7.4 DIVERSITY AND MULTIPLEXITY ON THE JOB: DRAWING ON COLLEAGUES FOR CAREER SUCCESS

Aim of the project

The aim of this project is twofold. Firstly, it aims to understand how informal and formal networks in diverse organizations exacerbate or soothe unequal access to resources such as support, advice and opportunities at work for diverse employees. It will pay particular attention to what extent self-organized networks of minority co-workers, such as female business networks or LHBTI+ employee groups, help them gain sustainable access to organizational resources. Secondly, it aims to investigate whether access to these organizational resources may improve career successes of minority groups, but might also reduce cooperation between different groups of employees, instead alienating specific groups of workers or fueling competition in the longer run between them.

Background

Employees form networks of relationships to colleagues, that cannot only be described in terms of their official hierarchy, but also in terms of the informal ties that they contain. People need their colleagues for the authorized workflow, for instance when they are obliged to have their work signed off by superiors or when they are assigned to the same projects. But they need it also for information, advice, emotional support and to learn the organizational culture. Some relations at work may contain overlapping roles (which is called multiplexity), for instance when a formal supervisor is also a friend, or when the same co-worker provides both emotional support and practical advice. The infamous old-boys network is prototypical of multiplex relations: career opportunities are spread alongside informal socializing. Recent research suggests that career advancement in a large organization was largest for smoking men who transfer to a smoking male manager, a finding that suggests that the informal schmoozing in the smokers section has real consequences (Cullen & Perez-Truglia, 2019). Women and migrants, often still minorities in the workplace, have long been known to have differently structured networks, in which they draw mostly on each other for support, but still have to depend on the same old-boys for career advancement (eg. Burt, 1998).

Individuals generally prefer to interact with similar others, because of higher trust and cooperation, reason why people build homophilous informal networks. Homophilous ties are necessary channels for "psychosocial" benefits in organizations such as role modelling (Ibarra, 1997). People similar to you can be more effective in teaching the organizational culture. This may put underrepresented groups at a disadvantage, as their homophilous ties typically do not occupy positions of power in the organization. Hence, for these disadvantaged groups, building multiplex networks is more challenging, as they can rely less on their homophilous ties to offer also performance related organizational resources. For instance, some research suggests that women may use their existing networks more for support, whereas men can also employ their networks for their career advantage (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Having separate networks to co-workers, depending on what they provide can be problematic, since these different co-workers might expect different behaviors of them (Podolny & Baron, 1997). For instance when your supportive colleagues expect you to behave collaboratively, but your mentor asks you to be competitive. Previous research has shown that men and women indeed differ in the extent to which they have these overlapping roles in their networks, but there is very limited research to date that studies whether having overlapping (ie multiplex) networks at work is indeed advantageous for careers also for disadvantaged groups (Woehler et al., 2021). The proposed project will investigate whether all groups could benefit from having multiplex relations, or only employees belonging to the dominant group(s). Recent research suggests that when the number of minority employees increases, they might benefit from the same network

structures as do white men (Schoen, Rost & Seidl, 2018). We expect that multiplexity is only beneficial when it means that you are tied to powerful positions in the organization. This project thus aims to understand whether people with different social identities, based on gender, migration background or sexual orientation, have varying degrees of multiplexity in their networks to co-workers, and whether this matters for their cooperation both within and across group lines and their individual career success.

As said, uniplexity can be related to the experience of conflicting behavioral expectations. A possible source for multiplex relations for underrepresented groups may be so called Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). Employee Resource Groups are self-organized networks of underrepresented or minority co-workers that offer organizational resources to their members. It is however an open empirical question whether these ERG's offer mainly emotional support and a sense of belonging, or whether they also offer career opportunities. This project will identify how ERG's may help shape a work climate that allows minority workers access to organizational resources, thus integrating them further in the organization and allowing for sustainable careers. However, ERG's pose a potential threat to sustainable cooperation between different groups in the same organization. ERG's may strengthen so called fault lines in organizations, creating separate but (un)equal networks for people with different social identities. Fault lines impact, for instance, team learning, psychological safety, satisfaction, and expected performance of individual employees (Lau & Murnighan, 2005). Previous research (DiBenigno & Kellogg, 2014; Mäs et al., 2013) also indicates that cooperation within and sustainability of the organization is dependent on the extent to which different groups of people interact and cooperate. ERG's might interfere in this process, either positively by spreading access to resources more equally, and/or negatively by reducing diversity in employee's cooperative networks. In the long run, ERG's could thus suffer from unintended consequences that diminish cooperation between different groups of employees.

Research design

This project will analyze longitudinal (3 waves, 6 months apart) network data on employees in organizations with and without ERG's to investigate multiplexity in the networks of employees with different social identities, and consequently cooperative behavior within and across group lines, as well as individual career successes. Employees will answer questions on whom in the organization they turn to for emotional and / or task support, to determine whether these are the same or different people. Additionally, they will be asked where they have met these colleagues, eg. via an ERG. Cooperation as well as individual job satisfaction and career success will be measured in subsequent waves, as happy and successful employees might attract more colleagues from all groups, thus changing the order of causation.

A maximum of ten organizations will be selected from existing contacts within the UU Future of Work Hub, as well as via ERG platforms. We will offer ERG's in organizations insight in their functioning and tailormade assessments on how they are doing in supporting their members. We specifically aim for organizations that have ERG's for some groups, but not for all. For instance, an organization may have an ERG for women employees, but not for people of color. In such organizations, women might have better access to resources, but also have fewer ties to men. In these organizations, two or three departments will be surveyed. Meaning that all employees from two or three organizational units will be asked to participate. This will result in approximately 20-25 networks of employees.

Four types of comparisons will be made. 1. Between members and non-members of an ERG with the same social identity, within the same organization. 2. Between individuals with different social

identities, for which one would have access to an ERG that exists in the organization, whereas for the other group no ERG exists within the same organization. 3. Between individuals with the same social identities, within different organizations with and without ERG's. 4. Between minority employees with and without ERG's and the dominant majority. Dependent variables are on the individual level, and examine both individual access to resources and career success, as well as the diversity of the individual employee's cooperative network. Furthermore, network data will be matched to organization level information on composition of the workforce, as well as the availability of ERG's and other diversity initiatives.

Literature

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