ABSTRACT

Researchers studying diversity in the workplace draw on several theories to explain an individual's behaviour in diverse settings. Each theory or concept aids in explaining part of the behaviour relating to individuals in a diverse workforce, however, individually they represent an incomplete perspective of the cognitive processes at play. Minimal attention has been given to understanding how these are relevant to each other and how they function together. This paper proposes a framework for understanding the foundations that underlie an individual's behaviour in a diverse workforce context. The premise of ten popular theories and concepts, frequently applied to diversity research, are examined and reviewed. These are divided into three groupings: social theories, interaction frameworks, and heuristics. Social theories refer to the identity theory, categorisation theory and social comparison theory. Interaction frameworks include the similarity attraction paradigm, person environment fit, and the tokenism and contact hypotheses. Heuristics accounts for the information processing that forms the bases of stereotyping, prejudice and bias. Furthermore, four common themes fundamental to these foundations recur. These are salience, the self concept, positive social identity, and familiarity. In combination, these theories and concepts reinforce and complement each other to provide a comprehensive understanding of an individual's behaviour within a diverse workforce. The paper concludes with a discussion of the practical implications arising from this framework, with a particular emphasis for the Asia Pacific, and directions for future research.

INTRODUCTION

Diversity in the workforce creates a complex phenomenon, with an underlying premise that results in altered interpersonal and group functioning. Several theories and concepts make up the cognitive fabric which explains how individuals relate to each other. Individuals can belong to and place others in an extensive number of categories, such as age, ethnicity, and education. These multiple categorisations drive identity creation where self concepts describe the core identities to which individuals subscribe. The extent to which individuals are attracted to and repelled from one another is often based on combinations of similarities and differences along these dimensions. Among these combinations, certain dimensions can become more important than others, depending on the context of the interaction, thereby affecting how individuals relate to each other.

Differences between workers have been shown to influence many areas of the workplace relationship. These have affected exchanges between managers and employees (Green, Anderson & Shivers 1996) and within work groups (Riordan & Shore 1997). Compared to homogenous teams, heterogeneous teams experience lower cohesion (O'Reilly, Caldwell & Barnett 1989) and greater disagreements and tension arising from conflict (Pelled 1996, Pelled, Eisenhardt & Xin 1999). Members communicate less frequently and more formally within the team (Smith, Smith, Olian, Sims, O'Bannon & Scully 1994), while preferring to communicate more often with external individuals (Zenger & Lawrence 1989). Further, some diverse teams have the benefit of better decision making (Jackson 1992) from a wider selection of alternative solutions (Cady & Valentine 1999). However, the effect of performance has largely been negative (Greenhaus, Parasuraman & Wormley 1990). Differences in demographic variables have also been demonstrated to increase turnover, role stress, and lower job satisfaction (Tsui & O'Reilly 1989, Riordan & Shore 1997).
**Purpose of the Paper**

Because of the extent of the effects arising from differences in the workplace, it is important to understand the foundations that underscore these findings. A number of implicit social relations theories underpin the research in workplace diversity. They function to explain the cognitive processes that individuals use to determine how they relate to each other and to their context. However, each theory only explains part of the picture. While many researchers have applied the various foundation theories in isolation, there has been some attempt to apply them in clusters of various combinations (e.g., Tsui, Egan & O’Reilly 1992, Riordan 2000). Given that workforce diversity is very much context driven and multiple theories have been applied, why have researchers sought to apply only one or a cluster of theories at a time?

Essentially, the assumption underlying the application of such theories, within the context of explaining the interactions amongst workers who differ from each other, has been one of parsimony. It has long been recognised that the pursuit of parsimony is necessary (Kilmann 1983). Without parsimony theories tend to expand out of control. However, an excess of parsimony may produce tautology, explain the obvious, or reduce complex human interactions to inflexible abstractions (North & Willard 1983). Paradoxically, the more researchers focus on the disjointed parts of reality, the less researchers may know about the whole (North & Willard 1983). Therefore, by only applying one theory or a cluster of theories and concepts, the need to draw linkages between these have been rendered unnecessary.

Of the implicit social relations theories that have been applied, there are ten theories and concepts that are most often cited in workforce diversity research. This paper seeks to weave together these theories to explain the foundation processes. This will demonstrate that when combined these theories reinforce, as well as complement, each other to provide a comprehensive understanding of the variety of perspectives, orientations, and emphases in the foundations of diversity research (Hogg & Terry 2000). The aim of this manuscript is to provide a holistic explanation of these forces at work.

To achieve this overarching aim, first, this paper groups the foundation theories of diversity research into three divisions. The social theories relate to identity, categorisation, and comparison. The interaction frameworks include the similarity attraction paradigm, person environment fit, tokenism, and the contact hypothesis. Finally, heuristics refer to bias, prejudice, and stereotypes. All are cognitive based and context specific. The premises of these are briefly explained, highlighting three recurring themes in the following sections. Furthermore, this paper identifies where these theories and concepts overlap and differ including a discussion of the boundary conditions arising from this foundations framework. Finally, the practical implications for human resource managers are discussed.

**Social Theories**

The social theories of identity, categorisation, and comparison are self contained units with different emphases. However, they are not mutually exclusive. When combined they complement each other to the extent that they are proximally intertwined. These three social theories, which are outlined in the foundations framework for behaviour in diverse settings, are shown as Figure 1.

**Figure 1 A Framework of the Foundations of Individual Behaviour in a Diverse Workforce**
Social theories have dominated the research literature studying diversity in organisations, particularly the theory of social identity. Identity operates as a social construct, rather than at an individual level (Foldy 2001). Based on symbolic interactionism, it recognises that people collectively create the reality in which they live by identifying symbolically with certain categories. According to the social identity and categorisation theories, individuals tend to classify themselves and others into various social categories (Tajfel & Turner 1985). Individuals define, describe, and evaluate themselves in terms of social categories and apply the norms of conduct of the ingroup onto themselves (Hogg 1987). Therefore, they attach meanings to objects arising from social interaction, and perceive the fate of the group as their own (Ashforth & Mael 1989). Based on observation and inference they are subject to change and modification, and assist individuals to determine what behaviours and responses are appropriate during exchanges.

Fundamental to these theories is an individual's awareness of the self and others. Social comparison draws on social cognition in the context of individual differences (Buunk & Gibbons 2007). This theory recognises that individuals are driven to compare themselves to similar others or to those slightly better on relevant dimensions (Abrams & Hogg 1990). They often choose to compare themselves with those perceived to be better, in the desire and belief they belong to the same category. The association between self evaluation affiliation choices has implications for problem solving and emotional regulation (Exline & Lobel 1997). This is particularly relevant because social identity becomes important where the category includes the individual since it holds a degree of emotional and value significance.

These social classifications are relevant for two reasons. On the cognitive level, social categorisations are used to order the social environment in groupings of people, which are assigned to the individual (Tajfel 1978). It provides order by assigning prototypical features of the category (e.g., stereotyping). Categorisation provides the individual with a systematic way of defining others. However, stereotypes are not necessarily reliable for predetermining behaviour (Oakes, Haslam & Turner 1994). The second reason is that they allow the individual to define him or herself within the social environment as opposed to being separate from the social context (Ashforth & Mael 1989). Individuals can develop a perception of oneness with the group. Thus, social theories explain the components of identity, categorisation, and comparison, which together assist in driving exchanges between individuals within the interaction frameworks.

**Interaction Frameworks**

Four common interaction frameworks explain behaviour related to diversity. Separately, they are the similarity attraction paradigm, tokenism, person environmental fit, and the contact hypothesis. These notions are expressed in Figure 1. *Similarity attraction* occupies a central position in the social theories. However, it differs in its focus on the interpersonal level, compared to the social theories operating at the group level (Turner 1985, Hogg & Hains 1996). The premise of the similarity attraction paradigm is that high order attraction is based on the individual's need to evaluate himself or herself for similarity of features, such as abilities, attitudes, values, opinions, and
The **tokenism** hypothesis argues that when individuals differ demographically from those around them, they become highly visible (Kanter 1977). Visibility can present a negative environment for the token individual, such as minority females (Spangler, Gordon & Pipkin 1978). Kanter defines the token individual as representing 15 per cent or less of the total work group. This visibility reduces the individual’s privacy and personal space since he or she becomes intensely observed compared to the demographic majority. Minorities have been found to experience poorer attitudes and individual performance compared to their majority counterparts as members encounter greater dissimilarity with their work group members than similarity (Spangler, et al. 1978).

**Person environment fit** encapsulates the fit between the person with the organisation’s workforce or the group. The framework argues for a level of congruence between two entities, to match elements, such as demographic characteristics and/or the norms and values, of one with those of elements of the environment (Edwards, Cabe, Williamson, Lambton & Shipp 2006). This follows the same premise as the similarity attraction paradigm. The level of fit between the individual with others in his or her organisation in terms of diversity characteristics, such as age and gender, will influence how they interact and relate to each other (Edwards, et al. 2006). Therefore, this fit can arise from pre existing individual dispositions prior to organisational entry or organisational membership can mould an individual’s values (e.g., Liewens, Decaesetecker, Coetsier & Geirnaert 2001, Parkes, Bochner & Schneider 2001).

The **contact hypothesis** argues that greater interaction between individuals provide opportunities to discover more similarity rather than difference (Kanter 1977). Greater knowledge through communication encourages mutual understanding, liking, and acceptance of dissimilar others (Tsui & O’Reilly 1989). Further, inter group relations become enhanced if the outgroup member’s characteristics refute the existing outgroup stereotype (Tsui & Gutke 1999), thus enabling perceptual adjustment. Therefore, favourable conditions are essential for accurate information exchange.

The counter argument to the contact hypothesis is that greater interaction can accentuate negative stereotypes and perceptual distortions, such as prejudice and ethnocentrism (Miller & Brewer 1984, Gudykunst 1987). These act to reinforce inter group hostility and competition (Nelson 1986), which is more likely when the diversity climate is not positive. For example, it has been found that when the proportion of racial minorities was increased in the organisation, informal communication between the minority and majority groups decreased (Hoffman 1985).

**Heuristics**

Stereotypes, prejudice and bias are the result of demands to process vast quantities of information. Essentially, the categorisations from attributes, such as demographic characteristics (Falkenberg 1990), are often based on perceived stereotypes. Individuals manage their limited capacity for cognitive processing by deriving stereotypes as a heuristic, or rule of thumb (Fiske & Taylor 1991). Therefore, stereotypes are often used to define group membership and to predict behaviour. Scenarios where the stereotyping is supported enables the perceiver to direct attention elsewhere, whereas discrepancies force the perceiver to form an appropriate impression by assessing each piece of information. Consequently, using stereotypes can lead to inaccurate assessments (Hilton & von Hippel 1996). While stereotypes may hold true for many within a particularly category, this does not hold true for all members.

While stereotyping is neutral (Falkenberg 1990), prejudice is negative. It differs from stereotypes in that it remains static despite the presence of new information showing the stereotype to be incorrect (Ivancevich, Olekalns & Matteson 1997). This resistance stems from an individual’s desire to avoid internal conflicts and inner insecurities (Katz 1960). For example, false correlations are sometimes made between language ability and accented speech with intelligence (Dovodio & Gaertner 1991). By rejecting the identity of the accented speaker, that is, his or her race, ethnic heritage, national origin, regional affiliation, or economic class (Lippi-Green 1994, Vrij & Winkel 1994), has the potential to evoke responses that are directly due to a prejudice (Ryan 1983), and seriously affect team interactions (Adler 1986).

Separate from, but related to stereotyping, is perceptual bias. Perception is often regarded as objective, stable, and homogeneous across individuals (Glazer 1984). However, social psychologists and information processing researchers have identified that perceptions are non objective, error prone, and highly individual specific. Perceptual bias occurs when there is a distortion in the information processing which allows for the preference of one group or attribute over another. For example, the concept of creating a positive social identity (to be discussed later) is based on ingroup outgroup bias and group serving bias. Ingroup outgroup bias is the tendency to view the
Common Themes of the Foundation Theories

While the deficiencies in each of these foundations to fully explain cognitive processing for diversity may be overcome through the consideration of the combination of these ten phenomena, four themes thread through the aforementioned foundations. The first is the notion of self concept. It is fundamental to the social theories, and to a lesser degree the interaction frameworks. The self concept is “…the system of concepts available to a person in attempting to define himself or herself.” (Gergen 1971: 23). This incorporates the attitudes, beliefs, intentions, norms, roles, and values of the collective self, which refers to identity groupings, such as the organisation and the work team. Therefore, multiple dimensions make up an individual’s self concept (Tajfel 1978).

The meaning that an individual attaches to the group membership affects how he or she will interact with others within the identity group and with those from other groups (Tajfel 1978). This contention supports the general notion of person environment fit, which recognises that individuals select environments based on the fit with their self concepts (O’Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell 1991). Where a match exists, this dimension operates to reinforce the individual’s identity allowing him or her to enjoy positive affectivity and comfort.

The self concept is also central to the heuristics that an individual holds. The formulation of one’s self concept often includes ethnicity. Ethnic identity arises when an individual identifies oneself within a particular ethnic group, and feels comfortable being labelled by others into that group. However, this identity is often complicated by issues of discrimination and pressures to assimilate (Bernal, Saenz & Knight 1991, Phinney 1991). When an individual identifies oneself with a minority ethnicity, such stigmatised groups tend to display higher self esteem compared to those of non stigmatised groups (Crocker & Major 1989, Porter & Washington 1993). The heightened loyalty to the minority status of their ethnicity in ones self concept positively relates to perceptions of stereotypes (Niemann, Jennings, Rozell, Baxter & Sullivan 1994). These stigmatised group attribute their disadvantage to prejudice in society (Lorenzo-Hernandez & Oullette 1998).

The second notion these foundations share is the salience of social categories. It is defined as the prominence of an individual’s group membership, such as a demographic category, in a particular context which influences the perception, behaviour, and influence of another person’s identity as a group member (Oakes 1987, Randel 2002). Because an individual often belongs to multiple categories, which make up the self concept, and the social identity is relational in nature, categories can sometimes contradict themselves, making their relevance situation specific. During an interaction, a particular category may become more important to the individual, whereby it will ‘switch on’, implying an adaptive function of social identity.

The salience of a category is essential for the interaction frameworks and can enhance perceptions of heuristics. Within a given context, the salient category will assist the individual determine the level of similarity and attraction to others and help to establish person environment fit. Visibility of a category, such as gender, can enhance salience to create a negative environment for the token (Spangler, et al. 1978). This negative environment may arise due to the presence of stereotypes, prejudice and bias. In addition, an individual is thought to select the salient characteristic for contexts where it will be favourably evaluated (Alexander & Knight 1971). This third theme, the issue of positive social identity, recognises that individuals are motivated to seek differentiation of their own group from others to achieve positive distinctiveness (Hogg & Abrams 1988). This relates to the original reason for joining the group, the desire to achieve needs satisfaction, to reach goals, and for the validation of attitudes and values. To satisfy these needs, individuals make social comparisons by maximising the distinctiveness between groups, and accentuating the similarities within the group. According to the contact hypothesis, individuals would engage in greater interaction within their groups to accentuate similarities (Kanter 1977), and such comparisons may draw on heuristics. This selective differentiation boosts self esteem, enhances self worth, and increases an individual’s sense of well being (Hogg & Abrams 1988). It follows then, that mutual attraction and esteem flow directly from these motives for positive self esteem linked to the particular social identification (Turner 1984).

These theoretical foundations also suggest that familiarity, the fourth theme, is an underlying motivator. Individuals are attracted to similar others based on the expectation that they would display similar attitudes, behaviours, cognitive processing, and have similar experiences. This ability to describe, predict and explain another individual allows the individual to make inferences based on the understanding of a particular category. Therefore, the extent of familiarity is used to categorise others. However, individuals cannot be familiar with all categories. The inference of differences suggests uncertainty. This influences categorisation of others into categories other than their own. While explanation furthers understanding, understanding exists opposite to uncertainty (Gudykunst 1987).
Unfamiliarity can accentuate perceptions of poor fit and reduce the extent of contact between groups. The lowered levels of interaction can heighten negative stereotypes and perceptual distortions, such as prejudice and ethnocentrism (Miller & Brewer 1984, Gudykunst 1987). Further, unfamiliarity affects communication because of linguistic differences, the lack of knowledge about socially appropriate responses, and there is a perceived lack of shared similarities (Berger 1986). Therefore, the extent of familiarity helps to understand how individuals are categorised. It is important to several of the foundation theories, such as the contact hypothesis, similarity attraction, and stereotyping, because it influences interaction among the different categories.

**Fundamental Overlaps and Boundaries Framework**

Between the three divisions of the foundation theories there are several fundamental overlaps containing contractions that limit the framework. First, all theories and frameworks are essentially group based. They refer to belonging to various group categories and their interactions with others ingroups. This is particularly important for workforce diversity research since the concept of diversity is relationally based. Differences amongst individuals cannot exist in isolation, but must be in relation to others, such as in groups. While categorisation can operate at the individual level as in the self categorisation theory (Hogg 1987, Oakes 1987, Jetton, Spears & Manstead 1996), whereby perception is depersonalised and the individual is regarded as an embodiment of the contextually salient group prototype (Hogg & Hains 1996), the theories of social categorisation, along with identity and comparison, refer to an inter group perspective on group membership. This analysis of groups is regarded as incomplete without acknowledging that in groups cannot exist without outgroups (Hogg & Abrams 1988, Tajfel 1978).

The exception to this group notion is the similarity attraction paradigm, which operates at the interpersonal level (Newcomb 1956). While an individual can belong to various group categories, the interactions based on similarity and attraction is between other individuals, not a group. However, Hogg and Hains (1996) proposed an inter group extension of Hogg’s (1992) social attraction hypothesis, finding that attraction can also operate at the group level. Positive inter group attitude produced the social attraction whereby ingroup members are liked not as unique individuals, but as embodiments of the group (Hogg & Hains 1996). They demonstrated that objective inter group status relations affected subjective social beliefs, which then influenced identification (Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg 1993). It is this identification that directly influences depersonalised social attraction (Hogg & Hains 1996).

Second, the social theories and heuristics make assumptions about categorised groups. Social theories are used to understand the surrounding reality by dividing up the world in an easily digestible manner. In particular, social identity theory is a general theory of the social group that is intended to be relevant to the analysis of large scale social categories, such as ethnic groups, as well as to small interactive groups, such as sports teams (e.g., Turner 1985, Hogg & Abrams 1988). By classifying an individual into a particular group with an exhibited dimension, assumptions are made about behaviour, attitudes and values. Heuristics operate in a similar fashion. These cues act as short cuts to information processing where individuals make assumptions about groups with an observable attribute.

While the interaction frameworks similarly make assumptions about categorised groups, there are some distinctions that limit the overlap across the theories. The person environment fit and similarity attraction paradigm differ slightly in their implicit outcome focus on comfort arising from congruence, rather than on familiarity for the social theories. In contrast, the contact hypothesis differs markedly as it concentrates on providing interaction opportunities to discover similarity or difference beyond the basic social categories. Research on inter group contact focuses on the effect of inter group relations on inter group attitudes and stereotypes (e.g., Miller & Brown 1984, Johnston & Hewstone 1990). This hypothesis encourages positive interactions, unlike the social theories and heuristics, which tend to focus on instantaneously categorising and forming assumptions often leading to negative interactions.

Third, all the foundation theories are concerned with the perception and relationship to another group. While a relational component exists, differences arise in several ways which limit this theoretical foundations framework. First, there is the type of relationship between groups. For example, the social theories focus on grouping according to categories to evaluate the importance or relevance of the categories to the individual’s identity, while the contact hypothesis concentrates on the interaction between two groups to encourage information exchange. Second, the relationship can differ in terms of the levels of groups for comparison. For example, the person environment fit is concerned with determining congruence between an individual and the group context. Third, the relationship between groups can be determined by the response to the different group. Heuristics are very much perceptually based. While stereotypes, prejudice, and bias may arise from experience, when they are applied they act to influence the behaviour and quality of exchange within a given context. The tokenism hypothesis relies on heuristics, since research has shown that the token individual becomes more visible and experiences less privacy and personal space.

The ten theories and concepts included in this foundations framework are not all encapsulating to explain the cognitive processes at work during interactions within a diverse workforce, which then limits its usefulness as a
Researchers of workforce diversity recognise that this field of study is context driven (e.g., Jackson & Joshi 2004). The notion of salience acknowledges that particular categories become switched on in different contexts. A major limitation of this integration framework is that it is not generalisable, particularly across all organisational contexts (Johns 2001), which may exert unique determining factors on the variables in each study (e.g., West & Anderson 1996, Hurley & Hult 1998).

**Practical Implications of the Foundations Framework**

There are several important implications arising from these conclusions. The relative closeness of countries in the Asia Pacific has aided immigration across borders to the extent that workforce diversity is keenly felt within organisations in this region. For example, Australia provides an unique population with which to understand the role of diversity in the workplace. Unusual characteristics include three in every ten Australians were born overseas representing up to 50 countries (ABS 2006). While the dominant presence is of an Anglo Celtic colonial past, waves of immigration from around the world have established large Italian, Greek, and Asian communities. Further, a history of racially discriminatory policies, such as the White Australia Policy and the forcible separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, commonly referred to as the Stolen Generation, contribute to the racial climate. Finally, while Australia belongs to the Asia Pacific region geographic isolation separates it from its surrounding Asian neighbours, and other dominant Anglo nations. Consequently, Australia's extensive multiculturalism would create several important practical implications for the workplace.

This paper has highlighted, heuristics such as stereotypes, bias and prejudice can influence how people interact and regard each other. For example, stereotyping has been found to affect job applicant evaluations of women (Dipboye, Fromkin & Wiback 1975), racial minorities (Parsons & Liden 1984), and older workers (Singer & Sewell 1989) compared to similarly qualified white males. They can restrict communication patterns, which can further reinforce stereotypical communication (Hewstone & Giles 1986). In particular, this has practical implications for decision making in organisations, such as for recruitment and selection. Research has demonstrated that recruitment and selection procedures are subject to bias arising from employing those that are similar to the recruiter (Jackson, Brett, Sessa, Cooper, Julin & Peyronnin 1991). Organisations will need to train managers to become aware of and navigate through the presence of heuristics, bias, and prejudice in their decision making. While organisations will maintain that their human resource decisions are objective and that they strictly adhere to their anti discrimination policies and the country’s law, research has consistently demonstrated the role of these information processing short cuts in these contexts (Canny 2004, Vázquez-Cupeiro & Elston 2006).

Process losses arising from poor communications can arise in multicultural contexts. Language differences and accented speech are common barriers to communication in the Asia Pacific region. While English is predominantly spoken by 79 per cent of the Australian population, there are over 60 other languages spoken in this country (ABS 2006). The most common languages in Australia other than English are Italian, Greek, Cantonese, Arabic, and Mandarin (ABS 2006). Language and accent barriers can affect understanding resulting in poor quality of member exchanges, and consequently, information loss. This can partly be explained by team members feeling compelled to communicate less frequently because they may not feel confident about their communication skills. Some individuals who are not native speakers of English may feel that they are not fully articulate and feel embarrassed about their accent, which clearly marks them as different from others in the workplace. This could have a detrimental effect on their psychological safety and limit their desire to fully participate in team activities such as suggesting solutions to problems. Multicultural work groups have been found to suffer from the inability to communicate and lack of cohesion (Adler 1986).

Language and accent barriers can also affect the perceived relative status of the employee, and the intelligence and ability of the employee to perform the job, which further contribute to discrimination. There is a need to recognise the difficulties encountered in diverse cultural environments (Horan 1976). Research has shown that providing intercultural communication training to staff can improve intercultural and diversity awareness (Krapels & Davis 2000). Therefore, managers and staff are likely to benefit from training which facilitates more effective and productive communications in day to day exchanges with special focus on diversity issues.

The extent of communication quality and frequency can also generate conflict within diverse groups. The level of communication frequency could indicate that conflict in the group results in an abundance of meetings and memos that detract from the task at hand (Smith, et al. 1994). This inefficient use of time, effort and resources can reduce performance. However, teams may be communicating frequently in an attempt to reduce and resolve the conflict (Applbbaum, Anatol, Hays, Jenson, Porter & Handel 1973). Multiracial groups have been strongly associated with emotional conflict, while being moderated by task routineness and group longevity (Pelled, et al. 1999).
Furthermore, similar groups have been found to be prone to frequent disagreements on expectations and attitudinal problems, such as mistrust (Adler 1986).

Strategies to reduce the process loss arising from conflict can be addressed though effective conflict resolution and negotiation skills training (Stevahn 2004). Research in the intercultural context indicates that conflict training not only enables individuals to learn, use, and develop more positive attitudes toward conflict resolution, it also enhances performance (Martin & Chapel 1999, Ramarajan, Bezrukova, Jehn, Euwema & Kop 2004). Such training has potential to assist in alleviating any tensions which may arise from perceived and actual discrimination. Furthermore, organisations are accountable to ensure sound procedures are in place to deal with any workplace complaints that may arise.

Finally, opportunities for informal social interaction amongst staff and access to communication networks are likely to facilitate greater contact with the culturally diverse workforce to lower any barriers arising from perceived and actual differences. Research has demonstrated that informal social interaction has the potential to influence communication and performance (Bell, Cheney & Mayo 1972). For example, the configuration of office space can increase contact between staff. Ornstein (1989) found that redesigned office space allowed for improved communication, improved information flow, less time spent on the telephone, doing paperwork, and in meetings, while more time was spent in face to face conversations, which led directly to increased productivity. Consequently, strategies that increased informal contact amongst staff can ease collaborations within the workplace.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this paper has been to propose the holistic framework of the underlying foundations applied in diversity research. By incorporating ten important theories and concepts, it extended beyond past attempts, whether individually or in bundles, to explain the behaviour of individuals in diverse workforce contexts. This combination produced a more cogent and comprehensive understanding of the cognitive processes that would arise during exchanges.

First, this paper highlighted how individuals draw on psychology based social theories to develop their identity, categorise others, and compare themselves. This implies that individuals do not operate in isolation, but act within a social context in which differences are determined. Second, the interaction frameworks explained how individuals would act and react as a consequence of these social theories. They imply that the extent individuals perceive similarity and dissimilarity determines their attraction or repulsion, experience of fit and visibility, as well as influencing the level of contact between groups. Third, due to the vast quantities of information that individuals are subjected to individuals formulate heuristics. The implication for the social and interaction processes is that they would not necessarily be free from the influence of stereotypes, prejudice, and bias.

Furthermore, this framework draws out three important themes. Individuals develop their self concept and the context triggers salience of particular categories to satisfy the need for a positive identity. A major implication of this framework is that the presence of these overlapping themes is fundamental to understanding of diversity relations. Finally, while the ten theories and concepts can be broadly classified into social theories, interaction frameworks, and heuristics, each one is still separate and distinct from the others. Each contributes significantly to the understanding of diversity relations. Therefore, diversity research cannot be considered from an unidimensional perspective. This combination of theories and concepts provides a more cogent and comprehensive perspective in which to understand relations between diverse individuals.

While this paper has presented a theoretical framework integrating several popular theories and concepts applied within the workforce diversity field, there are opportunities for the measurement of the framework. Future research could include empirically testing the framework since the theories and concepts are well established and have been operationalised for measurement. This paper introduced this foundations framework to present a more holistic picture to better understand why individuals within a diverse work setting interact in the way they do. The challenge for the future is to develop a greater understanding of diversity relations, not just from an outcomes perspective, but by further identifying the underlying drivers to individual behaviour.

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