

Reading Comprehension: Structuring An argument

Read the following essay and answer the questions below

Diversity: Help or Hindrance to Group Performance? (Taken from the University of Queensland)

In an increasingly complex and competitive business world, how is a company to generate the creative ideas needed for ongoing success? Many managers believe that forming teams with cross-functional diversity is the answer (Sethi et al., 2002), and this is becoming increasingly common (Mu & Gnyawali, 2003). However, while diversity in group membership may lead to the diversity of ideas needed for innovative problem solving, it is argued here that that managers need to be aware that there are many ways that diversity can in fact hinder team performance, though there are strategies that both teams and their managers can use to reduce the potential negatives and enhance the potential positives.

Aside from the cross-functional diversity, many other types of diversity can have effects on team performance and some of these types of diversity can have inherently negative effects. For example, any negative stereotyping by group members resulting from diversity in terms of gender, age or ethnicity will reduce team social cohesion and hence group performance (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990, as cited in Harrison et al., 2002) because a certain amount of social cohesion has been found to be correlated with effective group performance (Harrison et al., 2002). Other aspects of diversity, such as in attitudes towards the group's tasks, in values, and in time management styles, can also negatively affect group social cohesion and hence group performance (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990, as cited in Harrison et al., 2002).

The sorts of diversity that are most likely to be beneficial to group performance, such as diversity in relevant knowledge, experience and skills (Harrison et al., 2002), can unfortunately also cause problems for group performance. Having too many diverse views and opinions to coordinate can, for example, cause cognitive overload amongst group members and so impede its decision making processes (Mu & Gnyawali, 2003; Sethi et al., 2002). This is especially likely to be a problem when the team has a limited amount of time to complete its tasks (Mu & Gnyawali, 2003). The cross-functional diversity mentioned above can also cause problems if group members have difficulty understanding and coordinating the differing world views and values of group members from different functional areas (Colbeck et al., 2000 and Gallos, 1989, as cited in Mu & Gnyawali, 2003). Given all the above-mentioned problems associated with diversity, are there strategies that a team and its managers can implement to reduce the potential negatives and enhance the potential positives? Regarding cognitive overload, evidently a team needs to be given an adequate amount of time to complete its task. Scheduling frequent collaboration can also be used to build social cohesion and overcome the potential negative impacts of stereotypes (Harrison et al., 2002) provided "team psychological safety" is fostered in the group (Mu & Gnyawali, 2003). And since too much social cohesion can cause teams to avoid the robust debate needed to generate the best thinking in order to protect social relationships, management encouragement of the group to be "venturesome" in its work can also be helpful (Sethi et al., 2002).

In conclusion, it appears that if managers wish to create especially effective teams, they should seek to minimise diversity in terms of task and time management values, while looking to maximise differences in relevant knowledge and skills. They should further aim to foster as much collaboration as possible so as to develop team social cohesion, have rules about interactions which foster team psychological safety, and encourage the team to be

venturesome. Unless these things are done, managers will likely find diversity more a hindrance than a help for group performance.

1. What is the theme of the essay?

- a. Diversity
- b. Group performance
- c. The impact of diversity on group performance
- d. The negative impact of diversity on group performance

2. What type of essay is this?

- a. Argumentative
- b. Narrative
- c. Expository
- d. Analytical

3. What is the thesis of the author?

- a. There are many ways that diversity can in fact hinder team performance, though there are strategies that both teams and their managers can use to reduce the potential negatives and enhance the potential positives.
- b. Many managers believe that forming teams with cross-functional diversity is the answer, and this is becoming increasingly common.
- c. Aside from the cross-functional diversity, many other types of diversity can have effects on team performance and some of these types of diversity can have inherently negative effects.
- d. In an increasingly complex and competitive business world, how is a company to generate the creative ideas needed for ongoing success?

4. What is the background provided?

- a. In an increasingly complex and competitive business world, how is a company to generate the creative ideas needed for ongoing success? Many managers believe that forming teams with cross-functional diversity is the answer (Sethi

et al., 2002), and this is becoming increasingly common (Mu & Gnyawali, 2003).

- b. However, while diversity in group membership may lead to the diversity of ideas needed for innovative problem solving, it is argued here that that managers need to be aware that there are many ways that diversity can in fact hinder team performance, though there are strategies that both teams and their managers can use to reduce the potential negatives and enhance the potential positives.
- c. All of the above.
- d. None of the above.

5. What is the first argument?

- a. Regarding cognitive overload, evidently a team needs to be given an adequate amount of time to complete its task.
- b. The sorts of diversity that are most likely to be beneficial to group performance, such as diversity in relevant knowledge, experience and skills (Harrison et al., 2002), can unfortunately also cause problems for group performance.
- c. Aside from the cross-functional diversity, many other types of diversity can have effects on team performance and some of these types of diversity can have inherently negative effects.
- d. Other aspects of diversity, such as in attitudes towards the group's tasks, in values, and in time management styles, can also negatively affect group social cohesion and hence group performance (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990, as cited in Harrison et al., 2002).

6. Which of these serves as supporting evidence for the first argument?

- a. Since too much social cohesion can cause teams to avoid the robust debate needed to generate the best thinking in order to protect social relationships, management encouragement of the group to be “venturesome” in its work can also be helpful (Sethi et al., 2002).
- b. Scheduling frequent collaboration can also be used to build social cohesion and overcome the potential negative impacts of stereotypes (Harrison et al., 2002) provided “team psychological safety” is fostered in the group (Mu & Gnyawali, 2003).
- c. Having too many diverse views and opinions to coordinate can, for example, cause cognitive overload amongst group members and so impede its decision making processes (Mu & Gnyawali, 2003; Sethi et al., 2002). This is especially likely to be a problem when the team has a limited amount of time to complete its tasks (Mu & Gnyawali, 2003).
- d. Any negative stereotyping by group members resulting from diversity in terms of gender, age or ethnicity will reduce team social cohesion and hence group performance (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990, as cited in Harrison et al., 2002) because a certain amount of social cohesion has been found to be correlated with effective group performance (Harrison et al., 2002).

7. Which of these serve as supporting evidence for the second argument?

- a. Since too much social cohesion can cause teams to avoid the robust debate needed to generate the best thinking in order to protect social relationships, management encouragement of the group to be “venturesome” in its work can also be helpful (Sethi et al., 2002).
- b. Scheduling frequent collaboration can also be used to build social cohesion and overcome the potential negative impacts of stereotypes (Harrison et al.,

2002) provided “team psychological safety” is fostered in the group (Mu & Gnyawali, 2003).

- c. Having too many diverse views and opinions to coordinate can, for example, cause cognitive overload amongst group members and so impede its decision making processes (Mu & Gnyawali, 2003; Sethi et al., 2002). This is especially likely to be a problem when the team has a limited amount of time to complete its tasks (Mu & Gnyawali, 2003).
- d. All of the above.

8. Which of these is an example of a counterargument?

- a. While diversity in group membership may lead to the diversity of ideas needed for innovative problem solving, it is argued here that that managers need to be aware that there are many ways that diversity can in fact hinder team performance, though there are strategies that both teams and their managers can use to reduce the potential negatives and enhance the potential positives.
- b. Since too much social cohesion can cause teams to avoid the robust debate needed to generate the best thinking in order to protect social relationships, management encouragement of the group to be “venturesome” in its work can also be helpful (Sethi et al., 2002).
- c. All of the above.
- d. None of the above.

9. What is the conclusion?

- a. They should further aim to foster as much collaboration as possible so as to develop team social cohesion, have rules about interactions which foster team psychological safety, and encourage the team to be venturesome.

b. It appears that if managers wish to create especially effective teams, they should seek to minimise diversity in terms of task and time management values, while looking to maximise differences in relevant knowledge and skills.

c. Managers need to be aware that there are many ways that diversity can in fact hinder team performance, though there are strategies that both teams and their managers can use to reduce the potential negatives and enhance the potential positives.

d. None of the above.

10. What are some of the connectors of the text?

- a. Again, and, so, but, however
- b. In conclusion, while, however, unless
- c. In summary, and, but, for
- d. In conclusion, and, so, however