



# Does Cooperative Conflict Management mediate the relationship between Diversity Appreciation and Self-Efficacy for Teamwork with Dissimilar Team-mates?



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## Abstract

This research study examines the mediating influence of a problem-solving conflict style (PSCMS) on the relationship between diversity appreciation (DA) and self-efficacy for teamwork with team-mates who are perceived as dissimilar (SEDТ). One hundred and ninety-six undergraduate business management students completed self-assessment measures of DA and SEDТ, and identified a close associate who completed an observer version of the Dutch conflict management style scale. Product moment correlations were used to examine the hypothesized relationships between SEDТ and both DA and PSCMS, and both the Hayes process and the Sobel test were used to test the hypothesis that PSCMS mediates the relationship between DA and SEDТ. SEDТ was significantly correlated with both DA ( $r = 0.34, p < 0.01$ ) and PSCMS ( $r = 0.43, p < 0.01$ ). DA was significantly correlated with PSCMS ( $r = 0.37, p < 0.01$ ). Both the Hayes process and Sobel test ( $Z = 3.91, p < 0.001$ ) confirmed that PSCMS partially mediated the relationship between DA and SEDТ. Educators and practitioners need to be aware of the influence of DA and PSCMS on SEDТ. Development activities that promote both diversity appreciation and use of a problem-solving conflict management style should help improve team member confidence in their ability to work with team-mates who they perceive as significantly different from themselves. This is the first study to examine the relationships between DA, PSCMS and SEDТ. The results of this study highlight the importance of promoting both diversity appreciation and a problem-solving conflict management style as part of the process of helping team members develop confidence in their ability to successfully work with team-mates who they perceive as dissimilar.

**Keywords:** Conflict Management; Cooperative Conflict Management Style; Diversity Appreciation; Attitude toward Diversity; Teamwork; Self-Efficacy; Self-Efficacy for Teamwork

**Abbreviations:** CEM: Categorization-Elaboration Model; DA: Diversity Appreciation; DIPN: Diversity-Inclusion-Performance Network of Relationships; PSCMS: Problem-Solving Conflict Style; ODT: Optimal Distinctiveness Theory

## Introduction

Strategic commitments to diversity, inclusion and teamwork within organizations continues to expand [1]. This has intensified research on the performance of diverse teams which has produced mixed results, suggesting that the diversity-inclusion-performance network of relationships (DIPN) has not been sufficiently specified [2-5]. The dominant theoretical model of the diversity-performance relationship is the Categorization-Elaboration Model (CEM) [6]. The CEM explains the mixed research results by means of two independent but interacting

processes. Diversity constrains dysfunctional majority influences and supports information elaboration which improves decision-making (process 1) [6-9]. Diversity may also encourage social categorization, in-out group perceptions, and dysfunctional team dynamics arising from interpersonal resistance, rejection, and exclusion (process 2) [6,9,10-12]. Optimal distinctiveness theory (ODT) suggests that group participation is motivated by needs for engagement with supportive groups that can provide and reinforce preferred identities without loss of desired individuation [13-16].

Participation therefore involves decisions about the potential of group members and groups to satisfy needs for support, identity, and individuation, which helps determine the attractiveness of the group. Preference for groups that appear to possess greater likelihood of being supportive and reinforcing preferred identities makes similarity both an attractive feature and influential within the dynamics of group attachment, identification, commitment, functioning and performance [17-19].

Identifying a model of the diversity-inclusion-performance network that reliably predicts performance depends on identifying key mediating and moderating variables within both of the core processes [6,9,20-23]. Identifying mediating and moderating influences within process 1 (diversity-information elaboration process) should help address concerns that the diversity-information elaboration relationship is overly simplistic. Research confirms that workgroup diversity is often associated with tension and conflict that can disrupt communication and information sharing [24]. Variables like conflict management and team reflection appear to assist in establishing a more reliable diversity-information elaboration process [25,26].

Sources of mediation and moderation within process 2 (experience of differences) include both salience of differences and attitudes toward diversity [10,27]. The salience perspective suggests that the extent to which differences are noticed, focused on, and influential within the perceptual process varies among individuals and groups, which may reveal different diversity-inclusion-performance relationships at different levels of salience [28,29]. Individuals and groups that are less attentive to differences that typically get entangled within social resistance processes may be less likely to introduce social impediments into the diversity-inclusion-performance system [10,30]. Diversity appreciation refers to the influence of attitudes toward diversity on experiences, orientations, and responses to differences [27]. Research on positive attitudes toward diversity suggests that diversity appreciation supports improved functioning of the diversity-inclusion-performance network within both core processes [22,27]. Diversity appreciation may assist the diversity-information elaboration process via improved engagement and knowledge sharing [31], and may also constrain or prevent socially disruptive experiences of differences and promote more collaborative and productive relationships [32,33]. Attitudes towards diversity, and in particular appreciation of diversity, is an important variable whose determinants and influences require further research [27].

Research on team diversity, conflict and performance suggests that the translation of conflict into improved performance is assisted by team members with pro-diversity attitudes [34,35] and the use of a cooperative conflict management approach [36-38]. This suggests that team members with pro-diversity attitudes

and cooperative conflict management approaches should be more confident about their ability to perform in diverse teams. A search of the popular research publication databases produced no research on the relationship between pro-diversity attitudes, conflict management styles and self-efficacy for teamwork. This study examines the mediating influence of problem-solving oriented conflict management on the relationship between diversity appreciation and self-efficacy for teamwork with team-mates who are perceived as different from oneself.

### Variables

#### Dependent Variable – Self-Efficacy for Teamwork

Social cognitive theory [39] suggests that cognitive processing of social information influences human performance. Beliefs about one's ability to mobilize sufficient effort, cognitive resources, and the behavioral strategies necessary for successful task completion, are important determinants of performance and satisfaction [40]. Self-efficacy is generally defined as the perceived capacity to perform tasks [41], and is developed through mastery experiences, exposure to performance modeling, social persuasion, and judgements about performance readiness [42-44]. Positive or negative efficacy information is generated by evaluating task requirements, related personal experiences, and relevant personal and situational resources and constraints [45]. Numerous studies have confirmed self-efficacy as a valid predictor of satisfaction, effort, persistence, and performance across a wide range of tasks [45-48]. Meta-analysis of the efficacy-performance relationship suggests that efficacy is one of the better general predictors of performance [49,50].

Development and measurement of the self-efficacy construct has included global, domain, and task specific dimensions suggesting that efficacy assessments occur at different levels of specificity [51-53]. The inclusion of domain and task specific efficacy has given risen to numerous task and contextually oriented forms of efficacy, like efficacy for teaching [54], career decision making [53], smoking cessation [55] and teamwork [56-59]. The expanding use of teams within the workplace and higher education has increased the importance of researching the key determinants of team performance, including various forms of team related efficacies [60,61]. Research on student and organizational teams has mostly used the aggregation of team member general self-efficacy or efficacy beliefs about team performance as a measure of team efficacy (potency) [62]. Research suggests that team efficacy (potency) is an important determinant of student and organizational team performance [63,64], and a mediator of the team inputs-performance relationship [65]. Multiple research studies conducted by Coetzer [66-69] identified relationships between self-efficacy for teamwork and a variety of individual level variables like task attentiveness, critical thinking, cooperative conflict management, and role stress. This suggests that self-

efficacy for teamwork is an important part of the efficacies that influence both team member and team performance.

Team related efficacies continue to be contextualized as new forms of teamwork emerge like efficacy for technology mediated teamwork [70]. The increasing emphasis on teams with diverse members combined with the influence of team related efficacies supports further contextualization of self-efficacy for teamwork with an emphasis on teamwork with team-mates who are perceived as significantly different from oneself. This research study examines the influence of both diversity appreciation and a problem-solving conflict management style on self-efficacy for teamwork with team-mates who are perceived as significantly different from oneself.

### **Independent variable – Diversity Appreciation**

Attitude toward diversity is generally defined as beliefs about the value of diversity [17]. Research has confirmed that people possess differing attitudes and preferences regarding the dissimilarity of others that influences their social behavior [71-73]. Research by Miville et al. [74] described a positive attitude toward diversity as “an attitude toward all other persons that is inclusive yet differentiating in that similarities and differences are both recognized and accepted; the shared experience of being human results in a sense of connectedness with people and is associated with a plurality or diversity of interactions with others (p. 252).” Attitudes are comprised of cognitive, affective, and behavioral intention components [75]. The cognitive component of attitude toward diversity refers to the recognition, acceptance and valuing of similarities and differences. Behavioral intention is associated with seeking diverse interactions, whereas the affective component refers to the sense of connection with diverse others arising from the shared experience of being human. Research supports these components of diversity appreciation which have been labeled as relativistic appreciation, diversity of contact, and sense of connection with others who are different (comfort with differences) [76,77]. Research on pro-diversity attitudes have identified a positive effect on social integration [32,78], information elaboration [33], creativity [27], prevention of non-productive in-out group perceptions [33] and team performance [6,27,33].

### **Meditating Variable – Problem-Solving Conflict Management Approach**

Conflict is defined as incompatible actions or states, where one person’s actions or state is experienced as interfering with the preferences of others [79]. Conflicts occur in a variety of contexts including both competitive and cooperative situations [80], and there are various types of conflict including both task and relationship conflict [81]. Conflict participants have a variety of orientations toward the conflict management process, including avoidant, submissive, aggressive, and cooperative approaches [82]. Conflict management orientations are defined as consistent

cognitive and behavioral patterns used to frame and manage conflicts [81,83,84]. The identification of conflict management orientations emerged out of dual concern theory [85,86] and the theory of cooperation and conflict [87]. These theories argue that conflict management is a function of high or low concern for self, combined with high or low concern for others. High concern for self and others produces a problem-solving style which involves seeking outcomes that satisfy the needs for both parties as much as possible (win-win). An intermediate concern for self and others produces a compromising style which involves making matching concessions to reach agreement. The compromising style has been referred to as half-hearted problem solving [86].

Research suggests that people have a preferred or default conflict management style [88] which they can adapt depending on both the demands of the situation and their preferences [89]. The term style is used when referring to the general behavioral preference across situations, whereas the term approach refers to a conflict style profile (particular levels and proportions of problem-solving, compromising, yielding, forcing and avoiding) used in a particular situation or type of situation. Conflict management orientation (style and approach) has a significant influence on performance at the individual, relational and team levels [81,85,90-96]. Problem solving, and to a lesser extent compromising, are traditionally viewed as cooperative problem-solving styles [97]. Research supports the view that cooperative approaches capture most of the benefits that can be derived from conflict [97,98] and is positively associated with team performance [99,100].

The type of expectations, conflict management approaches, and conflict outcomes that occur within team conflicts, partly depends on the whether the participants perceive each other’s goals and posture as cooperative or competitive [79]. Co-operative approaches typically arise when those involved believe that the other party is not deliberately and unjustifiably engaging in blocking actions, and that an opportunity for a win-win solution is available [101,102]. Competitive approaches are more likely when the participants believe that the other party is intentionally and unfairly frustrating them, and the only possible outcome is win-lose [88,101,103]. The choice of how to frame the conflict and which conflict management approach to take impacts team functioning and effectiveness. Suspicious and competitive approaches typically elicit similar responses which reinforce win-lose beliefs [87], and once initiated, are hard to reverse [103]. Cooperative approaches typically elicit more positive responses, and reinforce beliefs that some degree of compatibility exists within each person’s goals. This supports the search for win-win outcomes [79]. Research by Tjosvold, Poon & Yu (2005) supports an association between cooperative conflict management and team effectiveness.

Research on team diversity, conflict and performance suggests that diversity influences performance via both task

and relationship (emotional) conflict processes [104]. Task conflict refers to disagreement about task issues among people of different functional backgrounds which can be a source of useful information elaboration that supports improved performance on complex cognitive tasks [105]. Relationship (emotional) conflict refers to interpersonal conflict arising from either negative stereotyping or competitive responses to similar others [98,104]. Relationship conflict is mostly viewed as a constraint on performance [36]. Translating diversity-based team conflict into performance or preventing diversity-based conflict from undermining performance is assisted by team members with pro-diversity attitudes [34,35] and the use of a cooperative conflict management orientation [36-38]. This suggests that team members with pro-diversity attitudes and cooperative conflict management styles should be more confident about their ability to perform in diverse teams. Research by Coetzer, Trimble [68] confirmed a relationship between cooperative conflict management styles and general self-efficacy for teamwork [68].

### Hypotheses

The general proposition guiding this research is that SEDT is positively related to both DA and PSCMS, DA is positively related to PSCMS, and PSCMS mediates the relationship between DA and SETDTM. This expands the specification and examination of the categorization-elaboration model (CEM) by investigating the influence of diversity appreciation on important performance related variables like team efficacies, and the influence of cooperative conflict management.

Engagement with increasingly diverse team-mates within both higher education and the workplace has elevated the importance of personal experiences and responses to diversity. People who have more positive attitudes and expectations regarding their engagements with others in their academic and work life, who they perceive as significantly different from themselves, are more likely to have productive experiences of team diversity. A positive orientation is derived from the suspension of fears often generated by uncertainty, combined with orienting oneself toward engagement with different others as if some of the requirements for trust have already been established. This encourages more cooperative opening gestures which is more likely to elicit similar responses producing a more cooperative culture of engagement. Participants with more pro-diversity attitudes are therefore more likely to perceive themselves as ready to perform within diverse teams. This should produce greater personal confidence in successfully working with team-mates they experience as significantly different from themselves.

**Hypothesis 1: Diversity appreciation is positively associated with self-efficacy for teamwork with team-mates who are perceived as significantly different from oneself**

Problem solving, and to a lesser extent compromising, are traditionally viewed as cooperative problem-solving styles that capture most of the benefits derived from conflict [97,98] and

help support team performance [99,100]. Research conducted by Coetzer & Trimble [68] confirms a positive association between cooperative conflict management styles and general self-efficacy for teamwork. Team members who encourage everyone to express their perceptions, experiences and preferences; actively work to understand the perspective and preferences of others, and seek creative ways to maximize satisfaction of different preferences (win-win), including their own, are more likely to be confident in their ability to work in socially diverse settings.

**Hypothesis 2: Problem-solving conflict management style is positively associated with self-efficacy for teamwork with team-mates who are perceived as significantly different from oneself**

People with pro-diversity attitudes are more likely to perceive potential value in differences and are more likely to actively identify and acknowledge, seek to understand, and integrate differences into the process of problem-solving. As a result, they are more likely to encourage everyone to express their perspective and preferences, actively work to understand the perspective and preferences of others, and seek creative ways to maximize satisfaction of different preferences (win-win)

**Hypothesis 3: Diversity appreciation is positively associated with a problem-solving conflict management style**

As suggested previously, team members with pro-diversity attitudes are more likely to use a problem-solving conflict management approach and feel confident about working in teams with team-mates perceived as different, and a problem-solving conflict management approach is more likely to promote confidence in working in diverse teams. This suggests that a problem-solving conflict management approach is likely to mediate the relationship between diversity appreciation and confidence in working in teams with team-mates who are perceived as significantly different from oneself.

**Hypothesis 4: Problem-solving conflict management style mediates the relationship between diversity appreciation and self-efficacy for teamwork with team-mates who are perceived as significantly different from oneself**

### Subjects and Methods

#### Sample

The subjects were one hundred and ninety-six undergraduate business students attending a public university in the North-Western United States. The average age of the subjects was 22.09 (low = 18, high = 49), and 52 % identified as male and 48% as female. Each subject completed a self-assessment of diversity appreciation and self-efficacy for teamwork under conditions of anonymity. Procedures recommended by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff [106] for addressing common method bias were used by administering the surveys at different times, generating psychological separation by associating them with different components and activities within the course, and making use



of different scale types. Each subject was also asked to identify someone who knew them well and would be willing to complete an honest assessment of their conflict management style. The identified observers completed an online version of the conflict management style measure developed and validated by De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Klumer, Nauta [82]. This provided additional protection against single source and common method bias.

### Measures

**Appreciation of Diversity.** The short form of the Universality-Diversity Scale (M-GUDS-S) developed by Feurtes et al. [76] and further validated by Kottke [77] was used to measure appreciation of diversity. The M-GUDS-S has been validated across multiple cultures [107]. The original and long form of the scale was developed and validated by Miville et al. [74], and measures the dimensions of diversity of contact, relativistic appreciation, and sense of connection (comfort with differences). Diversity of contact assesses interest in engaging and learning about people who are different, whereas relativistic appreciation assesses attitudes toward differences and similarities. Sense of connection and comfort with differences assesses discomfort in relating to people who are different. The Universality-Diversity Scale has been associated with individual level variables like identity formation, empathy, dogmatism; and team-oriented variables like aptitude for teamwork and interest in teamwork [108]. The M-GUDS-S contains 15 items with 5 items measuring diversity of contact (e.g. "I would like to join an organization that emphasizes getting to know people from different countries"), 5 items measuring relativistic appreciation (e.g. "Knowing how a person differs from me greatly enhances our friendship"), and 5 items measuring sense of connection and comfort with differences (e.g. "I am only at ease with people of my own race"). Items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = slightly agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree). The total score for appreciation of diversity was derived by adding up the scores on each of the questions.

**Self-Efficacy for Teamwork.** Self-efficacy for teamwork with team-mates who are perceived as significantly different from oneself was measured by slightly amending a scale developed by Coetzer, Richmond [66]. This scale has been used in multiple studies to examine the influence of individual level cognitive, emotional, and behavioral variables on self-efficacy for teamwork [66,68,69]. Scale items were developed to measure individual team member confidence in their ability to support a team to set team goals, create a division of labor, manage team tasks, integrate team member contributions, promote communication and constructive relationships, resolve problems, provide leadership and motivation, and achieve the team's overall goal through direct contributions to the team's task. To focus the respondents on teamwork involving team-mates who are perceived as different from themselves, the instructions for completing the questionnaire asked the respondents to focus on teams that included team-

mates who were significantly different from the respondent. The measure contains 16 items and example items are "I have the ability to coordinate the tasks and activities of team members," "I have the ability to energize and keep a team focused on completing key tasks," "I have the ability to build effective relationships with and between team members," and "I have the ability to contribute useful ideas and help a team complete key tasks." Items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 5 = slightly agree, 6 = agree, 7 = strongly agree). A total self-efficacy for teamwork score was derived by adding up the scores on each of the questions.

**Problem Solving Conflict Management Style.** Problem-solving conflict management style was measured using the conflict styles instrument developed and validated by De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Klumer & Nauta [82] and cross-culturally validated by [109]. The instrument has been widely used to measure the five conflict management styles (problem solving, compromising, forcing, avoiding and yielding) [68,110]. An observer version of instrument was used which asked the respondents to assess the extent to which the observed person demonstrated the behaviors referred to in the questions. This research study used the four items from the conflict styles scale that measure the use of a problem-solving conflict management style. Example items include "examines issues until they find a solution that really satisfies both themselves and others," "examines ideas from all sides to find a mutually optimal solution," "works out a solution that serves their own as well as the interests of others, as best they can." The items were measured on a 5-point behavioral frequency scale (1=not at all, 2=occasionally, 3=about half the time, 4=more often than not, 5=very much) and the total score for problem-solving conflict management orientation was derived by adding up the scores on each of the four items.

## Results

### Descriptives

Means, standard deviations and correlations among the research variables are reported in Table 1. All variable distributions are approximately normal and demonstrate reasonable variability across their respective scales. Cronbach alpha coefficients ranged from 0.81 to 0.93 suggesting good internal reliabilities. No univariate or bivariate outliers were considered problematic and product moment correlations revealed significant associations between the variables. The distribution of regression residuals produced by the mediation regression was approximately normal with no problematic outliers. None of the simple correlations between the control variables (age and gender) and the other variables were statistically significant. The standardized regression coefficients for the control variables of age  $\beta = 0.09$  ( $p = 0.17$ ) and gender  $\beta = -0.01$  ( $p = 0.80$ ) were not statistically significant, suggesting that neither had a unique influence within the mediation model after controlling for the influence of the other variables.

**Table 1:** Means, Standard Deviations, Internal Reliabilities and Correlations.

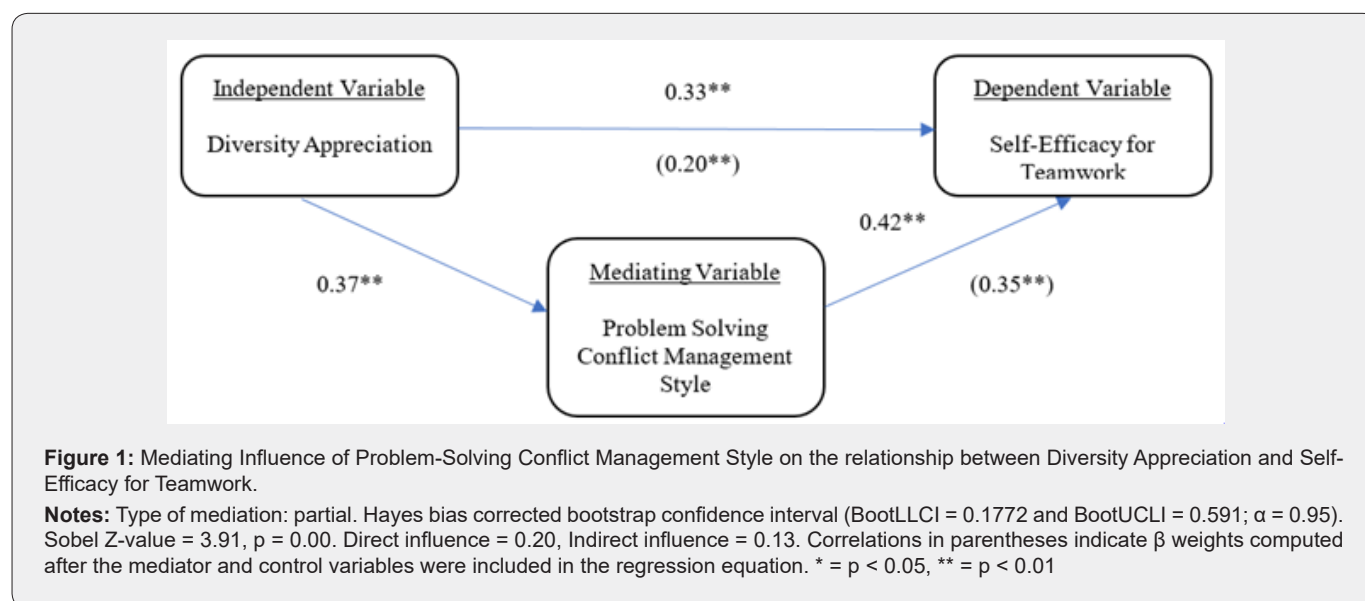
		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1	Self-efficacy for Teamwork	88.95	12.48	0.93			
2	Problem Solving Conflict Management Style	15.14	2.67	0.43**	0.83		
3	Diversity Appreciation	67.74	12.89	0.34**	0.37**	0.81	
4	Age	22.09	5.21	0.09	0.1	0.03	
5	Gender			-0.02	0.05	0.11	0.03

**Notes:** Internal consistency reliabilities are shown in parentheses on the diagonal  
 \* =  $p > 0.05$  (2-tailed), \*\* =  $p > 0.01$  (2-tailed)

### Empirical Tests of Hypotheses

The significant threshold for all the empirical tests was set to  $\alpha = 0.05$  (2-tailed). The correlation between DA and SEDT is statistically significant ( $r = 0.34, p < 0.01$ ) providing support for the hypothesis that DA is positively associated with SEDT. The correlation between PSCMS and SEDT is statistically significant ( $r = 0.43, p < 0.01$ ) providing support for the hypothesis that PSCMS is positively associated with SEDT. The correlation between DA and PSCMS is statistically significant ( $r = 0.37, p < 0.01$ ) providing support for the hypothesis that DA is positively associated with PSCMS. The Sobel test for mediation is statistically significant ( $Z =$

$3.91, p = 0.00$ ) and the Hayes bias corrected bootstrap confidence interval (BootLLCI = 0.1772 and BootUCLI = 0.591;  $\alpha = 0.95$ ) does not contain zero suggesting the presence of mediation. The mediation results suggest that a statistically significant portion of the relationship between DA and SEDT is the result of a problem-solving conflict management style (direct influence = 0.20 and indirect influence = 0.13) (Figure 1). A significant partial correlation between DA and SEDT ( $r = 0.20, p < 0.01$ ) remains after including the mediator (PSCMS) and the control variables in the regression. This suggests that PSCMS does not fully explain the association between DA and SEDT, and that other unmeasured factors are helping to transmit the effect.



### Discussion

The results suggest that SEDT is positively associated with both DA and PSCMS, DA is positively associated with PSCMS, and PSCMS partially mediates the relationship between DA and SEDT. The directionality of this relationship cannot be confirmed from this research study and both opposite and bi-directional effects

are possible. Treating diversity appreciation as a trait-based attitude that is hierarchically prior to behavior styles within the structure of personality supports the temporal position of the variables. However, if diversity appreciation is viewed as more of a state-based personality variable then the position of the variable within the personality hierarchy becomes less clear.

## Implications for Organizations and Academic Institutions

Research has confirmed that both diversity appreciation and a variety of teamwork related efficacies are positively associated with team performance [27,111,112]. This research study confirms that diversity appreciation is positively associated with self-efficacy for teamwork with team-mates who are perceived as significantly different from oneself, and that problem-solving conflict management style partially mediates the relationship. The results support use of an intervention framework that integrates both diversity appreciation and cooperative conflict management activities to promote confidence in working with team-mate who are perceived as different from oneself [113,114].

## Limitations and Suggestions Future Research

Broader generalization of the results of this research requires the use of samples that extend beyond higher education. Further specification of the self-efficacy measure that focuses on specific team-mate differences like ethnicity, gender, disability, and professional background may help to produce more feature-oriented insight. To conclude, this study confirms that diversity appreciation is positively associated with self-efficacy for teamwork with team-mates who are perceived as significantly different from oneself, and that a problem-solving conflict management style partially mediates the relationship. The results suggest the need for education, training, coaching and other developmental activities that integrate the promotion of both diversity appreciation and cooperative conflict management to enhance confidence in working with diverse team-mates.

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