

Across the great divides: How gender affects task conflict and creativity in intercultural collaborations

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Abstract

Working across cultures is commonplace in the global economy. This research investigates the role of gender in dyadic intercultural creative collaboration, examining how gender composition of dyads influences task conflicts and creativity. Through two studies (an online survey and a laboratory study), we found that task conflict is especially high in dyads comprising of two men from different cultures. However, intercultural man-man dyads are not able to translate that heightened task conflict into creativity gains as theories on creative abrasion would predict. In fact, we found that task conflict has a negative effect on creativity in intercultural man-man collaborations. Conversely, task conflict has a positive effect on creative outcomes in intercultural woman-woman collaborations. It appears that women are better at harnessing task conflict for creativity benefits than do men when working across cultures. We traced these differences to the different ways that men and women manage task conflicts during intercultural collaborations. Our findings shed light on gender differences in cross-cultural conflict management and creative collaborations, highlighting the often untapped creative potentials of women's workplace relationships.