

# A cultural lens on interpersonal conflict and creativity assignment

[Art & Culture](#)



Over the past 20 years, research on workplace demography, including demographic and cultural value diversity, has multiplied, revealing mixed and complex findings for the effects of diversity on team performance, creativity, and conflict (e. G. , Chatham, People, Barded, & Neal, 1998; Early & Moisakos, 2000; Conceal & Star, 2006; Josh & ROR, 2009; Josh, Lila, & ROR, 2011; Palette, Penn Reek, & Mascara, 2004 stall, Mezzanines Voice, & Jensen, 2010). Multicultural experiences and interactions may increase individuals' creativity (e. G. , A. K. -Y.

Lung & Chic, 2010; A. K. -Y. Lung Maddox, Gallingly, & Chic, 2008; Maddox, Adam, & callings, 2010; Maddox & Gallingly, 2009), but multicultural settings are more likely to increase interpersonal conflict (Baby & Jean, 201 0; Stall et al. , 2010). Despite its importance to growing workplace diversity, research on conflict and creativity in multicultural environments is scarce, with many researchers pointing out gaps in our knowledge in the broader domains of culture and creativity (e. G. , Palette & Penn, 2008; Shelley, Chou, & Lollo, 2004; Chou & Us, 2010).

Indeed, existing research on the effect of conflict on individual reinterative has yielded inconsistent findings. On the one hand, conflict in- To compete in the global market, address a growing need for innovation and creativity, and solve worldwide problems, many organizations are increasingly becoming international, integrating diverse knowledge and a multicultural workforce (e. G. , Sidewalk & Longboats, 1998). This growing trend has given rise to multicultural environments, which occur when individuals from multiple cultures interact.

In the United States, 17% of science and engineering workers report collaborating with individuals located in other entries during a specific week (National Science Board, This article was published Online First April 7, 2014. Susann B. F. Palette, Center for Advanced Study of Language, University of Maryland; Ella Moron-Speaker, William Davidson Faculty of Industrial Engineering and Management, Techno - Israel Institute of Technology, Hafiz, Israel; Chunk-Chi Line, Department of Psychology, National Taiwan University, Taipei, Taiwan.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Susann B. F. Palette, Center for Advanced Study of Language, University of Maryland, 7005 52nd Avenue, college park, MD 20742. E-mail:[email protected]Com 237 PALETTE, MORON-SPEAKER, AND LINE This document is copyrighted by the American Psychological Association or one of its allied publishers. This article is intended solely for the personal use of the individual user and is not

to be disseminated broadly. 238 nature, involve interaction, and so the existing literature is informative to our model.

The literature on team diversity has focused, perhaps too exclusively, on two theoretical traditions: information processing and social categorization (van Inkeeper & Chippers, 2007; Williams & Reilly, 1998). The inappropriateness's approaches focus on the cognitive benefits of perversity. These approaches assume that backgrounds of almost any type (e. G. , ethnic, age, disciplines) bring with them a variety of experiential information (van Inkeeper & Chippers, 2006).

Cultural diversity can go beyond simple surface diversity to deeper, attitudinal, value, and schema differences (e. G Harrison, price, & Bell, 1998). This " deeper" diversity (e. G. , Harrison et al. , 1998) of background information may, under certain circumstances, lead to greater task conflict as well (e. G. , Jean, Northeast, & Neal, 1 999; & Neal, 2005; peeled, Eisenhower, & Kin, 1999). However, his diversity also carries the potential for greater creativity, as a broader knowledge base can result in more creative combinations (Insisted & Strobe, 2006; Palette & Chunk, 2010).

In contrast, social categorization approaches assume that the differences between individuals' ethnicities and other characteristics will spark interrupt processes, such as suborning, generally to the detriment of team outcomes such as social cohesion (Manning & Neal, 2005; Williams & Reilly, 1998). This theory focuses on the negative affective outcomes associated with diversity based on differences in social identity, such as more conflicts. Although these theoretical traditions have spawned useful research (e. G. , Chatham

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et al. 1998), the past decade has seen creases the tendency to scrutinize and explore different alternatives, which contributes to creative thinking (e. G. , Moment, 1 986; Moment, Personnel, Personnel, & Conceal, 2004). A sense of conflict and disorientation, resulting from exposure to different cultures and values, can foster creativity (e. G. , A. K. -Y. Lung & Chic, 2010; Moron-Speaker, Going, & Argots, 201 1). On the other hand, conflict can be threatening and licit a motivation to avoid similar unpleasant social interactions.

Threat and a prevention regulatory focus hinder individuals' ability to deal with complexity and to solve creative problems, even when a conflict is only observed (R. S. Friedman & Forester, 2000, 2001, 2005; Impersonator, Frat-Termite, Rafael, & Schwartz-Cohen, 2011). To bridge gaps in the literature and reconcile these findings, specifically in culturally diverse settings, we present a dynamic constructivist theoretical model on the effects of interpersonal conflict on individuals' creativity in multicultural environments (see Figure 1).

Our model contributes to the literature on intricate conflict and creativity by detailing an important mediator of the conflict- creativity connection, threat, and several possible moderators related to culture, here defined as mental models shared across groups (not just national groups). Most of the existing intricate literature has focused on heterogeneous versus homogeneous cultural team composition (e. G. , Manning & Neal, 2005; Williams & Reilly, 1998), leaving unknown the broader case of multicultural environments, individual perceptions of interpersonal conflict, and individual creativity.

Although our model examines this broader case, teams, by their Multicultural Environments D Cultural Meanings (e. G. , values, implicit theories of face, etc. ) more likely Perception of and Actual Conflict Bal Tolerance Conflict Perception of Threat? 82 Creativity yes Prevention Orientation, Avoidance Motivation Figure 1 . Dynamic constructivist model of culture, interpersonal conflict, and threat on individual creativity in multicultural settings (negative relationships are dotted lines).

This document is copyrighted by the American psychological Association or CULTURE, INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT, AND CREATIVITY horses and variables that do not fit neatly into those two traditions (e. G. , Palette et al. , 2004; Swan, Swan, People, & Milton, 2003) or examine the interaction between them (e. G. , Woman, van Innkeeper, Van Sleek, & De Dreg, 2007).

Multicultural environments may also lead to conflict for cultural psychological reasons that have little to do with either social categorization processes or differing background knowledge, and the effects of conflict on creativity are dependent on the interpretation of that conflict.

This article thus also makes a contribution to psychological theory by reposing a broader, third model drawing on dynamic constructivist cultural theory. It helps to reconcile prior mixed findings on the impact of conflict on creativity. This model goes beyond the social categorization and information processing models, synthesizes elements from disparate topics within psychology, and explicitly blends cognitive and affective factors. This article attempts to tackle three problems with past literature.

First, research on the effect of experienced conflict on individual creativity is scarce, especially in multicultural environments (e. G. , Shelley et al. 2004; Chou & Us, 2010). Most research on conflict focuses on team conflict and team conflict management (De Dreg & Weinberg, 2003; Lovelace, Shapiro, & Weinberg, 2001 Much less is known about the effects Of cultural context and related factors on different, individual-level perceptions of conflict (De Wit, Greer, & Jean, 2012).

Second, the few studies that examined the effect of conflict on creativity revealed mixed findings (Zealand, Reek, & Cyan, 2007; Stall et al. , 2010), suggesting that the effect of conflict on creativity can vary under different situations and conditions. We contribute to hurry by going beyond team outputs to examine individual creative cognition. As has been requested (van Innkeeper & Chippers, 2007), we identify moderating and mediating conditions and factors that shape the effect of diverse environments on experienced conflict and then on individual creativity.

Specifically, our dynamic constructivist model assumes that individuals in multicultural settings are more likely than those in unicellular settings to experience conflict, either as something they encounter directly or observe, compared with those who work in culturally homogeneous settings. Whether they will benefit from conflict or be stymied by it depends on the relevant cultural meanings, or the lens through which individuals make sense of the world. Cultural meanings influence both the extent to which individuals perceive specific social interactions as conflict and the degree to which individuals can tolerate conflicts.

Greater tolerance of conflicts, regardless of heterogeneous versus homogeneous cultural setting, can mitigate against perceived conflicts becoming perceived threats. When a perceived conflict becomes a perceived threat, a prevention orientation (the motivation to avoid pain and seek security) is often a consequence. A prevention orientation then leads individuals to draw on their well-known reactions and avoid risks, resulting in less creativity. If, however, there is a high tolerance for conflict, perceived conflict may increase cognitive complexity and stimulate creative thinking.

Like many social psychological models, ours crosses individual and interpersonal levels: It is a model of how a social context (multicultural environments) encourages interpersonal conflict (an interpersonal, social process), and how that interpersonal conflict affects individual cognition as treated and mediated by individual perceptions, culture, and assumptions. 239 In the next section, we discuss culture as meanings. We then describe our model, after which we end with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications of our model. Culture as Meanings We draw upon cross-cultural psychology to define culture.

The implicit theories of culture tradition, which examines culture as unspoken assumptions, has emphasized that culture exists psychologically within individuals' minds (Penn, Ames, & Knowles, 2001). Culture is defined as an imperfectly shared system of learned, transmitted meanings (Ironer, 1984). Although it can include explicit knowledge, we emphasize the aspects that are implicit. By this definition, cultural differences are not limited to



nations or global regions but can include differences between any subgroup (e. G. , profession, ethnicity, family, organization).

The dynamic constructivist theory, an extension of this approach, goes beyond descriptions of national or ethnic differences to give a cognitive account of culture as it affects social perception generally (Betterment & Lopez, 1993; Hong, Morris, Chic, & Bent-Martinez, 2000; Morris & Zealand, 2004). Hong and colleagues (2000) asserted in their dynamic constructivist theory that culture acts, specifically, as shared mental models within the mind, serving as a lens through which the world is interpreted. A mental model is an internal representation of actions, situations, people, or objects (Johnson-Laird, 1980).

Mental models include both the structure and relationship between knowledge constructs and the content of knowledge itself, such as unspoken assumptions and heuristics. Shared mental models occur when the mental representations of individuals overlap, with more overlap indicating greater similarity, and hence a more animal understanding of a situation (Kowalski & Mohammed, 1994; Mohammed, Fernando, & Hamilton, 2010). Rather than being a singular fixed structure within the mind, one or more cultural meanings can be internalized as loose networks of categories and assumptions.

Bacterial individuals can therefore switch frames when primed by relevant elements reminding them of the applicable culture, such as national flags and other icons (Hong, Bent- Martinez, Chic, & Morris, 2003; Hong et al. , 2000). These culture primes can activate goals, procedural knowledge (mind-

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sets), and/or declarative knowledge, so long as the cultural structure already exists in the mind (Sherman & Lee, 2008). As with other mental models, cultural meanings can influence how individuals perceive the world, including social situations, and are created from learning (Ironer, 1984).

Cultural meanings are thus corrected by individuals and live within the mind, being activated by relevant information and aiding in the interpretation of experiences (Hong et al. , 2000 2003; Sherman, 2011). The overlapping mental models that represent culture can be shared not only between individuals of the same ethnicity or action but also by other mutual social characteristics, such as socioeconomic class, geographic region, discipline, occupation, religion, and work organization.

Past research on cultural implicit theories has demonstrated the effect of cultural meanings on social perception. For example, Anisette and colleagues (Anisette, Penn, Choc, & Normandy, 2001; Penn & Anisette, 1999) examined cognitive differences in what they termed analytic versus holistic thinking. Analytic cognitive styles involve a greater focus on objects rather than the context (field independence), and the tendency to attribute other's behavior to internal traits rather than the situation (Morris & Penn, 1994).

The holistic cognitive style, held more on average by East Asians, involves a greater focus on the context (field dependence) and a greater inclination, when compared with Caucasian Americans, to attribute the causes of behavior to the situation rather than the actor (I. Choc, Dalai, Kim-Priest, & Park, 2003). For example, Morris and Penn (1994) found that participants differently anthropomorphic the behavior of an individual animated fish

swimming separately from a school of fish in line with their different cultural lenses.

Chinese participants were more likely to attribute the fish's behavior to external forces, whereas Americans were more likely to make internal attributions. Culture can also influence individuals' ability to solve problems. Conceal and Star (2006) demonstrated how the activation of collectivist or individualistic orientations can affect whether generated solutions to a given problem are creative or practical. Individualism and collectivism are cultural dimensions that reflect differences in the tendency to focus on in-groups and the power of social context.

People from individualistic cultures, on average, are more likely to emphasize self-termination and autonomy, conceptualize people as independent individuals, and prioritize one's own importance over the group's interests when the two are in conflict. On the other hand, members of collectivist cultures are more likely to conceptualize individuals as inherently part of collectives and prioritize groups' interests over their own (e. G. , Hefted, 1980, 1983; Markus & Stamina, 1991; Transit, 1989, 1990; Transit & Zealand, 1998).

When asked to be creative, teams of participants primed with an individualistic mental model generated a greater number of ideas, more unique ideas, and more creative ideas than artisans primed with a collectivist mental model (Conceal & Star, 2006). Thus, cross-cultural psychological theories offer many ways in which individuals will hold different types of cultural meanings within their minds, which may then

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impact their cognition. When people who hold different, unshared sets of cultural meanings come together, the relevant social context is diverse teams or, more broadly, multicultural work and leisure environments.

Our model examines culture from these two different perspectives: multicultural environments as a social context and as the differing cultural meanings encapsulated therein. **Dynamic Constructivist Model** In this section, we describe the theoretical model and suggested propositions (also see Table 1). The relationships, as illustrated in Figure 1, are drawn in part as a decision tree and not simply as a model of proposed relationships.

**Multicultural Environments and Perceived Conflict (Path A)** Conflict is inherent to interaction, collaboration, and teamwork (De Dreg & Zealand, 2008).

The construct of conflict has been used at different levels of analysis to mean many things, from disagreement to bullying to riots and war (e. G. , De Dreg & Zealand, 2008; Jean & Benders, 2003). For the purposes of his model, we focus on conflict as interpersonal disagreement, which exists when “ parties think that a divergence of values, needs, interests, opinions, goals, or objectives exists” (Bark & Warwick, Table 1 Summary of Model Propositions  
**Proposition 1:** Interpersonal conflict will be more common in multicultural environments, particularly if the mental model gaps are large and about relevant issues.

**Proposition 2:** Interpersonal conflict may be interpreted as a threat, depending on exacerbated features of the situation and the conflict itself (e. G. Negative affect, relationship conflict, relationship conflict confounded with

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ask conflict, rude communication), and minimizing features of the conflict and situation (e. G. , psychological safety, trust, team emotional regulation processes). Proposition 3: If a conflict is perceived as a threat, a prevention focus and avoidance motivation will result.

Proposition 4: A prevention focus will hinder creativity. Proposition 5: Entertaining interpersonal conflict will enhance creativity, mediated by a promotion focus. Proposition 6: Culture will moderate whether a social interaction or exchange in a multicultural setting is perceived as a conflict, such that cultural norms grading implicit theories of conflict and the appropriate expression and manner of conflict will enable individuals to perceive an encounter as a conflict or not.