

Relationship Between Versatility and Diversity Among Leaders

OVERVIEW In a study of 143 managers at a large multinational defense contractor, we found that managers with high Versatility were rated significantly more effective at promoting diversity and inclusiveness (D&I) than managers with lower Versatility. Importantly, these evaluations came from the managers' direct reports, those in the best position to determine D&I behaviors.

Managers with high Versatility were more likely to engage in pro-diversity behaviors, such as actively trying to understand others' experiences and perspectives, recognizing employees' contributions, fostering a welcoming environment for the team, and valuing different opinions. Highly Versatile managers were rated up to 17% more effective on these behaviors than low Versatile managers.

We also found that SOCIAL STYLESM, a measure of a person's characteristic behavioral style, has virtually no relationship to D&I practices. In fact, we discovered that Versatility accounted for 21% of the variance in D&I practices, whereas SOCIAL STYLE did not account for any of the variance. Since Versatility can be learned and practiced, this means that any manager can learn to behave with higher Versatility, and this is likely to impact D&I practices, among other performance outcomes.



What is Diversity and Inclusiveness?

Most large organizations have made strides to increase diversity in their workforces, and many implement “diversity training” to help their leaders and employees be more aware of the issues faced by a diverse workforce. According to an article in “Training Magazine” (Dolezalek, 2008), the most effective training programs treat diversity as an inclusive process, rather than excluding people who don’t meet the traditional definitions of a diverse person. Essentially, diversity encompasses any dimension that differentiates a person or group from others. This definition includes everyone. Since we are all different from one another, we all contribute our own unique perspectives and abilities. And perhaps the most important distinction among individuals is their unique personalities and behavioral styles.

What is Versatility?

Closely related to the concept of emotional intelligence (EQ), Versatility is a measure of interpersonal effectiveness. It indicates a person’s ability to interact effectively and gain support of co-workers and others, regardless of differences in behavioral style. Research shows that Versatility is highly related to managers’ effectiveness, and has even been shown to impact the salaries of managers (TRACOM, 2005). Other research has shown that emotionally intelligent managers develop more attachment to their organizations, are more committed to their careers, and have greater job satisfaction (Carneli, 2003).



Study Overview

Participants were 143 managers out of 232 invited (62% response rate) from the global training and learning division of a large multinational corporation. This organization has an active D&I process that advises recruitment, hiring, development, community outreach, and multiple learning and development programs.

Each manager had at least three direct reports who were also solicited to participate as raters of their manager's Versatility and D&I practices. Participation for managers and their direct reports was voluntary.

Versatility Measure

Versatility was measured using TRACOM's Multi-Rater SOCIAL STYLE & Enhanced Versatility Profile. This measure consists of 88 items rated on a five-point agreement scale, and measures the two factors that make up SOCIAL STYLE (Assertiveness and Responsiveness) and Versatility. Versatility scores range from low to high. In ascending order from low to high, Versatility positions are labeled "W," "X," "Y" and "Z." The lowest 25th percentile of scores are "W," while the highest 25th percentile are "Z."

Versatility scores were calculated for each manager based on the averaged ratings of his or her direct reports. Most managers had Versatility above the 50th percentile. The table to the right demonstrates the breakdown of numbers and percentages.

VERSATILITY CATEGORY	NUMBER	PERCENT
W	20	14%
X	31	22%
Y	45	31%
Z	47	33%
TOTAL	143	100%

Diversity Measure

Concurrent with the Versatility assessment, each manager's direct reports also completed a 38-item D&I survey. This survey was developed for this study, tailored to the organization's D&I practices. It included items that measured individual manager behaviors, the impact that D&I practices have on the department and organization, and awareness of D&I initiatives. Each item was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The D&I survey items are listed in the Appendix.

Results

We tested the data to answer three questions:

1. Is Versatility related to D&I practices?
2. Is there a meaningful difference in D&I practices between managers with lower Versatility and managers with higher Versatility?
3. To what extent can Versatility and SOCIAL STYLE predict D&I practices?

Relationship between Versatility and D&I Practices

Versatility was positively and significantly correlated with 35 of the 38 D&I items, meaning that managers with high Versatility received higher ratings on these measures. Table 1 in the Appendix shows each of the D&I items along with its correlation with Versatility and percent improvement from low (W) to high (Z) Versatility.

Versatility was highly related to a number of D&I practices. What is interesting about these results is that the highest correlations (denoted by “r”) were found with very specific behaviors that are directly under the control of managers, such as “my manager tries to understand others’ experiences from their perspective” ($r = .55$) and “my manager treats me with respect” ($r = .54$). Although still significant, lower correlations were found between Versatility and aspects of D&I that are less directly influenced by a manager’s specific behaviors, such as “the diversity and inclusion mission is directly linked to our division’s strategic imperatives or business results” ($r = .23$) and “this organization is recognized outside of the company for its community outreach efforts” ($r = .18$). This indicates that employees see a strong relationship between their manager’s interpersonal effectiveness (Versatility) and their D&I behaviors, and these behaviors have a cascading effect on beliefs about D&I that are less directly under the influence of any individual manager.

To put these correlations into context, it’s helpful to examine some correlations among variables that are commonly understood by most people (Meyer and colleagues, 2001):

- Taking aspirin daily and reduced risk of death by heart attack ($r = .02$)
- Antihistamine use and reduced runny nose and sneezing ($r = .11$)
- SAT scores and subsequent college GPA ($r = .20$)
- Effect of alcohol on aggressive behavior ($r = .23$)
- Relationship between weight and height among U.S. adults ($r = .44$)

Thus the correlations of Versatility with D&I practices are strong and very meaningful.

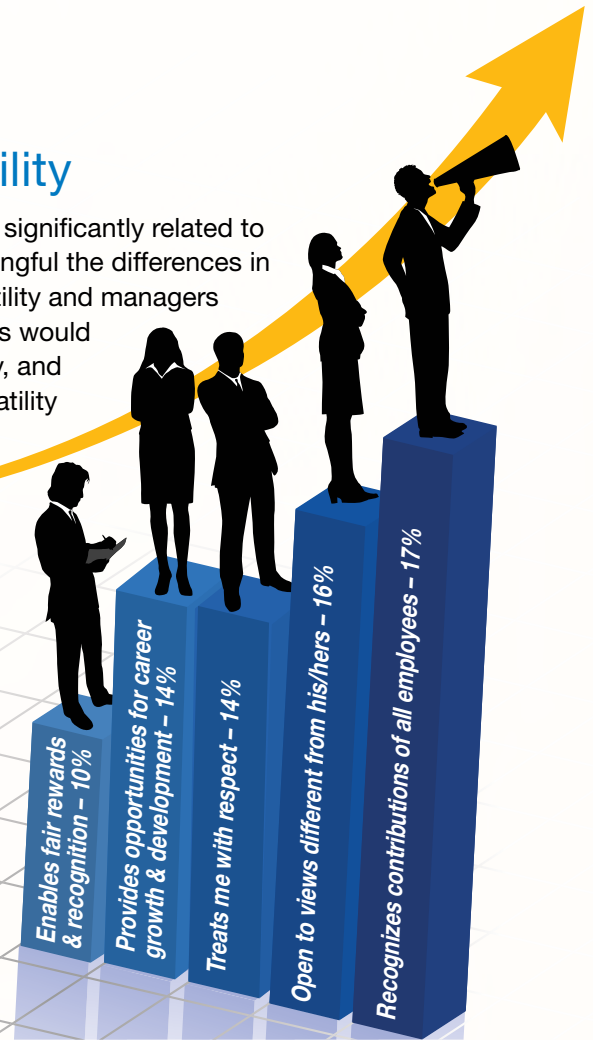


Differences in D&I Results between Managers with High and Low Versatility

The correlations showed that Versatility is positively and significantly related to D&I practices. The next step was to examine how meaningful the differences in D&I practices were between managers with lower Versatility and managers with higher Versatility. Our hypothesis was that managers would differ significantly depending on their Versatility category, and this hypothesis was supported. We found that high Versatility managers did in fact measurably outperform low Versatility managers on D&I practices.

To test these differences, we conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA). We calculated an average score across the 38 D&I items, and examined differences between low and high Versatility managers on this score. The ANOVA found significant differences between managers with “W” Versatility and managers in the upper half of Versatility, those scoring “Y” or “Z”. We also found that the difference in D&I scores between “X” and “Z” Versatility was significant (all mean differences were significant at the .05 level).

This indicates that there is a noticeable difference in the D&I practices between lower Versatility and higher Versatility managers. A plot showing the difference between low and high Versatility managers on the average D&I score is included in the Appendix.



Versatility Improves D&I Behavior—Managers with high Versatility outperform low Versatility managers.

Versatility Predicts D&I Practices

Our third hypothesis was that Versatility could, to a certain extent, predict D&I practices. We used the average D&I score to test this hypothesis. The correlation between Versatility and the average D&I score was large and statistically significant ($r = .47$), while it had a much smaller and insignificant relationship with Assertiveness ($r = -.01$) and Responsiveness ($r = .06$). Therefore we had reason to believe that Versatility could predict D&I practices while the behaviors that underlay SOCIAL STYLE could not.

We used multiple regression analysis to test how well Versatility predicted D&I practices. We found that Versatility accounted for 21% of the variance in D&I practices. This is comparable to the influence that measures such as intelligence, education or personality have on job performance. Assertiveness and Responsiveness were included in the regression analysis but did not meaningfully predict D&I practices. We should note that the regression analysis only included the three variables of Versatility, Assertiveness, and Responsiveness, because these were the only three variables we measured in this study. If we had accounted for other relevant variables such as age, years of tenure with the organization, or other demographic variables, this could have affected the results somewhat, though it is likely that Versatility would still have been a significant predictor.

Summary

This research study has shown that Versatility is a strong indicator of diversity and inclusion practices among a group of managers. Managers with high Versatility engage in personal behaviors that contribute to a diverse and inclusive team environment. Further, there are significant and noticeable differences in the D&I practices of managers with lower Versatility and those with higher Versatility. Importantly, SOCIAL STYLE is not related to D&I practices, indicating that people of any Style can be effective promoters of diversity and inclusion, and learning and practicing Versatility behaviors can impact this.



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About the Author

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Dr. Casey Mulqueen oversees the research and development of TRACOM's various assessment instruments and products. He has experience developing a wide variety of assessments such as personality inventories, 360-degree feedback programs, performance appraisal systems, and employee opinion surveys. His expertise in cross-cultural assessment and norming has helped ensure that TRACOM's global surveys are valid and reliable throughout the world. He is a writer who has authored a variety of materials including books, book chapters, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Casey has an M.S. in clinical psychology and a Ph.D. in industrial/organizational psychology.

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Appendix

Table 1 - D&I Correlation with Versatility and Percent Gain from Low to High Versatility

D&I Item	Correlation with Versatility	Percent Gain from W to Z
My manager fosters a welcoming environment for the team.	.60**	16%
My manager recognizes the contributions of all employees.	.56**	17%
My manager tries to understand others' experiences from their perspective.	.55**	18%
My manager is open to being persuaded by people who view things differently from him or her.	.55**	16%
My manager values the different opinions of employees.	.54**	15%
My manager treats me with respect.	.54**	14%
The people in my department feel supported and included.	.47**	15%
In my department, new team members feel welcomed and encouraged.	.40**	11%
My manager encourages employees to be involved in diversity and inclusion events.	.39**	13%
My manager communicates the measurable impacts that diversity and inclusion practices have on our business.	.35**	12%
I have opportunities for career growth and development within this organization.	.34**	14%
I have access to a mentoring program within this organization.	.34**	13%
In my department, a buddy or mentoring system is effectively utilized.	.32**	13%
Rewards and recognition is fair (note: this is distinct from the annual performance management review).	.32**	10%
The people in my department treat one another with respect.	.32**	9%
I have access to training programs to enhance my skills and abilities.	.29**	12%
My department's hiring practices are aligned with this organization's diversity and inclusion mission.	.28**	10%
The distribution of rewards and recognition is appropriately balanced among individuals and teams.	.27**	10%
This division's rewards and recognition systems are inclusive of all locations (note: this is distinct from the annual performance management review).	.26**	9%
My manager has encouraged me to attend diversity and inclusion training.	.26**	8%
The people in my department value my ideas and opinions.	.26**	7%
In my department, I have seen how our diversity and inclusion practices results in better ideas and solutions to problems.	.26**	8%
The diversity and inclusion practices in my department influence people to stay with the organization.	.25**	9%
In my department, we have an active internship program.	.23**	12%
At this division, I have seen evidence that diverse and inclusive teams generate more innovative ideas and solutions than teams that are less diverse and/or inclusive.	.23**	7%

Appendix

Table 1 - D&I Correlation with Versatility and Percent Gain from Low to High Versatility (continued)

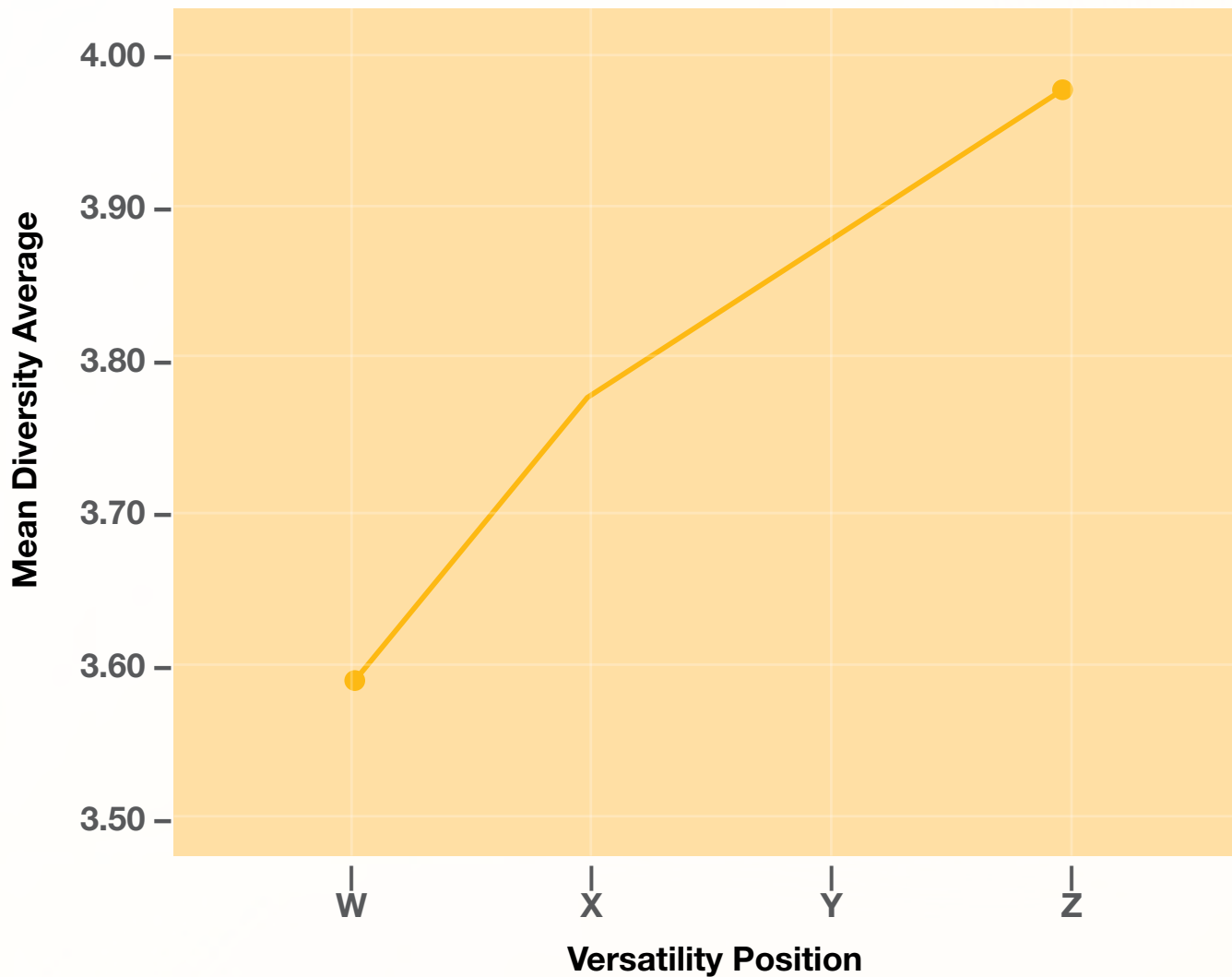
D&I Item	Correlation with Versatility	Percent Gain from W to Z
The diversity and inclusion mission is directly linked to this division's strategic imperatives or business results.	.23**	8%
I am offered meaningful work assignments and opportunities.	.22**	6%
People in my department are actively engaged in diverse and/or inclusive activities.	.21*	7%
I understand the value that the Diversity Council brings to this division.	.21*	8%
The purposes of the Diversity Council have been communicated to me.	.20*	7%
At this division, I have seen evidence that diverse and inclusive teams deliver greater customer experiences than teams that are less diverse and/or inclusive.	.20*	6%
I understand the organization's inclusion mission.	.20*	7%
In my department, we have people with diverse talents and perspectives.	.19*	4%
This organization is recognized outside of the company for its community outreach efforts.	.18*	7%
I am aware that metrics are utilized to measure the impacts of diversity and inclusion practices.	.17*	7%
At this organization, I have seen evidence that diverse and inclusive teams are more successful at generating new business than teams that are less diverse and/or inclusive.	.14	4%
I am aware of the Diversity Council.	.14	7%
This organization is recognized outside of the company as an employer of choice for its diversity and inclusion practices.	.10	3%

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

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

Appendix

Relationship between Versatility and Average Diversity Score





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