

Habilitation thesis

Petru Lucian Curşeu

ABSTRACT

Reflections on the cognitive and affective dynamics of groups

The current habilitation thesis provides an overview of my research contributions in the field of group dynamics. The first chapter addresses the association between group diversity on the one hand and group effectiveness and group cognitive complexity on the other hand. I start by summarizing the main research streams that attempted to elucidate the inconclusive results of the group diversity-effectiveness relationship (the taxonomic, contingency and non-linear models of group diversity) and then review the main theories that address the mechanisms that explain how group diversity impacts on group effectiveness. I then present Harrison and Klein's (2007) taxonomy for group diversity that distinguished between diversity as variety, separation and disparity, and present some empirical results that addressed the link between these forms of diversity and group cognitive complexity. The main insights of these empirical studies are that: (1) variety is beneficial for group cognitive complexity, (2) disparity has both positive (explained by cognitive activation) and negative (explained by process losses) influences on group cognitive complexity, (3) separation tends to display non-linear association with the quality of interpersonal relations within groups as well as with the density of advice network within groups, (4) group cognitive complexity mediates the relation between different forms of diversity and group effectiveness and (5) the interplay between different forms of diversity is a meaningful approach in trying to explain the intricate diversity-effectiveness link. The second chapter deals with the issue of emergence and emergent states (cognitive and affective) in groups. I start by introducing the concept of emergence as a process that transforms a simple association of individuals into a social entity, namely a group. I then introduce the concept of cognitive synergy as group-level cognitive structures that emerge from the interactions between group members and the co-evolution of their individual cognitive structures. Further on, I present several empirical results that: (1) pinpoint the relevance of teamwork quality as an antecedent of cognitive synergy in groups and (2) show that reciprocated relational preference and normative interventions can effectively be used to create cognitive synergy in groups. The second chapter concludes with several sections that explore the emergence and interplay of several socio-affective states in groups. The empirical studies presented here show that: (1) a positive group atmosphere blocks conflict transformation in such a way that task conflict does not evolve into relationship conflict, (2) effective strategies of dealing with the negative emotionality associated with intra-group conflict (emotion regulation and coping strategies) also reduce the chances of conflict transformation and escalation, (3) trust is the most resilient of the emergent states and it decreases conflict and increases psychological safety at later stages of group interactions. The thesis concludes with a section on future research directions that presents the main research plans as they draw from the contributions detailed in the two chapters. I plan to develop a cognitive architecture for groups (an integrative framework for information processing mechanisms in groups as socio-cognitive systems) and further explore (1) the interplay of human and social capital as they relate to group cognitive synergy and (2) the implications of cognitive artifacts for emergence and (3) use simulation studies to test the core arguments of the cognitive architecture for groups.