (Hargie et al., 2003). Highly congruent environments significantly reduce relationship conflict and allow diverse teams to fully leverage their diverse points of view to improve task performance creatively. Moreover, educational approaches such as intergroup dialogue create brave and safe spaces through a critical-dialogic model, which facilitates risk-taking, personal sharing, and self-reflection on power and privilege, and thereby opens the way for individuals to create cross-group alliances and collaborate actively for social justice (Sorensen et al., 2009).

5. Intergroup Dynamics And Social Identity

Categorizing the social world into in-groups ("us") and out-groups ("them") lies at the heart of intergroup dynamics and the development of social identities. Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory suggests that a person's sense of self is a large part of what is gained from belonging to a group; they try to protect their sense of self by in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination (Shamoa-Nir & Milford, 2025). Self-Categorization Theory elaborates on this and highlights the process by which individuals depersonalize their self-concept by moving from an 'I' to a 'we' identity when they assimilate to an in-group prototype (Cikara & Bavel, 2024). To separate these identification processes, the minimal group paradigm has been used to show that in-group favoritism can be provoked in people by allocating them to arbitrary groups that have never interacted face-to-face or competed against each other (Wang et al., 2009). This bias is manifested in social relationships, such as social integration, trust, and communication, and may be a major impediment to the processing of information related to tasks in diverse teams (Bond & Haynes, 2014). Nonnative accents are a remarkably strong cue to group membership, prompting automatic out-group categorization and stereotypes about competence, which often supersede visual group cues (Bond & Haynes, 2014). Furthermore, if several demographic or functional differences occur together, "diversity faultlines" are created, which can create antagonistic subgroups within groups and negatively impact team cohesiveness (Gallois et al., 2018). These powerful categorization systems have different neurological and biological underpinnings. Early research in social neuroscience suggested that amygdala activation was associated with out-group negativity; however, motivated belonging needs were studied using minimal-group work, and it was found that the amygdala tracked motivational relevance (valued in-group member) (Bodenhausen, 2010). Likewise, in-group more activates the fusiform face area (FFA) than out-group faces, indicating that in-group faces are seen in detail, whereas out-group faces are seen categorically as

interchangeable representatives(Cikara & Bavel, 2024). In addition, the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) is also involved in in-group evaluation, suggesting that there is some overlap between the representation of the self (I) and the collective in-group (we). The first study reported that, biologically, the effect of oxytocin is described as enhancing in-group favoritism but not out-group derogation—the out-group derogation effect is one of the first symptoms to surface, if it does at all, once the in-group favoritism effect has faded(Wang et al., 2009). If in-group members act differently from the group norms, it will trigger a "black sheep effect" or a "reclassification process." Threatened peers respond to an in-group member who is disliked by others by disidentifying from the group in online communication. In contrast, out-group hostility must lead to a rise in group differentiation, which reinforces in-group identification and endorsement of in-group norms. Moreover, collective victimhood narratives are extremely central to the construction of essentialist perspectives of in-group identity maintenance(Zabrodska, 2025). Coherent in-group rhetoric creating the victim image of the in-group also creates status insecurity, which in turn leads to the construction of social identity with perceived in-group superiority and in-group boundaries(Hymel & Katz, 2019). The Common Ingroup Identity Model suggests an alternative approach of recategorizing to a superordinate identity to reduce categorical divisions and shift boundaries to create a 'we'(West, 2011). However, a superordinate identity can also evoke a "dark side": minority groups may feel threatened by the loss of their minority identity, whereas the superordinate group may ethnocentrically believe that the superordinate prototype only represents itself, and its own values are universal. Based on these models, such as those of Dual Identity or those of Mutual Intergroup Differentiation, it is proposed that maintaining subgroup salience within a superordinate connection will increase the likelihood that positive contact will be generalized to the group(Sorensen et al., 2009). This is especially important because there is a dynamic tension between stability and change in hierarchical groups: Group A (advantaged) is drawn to maintaining stability and heightening differences through the focus on similarity and color-blind ideology, while Group B (disadvantaged) is drawn to the forces of change and diminishing the difference through the focus on power difference and equality(Dovidio et al., 2009). Finally, these processes are subject to individual differences: a positive contact can liberate the mind and lower SDO, while contact avoidance is promoted by high levels of social dominance orientation (SDO) or authoritarianism(Turner et al., 2020). Contextual neighborhood diversity also changes cognition: it increases the salience of non-overlapping categories, which makes people more aware of the complexity of social identities, and consequently lowers ethnocentric in-group bias and social distance(Schmid et al., 2013).

6. Communication, Empathy And Interpersonal Trust

Interpersonal communication, empathy, and social trust are all interconnected aspects of human interaction that shape and influence how diversity enriches or fragments societies. High levels of demographic, racial, or ethnic diversity are linked to lower levels of generalized trust and greater threat feelings among the majority group, a persistent challenge in heterogeneous settings known as the diversity paradox(Wang et al., 2009). However, this loss of trust does not have to occur; research shows that it is "diversity without contact" that is the problem(Stolle et al., 2008). Neighborhood-level contextual heterogeneity is completely offset when neighborhood members regularly talk to their neighbors(Wang et al., 2017). These face-to-face social connections offset inaccurate stereotypes and replace them with personalized knowledge, lessening out-group threat and helping generalized trust cross group lines. Effective communication processes are the vehicle through which diversity can impact relational outcomes in collaborative, team-based settings, but they are very sensitive to linguistic and structural disruptions(Oetzel et al., 2012). There is a high risk of linguistic diversity negatively affecting intra-team trust, especially in short-term project teams with no common history. This is because non-native accents automatically categorize and stereotype outgroups. In many cases, communication problems result in negative, personal attributions of why things are not understood, further increasing problems of cooperation and trust(Mitchell et al., 2010). To overcome these challenges, people need to learn and build the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural contexts and relate to others across various cultural contexts: "intercultural competence. Highly competent persons are more attentive, self-monitoring, and empathic to interpersonal interactions(Meleady et al., 2021). Intercultural competence is boosted by positive intergroup contact, which, in turn, lowers the likelihood of future negative contact, thus creating a virtuous cycle of confidence in contact with intercultural competence. Moreover, norms of "open-mindedness" encourage curiosity and information inquiry, helping to unlearn "petrified patterns" by team members from other backgrounds and incorporate different viewpoints(Khuri, 2004). In these intergroup encounters, empathy acts as a relational bridge, but it is complex to practice. Psychologically, empathy is a relational attitude that involves a reconstructive imaginative process of the other's subjective experience without judgment. This is because expressing empathy in cross-cultural contexts is cognitively challenging and limited by the social distance of participants' cultures, experiences, and cultural development. In addition, in highly polarized societies, intercultural dynamics at the micro-level are generally shaped by the "polite avoidance" of sensitive socio-political or religious issues, which are avoided to preserve a thin veneer of harmony(Hargie et al., 2003). Polite avoidance is not about fighting but about not letting any real intimacy or personal disclosure develop, which makes relationships shallow. To change this silence, structured interventions, such as intergroup dialogue (IGD), promote horizontal and reciprocal communication, moving participants from polite avoidance or adversarial debate towards dialogic engagement. These dialogues are based on the principle of "structured interaction, " which creates the context, motivation, and direction for learning. Specifically, they create psychological safety with clear agreements established in the conversations, for example, not interrupting, using "I" statements, and suspending judgment, all designed to protect the dignity of the participant(Nagda & Zúñiga, 2003). This formalized exchange supports an active and shared exchange of personal stories, active listening, and questions of real interest in others' experiences. Importantly, IGD brings dialogic sharing together with a critical analysis of structured inequality, power, and privilege. This integration is from traditional social-psychological empathy to critical-dialogic empathy(Frantell et al., 2019). Critical empathy is a hopeful yet circumspect process of making informed relational, emotional, and sociohistorical connections with others at emotionally, intellectually, and socially meaningful levels, while being aware of the sociohistorical forces and power disparities that may undermine equitable

relationships. This dialogic process is not based on trust, but it actively creates interpersonal trust and cross-group alliances based on shared vulnerability, personal intimacy, and a joint commitment to action for social justice(Nagda, 2006).

7. Stereotyping, Prejudice, And Intergroup Bias

Stereotyping, prejudice, and intergroup bias are enduring socio-cognitive processes that are deeply ingrained in the organization of the social world in the human brain(Cikara & Bavel, 2024). According to social identity theory, the sorting of others into in-groups ("us") and out-groups ("them") is intended to simplify complexity and is typically very fast, leading to in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. Importantly, aversive out-group bias is more likely to occur when positive behaviors and favoritism are systematically withheld from out-group members rather than when they are overtly and actively rejected(Bond & Haynes, 2014). Such categorization processes are very flexible, with automatically activated attitudes and stereotypes heavily contextualized and dynamic in the moment, in the situation, whether one is on a street corner in an urban area or in a church. There are both cognitive and affective components of prejudice, and although emotional affect is more predictive of intergroup behavior and attitudes over time, both components are significant(Hymel & Katz, 2019). In other words, individuals' overt recognition of inequalities and dedication to democratic ideals do not necessarily prevent them from displaying implicit, unintentional, and repulsive racial prejudices when evaluative ambiguity affords non-racial explanations(Bodenhausen, 2010). These subtle biases are expressed in the workplace in the form of microaggressions, which are brief, commonly occurring acts of mistreatment, invalidation, or dismissive looks that deny marginalized individuals a sense of legitimacy and feeling "taken for granted." The shifting standards model is also a distorting element because it holds that workers from groups that are stereotyped as being incompetent need to set much higher confirmatory standards than workers of the dominant group to demonstrate their competence(Khuri, 2004). In addition, there may be descriptive stereotypes about groups that contradict prescriptive stereotypes about how groups should act. Social sanctions are harsh when people cross these prescriptive lines (e.g., when competent women are assertive and not warm and communal). Social penalties are high when people cross these prescriptive lines and are assertive rather than warm and communal (e.g., competent women)(Amer & Obradovic, 2022). In the same way, the gender inversion theory accounts for the stereotype of gay men as less leaderlike because of perceived femminess and lesbians as very competent but unwarm. Linguistic diversity also serves as a strong indicator of stigma: non-native accents lead to automatic out-group categorization and stereotypes of lower intelligence, loyalty, competence, and so on, which often overpower visual demographic markers. These stereotypical expectations can create stereotype threat, a situational condition in which the norm-grouped person feels an increased threat to evaluation and struggles with cognitive overload due to an anticipated negative group stereotype(Bond & Haynes, 2014). Moreover, real, or perceived intergroup interactions are essentially regulated by status and competitive biases, leading to subsequent behavioral patterns. The stereotype content model categorizes social groups based on two dimensions: warmth and competence, which are based on perceived outgroup status and competition. High-status and competitive groups tend to trigger envy and counter-empathic smiles (zygomaticus major) and neural activation of the anterior insula when bad things happen to them(Shamoa-Nir & Milford, 2025). Furthermore, the salience of status threat elicits negative defensive responses: Whites saliently facing a future majority-minority country experience higher status threat, manifesting in higher racial identification and conservative ideological changes, and out-group-antagonistic behaviors. These stigmatizing biases can be actively managed and mitigated in societies and organizations by the adoption of diverse ideologies that inform group policies in a competitive way. Specifically, the color-blind approach fails to account for differences in categories and can place rigid assimilationist pressures on minorities and force silence that continues to maintain systemic inequities(Verkuyten & Yogeeswaran, 2020). Multiculturalism is an affirmation of differences, but can have the opposite effect when made explicit, intensifying race essentialism and the conviction that group differences are fixed and biological facts. However, polyculturalism is more about the historical interdependence of cultural groups, while the policy paradigm of interculturalism is about dynamic interpersonal interaction, shared belonging, and mutual dialogue, in order to effectively reduce out-group prejudice, social distance, and generalized trust(Stolle et al., 2008). Finally, it can be concluded that Allport's theory of contact states that positive face-to-face contact in equal status, shared goals, and institutional support is still a strong remedy that leads to cognitive change and the breakdown of the cognitive structure of prejudice(Broad et al., 2014).

8. Inclusion, Belongingness And Psychological Safety

Inclusion, belongingness, and psychological safety are socioecological and communicative constructs that are deeply interconnected and influence how individuals experience a variety of organizational, educational, and community contexts(Bond & Haynes, 2014). In organizational psychology, psychological safety is a culture of trust and respect in which people feel safe to take interpersonal risks, speak their minds, and share their differences without fear of negative consequences(Doorbosch et al., 2025). This safety does not mean that there is no conflict or cognitively there is no feeling of "comfort" in intergroup encounters; it does mean that there is a difference between "dignity safety, " which is the respect every person deserves, and "intellectual safety, " which can foster a false sense of harmony by steering clear of contentious issues. Building structured environments of interaction is about moving from providing a "safe space" (where participants are protected from experiencing discomfort because they are surrounded by people who hold the same opinion as them) to a "brave space" (where participants are encouraged to take risks, be vulnerable, and be open and honest about themselves). This shift from polite avoidance to dialogic engagement calls for a lot of relationship work and a careful balance of advocacy and inquiry that allows participants to bring more of themselves and be open to the other's alternative view(Doorbosch et al., 2025). Most importantly, the process of creating psychological safety is dynamic, collaborative, and co-constructed, not static, imposed by facilitators or institutional rules. In the interactions, participants develop personal engagement (self-disclosure, personal sharing, critical reflection) and interpersonal engagement (echoing the content of others, using positive characterizations). In a high-psychological safety group, people feel empowered

to reach interpersonal congruence (the extent to which the people in the group perceive them as they perceive themselves) and satisfy their basic psychological identity negotiation needs(Patil D. A, 2027). The key benefit of this congruence is that it allows for the expression rather than suppression of unique characteristics that make each team member distinct, thus directly protecting teams from relationship conflict and providing an opportunity to use deep-level cognitive diversity to boost creative performance(Zabrodska, 2025). Linguistic diversity, on the other hand, can create a significant obstacle for safety, as non-native accents and regional dialects can result in perceptions of low competence and consequently, lead to loss of status and linguistic ostracism, which can isolate members. Human needs for a sense of belonging are closely related to safety and are the subjective experience of the quality and frequency of supportive social relationships within a specific space. In neighborhood contexts, Communication Infrastructure Theory emphasizes that neighborhood integration, as a result of being connected in the neighborhood, is directly linked to a person's sense of belongingness and positive perceptions of neighbors, beyond the "diversity paradox" of decreased social trust in diverse settings(Broad et al., 2014). Same-group connections offer important developmental advantages and resources to minority adolescents in educational contexts, including familiarity, safety, and ethnic-racial identity support. However, if people feel a sense of "social exclusion anxiety" (an ongoing fear of being rejected by a group), they may try to resolve this sense of insecurity by toughening up the solidarity of their group and by marginalizing others, thereby illustrating how the lack of a sense of belonging can lead to a "us versus them" mentality and out-group bias(Kornienko & Rivas-Drake, 2022). Finally, full inclusion is achieved when organizations go beyond counting and hiring people from minority groups and begin to actively seek to be effective on the day-to-day experience of marginalized employees. The 'integration-and-learning' approach frames the vision of inclusion as an organizational philosophy that recognizes that skills, knowledge, and culture of diverse members are learned resources that are part of the main business of the organization; in this conceptualization, inclusion of everyone's full personhood is supported structurally throughout the day and is both valued and recognized(Bond & Haynes, 2014). Moreover, when people are exposed to particular neighborhood diversity, they may come to represent their multiple in-group identities in more complex, non-overlapping ways, leading to increased social identity complexity and lower social distance, which in turn should increase tolerance. Responding to contextual neighborhood diversity may encourage people to represent multiple in-group identities in more complex and non-overlapping terms, increasing social identity complexity, which should lead to greater tolerance and less social distance(Schmid et al., 2013).

9. Diversity And Collaborative Outcomes

Collaborative outcomes are influenced by workplace and team diversity via an intricate working mechanism, commonly referred to as the double-edged sword mechanism. From the information/decision-making view, it is argued—sometimes referred to as the value-in-diversity hypothesis—that socio-demographic and functional diversity bring many different aspects of knowledge and experiences that are relevant to the task, as well as different levels of understanding. This cognitive diversity makes a group more creative in its problem-solving ability and more effective in the quality of its decisions, especially on complex problems, problems outside the routine, and problems with an open structure that require divergent thinking and the transaction of knowledge across professions. However, social identity and self-categorization theories warn of automatic ingroup-outgroup distinctions that may seriously hamper cooperation because of visible differences(Bond & Haynes, 2014). Categorization can foster ingroup favoritism and outgroup bias, which can result in relationship conflict, reduced communication, systematic information withholding, and reluctance for team members to share task-relevant information with members that they see as different. This tension may manifest as diversity faultlines or hypothesized divisions within a group by various demographic or functional characteristics that can create oppositional subgroups that reduce team unity. To harness these diverse cognitive strengths and reduce social categorization barriers, organizations need to create enabling social climates that are more than just numbers(Bodenhausen, 2010). Diversity-related outcomes rely on enacting a particular diversity perspective; a discrimination-and-fairness perspective emphasizes equal treatment; an access-and-legitimacy perspective favors outcomes that are more likely to benefit niche markets to gain access; and only an integration-and-learning perspective ensures lasting benefits by valuing the unique skills, insights, and cultural backgrounds of diverse members as essential learning resources at the heart of the primary mission(Dovidio et al., 2009). Moreover, the positive individual, group, and time-based effects of diversity are very much moderated. First, the salience of group differences is important as a moderator, as surface-level differences in demographic characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity, location, education, etc.) may negatively affect the social interaction of a team in early stages; however, over time, deep-level differences in values, workstyle, attitudes, etc., become more salient and enable team members to find similarities, making categories less salient and group members more integrated(Bodenhausen, 2010). Second, the nature of the task changes this, as open-structured tasks with multiple objective solutions promote divergent thinking, and dominant group members value the contribution of lower-status counterparts more than closed-structured tasks with one objective solution. Third, diversity outcomes are positively moderated by diversity beliefs: When group members think of diversity as an asset, they perform better by engaging in more cognitive elaboration on group tasks. High interpersonal congruence buffers relationship conflict in these teams from all sides and allows them to authentically convey their distinct and idiosyncratic characteristics, which serve as a positive factor in creative task performance, as well as social integration and identification. Conversely, teams with low interpersonal congruence suffer from significant performance problems and increased relational conflict. Communication challenges also present a linguistic and dialect-based threat to these collaborative dynamics, especially in domestic and multinational project teams, where linguistic and personal attributions can lead to status loss, linguistic ostracism, and destructive personal attributions that impair trust(Kalra & Szymanski, 2023). Research in linguistically diverse environments demonstrates that cultural differences between subgroups of a given national language can also be further subdivided into smaller cultural differences at the regional level of a language group, which can lead to status differences and increase the difficulty in managerially crossing the boundaries, in the form of so-called dialect faultlines. Organizations should adopt a multilevel, dynamic view of diversity in their workgroups to proactively manage such highly

complex systems. It follows the coevolution of social, structural, cognitive, and affective dynamics across successive episodes of performance, creating a memory shared among individuals, processes of communication in groups, and organizational constraints, which in turn shapes how people work together in the future and what they learn over time within the organizational context (Karolidis & Vouzas, 2019).

10. Conceptual Framework And Research Propositions

We suggest a multilevel socio-ecological conceptual framework that covers the multidimensional aspects of diversity, technology-mediated affordances, communication processes, and cognitive-biological representations, and connects them (Bond & Haynes, 2014). This framework, which suggests that the heterogeneity of neighborhood or organization does not directly impact social trust, but is rather moderated by direct contact between people, resonates with the Communication Infrastructure Theory, which also argues that localized storytelling networks influence residents' perceptions of intergroup relations (Broad et al., 2014). Proposition 1: Actual contextual variety and integration, not just minority representation, will predict higher social identity complexity of individuals, and higher in-group bias and/or increased social distance will indirectly predict this (Verkuyten & Yogeeswaran, 2020). Proposition 2: Communicative interaction with diverse neighbors and neighborhood membership in localized storytelling networks will offset the impact of contextual heterogeneity on generalized interpersonal trust and will be a positive predictor of neighborhood attachment at the neighborhood level (Broad et al., 2014). However, in technology-mediated social settings, in which contemporary interaction processes are ever more prevalent, we combine the logical precedence framework of the affordance interdependence hierarchy, which suggests that low-level (structural) affordances are necessary for high-level (emergent) affordances to influence intergroup polarization (Pamirzad & Chen, 2026). Proposition 3: The interactivity and connectivity affordances of technology-based social media will indirectly decrease ethnic polarization through the high-level emergent affordance of plurality but not the affordance of collectivity. At the interpersonal level, different cultural contexts influence physical and social conduct, with collectivist cultures focusing on intergroup social boundaries as opposed to individualist cultures focusing on autonomous orientations (Wei et al., 2024). Proposition 4: Collectivist, relationally oriented Chinese individuals will have a significantly greater interpersonal distance (IPD) from out-group members than in-group members to preserve body integrity when confronted with a threat, while IPD in Italian individuals will not be influenced by group membership. Cognitive self-other dynamics, such as people's psychological well-being depending on the recognition from relevant others and experiences of misrecognition (including microaggression), deprive marginalized people of the legitimacy to exist (Amer & Obradovic, 2022). Proposition 5: Experiences of social misrecognition and subtle workplace discrimination will initiate a process of cognitive reclassification that will encourage threatened individuals to strategically dis-identify with their group to ensure that they are not associated with negative group stereotypes. Additionally, perceptions of social category overlap with each other, with the stereotype content model explaining that stereotypes are constructed on two dimensions of warmth and competence (Amer & Obradovic, 2022). Proposition 6: In job and leader selection contexts, gender, race, and age will be interacting factors such that warm and competent interviewees will be called back for job offers, while less desirable and marginalized candidates will need to meet higher standards to demonstrate their ability to be hired as leaders and preferred applicants. In structured interactions, Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) and Critical Dialogic model emphasize that vertical communication transforms participants from polite avoidance to meaningful alliances. The relationship between intergroup encounters and the collaborative outcome of bridging differences will be fully mediated by the processes of appreciating differences, engaging self, critical self-reflection on power and privilege, and alliance building, which will follow in sequence (Nagda, 2006). Proposition 7: . Most importantly, these joint processes are influenced by the communication atmosphere of the workgroup communication, which is described by effective intercultural workgroup communication theory (Turnalar-Çetinkaya & İşıaık, 2024). Proposition 8: A hypothesis for this hypothesis is that there will be a relationship between high interpersonal congruence, that is, the extent to which group members' appraisals match an individual's self-views, and a reduction in the likelihood of relationship conflict between diverse teams and an increase in the likelihood of leveraging deep-level cognitive diversity for the betterment of creative task performance (Verkuyten & Yogeeswaran, 2020). Finally, this framework is dynamic and bidirectional, as opposed to static and unidirectional models of intergroup contact. Proposition 9: Longitudinally, positive intergroup contact will predict greater increases in generalized intercultural competence, which will create a virtuous cycle of confidence in contact by decreasing the likelihood of future negative contact encounters across successive performance episodes (Meleady et al., 2021).

11. Managerial/Social Implications

The blending of diversity and human interaction in organizational, educational, and community contexts has significant management and social policy implications and calls into question a passive approach to compliance and the need for initiative-taking and systemic involvement. In terms of structure, although Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) policies are designed to prohibit discrimination, organizations need to create initiative-taking Affirmative Action (AA) plans that monitor, track, and actively remove structural inequalities that have long disadvantaged marginalized groups (Bond & Haynes, 2014). To ensure that everyone is fairly represented at every level of the hierarchy, managers at all levels must systematically remove the evaluative ambiguity and subjectivity that can enable unconscious cognitive biases to creep into the hiring, performance appraisal, and career promotion processes. This involves developing clear, consistent, and objective assessment criteria, as well as holding individual evaluators accountable for justifying their decision-making processes, thereby limiting evaluators' use of descriptive and prescriptive social stereotypes. In addition, there is a need to go beyond the "ostrich approach" of responding to differences in the population, cultures, and religions – the idea that if you touch them, you will inevitably spark conflict and/or amplify existing differences (Dovidio et al., 2009). Active denial, color-blind ideologies, and the "zero tolerance" policies often have the opposite effect: they stifle honest expression, exhaust employee cognitive resources dealing with self-presentation, and paradoxically

raise the bar for noticing subtle denials and diminishment, resulting in a lowered level of safety and commitment. Rather, leaders must create institutionalized mechanisms for people to express differences in opinion and power because a healthy, depersonalized conflict is an essential part of a developmental process that can lead to organizational learning, innovation, and increased long-term performance (Hargie et al., 2003). To help these climates, organizations need to have clear compliance structures in place, with individuals or functional groups, including diversity committees or officers, monitoring representation, and progress on diversity-related targets. This structural accountability helps to achieve better numerical representation and, as a result, also better longitudinal effectiveness of mentoring and sensitivity training courses, where these are not carried out in isolation and without oversight (Dovidio et al., 2009). In addition, there is a need for public policy to work with legal and organizational experts to extend existing hostile work environment protections. A parallel "hostile climate" standard for racial, religious, and sexual minorities, as is already available for sexual harassment, would create strong tools to identify, track, and fix patterns of exclusion (Hargie et al., 2003). Using the physical environment to neutralize interpersonal tension and/or intergroup tension in deeply divided societies or culturally fractured workplaces can be an effective strategy for a manager. Residents understand that a non-partisan society created by identity prohibitions, such as political attire, flags, and community symbols of conflict, leads to a more relaxed and stress-free workplace, which they readily adopt as a fair and peaceful approach (Bond & Haynes, 2014). These rules need to be monitored carefully and accompanied by cooperatively organized social activities across communities, outside working hours, to create common superordinate team identities. Linguistic and dialect-based diversity also requires active and sensitive management; not native language accents and regional dialects often automatically categorize them as out-group, status differences, and painful linguistic ostracism result in isolation of members (Hargie et al., 2003). It is important that organizations provide training on speech accommodation to facilitate intergroup communication and ensure that multilingual managers are aware of these silent fault lines based on the use of a dialect (R. Kim et al., 2019). These managers must play an active, empathetic, boundary-spanning role and use deliberate and structured cross-categorization strategies, not just automatic cross-categorization of attributes. Structured interventions, such as intergroup dialogue (IGD), must be used intentionally and systematically to address conflict in educational and community settings, including having structured interventions for the student residence advisors who work with roommates. Maintaining these dialogues is a matter of maintaining a balance in the composition of groups so that Allport's condition of equal status is maintained (Sorensen et al., 2009). Finally, urban planners and social practitioners need to create planned opportunities for contact in unstructured public spaces and shared recreational opportunities. Communities can break through pervasive social stigmas, defuse threat perceptions, and build general interpersonal trust through positive experiences (J. Kim, 2012).

12. Conclusion

The overall findings of this study chapter show that a fundamental paradigm shift is needed to move from a static, categorical view of demographic representation to a dynamic, multilevel, and social-ecological view of communicative engagement in different settings and contexts to fully understand the multifaceted relationship between diversity and human interaction. Indeed, team and organizational diversity is intrinsically locally situated; its subsequent outcomes in relation to group climate, group performance, and group cohesion are co-constructed over time both across the individual, group, and organizational levels of the nested, complex adaptive systems. The "diversity paradox" (when higher diversity among the population is correlated with lower average trust in society and increased threat perceptions among dominant majority groups) does not follow automatically at the macro-contextual level. Instead, however, as Communication Infrastructure Theory and neighborhood studies suggest, the negative impact of contextual diversity is countered and even neutralized if neighborhood residents have frequent face-to-face encounters with diverse out-group members that displace out-group stereotypes and replace them with personalized knowledge that validates the out-group members, and that helps to promote a sense of belonging to the neighborhood. This contact-driven cognitive restructuring is also reinforced on an individual cognitive level: exposure to non-overlapping social groups increases individuals' awareness of their multiple social identities, leading to increased social identity complexity and directly reducing ethnocentric in-group bias and social distance. At a micro-social and biological level, these processes are deeply embedded in the social brain, with social processes of self-categorization and social identity influencing neural systems of "us" and "them." The minimal group paradigm shows that the amygdala can track the motivational relevance of categorization, whereas the FFA can individuate in-group faces, but positive contact is a strong catalyst for cognitive liberalization and over time decreases social dominance orientation and increases open-mindedness. The boundaries of these psychobiological systems are physically and communicationally regulated, and cultural frameworks influence the choice of interpersonal distance (IPD) when threats arise; in technology-mediated virtual contexts, however, small differences such as audio-visual feedback delays can lead to negative interpersonal attributions that negatively affect team trust and global virtual innovation. In addition, social perceptions are inherently intersectional; that is, appraisals of overlapping categories of gender, ethnicity, age, and sexual orientation will dynamically change warmth and competence appraisals under the stereotype content model, which will influence preferences for supervisors and coworkers. Organizations will need to go beyond a passive and narrow equal employment opportunity compliance or Access and Legitimacy paradigm to navigate these complex dynamics. According to their groundbreaking model, Ely and Thomas argue that Collaborative benefits persist only if one views the unique skills, insights, and culture of the diverse members, as key learning assets that contribute to the primary mission of the organization, known as an Integration-and-Learning perspective. Interpersonal congruence (self-verifying appraisals that confirm members' unique self-views) is a key part of team effectiveness, and psychological safety (allowing members to be their authentic self among members, not just a group prototype) is another important factor. In hierarchical situations, this safety should differentiate between "dignity safety" and "intellectual safety" and allow cooperation and conflict to be seen as developmental processes. Majorities tend to favor the color-blind or common-identity model for maintaining the status quo and the marginalized subgroups favor forces that alleviate power differentials or create hierarchy-attenuating forces. Structured

interventions, such as Intergroup Dialogue (IGD), help to constructively respond to these tensions by moving intergroup groups from polite avoidance to collaborative alliances through a critical-dialogic model. Through the creation of brave spaces based on clear communication agreements, IGD facilitates a series of steps in appreciating difference, engaging self, and critical self-reflection on power and privilege and building alliances. This dialogic sharing combines with a structural analysis of inequality to change the nature of traditional social-psychological empathy to critical-dialogic empathy. Finally, positive contacts longitudinally predict increases in intercultural competence (the generalized construct), and a "virtuous cycle" whereby positive contact leads to greater intercultural competence, and in turn to further positive contact, is observed. Societies and organizations can effectively overcome systemic prejudice, foster profound belongingness, and embrace the promise of collaboration through human diversity by systematically combining initiative-taking affirmative policies, neutral physical environments, and dialogic communication.

13. References

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