Original Paper

Focusing on Diversity in a Multicultural Employee Group—The Case of an Engineering Consultancy in London

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Abstract

Despite the increasing research on work diversity, diversity itself remains an ambivalent term due to the various and in some cases even conflicting ways in which scholars conceptualize its nature (Janssens & Zanoni, 2005). A Literature Review of the relevant literature illustrates four main streams. The first one considers diversity as a concept with static nature and treats it as a measurable variable (Cox, 1993) while the second addresses the dynamic, socially constructed nature of diversity (Barinaga, 2007). A third stream of research explores both the dynamic and multiple nature of workgroup diversity while the last school acknowledges the dynamic, shifting relationship between the diversity categories focusing on issues of inequality and discrimination (Holvino, 2010).

The aim of this study is to contribute to the current diversity research by exploring from an a posteriori direction how the employees in a multicultural group perceive their group diversity during their everyday working life. In doing so, a research is conducted in engineering consultancy, to explore how the employees actively construct their workgroup diversity. Above research, drawing on the assumption that reality is social construction (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) shows diversity and identity as socially constructed concepts that should be identified from an a posteriori direction. The research questions guiding the narrative analysis shows that members' differentiation is dynamic and changes over time during their everyday project group life.

Keywords

Diversity, working groups, multicultural teams, employe's differentiation

1. Introduction

Diversity became a very popular concept in organizational studies (Shore et al., 2009) and there is a vast literature regarding diversity effects on organizational processes and outcomes (van Knippenberg

& Schippers, 2007), but also about diversity's controversial nature (static vs. dynamic; single or a multiple) (Jonsen et al., 2011; Zanoni et al., 2010).

In the majority of diversity literature, diversity is identified as national diversity (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Bredillet et al., 2010; Brannen & Salk 2000; Clausen, 2010; Freeman & Lindsay, 2012) whereas other scholars view diversity as having a multiple nature, consisting from several categories of differences such as gender, race, class, etc (e.g., Lau & Murnighan, 1998; Balkundi et al., 2007; Roberge & van Dick, 2010; Homan et al., 2010; Mahadevan, 2009; Bodenhausen, 2010; Tatli & Obliging, 2012).

There are many studies illustrating the positive effects of diversity on organizational processes and outcomes such as increased creativity, innovation, problem-solving (Gibson, 2004; Segala, 1998; House, 1998), whereas others demonstrate the negative effects of diversity in individual, group and organizational processes and outcomes such as increased conflicts, communicational problems, group cohesion, turnover, performance (Adair et al., 2006; Easterby-Smith & Malina, 1999; Masuda & Nisbett, 2001; Segalla, 1998; House, 2004).

The challenge of these contradictory findings leads some scholars to focus on the variables that moderate these effects (e.g., van Dick et al., 2008; Homan et al., 2010). This research on diversity effects is linked with the conceptualization of diversity as a static and stable concept (Omanovic, 2006; Zanoni et al., 2010). Scholars in this vein of research treat diversity as an independent variable that influences people' behaviour, and consequently the organizational and workgroup processes and outcomes.

In a different vein of research, diversity is conceptualized as a social construct with dynamic nature. Within this conceptualization, scholars focus on processes of diversity construction or production in workplace, discursive uses of diversity, organizational processes such as collaboration and knowledge creation, management practices, equal opportunities, experiences of inequality and discrimination that may arise to workplace (Tatli 2011; Bridgstock et al., 2010; Friesl et al., 2009; Tartas & Mirza, 2007, Gibbs, 2009; Espinosa et al., 2007; Ahonen & Tienari; 2009).

Given all this research on diversity someone might ask what this study has to offer in diversity research. Despite the vast literature on diversity, what literature lacks is an *a posteriori* understanding of diversity. The majority of studies are locked in a priori direction in exploring diversity; the categories of differences are pre-determined rather emerging within a specific context of study. The need of the present study grounds in that research is locked in *a priori* understanding of diversity. Diversity is *a priori* rather a posteriori determined as emerged and understood from the perspective of the people themselves.

Although there is enormous research on diversity approaching diversity from various and even contradictory perspectives (e.g., single or multiple nature; fixed or social constructed concept), yet in almost all studies scholars focus their studies in specific, pre-determined categories of differences (Tatli & Ozbilgin, 2012).

Although we have a wide and deep knowledge about diversity in workplace, what we know regards

categories of differences that researchers assume that are important for the people under the study. Even when scholars focus not only in managers' but also in employees' perspectives of diversity, taking a critical orientation and exploring for example whether (and how) employees experience discrimination or exclusion due to one or more socio-demographic characteristics such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity (e.g., Holvino, 2010; Atewologun & Singh, 2010), the *a priori* direction is still salient in their studies. Scholars give the opportunity to people to express their voice on pre-determined categories of differences. That *a priori* approach, however, exclude people's freedom to define themselves and categorize others in more ways different that scholars assume (Litvin, 1997; Nkomo, 1996; Nkomo & Cox, 1996; Osland & Bird, 2000; Garcia-Prieto et al., 2003; Bodenhausen, 2010).

What this research attempts to offer is an a posteriori exploration and understanding of diversity in a natural working setting, as it is the case of an EU mixed project group. The decision to focus on this type of multicultural workgroup is due to two reasons. First**,** the increased presence of EU groups that incorporate the cooperation of diverse Universities /institutions from several countries, makes the project teams a special and interesting setting for studying diversity (Ahonen & Tienari, 2009; Sackmann et al., 2004). Second, despite the increased presence and importance of EU mixed project groups, most of the diversity research is on the organizational contexts of multinational corporations and internationals merges (Nishii & Ozbilgin, 2007; Mannix & Neale; 2005). Multicultural workgroups and especially the setting of EU mixed groups is unexplored in organizational research and many scholars suggest its' exploration (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004; Ahonen & Tienari, 2009; Barinaga, 2007).

2. History of the Term Diversity

The term diversity first emerged in the mid-1980 in the US, when the Workforce 2000 Report estimated that by the year 2000 the US workforce would be more heterogeneous demographically (Zanoni et al., 2010). According to Kandola and Fullerton (1998), academics and business took into consideration the estimated demographic shift in the workforce and started considering its effects. It was the first time in management's history that diversity was described as a strategic asset that could provide a competitive advantage - with the precondition that it could be well managed (Boxenbaum, 2006; Zanoni et al., 2010). This business rationale about diversity's effects imbued and guided the researchers' interests to study how the demographic diverse identities could affect organizational processes (like communication) and outcomes (like productivity) (Milliken & Martins, 1996; Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007; Williams & O'Reily, 1998).

Today the concept of diversity gains the increasing interest of researchers due to the growing trend of globalization and the increased development of technology and communication systems, and the radical changes in work contexts such as new kinds of work and organizational arrangements (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004). Organizations have employed new strategies in order to remain competitive and take advantage of new opportunities, such as: mergers, acquisitions, strategic alliances,

and cross-functional project teams (Mahadevan, 2009; Sackmann & Phillips, 2004). The new emerged workplace reality is characterized by an increased diversity which requires taking into consideration the different facets of diversity (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004).

3. Defining Diversity

The concept of diversity refers generally to a broad variety of differences between people. Scholars view diversity as variation in a set of socio-demographic characteristics such as nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, age, profession, class, etc. (Shore et al., 2010). The Oxford English Dictionary (1993) defines diversity as "the condition or quality of being diverse, different, or varied; variety, unlikeness". Hambrick et al. (1996, p. 662) proposed that the heterogeneity of top management teams be defined as the "variation in team members' characteristics". Pelled et al. (1999) has specified diversity in terms solely of demographic characteristics as "the extent to which a unit (e.g., a work group or organization) is heterogeneous with respect to demographic attributes". Cox (1994) argues that diversity is "the representation, in one social system of people with distinctly different group affiliations of cultural significance" (p. 6). Triandis et al. (1994) offer another broad definition of diversity as "any attribute which may lead people to the perception that: that person is different from me" (p. 772). A similar definition is suggested by Williams and O'Reily (1998): "any attribute that another person may use to detect individual differences".

The definitions offered by Triandis et al. (1994) and Williams and O'Reily (1998) put the emphasis not on specific characteristics but recognize that it could be any characteristic in terms of which people perceive themselves to be different than others. This definition recognizes that diversity is a dynamic and on-going, process, not a fixed concept. The present thesis views the concept of diversity in accordance with the definitions proposed by Triandis et al. (1994) and Williams and O'Reily (1998). Both definitions are grounded on the premise that individuals can potentially use any available attribute in order to self-categorize and also to assign categories for others (Hogg & Terry, 2000) and are not constrained on specific attributes.

4. Mapping the Field of Diversity Research

Following mapping of diversity research, first it's presentenced the static view of diversity then we move to the presentation of the dynamic view of diversity that answers the limitations of the static view.

Regarding the second dimension, it's discussed how scholars conceive diversity as having a single character by focusing on one category of difference and discuss the critiques that have received. At last, the paper is moved forward to present the multiple perspective of diversity that resolves the constraints imposed by the single-dimensional view of diversity. Third, it is presented the *a priori* direction that scholars follow for identifying the categories of differences under study and discuss the problems that arise from this approach. Then, it's discussed the *a posteriori* approach for studying diversity which

resolves the limitations of the *a priori* approach.

The first distinction refers to the nature of diversity. Some scholars view diversity as a concept with objective, static nature. They define diversity while focusing on different aspects, such as visible and non-visible diversity (Jackson et al., 1995), surface-level and deep-level diversity (Harrison et al., 2002), individualistic and collectivist cultures (Hofstede, 1980). Other scholars view diversity as a dynamic, social constructed concept and focus on the ways that diversity is constructed (Brannen & Salk, 2000; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Janssens & Zanoni, 2005; Barinaga, 2007).

The second distinction in diversity's conceptualization is the character of diversity: single or multiple. Some scholars view diversity as having a single character and focus on one category of difference, usually nationality or ethnicity or race (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; House et al., 2004; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Barinaga, 2007). Other scholars view diversity as having a multiple character and study the effects of multiple categories of differences, such as nationality, gender, age, profession, etc. (e.g., Loden & Rosener, 1991; Lau & Murnighan, 1998; Jehn et al., 1999; Homan et al., 2010).

The third criterion refers to the direction that scholars follow for identifying the categories of differences constituting diversity. Most scholars have themselves pre-decide the categories of differences under study, following an *a priori* direction (Thomas & Ely, 2001; Ailon-Souday & Kunda, 2003; Barinaga, 2007; van Dick et al., 2008; Homan et al., 2010; van Knippenberg et al., 2011).

Recently, other scholars have started following an *a posteriori* direction, viewing categories of differences as emerged and empirically identified (Garcia-Prieto, 2003; Janssens & Zanoni, 2005; Bell & Hartmann, 2007). The discussion of the literature review that follows is not an exhaustive review of the literature. It is an indicative and illustrative review of the different approaches and streams of research that exist in diversity research.

5. Aim, Research Questions, and Context

The aim of the study is to explore, describe and understand the diversity construction from the perspective of people themselves and to develop further knowledge about how the members of a multicultural workgroup construct their diversity through the negotiation of their various identities. The main research question guiding the research is: *How the group members construct their group diversity?*

In this paper it's explored the main research question regarding the process of diversity construction through three sub-questions, focusing on members' perceptions, meanings, and discursive uses of their diversity:

1) How the group members perceive the content of their group diversity? Which categories of differences do they perceive as salient and how do they shape each of these categories?

2) How the group members use their perceived categories of differences as a discursive resource?

3) What meanings do members create for their perceived differentiation?

The research aim of the study is such that can be appropriate explored using a grounded theory

approach that enables to study the diversity area without pre-determined assumptions or specific theoretical frameworks.

6. Research Approach and Setting

6.1 Methodology - Grounded Theory

The research was integrated in two phases:

Phase A

a)   Literature review (research)

b)   Based on a dynamic approach to diversity

Phase B

a)   On field research was done using a qualitative method, a small sample (12 employees and a semi-structured interviews.

b)   The respondents were structural Design Engineers in a great consultancy, in London (Infrastructure projects).

Table 1. Profile of Group Members

Name	Origin	Years in UK	Level	Experience
Alejandro	Spain	7	Pricipal	10+
Pere	Spain	7	Pricipal	8
Georgina	Britain	UK passport	Pricipal	10+
Hugo	Portugal	7	Pricipal	10+
Elina	Greece	7	Senior	8
Joao	Spain	7	Senior	8
Caterina	Hungary	7	Senior	10+
Tiago	Portugal	7	Senior	8
Turan	Spain	7	Senior	6
Xixi	Spain	7	Engineer	3
Jonathan	Finland	3	Assistant	3
Shahed	Iran	4	Graduate	2
Lamia	Germany	4	Graduate	2
Viorel	Poland	7	Senior	9
Christ	Romania	4	Graduate	2

The present qualitative research is informed by a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2000; 2006; 2009) which is a modification of the classic grounded theory (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). The grounded theory approach aims to create a conceptual framework that is grounded in the data

rather to verify an existing one. Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain that by using the grounded theory approach "a theory is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other.

Grounded theory is well suitable with the research aim of this study - to describe and explore the construction of motivation process within structural design consultancy field. The design of the study is not based on predetermined assumptions about the content, meaning, and functions of the employee motivation. However, it is inevitable for all researchers to have former knowledge on their field of study. The previous knowledge about motivation concept does not function as lens constraining my inquiry; on the contrary, it enables me to have a wider knowledge concerning the motivation in workplace.

The constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2000; 2006) differ from the *classic* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) grounded theory approach in their beliefs about reality and the role of researcher.The classic grounded theory is grounded on the assumption that reality is single, and researcher can discover it. Many scholars characterize the classic grounded theory as "objectivistic" because it sees the researcher as having "a separate, unbiased, unobtrusive, researcher role in collecting and analyzing data and focus on the content of expressed verbalizations and observable behaviors" (Lal et al., 2012). In the classic grounded theory, the theory that emerges is assumed to be an objective portrait of the reality and independent from the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

On the other hand, the constructivist grounded theory approach assumes that a) there is not a single reality but multiple and b) reality is not discovered by the researcher but co-constructed between the researcher and the people under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The constructivist grounded theory accepts the subjectivity of researchers and their role in the co-construction of reality. Charmaz (2006) points out that the theory that emerged from data is not separate from the researchers, but they construct the grounded theories through past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and the research practices."

The present study follows a constructivist grounded theory approach because its ontological and epistemological assumptions are compatible and suitable with the corresponding assumptions.

6.2 Target Population – Sample

Initially, fifteen structural design engineers of company A, were selected. In this company the researcher had a long working experience. At the time of the interviews (2019-2020), the author no longer belonged to the body of employees, but his privileged access to this area allowed for an in-depth understanding of respondents' answers. Company A mainly deals with publics design of concrete bridges projects, it was fully specialized in the subject of its studies, has a small number of projects, but has a long duration and budget and is fully dependent on the public sector.

In this study, knowing that the specimen is not representative, sampling will be used without probability and, more particularly, convenient sampling. This type is used in pilot surveys, where there

is no intention of generalizing the results. In this sampling, people close to the researcher are selected and represent a common feature that is attempted to study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2008). The above type o sampling is chosen as the most appropriate because of the researcher's access to research facilities due to his work in the specific consultancy in the past.

The sample of the survey was fifteen employees, who have worked as Structural Design Engineers for 3 to 10 years. The sample, all the individuals have high level education (5 years diploma) and 3 of them holding a postgraduate degree. Employees are 30-45 years old. The majority (9 employees) were born out of the UK and moved to the UK during the economic crisis of 2012.

6.3 Collect Data – Interviews

Interviewing - and particularly the semi-structured technique - is the most widely used method in social sciences (Silverman, 2010).

Table 2. Interviews Schedule

Would you like to talk a little about yourself?
Would you please describe me in short, your life until now?
Where are you from? Where have you studied? Where have you worked?
Describe your role, your responsibilities, your relationships in the firm
Are you happy working here?
Please take me into a positive experience during the last years.
Please take me into a negative experience during the last years.
Please describe your thoughts, fillings, and perceptions you experienced the last years in the company.
Do you feel that there are any problems in the working team?
If yes, which one?
How do you think three created?
What kind of differences backgrounds / cultures do you perceive during the projects?
What are the characteristics of each partner that make him/her unique and in what ways are similar with the others?
In which manner you think that nationality/profession affect employee behavior/cooperation in the projects?
What do you view as benefits and costs of working with people of different ethnicities and nationalities?
Please explain.
What's the meaning of *expert* according to you? Please describe the profile
What's the meaning of *professional* according to you? Please describe the profile

The use of interviews in a grounded theory approach is an appropriate and suitable method for data

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collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2002; Silverman, 2010) and complements other methods such as participant observation. I decided to include the technique of face-to-face semi-structure interviews in the design of the study in order to gain deep understanding of group members' ideas, perceptions, and meanings. Prior to entering the field, the author designed a semi-structured interview guide (See Table 1) with few, broad and open-ended questions that would enable the group members to offer their own perspectives, but also allow unexpected accounts and stories to emerge (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Before each interview, the interviewer ensured group members for anonymity, confidentiality and also provided them with the opportunity to make any questions. Finally, all the employee groups are asked and agreed to, that, the author could record their interview. During interviews, notes are kept that was stopped whenever was distracting the participants. The interviews were conducted in English and typically lasted between 90 to 150 minutes. After each interview the author updated his record about the interviewing experience with each member, ideas, impressions, and incidents that emerged during the interview. The interviews took place in the second half of 2019.

6.4 Analyzing the Data

Initially the interviews were transcribed in a high level of detail and the transcripts were checked for accuracy. The research questions that led to the narrative analysis were as follows:

a)   What are the categories of diversity that employees perceive as obvious - how they are shaped / formatted?

b)   How do they perceive their differences in behavior in your workplace (motivation factors)?

c)   What do employees attribute to these variations?

Employees define their diversity by referring to specialization / professional experience, existing work experience, alternative work choices, and their economic and family status. Employees are influenced by their diversity mainly to the extent they are motivated, their willingness to stop or continue their cooperation with the company but also to shape the motivation factors. The above differentiation of employees determines motivational factors and shapes their behavior, goals and future plans and actions.

The data analysis was an emergent, iterative process and consisted of four phases. At the first phase it's followed *a thematic* approach focusing on members' perceptions about their employee differentiation. In the second phase, the author employed a dialogic or performance approach to focusing on how members affected from the perceived categories that were identified in the first phase. In the third phase, *compared* the findings of the first and second phase (thematic and performance approaches to narrative analysis respectively) focusing on the meanings that members create for their differentiation. Finally, at the fourth phase the author moved from the core categories towards to theoretical development and attempted to create an abstract theoretical framework regarding. More details about the phases are following:

Phase 1: A thematic approach

The first phase in data analysis includes a thematic approach (Riessman, 2003) in which the emphasis is "on the content of the data" - in "what was said". The analysis started focusing on the content of narratives and specifically on members' perceptions regarding their differentiation The research questions guiding me in the first stage of analysis were:

• How the employees perceive their self and others as different?

• What types of categories of differences do they perceive as salient and how do they construct these categories of differences?

Phase 2: A performance approach

After the exploration of employees' perceptions about their differentiation, in second phase employing a performance approach to narrative analysis and focusing on what members achieve through their narratives. A narrative analysis was employed to look across the data, focusing on how the employee members were affected from their perceived categories of differences as a discursive resource.

Phase 3: Comparing the findings (thematic and performance analysis)

After the completion of the thematic (first phase) and the performance (second phase) narrative analysis, during the next phase we moved on to the comparison of the categories that emerged from the first two phases. In this third phase the focus was to identify the meanings that members created for their perceived differences within their narratives, either when members construct their perceived differentiation and/or when they use their perceived differentiation as a discursive resource. These categories are analyzed focusing on the meanings that employees created for their perceived differences while they use their differences.

The following categories are created:

• Meanings of current professional status.

• Meanings of current economic situation, and

• Meanings from using professional differences

Phase 4: Theoretical Development

In the first three phases the analysis moved from the "ground" to the creation of analytical or conceptual categories. In the fourth phase the analysis proceeds from the analytical categories towards a higher and theoretical level, thus attempting to create a theoretical framework regarding the motivating construction during economic crisis.

7. Results

The chapter presented members' perceptions about their national differences, how they construct their national differentiation in their interviews and during the group meeting.

Although in their interviews all group members emphasize the importance of being aware of the national differences in the project however few members avoid referring on specific national or ethnical differences.

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The Romanian, Hungarian, and Greek members did speak openly about their national differences and construct their national diversity as differences between broad regional groups: South/East vis-a-vis North/West. Although Hungarian and Romanian members categorize the same countries in these regional groups like the Greek members did, yet they articulate the working identity of people belonging to these regional groups differently. Hungarian and Romanian members construct a positive working identity for themselves and their perceived regional group, the Souths. The Greek members articulate a negative working identity for the people belonging to the East (South) countries. Although they construct a different working identity for the East/South people, the process underlying these constructions is the same: members' need to have a working identity for the self. The Hungarian and Romanian members shape a positive working identity for themselves by identifying with their nationality and forming a positive working identity for their national group. The Greek members, contrary, pursue to shape a positive working identity for themselves by dis-identifying with their nationality and the negative working identity they perceive as associated with it. Members' differentiation work apart from this function that serves (i.e., members' need for a positive sense for self) is also informed by contextual factors (such as the context in which their social interaction takes place, dominant discourses like national stereotypes) and who is the Other.

Professional diversity is another salient category of differentiation in the project. The professional diversity construct, however, is not a homogenous one - group members perceive differently their professional differences. Two members shape their professional diversity in terms of the different way members are working: they perceive their professional differentiation to be between the *practitioners* and the *academics*. Most members, however, create their professional differences in terms of the different goals that members pursue in the project, and yet, they do not articulate their professional differences in the same way. Some members discuss the differences between academics and business, while others focus on the differences between education , training, and universities.

The construction of their professional differences takes three different forms: differences between

(a) academics and business,

(b) universities, and

(c) practitioners and academics.

A common process that seems to partly underlie the creation of the different forms of professional differentiation is members' identity work and their need to create a positive sense for their self.

Expertise diversity is the third category of differentiation that members perceive as salient in their project group. The creation of expertise diversity partly entails members' relational identity work; members define their expertise in terms of who the other is and the field of expertise they perceive as out-group.

Although group members recognize three field of expertise ("IT specialists", "technical specialists" and "language experts"), they create their expertise diversity focusing on the these. These sub-groups, however, are not homogenous and members articulate them differently.

8. Discussion

The previous section discussed the findings and the proposed theoretical framework of doing differentiation work, for understanding diversity construction. The several categories of differences (e.g., professional, national, expertise) that emerged as interrelated facets of group differentiation, show the multiple nature of diversity that contradicts with the dominant approach that identifies diversity as synonymous to national diversity (Hofstede, 1980), while is in agreement with other scholars who argue that diversity is a multidimensional construct (Nkomo & Cox, 1996; Litvin, 1997 & 2000, Zanoni et al., 2010) and therefore should be approached from an a posteriori direction (Tatli & Ozbilgin, 2012). Intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991) facilitated the interpretation of the complex, intersectional nature of members' differentiation, while at the same time helped to position the present study along with the other studies using intersectionality as theoretical lens (Holvino, 2010; Atewologun & Singh, 2010).

The discussion of the findings further illustrates the anti-essentialist, socially constructed nature of members' differentiation countering the positivistic assumption that social categories carry an "essence" and therefore members' differences in these social categories reflect real differences (Hofsted, 1980; Trompenaars, 1993; Jehn et al., 1999; House et al., 2004). The empirical illustration of the constructed, anti-essentialist nature of members' differentiation supports previous theorization proposing that social categories are not homogenous, but heterogeneous, as well as differential and shifting (Connel, 1995; Butler, 1990, 2004; Litvin, 1997, 2002). The discussion of the shifting nature of group differentiation illustrates the relational and contextual processes that are part of the differentiation work process, and support both theorization (Berger & Luckman, 1991; Josselson, 1994; Ybema et al., 2009; Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Alvesson et al., 2008) and empirical research (Ailon-Souday & Kunda, 2003; Janssens & Zanoni, 2005) on the relational and contextual nature of identity and diversity. The discussion proceeds in the next section that offers the acknowledgment of the limitations of the study and propose recommendations for future research.

8.1 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study has several limitations. The first limitation regards author's role as researcher during the field work and the potential impact in the research process. *I have discussed in detail my concerns regarding this limitation in sections 1.1 and 5.4, where I offer my self-reflection on my role as researcher.*

Another limitation regards the rather small duration of my field work, which was two months in total. Future research could include a research design with a long-term immersion of the researcher(s) in the field: starting from the first stages of its creation and extending to the last stage of the project completion. A long-term study of a multicultural workgroup could offer more insights on how the group members perceive, use, and sense- make their group differentiation during time.

A third limitation is that research took place in the setting of a specific project group that may differ in terms of purpose and structure from other multicultural workgroups. The findings are not easily

transferable to other settings although they could offer useful insights in studying diversity in other groups or multicultural workgroups in general. This last limitation produces a recommendation for future research to include working groups in the single study. The comparison between different multicultural workgroups could enable a more fruitful exploration of the role that the contextual and relational settings play in the construction of group diversity.

A fourth limitation regards issues like power relations that are not addressed in the study. Future research should explicitly take them into consideration since power relations could further enhance our understanding of diversity construction process in a workplace (Zanoni et al., 2010).

8.2 Contribution of the Study

The present study attempts to contribute to the field of workforce diversity in the organizational studies literature. Taking into consideration the suggestions of several scholars (Sackmann & Phillips, 2004; Mannix & Neale, 2005; Barinaga, 2007; Ahonen & Tienari, 2009) who point out the need for additional research on diversity in the setting of multicultural workgroups, the study attempts to contribute to the existing literature surrounding diversity in multicultural workgroups.

To the best of my knowledge, the present study is one of the few studies studying diversity in mixed EU and different nationalities projects groups.(Barinaga, 2007; Ahonen & Tienari, 2009).

The research question of the study addresses the concept of diversity itself - something that is often neglected or taken for given (Nkomo & Cox, 1996; Litvin, 1997; Janssen & Zanoni, 2005; Tatli & Ozbilgin, 2012).

The study attempts to address a gap in group diversity literature that derives from the traditional *a priori* identification of the concept of diversity that has dominated diversity research. This *a priori* approach characterizes studies that view diversity either as static or dynamic concept (Tatli & Ozbilgin, 2012). Several scholars criticize the predetermination of categories of differences and suggested to approach diversity as an emergent rather as a predetermined phenomenon (Osland & Bird, 2000; Garcia-Prieto et al., 2003; Bodenhausen, 2010; Tatli & Ozbilgin, 2012; Zanoni et al., 2010; Mahadevan 2009; Janssens & Zanoni, 2005).

The study attempts to address this gap employing an a posteriori approach that enables a fruitful exploration of the complex nature of group diversity without focusing on specific, predetermined categories of differences.

The posteriori direction in the exploration of group diversity offers significant insights regarding the complex and constructed nature of diversity in a workgroup. Group members themselves emphasized that they differ not only in terms of nationality or ethnicity, but repeatedly referred to the intersection of their national, professional, expertise, and gender differences. The study offers, thus, significant findings and insights regarding the multiple and intersectional nature of diversity, showing empirically how the group members of a workgroup intersect their several constructed categories of differences.

Furthermore, the study approaches the construct of diversity not only in terms of the content and structure that diversity has (intersection of categories of differences) but also addresses how the group

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members used their perceived differentiation and the meanings they created for their differences. The study, therefore, addresses simultaneously several facets that a social constructed concept (as group diversity) could have. It explores the content, structure, discursive uses, and meanings of a construct (group diversity) offering a more thorough understanding of the diversity's construction process. The findings of the study further highlight the role of the contextual and relational setting in diversity construction, along with the social psychological functions that this construction serves.

The study further offers empirical support to the well-established critique towards the positivistic assumptions of diversity and identity that addresses them as static and given. The research findings position the present study along other studies in the literature of diversity that also emphasize the multiple, intersectional character of diversity (Atewologun & Singh, 2010; Boogaard & Roggeband, 2010; Essers & Benschop, 2009) and its contextual and relational nature (Ely & Thomas, 2001, Janssens & Zanoni, 2005; Barinaga, 2007; Mahadevan, 2009; 2012). Finally, the creation of the main theoretical term "differentiation work" that reflects the dynamic process of diversity construction, contributes to diversity research by drawing the focus in the *process* rather to the *labels* of categories (Nkomo & Cox, 1996, Litvin, 1997).

8.3 Final Conclusions

The study offers significant insights regarding the process of diversity construction in a working project group, which although are not directly transferable to other organizational settings, they can nevertheless offer useful insights for future research on diversity in similar settings, such as international research teams, international management teams (Henderson, 2004). What this study mainly offers is first, an empirical demonstration of the multiple, intersectional, constructed nature of diversity and the ongoing process of group diversity construction, and second, an attempt to contribute to the relevant diversity literature with the introduction of a new theoretical term "differentiation work" as the lens for future research exploring diversity construction in workplace.

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