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FOCAL ARTICLE

The potential of fostering connections: Insights into polycultural organizations

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Abstract

Diversity in organizations is a recurring and increasing reality of vast importance. The diversity management literature describes different types of organizations based on their treatment and management of diversity, including plural and multicultural organizations. However, recent research suggests the added value of considering polycultural organizations in diversity management. Based on a polycultural ideology that sees values, traditions, and norms inherently and dynamically intertwined and mixed, polycultural organizations emphasize the value for and "connectedness" to diversity among organizational members. Contributing to the diversity management literature, this paper conceptually describes and compares polycultural organizations with other types of organizations in the diversity management literature. It argues the potential benefit of including a polycultural ideology to current perspectives in diversity management to further advance our understanding of how diversity can be effectively managed in organizations. Additionally, practice implications and strategies to foster polycultural organizations are provided.

Keywords: diversity; multiculturalism; polyculturalism; organizations; diversity ideologies; diversity paradigms

As the workforce becomes increasingly ethnically diverse, both diversity managers and scholars tirelessly focus on taking steps to create an organization that can harness the benefits of diversity (e.g., greater innovation) while minimizing its potential challenges (e.g., intergroup conflict).[1] Different types of organizations are discussed in the diversity management literature and business media based on an organization's management of diversity, including plural and multicultural organizations. Among these, the one most typically discussed and promoted is a multicultural organization. Grounded on a multicultural ideology, a multicultural organization values diversity and integrates it in the organization's core values, business practices, and policies with the finality to enhance organizational performance and employees' attitudes (Arredondo, 1996; Jackson et al., 1992; Jackson & Joshi, 2011). This view on diversity is different than other organization types such as plural organizations, where diversity holds no strategic value.

Even though the merits and benefits of multicultural organizations are well-established (e.g., Leslie et al., 2020), the overreliance of multicultural organizations as the capstone of diversity management approaches might obstruct our advancement of diversity management within organizations. This is mostly due to the inherent challenges associated with a multicultural perspective such as accentuating cultural differences, which may adversely lead to the salience of ingroups and

[1]We treat ethnicity as the cultural characteristics of a group of people (e.g., Phinney & Ong, 2007). In terms of cultural characteristics and culture in general, we recognize that multiple definitions of culture exist without much consensus (Tayeb, 1994), but most definitions depict culture as a collection of shared knowledge, ideas, values, and beliefs that guide behavior (e.g., Gelfand et al., 2007). We take such approach to culture when discussing ethnic diversity and relations.

outgroups and consequently negative group attitudes, perceptions of threats, and exclusion (Chao et al., 2015; Dover et al., 2016; Meeussen et al., 2014; Prashad, 2001; Rosenthal & Levy, 2010, 2012). For example, accentuating differences in organizations may unintentionally create a sense of divisiveness, setting the stage for an "us versus them" mentality. As long as the main focus lies only in differences, one can anticipate the creation of separate ingroup and outgroups, with organizations responding reactively, instead of proactively, through current diversity practices. The problem is evident as reports across professional organizations (e.g., Society for Human Resource Management, 2020), federal commissions (e.g., Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2020), and policy institutes (e.g., Yang & Liu, 2021) present a prevalent experience of racial-ethnic discrimination, division, and conflict in organizations. Not surprisingly, organizations often struggle to create inclusive organizations despite best efforts (Benschop et al., 2015; Ely & Thomas, 2020). As the workforce becomes increasingly more diverse and complex, and social justice issues emerge and are faced by managers and organizations, such challenges merit further attention. These challenges are nowadays widely portrayed in organizations and social media and call for a proactive approach for corporate action (Zheng, 2020).

Recent research on polyculturalism, a novel diversity ideology that sees cultural values, traditions, and norms inherently connected and mixed (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010), may provide insights into how to ease these challenges to improve intercultural relations. Indeed, some suggests polyculturalism might be the "next stage" of multiculturalism, as multiculturalism begins by recognizing and celebrating differences and polyculturalism ends with trying to foster mutual interaction and influence (Cho, Tadmor, et al., 2018). Yet, the question of what characterizes polycultural organizations in terms of its strategic role for diversity and diversity practices as compared to other types of organizations remains mostly unexamined.

Thus, we attempt to conceptually delineate the characteristics of polycultural organizations as a novel "new form of organizing" in diversity management (Zanoni et al., 2010). Our novel approach seeks to complement, rather than exclude, current views of organizing as an initial point of discussion for the increasingly and complex reality of diversity in organizations and its benefits and challenges. In addition, we discuss potential strategies and initiatives to help foster polycultural organizations. We contribute to the diversity management literature by arguing the possible added benefits of polycultural organizations. First, we discuss plural and multicultural organizations as they are typically discussed in the diversity management literature. Second, we describe polycultural organizations. Last, we propose practice implications and strategies to foster polycultural organizations.

Plural and multicultural organizations in the diversity management literature

Before introducing a polycultural organization, we briefly review plural and multicultural organizations as they are typically described in the diversity management literature and commonly describe many organizations (Cox, 1991, 1993; Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2000). We frame our discussion by comparing each organization's diversity ideologies and how these may influence typically discussed organizational characteristics in diversity management such as the strategic role of diversity, diversity paradigms, and acculturation (see Table 1). We focus on these characteristics to be consistent with the diversity management literature as they are widely used to assert diversity management views and practices in organizations (e.g., Cox, 1991, 1993; Ely & Thomas, 2020; Thomas & Ely, 1996), and to show how they may be integrated under different diversity ideologies as per the focus of the paper.

At the individual level, diversity ideologies refer to people's "background beliefs about the nature of cultural and ethnic groups" (Cho, Tadmor, et al., 2018). Similarly, we conceptualize *diversity ideologies* as an organizational feature representing the collective background beliefs of organizational members about the nature of culture and ethnic groups. These background

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Table 1. Comparison of different types of organizations

	Types of organizations			
	Plural	Instrumental multicultural	Multicultural	Polycultural
Diversity ideology and assumption of conflict	Colorblindness; Differences as a source of conflict	Multiculturalism; Lack of understanding and value as a source of conflict	Multiculturalism; Lack of understanding and value as a source of conflict	Polyculturalism; Lack of connection as a source of conflict
Strategic role of diversity	Tolerance but non-value for diversity; legal rationale	Value for diversity; economic rationale	Value for diversity; economic and moral rationale	Value for and connection to diversity; economic, moral, and connection rationale
Diversity paradigm	Discrimination and fairness	Access and legitimacy	Learning and effectiveness	Learning and connecting
Acculturation	Assimilation (cultural minority groups replace their heritage cultural orientations with those of the majority cultural group to operate effectively in the organization)	Pluralism (cultural minority group members retain their heritage cultural orientations and adopt that of the cultural majority group, whereas both cultural majority and minority groups celebrate these differences)	Pluralism (cultural minority group members retain their heritage cultural orientations and adopt that of the cultural majority group, whereas both cultural majority and minority groups celebrate these differences)	Cultural fusion (cultural minority groups adopt the cultural majority's culture and retain their own heritage culture, while at the same time the majority's culture is transformed and enriched by the elements of the minority group's culture), resulting in an interconnected culture

Table 2. Practice implications and strategies for creating a polycultural organization

	Multiculturalism	Polyculturalism
Leadership	Emphasizes and clearly communicates the need for diversity and intercultural differences in organizations as per the economic and moral rationale	Additionally, clearly emphasizes, communicates, and fosters the need for intercultural connectedness, intercultural contact, and dialogue as per the connection rationale
Diversity training	Adopts the business case, social justice, and learning perspectives in training	Additionally, builds on the learning perspective by focusing on increased intercultural contact and understanding the interconnectedness of cultural relations and how this can help benefit individuals, teams, and overall organization
Socialization	Acclimates employees to their organizational roles, colleagues, and organizational culture	Additionally, increases collaborative intercultural contact through mentoring, volunteering (including organizational or community activities), cross-functional training, or other activity. Also, communicate the "connection rationale" by clearly communicating a shared purpose for understanding such rationale of historical interactions, influence, and connections while treating everyone fairly

Note. We posit these implications and strategies are interrelated (e.g., the role of leadership may influence the role of socialization and diversity training).

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beliefs influence how people are perceived, judged, and treat members of other cultural groups (Cho, Morris, et al., 2018; Park & Judd, 2005; Rattan & Ambady, 2013; Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). Importantly, they also influence assumptions about the origins of intercultural conflict and how to solve them (Rattan & Ambady, 2013; Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). The *strategic role of diversity* refers to the "business case" for diversity (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000) and its purpose or "value" within organizations. For example, some organizations may value diversity for strategic purposes to increase market share or improve the innovation of ideas and foster employee relations, whereas others may ignore this value altogether. *Diversity paradigms* refer to perspectives and approaches organizations take to manage diversity issues (Dass & Parker, 1999; Thomas & Ely, 1996). *Acculturation* describes to the ways in which cultural groups (i.e., cultural majority and minority groups) adapt to each other in an organization (Cox, 1991). We consider these four organizational aspects (i.e., diversity ideologies, strategic role of diversity, diversity paradigms, and acculturation) interrelated. That is, diversity ideologies may influence how diversity is treated within the organization (strategic role of diversity), which in turn affects the organizational practices (diversity paradigms) and how organizational members adapt to it (acculturation).

Plural organizations

Plural organizations are considered to be common in society (Hitt et al., 2017). Structurally, a plural organization is considered a culturally heterogeneous organization that follows a colorblind ideology. A colorblind ideology asserts that *cultural differences give rise to intergroup tensions and conflict* (Wolsko et al., 2000). Thus, colorblindness overlooks those differences and emphasizes a shared commonality (e.g., being all humans) or focuses on individual differences (as opposed to group differences) as an approach to reduce intergroup problems (Gündemir et al., 2019; Rattan & Ambady, 2013; Ryan et al., 2007; Wolsko et al., 2000). This results in an organization where diversity is tolerated, not emphasized, for the sake of equality and to reduce intergroup conflict, and thus serves no strategic value except for accomplishing legal compliance (i.e., legal rationale) (Dass & Parker, 1999). As a result, plural organizations are more likely to result in a discrimination-and-fairness diversity paradigm. This paradigm, which sees diversity under the lens of equal opportunity, fair treatment, and compliance with federal and legal mandates (e.g., Civil Rights Act of 1964), tends to increase diversity in organizations by promoting fair and equal treatment to all employees while ignoring cultural differences (Dass & Parker, 1999; Thomas & Ely, 1996). As such, even when organizational members tend to be diverse in a plural organization, they follow an assimilation acculturation approach, dissipating cultural differences and their heritage cultural orientations by adopting that of the cultural majority group in the organization (Cox, 1991).

Although plural organizations seek to reduce levels of prejudice and discrimination toward minority employees, issues of discrimination may still continue but in the form of institutional discrimination (Cox, 1991). In addition, due to the blindness of cultural differences, organizations may fail to learn from these cultural differences and their potential organizational benefits. This may hinder the ability to improve the organization's strategy, processes, and practices, and keep employees from personally identifying with their work (Thomas & Ely, 1996).

Multicultural organizations

A multicultural organization is a culturally heterogenous organization that heavily derives from the ideology of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism recognizes the value of cultural differences as essential to people's identity and thus demand attention and acceptance (Berry, 2016; Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). The main tenet behind multiculturalism is that the *lack of understanding and value of cultural differences lead to intergroup prejudice and conflict* (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). For these reasons, multiculturalism celebrates and educates about cultural differences and their positive contributions (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010; Ryan et al., 2007; Stephan & Stephan, 2001;

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Wolsko et al., 2000). This results in mutual acceptance among cultural groups (Berry, 2016) and the preservation of different cultural values, traditions, and norms (Berry & Kalin, 1995). In other words, cultural minority and majority groups tend to follow a pluralism form of acculturation, where cultural minority group members are able to retain their heritage cultural orientations as well as adopt that of the cultural majority group, whereas both cultural majority and minority groups celebrate these differences. Consequently, and different than plural organizations, diversity is considered of strategic value and encouraged in a multicultural organization. However, because organizations may be motivated to understand and value diversity for different strategic reasons, research in diversity management further refines the idea behind multicultural organizations. We used the terms "instrumental multicultural" organizations and "multicultural" organizations to denote this difference.

An instrumental multicultural organization

We refer to an *instrumental multicultural organization* as one where diversity is understood and valued mainly for financial strategic purposes in line with an economic rationale (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). This type of organization may strategically value diversity and impart knowledge and understanding about it with the sole purpose and motivation of increasing financial goals and organizational performance (Jackson & Joshi, 2011). The argument is that diversity attracts people from different cultural backgrounds to utilize their perspectives, networks, and knowledge to benefit the organization (Stevens et al., 2008). For example, an organization may value and understand diversity because it helps it expand its market share by targeting different demographic markets. For this reason, an instrumental multicultural organization adapts an access-and-legitimacy paradigm (Dass & Parker, 1999; Thomas & Ely, 1996), where cultural differences are recognized and celebrated but mostly for strategic organizational purposes (e.g., increasing diversity to further target different demographic consumer markets and populations; Dass & Parker, 1999). From this perspective, recognizing cultural differences makes business sense.

One limitation of an instrumental multicultural organization is that despite understanding and valuing cultural differences and their strategic purpose, it fails to learn from these beyond the fact that cultural differences "make a difference." For example, assigning a Hispanic executive to manage a predominantly Hispanic market product without understanding how or what makes the Hispanic executive so successful in such market beyond the notion of cultural differences (Thomas & Ely, 1996). Strategic decisions are thus mostly made solely based on cultural background and identity-group affiliations without further interest in learning from them. This prevents a long-term learning perspective of diversity in which it can be further capitalized and incorporated into the organization (Dass & Parker, 1999). In addition, this may make some employees feel exploited and devalued because of their cultural differences.

A multicultural organization

In contrast to an instrumental multicultural organization, the current concept of a multicultural organization not only values and understands diversity for strategic purposes but also seeks to integrate diversity into its core values and business practices and policies (Arredondo, 1996; Jackson et al., 1992). In this sense, diversity is fully integrated in a multicultural organization across different organizational levels because is "the right thing to do" with the intent to eliminate prejudice and discrimination and impose a sense of organizational identity. This adds a moral rationale in addition to an economic one to the organization (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000).

From this perspective, a multicultural organization is likely to incorporate a learning-and-effectiveness paradigm, which incorporates the perspectives in the fairness-and-discrimination paradigm and access-and-legitimacy paradigm. That is, a learning-and-effectiveness paradigm creates an organizational environment of fairness and equal opportunity while recognizing cultural

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differences make business sense (Thomas & Ely, 1996; see also Cox, 1993).[2] However, this ideology goes beyond by proposing a learning perspective of diversity and cultural differences in organizations (Anand & Winters, 2008; Thomas & Ely, 1996). For example, beyond recognizing the cultural differences and capabilities of the Hispanic executive mentioned in the instrumental multicultural organization, the organization is also receptive to the executive's ideas and how these can be incorporated in future business and core practices (i.e., integration of diversity with the organization's strategic plan). The integration of these different cultural perspectives is what benefits the organization and results in enhanced organizational performance (Jackson & Joshi, 2011; Stevens et al., 2008). In addition, individuals may feel more valued and engaged (D'Netto & Sohal, 1999; Ferdman & Deane, 2014; Plaut et al., 2009; Thomas & Ely, 1996), resulting in improved intergroup relations (e.g., decreased prejudice and discrimination; Leslie et al., 2020). When this occurs, organizational diversity is assumed to be the most effective in terms of organizational results due to the resulting organizational "adaptive" processes (Kwon & Nicolaides, 2017). Not surprisingly, a multicultural organization seems to be the preferred approach to manage diversity in organizations.

Potential criticisms in a multicultural organization

Though much research points to the multiple benefits of multicultural organizations, the literature also points to the potential disadvantages and criticisms of multiculturalism. A core criticism is that an overemphasis on cultural differences may adversely provoke unintended and negative intergroup attitudes by highlighting the salience of cultural groups as separate entities, resulting in stereotyping, bias, and discrimination (e.g., Chao et al., 2015; Prashad, 2001), even when casted in a positive light (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010, 2012). This is in part because multiculturalism, in its attempt to promote cultural diversity, sees multiple cultures as *separate and unchanging traditions and entities* (Kelley, 1999; Prashad, 2001; Rosenthal & Levy, 2010), essentially differentiating distinctive subgroups within an assumed superordinate group (Dovidio et al., 2007). Such group categorization, regardless of intentions, may inadvertently and subconsciously (or even consciously) create an "us versus them" context, and thus a context of ingroups and outgroups (Dovidio et al., 2007; Meeussen et al., 2014). A prevalent example of the phenomenon is seen in much of the diversity training literature where emphasizing differences may result in enhanced stereotyping and negative attitudes toward diversity (Fujimoto & Härtel, 2017; Paluck, 2006).

Similarly, research on both organizational and social sciences has shown that the majority cultural group as an ingroup may feel ostracized or excluded because of the emphasis multiculturalism imparts on other cultural groups (Dover et al., 2016; Jansen et al., 2016; Plaut et al., 2011; Stevens et al., 2008; Thomas & Plaut, 2008; c.f., Wolsko et al., 2000), which can also result in perceptions of threat to their ingroup values (Morrison et al., 2010; Verkuyten, 2009; also see Verkuyten, 2005). This may result in majority group members to be less motivated and identify less with the organization while at the same time even increasing instances of discriminations and backlash against minority groups (Linnehan & Konrad, 1999; Thomas & Plaut, 2008). For this reason, majority groups may be less supportive of multicultural ideologies than cultural minority groups (Jansen et al., 2015; Plaut et al., 2011; Ryan et al., 2007), especially when presented concretely (i.e., emphasizing the specific ways in which the goals of multiculturalism can be achieved; Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014).

The "separate" and "unchanging" aspects of multiculturalism may also unintentionally reinforce stereotypes and delineate ethnic group boundaries for minority groups (e.g., Cho,

[2]This notion also aligns with Berry's (2016) concept of diversity and equity in multicultural ideologies to further support the relationship between multicultural ideologies and a learning-and-effectiveness paradigm. Recognizing cultural differences implies the presence of diversity whereas fairness and equal opportunity ensures equity.

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Morris, et al., 2018; Gutiérrez & Unzueta, 2010; Wolsko et al., 2000).[3] For example, Gutiérrez and Unzueta (2010) found that when individuals were primed with multiculturalism, they tended to like stereotypic targets more than counterstereotypic targets, suggesting a preference for individuals to stay within their ethnic group boundaries. Similarly, Cho, Morris, et al. (2018) found that individuals endorsing multiculturalism tended to dislike foreigners when trying to act "local," judging them as sellouts or untrue to their heritage. Such drawing of ethnic boundaries may result in separate and noninteracting communities (Morris et al., 2015) within organizations.

Addressing the inherit challenges of a multicultural organization

As a result of its disadvantages, several approaches have been advocated to overcome the unintended formation of ingroups and outgroups resulting in a multicultural organization. One example is an all-inclusive approach, where majority groups, in addition to minority groups, are explicitly encouraged to participate and be part of organizational efforts to increase overall perceptions of inclusion (e.g., Jansen et al., 2015; Jansen et al., 2014; Shore et al., 2018; Shore et al., 2011; Stevens et al., 2008). Another example includes establishing (and communicating) transparent affirmative action programs that emphasize opportunity enhancement and equal opportunity instead of preferential treatment to minority groups (Harrison et al., 2006; Leslie et al., 2014). Other relevant practices include authentic leadership commitment, inclusive recruitment practices, long-term retention strategies and developmental programs such as diversity training and mentoring programs, assessing diversity management metrics, and a focus on minority employee professional networks (e.g., Arredondo, 1996; Avery & McKay, 2006; Benschop et al., 2015; Cañas & Sondak, 2014; Cox, 1991; D'Netto & Sohal, 1999; Ferdman, 2017; Gilbert et al., 1999; Gutiérrez & Saint Clair, 2018).

Though these approaches are useful in managing diversity in multicultural organizations, they mostly rely on reactive practices to diversity without fundamentally addressing the root challenge of multiculturalism, that of focusing on differences. Consequently, these approaches may be considered anticipatory or reactive strategies to deal with an organization founded on an ideology that in essence separates groups in an attempt to understand cultural differences. As long as the main focus lies only in differences, one can anticipate the creation of separate ingroup and outgroups. Thus, a more effective solution might be an organization with a fundamental ideological lens about diversity that does not only emphasize the differences but rather the connectedness of cultural groups with the intention to fundamentally reduce the creation of ingroup and outgroup structures. We discuss such organization and ideology in the form of a polycultural organization.

A polycultural organization

A polycultural ideology sees cultural values, traditions, and norms inherently and dynamically intertwined and mixed. That is, polyculturalism focuses on how people are connected and constantly influenced by multiple cultural legacies in their daily life, where cultures are seeing as connected and changing rather than separate and fixed (Morris et al., 2015). Polyculturalism assumes that the failure to understand historical intercultural interactions, contributions, exchanges, and connections (i.e., *lack of connectedness among cultural groups*) may give rise to intergroup conflict (Kelley, 1999; Prashad, 2001; Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). Therefore, intercultural conflict is reduced by informing on these relations.

Polyculturalism and multiculturalism are related but different diversity ideologies. Whereas multiculturalism focuses on differences and seeks the preservation and distinction of cultural values, traditions, and norms, polyculturalism goes further by also acknowledging the interactions

[3]Although results on the effect of stereotyping and diversity ideologies are still unclear (e.g., Leslie et al., 2020), the presented line of research suggests some potential problems.

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and connections that exist among cultures and the creation of cultural patterns (Kelley, 1999; Morris et al., 2015; Prashad, 2001). This is because polyculturalism postulates that all cultures are a product of historical intergroup interactions and influences, and thus are deeply connected (Kelley, 1999; Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). In this sense, polyculturalism also recognizes and respects cultural differences but sees these differences as interconnected and changing (rather than fixed or separated) systems influencing each other through constant interaction and shared history to foster and evolve intercultural relations (Kelley, 1999; Morris et al., 2015; Prashad, 2001; Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). As mentioned by Rosenthal and Levy (2010), polyculturalism "emphasizes the interconnectedness rather than the separateness of racial and ethnic groups" (p. 224). In addition to focusing on an "ethos of preserving cultural traditions," polyculturalism focuses on an "ethos of fostering intercultural interactions" (Cho, Tadmor, et al., 2018). This allows for the conversation of open cultural boundaries and creation and acceptance of new ideas. For this reason, some might refer to polyculturalism as the next stage of multiculturalism (Cho, Tadmor, et al., 2018). Previous studies have empirically shown the distinctiveness of polyculturalism as compared to multiculturalism and other diversity ideologies (e.g., Bernardo et al., 2013, 2016; Cho, Tadmor et al., 2018; Rosenthal & Levy, 2012).

For example, Rosenthal and Levy (2010) cite Flint's (2006) study on African and Indian people in South America, where Flint (2006) explains how emphasis is often mistakenly put on differences and conflict about Zulu and Indian tribes instead of focusing on their historical connections and interactions regarding medicine and common cultural practices. Other examples of connectedness and interrelatedness of cultural differences include the Western social and musical influence in Japan and around the globe, the influence of the Arab world and Dark Ages in Italian Renaissance, the introduction of tomatoes from the Aztecs to European cuisine (Morris et al., 2015), paper currency from China and its impact in global commerce, and shared values of family and religion along with history of migration across countries and ethnic groups. Polyculturalism focuses in such shareable and interrelated cultural connections in addition to differences to mitigate intergroup conflict (Morris et al., 2015). As summarized by Morris et al. (2015), "even the most central and celebrated elements of national cultures are often not autochthonous" (p. 635). We discuss these implications of polyculturalism in organizations and how it might influence an organization's strategic role, diversity paradigm, and acculturation.

A connection rationale as strategic role

Because of its emphasis on the connectedness and interrelatedness of cultural differences, an organization rooted in a polycultural ideology may lead to an organization that not only values but also "connects" with diversity. That is, similar to a multicultural organization, diversity is valued following an economic and moral rationale (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000), but the value for diversity goes beyond that as well. Diversity is also valued because it constantly shapes the organization, its strategy, and its members as part of a connected system of intercultural relations, what we refer to as a *connection rationale*. This type of value leads to a polycultural organization, where intercultural differences are embraced and celebrated in addition to their interconnections, thus enhancing the economic and moral rationale. For example, the economic rationale can be enhanced by strategically implementing interrelations across market segments to further expand market share (e.g., using Hispanic knowledge not only to expand the Hispanic market but also to expand into the Asian or Black markets based on their cultural interconnections). The moral rationale is also enhanced by strategically using intercultural connections to improve intercultural relations and morale in the organization (e.g., reducing ingroup and outgroup structures and thus improving employees' work attitudes). In all, a polycultural organization through a connection rationale strategically focuses on the "poly hybridity" and intercourse of cultural differences rather than their exclusivity to further enhance the economic and moral rationale.

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A learning-and-connecting paradigm

Consequently, a polycultural organization then follows what we refer to as a *learning-and-connecting* paradigm. This paradigm contains all aspects of the learning-and-effectiveness paradigm in multicultural organizations (fairness, equal opportunity, cultural learning perspective), but not only does it seek to learn about intercultural differences, it also seeks to understand how these differences are intertwined and continuously influence each other as a function of increased intercultural contact. For example, a learning-and-effectiveness paradigm may impart relevant experiences of different cultural groups, but a learning-and-connecting also focuses on the interactions, influences, and connections between these groups. Thus, based on a connection rationale, a learning-and-connecting paradigm also seeks to stimulate intercultural contact and dialogue (Morris et al., 2015) through different practices, policies, and structures to establish common intercultural relations in an effort to increase cohesiveness and performance and decrease intergroup conflict.

An intention and expected result of a learning-and-connecting paradigm is to not only foster employee inclusion and commitment as in a multicultural organization but also a sense of "identity fusion" revolving across cultural patterns. In psychology, identity fusion refers to "a unique form of alignment with a group, one that entails a visceral feeling of oneness with the group" (Swann et al., 2012, p. 441). As explained by Gómez et al. (2011), identity fusion is created through relational group ties (Brewer & Gardner, 1996), or ties where group members form relationships through connections and relationships among each other (Aron et al., 1991; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Members in relational groups perceive each other as unique and irreplaceable members of a larger "family" (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Gómez et al., 2011). Thus, relational groups exhibit a high degree of perceived connectedness and bonding and are more likely to engage in powerful prosocial behaviors for the benefit of the group (Gómez et al., 2011).[4] At the individual level, identity fusion may also help to satisfy different needs, including meaningfulness, affiliation, belonging, and personal agency (Swann et al., 2012), which may in turn lead to a higher quality of life (Jetten et al., 2011). In addition, identity fusion does not necessarily mean to give up one's unique identities but to see how these are interrelated with others. Indeed, research supports the idea that it is possible for individuals to recategorize themselves in bases other than their primary social identity through common connections (Gaertner & Dovidio 2014; Gaertner et al., 1993). Thus, identity fusion may present benefits for both groups and individuals (Swann et al., 2012). In a polycultural organization, the "connecting" or "identity" aspect focuses on cultural patterns and their interrelations among one another.

In this manner, the idea behind identity fusion is similar yet distinct than the concepts of inclusion and commitment in multicultural organizations. Identity fusion is similar to inclusion, which indicates the degree individuals feel included by a group to satisfy belonging and uniqueness needs (Jansen et al., 2014; Shore et al., 2011). However, identity fusion goes further by also indicating voluntary feelings of "oneness" with the group. In addition, unlike identity fusion, commitment is based solely on collective groups, or groups where members perceive other members as "categorically undifferentiated and interchangeable . . . as such, although identified people may display solidarity with the collective, their positive sentiments will be directed to the category and not necessarily to its members" (see Gómez et al., 2011, p. 919). This implies that loyalty to the collective may not translate to loyalty or prosocial behaviors toward individual members (Gómez et al., 2011). In addition, identification with the collective as a category does not necessarily require interaction with others due to its categorical nature (e.g., Billig & Tajfel, 1973) and thus may not

[4]Though identity fusion may also serve as an explanation for antisocial or harmful behavior just like any other identity theory, Swann et al. (2012) explains this issue is complex and overly simplistic. Instead, they conclude that "the process of fusion augments and empowers the group" (p. 452). In line with this conclusion, the concept of fusion in a polycultural organization is to foster a cultural identity that will benefit organizational members and reduce ingroup and outgroup structures and consequences. Strategies to accomplish these goals are presented later in the paper.

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result in the same prosocial behaviors or identification as identity fusion. Despite their inherent differences, commitment and inclusion are still important elements for developing identity fusion.

Acculturation as cultural fusion

When an organization adopts a learning-and-connecting paradigm through its identity fusion approach, cultural majority and minority groups engage in a form of acculturation called "cultural fusion." In cultural fusion, cultural minority groups adopt the cultural majority's culture and retain their own heritage culture while at the same the majority's culture is *transformed* and *enriched* by the elements of the minority group's culture (see Croucher & Kramer, 2017). In practice, for example, cultural fusion may represent cultural groups adopting and retaining their own and other's cultural practices (e.g., behaviors such as working styles) and cognitions (e.g., ways of thinking) while at the same time transforming them into new ways of acting/thinking to function more effectively within the organization and making them their own. Cultural fusion is similar to pluralism (or integration) in multicultural organizations in that cultural minority groups are encouraged to adopt the cultural majority's culture while at the same time retaining their own heritage culture. However, cultural infusion also depicts how the cultural majority group's culture is transformed and enriched by the cultural elements of the cultural minority groups' culture given the interconnectedness of cultures in accordance with a polycultural approach. The mixture of different cultures creates a "fused" new culture (Hermans & Kempen, 1998), combining "the best of both worlds" (Arends-Tóth & Van de Vijver, 2004, p. 6), if managed properly (see next section for some strategies). This fused culture then evolves to become that of the cultural majority group, which is in turn constantly adopted by the cultural minority group, eventually uniting cultural groups under one common interconnected culture. In this way, cultural fusion creates a dynamic environment of intercultural transformation where individuals and organizations are continuously evolving (Croucher & Kramer, 2017).

Conductively, a polycultural organization may then lead to the highest levels of intercultural relations and lowest levels of intercultural conflict. Indeed, the polycultural ideology behind this type of organization has been associated with positive attitudes toward people from other cultures (Bernardo et al., 2013; Rosenthal et al., 2015) and more interest, comfort, ethnic empathy, and appreciation of intergroup cultural differences than other diversity ideologies (Rosenthal & Levy, 2012; Virgona & Kashima, 2021). Consequently, polyculturalism has been shown to increase the willingness to interact with other cultural groups (e.g., Bernardo et al., 2013; Rosenthal & Levy, 2012, 2016; Rosenthal et al., 2015), whereas multiculturalism may sometimes decrease it (Rosenthal & Levy, 2012). Similarly, polyculturalism is associated with more positive and meaningful engagement than multiculturalism (Virgona & Kashima, 2021). In addition, polyculturalism is more appreciative of people's flexibility to learn and perform other cultural orientations (Cho, Morris et al., 2018). Consequently, polyculturalism has also been shown to be associated with higher levels of greater inclusion of foreign ideas and cultural creativity (Cho, Tadmor, et al., 2018). Indeed, although higher levels of creativity are typically attributed to multiculturalism in organizations, Cho, Tadmor, et al. (2018) explain and found that "multicultural experience" (through contact and exposure to cultural others), not multiculturalism as an ideology (which preserves cultural boundaries through its celebration of differences), is what produces boosts in creativity and organizational performance. In all, we posit that increased and willful engagement, more positive intercultural relationships, and inclusion of cultural ideas may result in lower intercultural conflict and higher levels of performance and retention within polycultural organizations.

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Practice implications and strategies to foster connectivity

Realizing the potential of polycultural organizations is certainly complex and not easy without a concrete manual at hand, but we propose practice implications of polyculturalism and different potential and interrelated strategies managers and practitioners may use to foster the intercultural connectedness embedded in a polycultural organization. Before doing so, we note three important points. First, it is essential to still consider the best practices for diversity management in multicultural organizations as indicated by the extant literature (e.g., Arredondo, 1996; Avery & McKay, 2006; Benschop et al., 2015; Cañas & Sondak, 2014; Cox, 1991; D'Netto & Sohal, 1999; Ferdman, 2017; Gilbert et al., 1999; Gutiérrez & Saint Clair, 2018). As alluded throughout the paper, polyculturalism as an ideology and as a foundation for polycultural organizations should not be construed as a single and isolated ideology by managers and organizational leaders. Diversity ideologies are independent but still related to one another (Guimond et al., 2014; Hahn et al., 2015; Whitley & Webster, 2018), with both positive, null, and negative intergroup outcomes (e.g., prejudice, discrimination) associated to them (Leslie et al., 2020). In addition, research suggest that individuals can simultaneously subscribe to different diversity ideologies to varying degrees (Whitley & Webster, 2018). Therefore, polycultural organizations should be seen as both an integration and advancement from previous types of organizations with the purpose to increase diversity-related benefits while minimizing its disadvantages.

For example, the discrimination-and-fairness paradigm inherent in plural organizations and colorblind ideology may be needed to reduce discrimination in policy in organizations (Morris et al., 2015), but its disadvantage in terms of reduced performance (i.e., reduced creativity; Cho, Tadmor, et al., 2018) and poorer intercultural group relations may be reduced by a polycultural approach. As previously mentioned, polyculturalism is not to be treated as an isolated ideology but in conjunction with other positive aspects from other ideologies. Another example includes diversity programs such as Black or Hispanic History month in US organizations to celebrate differences and contributions of different racial or ethnic groups in accordance with multiculturalism. However, a sole focus on differences and uniqueness may unintentionally portray Black/Hispanic Americans and their history as separate from other Americans or relevant to only Blacks and Hispanic Americans, reducing the effectiveness of such programs. Including colorblind and polycultural aspects to this multicultural approach may improve intergroup attitudes and relations as explained by Rosenthal and Levy (2010):

> For one, this program could additionally incorporate an emphasis on similarities between Black Americans and other groups in their experiences, both with discrimination and otherwise, and in their contributions to society; moreover, there could be an emphasis on the great variation and individual differences among Black Americans ("similarities" and "uniqueness" forms of colorblindness). There could also be a focus on the many and varied interactions and connections between Black Americans and other racial and ethnic groups throughout history that have influenced and shaped Black American as well as all other American cultures (polyculturalism). (p. 218)

For this reason, we further argue about the strength of incorporating a combined ideological approach in organizations.

Second, and based on the previous point, a polycultural approach might be recommended for organizations that are in the process of becoming, or already find themselves in, a multicultural organization. A drastic move toward polyculturalism without first having a sound foundation and experience on previous ideologies and associated programs might be a monumental task, and one that may result in counterproductive efforts and unnecessary use of financial and human resources. For example, Ely and Thomas (2020) argue that some organizations still struggle to implement a learning-and-effectiveness paradigm in multicultural organizations, possibly making the

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move toward the learning-and-connecting paradigm found in polycultural organizations more difficult to achieve.

Third, it is important to recognize the cultural plurality of individuals in polycultural approaches. Cultural plurality refers to the individuals' variety of cultural knowledge and identities (Morris et al., 2015). Without recognizing and valuing the individuals' cultural plurality, intercultural connections (and identity and cultural fusion) are unlikely to develop. In addition, cultural plurality should not be construed only as a way to demarcate individual differences. Instead, it should also be used to combine different cultural strands in line with the purpose of cultural fusion. That is, cultural differences should also be utilized to generate new cultural patterns that will allow employees to connect better among each other. Notably, the participation of all cultural groups in organizational programs and practices should be encouraged across all organizational levels. With these three points in mind, we further discuss practice implications and strategies in terms of the impact on organizational leadership, diversity training, and socialization (see Table 2).

The impact on leadership in fostering intercultural connectedness

Similar to multicultural organizations, authentic leadership commitment and support to diversity and inclusion across organizational levels would be crucial in a polycultural organization. Organizational leaders, such as founders and managers, are the embodiment of the organization and what it represents (Ashforth & Rogers 2012). They drive and shape an organization's culture (Berson et al., 2008; Schein, 2010; Schneider et al., 2013) and directly influence HR diversity practices (Buengeler et al., 2018; Shore et al., 2018) needed to effectively change diversity paradigms (Thomas & Ely, 1996) by building trust and fostering positive climates (e.g., Ely & Thomas, 2020; Kukenberger & D'Innocenzo, 2019; Mor Barak et al., 2016). For example, through inclusive leadership, leaders can foster a sense of inclusion by treating everyone equally and fairly while recognizing and appreciating cultural differences, and how they can create synergy from diversity by acknowledging different cultural knowledge/products can be resources for organizational problem solving (Randel et al., 2018; van Knippenberg & van Ginkel, 2021).

However, it is suggested the underlying tone and assumptions of leadership and its proposed practices move beyond an emphasis on differences to an emphasis of intercultural connectedness. For instance, similar to a multicultural approach, leaders and managers may need to emphasize and clearly communicate the need for diversity in organizations (e.g., Ewoh, 2013); however, this need should be communicated not only following an economic and morale rationale, but a connection rationale as well. In addition, managers should constantly stimulate intercultural contact and dialogue (Morris et al., 2015). For this to be effective though, managers should first be aware and trained in the intercultural relations that exist not only in their organizations but in society in general to foster a polycultural ideology. Helping leaders develop a polycultural ideology and understanding how intercultural relations have unfolded and continue to influence one another is imperative before communicating these perspectives to others in the organization or establishing any other practice conductive to a polycultural organization. Awareness of intercultural relations for managers and other employees may be facilitated through specialized diversity training designed to appreciate the interconnectedness of cultures (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010).

The impact on diversity training in developing intercultural understanding

Diversity training is another example of best practices for managing diversity in organizations (for comprehensive reviews see Alhejji et al., 2016; Anand & Winters, 2008; Bell et al., 2017; Bezrukova et al., 2016; Kalinoski et al., 2013). A recent systematic review by Alhejji and colleagues (2016) discussed the three dominant theoretical perspectives in organizational training, including the business case perspective (i.e., emphasizes the impact of diversity on performance), the social justice perspective (i.e., emphasizes equal opportunity and fair treatment), and the learning

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perspective (i.e., emphasizes learning from different viewpoints can result in short-and-long learning outcomes). Aligned with a polycultural ideology, diversity training approach in polycultural organizations could utilize all three perspectives because multiple perspectives are likely to be more effective than simply one approach, especially due to the lack of evidence demonstrating the efficiency of each perspective separately (Alhejji et al., 2016).

In addition, diversity training would build on the learning perspective, which often results in learning outcomes related to increasing awareness of diversity issues and the skills needed to deal with them (Alhejji et al., 2016, see also Bezrukova et al., 2016). That is, besides focusing on the benefits associated with different viewpoints, diversity training should also focus on increased intercultural contact and understanding the interconnectedness of cultural relations and how this resulting "poly hybridity" can benefit individuals, teams, and overall organization. For example, beyond the broad recognition of implicit bias and its consequences, diversity training could nurture cultural interconnectedness awareness to further reduce prejudice based solely on cultural differences. Doing so would increase people's assumed cultural similarity with others (see Locke et al., 2012), enhancing attraction and connection with them (Locke et al., 2012) while fulfilling belonging needs (Morrison & Matthes, 2011). Furthermore, the perception that one's attributes (e.g., cultural attributes) overlap with others may increase prosocial behaviors and attitudes such as altruism and empathy toward others (Cialdini et al., 1997).

A suggestion when conducting diversity training would be to consider a process similar to a "triple-loop learning" recently proposed by Kwon and Nicolaides (2017). Triple-loop learning is a "conscious effort to purposefully change our way of being that influences our way of knowing and doing things . . . a total re-creating of oneself. It is a continuous process of experiencing the unexperienced and a journey of exploring the unexplored" (p. 91). It relies on reflection and changing one's current awareness to be engaged in the process of transforming oneself. Learning in this case is assumed to be continuous, holistic, authentic, and transformative. Thus, different than traditional methods of diversity management that focus on the behavioral (doing) and cognitive (knowing) components of diversity, a triple-loop learning also includes an existential (being) component (Kwon & Nicholaides, 2017). Although behavioral and cognitive components are important and should be considered too, the existential one may be especially necessary to change people's awareness about their own cultural connections with others. These connections would unfold across time, as time is a central component of organizational change (Schneider et al., 2013), and take into consideration individuals' multiple identities and authentic selves to create "a sense of a mini-community wherein mutual inquiry is practiced, deepening our awareness and guiding our actions as we engage with each other" (pp. 93–94, citing Torbert, 1999). We also suggest this approach to diversity training be integrated with other diversity initiatives and conducted over a significant period of time instead of a one-time-only occurrence (Bezrukova et al., 2016).

The impact on socialization in increasing collaborative intercultural contact

Socialization practices in organizations are utilized to acclimate employees to their organizational roles, colleagues, and organizational culture. Given the focus on continuous intercultural contact in polyculturalism, a practice implication and strategy related to organizational socialization would be to increase "collaborative intercultural contact" among employees by exposing them to people from different ethnic groups (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). For example, based on contact theory (Allport, 1954) and previous meta-analyses on intergroup relations (e.g., Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), Bernstein et al. (2020) argued about the importance of generative interactions as a form of collaborative intercultural contact, or "interactions across diversity that generate social connection and the deeper understanding needed to facilitate equity at the organizational level" (pp. 396–397). In organizations, opportunities of such interactions may not be restricted to new employee orientations but also include mentoring, volunteering (including organizational or community activities), or even cross-functional training (Bernstein et al., 2020; Dobbin & Kalev,

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2016). Importantly, these activities are not explicitly focused on promoting diversity or necessarily labeled as diversity initiatives, making them less threatening and more encouraging for majority employees and lessening stereotyping and stigmatization for both majority and minority groups (Leslie et al., 2014).

Collaborative intercultural contact may be of most benefit under certain conditions to overcome potential diversity problems. For example, negative contact tension may be alleviated by working under *common goals* and as *equals* (Bernstein et al., 2020; Dobbin & Kalev, 2016). Based on previous studies in sociology, Dobbin and Kalev (2016) cite an example during World War II when armies in the US were segregated but understaffed. When Blacks volunteered to serve, Whites who worked alongside Black platoons reported lower racial hostility and greater willingness to work alongside Blacks despite their history of racial segregation and slavery. Similarly, ensuring a shared organizational purpose and working as equals is likely to increase the benefits of collaborative intercultural contact and increase connectedness. That is, fostering connections during generative interactions requires that people understand the reasoning behind doing so while being treated fairly. For example, when communicating the "connection rationale" as mentioned previously, managers also need to clearly communicate a shared purpose for understanding such rationale of historical interactions, influence, and connections while treating everyone fairly. Examples of shared purpose may include "connecting" and "intercultural learning" to improve intercultural relations and foster a sense of connectedness (as opposed to separation as in multiculturalism) for the benefit of both employees and the organization or use such connectedness to create more effective organizational policies and work systems. Doing so may also foster a common ingroup identity, moving categorizations from "them" and "us" to "we" (Bernstein et al., 2020). Thus, when supported by leadership, it is possible to adopt a superordinate common work identity "that transcends, but still recognizes and utilizes, the differences among members" (Bernstein et al., 2020, p. 402; see also Ashforth & Mael, 1989) through constant collaborative intercultural contact, which is also in line with the connection rationale and learning-and-connecting paradigm in polycultural organizations.

Potential challenges associated with polyculturalism

Possibly due to its relative novelty in formal social and psychological research, no major criticisms have been raised about polyculturalism at this point, although some potential difficulties and weaknesses have been identified (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010, 2013). For example, some negative historical interactions and influence among groups may involve exploitation, colonization, slavery, and wars, provoking feelings of resentment toward outgroup members, thus further reducing interaction. We argue that though some discussions may involve sensitive topics and create discomfort, such discussions may be necessary. Indeed, some practitioners (e.g., Gurchiek, 2020) and scholars (e.g., Ely & Thomas, 2020) argue that having hard but respectful discussions about these topics may be necessary to understand current racial/ethnic disparities. During such conversations, we suggest refraining from creating a sense of "victims versus oppressors", making judgments, and "pointing fingers" in past negative discourses while also focusing on commonalities (e.g., sharing common goals/purposes and working as equals while learning about cross-cultural influences and commonalities as previously discussed) and influences (e.g., improvements in business models and technology) to foster connections and decrease resistance to diversity efforts (see also Molinsky & Jang, 2016).

Therefore, such potential difficulties associated with polyculturalism may be resolved by adopting a "neutral" form of polyculturalism or one that highlights both the positive interactions, commonalities, and influences among groups while also acknowledging any negative interactions in past discourses (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). Ample research shows that such approach is associated with reduced hostility, resentment, or resistance, leading to higher quality intercultural contact and greater comfort with and appreciation for diversity (e.g., Bernardo et al., 2013, 2019;

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Rosenthal & Levy, 2012, 2016; Virgona & Kashima, 2021). Not "sugar coating" past intercultural relations might also be perceived more genuine than superficial and may also be the most practical and realistic given mixed discourses among groups in many countries.

Another potential difficulty may include people reacting defensively or resentfully if one group's cultural aspects and contributions are undervalued (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010). However, defensiveness and resentfulness may be reduced by acknowledging contributions to all contributing groups regarding particular cultural products. For example, instead of "overemphasizing" the attribution of a particular cultural aspect to one of the involved groups (i.e., a focus on one group), recognize all groups involved (i.e., a focus on multiple groups) and move away from assuming that one culture may have primary ownership of a cultural product. Further research may want to further explore these and other potential difficulties associated with polyculturalism.

Moving forward and conclusion

As organizations become more heterogenous and diversity becomes an increasingly complex reality in organizations that may act as a double-edge sword (Zhan et al., 2015), it behooves organizational leaders and researchers to start a discussion on a new type of organization that may further harness the benefits of diversity (e.g., enhanced innovation) while minimizing its potential challenges (e.g., increased relational conflict). We attempt to start such discussion by characterizing polycultural organizations as a potential "new form of organizing" in diversity management (Zanoni et al., 2010) by going beyond "traditional" views of diversity (Roberson, 2019, p. 80) and reconsidering our views of organizational diversity management in our research, teaching, and consulting. We argue that a polycultural organization may complement and provide additional benefits to current types of organizations. For example, a polycultural organization may help improve intercultural relations, inclusion, and tolerance among cultural groups thus reducing ingroup and outgroup structures leading to intergroup conflict, bias, and discrimination. Besides improving intercultural relations, polycultural organizations may also further increase performance by facilitating the integration of cultural ideas resulting in increasing creativity (Cho, Tadmor, et al., 2018). Realizing such benefits will not be easy, but we still encourage a discussion around the topic.

We hope the implications of polyculturalism may open new practical and theoretical opportunities to improve other types of interpersonal relations besides ethnic relations. That is, though much of this discussion has focused on intercultural relations, it is not restricted to other forms of diversity. For example, polyculturalism can also help reduce sexual prejudice (Rosenthal et al., 2014; Rosenthal et al., 2012). In addition, it is expected that the implications of a polycultural organization and its view of diversity would transcend organizations and have ramifications at the societal level too. This would create the type of social change in terms of diversity management advocated in the diversity management literature (e.g., Zanoni et al., 2010).

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