

# Theory of subgroups in work teams essay sample



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Subgroups are a prevalent and widely studied characteristic of work teams. Despite considerable advances in our understanding of subgroups in existing research, this article suggests that an integrated theory is needed to organize and synthesize this research. To address this need, the authors suggest ways of using subgroups that includes a typology of the subgroups and have formulated models that would better provide formation and outcomes of subgroups. With the hopes that it would provide a common language for scholars, and clarify ways in that present literature do not. Many of the existing researches have failed to answer key question or correctly connected subunits with work teams whereas this study identifies three underlying factors of subunits which are identity, resources and knowledge.

#### Statement of the Research Problem

“ As organizations continue to turn to work teams to accomplish key objectives, researchers have converged on the notion that team processes and outcomes are strongly influenced by subgroups (Gibson & Vermeulen, 2003; Lau & Murnighan, 2005). Scholar’s identify some of the fault in accomplishing key objectives of subgroup as the characteristics related to team composition, and how subgroups affects team learning. By identifying and clarifying the dominant types of a construct an organization can then specify the theoretical basis of that construct. “ Since no commonly accepted definition of Subgroups exists in the literature on teams, we suggest that a set of two or more organizational members has to meet two criteria in order to be considered a subgroup.

First, it must be a subset of members of the same work team, whereby a work team is a group (e. g., project team or management team) whose membership and task are formally recognized by the organization (Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Kozlowski & Bell, 2003). Second subset of members can only be considered a subgroup after they have been characterized by the degree of interdependence allotted to each member of the subgroup but is unique when compared to that of other members of that same group. They interacting would be different with other subgroups because these members share a cultural value, scarce resource, or knowledge frame that is unique to their groups. Understanding this will better help organizations subgroups interact with each others to be more productive as an organization.

#### Description of the Research Procedure

The processes within and between identity based subgroups are characterized by social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social identity is perceived as how other in subgroups represents their shared values and social characteristics and how these traits “ fit” with other groups members. In order to identify these characteristic the authors focused on two inter-subgroups that processed some of the same particular social identities that past literature have identified as important characteristics. First they focused on why members often feel some sort of identity threat from other subgroup members, and why this would undermined their ability to comfortably distinct themselves from other groups and second “ inter-subgroup process relates to when the super ordinate group (i. e., the team) in which subgroups reside appears to be so fragmented that it is difficult for subgroup members

to perceive that they belong to the same unitary whole as members of other subgroups (Yoon et al., 1994).

### Analysis of Data

This article has provided a theory on how clarification of subgroups can be used by management to enhance team effectiveness as there is no question that the use of subgroups can be helpful in organizational cultures. This theory suggest that by establishing functional inter-subgroups, which is no easy task, the positive and negatives effects still promote the configurational properties of each subgroup type while keeping its distinctiveness, identity threat lessen when you identity these configurations. Another consideration to keep in mind is that there will be more then one subgroup type present in a team and when forming these subgroups, just merely possessing different values , knowledge or expertise are more likely to assimilate majorities in group and therefore marginalize other in that same subgroup or other subgroups. “ Instead, to be most influential, minority identity-based subgroups and minority knowledge-based subgroups may also have to be in positions of power by being in dominant resource-based subgroups” (Carton, A & Cummings, J, 2012).

### Limited and Justifiable Conclusions

According to Carlton and Cummings (2011), despite considerable advances in the study of subgroups as a characteristic of work teams they would still suggest that an integrated theory is needed to organize and synthesize this research. To address this need, they suggest that organizations developed a “ theory of subgroups that includes a typology of subgroups and a model

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depicting the formation and outcomes of subgroups” (Carton, A & Cummings, J, 2012). By providing a common language older bodies of literature can still be used to answer questions that past ligatures by itself failed to answered questions in the literature relevant to work teams.

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