UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Correlation between team identity and good meeting practices in interprofessional project teams

Niki Vaghti Chalusi

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Abstract. In this article, the author examines the relationship between team identity and good meeting practices, as well as team identity and perceived professional diversity. Sixty-eight participants, civil servants working with urban planning at Swedish municipalities, participated by answering a survey. The findings indicate a positive medium effect between good meeting practices and team identity – that is, as one of the variables increases the other one increases as well. A weak negative correlation was additionally found between team identity and perceived professional diversity. As team identity and good meeting practices have been shown to improve efficiency, the results call on urban planners to be mindful of team identity and good meeting practices.

There are many explanations on how the human species became the ruler of planet earth— their superior intelligence, their ability to communicate verbally, or the use of tools. These features are perhaps the first things that come to mind but as important is the history of collaboration. Groups have had the most significant role in the struggle for survival. Some would even say that it was the key to human evolutionary progress (Wheelan, 2013). But there is no single composition that can describe the nature of groups. As Arrow et al. (2004) claim, groups are complex systems that change systematically over time. The complexity of groups can indeed be challenging but many researchers have the attitude that knowledge is power. By studying groups, researchers try to understand patterns that later can be of practical benefit.

One of the most studied group formations is teams (Emich et al., 2020), which Cohen and Bailey (1997) defines as:

> […] a collection of individuals who are interdependent in their tasks, who share responsibility for outcomes, who see themselves and who are seen by others as an intact social entity embedded in one or larger social systems (for example, business unit or the corporation), and who manage their relationships across organizational boundaries. (p. 241)

How well a team performs depends on the teams' ability to share cognition, which is argued by Cannon-Bowers and Salas (2001) to be the common trait in high-performance teams. Their definition of shared cognition is shared knowledge that is highly task-specific; in fact, it involves the specific procedures, sequences, actions, and strategies necessary to perform a task. As a result, Jacobsson (2017) has compiled a model for developing shared cognition with a matrix of significant goals that need to be processed for teams to share cognition. The first goal - internal standards, is defined as an internally focused process goal that clarifies the behaviors that are needed for the team to easily cooperate (Jacobsson, 2017). Internal standards can, for example be meeting practice, work assignment, and other logistical issues that refer to the group's work procedure. To resolve and agree on internal standards early can be crucial for the teams' further cooperation. Conflicts linked to internal standards have been shown by Behfar et al. (2011) to have a negative impact on group performance, member satisfaction, and group coordination and when internal standard conflict is occurring early in a team's interaction it leads to other conflict types like task and relationship conflict (Greer et al., 2008). Internal

standards, which is partly how a team shares cognition can therefore be regarded as an important component of a team's well-being and functioning.

Pragmatically, one could assert that having a good meeting practice is linked to having internal standards. Meetings are vital situations where group member's expertise is shared and integrated, where ideas are discussed, and decisions are made. The effects of team meetings are on organizational scale, as Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2012) propose, constructive meeting processes were related to organizational success 2.5 years later. But meetings are not always productive, and when meetings are not well run, there can be direct and indirect costs in form of salary, opportunity, and the participants' time (Rogelberg et al., 2012). These costs are manifested through paid working hours that are not beneficial for the company's pursuit and through situations where the employee's solutions and ideas aren't seized, which leaves the employees feeling that their time is being wasted. Both team and organizational outcomes are shaped by dysfunctional communication in meetings, such as criticizing others or complaining (Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). Research also suggests a strong relationship between meeting satisfaction and overall job satisfaction (Rogelberg et al., 2010). There is furthermore a link between high meeting time demands and employee stress and fatigue (Luong & Rogelberg, 2005). Another study also found that meeting ineffectiveness had a direct relationship with decreased well-being (Rogelberg et al., 2006). To assure productive meetings, Rogelberg et al. (2012) suggest interventions where among other strategies like thought-out meeting practices are proposed.

The importance of meeting satisfaction, shown by research, has motivated researchers to define some universal factors that can define a good meeting practice. According to Leach et al. (2009) a meeting is perceived as effective by its participants when there is an agenda that is being followed, as well as when there is a good meeting environment. The researchers also observed that the size of the group did not affect effectiveness or the meeting characteristics. Even though meeting practice is a fraction of shared cognition, meeting satisfaction is both important for the individual employee and the organization at large and can therefore be considered a valuable subject.

In addition to shared cognition, team identity has been shown to be an important factor for team performance. Team identification can be defined as how psychologically connected the members perceive themselves to be, how much they identify themselves with the team by experiencing the success and failures of the team as their own (Riordan & Weatherly, 1999). It is also suggested by Tajfel (1978) that there are significant values and emotions attached to the membership of a group and that the individuals' self-concept is tied to their knowledge of their membership. This definition has been rephrased by Brown et al. (1986) to three facets: evaluation, affect, and awareness of group membership (which contributes to self-definition). A longitudinal study conducted by Solansky (2011) wanted to explore why some teams perform better than others. They found out that team identification is linked to team performance. Other researchers have found similar findings that link team identification to team performance. Henttonen et al. (2014) suggest that team identity mediates the relationship between the team's social-network structure and its performance effectiveness, which can be understood as those who identify more with their work teams perform more effectively.

A challenging aspect of team identification can be diversity. Perceived diversity had a negative association with team identification and was positively associated with relationship conflict, while objective diversity did not influence team identity (Hentschel et al., 2013). Furthermore, Mitchell et al. (2011) propose that highly professionally diverse teams with low team identification are less effective. According to McCarter and Northcraft (2007) collaborations between organizations through inter-organizational teams can be challenging, depending on how much the members identify with the inter-organizational team. To overcome this challenge, it has been suggested by Rockmann et al. (2007) that the use of a rich

communication medium enhances team identification in inter-organizational teams. These findings on how team identity and diversity influence each other suggests that measuring diversity while studying team identity can be important.

There are studies that have not investigated diversity in relation to team identity but to other aspects of teams that can be worth mentioning. Huang and Cummings (2011) have found that executive teams that were objectively diverse in a matter of tenure (e.g., teams composed of members from different organizations, professions, or departments) would perform worse than more homogeneous teams when critical knowledge was not shared by the members evenly across the members of the team. A further dimension that affects teams with high diversity is the probability of high expertise being divided among the members, Woolley et al. (2008) suggest that high expertise in absence of collaborative planning decreases team performance.

Although some research suggests that diversity can be difficult in teams, there are other findings that reveal the positive side of diversity. In the study by Woolley et al. (2008) high expertise in combination of collaborative planning increased team performance. The team with experts (high professional diversity) surpassed the team with no experts (low professional diversity) in efficiency when the team had collaborative planning. Moreover, informational diversity can increase group members' task and creative performance when proper communication is present among members (Zhang & Huai, 2016). And when there is diversity in members' initial preference regarding a decision it improves the decision quality (Klocke, 2007). Nonetheless, how objectively diverse a team is and perceived to be, can empower, or challenge a team depending on the circumstances, and for purposely diverse teams, it can be important to be aware of these conditions.

Present study

To sum up, shared cognition as internal process goals – specifically meeting practices are important for the success of a team, both for the individual wellbeing and organizational success. The importance of meeting practices is due to the impact meetings have on the individual when it comes to job satisfaction and overall health. The results from meetings affect the organization at large by generating task-related progress or stagnation. Likewise, team identity is shown to be linked to performance, where teams with higher team identity tend to perform better. Some findings also suggest that team identity plays a role in how well a diverse team performs.

A setting where all these components (meeting practices, team identity and professional diversity) exists is in urban planning. In urban planning of Sweden's local municipalities, civil servants with different professional expertise must collaborate to contribute with their knowledge when they at the same time can have professional dissent. In situations where the members are focused on their area of expertise without seeing the whole picture projects can become long, drawn-out issues (Siesjö, 2020, 17 September). The disagreements that arise can be beneficial if they lead to better solutions (Klocke, 2007) but when they do not, it can be time consuming and drag out an already long process. This collaboration is done in project teams, which in urban planning is the term used for the executive group that exercises public authority. The project teams consist of civil servants from different stakeholders where each member has guidelines that can be integrated depending on the political authority that governs the department. If the municipality has more than one commission that governs urban planning, then the departments can have different guidelines – meaning that members of the project team can have different directives. (SKR, 2020)

This thesis focuses on urban planning project teams' and have therefore collected data from civil servants working for Swedish municipalities. According to the Project Management

Institute (2008) a project is "a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique project service or result". Chiocchio and Essiembre (2009) suggest that project teams differ from other types of teams. While production and service teams work with ongoing, simple, and repetitive tasks, project teams have an uncertain and progressive task that is bound by time.

Ideally, project teams must invent their own work procedures and administer themselves. To investigate if good meeting practices have a relation with team identity in interprofessional project teams can therefore be an important discovery for finding opportunities for improvement in government-funded projects.

There are currently no studies to my knowledge that examines the relationship between team identity and meeting practices (e.g., SAGE Journals: 0 results). With no previous research conforming a relationship between these variables I decided to fill the gap in the field with this thesis. As a result, this thesis will investigate the relationship between team identity and good meeting practices with a correlation analysis. The reason for not using a more sophisticated analysis is the lack of research that could support a direction of the effect (if there is one).

> H_1: Team identity will be positively correlated with good meeting practices in interprofessional project teams.

As for measuring professional diversity, based on Hentschel et al.'s (2013) research, there should be a negative correlation between perceived diversity and team identity. Their research included general diversity such as sex, age, and ethnicity, whereby this thesis will focus on professional diversity. Hence, perceived professional diversity is likely to have a negative effect on identification with the entire team.

> H_2: Team identity will be negatively correlated with perceived professional diversity.

Method

Population and Sample

A total of 68 civil servants from 36 Swedish municipalities completed a survey. An email invitation was sent out to all of Sweden's 290 municipalities, the majority did not respond and 12 declined with reasons such as lack of resources or ongoing urban projects. The requirements for participating were that the respondent had to be a civil servant and a member of a project group that handles urban planning in a municipality.

Instructions. The participants were informed that the purpose of the survey was to test the relationship between meeting structure and the team identity in a group. They were contacted through email, some directly and others via the contact service of the municipality. The data was collected through an internet-based survey that took approximately six minutes to complete. The participants were reminded one week later through email before ending data collection. Participants were instructed to have one of their project groups in mind when they answered the questions explained below.

Measures

The measures were assessed using a Likert scale with 5-points options ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very well*) with questions concerning personal descriptions. This scale is

suggested by Wenemark (2017) and both Baran et al. (2012) and Hentschel et al. (2013) use it in their research. All question items were translated from English to Swedish. Each group of items was aggregated to create a single average score for each participant. In addition, every item measuring perceived professional diversity were analyzed separately since the alpha was unacceptably low. One single item from the scale measuring team identity was also separately analyzed with the other variables.

Good Meeting Practices. This study used ten items validated by Baran et al. (2012) for measuring good meeting practices: a) "The meetings that I attend are well run.", b) "Meetings are usually scheduled in plenty of time for me to fit them into my schedule.", c) "My direct supervisor is interested in the opinion of others.", d) "Meetings end when you expect them to end.", e) "The meetings I attend are worth my time.", f) "The times of meetings scheduled are convenient.", g) "Meetings start on time.", h) "We are informed about our meetings well in advance", i) "I usually receive meeting agendas ahead of the meeting", and j) "The meetings I attend typically have agendas.". This list of items reached an acceptable level of internal consistency ($\alpha = .81$).

Team Identity. Five items were composed to measure team identity by reading relevant research (Hobman & Bordia, 2006; Riordan & Weatherly, 1999): a) "I identify with this project group (its qualities, faults, common destiny)", b) "I experience the project group's successes and failures as my own", c) "The members are interested in each other", d) "The members are willing to work together", and e) "The members are committed to the completion of the tasks and goals of the project group". This list of items reached an acceptable level of internal consistency ($\alpha = .84$). It is important to mention that these items are not validated. And that the internal validity can be regarded as poor. For example, item (c) is shown by Riordan and Weatherly (1999) to measure team cohesiveness rather than team identity. The reason for the items being used is due to an error in the construction of the survey. By mistake the items from the pilot scale were applied instead of the validated scale from Riordan and Weatherly (1999).

Perceived professional diversity. I used the three items from Hentschel et al. (2013) to assess perceived diversity. They were rephrased to especially depict professional diversity: a) "When I am supposed to describe my project team, I automatically think about the differences among my colleagues regarding their area of competence.", b) "I am very aware of the differences regarding goal interests among my colleagues.", and c) "I sometimes think about the differences regarding expertise among the colleagues in our team." The scale displayed poor internal consistency ($\alpha = .37$).

Alternative perception of professional diversity. Respondents rated the number of departments/areas of competence by indicating how many departments they believed were represented in their project team. This variable was measured using a numeric scale with 8-point options ranging from 1 to 8.

Results

This study aimed to investigate the correlation between good meeting practices and team identity in interprofessional project teams. To test this hypothesis the data were analyzed using Pearson's correlations coefficient.

In terms of correlation coefficient, the results showed a medium positive effect according to Cohen's Conventions ($r = 0.34$), thus supporting hypothesis 1, which proposed that good meeting practices positively correlate with team identity. This means that when one of the variables increases or decreases the other variable follows. Regarding the percentage of variance explained, that is 12 percent. See table 1.

Due to an error in the construction of the survey additional results were deemed as necessary to examine hypothesis 1 and increasing the validity. This sub analysis only uses one item from the scale measuring team identity: a) "I identify with this project group (its qualities, faults, common destiny)" and calculates the correlation between good meeting practices. The correlation analysis showed positive (2-tailed) significant results with Pearson ($r = 0.41$). Translated to a variance of 17 percent. This means that there is a slighter stronger relationship between the first question item alone and good meeting practices, than it is with the scale measuring team identity. Further concerns regarding this sub analysis will be discussed below the headline Limitations.

As for hypothesis 2 there was no significant correlation between perceived professional diversity and team identity, neither did alternative perception of diversity have any significant results. Nevertheless, additional results were found by analyzing the item scales from perceived professional diversity separately. However, none of the question items had a significant correlation with team identity as an index. But item c) "I sometimes think about the differences regarding expertise among the colleagues in our team." showed a negative (2-tailed) significant correlation with the first item from the scale measuring team identity: a) "I identify with this project group (its qualities, faults, common destiny)". The negative effect can be regarded as weak ($r = -.26$) and were only significant at the 0.05 level using Pearson.

The mean value regarding alternative perception of diversity was ($M = 4.88$) which implies that the project groups on average consisted of five people. Meanwhile, the mean value of perceived professional diversity was $M = 1.82$. There was no significant correlation between perceived diversity and alternative perception of diversity, neither did these variables have a significant correlation with good meeting practices.

Table 1. Mean, SD, and Correlations from Pearson.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1. Team identity	3.81	0.71	1			
2. Good meeting practice	3.79	0.52	.34**	1		
3. Perceived professional diversity	1.82	0.57	.05	-.06	1	
4. Alternative perception of diversity	4.88	1.88	-.05	.05	-.09	1

Note. **p < .01, two-tailed tests.

Discussion

This study set out to investigate the relationship between good meeting practices and team identity in interprofessional project teams. It was hypothesized that there would be a positive correlation between the variables. As the study predicted the results indicate a medium positive effect between good meeting practices and team identity. In the context of this research, this might be considered a trivial effect. However, this result is likely, given good meeting practices are a fraction of shared cognition. When both team identity and shared cognition are positively related to team performance then it can be expected that there would be a positive

correlation between good meeting practices and team identity. In Jacobsson's (2017) model there are other goals besides internal standards that must be shared for teams to have shared cognition. An assumption is that team identity would have a stronger correlation with all the goals together, than with one aspect of internal standards alone. This is based on the deductive speculation that teams that share external standards, developmental goals, operative goals, guiding stars, and vision besides internal standards have a higher level of team identification.

The reason for good meeting practices positively correlating with team identity can have several explanations. Leach et al.'s (2009) research suggests that involvement predicts a greater perception of a meeting being effective. Based on this I believe that good meeting practices can engage participants by including them in collaborative work. When there is a meeting structure such as good meeting practices, it enables the use of everyone's competence by letting them participate. This is possible through the characteristics of good meeting practices such as letting everyone receive meeting agendas ahead of time (participants can then propose additional meeting-points). It is then more likely that the participants will identify more with the team. By being more involved in a project the participant will feel like they have ownership of the project. This will cover the part of a team identity that addresses participants experiencing the team's success and failures as their own. Other parts of team identity like members being committed to complete the tasks and goals of the project can presumably also be enabled by good meeting practices. Good meeting practices become a work procedure that makes way for other administrative tasks such as distributing responsibilities.

Yet it should not be assumed that the ten items from Baran et al. (2012) measuring good meeting practice are the very items that need to be practiced. These items are supposed to measure if the team has good meeting practices, they can just as well measure the symptoms of good meeting practices. To illustrate, take the item measuring the participants feeling that the meeting is worth their time, this component is hard to exercise because we do not know what brings that feeling. My overall suggestion is that good meeting practices enable greater involvement which strengthens team identification.

Team identity could, on the other hand, affect good meeting practices by creating an atmosphere that is agreeable resulting in the participant being biased on how well their meetings are run. Meetings could objectively start late but the identification with the team prevents the participant from feeling irritated by it, so they do not notice or register this detail. The same goes with the feeling of the meeting being worth their time. Perhaps the participants do not spend the time and energy on the intended task, but the agreeable atmosphere leaves them feeling that they had a good time and therefore evaluate the meeting to be worth their time. Team identity can according to Litchfield et al. (2018) actually harm teams' innovative behavior if unaccompanied by collective reflection. However, studies show that both team identity and good meeting practices correspond with efficiency and performance (Henttonen et al., 2014; Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012; Solansky, 2011) which contradicts these points. Another explanation to how team identity can cause good meeting practices is that the team feels more motivated to work together and therefore invest the energy that is needed for creating internal standards such as good meeting practices.

As presented in the Method and Result section some additional analysis was made due to the low alfa score for perceived professional diversity. These sub analyses were made believing that the non-significant and zero correlation scores were a result of the poor internal consistency of the scale. Analyzing the question items separately resulted in a significant correlation between the first question item measuring team identity ("I identify with this project group (its qualities, faults, common destiny)") and the last question item measuring perceived professional diversity ("I sometimes think about the differences regarding expertise among the colleagues in our team."). Why is the last question item in the scale of perceived professional diversity the only variable that significantly correlates? It could be that the question items

measure different kind of diversity or that the other two question items are easily interpreted differently by the participants. The remodeling of the questions to fit professional diversity accompanied with a translation from English to Swedish could have intricated the text. Nevertheless, the negative correlation between the first question item from the team identity scale and the last item from perceived professional diversity supports hypothesis 2. However, the negative effect was low in contrast to Hentschel et al.'s (2013) study which showed a strong effect. The altered strength in effect can be explained by the fact that the studies used different scales for measuring identification and diversity. While Hentschel et al. (2013) used a broader perception of diversity this thesis only addressed professional diversity. But why did not perceived professional diversity (the last item) correlate with team identity as an index? The reason could be the questionable validity of the team identity scale, which is further discussed under Limitations.

The mean value of perceived professional diversity was low suggesting that the participants on a group level did not consider their project group to be professionally diverse. As additional data the mean value of the perception on how many team members coming from a different department or representing a different area of competence was five, meaning that on a group level every team consisted of a minimum of five people. Unfortunately, there was no significant correlation regarding the two variables measuring diversity and good meeting practices. If there was significance, then the close to zero effect would have supported Leach et al.'s (2009) study suggesting team size does not affect meeting characteristics.

Limitations

With no previous research investigating the relationship between team identity and meeting practices, I decided that a correlation study would be the best approach. Before this study, we did not know if there were a relationship between these two variables. This said, there are some limitations concerning a correlation analysis. Firstly, it is important to mention that a correlation between two variables does not tell what direction the effects are. And further assessment can show that there is no direct causal relationship between the two good meetings practices and team identity. Good meeting practices might not influence team identity, and team identity might have no causal effect on good meeting practices. According to Cozby and Bates (2018), this relationship would be known as a spurious relationship. The reason is that there may be a relationship between the two variables and some other variable (known as a third variable/extraneous variable) that causes both good meeting practices and team identity. In this case, the third variable can only be identified by further research that includes additional variables in their observations.

From this research, perceived diversity and the alternative perception of diversity cannot be excluded as the third variable since there was no significant correlation between the two variables and the main variables.

The further limitations of measuring diversity have been the low alfa score of the perceived professional diversity scale. The small quantity of the scale made it hard to exclude any item that would improve internal consistency. Another challenge has been the approach to measure objective diversity. Originally the question item labeled as an alternative perception of diversity was thought of as a measure for objective diversity. This measure got criticized and was therefore relabeled. An alternative way to design an objective measurement for diversity would have been requesting the participants to report the number of departments in their project team without a numeric 8-point option.

The most predominant weakness of this thesis was the instrument measuring team identity. The study intended to use a validated measuring instrument from previous research

but by mistake other question items were used. This question items were devised and piloted measures with inspiration from other validated measures. I made an error when and substituting the piloted scale with the validated scale. As such, I ended up using the pilot scale, but it turned out ok. The internal reliability of the items is ideal. The issue is the validity of the items, are they really measuring team identity or something else? According to Riordan & Weatherly (1999) is the third item (c) a measurement of team cohesiveness and not team identity. The last two question items, (d) and (e), could be interpreted as symptoms of high team identification rather than team identity (Riordan & Weatherly, 1999). Therefore, additional statistical analysis was added only testing the correlation with the first question item that explicitly asks if the participant identifies with their team. The results showed a slightly higher correlation, but the results are still in the range of medium effect.

Conclusion

Lastly, this research has contributed to an understanding of the relationship between team identity and meeting practices by suggesting that there is a positive relationship between the two in interprofessional project teams. Despite the shortcomings regarding the instrument measuring team identity, it is still an instrument inspired from validated measures as described in the Method section. Managers should work to increase both team identity and good meeting practices in interprofessional project teams. Secondarily, this thesis show a tendency as that there is negative correlation between team identification and professional diversity.

The challenges of conducting research at the bachelors' stage have been noticeable within this thesis. The short amount of time the student must get familiar with the research process can be demanding. Errors that are irreversible are easier to make because of the many tasks that must be done in a short period of time. The lesson that should be learned from this thesis is that research and science is not about being perfect and looking smart. What is most important is reporting the process truthfully and explaining judiciously what we can learn from the process.

For further research good meeting practices and team identity should be observed along additional variables in more advanced statistical tools like regression and structural equation modelling. Knowing the direction of the effects or a mediating variable can be valuable for practitioners.

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