Mending the gaps: An exercise in identifying and understanding
multicultural team faultlines

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ABSTRACT

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The Faultlines Exercise, an experiential activity, introduces students to concepts of diversity attributes (surface and deep levels), social identity, and team faultlines. Through individual reflection and team discussion, students apply these concepts to their own diverse and/or multicultural class teams with the goals of preventing negative outcomes that may develop from faultlines, as well as developing effective communication and trust-building norms, which can improve team performance. Plenary class discussions reinforce key learning points. Instructions for facilitating classroom discussion, summary of key concepts, and student handouts are provided.

KEY WORDS: diversity, social identity, faultlines, teams, experiential exercise

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The benefits of teams, including better decision-making, higher job satisfaction, and increased profitability, among others, are well documented (see, for example, Connaughton & Shuffler, 2007; Tadmor, Satterstrom, Jang, & Polzer, 2012; van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004). Yet, not all teams operate effectively (van Knippenberg et al., 2004), as the impact of the aging workforce, the influx of immigrants into the workforce, the need to accommodate workers with disabilities, and the need to include and respect members of religious and LGBT communities (Konrad, 2006) complicate team effectiveness and overall performance.

How can we prepare our students to face these challenges and to function at high levels in diverse and multicultural teams and organizations? There is wisdom to be gained from organizations that have faced these challenges and met them head on. For example, Google launched a multi-year intensive investigation, called Project Aristotle, to learn how to build the perfect team and improve team performance (Duhigg, 2016). Perhaps not surprisingly, it found that 1) team process was more important than who was on the team and 2) the most important factor contributing to working together was psychological safety – a concept defined by Edmondson (1999) as "shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking" (p. 354). In Google's research findings, the ability of team members to communicate freely and to have empathy (Duhigg, 2016), which are the foundation blocks of interpersonal trust, was found to be key.

In an effort to aid students' sophistication in managing effective teams, The Faultlines Exercise asks students to identify and apply the concepts of diversity attributes, social identity, and team faultlines to their own teams. By reflecting on and applying these concepts to

their team interactions, team members may develop communication norms and an understanding of their teammates that helps to form psychological safety within the team. When such trust develops, teams will likely perform more effectively (Edmondson, 1999; "Identify dynamics", n.d.).

Theoretical Base for the Faultlines Exercise

The Faultlines Exercise is designed to introduce students to major theories about diversity and demographic attributes (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998)*,* social identity (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986), and team faultlines (Gratton, Voight, & Erickson, 2007; Lau & Murnighan, 1998, 2005; Thatcher & Patel, 2012). Students reflect upon and then discuss and apply these concepts to their teams during the process of forming the teams, with the goal of developing effective communication and empathetic norms to improve team effectiveness. In order to assist faculty in their lecture preparations, definitions and a brief literature review of each of these concepts is provided in Appendix A: Diversity, Social Identity, and Faultlines -- Theoretical Underpinnings.

The Faultlines Exercise

The Faultlines Exercise was designed for a graduate course in leadership and ethics. The course introduces graduate students to leadership and followership in dyads and groups, as well as ethics involved in leader and follower behaviors in organizations at individual, group, and organizational levels. The purpose of the exercise is to encourage students to reflect individually about basic concepts in diversity and social identity and to then apply their self-reflections to better understand faultlines that their diverse, multicultural teams may face. Finally, participants are asked to brainstorm strategies and solutions to face and improve potential faultline issues.

Learning Objectives for the Exercise

Two student learning objectives inform this exercise:

1. To identify the concepts of demographic diversity, including surface level and deep level attributes, social identity, and team faultlines, and to apply these concepts to enhance team effectiveness.

2. To collaborate with teammates in devising team-centric strategies to prevent or combat negative outcomes associated with faultlines and to improve the positive outcomes of team communication and trust.

Target Audience

Although designed for a graduate leadership course in which team effectiveness is a critical component, the exercise may be used with both graduate and undergraduate students. The most ideal circumstance is that student teams are curated by the instructor to include members with various diversity attributes and cultural backgrounds. Such standing teams may be employed, or the instructor may form new teams for the exercise.

The recommended team size for this activity is teams of four to five members, although larger teams may be used, if necessary. Multiple teams' experiences will add richness to plenary discussions. In large class sizes, the instructor may need to adjust the timing of plenary discussions to allow for participation by all teams.

Timing of Exercise

This exercise is designed to be used soon after teams are formed, typically at the beginning of a semester. The exercise is timed for 75 minutes in one class meeting but may be divided into two sections for 50 minute class meetings. It may also be expanded to allow for

more plenary discussion in a longer class period. Please see Table 1 for a summary of the

suggested timing of the exercise.

Materials Needed

Students will need a copy of assigned readings (see Appendix B: Required and Suggested

Readings). They will also need individual copies of Appendix C: Student Worksheet and of

Appendix D: Reflection Questions about The Faultlines Exercise. If desired, the instructor will

need a white board and writing instruments to make notes during plenary discussion.

Advance Preparation by Students

Students should be assigned traditional research articles chosen from the reading list in

Appendix B. The articles introduce the concepts of diversity demographics, social identity, and

faultlines in diverse and multicultural teams.

Advance Preparation by Instructor

Before running the exercise with students, the instructor should:

- curate diverse and/or multicultural teams within the class,

- assign specific readings for the class,

- read through the entire exercise,

- gather the writing materials needed for a white board, if one is to be used, and

- print/photocopy copies for each student of Appendix C: Student Worksheet for The

  Faultlines Exercise, and of Appendix D: Reflection Questions about The Faultlines

  Exercise.

For those who would like to read more about diversity demographics, social identity,

faultlines, and multicultural team theories, please see Appendix B: Required and Suggested

Readings. Definitions and a brief discussion of the theories on which this exercise is based can

be found in Appendix A: Diversity, Social Identity and Faultlines -- Theoretical Underpinnings.

Teaching Notes

Instructions for Running the Exercise

Please review Table 1 for the timing of each step of the exercise and decide whether to

modify time allotted for plenary discussions and individual and team tasks to fit the time frame

of your class meetings. Also, review the previous section entitled "Advance Preparation by the

Instructor." To begin the exercise in class, ask students to sit with their teams. Then follow the

steps and timing outlined in Table 1.

Leading the Plenary Discussions

There are two plenary discussions led by the instructor. The purpose of the plenary

discussions is to ensure that students understand the concepts discussed in the assigned readings

on which the exercise is based.

The first plenary discussion occurs at the beginning of the in-class exercise and focuses

on the concepts of surface level diversity, deep level diversity, and social identity. Definitions

from suggested readings are provided in Appendix A: Diversity, Social Identity and Faultlines --

Theoretical Underpinnings.

Begin by stating that students will be working individually and with their teams to apply

the concepts of diversity and social identity to their team interactions and will be doing so in

multiple steps throughout the class meeting. The instructor may add that as a first step, he/she

would like to ensure that students have a good understanding of these concepts. Open the floor

to discussion by asking, in your preferred style, a broad question, such as "What can you tell me

about diversity?" or a specific question, such as, "How might you define surface level diversity?"

Encourage students to build on their classmates' contributions. If students do not quickly arrive at the definitions provided in the assigned readings, the instructor may shorten the discussion by adding his/her own commentary and completing the definition.

The second plenary discussion occurs at the midpoint of the in-class exercise and focuses on the concept of team faultlines. If the exercise is run in two 50 minute class meetings, this plenary discussion occurs at the start of the second day. The instructor may begin by noting that this part of the exercise involves both individual and team effort in applying the faultline concepts to their teams. Similar to the first plenary discussion, the instructor may ask students to describe faultlines to ensure a common understanding of the term. After this brief introduction, the teams should meet and, building on their previous discussion of diversity attributes and social identities, identify possible faultlines within the team. Likely these would be based on surface level characteristics at this early point of team interaction. As possible faultlines are identified, teams should brainstorm strategies to prevent or combat negative outcomes associated with faultlines and to improve the positive outcomes of team communication and trust. Teams should appoint a scribe to record notes about this discussion for sharing in plenary discussion and for future team meetings (Please see Table 1.)

Debriefing the Exercise

Depending on the time allotted for the exercise and on the instructor's preference, the debriefing session may be conducted in class or via the course's electronic learning system as a class discussion board or as an individual journal assignment. Whether conducted in class or online, distribute the debriefing questions to the students (please see Appendix D: Reflection Questions about The Faultlines Exercise).

Typical Student Reactions

During the exercise, which occurs at the beginning of the course, students typically are reflective and quiet as they individually complete the Worksheet (Appendix C), listing their surface-level and deep-level diversity characteristics and social identities.

After students move from completing the Worksheet to discussion with their teams, individual and team reactions may vary. At this point in the course, most students are still new to each other and often do not know their teammates. As teams engage in discussion, students appear to be more reticent than they become later in the semester, thinking a bit before they share information or respond to their teammates. Most students are willing to share at least some of their surface level and deep level diversity characteristics and social identities.

Most teams follow instructions and ensure that each teammate has a chance to speak, listening respectfully to each teammate. After team sharing gets underway, more outgoing members of teams may interject while others are speaking or may lead teammates in discussion of comparisons or dissimilarities as sharing continues or after sharing has concluded.

Hints on Making the Exercise Work Effectively

Plenary discussion about diversity and social identity. This plenary discussion kicks off the exercise, and students may be hesitant to express their ideas. The instructor can model desired communication behaviors and empathy by listening respectfully to those students who volunteer and by encouraging all to speak.   The instructor may also provide his/her own personal examples of each construct.

Plenary discussion about faultlines. This discussion, which occurs halfway during the exercise, is generally shorter than the first discussion. To ensure that students have a good understanding of the faultline concept and how it applies to teams, ask students for examples

from past reading or team experiences that they have had. The instructor may also share examples from his/her work experience.

Team meetings and discussions. During the teams' discussions about diversity attributes and social identity, the instructor should be an observer of how each team interacts. Give help only if asked. Note to yourself if any student does not speak, if team members listen respectfully to peers or interrupt or ignore some team members. These observations can be shared with teams during the debriefing session or in a private meeting, as appropriate.

Variations in the Use of the Exercise

The Faultlines Exercise can be extended by adding articles and assignments about cultural intelligence or about team charters. The exercise may also be extended by adding a follow-up session at the end of the course in which team dynamics since the first discussions are explored.

How We Will Run the Exercise at ELA

We will demonstrate The Faultlines Exercise in a 30-minute ELA session by introducing the exercise (2 minutes), reviewing the definitions of the major constructs by using the Appendix A handout (5 minutes), and then asking individuals to reflect and list some of their diversity attributes and social identities on their Student Worksheet handout (Appendix C) (5 minutes). While participants are doing that, we will form groups based on surface level characteristics. After participants complete their worksheets, we will ask them to join their newly-named groups to share their attributes and identities (6 minutes), alerting them that not everyone may be able to share, due to group size and time constraints, and that this differs from the classroom experience. Due to the 30-minute time constraint, we will then ask groups to proceed with discussion of possible group faultlines and begin to brainstorm some possible solutions should faultline

challenges occur (7 minutes), again alerting group members of the time difference between this

demonstration and the classroom exercise. During the last five minutes of the session, we will

ask for reactions and suggestions to improve the exercise. We will provide handouts that will

enable participants to run the exercise in their own courses.

Appendix A: Diversity, Social Identity, and Faultlines -- Theoretical Underpinnings

Definitions

Surface Level Diversity: "Differences in individual characteristics that are immediately observable, such as gender or race" (Feitosa, Grossman, Coultas, Salazar, & Salas., 2012, p. 71).

Deep Level Diversity: Characteristics that are not as easy to observe, such as cultural values, personality, attitudes, and experiences (Feitosa et al., 2012).

Social Identity: Individual's conceptualization of self, derived from her/his affiliation to a social group (Tajfel, 1974).

Faultlines: "Hypothetical dividing lines that may split a group into subgroups based on one or more attributes" (Lau & Murnighan, 1998, p. 328)

Psychological Safety: "Shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking" (Edmondson,1999, p. 354).

Diversity, Social Identity, and Faultlines -- Theoretical Underpinnings

The major constructs employed in The Faultlines Exercise are described below.

Diversity - Demographic Attributes

Diversity typically refers to the differences between individuals on attribute(s) that may lead to the perception that another person is different from the self (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Two types of diversity commonly associated with group formation are surface level diversity and deep level diversity (Harrison et al., 1998). Surface level diversity refers to the differences in individual characteristics that are immediately observable and are typically reflected in physical features. Such characteristics include age, sex, race/ethnicity, and country of origin (Harrison et al., 1998). Deep level diversity refers to the differences in individuals that are not easily observable and are communicated through verbal

and nonverbal behavior patterns. Such characteristics include attitudes, beliefs, and values. As deep level diversity is not easily observable, it is "learned through extended, individualized interactions and information gathering" (Harrison et al., 1998, p. 98).

In a group setting, at the stage of a team's initial formation, group members may categorize themselves using readily observable demographic features, i.e., using surface level definitions. However, as time progresses and more group interactions take place, group members' perceived notions about other members can be modified or replaced with a deeper level understanding of the psychological features of the other individual, i.e., deep level (Harrison et al., 1998).

Social Identity

The concept of social identity was first introduced by Tajfel in the early 1970's and later Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed Social Identity Theory. Tajfel (1974) defines social identity as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 69). In other words, it refers to an individual's conceptualization of self, using her/his affiliation to a social group. Because a person derives her/his identity from the group to which s/he belongs, in order to increase self-image, a person may enhance the status of the group to which s/he belongs. Alternatively, self-image can be enhanced by discriminating or holding prejudice against members of outside groups. These situations promote intergroup social comparisons and creates *in-group,* the group to which we belong, and *out-group,* the group to which we do not belong (Turner, 1975).

The central tenet is that people try to achieve or maintain positive social identity and therefore make favorable comparisons between *in-group* and relevant *out-group(s).* In the event

that the derived identity is unfavorable, people may leave their group or find ways to achieve

more positive distinctiveness for it (Brown, 2000).

The concept of social identity is useful in understanding how groups are formed and how

in our need for more positive identity, we treat *in-group* members more favorably than *out-group*

members. Social identity is also helpful in explaining the problems that can occur in groups with

diverse members (Brickson, 2008) and in easing the problems associated with diversity (Stahl,

Mäkelä, et al., 2010).

Faultlines

A rich body of literature has evolved in the organizational behavior domain that explores

the intra-group differences of team members from the unique perspective of what are referred to

as "faultlines." Group faultlines are hypothetical dividing lines that are based on the attributes of

members. The most immediate impact of faultlines is that they serve to break the primary group

into several smaller sub-groups (Lau & Murnighan, 1998).

In geology a fault line occurs when rocks slide past each other in large scale plate

tectonic movements that can eventually lead to earthquakes. As with plate tectonics, a fracture

in the group can lie dormant for many years absent an outside external (Lau & Murnighan,

1998). And, just as the earth represents many layers of attributes, group members' demographic

attributes exist side-by-side in a group, representing a complex array of layers of understanding

and perceptual similarity.

Faultlines are said to develop within groups based on members' social identities and on

perceptions that members form regarding their own similarities and/or differences when they

compare themselves with other members. We study faultlines because of the impact that they

have on group performance. Some benefits have been reported, particularly as it pertains to the

increased learning within subgroups separated by faultlines (Gibson & Vermeulen, 2003). More often than not, however, faultlines have been found to lower group outcomes and to lower employee attitudes and citizenship behaviors (Thatcher & Patel, 2012).

Two primary root failures are associated with faultlines (Gratton et al., 2007). The first is a failure of collaboration, in which team members did not develop trust and goodwill among themselves. The second is a failure of knowledge sharing, in which team members failed to share information freely and openly with other team members.

In summary, when a team focuses on surface level diversity characteristics of its members, it is more likely to emphasize faultlines and distinguish between similar *in-group* members and dissimilar *out-group* members (Stahl, Mäkelä, et al., 2010; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Social identity theory helps us to understand how groups are formed and why we treat *in-group* members more favorably than *out-group* members. Social identity is also helpful in explaining the problems that can occur in groups with diverse members (Brickson, 2008).

However, if a team focuses on the deep level diversity characteristics of its members, it is more likely to extend effort in communicating effectively, which enhances its ability to be creative and innovative (Stahl, Mäkelä, et al., 2010). Better communication may also improve knowledge-sharing (Gratton et al., 2007), which may enhance team performance. For these reasons, we emphasize the concepts of diversity, social identity, and faultlines in The Faultlines Exercise.

Appendix B: Required and Suggested Readings

Required Readings for Students

We recommend that the following two articles should be read by students before the

class meeting in which the exercise is run. Alternately, instructors may choose their own articles

to describe the concepts of diversity, social identity, and faultlines:

Feitosa, J., Grossman, R., Coultas, C. W., Salazar, M. R., & Salas, E. (2012). Integrating the

fields of diversity and culture: A focus on social identity. *Industrial and Organizational*

Psychology, 5(3), 365-368.

Gratton, L., Voigt, A., & Erickson, T. J. (2007). Bridging faultlines in diverse teams. *MIT Sloan*

Management Review, 48(4), 22-29.

Suggested Readings for Instructor

For further information about the constructs, instructors may wish to read the following

articles:

For demographic diversity, surface and deep levels:

Stahl, G. K., Mäkelä, K., Zander, L., & Maznevski, M. L. (2010). A look at the bright side of

multicultural team diversity. *Scandinavian Journal of Management, 26,* 439-447.

van Knippenberg, D., & Schippers, M. C. (2007). Work group diversity. *Annual Review of*

Psychology, 58, 515-541.

For social identity theory:

Brown, R. (2000). Social Identity Theory: past achievements, current problems and future

challenges**.** *European Journal of Social Psychology, 30*, 745-778.

Hogg, M. A., & Terry, D. J. (2000). Social identity and self-categorization processes in

organizational contexts. *The Academy of Management Review, 25*(1), 121-140.

McLeod, S. (2008). Social identity theory. Simply Psychology. Accessed on January 16, 2017

    from: http://www.simplypsychology.org/social-identity-theory.html.

Zee, K. V. D., Atsma, N., & Brodbeck, F. (2004). The influence of social identity and

    personality on outcomes of cultural diversity in teams. *Journal of Cross-Cultural*

    Psychology, 35, 283-303.

For faultline theory:

Gibson, C., & Vermeulen, F. (2003). A healthy divide; subgroups as a stimulus for team

    learning behavior. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 48*, 202-239.

Lau, D. C., & Murnighan, J. K. (1998). Demographic diversity and faultlines: The compositional

    dynamics of organizational groups *Academy of Management Review, 23*(2), 325-340.

Lau, D. C., & Murnighan, J. K. (2005). Interactions within groups and subgroups: The effects of

    demographic faultlines. *Academy of Management Journal, 48*(4), 645-659.

Thatcher, S. M. B., & Patel, P. C. (2012). Group faultlines: A review, integration, and guide to

    future research. *Journal of Management, 38*(4), 969-1009.

Appendix C: Student Worksheet for The Faultlines Exercise

Instructions: Thinking about yourself, list some examples of your own surface level characteristics, your own deep level characteristics, and your own social identities. You may list any number of characteristics and identities.

Surface Level Diversity Characteristics
Some examples of surface level diversity characteristics include, but are not limited to, age, gender, race, and ethnicity.

1.	4.	7.
2.	5.	8.
3.	6.	9.

Deep Level Diversity Characteristics
Some examples of deep level diversity characteristics include, but are not limited to, education, values, attitudes, beliefs, religion, and sexual preference.

1.	4.	7.
2.	5.	8.
3.	6.	9.

Social Identity(ies)
Some examples of social identities include, but are not limited to, family roles (father, mother, uncle, aunt, daughter, son), work position, and community relationships.

1.	4.	7.
2.	5.	8.
3.	6.	9.

Appendix D: Reflection Questions about The Faultlines Exercise

These questions may be distributed to students prior to the debriefing discussion. They may also be used for a written discussion board or journal assignment, as the instructor prefers.

Identification of Constructs and Relation to Exercise

The instructor may ask: How would you describe (insert one of the constructs of surface level diversity, deep level diversity, social identity, or team faultlines; for example, how would you describe surface level diversity? Or, how would you describe social identity?). Or, how would you compare surface level and deep level diversity? Did your reading about these concepts help you gain insight into yourself or help you as you engaged in the exercise with your teammates?

Application of Constructs to Own Team

The instructor may ask the individual: Would you give me an example of (insert name of construct) in your team? Or, the instructor may address the team: As a team, how did you apply (insert name of construct) in your team? What occurred in your team as you discussed these concepts?

Collaboration with Teammates to Prevent Negative Outcomes and/or Maximize Positive Outcomes

To follow the last question, the instructor may ask the team: Recognizing as you did (insert name of construct) in your team, how will you approach it to prevent or minimize its impact on your team performance? What strategies or techniques did you develop to minimize negative effects or maximize positive effects of (insert name of construct)?

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Table 1

Time Table for Conducting the Exercise in 75 Minutes

Estimated Time	Action
Before class meeting in which exercise is run	Students read assigned readings about diversity, social identity, faultlines, and multicultural teams (see Appendix A or Appendix B)
10 minutes in class (This can be extended for longer classes.)	Instructor leads brief plenary discussion of surface level diversity, deep level diversity, and social identity, based on assigned readings, to ensure students are familiar with concepts
5 minutes in class	Instructor briefly introduces exercise to students and asks them to sit with their previously formed teams. Instructor distributes Student Worksheet (Appendix C).
4 minutes in class	Students use the Worksheet to individually write notes to describe their own surface level and deep level diversity characteristics, as well as their own social identities.

16 minutes in class	Students join with team members. Each team member shares his/her diversity attributes and social identities as he/she is willing to share. All team members speak, if only to say, "I don't want to share anything." All team members listen respectfully while each teammate speaks in turn.
8 minutes in class (This begins the second session for a 50-minute class meeting.)	Instructor leads brief plenary discussion of team faultlines, based on assigned readings, to ensure students can apply concept to their teams.
12 minutes in class, as time allows	Each team appoints scribe to capture main points of discussion to distribute to team members. Team members may also make notes for personal use. Based on what team members know of themselves and each other at this time, each team brainstorms about its own possible surface level faultlines,

	how to prevent or combat negative outcomes associated with faultlines and how to improve the positive outcomes of team communication and trust.
	Depending on design of module and length of class, this discussion may be extended.
10 minutes	In plenary discussion, each team shares a one-to-two minute summary of its discussion about possible faultlines and strategies, maintaining individual confidentiality. Alternately, teams may post this summary on the class' electronic learning system.
10 minutes	Instructor leads Exercise Debriefing using the questions listed in Appendix D. Alternately, the questions may be used for a written discussion board or journal assignment, as the instructor prefers.