Unlocking Creativity within Cognitively Diverse Teams in High-technology Firms- A Social Cognitive Theory Perspective

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While previous studies indicate that cognitive diversity in teams can significantly contribute to creativity, the relationship between diversity and creativity is multifaceted. Team creativity is largely influenced by social factors, including interactions among team members, task requirements, and contextual elements, all crucial for creative outcomes. Team members learn from each other's actions and experiences, shaping their daily behavior and performance. This paper explores how team social influence enhances creativity within cognitively diverse teams, employing Social Cognitive Theory to develop a conceptual model. The model highlights the roles of peer mentoring and knowledge integration in driving team creative performance in the high-technology sector. Additionally, contextual factors like psychological safety and structural elements such as task interdependence moderate this relationship.

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Introduction

High-technology firms rely on creativity and innovation to maintain competitiveness and thrive. They typically seek teams equipped with extensive knowledge, exceptional skills, and problem-solving abilities essential for generating novel ideas (Su et al., 2023). When confronting diverse and complex challenges, these companies prioritize teams rich in varied knowledge and skills. Cognitively diverse teams comprise members with differing thinking styles, skills, professional backgrounds, knowledge, perspectives, and work experiences (Qi, Meng, et al., 2022). These teams are recognized for their ability to stimulate creativity (Kim et al., 2021), foster innovation (Wang, et al., 2019), and improve decision-making quality (Mello & Rentsch, 2015). While earlier research emphasizes the importance of team cognitive diversity

in promoting creativity, the relationship between diversity and creativity is more intricate than previously assumed (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2017). Some scholars suggest that cognitive diversity might impede creativity by hindering a team's ability to effectively integrate diverse knowledge (Anderson et al., 2014). Chamorro-Premuzic (2017) highlights that despite the potential benefits of increased cognitive diversity, inherent social conflicts and decision-making challenges, which are less prevalent in homogeneous teams, may diminish these advantages. Recent studies suggest that although cognitive diversity contributes to generating innovative ideas, the behavior of withholding knowledge among team members could diminish these benefits during implementation (Matsuo, Aihara, & Hong, 2023). With conflicting perspectives among researchers, the question of whether cognitive diversity promotes or inhibits team creativity remains inconclusively addressed.

Given that team-level creativity is fundamentally a social process (Ali et al., 2023), various social factors influence the dynamic interactions among team members, tasks, and contextual elements, all crucial for the team's creative output. Observing peers and role models and drawing from their actions and experiences can significantly shape how team members perform and behave in their daily activities. Thus, referring to social influences individuals adjust their thoughts and behaviors to align with the group's needs (Ren & Sun, 2023). This conceptual paper explores how the team's social environment influences knowledge processing and integration to enhance creativity in cognitively diverse teams. For example, exposure to diverse perspectives fosters creativity and innovation by enriching the knowledge pool that generates new ideas (Aggarwal, et al., 2019). When members strive to merge and harmonize different viewpoints, it leads to a comprehensive understanding of task-related information and reduces premature acceptance of solutions.

However, embracing diverse perspectives can sometimes disrupt the social dynamics of knowledge exchange, potentially diminishing creativity rather than enhancing it (Paulus & Dzindolet, 2008). Members possessing task-relevant knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) engage in sharing ideas and offering solutions to problems (i.e., participating in cognitive processes) only when they are adequately motivated (Ballesteros-Rodríguez et al., 2022). These motivations are believed to be influenced by the team environment, including the presence of peer mentors encouraging creativity and a psychologically safe atmosphere that fosters open sharing of ideas during group meetings (van Knippenberg, 2017).

This article aims to develop a conceptual framework for understanding team creative performance by drawing upon the cooperative learning model of instructional design (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). It aims to uncover the intermediary processes and potential moderating factors that elucidate the relationship between cognitive team diversity and team creativity. A moderated mediation

model is proposed to achieve this goal, examining the influence of peer mentoring and knowledge integration as group processes that mediate the link between team diversity and creativity. This model seeks to elucidate how members of cognitively diverse teams process task-related information. Furthermore, the article explores how aspects of work structure, such as task interdependence, and contextual factors like psychological safety, moderate this relationship. Grounded in Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), the emphasis is placed on reciprocal determinism to understand the impact of cognitive team diversity on team creative performance. SCT underscores how individual factors, behavior, and the environment interact reciprocally within teams (Bandura, 1978; 1986), positing that an individual's psychosocial functioning is a result of the interplay among behavior, cognition, personality attributes, and environmental factors, all of which mutually influence each other (Bandura, 1997).

This paper aims to make significant contributions to the existing literature in multiple ways. First, it explains how social influences enhance team creativity through the mechanisms of peer mentoring and knowledge integration and team climate such as psychological safety. Secondly, the paper establishes a link between peer mentoring and knowledge integration, emphasizing the crucial impact of a team's ability to blend diverse knowledge based on its creative performance. This exploration of relationships is novel and contributes to the understanding of peer mentoring and knowledge integration within existing literature. This paper explores the connection between cognitive team diversity and team performance.

Theoretical Background

The conceptual model presented here draws upon the cooperative learning model of instructional design established by Johnson and Johnson (2005). Cooperative or collaborative learning is an educational approach aimed at improving learning efficiency within group settings. This method is commonly employed in educational environments such as schools and universities, where students from diverse backgrounds, including gender, race, culture, and abilities, are organized into groups. However, the literature emphasizes that not all teams naturally demonstrate cooperative behavior (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Simply forming and labeling a team does not ensure effective cooperation. David Johnson (2014) identified five critical elements necessary for successful group processes to foster cooperative learning: positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, individual and group accountability, appropriate utilization of collaborative skills, and group processing.

Following this approach, a conceptual model is formulated for teams operating within high-tech firms, which are typically engaged in industries such as automobile manufacturing, telecommunications, networking, computing, automation, modern pharmaceuticals, commercial air transport, advanced instrumentation, retail, consumer goods, and office

administrative services. This model aims to delineate how intermediary mechanisms and contextual factors, including task interdependence, psychological safety, peer mentoring, and knowledge integration, contribute to enhancing creative performance within cognitively diverse teams. By assessing the effectiveness of these crucial elements within diverse groups, this paper aims to investigate the relationship between cognitive team diversity and team performance.

Cognitive Team Diversity (CTD): Cognitive team diversity refers to perceived distinctions in thinking styles, knowledge, skills, values, and beliefs among individual team members (Shin et al., 2012: 197). This diversity entails differences in abilities and information among members within a work group. Consequently, cognitive team diversity is expected to have a positive correlation with team creativity because it has the potential to provide varied knowledge and perspectives to team members.

Intermediary Mechanism: Peer Mentoring: Peer mentoring is defined as "a process involving mutual engagement in encouraging and enhancing learning and development between two individuals of similar hierarchical status or those who perceive themselves as equals" (Beattie & McDougall, 1995: 3). It facilitates the sharing of knowledge within organizations, particularly in nurturing the growth of new employees by facilitating the exchange of job-related information. This approach is essential for individual learning and team performance. In the fast-paced environments of many high-technology organizations, where formal knowledge quickly becomes outdated, peer mentoring plays a crucial role. Amid these dynamic situations, organizations rely on experienced employees who possess tacit knowledge not formally documented in databases or manuals (van Knippenberg, 2017). Peer mentoring serves as a means to externalize tacit knowledge, transforming it into explicit knowledge (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2007). Consequently, peer mentoring fosters a more cohesive environment, enabling the entire team to effectively contribute to the achievement of team goals.

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Knowledge Integration: Knowledge integration involves the amalgamation of information, perspectives, and expertise among team members through social interaction. It constitutes a critical component of the team's creative process, entailing the active assimilation, combination, and synthesis of diverse knowledge resources possessed by team members to accomplish shared objectives (Mehta & Mehta, 2018). This process necessitates substantial cognitive and social efforts from the team, involving tasks such as incorporating multiple perspectives to establish a common understanding of work issues or merging new knowledge with the team's existing knowledge base.

Task Interdependence: Task interdependence refers to the level of reliance

among team members and the direct support they offer each other (e.g., equipment or information) to achieve a collective group goal. Described as the "degree to which team members collaborate and interact to complete tasks" (Stewart &Barrick 2000, 137), it stands as a crucial factor for group success (Johnson & Johnson, 2005).

Contextual Factor: Psychological Safety: Psychological safety refers to a shared belief among team members that the team environment encourages open interpersonal communication without fear of judgment or belittlement when expressing ideas or opinions (Martins et al. 2013). It embodies a sense of confidence that speaking up would not result in embarrassment, rejection, or punishment within the team. This environment fosters openness among team members, ensuring disagreements are not taken personally.

Team creativity emerges from a dynamic process where team members collaboratively build upon and connect their ideas, leveraging each other's unique skills and perspectives.

Team Creative Performance: Team creativity, according to Shin and Zhou (2007: 1715), refers to "the generation of fresh and practical ideas related to products, services, processes, and procedures by a collective of employees collaborating." Creativity can manifest both individually and collectively within a group setting. While individual contributions matter, they are part of a larger team effort. Team creativity emerges from a dynamic process where team members collaboratively build upon and connect their ideas, leveraging each other's unique skills and perspectives (Shin & Zhou 2007). As a result, team creativity represents a social process intertwined with both the team and individual creative processes (Perry-Smith & Shalley 2003).

Social Cognitive Theory: Social cognitive theory posits that learning takes place within a social context, involving reciprocal interactions among an individual, their environment, and their behavior (Bandura, 1997). It emphasizes the role of observational learning and underscores the significance of cognitive aspects in the learning process. According to this theory, an individual's psychosocial functioning is the result of a combination of behavior, cognition, personality attributes, and environmental influences, all of which mutually influence each other (Bandura, 2001). This reciprocal relationship varies among different sources of influence, with certain factors exerting more influence than others. Consequently, social cognitive theory offers a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the interaction between employee motivation and the organizational environment (Bandura, 1997; 2001; 2012). It presents a unique approach to individual behavior, taking into account past experiences that influence reinforcement, expectations, and anticipations, thereby shaping future behavioral actions and providing explanations for such behavior (Bandura, 1986).

Conceptual Model: The Cognitive Team Diversity-Team Creativity

Cognitive Team Diversity and Peer Mentoring: High-technology firms rely on the expertise of their teams and employees to achieve organizational goals. In these sectors, where creativity and innovation are crucial, cognitively diverse teams often excel in handling new, uncertain, and complex situations (Reynolds & Lewis, 2017). However, the effectiveness of cognitive diversity hinges on team members aligning with common goals (Staples & Webster, 2007). In such situations, peer mentoring helps to foster an environment that promotes creativity. Peer mentoring, as highlighted by Kram (1985), plays a vital role in high-tech firms, where collaborative tasks require each member's contribution towards achieving team objectives. According to Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977; 1982;1986), peer mentoring influences self-efficacy through dynamic interactions between individuals and environmental determinants. It provides opportunities for team members to enhance their competence, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal relationships and psychological support. The reciprocal nature of peer assistance enhances team members' self-efficacy, motivating them to contribute actively to the team's success (Bandura, 1977; 1986). Peers also aid in socializing new team members, helping them acquire the attitudes, behaviors, and information necessary for effective group participation (Bryant, 2005). In environments where team members offer assistance, high cognitive team diversity can enhance learning and performance, enabling everyone to benefit from diverse knowledge, expertise, and experiences (Eby, 1997). This leads to the formulation of the first proposition.

Proposition 1: Cognitive team diversity is positively associated with peer mentoring.

The Effect of Peer Mentoring on Knowledge Integration: Reluctance to share knowledge often arises in teams with diverse cognitive backgrounds, where differences in skills, perspectives, and knowledge may hinder motivation for knowledge sharing (Mehta & Mehta, 2018). Peer mentoring serves as a significant mediator in such situations, facilitating knowledge and experience sharing among diverse team members in real-time (Staples & Webster, 2007). Despite cognitive diversity, encouragement from peers drives employees to share ideas and information (Staples & Webster, 2007), strengthening interpersonal connections and motivating team members to integrate knowledge toward common goals (Yomtov et al., 2017). For example, in software development teams, engineers use peer mentoring to demonstrate problem-solving techniques using specific software tools, combining verbal instructions with visual presentations (Bryant, 2005). This fosters a positive response, encouraging individuals to reciprocate by sharing information necessary for achieving shared objectives (Bandura, 1997).

Moreover, past research suggests that employees are more likely to share knowledge if they experience reciprocal knowledge-sharing behavior or believe that organizational norms encourage it

(Titi, 2013). Peer mentoring mediates knowledge-sharing processes by socializing employees within the team, and establishing standards for desired work and behavior (Eby, 1997; Kram, 1985). Furthermore, observations of rewarded or punished behaviors among group members lead to vicarious reinforcement of similar behaviors in the observer (Paulus & Dzindolet, 2008). Collaborative attitudes and trust overcome individual differences, fostering a culture of sharing and reciprocity (Bandura, 1978; van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Workplaces with peer mentoring have the potential to enhance knowledge-sharing behavior and promote the synthesis of shared knowledge (Bandura, 1997). Hence:

Proposition 2: Peer mentoring is positively associated with knowledge integration

Proposition 3: Peer mentoring mediates the relationship between cognitive team diversity and knowledge integration

The Moderating Role of Task Interdependence: In the high-technology industry, where intellectual capital is crucial, and frequent communication among team members is vital for fostering team creativity, the team's access to information is significantly influenced by the frequency of interactions, interdependence among team members, and how they address organizational challenges. Additionally, a group of cognitively diverse members proves beneficial when the task consistently demands creativity and an innovative outlook, which is often the case for high-technology organizations (Bantel & Jackson, 1989). Studies have suggested that team diversity yields more positive effects when there is a high level of task interdependence (Schippers et al., 2003). The stronger the task-related bond among team members, the greater the likelihood of information sharing (Bakker et al., 2006).

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In this context, the task setting is such that team members mutually rely on each other for group functioning, and their goal-directed behavior strengthens the team's overall outcomes (Bandura, 1978; Rodriguez-Sanchez et al., 2017). Therefore, it is contended that task interdependence serves as a contextual factor at the team level, playing a crucial role in enhancing the relationship between cognitive team diversity and peer mentoring. Even when team members are cognitively different, the success of the task relies heavily on the performance of other team members. Subsequently, team members are likely to adjust their behavior to meet the assigned deliverables (Bandura, 1986), amplifying cognitive team diversity's positive impact on peer mentoring (Shemla et al., 2013). The higher the task interdependence, the stronger the expectation of reciprocity. This leads to our next proposition.

Proposition 4: Task interdependence moderates the relationship between cognitive team diversity and peer

mentoring, such that the higher the task interdependence within the team, the higher the peer mentoring.

The Moderating Role of Psychological Safety: Lin and Huang (2008) suggested that an individual's willingness to share knowledge and engage in collaborative learning is influenced by both the environment and personal beliefs, impacting team outcomes significantly. Psychological safety within teams allows members to freely question ideas and decisions, fostering a climate where creativity can thrive (Kim et al., 2020). In psychologically safe environments, team members feel confident to express their thoughts and creativity without fear of rejection or punishment, enhancing knowledge synthesis and assimilation (Edmondson, 1999). Conversely, in less psychologically safe climates, team members may hesitate to share their viewpoints, leading to reduced knowledge sharing and integration (Jiang et al., 2019), ultimately affecting team efficiency (Mehta & Mehta, 2018; Delizonna, 2017). Psychological safety emerged as a key factor for effective teams, with high psychological safety positively correlating with team learning behavior and performance (Rozovsky, 2015). Therefore, psychological safety moderates the relationship between peer mentoring and knowledge integration.

Proposition 5: Psychologically safe climate moderates the relationship between peer mentoring and knowledge integration, such that the higher the psychological safety within the team, the higher the knowledge integration within the team.

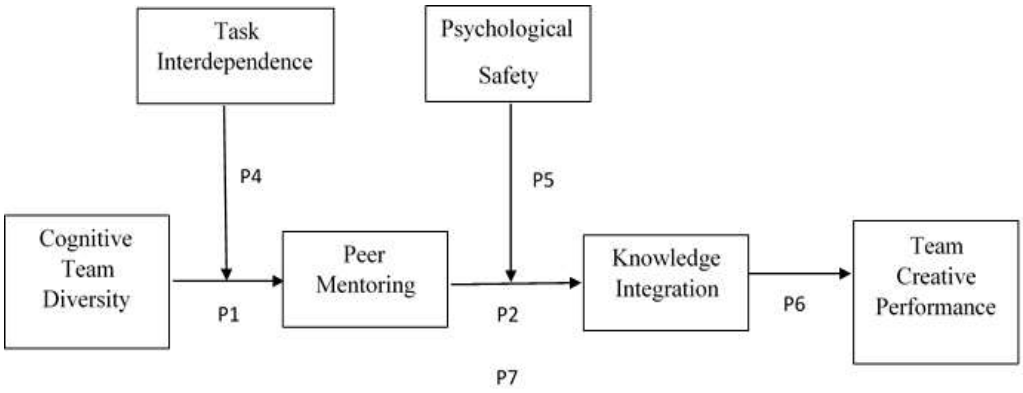
The Effects of Knowledge Integration: High-performance projects demand teams to discover new associations among different ideas, perspectives, and domain expertise held by individual team members (Felin & Powell, 2016). Each member brings his/her unique ideas and expertise, shaping their partial mental models based on prior experiences with problems and solutions. As they merge their perspectives with those of others, the team gradually reaches a consensus on the project's structure, functionality, interdependence, and necessary capabilities. This consensus fosters a shared understanding among team members regarding project requirements (Felin & Powell, 2016). Team members acquire knowledge by sharing information, engaging in verbal communication, exchanging tangible artifacts, and synchronizing their expertise (Rulke & Galaskiewicz, 2000). These positive communication and coordination activities not only assist in forming a unified perspective on issues and potential solutions but also fulfill their social and intellectual needs in pursuit of team goals. Hence, knowledge integration significantly enhances team creativity in high-technology domains by exploring new connections between individual team members' expertise, perspectives, and potential solutions. Sharing and assimilating knowledge allow teams to leverage collective knowledge, empowering them to offer innovative solutions, and ultimately contributing to the team's creative performance in organizations seeking to introduce new products and services to the market (Wang & Noe, 2010). This forms the basis of the fifth proposition.

Proposition 6: As the knowledge integration of cognitive team diversity increases, the team's creative performance will increase.

As the onus lies with the team members to generate, develop, and adopt novel thoughts to seek an appropriate solution for the desired result, a cognitively diverse team to work efficiently, it becomes essential to transfer job-related knowledge and skills among its team members. Moreover, the cognitive model of creativity emphasizes that the pursuit of knowledge and the acquisition of information are critical to creativity. In addition, Wang and Noe (2010) advocate the role of integrating knowledge for strengthening team creative performance. Thus, in these situations, peer mentoring facilitates knowledge sharing within the team (Bryant, 2005). Such elements influence team members to share skills and functional understanding, integrate knowledge, and expect more positive team and personal outcomes. This leads to the last proposition.

Proposition 7: The cognitive team diversity increases the team's creative performance. Peer mentoring and knowledge integration mediate the relationship between cognitive team diversity and team creative performance.

Fig. 1 Model of Cognitive Team Diversity, Peer Mentoring, and Mediating Factors Influencing Team Creative Performance



Discussion

Over time, there has been significant interest in how team members' characteristics influence team performance, particularly regarding team diversity (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007; Wang et al., 2016). While cognitive team diversity indeed impacts performance, the mere presence of diverse members may not suffice. Concerns about knowledge sharing due to a perceived lack of incentives highlight the importance of peer mentoring in fostering a culture of sharing, learning, and mutual support (Bryant, 2005). Peer mentoring promotes team cohesion, facilitating collaboration and knowledge exchange among members. Structural factors like task interdependence further shape the relationship between cognitive

team diversity and peer mentoring. Increased task interdependence prompts more peer mentoring, regardless of team members' differences, especially in creative and innovative tasks. Hence, higher task interdependence correlates with increased peer mentoring.

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Furthermore, an open team environment, where information exchange is encouraged and criticism is constructive, sets a standard for reciprocal behavior, promoting knowledge sharing. Peer mentoring serves as a platform for externalizing tacit knowledge and transforming it into explicit knowledge, fostering diverse problem-solving approaches and ideas, thereby enhancing team creativity in high-tech sectors (Mehta & Mehta, 2018; Men et al., 2020). Knowledge integration emerges as a critical mechanism for assimilating and synthesizing expertise within teams. In service-oriented high-tech jobs, where knowledge sharing is fundamental, higher psychological safety enables the flow of diverse perspectives, leading to enhanced creative performance through the combination and assimilation of unique information among team members (Kaewchur et al., 2013).

Conclusion & Future Research

This paper introduces a conceptual model that aims to investigate how cognitive team diversity influences team creative performance, particularly in the high-technology sector. While existing literature discusses team diversity and creativity, fewer studies explore social influences on team behavior. This study pioneers the focus on peer mentoring as a significant factor in fostering knowledge integration among teams. By addressing gaps in current knowledge, this research contributes to understanding team dynamics. Furthermore, this study extends previous research by highlighting the impact of team climate on knowledge integration and creativity. By exploring how team climate, especially psychological safety, influences group behaviors, this research addresses a gap identified by Mehta and Mehta (2018). Future research could explore factors that moderate or mediate the relationship between cognitive team diversity and outcomes. For example, investigating how organizational culture impacts the creation of a secure environment for knowledge sharing among diverse teams could be essential. Bridging insights from team diversity research with knowledge management studies could yield valuable perspectives, potentially leading to the development of a new theoretical framework concerning team cognitive diversity and outcomes.

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