

Does National Diversity Impact Conflict in Global Virtual Teams? The Role of Language Factors

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Abstract: This study looks at the impact of national diversity on task and relationship conflict in the context of global virtual teams (GVTs). We investigate the interaction effects of both English skills and openness to linguistic diversity on these relationships. We administered a questionnaire to 283 GVTs working on a collaborative experiential learning project to develop an international business plan. Our results show that, for teams exhibiting high levels of openness to linguistic diversity and high levels of English skills, increased levels of national diversity on the team are associated with lower levels of task and relationship conflict. The relationship is reversed, however, in teams where openness to linguistic diversity and team English skills are low. These findings shed light on the relationship between national diversity and conflict by suggesting that both English skills and team attitudes toward language diversity are important in reducing conflict. Moreover, openness to linguistic diversity may be more important in reducing conflict than the level of team members' language proficiency.

Keywords: GVTs, National diversity, Conflict, English skills, Openness to linguistic diversity

Introduction

The mechanisms of globalization have led to a dramatic increase in the number of multicultural/multinational teams, including global virtual teams (GVTs), in recent decades (Gonzalez-Perez *et al.*, 2014; Rowell, 2016). GVTs are defined as “culturally diverse and globally dispersed virtual teams” (Glikson & Erez, 2020, p. 1). This trend has increased with the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, leading to the nearly ubiquitous use of virtual teams within organizations both large and small in both domestic and international settings. Hence, the value of better understanding variables which impact both GVT processes and performance continues to grow in importance.

Team member diversity, consisting of differences in either nationality and/or culture, has been the object of substantial research in international business and other disciplines. National diversity is a particularly relevant type of diversity as businesses and organizations operate across multiple countries.

Of particular interest is assessing how team diversity impacts the process and output of team work, including communication, exchange of task relevant information, task and relationship conflict, team creativity and performance. In general, these diverse streams of research find that the effect of diversity on team effectiveness can be either positive or negative ([van Knippenberg, van Ginkel & Homan, 2013](#); [Ayub & Jehn, 2011](#)). A number of studies find that increased diversity is associated with declines in team communication, functioning and dynamics, as well as increases in both relationship and task conflict ([Homan *et al.*, 2007](#); [Kankanhalli, Tan & Wei, 2006](#); [Shachaf, 2008](#)). [Stahl *et al.* \(2010\)](#), in their thorough meta-analysis of team cultural diversity, find that increases in team diversity are associated with both process losses through increased task conflict and decreased social integration. On the other hand, the authors also find that increasing diversity levels lead to process gains through enhanced creativity and satisfaction. No direct effect between diversity and performance is found, but the authors call for further research examining multiple moderators of relationships between diversity and both contextual and process variables. This highly influential paper was awarded the 2020 JIBS Decade Award and is widely cited in the literature. More than ten years later, however, very little progress has been made in clarifying the input-process-output logic of the “double-edged sword” of cultural diversity ([Minbaeva, Fitzsimmons & Brewster, 2021](#)). The current study endeavours to address this deficit by examining two potentially important language-related factors that could moderate the impact of diversity in GVTs. — proficiency in the language of group communication and openness towards language diversity. This builds on previous work which finds that linguistic difficulties of members of multilingual GVTs may negatively impact effective communication within the group and hinder the interpersonal relationships and group dynamics, especially the formation of a shared understanding within the group ([Fleischmann, Folter & Aritz, 2020](#)).

After a comprehensive review of the literature, we have identified three significant gaps. First, existing studies view language exclusively as a skill residing in individuals or as a social marker that serves as a basis for subgroup formation. We recognize the possibility that language skills also exist at the group level and can be measured as a collective phenomenon, rather than exclusively at the level of the individual. Second, many of the existing language-focused research studies at the group level highlight language diversity and do not measure group level common language skills. In addition, the results of these studies are mixed and inconclusive. Some support the association between language heterogeneity and negative group processes

([Stahl et al., 2010](#)), while others fail to establish this link ([Tenzer, Terjesen & Harzing, 2017](#)). Third, research on diversity mindsets is lacking, especially the mindset referred to as group openness to language diversity. The inconsistency in findings of previous studies may be due to the fact that negative team outcomes are explained not by diversity itself but by group levels of openness or commitment to difference ([Shrivastava & Gregory, 2009](#)).

To fill these gaps in the literature, this study focuses on the team level of analysis and explores how language skills and openness to linguistic diversity can moderate conflict in diverse teams.

In this paper, we will first develop a conceptual framework based on four key variables as evidenced in GVTs: 1) national diversity; 2) conflict; 3) team skills in a common language (in this case, English); and 4) openness to linguistic diversity. We develop a research model in which we hypothesize the relationships between these variables, with openness to linguistic diversity and English skills serving as moderators to the central relationship between national diversity and task conflict. We test this model using a large dataset derived from 283 GVTs. Results of the analysis are discussed and implications for practice as well as directions for future research are explicated.

Conceptual Framework

National diversity

According to Ayub & Jehn ([2018](#), p. 616), “[d]iversity refers to differences with respect to a common attribute used as the basis to perceive oneself to be different from another”. Since global teams have members from different national, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, they are usually very diverse on several dimensions. Given the growing number of companies and organizations operating across borders, we focus on national diversity, defined as differences in the home countries of the GVT members.

As highlighted by Jimenez *et al.* ([2017](#)), this diversity constitutes a potential strength for GVTs compared to more localized teams as it may improve problem-solving skills and boost the creativity of teams ([Kankanhalli, Tan & Wei, 2006](#)). This optimistic view of diversity’s positive effects in decision making has been challenged, however, by studies describing negative effects of diversity in team communication, functioning and dynamics ([Homan et al., 2007](#); [Shachaf, 2008](#)). In particular, in the negative impacts that increasing levels of diversity have on teams, cohesion and conflict communication have been noted ([Kankanhalli, Tan & Wei, 2006](#)).

Several theoretical frameworks are useful in understanding the effects of team diversity on team outcomes, including the categorization-elaboration model and the concept of diversity mindsets. The categorization-elaboration model holds that there are positive and negative

effects of each type of diversity ([Ayub & Jehn, 2018](#)). The positive effect refers to information processing, while the negative effect is related to social categorization. According to the positive view, similarities among team members in knowledge and skills leads to improved team outcomes. On the contrary, diversity manifested as interpersonal differences and intergroup biases (the social categorization perspective) has a negative impact on team outcomes. This suggests a process-content distinction in terms of team functioning. Team dynamics related to process are more exposed to impacts from misunderstandings based on differences in cultural norms and values, while content-related issues would be less impacted by the negative effects of diversity and instead would benefit from the different skills, perspectives, and capabilities of diverse team members.

Conflict

There are several obstacles to working in GVTs. In particular, coordination and communication may be challenging as team members may not agree on how to collaborate ([Wakefield, Leidner & Garrison, 2008](#)). The potential for lack of agreement is enhanced by the geographical, cultural, temporal and technological distance ([Scott & Wildman, 2015](#)). This disagreement may lead to team conflict ([Jimenez et al., 2017](#); [Ayub & Jehn, 2011](#)).

The literature on intragroup conflict has focused on two main types of conflict: relationship conflict and task conflict. Relationship conflict refers to interpersonal disputes and incompatibilities, while task conflict refers to lack of agreement over different options regarding the group tasks ([Dechurch & Marks, 2001](#); [Simons & Peterson, 2000](#)). Task conflict may involve questions related to members' roles, the allocation of tasks to team members, and the responsibility levels that should be allocated to each member ([Kankanhalli, Tan & Wei, 2006](#)). Negotiating task assignments and creating a common understanding of mutual and individual responsibilities within a team is a process-focused activity. As previously discussed, the categorization-elaboration model would indicate that process-oriented variables are more likely associated with the negative impacts of diversity. Specifically, the categorization process related to diversity can increase intragroup conflict ([Ayub & Jehn, 2011](#)). Task conflict may impact teams' abilities to effectively accomplish their goals and could lead to inefficiencies and misunderstandings within the team.

Prior research has noted that, along with geographic distribution, team member diversity is most often an antecedent to conflict ([Kankanhalli, Tan & Wei, 2006](#); [Scott & Wildman, 2015](#)). National diversity may create informational and interpersonal distance, which makes the possibility of task conflict more likely. According to Ayub & Jehn (2011, p. 254), "outgroup disagreements are often expected in diverse groups and opinion differences with the outgroup

members are accepted because they are congruent with the expectations of being different". Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1a. National diversity positively impacts task conflict.

Similarly, cultural diversity may contribute to relationship conflict ([Kankanhalli, Tan & Wei, 2006](#)). Communication challenges resulting from different values, beliefs and language backgrounds as well as other factors associated with the nature of collaboration in GVTs, may lead to misunderstandings and trigger tension and friction among group members.

Hypothesis 1b. National diversity positively impacts relationship conflict.

English skills

Researchers have been keen to acknowledge the importance of communication and language use within multinational corporations (MNCs) in recent years ([Lauring & Selmer, 2012](#)). In general, research in this area recognizes the impact of language on both a) companies' abilities to pursue their strategies consistently across borders ([Karhunen et al., 2018](#)) and b) the performance of multinational groups and teams ([Fleischmann, Folter & Aritz, 2020](#)). English is often the mandated language of global business and international projects; hence we focus on English skills.

While the study of language in international business has grown into a rich field of study, we focus on the role of language (English in our case). A systematic literature review of language issues in international management has uncovered three main categories of assumptions about language in research in this area: language as a top management problem; language as an individual characteristic of MNC employees; and language as a social practice in MNCs ([Karhunen et al., 2018](#)). The first category highlights the existence of different languages in use within organizations and teams as posing a problem for communication. Given the prominence of English as an international business language, it is also often the working language in MNC and global teams, but differences in English proficiency among organizational participants can be quite pronounced. Studies within this perspective have also looked at linguistic competence, with an underlying view that improving language skills contributes to overcoming communication barriers. In what concerns category 2, a focus on the negative implications of languages (e.g., social categorization and ingroup-outgroup divisions) is dominant.

The negative implications of language seem to have dominated research in the area ([Karhunen et al., 2018](#)). Research has found that differences in language proficiency impairs knowledge sharing ([Presbitero, 2020](#)). Language matters also for group dynamics. Neeley ([2013](#)) found that non-native speakers of English resent and distrust their native English-speaking co-workers.

In virtual teams where communication is often conducted through lower context means, such as email and text messages, and/or asynchronously, the challenges of subpar language proficiency can be even more acute due to truncated contextual clues ([Barner-Rasmussen & Aarnio, 2011](#), [Daim et al., 2012](#)). Tenzer, Terjesen & Harzing (2017, p. 816) argue that language “constitutes the foundation of knowledge creation”, as a shared language is required for interpreting, understanding, and responding to information ([Lauring & Selmer, 2012](#); [Klitmøller & Lauring, 2013](#)). Language is also instrumental for social interaction and developing a shared group culture and identity. Hence, being able to communicate smoothly in a shared language will likely contribute to effective knowledge sharing ([Klitmøller & Lauring, 2013](#)) and thus reduce the informational distance in GVTs. Based on these findings, we expect that English skills function as a moderator of the positive impact of diversity in task conflict, specifically:

Hypothesis 2a. Team English skills moderate the relationship between national diversity and task conflict in GVTs, such that better English skills weaken the positive impact of national diversity on task conflict.

Hypothesis 2b. Team English skills moderate the relationship between national diversity and relationship conflict in GVTs, such that better English skills weaken the positive impact of national diversity on relationship conflict.

Openness to linguistic diversity

The concept of diversity mindsets has been developed as an extension of diversity theory ([Van Knippenberg et al., 2013](#)). According to these authors, the team’s mental representation of the team’s diversity is the key to understanding the impact of differences among team members. This perspective differs from other theories of diversity since it argues that it is not the actual diversity of teams that impacts outcomes, but the openness of team members toward diversity that influence outcomes. For example, Minbaeva, Fitzsimmons & Brewster (2021) found that a diversity mindset moderates the effect of diversity in performance, so that the dual outcomes of diversity depend on whether the team climate is favourable to diversity.

This introduces an important attitudinal aspect to diversity that is rarely examined. In this study, we are particularly interested in the impact of linguistic diversity on team functioning. The diversity mindset perspective suggests that it is not just differences in linguistic abilities among team members that will impact team outcomes, but also the attitude of team members toward those differences. Thus, we propose that openness to linguistic diversity will have a moderating effect on the central relationship between national diversity and task conflict.

Openness to linguistic diversity is a dimension of diversity climate that refers to the acceptance of team members' differing language proficiency ([Lauring & Selmer, 2012](#)). GVTs rely on a common working language for communication; however, group members may have differing levels of proficiency. These differences may affect in-group communication, but the attitudes of team members toward these differences may be equally, if not more, important than the differences themselves.

Working with people at different levels of common language proficiency requires being willing to clarify and restate when understanding appears limited. Team members with low openness to linguistic diversity are less likely to display these communication-facilitating traits and behaviours. When team members are more tolerant to linguistic diversity, however, the benefits of information sharing from people with varied perspectives are likely to be magnified. Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 3a. Team openness to linguistic diversity moderates the relationship between national diversity and task conflict in GVTs, such that higher openness to linguistic diversity weakens the positive impact of national diversity on task conflict.

Hypothesis 3b. Team openness to linguistic diversity moderates the relationship between national diversity and relationship conflict in GVTs, such that higher openness to linguistic diversity weakens the positive impact of national diversity on relationship conflict.

We are proposing an additive multiple moderation model among the predictors. We expect that there is an interacting effect of team members' language skills and openness to linguistic diversity on the relationship between national diversity and task and relationship conflict. According to social identity theorists, in GVTs, language not only serves as the medium of interaction but, more importantly, it also serves as a social marker by which individual differences/similarities are identified ([Giles & Byrne, 1982](#)). Although GVT members may use a common language, in teams with lower openness to language diversity, non-native-common-language speakers' language fluency and accents are likely to become more noticeable and could result in the formation of social barriers, which are then manifest in increased conflict. We argue that team members' language skills and tolerance to language dissimilarities are equally important. Effective skills in the team's common language provide GVTs a high-quality communication medium. In addition, team members' openness towards language differences can lead to a more supportive climate in the team, which then further reduces any conflict that may emerge as a result of language and other forms of national diversity. This relationship is born out in the literature. [McMonagle \(2010\)](#) found that teams exhibiting intolerance for variations in spoken language experience higher levels of conflict and mistrust.

Therefore, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 4a. The positive relationship between national diversity and task conflict is strongest when both English skills and openness to linguistic diversity are low, and lowest when they are both high.

Hypothesis 4b. The positive relationship between national diversity and relationship conflict is strongest when both English skills and openness to linguistic diversity are low, and lowest when they are both high.

Research Model

We present the research model depicted in Figure 1 based on the theory and hypotheses presented above.

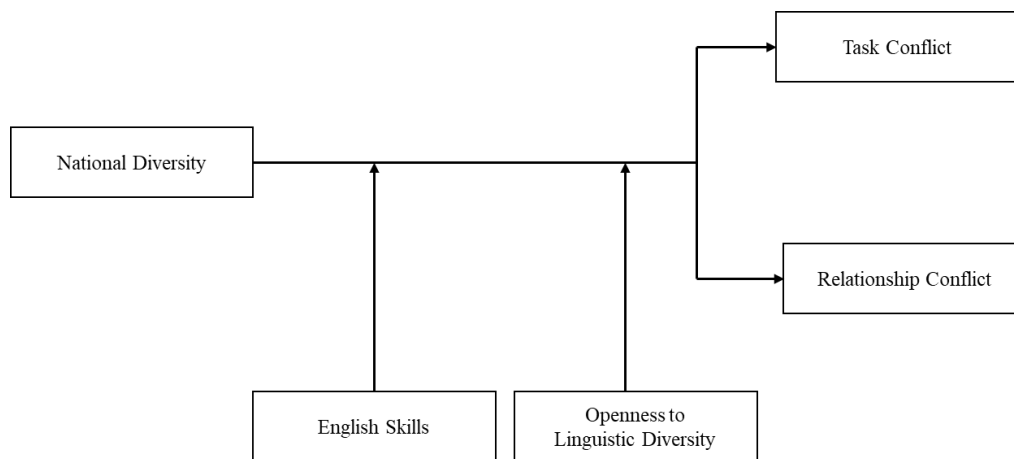


Figure 1. Research Model

Method

A quantitative approach has been followed to evaluate the proposed model. Hypotheses are tested using the data from the X-Culture Project.

Data collection

For the present study, we use data from X-Culture, a large-scale international experiential learning project involving over 6,000 MBA and bachelor's level business students from 150 universities in about 40 countries. The project involves the development of a solution to real-life business challenges presented by actual companies from around the world. Students are assigned to global virtual teams and work for about 8 to 10 weeks. The task includes market research, market entry plan development, and product design. All communication regarding project instructions and parameters is provided online and in English. The project is supervised by instructors with rich business consulting experience and managed as a regular

business consulting project. During their participation in the project, team members answer a survey about their experience.

Questionnaire

The measures used in the survey are previously validated scales sourced or adapted from the literature as follows.

National Diversity. All students indicated their home country. To calculate team level national diversity, we used a formula developed by Tsui, Egan & O'Reilly (1992):

$$D = \sqrt{1 / n \sum_i^n (S_i - S_j)^2}.$$

This measure represents the square root of the summed square differences between individual S_i values of a specific demographic variable (in this case, home country as indicated by each student) and the value of the same variable for every other individual S_j in the sample for the work unit, divided by the total number of respondents in unit (n), in this case the syndicate group (Tsui, Egan & O'Reilly, 1992).

Conflict. Task and relationship conflict were assessed using a five-point Likert three-item scale inspired by Jehn (1995). Table 1 details the items used in the questionnaire. The Cronbach's alpha for task conflict is 0.893 and for relationship conflict is 0.880.

English Skills. Team English proficiency was measured using the average of each team member's self-reported English skill level on a scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) (Table 1). Using self-reported levels of language proficiency is in line with other studies in this area (Jehn, 1995; Erez et al., 2013).

Openness to Linguistic Diversity. Openness to linguistic diversity was assessed by a four-item scale adapted from Luring & Selmer (2012) (Table 1). The Cronbach's alpha was 0.600 with all four items. After a closer inspection, we removed the last item due to its low loading on the construct (0.051), possibly due to the reverse coding of the item. The Cronbach's alpha of the abbreviated three-item scale is 0.824.

Table 1. Operationalisation of Variables

Variables	Items used in the questionnaire
Author	
Task conflict Jehn (1995)	How much conflict of ideas is there in your work group? How frequently do you have disagreements within your work group about the task of the project you are working on? How often do people in your work group have conflicting opinions about the project you are working on?
Relationship Conflict Jehn (1995)	How much relationship tension is there within your work group? How often do people get angry in your group? How much emotional conflict is there in your work group?
English Skills	How would you describe your ability to understand spoken English? How would you describe your ability to understand texts written in English? How would you describe your ability to speak English? How would you describe your ability to write in English?
Openness to Linguistic Diversity Lauring and Selmer (2012)	My team members enjoy working with other people on the team despite language barriers. My team members make an extra effort to listen to people speaking different languages. My team members are eager to learn from people even when communication is slowed down by language barriers. My team members are more reluctant to communicate when faced with people speaking a different language.

Controls. We have considered team size, percentage of male teammates on a team, and readiness test score (a pre-project test for students' readiness to participate in a global virtual team) as control variables.

Analytical approach

To analyse the effects of the moderating effects of both English skills and openness to linguistic diversity on the relation between diversity and conflicts, we performed additive moderation analysis using PROCESS SPSS Macro version 2.13, model two, created by Hayes (2017). All the variables that define the interaction terms were mean centred. The conditioning values were one standard deviation below the mean (Low) and one standard deviation above the mean (High). Following Hayes (2017), a bootstrapping approach with 5,000 samples was used to determine the significance of all the effects at 95% percentile confidence intervals, and the estimated effects were reported as unstandardized regressions coefficients.

Results

For this study we used data from the X-Culture survey which was applied to all the teams that participated in the project in the Fall of 2018. Our database includes data from 283 GVTs (1,191 students) with an average team size of 4.21, on average 43% males on a team. and average age of 22 years old; 88% of the participants are undergraduate students, and 12% have a master's degree. Most students (81%) have at least 1 year of work experience. These students are from 45 different countries. Table 2 reports the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the studied variables.

Table 2 Means, standard deviations, and correlations

	Mean	S.D.	2	3	4	5	6	7	
1. Team Size	4.214	0.643							
2. Male Percentage	0.427	0.251	0.022						
3. Readiness Test	85.860	4.991	-0.070	-0.037					
4. Diversity	0.872	0.069	-0.060	-0.115	.271**				
5. Openness to Linguistic Diversity	3.854	0.457	-0.095	-0.026	-0.086	-.151*			
6. English Skills	4.382	0.329	0.052	0.085	0.078	-0.004	-0.046		
7. Relationship conflict	1.683	0.636	-0.037	0.127	-0.091	-.143*	-.404**	0.011	
8. Task conflict	1.758	0.569	0.006	0.124	-0.049	-0.039	-.340**	0.004	.805**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To assess our hypotheses, as mentioned, we resorted to additive moderation analysis (Hayes, 2017). We analysed the effects of the moderating effects of both English skills and openness to linguistic diversity on the relation between diversity and conflicts.

Table 3 shows the results which failed to support a positive relationship between national diversity and task conflict ($b = -.12$, $p > .05$) and relationship conflict ($b = -1.08$, $p > .05$). Therefore, our hypotheses 1a and 1b were not supported. Hypotheses 2 and 3 predicted moderating effects of English skills and openness to linguistic diversity, respectively, on the positive relationship between national diversity and the two types of conflict. Our results only supported hypothesis 3a ($b = -2.87$, $p < 0.01$) and hypothesis 3b ($b = -2.93$, $p < 0.001$).

We then followed up with slope tests to probe the strength and direction of these interaction effects. The results from the slope test for hypothesis 3 showed that. for teams with a low level of openness to diversity, the effect of national diversity on both types of conflict is positive and strong (for task conflict, $b = 2.09$, $p < .05$; for relationship conflict, $b = 1.02$, $p > 0.05$). Such positive effects became weaker for teams with an average level of openness to linguistic

diversity and even turned negative for teams with a high level of openness to linguistic diversity (for task conflict, $b = -.53$, $p > .05$; for relationship conflict, $b = -1.66$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 3. Additive Moderation Results

Variable	DV = Task Conflict				DV = Relationship Conflict			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Controls								
Team Size	-0.00 (0.78)	-0.01 (0.06)	0.07 (0.06)	0.07 (0.06)	-0.05 (0.06)	-0.06 (0.06)	0.01 (0.07)	0.01 (0.07)
Male Percentage	0.274 (0.15)	0.26 (0.15)	0.24 (0.14)	0.22 (0.14)	0.28 (0.16)	0.26 (0.17)	0.23 (0.14)	0.20 (0.25)
Readiness Score	-0.001 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Step 1: National Diversity								
National diversity (ND)	-0.12 (0.56)	-0.18 (0.57)	0.78 (0.67)	0.63 (0.67)	-1.08 (0.62)	-1.19 (0.63)	-0.32 (0.71)	-0.34 (0.71)
Step 2: Moderators								
English Skills		0.83 (1.17)	--	-0.02 (0.11)		0.01 (0.13)	--	-0.03 (0.11)
Openness to Linguistic Diversity		--	-0.47*** (0.08)	-0.40* (0.08)		--	-0.64*** (0.08)	-0.65*** (0.08)
Step 3: Multiple Additive Moderation								
ND * English Skills		-0.98 (1.34)	--	-1.70 (1.24)		-1.85 (1.48)	--	-2.65* (1.31)
ND * Openness to Linguistic Diversity		--	-2.87*** (0.92)	-3.07* (0.93)		--	-2.93*** (0.97)	-3.24 *** (0.98)
R2	0.02	0.02	0.17	0.18	0.38	0.04	0.26	0.27
F	1.04	0.78	8.15***	6.35***	2.31	1.80	13.42***	10.67***

* $p \leq 0.05$ *** $p \leq 0.001$

According to Hypothesis 4, both English skills and openness to linguistic diversity additively moderate the effect of national diversity on the two types of conflict. Results show that for task conflict, the interaction between national diversity and English skills was non-significant ($b = -1.70$, $p > .05$), but the interaction between national diversity and openness to linguistic diversity is significant ($b = -3.07$, $p < .001$); thus the effect of national diversity on task conflict was additively impacted by the two moderators [$R^2\Delta = .04$, $F(2, 229) = 5.81$, $p < 0.01$](Table 2). On the other hand, when relationship conflict was the dependent variable, both interaction terms were found significant and additively moderated the relation between national diversity and relationship conflict [$R^2\Delta = .04$, $F(2, 229) = 6.62$, $p < 0.001$].

Then, as shown in Table 4 and Figure 2, the slope test showed that, the effects of national diversity are the strongest and positive on both task conflict when the two moderators are low ($b = 2.13$, $p < 0.05$) and relationship conflict ($b = 2.02$, $p < 0.10$). However, the effects turn negative on task conflict ($b = -1.46$, $p < .05$) and relationship conflict ($b = -2.70$, $p < 0.001$) when both are high.

Table 4. Conditional effects of the focal predictor at values of the moderator(s)

		Effect of National Diversity on					
		Task Conflict			Relationship Conflict		
English Skills	Openness to Linguistic Diversity	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>se</i>	<i>t</i>
<i>Low</i>	<i>Low</i>	2.13	0.98	2.18*	2.02	1.16	1.73 †
<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>	-0.15	0.61	-0.26	-0.95	0.65	-1.46
<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>	0.83	0.9	0.93	-1.22	0.84	-1.45
<i>High</i>	<i>High</i>	-1.46	0.65	-2.23*	-2.70	0.75	-3.59***

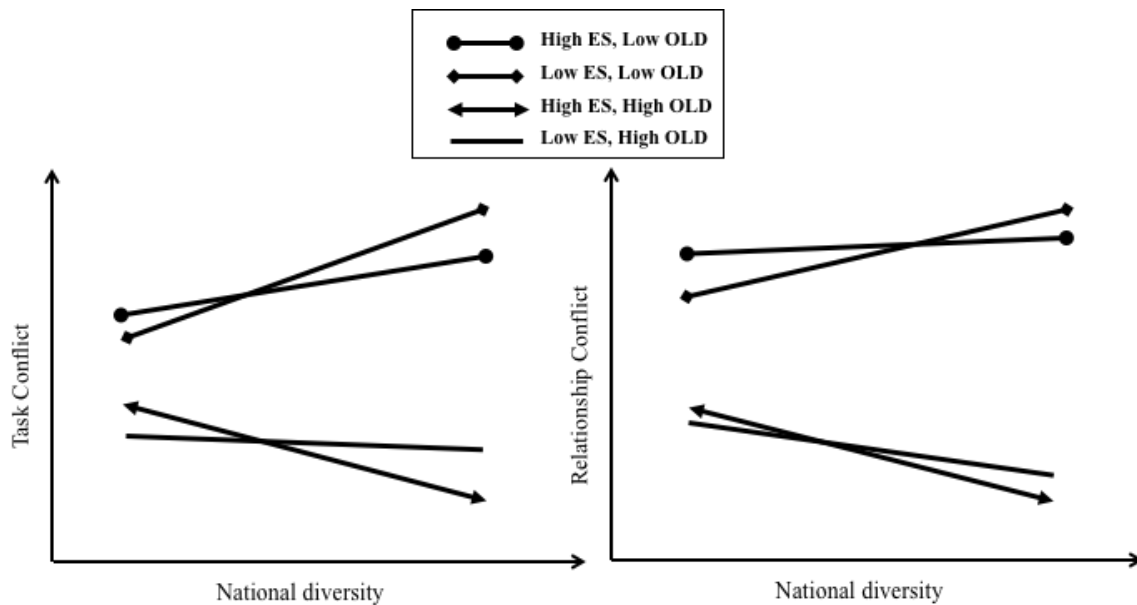
* $p \leq 0.05$ *** $p \leq 0.001$ 

Figure 2. Interaction plots

Conclusion

This study attempted to unravel the effect of national diversity on task and relationship conflict. Data from 283 GVTs show that national diversity does not have a direct significant effect on conflict. A closer inspection of this relationship, however, shows that English skills and openness to linguistic diversity do play a moderating role. Specifically, when both team English skills and openness to linguistic diversity are high in GVTs, the relationship between national diversity and both types of conflict is negative, i.e., teams with this high/high characteristic experience less conflict as diversity increases. When team English skills and openness to linguistic diversity in the team are both low, the opposite is observed. Here, task conflict increases as national diversity on the team increases. High team English skills amplify the negative relationship between team national diversity and conflict when openness to linguistic diversity is high, and low team English skills amplify the positive relationship between team national diversity and conflict when openness to linguistic diversity is low.

These results help to disentangle the effects of national diversity in GVTs' outcomes by considering the moderating impact of communication-related factors. Our findings amplify and confirm the findings of previous studies, which indicate diversity can have both positive and negative effects in teams (Ayub & Jehn, 2011). Our results suggest that, with regard to team conflict, communication-related factors are key. Minbaeva, Fitzsimmons & Brewster (2021, p. 50) point out that in order to advance our understanding of the mechanisms of diversity it is necessary to move beyond "cultural diversity per se to how the diversity is managed". In discussing this issue, the authors stress the importance of inclusion as a way to reap the benefits of diversity as a strategic resource.

Implications for practice

Our findings can help practitioners identify conditions under which diversity is an asset for GVTs and situations in which it is a liability. In particular, the importance of openness to linguistic diversity, an attitudinal variable which weakens the positive impact of diversity in conflict and even turns it negative for teams with a high level of openness to linguistic diversity, has far-reaching implications for training and human resources management strategies. Diversity training focused on attitudes toward language diversity could be a very effective tool for helping to reduce conflict in GVTs. Team members who are exposed to diversity training are likely to gain a better appreciation for differences among team members and avoid in-group/out-group divisions. Emphasizing the point that differences in language skills in the team's common language are not an indication of a lack of general intelligence could help team members to better appreciate the contributions of fellow team members, even if they are eloquently stated. A greater appreciation and respect for diversity in the team would hopefully also result in team members exhibiting more patience in their interactions with those who struggle in the common language. An increased level of patience, along with more frequent use of techniques such as restating, summarizing, and clarifying would likely lead to less conflict, better communication, and improved team performance. Therefore, we strongly suggest that managers put more emphasis on providing training for employees assigned to work in GVTs which concentrates on improving team-members' openness to linguistic diversity. While helping team members increase their skills in the GVT's common language can also help, further emphasis on attitudinal variables such as openness to linguistic diversity may be even more impactful.

Directions for future research

In an increasingly global world, GVTs will continue to play an important role in international collaboration in different business and non-business contexts.

In order to improve their effectiveness, a better understanding of the perceptions and experiences of groups' dynamics is required. Future research addressing the communication aspects that facilitate GVTs group dynamics and interpersonal relationships remains a fertile area for study. In particular, researching potential mediators and moderators in the diversity-conflict relationship, especially attitudinal variables, continues to be important, as previous research has emphasised that the impact of diversity in team performance is indirect (Stahl & Maznevski, 2021). It is also important to understand how and when national diversity has positive implications: are there minimum levels of diversity below or above which the negative/positive effects of diversity become salient? A Necessary Condition Analysis approach may allow for the identification of the 'must-have and should-have factors' for benefiting team diversity (Richter *et al.*, 2020). Ayub & Jehn (2018), for example, found that the impact of national diversity depended on the number and specific mix of nationalities present (with higher or lower perceived social distance). Additional work along these lines would add further nuance to our understanding of the links between diversity and performance in GVTs.

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