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"What's the Norm Here?" Social Categorization as a Basis for Group Norm Development

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ABSTRACT

Social categorization processes may lead work groups to form different types of group norms. We present a model of norm formation and suggest that group norms may emerge immediately following the group's inception. Further, the content of such norms may be influenced by group members' demographic heterogeneity. We outline a profile of work group norms and describe how social categorization processes influence the norm formation process. We also develop a series of testable propositions related to these norms. Finally, we discuss the implications of our social categorization model for future research on work groups in organizations.

Many theoretical explanations of group processes in organizations emphasize the substantial influence and diversity of group norms. Research suggests that norms play a critical role in determining group effectiveness and individual group member performance (Levine & Moreland, 1990). Despite the importance of group norms, researchers understand relatively little about how and why specific norms emerge. Why, for example, do some work groups emphasize norms that regulate dress (e.g., Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997) while others adopt norms that regulate where people should sit in meetings (e.g., Puffer, 1999) or when they should arrive (e.g., Sutton & Hargadon, 1996)? Further, what social processes lead groups to decide that formal dress, seating arrangements, or punctuality should be emphasized?

Some studies have suggested that group composition, particularly members' demographic characteristics, may influence which group norms emerge. Even among work groups with the same structure, tasks, incentives, and goals, different norms emerged in different groups (Chatman & Flynn, 2001). Specifically, more demographically diverse work groups tended to develop less cooperative norms than did more demographically homogenous work groups. Demographically dissimilar group members were less likely to emphasize cooperative norms because they categorized one another as out-group members, rather than in-group members.

In this chapter, we outline a model of norm formation grounded in social categorization theory. We argue that when people become members of work groups, they categorize each other according to common membership in salient demographic categories. Lacking information about deep-level personal characteristics (e.g., beliefs, values), group members may rely on accessible or visible characteristics (e.g., race,

gender, age) to serve as the basis of their categorizations. Our objective is to demonstrate how these categorizations, in turn, provide the basis for different normative expectations among group members.

We first review the various types of norm formation processes in work groups. Next, we outline our model of norm formation based on social categorization among group members. We then draw upon this model to describe how different levels of demographic heterogeneity in work groups can lead to specific types of group norms. From this discussion, we derive a series of testable propositions. We conclude by describing the potential implications and contributions of the model and suggesting directions for future research.

Perspectives on the Origin of Group Norms

Following others, we define group norms as legitimate, socially shared standards against which the appropriateness of behavior can be evaluated (Birenbaum & Sagarin, 1976). As regular behavioral patterns that are relatively stable and expected by group members, norms influence how members perceive and interact with one another, approach decisions, and solve problems (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1991: 21). The concept of norms also implies social control; that is, norms act as positive or negative means of ensuring conformity and applying sanctions to deviant behavior (e.g., O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996).

Several types of norm formation processes exist (for reviews, see Opp, 1982 and Feldman, 1984). First, external norm formation suggests that certain individuals (e.g., firm leaders, heads of departments, supervisors) or institutions (e.g., boards of directors, bureaucracies) are authorized to prescribe and enforce norms, thereby regulating the

behavior of the groups or individuals they supervise. Managers or group leaders often rely on external norm formation to define role expectations for individual group members. Such expectations may reflect the core values of an organizational leader who wishes to maintain a strong, cohesive culture (Schein, 1985). Typically, these expectations of normative behavior are explicitly communicated from leaders to followers, either in verbal or written form.

Newcomb (1943) described the external norm formation process in a study of political attitudes on a college campus. Although most of the students on campus came from politically conservative families, upperclassmen tended to express more liberal attitudes than did freshmen students. After examining students' attitudes over a four-year period, Newcomb concluded that students' attitudes changed as they left the family group and joined the new group composed of their young college classmates. While the family's norms supported conservative attitudes, the college faculty and upperclassmen, those individuals who were considered leaders on the college campus, supported liberal attitudes. Further, the shift toward liberal attitudes was more pronounced among popular students. Those students who did not accept more liberal attitudes were isolated from the college's social life or became more family-oriented. Newcomb's study offered a clear demonstration of the external norm formation process by describing how senior members of the group (faculty and upperclassmen) imposed expectations of attitudes and behaviors that junior members were required to adopt in order to gain acceptance.

Second, responsive norm formation refers to critical events that shape normative expectations among group members. Events may be considered critical if they are central to the group's values, instrumental to achieving the group's task, or occur in an early

stage of group development. Assuming group members interpret these critical events in similar ways, they will likely establish a precedent that sets expectations about how to behave when similar events occur in the future. The group's response to such events is often negotiated in an open forum, with debate and dissenting opinion eventually giving way to group consensus.

In an ethnographic study of culture and social control, Barker (1993) described how a newly formed self-managing work group in a small manufacturing company developed norms about working late. After falling behind on a deadline for a major shipment, the group held an impromptu meeting to decide how to catch up. During the course of the meeting, group members negotiated a resolution, which was to have all members work late until the shipment could be made on time (Barker, 1993: 421). Their unanimous decision established a precedent, which, in turn, set an expectation among group members that, if necessary, the group would work late to make its shipments on time. This is an example of responsive norm formation because group members explicitly established the norm in response to a critical event that occurred early in the group's history.

Third, emergent norm formation refers to the "spontaneous" emergence of group norms (von Hayek, 1979). Once people join with others, they rapidly structure their experiences and conform to a general standard (Levine & Moreland, 1990). Sherif's (1936) experimental work on autokinesis highlighted the power of emergent norm formation. Sherif studied judgments made by members of ad hoc groups (people without affiliation or common view of a particular issue) who were asked to report whether a stationary dot of light viewed in a dark room began to move in a particular direction

(referred to as the autokinetic effect). Alone, each person judged the movement of light to be erratic, but when asked to complete the same task among other individuals, each person was influenced by others' judgments. Once the individuals had made judgments in the group setting, they then adhered to the group norm, even when making judgments alone. An individual's adherence to the group norm was less stable, however, if they had first made judgments alone rather than first making judgments in a group. Thus, group influence on the autokinetic task was particularly powerful when it was part of the origination of the norm.

The emergent norm formation process may also incorporate carry-over behaviors from prior experience. Group norms may emerge because individual group members bring a set of expectations with them from other work groups in other organizations. This carry-over of individual behaviors from past situations can increase the predictability of group members' behaviors in new settings and facilitate task accomplishment (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1985, 1991). For instance, consultants bring with them fairly standard sets of expectations from project group to project group, and, as a result, do not need to relearn their roles continually. In addition, such carry-over norms can help avoid potentially embarrassing situations or detrimental forms of interpersonal conflict (Mannix, Thatcher, & Jehn, 2001). Instead, individuals know which conversations or actions are likely to provoke annoyance, irritation, or embarrassment to their colleagues and are able to avoid them.

These three types of group norm formation differ in their level of explicitness. External norm formation and responsive norm formation are explicit processes. External norms are formally imposed by a leader or institution, and responsive norms are

established by open bargaining among group members. Emergent norm formation, however, is an implicit process. Expectations of desired behavior are not openly stated; rather, they are assumed. In this sense, norms become established as people continually align their behaviors until consensus in their opinions and actions emerges.

Economists and sociologists have argued that group norms will emerge depending on the costs and benefits associated with the behaviors they control. Consistent with economic theories of utility, groups select norms depending on the relative gains people get and the extent to which norms satisfy members' needs. For example, Opp (1982) described emergent norm formation as a multi-stage process beginning with recurrent behavior, leading to the expression of individual preferences for specific types of recurrent behavior, and concluding with the acceptance (internalization) and enforcement of the most highly valued recurrent behavior (group norms). Thus, economic approaches suggest that group members deliberately select normative behaviors as the utility they offer to the group increases.

Emergent norm formation is also an inherently social psychological process. People form impressions of others in their social environments by interpreting information gathered from observation of and interpersonal interaction with the focal individual and similar others (Snyder & Swann, 1978). Upon joining a group, people form impressions of their fellow group members, and, based on these initial impressions, develop expectations about how group members will be encouraged to behave and interact with one another in the future. The link between initial impressions and expectations of future interactions may be driven by how similar or dissimilar the focal member perceives him or herself to be from other group members based on their shared

membership in various social groups. Focusing on this social psychological process of self- and other-categorization, we develop below a model of emergent norm formation in work groups.

A Social Categorization Perspective on Group Norm Development

Social categorization in work groups

Psychologists suggest that, upon entering any new situation, how we see and understand our social environment is a function of the categories we use to interpret it (Rosch, 1978). To make sense out of an overly complex and confusing world, people categorize others as being members of either the same social group (in-group) or a different social group (out-group). In addition, self-categorization is the cognitive process by which people define their self-concepts in terms of membership in various social groups. Self-concepts become activated and provoke specific behaviors depending on the characteristics of others who are present in a given situation (e.g., Markus & Cross, 1990).

People engage in social categorization for at least three reasons. First, to protect self-esteem, people strive to achieve a positive evaluation of their group in comparison to other groups (Barnum, 1997; Turner, 1987; Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Thus, individuals actively manipulate or redefine the social context to make salient the positive aspects of categories of which he or she is a member. Second, people strive to simplify and organize complex environments (Turner, 1982). The accentuation effect, in which people tend to view those who are a member of their social category as more similar to one another while viewing those who are non-category members as more different from category members than they actually are, is driven by an attempt to simplify the world (Tajfel &

Wilkes, 1963). Third, placing people into categories may reduce uncertainty people feel about how others are likely to behave. Once people have been categorized, an observer is likely to view their behavior as more predictable.

It is not hard to imagine, then, how the process of categorizing others can elicit stereotyping behavior (Brickson, 2000), influence expectations about interpersonal behaviors such as cooperation and altruism (Chatman & Flynn, 2001), and facilitate or constrain collective action among group members (Chatman, Polzer, Barsade, & Neale, 1998). Indeed, an individual's experience in a work group, and the group's ability to function effectively, may depend on the extent to which people categorize themselves as being similar to or different from other members of the group.

Demographic diversity as the basis for initial social categorizations

Self-categorization relies on the activation of salient social categories that function psychologically to influence a person's perception and behavior as well as others' behavior toward that individual (Turner, et al, 1987). Group members often use immediately apparent physical features to categorize others and predict their behavior (e.g., Stangor, Lynch, Duan, & Glass, 1992), particularly at the group's inception when members possess little personal information about one another due to their lack of familiarity (Chatman & Flynn, 2001).

In organizations, demographic characteristics such as sex, race, age, and citizenship emerge as salient social categories because they offer readily identifiable distinctions among coworkers, often signaling a likelihood that similar people share common backgrounds and experiences and can expect one another to react to situations similarly (e.g., McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001; Pfeffer, 1983). This process

occurs quickly and people use relatively little evidence, or "thin slices" of behavior, to judge even potentially concealable aspects of identity such as sexual orientation (e.g., Ambady, Hallahan, & Conner, 1999; Ambady, Bernieri, & Richeson, 2000). For example, Tsui, Egan, and Porter (1994) found that supervisors categorized subordinates as either in-group or out-group members early in their relationships, when the two had exchanged very little information. They suggested that "physical, observable" characteristics, such as race and sex, played a critical role in the initial categorization process (Tsui, et al., 1994: 8). Indeed, there is increasing agreement that social targets initially activate primary or primitive generic categories such as race, gender, and age (Messick & Mackie, 1989: 54) and use these categories to form impressions of fellow group members.

The distinctiveness of the target's demographic characteristics may act as a catalyst for the social categorization process. The distinct attributes of, for example, a single woman in a group of men or a single black in a group of whites disproportionately influenced observers' causal judgments (Taylor, 1981). People notice their own and others' distinctive characteristics because such characteristics provide greater informational richness and value for discriminating themselves or a focal individual from others (McGuire, 1999). The central prediction of distinctiveness theory is that an individual's unique traits in relation to other people in a given context will be more salient, that is, they will garner more attention and focus and will be viewed as more diagnostic and predictive of behavior than will more common traits. A long tradition of research has supported this prediction. For example, when asked to respond to the open-ended query, "who am I?" boys were more likely to mention being male as the proportion

of females in their household increased, while girls were more likely to mention being female as the proportion of males in their households increased (McGuire, McGuire, & Winton, 1979). Similarly, Oakes and Turner (1986) found that observers were more aware of a group member's sex when the object of the evaluation was the most distinctive (the only male in the group).

Distinctiveness predictions vary, however, depending on whether an individual's or a group's perspective is considered (Chatman, Boisnier, Berdahl, Spataro, & Anderson, 2001). An individual may experience maximum diversity when he or she is the sole representative of a particular social category (e.g., one male in a group of three females). But, a group may experience maximum diversity when members are equivalently different from one another (two males and two females). For example, demographic differences were more salient than organizational categories when demographic variance among members was higher rather than lower (e.g., Chatman, et al., 1998). Thus, members of demographically heterogeneous groups are more likely to categorize one another in terms of demographic characteristics than are members of more homogeneous groups (Stroessner, 1996).

The impact of social categorizations on the emergence of work group norms

We suggest that social categorizations triggered by group members' immediate appraisals of demographic heterogeneity can serve as the basis of norm formation. One of the few studies that focused on norm formation in work groups found that group norms formed early, often before members adequately understood their task (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1985). Further, group heterogeneity predicted the presence of cooperative group norms after MBA student teams had been organized for only two weeks (Chatman

& Flynn, 2001). Thus, it seems that group members often form enduring norms quickly, even with limited personal information and few interpersonal interactions. The question that remains is, what type of norms will emerge based on members' initial social categorizations?

Social identity theory suggests that expectations of other work group members may be driven by an in-group/out-group bias, which is a tendency to enhance one's evaluations of fellow in-group members and degrade one's evaluations of out-group members in order to maintain high levels of self-esteem (e.g., Hogg & Abrams, 1988). As this process permits an individual to assume and maintain a positive self-identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), a highly valued outcome, he or she may seek to maximize inter-group distinctions and, through the use of negative stereotypes, view out-group members as less attractive (Kramer, 1991). Categorizing different others into groups, even based on trivial or rationally irrelevant criteria, leads people to perceive out-group members as less trustworthy, honest, and cooperative than are members of their in-group (Judd, Ryan, & Park, 1991; Linville & Fischer, 1993; Hewstone, Bond, & Wan, 1983; Brewer, 1979; Tajfel, 1982). Thus, in-group members are more likely to enhance their impressions of, and cooperate with, one another while forming negative impressions of, and distinguishing themselves from, out-group members. In a demographically diverse environment, then, categorizations based on salient demographic distinctions will magnify negative impressions of demographically different people (e.g., Flynn, et al., 2001).

This pattern of categorization leading to in-group enhancement and out-group degradation may influence members' initial perceptions of work group norms by

anchoring expectations of other group members' behavior. For example, dissimilar group members may interact less with one another, tend to think poorly of each other's potential performance, and hold low expectations of others' willingness to cooperate (e.g., Chatman & Flynn, 2001; Flynn et al., 2001). Further, in-group/out-group biases elicited by the social categorization process may cause new group members to misperceive one another. People tend to retain information that confirms an existing stereotype profile rather than information that is inconsistent with that stereotype (e.g., Allport, 1954; Snyder, Campbell, & Preston, 1982), leading group members to interpret information gathered from observation of and interpersonal interaction with dissimilar group members in ways that confirm negative out-group stereotypes (Kramer, 1991). These stereotypes can, therefore, persist despite observing behavior that contradicts the stereotype.

Social categorizations can also alter the target person's behavior. In particular, initially false definitions of a situation based on categorical generalizations can evoke behaviors that make the generalized belief come true (Miller & Turnbull, 1986). Past research on self-fulfilling prophecies suggests that such effects are common in group settings (for a review, see Darley & Fazio, 1980). For example, when teachers were misled to believe that certain students had greater learning potential than did other students in their classrooms, they developed higher expectations of these "special" students, gave them more individualized attention, and allowed them more opportunities to demonstrate their competence. As predicted, those students who were falsely depicted as high-potential learners improved significantly more in the classroom than did their low-potential counterparts (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

Such expectations can also create stereotype threats that influence targets' behavior and effectiveness. For people who are atypical performers of a task by virtue of social category membership, stereotype threats can emerge and preclude them from displaying their true expertise by disrupting their intellectual functioning (e.g., Steele & Aronson, 1995). For example, high potential women performed substantially worse on a standardized math test than did equally qualified men when the women were told that the test produced gender differences (high stereotype threat) but as well as men when they were told that the test did not produce gender differences (low stereotype threat) (Spencer, Steele, & Quinn, 1999).

Expectations based on initial social categorizations can be transmitted from the perceiver to the target person in many ways, including the use of nonverbal behavior. A study by Word, Zanna, and Cooper (1974) found that negative expectations communicated nonverbally by an interviewer caused an interviewee to perform more poorly in the interview. Thus, even in brief interactions, such as job interviews, and even using simple paralinguistic cues, such as posture or facial expressions, perceivers can influence a target person's behavior by communicating and enacting their expectations of that person. Likewise, in work group settings, group members who have little contact with one another and lack opportunity for rich communication may still form immediate impressions of other group members and behave in ways that lead others to fulfill these immediate impressions or constrain their ability to perform according to their actual level of expertise (Steele & Aronson, 1995). Such behavior may serve to strengthen members' immediate impressions of group norms, which were anchored by their initial social categorizations.

Dyadic interactions that stem from individual-level categorizations may shape others' categorizations of and interaction with demographically different team members. For example, one team member, Steve, might categorize another team member, Amy, as an out-group member using sex as an active social category. Steve's categorization of Amy as an out-group member may elicit stereotypes that he enacts and she confirms through their respective behavior toward one another (e.g., Swann, Milton, & Polzer, 2000). In a group setting, this sequence would increase the salience of sex as a demographic category for other group members who observe the interaction between Steve and Amy. Other group members' inferences about Amy would then be influenced by both her membership in an activated social category (female) and her behavioral response to the treatment she received from Steve. Thus, the iterative interaction and observation that occurs in a group may cause members' activated demographic categorizations and associated biases and expectations to converge. In this sense, social categorizations that occur initially at the individual level of analysis might influence the norm formation process that occurs at the group level of analysis.[2]

Summary

Since group members initially lack information about one another, they categorize themselves and others based on salient demographic characteristics. As a result of an in-group/out-group bias, group members form expectations of other members' attitudes and behaviors. These expectations provide the primary foundation for group norms. Research on self-fulfilling prophecies and stereotype threats suggests that group members may behave in a manner consistent with these, typically erroneous, expectations. Their colleagues in the group will then interpret the focal member's behavior and respond with

[2] We thank the editor, Jeffrey Polzer, for these ideas.

actions that are subsequently interpreted by the focal group member as consistent with their original expectations of normative behavior, thereby strengthening the impact of demographic differences on the emergent norm formation process.

The Influence of Social Categorization on a Profile of Work Group Norms

In the previous section we outlined how categorizing work group members can influence *how* group norms emerge. We now consider how perceived heterogeneity across salient demographic categories can affect *which* group norms emerge. We focus on those norms that, according to our review of the relevant literatures, have been most closely linked to group effectiveness. In particular, we examine those norms that relate to (1) the extent to which the group emphasizes individualism or collectivism, (2) communication and conflict, (3) group decision making, (4) and group allocation rules.

Norms regulating individualistic versus collectivistic orientations

Individualism can be defined as a social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives. Groups adopting individualistic norms encourage members to focus on their own preferences, needs, rights, and the contracts they have established with others; give priority to their personal goals over others' goals; and emphasize rational analyses of the advantages and disadvantages of associating with others (Triandis, 1995). Conversely, collectivism is a social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as parts of a collective (e.g. family, coworkers, tribe, nation). Collectivistic norms encourage members to focus on the duties imposed by the collective; give priority to the goals of the collective over their own personal goals; and emphasize their connectedness to members of the collective (Triandis, 1995). Members of groups emphasizing individualistic norms

are rewarded for and derive satisfaction from performance based on their own achievements. In contrast, members of groups emphasizing collectivistic norms place priority on collective goals and action and are rewarded for and derive satisfaction from the group, organization, or society's accomplishments (Triandis, 1989).

Demographic heterogeneity may influence the emergence of individualistic and collectivistic group norms by changing the focal member's sense of interdependence, or lack thereof, with fellow group members. Functional antagonism describes the inverse relationship between the salience of different social categories such that as one category becomes more salient, others become less salient (e.g., Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). This principle implies that, when demography is salient, a group of people will focus more on their differences than their similarities; that is, they will be less likely to acknowledge and act in accordance with factors that tie them together such as group tasks and goals.

Past research found that demographic heterogeneity within work groups was inversely related to members' focus on organizational objectives (Chatman et al., 1998). We, therefore, suggest that a focus on demographic differences will lead to the formation of norms that highlight individual members' interests, or more independent (individualistic), rather than interdependent (collectivistic), group norms.

> **Proposition 1:** At their inception, work groups that are more demographically heterogeneous will be more likely to adopt individualistic norms, while work groups that are more demographically homogeneous will be more likely to adopt collectivistic norms.

Norms regulating communication among group members

Assuming that demographic attributes provide surrogate measures for the common experiences and backgrounds that shape communication (e.g., Pfeffer, 1983), people may be less inclined to share task information with those who are demographically different (e.g., Zenger & Lawrence, 1989). Further, communication and timing in work groups may be influenced by the team's level of demographic heterogeneity. Specifically, Chatman and Flynn (2001) found that demographically heterogeneous, compared to homogeneous, work groups were less likely to meet with one another early on, close to the time the task was assigned, and, instead, were more likely to hold a flurry of meetings just before the task was due.

The initial social categorization process may underlie these differences in group member behavior. To the extent that a focal group member categorizes demographically different others as belonging to an out-group, the focal group member may be hesitant to associate and communicate with others. Such reluctance may be conveyed, verbally or nonverbally, intentionally or unintentionally, to other group members, who reinforce this behavior by conveying similar reluctance. Thus, categorizing group members according to salient demographic characteristics may establish normative expectations of communication behavior that lead more demographically heterogeneous groups to communicate less frequently with one another.

> **Proposition 2:** At their inception, more demographically homogeneous work groups will be more likely to adopt norms that encourage frequent communication among group members than will more demographically heterogeneous work groups.

Norms regulating conflict among group members

Groups and organizations typically develop patterns of interpersonal conflict. The usefulness of such conflict, particularly how it helps or hinders group effectiveness, may depend on its form and timing. For example, Jehn and Mannix (2001) showed that groups performed more effectively when task conflict was moderately high during the middle of the project, and process and relationship conflict were relatively constant at moderate and low levels, respectively, throughout the entire project. Past research also suggests that the incidence of conflict may depend on the demographic composition of the group. More demographically diverse work groups experienced greater turnover and alienation and lower levels of social integration than did more demographically similar work groups (e.g., O'Reilly, Caldwell, & Barnett, 1989).

Social categorization processes may again help explain the greater incidence of conflict in heterogeneous work groups compared with homogeneous work groups. First, categorizing other group members as out-group members may fuel relationship conflict. Because team members must often rely on others' assistance to accomplish interdependent tasks (e.g., Wageman, 1995), establishing trust is a necessary condition for effective individual performance in interdependent work groups (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Demography-based categorizations are likely to decrease trust and communication between group members and increase stereotyping, polarization and anxiety (Kanter, 1977; Tajfel, 1982). Then, if demographically different team members are considered untrustworthy, demographically similar team members may be reluctant to offer them assistance or respect their different opinions, thereby instigating interpersonal conflict (Brewer, 1979).

Second, categorizing fellow group members as out-group members may lead the team to develop norms that tolerate higher levels of task-oriented and process-oriented conflict. If group members come from different functional backgrounds associated with demographic segmentation, or from different social circles, they may bring with them different perspectives about how to approach group tasks (e.g., Ely & Thomas, 2001). This suggests that more demographically heterogeneous groups will be less likely to adopt a uniform approach to the task at hand. If members' mental images of how a task should be approached and completed concurred, task accomplishment would occur with relatively little conflict and uncertainty (Bettenhausen & Murnighan, 1991:21). Taken together, these arguments imply that conflict, and the team's tolerance for conflict, will increase as the level of demographic heterogeneity in the group increases.

> **Proposition 3:** At their inception, more demographically heterogeneous work groups will adopt norms that tolerate multiple types of conflict (e.g., task-oriented, relationship-oriented, process-oriented), while more demographically homogeneous work groups will adopt norms that discourage all types of conflict.

Norms regulating group decision making

A group decision rule specifies how a group goes about determining it preferences regarding some set of alternatives (Arrow, 1963). Most groups choose to adopt one of two modes of resolving decisions, either "unanimity" or "majority-rules" decision making. In a unanimity mode, all group members must agree to a single decision alternative before the group reaches a decision. Conversely, in a majority-rules mode, members may "agree to disagree;" that is, if group members encounter some difficulty

selecting a single decision alternative unanimously, they will accept the alternative that most group members prefer (Miller, 1989).

To be effective, a norm that emphasizes a unanimity mode of decision making requires that group members' preexisting preferences are already similar (Kaplan & Miller, 1987). In contrast, the norm to emphasize a majority-rules mode of decision-making assumes that group members lack such similarity among their preexisting preferences. This suggests that more heterogeneous work groups may adopt a majority-rules mode of decision-making, while more homogeneous work groups may adopt a unanimity mode of decision-making.

Our model of emergent norm formation suggests that members of demographically heterogeneous work groups will initially categorize demographically different others as out-group members and, consequently, a focal group member may assume that out-group members have different views, opinions, and perspectives, even if this is not necessarily true (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). As a result, a focal group member may expect that, as the number of perceived out-group members increases, group conflicts in decision making will become more common and more difficult to resolve. Given this expectation of contentious behavior, a demographically diverse work group may prefer to sacrifice unanimity for increased efficiency. Thus, demographically heterogeneous work groups will likely adopt a majority-rules mode of decision making rather than a unanimity mode of decision making.

Proposition 4: At their inception, more demographically homogeneous work groups will develop norms that emphasize unanimity decision making, while

more demographically heterogeneous work groups will develop norms that emphasize "majority-rules" decision making.

Norms regulating the distribution of power in decision making

A second way that work groups may differ in making decisions is the extent to which power is distributed among group members. Some work groups treat members equally with respect to their formal influence on the group decision – or what the procedural justice literature refers to as outcome control (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), while others may treat members as having unequal influence. At one extreme, a norm that emphasizes the minimum distribution of power concentrates decision-making power in the hands of a single group member. At the other extreme, a norm that emphasizes the maximum distribution of power accords every group member an equal say with respect to the group decision.

Power distributions may vary according to a group's demographic composition. If a group is composed of demographically homogeneous members, power is likely to be distributed widely because members trust one another and may be unable to justify a concentration of power among a few group members. If power concentration exists in these groups, it may be based on specific members' personality traits such as charisma and extroversion (e.g., Barry & Stewart, 1997).

In groups characterized by a solo member who is demographically different from otherwise homogenous members, power may be more concentrated among homogeneous group members rather than the different member, who may be perceived as untrustworthy or unable to understand and act in accordance with the majority of members' interests. Indeed, if in-group members perceive out-group members as less trustworthy, honest, and

cooperative than are fellow in-group members (e.g., Judd, Ryan, & Park, 1991), in-group members may be hesitant to place too much power in the hands of an out-group member. Finally, in groups characterized by more balanced heterogeneity, in which each member is equivalently different from each other member, power may again be broadly distributed, such that all group members have an equal say in decision-making.

> **Proposition 5:** Power distribution will vary curvilinearly with a group's demographic heterogeneity. Power distributions among members will be least concentrated in demographically homogeneous and balanced heterogeneous groups and most concentrated in groups characterized by a solo or small minority of demographically different members.

Norms regulating allocation of tasks among group members

Even when collective incentives and rewards are allocated to the group externally the level of interdependence exhibited in assigning tasks to group members may vary (e.g., Wageman & Baker, 1997). More demographically homogeneous work groups display greater agreement about assigning required tasks, perhaps because members of such groups are more likely to meet sooner in relation to when the task is assigned, providing more time to consider and determine group processes (Chatman & Flynn, 2001). In contrast, teams that are more demographically diverse often fail to recognize the need to address procedural issues beyond dividing up the task. Members of these teams may assume instead that the group is merely a collection of individuals who each will work on a part of the task independently (Wageman, 1995).

Categorizing group members at the outset of team projects may underlie differences in how groups allocate tasks to their members. To the extent that a focal

group member categorizes demographically different members as belonging to an out-group, the focal group member may be hesitant to allow his or her performance on an assigned task to depend on the performance of an out-group member. Such reluctance may be conveyed to out-group members, who reinforce this behavior by conveying similar reluctance to those they consider out-group members. Thus, categorizing group members according to salient demographic characteristics may establish normative expectations of assigning tasks to individual team members in demographically diverse groups.

> **Proposition 6:** At their inception, more demographically heterogeneous work groups will allocate tasks to individual members, while more demographically homogeneous work groups will allocate tasks to subgroups of two or more individual members.

Norms regulating the allocation of rewards among group members

Normative differences in how rewards are allocated among group members may also emerge (Mannix, Neale, & Northcraft, 1995). Some work groups may choose to allocate rewards according to the value of the contributions made by individual group members (equity), whereas other work groups may choose to allocate rewards equally among all groups members (equality). Past research suggests that groups of individuals who sense they are part of an interdependent collective prefer to distribute rewards using equality as a mode of allocation and groups of individuals who view themselves as set apart from the collective prefer to distribute rewards using equity as a mode of allocation (Fiske, 1991).

As suggested earlier, the social categorization model would predict that members of groups that are more demographically diverse will likely think of themselves as independent individuals while members of groups who are more demographically homogeneous will likely think of themselves as part of a collective. If demographically similar group members think of themselves and their fellow in-group members as part of a collective, they may prefer equality as a mode of allocating rewards because they are motivated to sacrifice their self-interest for the interests of the group (Triandis, 1995). Conversely, if demographically dissimilar group members think of themselves and out-group members as independent individuals, they may emphasize equity as a mode of allocating rewards because they expect that each individual will be valued for his or her respective contributions to the group.

> **Proposition 7:** At their inception, more demographically heterogeneous work groups will adopt equity as a preferred mode of allocating rewards, while more demographically homogeneous work groups will adopt equality as a preferred mode of allocating rewards.

Broader Implications and Directions for Future Research

We began this chapter by inquiring about the origin of group norms. Where do they come from? Why do they differ so widely across work groups in organizations? In response to these questions, we suggested that the demographic composition of a work group provides a foundation for social categorizations that occur immediately after the group is formed. Specifically, to enhance their self-esteem, make sense of a complex context, and increase behavioral predictability, group members categorize themselves and other team members. These categorizations often are based on surface-level

characteristics (e.g., demographics) because members lack information about one another and surface-level characteristics are most salient in initial interpersonal encounters. This process elicits stereotypes about out-group members that, in turn, establish expectations of normative behavior. Following subsequent group interactions, these expectations are confirmed as they influence and potentially constrain focal individuals from demonstrating their true (non-stereotypic) capabilities.

In this chapter, we hoped to synthesize past research on demographic diversity and work group behavior by offering a causal explanation for why demographically different teams work in different ways. Our social categorization model of emergent norm formation may improve upon previous models of demography and group behavior, such as the similarity-attraction model, by offering a more dynamic perspective on the impact of diversity. While the similarity-attraction model implies a steady-state relationship between diversity and group behavior, the social categorization model suggests that the impact of diversity is continually changing. That is, the impact of diversity in work groups depends on the momentary salience of various social characteristics that trigger group members' categorizations of one another. Further, through processes such as identity negotiation (Swann et al., 2000), shared views about group members are shaped both by focal individuals and how others members treat focal individuals over time.

Using this model, we outlined a set of propositions that described how different levels of demographic diversity influenced the type of group norms that emerged. These norms focus on core group behaviors such as how members relate to the group (individualism/collectivism), interact with one another (communication, conflict), decide

(majority/unanimity, power), and allocate (tasks, rewards). As a set, our propositions appear cohesive and consistent. Further, the separate effects of demographic differences on each of the norms we identified may actually reinforce one another. For example, a lack of communication could increase the incidence of conflict or decrease the distribution of power in heterogeneous groups. Further, the psychological processes underlying our propositions seem similar in that demographically different group members experience a sense of psychological distance between themselves and demographically similar group members that influences normative expectations of group member behavior.

It is not our intention, however, to cast demographically heterogeneous work teams in a pejorative light. Indeed, we could develop a complementary set of norms that focuses on more positive aspects of psychological distance. For example, norms that emphasize tolerance of divergent thinking are critical to innovation success (e.g., Hargadon & Sutton, 1996). Given their members' proclivity to create psychological distance from the group, demographically different work teams may be better able to generate creative ideas (e.g., Chatman et al., 1998; Flynn & Chatman, 2001). Further, psychological distance implies that group members will feel less pressure to conform to the group consensus (e.g., Nemeth & Staw, 1989). A lack of social pressure may prevent group members from committing decision-making errors, such as groupthink and risky shift, which often are driven by strong group cohesion.

On the other hand, we chose to focus on these norms because of their importance and likely emergence in demographically diverse work groups. Further, the total constellation of norms we identified may, in fact, be greater than the sum of its parts.

That is, as these norms emerge in demographically heterogeneous work groups, they are likely to create a powerful system of social control that fragment rather than unify group members. This suggests that managing demographically diverse groups, and specifically the norms that are likely to emerge within them, requires a great deal of effort as well as consideration of the desired outcomes of such groups. Managers must therefore think carefully about how to best address the emergent norm formation process in demographically diverse work groups.

The norm formation process may be partially managed by carefully selecting group members. For example, if more collectivistic norms are preferred to ensure that divergent perspectives are integrated for the greater good, selecting group members who are more homogeneous along salient demographic dimensions may be encouraged. Conversely, if more individualistic norms are preferred, selecting group members who are more heterogeneous along salient demographic dimensions may be encouraged. Carefully selecting group members may further shape the social categorization process, and, in turn, the emergent norm formation process, by including group members who are familiar with one another. Members who are already acquainted may use preexisting social categorizations rather than salient demographic differences and, as such, avoid basing norms on the inaccuracies and performance decrements associated with stereotyping behavior.

Our model of emergent norm formation and the research that supports it suggest that expectations of group norms form immediately, perhaps during a group's initial encounter. Consistent with this prediction, Swann, Milton, and Polzer (2000) found that the level of interpersonal congruence achieved by groups after an initial ten-minute

introductory meeting had far-reaching effects on their subsequent interaction. In particular, self-verification and appraisal effects heightened participants' feelings of connection to their groups and improved individual and group performance. This implies that, when controlling the selection process is not possible or still results in the potential for in-group/out-group categorizations due to differences among members on visible but irrelevant categories, managers may still be able to intervene in ways that facilitate the social categorization process and discourage negative stereotyping behavior.

In particular, managers may encourage members to provide individuating information about them at the outset. For example, an introduction of each group member that covers their work background, the reason that they were appointed as a member of the group, their approach to working in groups, and their expectations of normative behavior may override members' tendencies to rely on easily accessible categories to form impressions of one another. If managers are not able to provide this information, individuals themselves, particularly those susceptible to stereotypes based on their relative distinctiveness on accessible categories, might provide such information on their own behalf (Flynn et al., 2001). For example, organizations that rely on diverse teams to accomplish critical tasks may wish to encourage people who are demographically different from their coworkers to "speak up" in meetings even if they are not extraverted, or managers may create specific opportunities for team members to disclose individuating information to one another. Such information might preclude members from relying on visible characteristics, which, in the absence of individuating information, could result in stereotyped impressions (Flynn et al., 2001).

Further, managers might provide information that orients the group to focus on its collective objectives and boundaries rather than on individual differences within the group because this collectivistic focus has been found to reduce a focus on stereotypic demographic categories (e.g., Chatman et al., 1998). With sufficient individuating information and an emphasis on the group's goals and common characteristics among group members, each member may recategorize demographically different members as fellow in-group members, rather than stereotype them as out-group members (e.g., Flynn et al., 2001). The key is to provide this information at the moment that the group is formed, thereby precluding the emergence of norms based on characteristics that are potentially irrelevant to the group task.

Similarly, encouraging people to take out-group members' perspectives may reduce the negative impact of norms that emerge from out-group stereotyping. Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000), for example, showed that when people took others' perspective, stereotypes were less likely to be activated and they were less likely to apply category specific stereotypes. Taking another's perspective also decreased the negativity of generalized stereotypes -- that members of the out-group are less trustworthy, cooperative, or loyal. They showed that the connotative meaning of group-relevant traits changed when considered with respect to the in-group versus the out-group. For example, loyalty may be viewed positively when describing the in-group, but take on negative connotations, such as representing clannish or exclusionary behavior, when describing the out-group. Perspective taking eliminated this connotative shift, thereby enhancing evaluations of the out-group. Thus, the level of perspective taking and the level of

empathy may predict whether emergent norms are strongly or only weakly based on the initial social categorization of in-groups and out-groups in heterogeneous groups.

Future research on emergent norm formation in work groups might build upon our social categorization model in several ways. First, despite the importance of initial social categorization processes in groups and their influence on group norms, the impact of these processes may diminish over time (e.g., Harrison, et al., 1998). Initial perceptions of other group members, which are based on surface-level social characteristics (e.g., demographic characteristics) may give way to perceptions that are based on deep-level personal characteristics (e.g., values, beliefs) when deep-level information is obtained (Stangor, et al., 1987; Turner, 1987). For example, Byrne and Wong (1962) found that subjects initially perceived greater attitudinal dissimilarity between themselves and a stranger of another race. When more details were provided about the stranger's attitudes, perceived dissimilarity and the willingness to categorize the different other as an out-group member decreased. Similarly, past research on collegial choices found that people placed greater emphasis on attitudinal similarity and less emphasis on ethnic similarity when information about attitudinal differences was available or salient (Triandis, 1960). Future elaborations of the social categorization perspective might explore the "staying power" of emergent norms, thereby clarifying the relative impact of demographic diversity on the norm formation process.

Second, the model we outlined here focused on the degree to which group members were demographically different from one another, rather than the content of their demographic differences. It is possible, however, that content-specific demographic differences will also influence the content of work group norms. For example, past

research found that when gender was a salient demographic characteristic in a group environment, women tended to be less tentative in their conversations with, and offered higher levels of social support for, other work group members (e.g., Johnson, Funk, & Clay-Warner, 1998; Ridgeway, 1988). Identifying salient content-specific demographic differences and links to group member behavior would enhance the strength of the social categorization model.

Third, future research might consider how group norms become adjusted as new members join the work group. Does the social categorization process begin anew with the addition of new members? If so, are a new group member's salient demographic characteristics overweighted or underweighted in the eyes of other group members? A new member's demographic characteristics may be overweighted if other group members have been recategorized as fellow-in-group members, but the new member has not. On the other hand, demographic characteristics may be underweighted because group membership is relatively more salient than are team members' demographic characteristics.

Fourth, the model presented here allows for the possibility that other group factors, combined with, for example, demographic composition, influence the emergent norm formation process. The nature of the task, specifically whether it is independent or interdependent in orientation, may have an impact on the emergent norm formation process that either strengthens or dilutes the impact of demographic composition (e.g., Wageman, 1995). Also, the historical typicality of a group's demographic composition may influence the emergent norm formation process. When a group's demographic composition is historically atypical, novel, infrequent, or distinctive stimuli are likely to

increase the salience of the particular category that the stimuli represent (Kanter, 1977; Taylor & Fiske, 1978; Chatman, et al., 1998). Further, a group's mode of communication may also influence emergent norms. For example, teams that meet initially (or over time) in person may develop different types of norms than those meeting virtually, and the mode of communication may have a more pronounced influence on demographically diverse teams than on more demographically homogeneous teams (Griffith & Neale, 2001).

Finally, past research on group norms in organizations has tended to focus on specific types of group norms. In developing a series of testable propositions for our model, we, instead, have tried to outline a comprehensive profile of group norms that covers an array of work group behaviors. This particular profile of group norms is based on our review of the relevant literature, rather than empirical data. It may be worthwhile for future research to conduct an even more comprehensive analysis of how demographic heterogeneity influences other, equally important, types of work group norms.

Conclusion

Norms have been described as fundamental elements of social structure that provide the "cement of society" (Elster, 1989: 251). In work groups, as well as in society, norms simplify behavioral choices, provide direction and motivation, organize social interactions, and make other people's responses predictable and meaningful. As a result, each group member's behavior is restricted to a degree by the influence of norms, but, likewise, each member benefits from the order that norms provide in interactions with other group members. While much is known about the behavioral consequences of group norms, researchers know relatively little about the factors that influence the emergence of

specific group norms. Given the prevalence of norms in organizations and the importance of matching a group's normative orientation to its task in order to enhance group effectiveness (e.g., Ancona & Caldwell, 1992), understanding the emergence and stability of group norms over time becomes critical. Our belief is that examining how members categorize themselves and other members based on their demographic differences at a group's inception may shed light on variations in the process of emergent norm formation across work groups.

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