



# Relating Social Category Similarity and Diversity Faultlines to Training Outcomes

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## INTRODUCTION

### Research Questions

1. Does social category similarity to a trainer have an impact on students' performance?
2. Do diversity faultlines within small groups have an impact on students' performance over time?

### Theory

#### Social Categorizations and Ingroup Processes

Individuals favor other individuals who they perceive as belonging to the same social category or group as themselves. The reasons for this so-called ingroup favoritism are rooted in the *social identity theory* (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). According to the SIT, individuals derive a sense of self-worthiness from belonging to social groups. Thus, groups one belongs to (i.e., ingroups) are evaluated in a more positive way than groups one does not belong to (i.e., outgroups). SIT also implies that individuals belonging to the same social category as oneself are also evaluated in a positive way. In a training context, belonging to the same group as a trainer may be associated with performance benefits.

#### Social Categorizations and Diversity Faultline Strength

- The salience of social categories depends on comparative fit, to the extent to which observed similarities and differences between people or their actions are perceived as correlated with a division into social categories (Turner et al., 1987).
- Comparative fit can be operationalized through *diversity faultlines*, "hypothetical dividing lines that split a group into relatively homogeneous subgroups based on the group members' demographic alignment along multiple attributes" (Bezrukova et al., 2009, p. 35).
- Strong faultlines may increase the likelihood of perceiving oneself as belonging to the same category as the trainer.

## HYPOTHESES

- **Hypothesis 1:** The interaction between faultline strength Fau and Students' inclusion in the trainers' subgroup affects students' initial training performance.
- **Hypothesis 2:** The interaction between faultline strength Fau and Students' inclusion in the trainers' subgroup affects students' growth in performance over time.

## METHODS

### Sample

- $N = 1133$  students in 84 training groups, average of 13.1 students per group.
- Two trainers per group.
- Sample was diverse in terms of race, gender, military service affiliation, rank, and organizational affiliation.

### Procedure

- Students participated in a 15-weeklong training program during which they received training to become Equal Opportunity Advisors. Within this course students' demographic diversity and diversity of experience is used to facilitate learning. Furthermore, small groups are purposefully constructed to be demographically diverse.
- As part of the training, students participated in small group sessions during which their behavior was rated at 3 intervals.

### Measures

- Assessments of students' behaviors associated with course objectives at three equally spaced measurement time points by three raters (the two trainers and one outside assessor) on five scales including *communication* (e.g., in an understandable and sincere manner) and *feedback* (e.g., giving specific feedback that is focused on behavioral change).
- Faultline strength Fau (Thatcher, Jehn, & Zanutto, 2003) computed over available social categories.

#### Team 1: Four Members

2 Army Men; 2 Navy Women  
2 Engineers; 2 Aviators

#### Team 2: Four Members

2 Army Men; 2 Navy Women  
2 Engineers; 2 Aviators

#### Team 1: Four Members

Army Man Navy Woman  
Army Man Navy Woman

Strong Divide, Faultline, Fau = 1.00

#### Team 2: Four Members

1 Army Engineer 1 Navy Aviator  
1 Army Aviator 1 Navy Engineer

Weaker Divide, Faultline, Fau = 0.50

- Students' inclusion in the trainers' subgroup: With no trainer, with one trainer, and with both trainers.

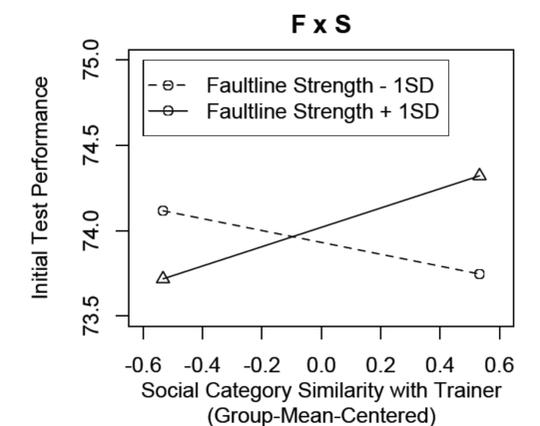
## ANALYSIS

- Multilevel growth modeling with three levels (measurement time, individual, class)
- Students' behavioral assessment (performance) is nested:  $ICC(1) = .09$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $ICC(2) = .79$

## RESULTS

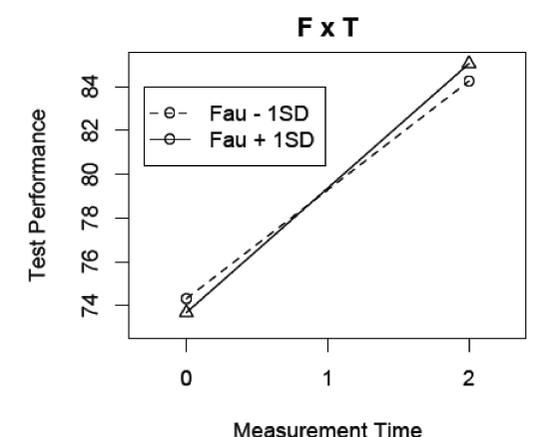
**Hypothesis 1:** Initial test performance is influenced by an interaction of diversity faultline strength  $\times$  social similarity with the trainer.

Variable	$r$	df	$t$	$p$
(Intercept)	73.66	2177	44.79	< 0.01
Faultline strength (F)	1.14	82	0.19	0.85
Similarity with trainer (S)	-3.13	1003	-2.05	0.04
Measurement time (T)	5.35	2177	81.14	< 0.01
F $\times$ S	11.85	1003	1.99	0.05



**Hypothesis 2:** Students' training performance increase is influenced by an interaction of diversity faultline strength  $\times$  social similarity with the trainer.

Variable	$r$	df	$t$	$p$
(Intercept)	76.25	2174	46.98	< .01
Faultline strength (F)	-8.22	82	-1.40	.17
Similarity with trainer (S)	-2.10	1003	-1.41	.16
Measurement time (T)	2.79	2174	2.20	.03
F $\times$ S	8.22	1003	1.42	.16
S $\times$ T	-1.04	2174	-1.00	.32
F $\times$ T	9.27	2174	2.02	.04
F $\times$ S $\times$ T	3.64	2174	0.91	.36



## DISCUSSION

- Social category similarity between trainer and students predicted initial training performance (Hypothesis 1) while diversity faultline strength predicted growth in students' performance (Hypothesis 2).
- These results indicate that the content of the training program as well as its goals are facilitated by diversity faultlines and—to a smaller extent—by similarity between trainers and students within the training groups.
- Although perceived differences among people are intangible, their impact can be profound.