LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR DIVERSE GROUPS

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LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES FOR DIVERSE WORK GROUPS: KROUT

Abstract

As organizations and corporations move beyond national borders and the demographics in the United States become more diverse, difference in the workforce will continue to expand. In order to effectively lead a diverse work force, certain leadership qualities and traits will need to be identified, cultivated and implemented. This particular study sought to understand how diverse workgroups are effectively led. Furthermore, this study sought to assess how the qualities of shared authority, collaboration and integrity impact the relationship between supervisor and employee through the lens of relational dialectics theory. This study focused on staff work groups at institutions of higher educations and used qualitative measures of a short written survey and a phone interview to understand the connection between collaboration, shared-authority, integrity, supervisor employee relations and effective work in diverse work groups. This study also sought to understand the role that dialogue plays in work groups producing effective work. The study found that supervisors who described their values as collaborative had good to excellent relationships with employees. The study also discovered a strong connection between dialogue in the work place and producing effective work.

Key words: social identity, dialogue, integrity, diversity
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Ch. 1 Introduction

Introduction

As demographics in the United States and around the world change, more organizations operate across national boundaries and businesses embrace cultural diversity as a business strategy, it will become increasingly important to understand how culturally diverse work teams find success (Hopkins, Hopkins & Gross, 2005). Research indicates that diverse groups are more effective than homogenous ones. In a study of undergraduate students by Watson and his colleagues, he found that diverse work groups were more effective over time at identifying problems and generating solution alternatives than their homogenous counterparts (Watson, Kumar & Michaelsen, 1993). In light of understanding the value of diversity in work groups, understanding the leadership qualities that help cultivate group success is imperative. To that end, this study sought to understand how communication, leadership qualities and behaviors best promote egalitarian pluralism in diverse work groups. The study seeks to navigate and understand the varying dynamics and influences of social identity, personal values, organizational culture and dialogue impact work group success.

Importance of the Study

As the world becomes more globalized, it will become even more important to effectively lead diverse work groups. Leaders will need a variety of tools and strategies in order to best serve and work with employees that are different from leaders and from each other. Leaders will need to be thoughtful and creative about how to best utilize employees to their fullest potential. Humans are complex beings
who bring their entire person to work. According to Gallup, half of all full-time workers indicate they work more than 40 hours in a week with nearly four in 10 claiming they work at least 50 hours (Saad, 2014). This leaves workers spending more time with colleagues than family or friends. In order to create effective and positive work teams, new strategies for leadership will need to be considered, studied and possibly embraced. Companies and organizations have a huge opportunity to engage very different employees with the possibilities being endless as to how effective work can be achieved together.

While a topic like leading diverse groups could be viewed through communication theories of group or intercultural communication, this particular study will focus on interpersonal communication theory. Baxter and Montgomery’s relational dialectics theory focuses on close relationship between family, close friends and romantic partners. While relational dialectics isn’t specific to supervisor and employee relationships, the three dialectics of the theory ring true in the work environment. Baxter and Montgomery’s theory discusses the tension of competing priorities in relationship that are often paradoxical (Griffin, 2012). These competing priorities or tensions are best negotiated in dialogue and dialogue is imperative to the values of shared authority and collaboration.

Statement of the Problem

The primary problem is that companies and organizations recognize the value in having a diverse work group but struggle to implement change in an effective and productive way that embraces difference. The problem, or issue, is more about a loss of opportunity for the organization to reach its full potential. This
is where the problem lies. When diverse employees work at companies or organizations that merely give lip service to valuing diversity, and don’t have practical strategies for capitalizing on and managing the diverse work group, these may be more likely to seek employment elsewhere or simply not contribute fully.

**Definitions of Terms Used**

**Diversity**- a characteristic of identity such as gender, race or age (Allen, 2011).

**Social Identity**- the social identities of an individual that impact how the individual sees and interacts with the world (Griffen, 2012)

**Dialogue**- understood as the communicative exchange of agents embedded in a particular historical moment, a particular sociocultural standpoint, and a particular set of experiences, requires individual to stand on his/her own ground while being open to the Other's standpoint. (Arnett, Fritz & Bell, 2009)

**Integrity**- leaders following the same rules as employees or subordinates (Bordas, 2012)

**Organization of Remaining Chapters**

The remainder of the study is organized into four chapters. The second chapter outlines the philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks that have influenced the creation of the study. It also provides the context for the study by highlighting what current literature contributes to understanding leadership and diversity. Chapter three outlines the scope and methodology of the study as well as how the data was analyzed and ethical considerations. Chapter four discusses the findings of the study and the connections found with the literature reviewed and
influencing theory and philosophy. Chapter five concludes the study with a summary, the limitations of the study, and suggested future research.
Ch. 2: Review of the Literature

Philosophical Assumptions

Difference matters. A failure to recognize difference undermines the opportunity to understand the richness of life as a unique manifestation of the possibilities of humankind (Allen, 2011). Difference manifests in individual life experiences and the many facets of individual identity. Identity is both socially constructed and personal (Allen, 2011). Differences are primarily highlighted in the context of relationship. Without relationship with the Other, there can be no recognition of difference. “As we consider difference matters and social identity, two important ideas to remember are: (1) identity is relational and (2) human beings develop their social identities primarily through communicating” (Allen, 2011, pp. 12). Communication is the avenue for engagement. It is through communication that meaning making occurs. Through exposure, engagement, and empathy an understanding of the richness of life can begin to manifest. This richness will bring more depth and possibilities to what can be accomplished by diverse work teams in organizations both domestically and abroad.

Theoretical Basis

“From a dialogic perspective, difference is the key to growth, change and vitality” (Shepherd, St. John & Striphas, 2006). It is through dialogue, and a dialogic perspective that communication empowers the creation and construction of the social world. Dialogue creates the notion of the self, the other and the relationship between them (Shepherd, St. John & Striphas, 2006).
Difference is basic to the human experience (Shepherd, St. John & Striphas, 2006). “The unique contribution of a dialogic view is an articulation of the generative mechanism for the meaning making process: the interplay of different, often opposing, voices” (Shepherd, St. John & Striphas, 2006, pp. 105). As Isaacs writes, dialogue is about a shared inquiry. It is a way of thinking and reflecting together (1999). It is through this thinking and reflecting that attitudes about relationships with others can begin to shift (Isaacs, 1999). Williamson writes, “all individuals are influenced by their culture, but generally they are not conscious of its affect on their beliefs, values, and behaviors as they go about everyday tasks” (2007, pp. 329). Williamson discusses communication styles, expectations and decision-making as examples of everyday behaviors completed without conscience (2007). Without awareness of the influence and impact of culture on everyday life, navigating difference can prove challenging. Dialogue and relationship become paramount in navigating difference and building a richer understanding of life.

Baxter’s relational dialectic theory was birthed out of Bakhtin’s dialogism work. A foundational principle of the theory is the idea that the self is a relative event constructed out of the relation of two perspectives (Baxter, 2011). This idea is particularly powerful in understanding difference and strategizing effective leadership of diverse work groups.

Baxter writes, “consciousness is the ongoing, situated, act of relating” (2011, pp. 25). Additionally, “self and other do not exist as separate entities but as a relation of similarity and difference” (Baxter, 2011, pp. 25). An important premise of Baxter’s work is that an individual cannot fully know his/her Self without the Other.
Dialogue is the avenue for meaning making in the context of relationship. Kahl and Schmitz describe dialogue as a conversation in the context of relationship “whereby you relax your grip on certainty and listen to the possibilities that result from being in relationship with others” (2010, pp. 109). This being in relationship with Others first requires a willingness to engage relationship with those that appear to be and are different from the Self. Curiosity and the suspense of judgment are foundational for creating a context in which dialogue is possible and valued. In the context of the workplace, leaders must be cognizant of their ability to model engagement, especially when difference threatens to produce negative relations.

As in any relationship, there is often tension in the relationship between the Self and the Other as they seek to share space and find meaning (Cissna & Anderson, 1994). Cissna and Anderson wrote “dialogue implies more than a simple back-and-forthness of messages in interaction; it points to a particular relationally based process/quality communication in which the participants not only meet to exchange messages but to allow fully for changing and being changed” (1994, pp. 92-93).

Dialogue appears then to be a most powerful tool when considering leading and working with diverse groups. Supervisors and employees who differ from each other may expect simplicity, independence, predictability and isolation in the workplace but to produce effective work, collaboration will be needed. Dialogue, and more specifically relational dialectics theory, creates the opportunity to effectively negotiate the shared space of Self and Other. Mari and Johnson (2000) describe dialogue as motivated by opposition, directed toward shaping judgment and action and sensitive to situation and particularity of communication. Where
there is difference, whether it is intellectual, experiential, and cultural or otherwise, dialogue will be imperative for effective work.

**The Literature**

As demographics in the United States and around the world change, more organizations operate across national boundaries and businesses embrace cultural diversity as a business strategy, it will become increasingly important to understand how culturally diverse work teams find success (Hopkins, Hopkins & Gross, 2005). Research indicates that diverse groups are more effective than homogenous ones. In a study of undergraduate students by Watson and his colleagues, he found that diverse work groups were more effective over time at identifying problems and generating solution alternatives than their homogenous counterparts (Watson, Kumar & Michaelsen, 1993). In light of understanding the value of diversity in work groups, understanding the leadership qualities that help cultivate group success is imperative. To that end, this study sought to understand what leadership qualities and behaviors best promote egalitarian pluralism in diverse work groups.

**Understanding Diversity**

Inevitably, members of work groups can differ on a variety of dimensions (Homan, van Knippenberg, Van Kleef & De Dreu, 2007). These dimensions may or may not be visible. Two main categories of diversity can be described as cultural and informational. Cultural diversity includes gender, race, culture, ethnicity and sexual orientation while informational diversity pertains to differences in knowledge, perspectives and ideas (Homan, van Knippenberg, Van Kleef & De Dreu, 2007). Both
cultural and informational diversity represent a variety of group values, norms and behaviors.

Diversity and difference are important because humans perceive and treat one another differently depending on the social identity categories they embody (Allen, 2011). The way individuals treat each other directly impacts the work they can perform and accomplish. Diversity in work groups can be an asset or a challenge for a team or organization.

Nishii and Mayer found that the more diverse the group regarding tenure, the more likely the group was to experience communication problems, lower levels of trust and lower levels of cooperation (2009). Additionally, Watson, et al, found that heterogeneity based on cultural diversity was a detriment to newly formed groups. Therefore, they state it would be “unwise to expect newly formed groups with a substantial degree of cultural diversity to be able to solve problems very effectively” (Watson, 1993, pp.). Interestingly, over the course of the Watson, et al study, task performance and process improved. By its conclusion, the diverse groups had become more effective on the task elements of identifying problem perspectives and generating solution alternatives than its homogeneous counterpart (Watson, 1993). To that end, the authors suggest important implications for managing culturally diverse work groups.

**The Importance of Leadership**

Work teams function in the context of an organization. Organizational structure, values and norms have a direct impact on the work team and its ability to embrace diverse perspectives (Larkey, 1996). One difficulty in working within a
diverse work environment is that an organization’s progressing policies and philosophy statements often give lip service to valuing diversity, fairness and equality but implementation is weak (Larkey, 1996). Larkey suggests—“the ideal diversity climate then is one that is held or shared by all employees and that encourages pluralism in ideas, communication and management styles, and ways of working” (1996, pp. 468). Juana Bordas echos this sentiment when she describes egalitarian pluralism as an organizational way of functioning that can create space for the values and perspectives of many cultures (2012). She claims that, “changing structures, norms, and values is the key to egalitarian pluralism and the foundation for multicultural leadership” (Bordas, 2012, pp. 204). One key to moving from lip service to a diversity climate of egalitarian pluralism lies in management. More specifically, the characteristics of management as well as the communication theory embodied by management have the potential to be particularly impactful.

In *Salsa, Soul and Spirit*, Bordas discusses leadership approaches from Latino, Black and American Indian communities. One principle she explores is community-conferrered leadership. Two important characteristics of community-conferrered leadership are receiving authority from the group and demonstrated character. In community-conferrered leadership, the leader is chosen from among the group because of his/her ability to solve the challenges being faced or because of his/her vision. The individual is a leader among equals (Bordas, 2012). The leader also must demonstrate that he/she will follow the rules set up for the group. This makes the individual a leader among equals (Bordas, 2012).
In our Western world, and in contrast to Bordas’s proposed leadership values, leadership is often seen as an individual or small group of individuals that oversee groups of people in order to accomplish a task. Fairhurst draws attention to, and problematizes, several ‘important dualisms’ in the leadership communication leadership. She particularly draws attention to the idea that leadership studies tend to focus exclusively either on leaders or followers. In focusing solely on leaders, the influence of the collective is neglected and a leader’s basis for action is overlooked when studies focus solely on followers (Collinson, 2005). Therefore, Fairhurst advocates reframing literature so as to view leadership as both-and. This reframe produces a perspective viewing the interplay of leaders and subordinates as a dynamic relationship. This dynamic interplay is the framework for understanding leadership of diverse groups through the lens of relational dialectic theory.

**Rationale**

**Significance**

Nishii and Mayer examined the moderating role of leader-member exchange (LMX) on the relationship between group diversity and turnover (2009). They concluded that inclusive forms of leadership are critical for successfully managing diverse human capital (Nishii & Mayer, 2009). It can be argued that a leader's understanding of effective communication practices and strategy has a large influence over inclusive forms of leadership. Based on Nishii and Mayer's work, inclusive forms of leadership seem to correlate with the quality of relationship a leader develops with his/her followers. Yet, what specific characteristics, or leadership behaviors, demonstrate inclusive forms of leadership that are critical for
creating a quality relationship with followers and successfully managing a diverse work group? Learning more about the characteristics, behaviors and traits of managers who successfully lead diverse work groups is valuable so that leaders can build quality relationships with employees and become more effective at leading diverse teams in a changing work environment. Learning more about the values, traits and characteristics that effective managers embody could have implications for hiring practices in organizations and potentially create organizational change to better reflect and embrace the rich culture of an evolving work force.

**Specific Purpose**

The specific purpose of this study was to consider what values, characteristics and traits are most effective for managers when leading a diverse work group. We already know leaders are highly influential in shaping team processes and outcomes and therefore may influence the relationship between group diversity and outcomes, research in this area is largely unexplored (Nishii, L. H., & Mayer, D. M. (2009). Therefore, this study sought to explore how the values of shared authority and collaboration, as well as how leader behavior, influences diverse work groups.

One challenge that leaders of diverse work groups face is that of managing and connecting a variety of employee social identities. Jake Harwood describes it well when he says,

"we need to understand collective identities as a key aspect of human behavior. We are not random individuals wandering the planet with no connections to others, and our connections to others cannot be understood
purely as a function of individual-level phenomena” (Shepherd, St. John, Striphas, 2006, pp. 89).

Supervisors and leaders need a distinct awareness and strategy for managing the spectrum of social identities they employ. Relational dialectics, or dialogue, is a communication theory that may positively impact the relationship between supervisor and employee.

**Research Questions/Hypotheses**

*h1: Leaders who embody collectivist values of shared authority and collaboration will be positively associated with high overall leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships within diverse contexts.*

*h2: Leaders who demonstrate integrity (by following the same rules as members) will develop high overall leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships within diverse contexts.*
Chapter Three: Scope & Methodology

The Scope of the Study

This study sought to determine what connection, if any, exists between collectivist values, integrity and effectively leading diverse groups. Furthermore, it sought to understand the role that dialogue plays in supervisor and employee relationships where demographic diversity is apparent. In order to determine if a connection exists, work groups in higher education completed a short survey. This survey sought information about personal values, collectivist or individualistic tendencies and information regarding the employee supervisor relationship. The study included personally identifiable information to determine work group diversity.

The breadth of the study was broad with the context being specific. Individuals were sought out at institutions of higher education, primarily in Student Affairs or co-curricular departments. The leader, or supervisor, participants supervised two or more staff persons. Participants were from a variety of universities including large public universities and small private universities. All of the universities are located in Oregon, primarily in the Portland Metro area with one located in central Oregon.

Methodology of the Study

This study was a people oriented research study that used qualitative measures to assess attitudes and behaviors of diverse work groups. The qualitative measure used were survey and individual interviews. Participants were sought at
Portland Metro universities and colleges. Participants agreed to answer preliminary questions in writing with a follow up interview of thirty to sixty minutes.

Because the primary location for many of the universities was the Portland Metro area, diversity in culture or race may be lacking but other demographical aspects may be higher. Supervisors and employees alike were assessed through completing a short survey. Survey questions were influenced by and adapted from Schwartz’s Portrait Values Questionnaire (PVQ) Self-Assessment, Individualism/Collectivism Scale, Moral Foundations Questionnaire and LMX7.

Schwartz’s PVQ is concerned with the basic values that people in all cultures recognize (2012). Schwartz’s value theory specifies six main features (Schwartz, 2012). These features include values as beliefs, desirable goals, transcending specific actions and situations, serving as standards, ordered by importance the influence of multiple values guiding action (Schwartz, 2012). The tool makes forty statements and asks respondents to select one option that reflects the level of agreement the respondent has with the statement. The response options range from Not Like Me At All to Very Much Like Me.

The second influencing questionnaire comes from Johnson’s text on Organizational Ethics (2016). Through a series of twenty statements, the questionnaire indicates an individual’s tendencies towards individualism or collectivism (Johnson, 2016).

Another influencing questionnaire is the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (Johnson, 2016). This particular questionnaire assesses moral relevance and moral judgments. Select questions specifically correlate with one of the five value
foundations being assessed. The higher the score of the questions connected to the foundation, the more important the foundation to the individual. The five foundations include Harm, Fairness, Ingroup/Loyalty, Authority and Purity (Johnson, 2016).

In order to assess the relationship quality between the supervisor and the employee, inquiry will be made during the interview to understand the quality of the relationship and what evidence exists to support the individual’s assessment of the relationship. According to Leader Member Exchange Theory (LMX), the quality of the relationship developed between a leader and follower is predictive of outcomes at all organizational levels (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Additionally, according to a meta-analysis of LMX research, having a high-quality relationship with one’s supervisor can affect the whole work experience in a positive manner (Gerstner & Day, 1997).

The completion of the short survey and the more in-depth interview, informed where the leader falls on the continuum of embodying collectivist values and integrity. The interview dove deeper into the survey questions as well as inquired about dialogue and its potential role in the effectiveness of the work group. By assessing the relationship between supervisor and employee, we will understand further how the demonstrated values of the supervisor impact the work experience of the employee and thus the organizational objectives.

Data Analysis

The data was primarily analyzed through the lens of relationship. Each influencing assessment tool individually produced holistic information that
described the relationship between supervisor and employee. By retrieving and analyzing the content of the short survey and the interviews, a clearer view of both what values influence the leader-employee relationship and how the values positively or negatively impact the relationship.

**Ethical Considerations**

The most important ethical consideration is adhering to a basic “do no harm” rule (Rubin, 2010). One strategy for doing no harm in this study included participant consent and confidentiality. It was important to consider the possible implication to the organizational team if the results of the study indicate a negative correlation between the supervisor and employees. Therefore, it was important for the participants to understand the study’s purpose of inquiry and its limitations.
Chapter 4: The Study

Introduction

This study succeeded in procuring professionals in higher education who primarily work in Student Affairs or co-curricular programs. Work groups were initially sought at a public university located in Oregon. Additional individuals were sought at other Oregon colleges and universities primarily located in urban settings. The two other participating institutions are Christian Liberal Arts institutions. The study was completed in four phases.

Identified supervisors completed a short survey (Appendix C) and a follow up interview (Appendix D). Within the short written survey, employee name and contact information were requested and then pursued.

After the employees were identified, they were asked to complete a similar short survey (Appendix C) and then a follow up interview was scheduled and completed. The study took place over a two-week period in November 2016.

The study inquired about the social identities and values of both supervisors and employees, collectivistic and individualistic tendencies of supervisors and employees, communication strategies when navigating difference, the use of dialogue to navigate difference, the perceived correlation of dialogue and effective work and the demographic diversity of the work group.

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the role of social and cultural identity and values in effectively leading diverse work groups. Additionally, this study sought to understand what communication strategies are used in negotiating difference and ultimately creating effective work within the group.
The development of the survey and interview questions were influenced by the PVQ inventory, collectivist and individualist evaluation and the LMX7 as described in Chapter 3. Through the short survey, each participant had the opportunity to consider personal cultural identity, departmental culture, personal values, diversity, and communication prior to the phone interview.

This was a small, broad study that may conclude different results in other industries. Considering that the study was implemented in institutions of higher education, there may be an organizational culture that is more aligned with collectivistic values than in an industry marked by competition and sales. One supervisor began the interview by discussing her intentionality in choosing an organization that was a good fit for her values and lifestyle. The fact that she currently works at a public institution of higher education certainly indicates that she believes her organization and department are a good fit for her personally.

**Results of the Study**

*h1: Leaders that embody collectivist values of shared authority and collaboration will be positively associated with high overall leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships within diverse contexts.*

In reviewing the information gleaned from both the short online survey as well as the interview, the primary data of concern included collectivistic values of shared authority and collaboration, the quality of supervisor and employee relationship and a diverse work group. This study analyzed information received
from both employee and supervisor to see if and how the perspectives aligned regarding communication strategies and behaviors within the department. Additionally, employees were asked to rate their relationship with their supervisor. Lastly, demographic data was assessed to determine the variance of diversity.

In analyzing the data, each participant was able to identify and articulate his/her own personal values, culture and social identities. Participants also all articulated how they saw these aspects or personal dimensions impacting colleagues, employees and departments as a whole. A participating supervisor and an employee both noted that they understand their values to be both collectivistic and individualistic. The collectivist values were most obvious when considering the team and how to approach challenging topics, or controversy, while the individualistic values impacted how each employee or colleague is engaged and honored as his/her own person. Other work groups and individual participants expressed similar understandings of their values being collectivistic when it came to creating vision, priorities and values for the group. Interestingly, employees from one work group described their personal work preference as more individualistic. One expressed discomfort and dislike that this was the case. Aspects and descriptors of dialogue were described in nearly every interview as a communication strategy that helped work teams produce good work.

Four supervisors and five employees completed the full study. Two supervisors were white women with social work backgrounds that report having a lot of experience working with many people different from themselves. The other two participating supervisors were white males who indicated they have a
moderate amount of experience working with colleagues whom are different than them. Every supervisor described his or her values as being collectivistic. One did comment that she likely wasn’t as collective as some from other cultures as she recognizes she is an American and also possesses individual values. Her individualistic values are most prominent in how she interacts with each of her direct reports. Much of the collectivistic values were demonstrated in reaching group decisions about how to fulfill the mission and objectives of the department. Collectivism was also demonstrated in the strategies the supervisors used to connect with their respective employees. Two supervisors discussed opportunities outside of the office where staff connects. It was clear that these opportunities were an intentional aspect of the departmental culture to care about and support each other.

All employee participants reported good or excellent relationships with supervisors. One work group noted that despite the challenge of time, the quality of interaction with the supervisor was strong. Another employee went so far as to say that while on paper his supervisor is his superior, in action the department is collaborative and the supervisor is viewed as a colleague, mentor and friend. Employee time at the organization and in the department ranged from three months to six years. Despite the large range, employees articulated strong working relationships with his/her supervisor.
h2: Leaders that demonstrate integrity (by following the same rules as members) will develop high overall leader-member exchange (LMX) relationships within diverse contexts.

Similar to hypothesis one, information was gleaned from both the short online survey as well as the interview. The primary data of concern included demonstrated integrity, the quality of supervisor and employee relationship and a diverse work group. This study analyzed information received from both employee and supervisor to see how the perspectives aligned regarding communication strategies and behaviors within the department. Additionally, employees were asked to rate their relationship with their supervisor. Lastly, demographic data was assessed to determine the variance of diversity.

The theme of integrity came out primarily in the interviews with supervisor participants. One supervisor’s integrity came from her expressed values. She expressed a strong value for a positive work experience. Beyond valuing a good work experience for herself, she also desires her employees having a positive work experience. In the discussion, she commented that she must be willing to do anything she asks or expects of an employee. This is precisely the idea of integrity as outlined by Bordas. Bordas describes integrity as leaders being willing to follow the same rules as followers (2012).

Another supervisor engaged the idea of integrity when describing a team retreat where ground rules were created for the group. The supervisor used a lot of “we” language when describing how the group came to decide the ground rules.
Additionally, the supervisor was transparent and honest in recognizing that they don’t always follow all the ground rules. The main reason rules aren’t always followed is because they are difficult. However, there are intentional strategies for communication and accountability.

Employees also had some contributions regarding integrity. One employee participant described a culture of “calling in”. “Calling in” was described as a process where conflict, or controversy, is confronted. The idea of calling in, as opposed to calling out, seeks to preserve and develop relationship amidst the controversy.

As stated previously, all employee participants reported good or excellent relationships with supervisors. While participants were not asked to make a direct correlation between leaders following the same rules as employees, the theme of personal relationship, care and support was strong from several employees and were explicit reasons as to why the relationship was so positive. Employee time at the organization and in the department ranged from three months to six years. Despite the large range, employees articulated strong working relationships with his/her supervisor.

**Discussion**

Fairhurst advocates for reframing leadership literature as both and. Primarily, this perspective is because of the limitations of only focusing on the leader’s perspective or only focusing on the employee’s perspective. This study sought to engage both supervisor and employee in order to understand a more holistic perspective of the departmental dynamics, values and relationships.
Recognizing and embracing difference is foundational for understanding the richness of human experience according to Allen (2011). Two of the participating supervisors discussed their personal value of diversity and equity. One responding supervisor stated her personal values as “helping others and embracing diversity and difference”. Furthermore, all participants recognized the important role that dialogue played in work group discussions and ultimately in performing effectively as a group. One supervisor participant said dialogue was “foundational work to build community”. While an employee participant said, “communication and delegation is super important”. “When it is missing, there is tension and people step on each other’s toes.”

Investigating the connections between personal social identities, values and leadership as well as work place relationships proved to be complex and multilayered. Cissna and Anderson discuss shared space as being complex, unpredictable, collaborative, strange, interdependent and vulnerable (1994). Listening to the work stories of the different participants spoke to this complexity. One story shared was regarding the religious difference between a supervisor and her employee. Both participants recognized and verbalized the difference but also highlighted the difference as a source of opportunity to be allies and work towards breaking down negative stereotypes of both groups. As Larkey states, the ideal diversity climate is one that is held by all employees and encourages pluralism in ideas, management styles, communication styles and ways of working (1996). While this particular study cannot speak to the larger organizational climate, the departmental climates seem to reflect the value of pluralism.
Relationships are dynamic as are group dynamics. Most, if not all, of the participating supervisors were aware of the many factors and complexities involved in effectively leading diverse work groups. Supervisors expressed value for their employee's perspectives and experience and yet also expressed the need to move the group forward in meeting declared mission and vision for the department. Collaboration and shared authority were articulated as values espoused by them personally as well as in their work group. These values seemed to permeate the departments investigated. From the perspective of participants, Isaacs's four behaviors of dialogue (listening, respecting, suspending judgment and speaking your voice) were important and closely correlated with the group’s ability to work effectively together.

While several participants described themselves as having worked with many people different from themselves, the demographical diversity of the participants was limited. Two female and two male supervisors were interviewed as well as two male and three female employees. While each supervisor had examples of controversy or conflict with employees different than themselves, the differences were primarily related to social and political identities rather than demographical difference. The participants were near in age to each other and similar in earned education degrees.
**Ch. 5 Summary and Conclusions**

**Limitations of the Study**

There were a variety of limitations in this particular study. First was the limitation of time and resources. The study was conducted over a short period of time and required participants to complete two phases. This required a significant time commitment for both the participant and the researcher.

An additional limitation was the type of organizations sought. While a broad study, it was narrow in that it only requested participants that currently work in higher education. This is a limitation because it is unclear as to whether the results from studying work groups in higher education would be applicable to other industries.

The study was also limited in that supervisors suggested employees for contact. There was no criterion set forth regarding what kind of employees should be selected and for what reasons. This could have led to supervisors choosing employees with whom they have the best relationships. Furthermore, it is generally not understood what the supervisor’s motivation may have been for selecting the employees he/she did.

**Further Study and Recommendations**

Further studies should be conducted to gather more information on how values and morality impact the relationship between a supervisor and employees and how communication mitigates differences. It would be valuable to consider organizational culture in future studies. Because this study focused primarily on an individual's culture and values, organizational culture fell outside the scope of the
study. However, organizational culture may be a prominent factor of influence on the work environment as a whole and the relationship of supervisor and employee.

It would also be valuable to expand the study to include other industries. Perhaps in studying work groups in industries other than higher education, particularly industries that tend to be more competitive or sales oriented, different results might be found.

Additionally, because this study was particularly interested in understanding how diverse work groups function effectively, future research may want to first identify diverse organizations, or work groups, and then study the communication strategies and values that make the group effective and encourage positive relationship with each other. Because this study was focused on Oregon higher education, the participants lacked visual diversity but did have a moderate level of cultural diversity in regard to religion, gender, age and highest earned degree.

**Conclusion**

As the world becomes more globalized, embracing diversity will increase in importance. While untraditional, relational dialectic theory and dialogue provide an important framework for understanding and engaging in relationship and creating meaning with those other than the self. Leaders looking to effectively lead diverse work groups should consider incorporating collaboration, shared-authority and integrity into their leadership strategy to determine if employee relations and quality of work is improved. Depending on the leader, these may be challenging qualities and behaviors to develop and embrace. In order to understand if values of shared-authority, collaboration and integrity are characteristic of other industries,
further studies should be conducted. These studies should focus both on industries marked by more individualist values of competition, independence and self-reliance and on more culturally diverse work groups.

From the interviews conducted, themes of emotional safety of employees, individual value of employees, collaboration, listening and speaking voice were strong themes. There was a clear intention by supervisors to value their employees personally and listen to employee perspectives. Work groups embraced and valued walking through issues of difference and challenge together and all remarked on the important role that dialogue played in the work group producing effective work together.
References


Appendices

Appendix A

Email Communication to Potential Supervisor Participants

Dear «Title» «First_Name» «Last_Name»,

My name is Kaylee Krout and I am currently working on my Master of Arts in Communication and Leadership Studies’ thesis for Gonzaga University. I am reaching out in hopes that you might be able to assist me in my capstone project. I am investigating the role that dialogue plays in effectively leading diverse work groups. I am sampling Portland area universities.

Would you be willing to answer the six questions below and then answer some follow up questions either over the phone or in person? Because I am looking at the relationship between leaders/supervisors and their employees, I am also wondering, would be willing to identify several employees that you supervise that I could also reach out to? All answers will be kept strictly confidential.

Thank you for your consideration. If you are willing to participate, please respond to the following five questions. Once I receive your responses I will reach out for further discussion.

Sincerely,

Kaylee Krout
Gonzaga University Graduate Studies
Portland, OR
Appendix B

Email Communication to Potential Employee Participants

Dear «Title» «First_Name» «Last_Name»,

My name is Kaylee Krout and I am currently working on my Master of Arts in Communication and Leadership Studies’ thesis for Gonzaga University. I am reaching out in hopes that you might be able to assist me in my capstone project. I am investigating the role that dialogue plays in effectively leading diverse work groups. I am sampling Portland area universities.

Would you be willing to answer the short survey below and have a 30-60-minute follow up interview either over the phone or in person? I am looking at the relationship between leaders/supervisors and their employees, and your supervisor gave me your information as a potential participant. All answers will be kept strictly confidential.

Thank you for your consideration. If you are willing to participate, please read and agree to the below terms of the study and follow the survey monkey link to answer the short survey. Once I receive your responses I will reach out to schedule a phone or in person 30-60 minute interview.

Sincerely,

Kaylee

Kaylee Krout
Gonzaga University Graduate Studies
Portland, OR

Document of Understanding

I, the undersigned, agree to participate in Kaylee Krout’s communication study to partially fulfill her graduation requirement. I willingly agree with the understanding that my answers and communication will be kept confidential and anonymous. No personally identifiable information will be published.

Participant’s Printed Name and Signature
Appendix C

Short Written Survey

1) If you were on the outside looking in, how would you describe your personal culture?

2) How would you describe your department’s culture?

3) How would you articulate your personal values?

4) Describe your engagement with your employee (supervisor).

5) What professional experiences do you have with colleagues who are different than you?

6) What communication strategies do you employ to produce effective work together?
Appendix D

Interview Questions

1) How do you see your personal culture impact your work?

2) How does your personal culture influence or impact your employees?

3) How would you describe your influence or impact on your department’s culture?

4) Do your personal values tend to lean more towards individualistic values or more collectivist values? What leads you to believe this?

5) Would you describe your work group’s values as being more individualistic or more collectivistic? Why?

6) What communication strategies do you use to negotiate misunderstanding, conflict or difference in your work team?

7) The essential behaviors of dialogue, according to Isaacs, are listening, respecting, suspending and speaking your voice. To what degree would you say your work group engages in dialogue?

8) What connection, if any, exists between effective work by your team and the communication strategies the team uses?

Name of Organization: _______________________
Name of Department: _______________________

Length of Time at Organization

[ ] Less than 6 months       [ ] 6 months - 2 years
[ ] 2-5 years               [ ] more than 5 years

Length of Time in Department

[ ] Less than 6 months       [ ] 6 months - 2 years
[ ] 2-5 years               [ ] more than 5 years

Age

[ ] 18-24       [ ] 25-34       [ ] 35-44       [ ] 45-54       [ ] 55-64
[ ] 65-74       [ ] 75 years or older
Education Completed
[ ] Associate degree
[ ] Bachelor's degree
[ ] Master's degree
[ ] Professional degree
[ ] Doctorate degree

Gender
[ ] Male
[ ] Female

Ethnicity
[ ] Hispanic/Latino
[ ] Non-Hispanic/Latino

Race
[ ] American Indian or Alaska Native
[ ] Asian
[ ] Black or African American
[ ] Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
[ ] White
(Multiple Races can be checked)