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Use of Demographic Faultlines to Predict Teams' Conflict, Satisfaction and Performance

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ABSTRACT

During the past decade, industries and businesses have experienced the formation of a global market place. Current tasks require professionals from different fields and with different backgrounds to work together as a team. The goal of this study is to investigate how diversity in teams may impact perception of conflict, satisfaction and performance, in first-year engineering students. Team diversity is associated with faultlines: the potential to form subgroups based on certain characteristics. The strength and width of faultlines in a team is likely to impact the team's outcomes. In this research, we used demographic characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, language and nationality to calculate values of faultlines strength for each team of freshman students, in an introductory engineering class. Teams were also discriminated based on which of the demographics characteristics contributed the most to the faultline strength. Means for each team dynamic's indicator, i.e. performance, satisfaction and conflict, were calculated for each characteristic. Our results identify ethnicity as the demographic characteristic that most frequently contributes to high faultline strength values in teams. At the same time, language and nationality were the characteristics that less frequently contributed to high faultline strength values. Nationality was the only factor that showed significant effect on team dynamic indicators. The results of this research suggests that formation of subgroups in team based on gender, language or nationality do not impact team dynamics. On the other hand, formation of subgroups based on nationality increases team conflict and reduces team satisfaction. These results can be instrumental for improving the mechanism of team making to minimize faultline strength. They also point to the importance of continuing investigating the impact of multiple experiences working in diverse teams on the outcomes and performance of engineering students, beyond their first semester.

KEYWORDS

Teamwork, Diverse Teams, Faultlines