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CALLING IN THE SOUTHPAW: LEFT-HANDEDNESS AND GROUP DIVERSITY

In search of group performance and creativity, North American workplaces are experiencing more work teams and groups as well as increased diversity (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). With 33 million left-handed North Americans (Coren, 1992) this minority group should not continue to be ignored. It is clear that much research has already investigated the demographic effect of gender, age, race, and tenure diversity (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998; Joshi & Roh, 2009). Common lists of 'surface-level' demographic diversity include the characteristics of age, gender, race, and nationality (Mohammed & Angell, 2004; Kearney, Gebert & Voelpel, 2009). This seemingly comprehensive list of diversity variables may lead some researchers to believe that the demographic approach to group diversity has been fully explored. However, one visible minority group has been completely omitted from this research.

Investigating ways organizations can utilize employee diversity and turn it into an asset (Kearney et al, 2009), this study introduces the idea that handedness should be included in team composition decisions. Left-handed diversity may be especially valuable as it may be a difference that is distributed across all demographic team composition variables. Firmly falling into the relation-oriented aspects of diversity (Joshi & Roh, 2009) being left handed is cognitively accessible, pervasive, and immutable. Left-handed individuals possess a clear, visible difference with the other group members (who are right-handed). The experience of being left-handed is explored using neurological, cultural, psychological, and physical perspectives.

It is not the purpose of this study to discuss the potential causes of handedness, but to introduce handedness as a consideration for team composition and design. After all, "If you are left-handed you are discriminated against and at a definite disadvantage" (Trotter, 1974, p. 220). To that end, the issue of handedness within group diversity and team composition is considered with respect to creativity, groupthink, task conflict, minority viewpoints, and as a scarce resource. Though left-handedness may not be the typical conception of team composition diversity, perhaps with increased organizational attention, left-handed employees can gain a fresh start, without prejudice and discrimination. In doing so, left-handed employees may actually start being valued for the unique and creative ideas and perspectives they bring to the organization.