Temporal effects of diversity faultlines and social categories in training groups

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Diversity

- Is diversity good or bad for organizations?

  – "Diversity refers to differences between individuals on any attribute that may lead to the perception that another person is different from self" (van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004, p. 1011).

  – Diversity becomes more important as more organisations employ more heterogeneous individuals, e. g.:
    - Demographic change (age)
    - International mobility (ethnicity)
    - Gender equality

A test case for the impact of diversity

- *Background*
  - DEOMI's flagship course entails weeks spent in highly diverse small groups exploring diversity and discrimination.
  - This experience is taxing both affectively and cognitively
  - The groups are geared toward achieving behavioral change in students.
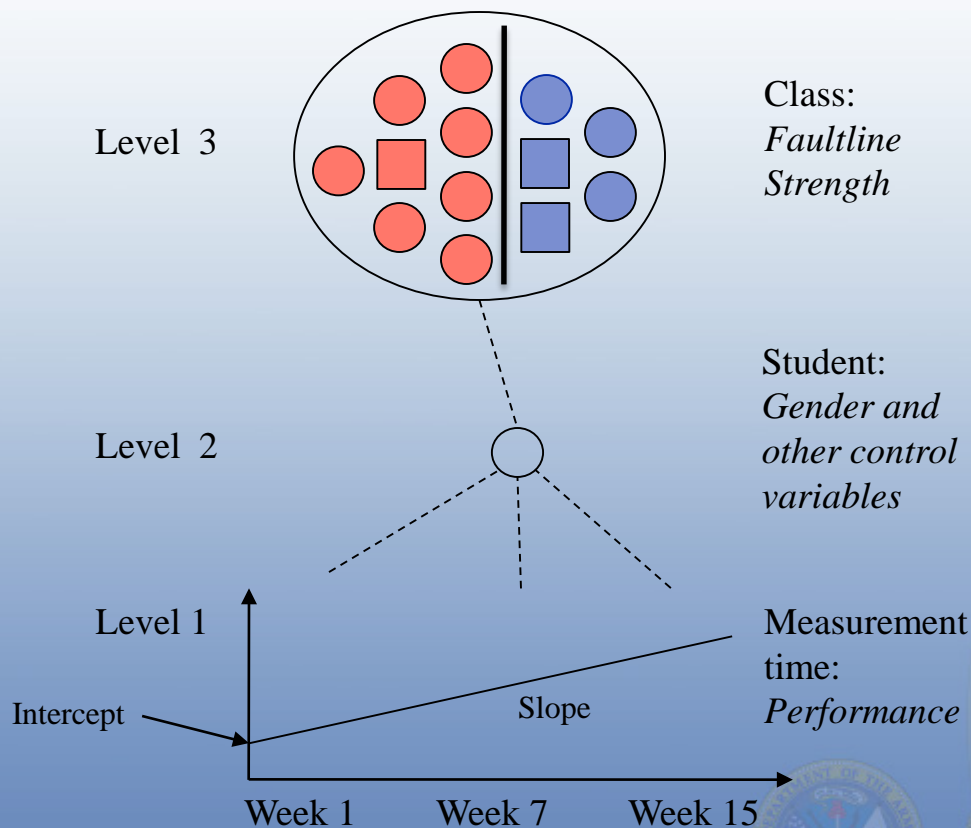
- *Research Question*
  - We were interested in finding out whether diversity within training groups as well as perceived similarities between trainers and group members affected students' behavioral change

Faultlines over time: Can stronger faultlines lead to more positive outcomes over time than weaker ones?

- Diversity faultlines could lead to problematic effects at the beginning, but could foster team learning over time (e.g., Brodbek & Greitemeyer, 2000)

- Test of this assumption in 84 diverse military training groups (N = 1133, 13.1 trainees per group) where learning was measured over time

- Sample was diverse with regard to race (32 Asian, 578 Black, 114 Hispanic, 13 Native American, 345 White), gender (721 male, 368 female), and other attributes

- Focal area of training: Behavioral change associated with challenging interactions brought about by group diversity – Assessments of students'' behaviors associated with course objectives: Ratings (0-100) at three equally spaced time points by three raters (the two trainers and one outside assessor) on five scales

- Faultline strength Fau (Thatcher, Jehn, & Zanutto, 2003) computed over available social categories

A three-level growth model of the impact of faultlines on training performance over time

Level 3

Level 2

Level 1

Intercept

Slope

Week 1   Week 7   Week 15

Class:
Faultline Strength

Student:
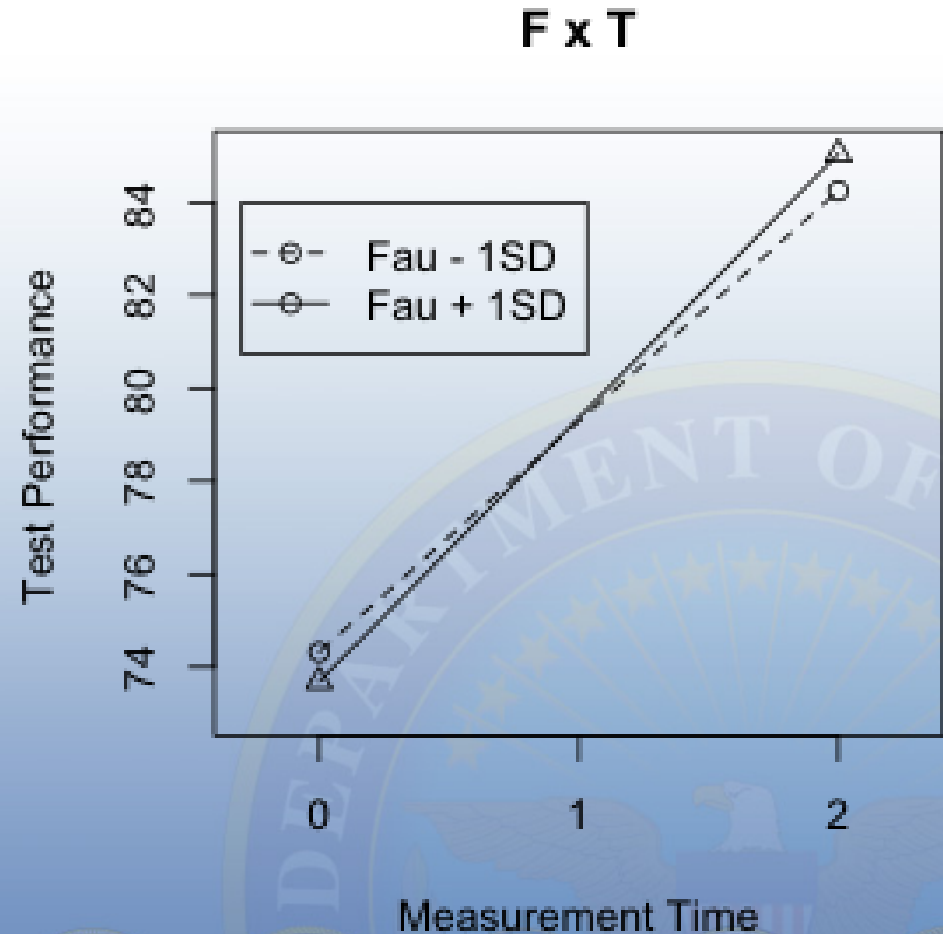*Gender and other control variables*

Measurement time:
Performance

- Hypothesis: Strong faultlines are associated with a lower intercept and a higher slope in test performance than weak faultlines

- ICC(1) of test scores in classes = .09, $p < 0.001$, ICC(2) = 0.79: Multilevel modeling warranted

The proposed effect

- *Analysis*
  - Random Coefficient Growth Modeling in R (Bliese, 2009) shows that…

    - Students' similarity to trainers only impacted students' learning initially

    - Faultines (i.e., group diversity) has a positive impact on student learning over time

F x T

Implications

- Salient team diversity (faultlines) can have negative short-term effects but positive long-term effects

- Diverse teams may require time to attain their optimal level of functioning.