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The interplay of rules, asymmetries in language fluency, and team dynamics in culturally diverse teams: Case study insights

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Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this paper is to explore how newly formed culturally diverse project teams develop and implement rules, and how these processes may be affected by language-fluency asymmetries. Design/methodology/approach - Using a case-study research design, the authors investigated three multicultural project teams within a management integration program in a multinational company in France. Their complete data set includes 37.5 hours of observations and 49 hours of semi-structured interviews. Findings - Findings revealed that subgroups formed on the basis of language-fluency and this affected the development and implementation of rules. While rule-setting mechanisms emerged across teams, they varied in form. On the one hand, tightly structured rules emerged and rules were rigidly applied when there were greater language inequalities. In contrast, implicit behavior controls guided interactions when language-fluency subgroupings were less salient. The findings also revealed that the alignment of other individual attributes with language fluency reinforced subgroup divisions, further impacting the rule development and implementation processes.

Practical implications - Understanding rule development and implementation in culturally diverse teams and how these processes are impacted by language disparities enables managers to help members develop more successful behavioral patterns by keeping language-fluency (and other) attributes in mind.

Originality/value - The study extends and complements previous team research by providing in-depth insights into the process of rule development and implementation. It demonstrates the impact of language-fluency asymmetries and subgroup dynamics on these processes. The authors propose a model to capture the processes by which culturally diverse teams create rules, and how the rule-setting mechanisms might be moderated by faultlines such as language-based disparities.

Keywords – Multinational company, Culturally diverse project teams, Faultline configurations, Language-fluency asymmetries, Rules and norms

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Introduction

Short-term project teams, increasingly prevalent in today's competitive business environment, need members to pool their diverse perspectives and collaborate to complete organizational tasks (Crisp and Jarvenpaa, 2013; Tjosvold, 1985, 1988; Tjosvold *et al.*, 2014). In recent years, due to globalization, these temporary, project-based teams (Pazos, 2012) have become more and more diverse in terms of demographic and professional variables (Kozlowski and Ilgen, 2006; Tjosvold *et al.*, 2014; Tsui *et al.*, 2007; Zhou and Shi, 2011). While tension is inherent in any group or team (Appelbaum *et al.*, 1998; Maznevski *et al.*, 2006; Smith and Berg, 1997), the heterogeneity of culturally diverse teams amplifies individual differences and intensifies the likelihood of conflict and controversy (Appelbaum *et al.*, 1998; Griffith *et al.*, 2003; Mach and Baruch, 2015; Pelled *et al.*, 1999; Tjosvold, 1985). In this paper, we take a case study approach to explore the impact of rule and language fluency disparities, and the interplay between the two, on the ways in which members of culturally diverse teams establish ways of working together smoothly.

It is typically recommended that project teams need to agree on rules and practices soon after starting to work together in order to manage their disagreements and differences (Appelbaum *et al.*, 1998; Pazos, 2012) and to carry out their activities successfully (Crisp and Jarvenpaa, 2013; Mathieu *et al.*, 2008; Tjosvold *et al.*, 2014). Yet new groups often begin working on their tasks before considering their processes and procedures (Lau and Murnighan, 2005) and this may lead to conflict. Understanding the development and enforcement of rules in diverse work groups is thus important, so O'Leary and Mortensen (2010, p. 27) call on researchers to explore the effects of "rules, norms, and roles" that might "guide individual team members' behavior" in diverse work groups. There are at least two main reasons why this understanding is important. First, the establishment of clear rules and procedures can play a major role in determining the effectiveness of group processes since they facilitate group interactions (Gluesing *et al.*, 2003; Goodbody, 2005; Krumm *et al.*, 2013) and help promote cooperative vs competitive approaches to teamwork (Kozlowski and Ilgen, 2006; Tjosvold, 1985). Second, adopting ground rules helps build trust among team members, which in turn contributes to increasing group success (Crisp and Jarvenpaa, 2013; Kozlowski and Ilgen, 2006), especially in culturally diverse teams (Krumm *et al.*, 2013; Moser and Axtell, 2013). Yet despite this, there has been little empirical focus on the emergence and enactment of rules in culturally diverse teams; in other words, there have been very few studies that have examined how teams decide on their rules and the strictness with which they should be implemented. Chatman and Flynn (2001), Mathieu *et al.* (2008), and Moser and Axtell (2013) all emphasize the importance of understanding the development of team process procedures in such teams, and point out that this area of investigation deserves more attention.

A second factor that can influence the process of working together is language fluency. Previous research has repeatedly found that asymmetries in language fluency result in power imbalances in which individuals fluent in the common corporate language(s) are elevated to a certain level of power and status in multinational organizations (e.g. Marschan-Piekkari *et al.*, 1999; Neeley, 2013; Thatcher and Patel, 2012; Vaara *et al.*, 2005; Welch *et al.*, 2005), as well as in multinational teams (e.g. Hinds *et al.*, 2014; Lauring and Klitmoller, 2015; Tenzer and Pudelko, 2015, 2017). Most empirical studies on lingua-franca situations in multinational teams deal with the specific challenges triggered by language-related differences and the particular procedures required to manage these language issues (e.g. Hinds *et al.*, 2014; Neeley, 2013; Tenzer and Pudelko, 2015, 2017). Yet, little is known about the interplay between language-fluency asymmetries and team dynamics, and the ways in which rules are established and managed. Several researchers have called for further empirical inquiry into the management of language-fluency disparities in lingua-franca contexts (e.g.

Neeley, 2013; Thatcher and Patel, 2012), and Hinds *et al.* (2014) go a step further and call for observational studies that enable a micro-analysis around the language challenges and asymmetries experienced, as well as the coping strategies employed. In this paper, we address this gap and explore how language fluency affects team dynamics and the need for rules, analyzing qualitative data collected in three culturally diverse project teams in a multinational company. We draw on the concept of faultlines (Lau and Murnighan, 1998) to help interpret our findings.

Our aim is to extend theory on the impact of language asymmetries and rule development on group dynamics, and we propose a theoretical framework to capture this. The paper is organized as follows. We first introduce the literature on rules in culturally diverse teams, on language-fluency asymmetries, and on the concept of faultlines. The next section describes our methodology and after this we present our findings. In the last section, we discuss our findings in relation to faultline theory, consider theoretical and managerial implications, assess our study's limitations, and suggest recommendations for future research.

Literature review

Intragroup rules in culturally diverse teams

As the development of "rules" is a key focus of our research, it is essential to clarify the precise meaning of the construct by contrasting it with that of "norms". "Norms" have been regarded as regular patterns of behavior that are acknowledged by team participants as acceptable practices (Chatman and Flynn, 2001; Krumm *et al.*, 2013) within their team. In contrast, rules are the guidelines for behavior that members of a team need to operate by, for effective process reasons. Newly formed teams typically have to create these guidelines, preferably at the beginning of their life cycles (Canney Davison and Ward, 1999; Pazos, 2012), in order to function together smoothly and they may evolve as members become more familiar with each other and their task. In sum, we define "rules" as the necessary practices, routines, and procedures that have been established in order to govern behavioral dynamics and attain team objectives (Earley and Gardner, 2005; Earley and Mosakowski, 2000; Krumm *et al.*, 2013). We use the term "norms" to refer to conventions that have already been established and become habitual, thanks to a common agreement to follow them.

As explained in the introduction, the importance of rules for effective team functioning is now widely accepted. Studies that have taken a life-cycle approach (e.g. Canney Davison and Ward, 1999; DiStefano and Maznevski, 2000; Earley and Gardner, 2005; Gluesing *et al.*, 2003) have argued for the importance of establishing ground rules during the early phases, and have proposed a number of action steps to take at different stages. However, while the advice and lists of behavioral guidelines in these frameworks are relevant for international project teams, few in-depth concrete examples are provided about how this occurs in real-life settings. What are missing are rich and thick descriptions of how these rule-setting processes take place in culturally diverse teams.

Another point involving rules deserves attention. The literature suggests that flexibility in rule adherence is crucial in culturally diverse teams (Easterby-Smith and Malina, 1999; Iles and Hayers, 1997; Peterson, 2001) in order to address the potential impact of cultural unpredictability (Peterson, 2001). In fact, tightly structured control mechanisms can be detrimental since once clearly specified, explicit rules are set, team members may begin to monitor their fellow teammates to detect any deviation from the prescribed behavior (Crisp and Jarvenpaa, 2013). When explicit control mechanisms such as a written "social contract" (Peterson, 2001) are not employed, rules are expressed passively or are inferred from the behavior of others. In fact, such soft social processes constitute a form of group control that emphasize

trusting relationships, mutual respect, and strong interpersonal ties (Easterby-Smith and Malina, 1999; Peterson, 2001), which are essential for the successful implementation of projects (Easterby-Smith and Malina, 1999). These more subtle forms of control work quite effectively by reducing the level of conflict and by fostering a positive group atmosphere (Pelled, 1996), high levels of respect (Easterby-Smith and Malina, 1999), intragroup trust (Griffith *et al.*, 2003), and cooperative relationships (Tjosvold, 1988; Tjosvold *et al.*, 2014). Such internalized patterns of social conduct, involving an embedded degree of trust, therefore, develop to guide interpersonal relations and structures (Peterson, 2001), and may replace formal rules to govern behavior. However, while there is consensus over the need for flexibility once rules have emerged, and justification as to why it is important (e.g. Bettenhausen and Murnighan, 1985, 1991; Crisp and Jarvenpaa, 2013; Hanges *et al.*, 2005; Piccoli and Ives, 2003; Smith and Berg, 1997), again there is very little research that explores how diverse teams manage this in practice.

Language fluency and language asymmetries

From a broad perspective, foreign language proficiency gives people the functional skills (Neeley, 2012) as well as the symbolic social power to engage in linguistic practices (Bourdieu, 1991), thereby enabling communication (Barner-Rasmussen and Björkman, 2007; Freeman and Olson-Buchanan, 2013; Van Dyk *et al.*, 2006). In a multinational environment (Marschan-Piekkari *et al.*, 1999), an individual's facility with the group's working language influences the extent to which they can participate (Barner-Rasmussen and Björkman, 2007; Janssens and Brett, 1997), while weak skills may lead to a high use of a local language rather than the team's lingua franca (Kroon *et al.*, 2015), i.e., code-switching, which may not always be appreciated by those who do not speak the local language and who might, therefore, feel excluded (Brett *et al.*, 2006; Hinds *et al.*, 2014; Tenzer and Pudelko, 2015; Tenzer *et al.*, 2014; Vigier and Spencer-Oatey, 2017).

Although previous researchers point out the lack of a universally recognized definition of the precise language-proficiency skills required by the general business community in order for employees to operate effectively in work settings (Damari *et al.*, 2017; Van Dyk *et al.*, 2006), others have proposed various fluency distinctions in international contexts based on precise measures (e.g. Kroon *et al.*, 2015; Neeley, 2012, 2013). In contrast, other studies have been less specific and have suggested that possessing English language competence corresponds to having sufficient knowledge of English to use in a job (Hagan and Wassink, 2016) rather than meeting particular proficiency standards. Likewise, Neeley (2015) distinguishes between two broad fluency categories of speakers of English in global organizations and teams: fluent speakers (FSs) and less-fluent speakers (LFSs), without specifying a particular level corresponding to these broad fluency classifications.

Previous empirical studies have shed light on the contribution of language-fluency asymmetries to power contests in global teams (e.g. Hinds *et al.*, 2014; Neeley, 2013; Tenzer *et al.*, 2014), and thus on language as a potential faultline dimension (Hinds *et al.*, 2014; Tenzer *et al.*, 2017) through in-group/out-group categorizations. Social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), and the resulting in-group/out-group dynamics, provide an explanation for the activation of faultlines. SIT starts with the premise that individuals define their own identities in comparison with members of their social groups which they use for self-reference. These identifications involve categorizations that psychologically classify the social environment into in-groups and out-groups. These in-group/out-group comparisons lead social groups to perceive themselves as different and distinct from each other and involve relative superiority and inferiority along a shared value dimension of comparison, giving the subordinate group an insecure identity.

In global teams, the higher-status people who possess a linguistic edge may be seen as powerful players among their lower-status peers who might resent their dominance and greater voice (Neeley, 2013). Team members outside the dominant subgroup often remain less vocal (Gratton *et al.*, 2007), and employees with low fluency in the common language may feel particularly inhibited and uncomfortable expressing themselves (Lauring and Klitmoller, 2015), as well as devalued and less confident (Neeley, 2013). Power imbalances tend to produce negative emotional responses from individuals who might feel excluded, reinforcing the in-group/out-group dynamics (Hinds *et al.*, 2014; O'Leary and Mortensen, 2010; Tenzer *et al.*, 2014), and may consequently foster distrust and conflict (Neeley, 2013). Thus, in imbalanced teams, it has been suggested that the subordinate subgroup who perceive a relative inequality in status and power may seek equality and balance (O'Leary and Mortensen, 2010). We intend to examine how rules may interact with the salience of language attributes and in-group/out-group categorization (Tajfel and Turner, 1986).

The concept of faultlines

Lau and Murnighan (1998) suggest that in diverse teams, the alignment of members' individual attributes can potentially subdivide the team along one or more member characteristics (Li and Hambrick, 2005; Thatcher *et al.*, 2003). While faultlines may be less likely in teams of high diversity, since there may be no clear subgroup divisions, they tend to be stronger when subgroup members share similar attributes (Lau and Murnighan, 1998). The nature of the hypothetical dividing lines, or faultlines, can thus vary within teams and influence their internal developmental processes (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman and Jensen, 1977). Members in more dominant subgroups can act with greater power and may voice their opinions more frequently or forcefully, polarizing the group and disturbing team dynamics. Whether a faultline emerges or not depends on how apparent and how relevant the attribute is to the team. Previous studies have investigated the triggers that activate faultlines (e.g. Chrobot-Mason *et al.*, 2007, 2009; Jehn and Bezrukova, 2010), yet they do not list language as a potential trigger. Other studies have examined the extent to which faultlines may be deactivated (Bezrukova *et al.*, 2009; van der Kamp *et al.*, 2011). Faultline deactivation concerns the process of minimizing the salience of the attributes related to subgroup categorization (Tajfel and Turner, 1986), thus helping to reduce team conflict in order to become more effective (van der Kamp *et al.*, 2011). Yet, while previous researchers have proposed strategies to bridge intergroup social identity inequalities in global organizations (e.g. Chrobot-Mason *et al.*, 2009; Hinds *et al.*, 2014), there do not appear to be any studies investigating the interplay between language asymmetries, the role of rules, and the activation/deactivation of faultlines. Bezrukova *et al.* (2009) have pointed this out and have called for further research on faultlines in diverse workgroups, particularly looking at the mediating and moderating mechanisms behind potential and active group faultlines. In fact, in their extensive review of language in international business, Tenzer *et al.* (2017, p. 26) suggest that researchers could "explore the disruptive potential of language-based faultlines within and across multilingual groups."

Taking all this into consideration, we have used a case study design involving three culturally diverse teams in a multinational company to explore the following research questions:

RQ1 How do culturally diverse teams establish procedures for working together effectively?

RQ2 How may language fluency affect the development and implementation of their procedures?

RQ3 To what extent does language fluency act as a diversity faultline?

Method

Research setting

Research for this study was conducted in a French-based multinational company in the automobile industry. Access was given to a management integration program (MIP) designed for newly recruited or internally promoted people with high potential to take up managerial responsibilities both at home and abroad.[1] The MIP brings together participants from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds, from all age groups and professional disciplines. As the company is headquartered in France, French people make up a large percentage of the program's participants, all of whom speak either French or English, the company's two corporate languages.

The MIP sessions consist of an intensive four-week program held three times a year. Among other activities, MIP participants are put into culturally diverse teams and given work assignments that are useful and real. The company gave its permission for non-participant observation of one type of team interaction, the project-team workshops, for three cohorts. Cohort 1 included 85 current and potential managers of 17 nationalities divided into seven project teams; Cohort 2 consisted of 102 participants from 21 countries put into nine project teams; Cohort 3 was comprised of 83 people from 14 countries working in ten project teams. These teams had never collaborated previously, were in existence solely for the purpose of the MIP program, and did not continue into real-life work at the end of the program. The MIP program is managed by a Head *Moniteur* and a group of *moniteurs* who coach one team per cohort. The Head *Moniteur* allocates individuals to project teams, creating a balance of nationalities with people all speaking a common language, either English or French.[2] [2]. For this research, authorization was given to Vigier to observe the interactions of the Head *Moniteur*'s English-speaking project teams in three cohorts.

The problem-solving tasks the teams were assigned were real dilemmas in Supply Chain Steering, Order-to-Cash Processing, Sales and Operational Planning, and Change Management in a Production Warehouse, which the company had already solved. Thus, while the problems were authentic, the teams were not expected to find any particular results. The ultimate goal of the four problem-solving tasks was to enable the participants to learn to work in culturally diverse groups, establish processes collectively, find procedures for completing their tasks effectively, and develop as a team (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman and Jensen, 1977). In fact, the company provided all participants with literature on Tuckman's (1965) four initial developmental stages (forming, storming, norming, and performing) and organized the MIP sessions with four project-team workshops (one per week during the four-week program) with the aim of reaching the "performing" stage by the fourth and final workshop.

Each project-team workshop took place in four distinct phases:

(1) Presentation to the entire cohort by a corporate expert of the task to be solved.

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[1] This paper is part of a larger study investigating the effects of cultural diversity on the interactional processes of project-teams in a multinational company (Vigier, 2015).

[2] Prior to the start of the program all potential participants indicated which language(s) they would be comfortable to use. On arrival they discovered their project-team composition and the working language based on their preferences.

(2) *Problem-solving and decision-making interactions in project teams – teams were given approximately one and a half hours to solve their problems.*

(3) Presentations to the entire cohort by two or three teams chosen at random.

(4) *Debriefing sessions in each project team with the team's moniteur.*

Of these, the second and fourth phases (indicated in italics above) were of primary interest: the team interactions and team debriefing sessions, respectively.

Research design

As our objective was to generate new insights into an area not yet systematically explored (i.e. links between rules and language disparities in culturally diverse teams), we undertook a qualitative, exploratory research design, and adopted a case study approach (Creswell, 2009; Eisenhardt, 1989, 1991; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). This included gathering data via non-participant observations; informal discussions during lunches and breaks; in-depth interviews and audio recordings of these; and written artifacts and documents, where provided, to complement the data and enable data triangulation (Gill and Johnson, 2002; Yin, 2009). While our initial aim was to examine the impact of diversity on team performance, as data collection and analysis took place, rules and language quickly emerged as prominent in managing the challenges of interacting in culturally-and linguistically-diverse teams, so we adjusted our focus to address the research questions identified at the end of the Literature review section. In other words, our approach became more exploratory, inductive, and data responsive (Eisenhardt, 1989; Welch *et al.*, 2011).

Working with three cohorts enabled us to collect data using within-case strategies (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009) and multiple-case comparative logic (Eisenhardt, 1991), since different informants were taking part in similar corporate activities. The settings were duplicated and the topics and the nature of the interactions were repeated for each new group. Consequently, the tasks observed were the same for each of the cohorts, the data collected are, therefore, comparable, and the findings have been strengthened thanks to this replication strategy (Eisenhardt, 1991; Yin, 2009). Comparisons between teams, thus, allowed us to explore the variations and commonalities across teams.

Data collection

As mentioned previously, our data consist of three main sources: observational data of team interactions, observational data of team debriefs, and interview data. Vigier attended ten project-team workshops (two for Cohort 1 and four each for Cohorts 2 and 3) and thus observed ten team interactions and seven team debriefing sessions.[3] Additionally, Vigier conducted 41 individual interviews with 27 members from the three teams observed (7 of the 12 members of the first team, and all 12 and 8 members of the second and third teams, respectively); eight from teams not observed; and six *moniteurs*. The complete data set includes 37.5 hours of observations of project-team workshops and over 49 hours of interviews.

Two points concerning the observations need to be specified. First, we are aware of the "observer's paradox", i.e. the influence that an observer has on the activity under scrutiny (Gill and Johnson, 2002);

[3] Some interactions were not followed-up by team debriefs, and Vigier was unable to attend two workshops for Cohort 1 due to professional obligations; interviewees provided details about the team interactions missed.

yet, since the participants were already being observed by a *moniteur* for corporate purposes, many of them admitted they tended to overlook Vigier's presence almost entirely. Second, Vigier was invited to lead one debrief for the team in Cohort 3, and thus became, briefly, a participant-observer. This may or may not have influenced the debrief discussion for Team C's Task 2, and will be addressed later in the paper.

The initial set of 41 individual, semi-structured interviews conducted by Vigier was exploratory to gain deeper insights into the rule-development processes that were being observed, so the interview protocol was adapted on an ongoing basis as the data gathered in the field became richer and thicker (Stake, 2005; Welch *et al.*, 2011). After adjustments, the final interview guide included, amongst others, the following open-ended questions:

- How are you experiencing/did you experience participating in your workshop team?
- How do/did you feel you are collaborating as a team member (to enable the team to progress, to cooperate, to work in harmony and/or to be productive and creative)?
- How well are/were you able to communicate your ideas?
- To what extent do/did you feel you are/were listened to?
- Your team is/was composed of a mix of members possessing a number of individual attributes (nationality, professional sector, gender, age and experience, corporate tenure, and language fluency). Which particular elements of diversity do/did you feel affect/affected how your team functions/functioned? Why? In what ways?

The dates of the interviews influenced the interviewees' comments regarding their team's development; the early interviews conducted while the interactions were still in progress concentrated on the initial stages, while the interviews that took place after the sessions had ended provided a more holistic view of team dynamics and processes.

Being bilingual in English and French enabled Vigier to carry out interviews in both languages. The international participants were given the choice between English or French, based on how comfortable they felt with each language. Rather than giving the native French speakers the opportunity of choosing their interview language, a decision was purposefully made to interview them in French to enable the collection of more nuanced and authentic data (Welch and Piekkari, 2006). Only one of the native French speakers requested using English in her interview and negotiated the option of reverting to French at any time. Altogether, 29 interviews were conducted in French for nationals from Belgium (1), Brazil (1), France (24), Italy (2), and Romania (1); and 12 were held in English for participants from Australia (1), Canada (1), Germany (1), France (1), India (2), Singapore (1), Sweden (1), and the USA (4). All interviews were recorded except for two.[4] The recorded interviews have been rigorously transcribed in both English and French, and detailed notes were made of the two unrecorded interviews.

[4] The interview with the Head Moniteur could not be recorded for reasons of confidentiality; while all interviewees were given a participant recording consent form at the start of each interview, only one member of Team A declined to give his consent.

Case study participants

For reasons of confidentiality, the pseudonym Global Player (GP) is used in all references to the company; aliases have been assigned to protect the informants' identities, and the project teams are labeled using letters of the alphabet (subsequently referred to as Teams A, B, and C). Three tables in the Appendix provide the demographic characteristics for the 12 members of Team A (Table AI)[5], the 12 members of Team B (Table AII), and the 8 members of Team C (Table AIII). These attributes include nationality, language fluency in English and French, professional sector, gender, age, pre-GP professional experience, and GP corporate tenure at the start of the integration program. We have also included a column indicating the interview language used.

Language fluency in the three teams

As mentioned in a footnote in the Research setting section, prior to attending the MIP, each participant completed a form indicating whether they spoke English and/or French, GP's two corporate languages, and whether they would feel comfortable in an English-speaking and/or French-speaking team. The program organizers used the responses to these questions to create the teams with a mix of nationalities, and the participants discovered their teams and the team's working language on arrival. Therefore, the language issue was handled informally, without any official testing, as GP's company policy does not require any formal language testing for recruitment or other purposes. Instead, they expect their managers to be able to apply their language skills in on-the-job situations.

Drawing upon previous studies (Kroon *et al.*, 2015; Neeley, 2015), and in light of GP's language policy, our measure of English-language proficiency was not codified through formal testing, but instead referred to the language demonstrated through interaction (Hagan and Wassink, 2016) in the particular environment (Blommaert *et al.*, 2005; Bourdieu, 1991) of the MIP observed by Vigier. Based on these observations, we classified team participants into two overall categories: FSs - including both native speakers and non-native speakers - and LFSs (Neeley, 2015). These categories of language skills do not reflect what the individuals possessed or lacked in absolute terms, but what the interactive processes enabled them to deploy in their specific contexts (Blommaert *et al.*, 2005).

Data analysis

Gathering data from three separate cohorts led Vigier to carry out an iterative process of overlapping data collection, coding, and analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The computer software program for qualitative research methods, NVivo (Bazeley, 2009), was used to store, organize, and code the data. These data were analyzed and classified in the original language in which they were collected: English for the observational data (records of team interactions and debriefs) and English and/or French for the interview data. Vigier subsequently translated relevant passages of the French transcripts into English. During the initial phases of coding, the focus was on classifying for topic. This led to a very large number of open categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), and so as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), a master coding sheet was

[5] It is important to note that one member (Bob-A, LFS-France) left Team A after Task 2, which meant that for the final two tasks, both Teams A and B had the same number of members and were of similar composition language-wise. These similarities enabled the authors to draw greater comparisons between these two teams. Thus, for the purpose of this study, our concern is with Team A's 12-member team.

developed, listing the coding clusters and sub-clusters that emerged from all data sources. Having done this and in view of the volume of data, a decision was made by both authors to use the themes that arose in the debrief sessions to refine the coding categories into more selective coding patterns (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The rationale underlying this decision is as follows. The debrief sessions were a joint production in which all participants, both *moniteurs* and team members, commented on the team interactions, after stepping back and reflecting on their dynamics and processes. The topics raised were done without Vigier's intervention and hence avoided any risk of imposition. As early as Cohort 1-Task 1, the three observed teams' *moniteur* brought up the topic of rules at the beginning of each team's first debrief, which indicated rules were apparently important for the team coaches. Thus "rules" became a key coding classification, and the coding scheme was gradually refined based on Team A's written rules (see "Team A's rules" below), as these or similar practices were observed and discussed in the debriefs for all three teams.

Team A's rules:

(1) Roles and responsibilities

- Facilitator
  - Neutral
  - Teamwork
  - Organize
  - Interaction between groups
  - Make sure everybody speaks
  - Challenger
  - Make group define who will present
- Timekeeper
- PPT writer
  - Responsible for writing PPT presentation
- Comments
  - "Experts": no specific rule. Not compatible with facilitator if they want to keep neutral?

(2) Global method

- Understand the objective
  - Write it on paper board (visual management)
- Gather facts describing the problem
- Identify and choose a solution
- Describe solution
- Define implementation
  - Risk management, change management, ...
- Share PPT presentation and define who will present

(3) Common group rules

- Listen to others

- Speak English and slowly
- Have trust in others' job
- There's no perfect answer, we'll have to make assumptions
- Define and respect a planning

Table 1 depicts the particular themes that were highlighted as being important in some way during the seven team debriefing sessions that Vigier attended: that they occurred when they should not have done, that they were missing from the interactions when they should have been present, or they were recommended as behavior the teams should strive toward or in which they had improved. Three main categories appeared in the debriefs and relate to the challenges with which the teams were confronted during their interactions: task management; language and communication management; and attitudes and atmosphere. Table I outlines these broad themes and the associated sub-themes identified during the debriefing sessions after the tasks Teams A, B, and C carried out. The acronyms (A1, B1, B2, B3, C1, C2, and C4)[6] correspond to the specific task sessions for which a team debriefing was held.

Elements of team diversity were also coded to help identify what impact diversity might have had on the rule-setting phenomena across teams. While diversity was discussed in the interviews, it was never mentioned in the debriefs.

During this constant iterative process, we moved among our data and the relevant literature, (Gioia *et al.*, 2012), by comparing the emerging concepts against the literature on rules, language asymmetries, and faultline dynamics in culturally diverse teams.

Debrief themes	Team tasks A1	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C4	Total references
Task management								
Roles and leadership	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6
Expertise	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	5
Rules	✓	✓	✓		✓			4
Planning and organization	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6
General practices (clarifying objectives, working in subgroups, managing the time)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	6
Shared processes	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
Language and communication								
Participation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	7
Listening and turn-taking	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6
Language differences						✓		1
Attitudes and atmosphere								
Respect	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	5
Trust			✓			✓		2
People and personalities	✓				✓			2
Frustration	✓							1

Table I. Coding frame: themes that emerged in the debrief data

[6] A1 refers to Team A's first task, while B2 and C4 refer to Team B's and Team C's second and fourth tasks, respectively, and so on.

Findings

Rule development and implementation

One of the major objectives for the MIP project-teams was to develop strategies for working together and to evolve as a group (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman and Jensen, 1977). In terms of *RQ1*, the development of rules emerged as a key strategy. Table II summarizes the rule-development and implementation processes across teams.

As illustrated in Table II, from the start Team A's working atmosphere was characterized by anarchy and negative feelings. They, therefore, called a special meeting between Tasks 2 and 3, and nine members got together to devise a set of written rules to improve their processes (see the list "Team A's rules"). Yet, because they apparently applied their rules rigidly and expected them to be applied to the letter (i.e. followed religiously with extreme politeness and unnaturalness, since people were raising their hands), three rule-breaking incidents were detected in Task 4 that offended people: interrupting (see comment by Olivia-A); the non-neutrality of the leader (see comment by Ethan-A); and a code-switching incident (see comments by Audrey-A and Olivia-A below – after Table II). Therefore, even by Task 4, many people had given up and there was mistrust, so they could not reach the "performing" stage (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman and Jensen, 1977).

Team	**Data findings**
Team A	*Task 1 debrief:*
	Moniteur-Anita: Before looking at the details, set rules [...] it was difficult to work together. [...] From the start, this group was not on the right track
	Moniteur-Anita-interview:
	They got off to a very bad start
	Task 4 interviews:
	Ethan-A (LFS-France): [In Task 2] we weren't respectful […] we interrupted; […] those who weren't heard got offended; […] there were a few clashes. […] This left a mark on the team for the following tasks […] and […] was the origin of tensions
	Jacob-A (LFS-France): There was a very strong reaction to put in place […] some discipline […] to channel […] the anarchy […] that was starting to be a little negative […] We managed […] to get together about nine of us between […] [Tasks 2 and 3] […] to express […] what wasn't working out […] and then to try to draw up […] some rules of conduct
	Audrey-A (FS-India): In one of the meetings [Task 3] we did very well, where people were very religiously following [the rules] and […] things changed […] At the last meeting I think people had given up […] There were people who could not trust simply some of the other people […]. We could not really reach the performances […] at the last stage [Task 4]
	Jacob-A (LFS-France): It wasn't natural […] between […] the anarchy at the beginning […] the extreme […] politeness and the extreme structure of the end […]. I think there's a happy medium […] where people can speak when […] they have […] an interesting idea to pass on and not necessarily when […] after raising their hand, the facilitator gives them the floor
	Olivia-A (FS-France): We need rules that are […] culturally acceptable for everyone, and I think that not interrupting [was] probably a good rule […]. But, like all rules, it's […] not necessary to take them to the extreme […] either

Ethan-A (LFS-France): It was [...] decided that someone would lead but not get involved [...] and would see that the group was efficient. [...] We tested it twice; [...] the last task [...] Wyatt-A held out almost the entire time, then the last ten minutes he entered the talks. [...] However, Jacob-A in the task before [...] played that role and respected it from beginning to end. [...] He stayed on the sidelines [...] which Wyatt-A tried to do, but [...] didn't manage [...] the whole time

Team B *Task 1 debrief:*

James-B (LFS-France): We showed respect [...] even though there were often five conversations at the same time

Moniteur-Anita: Key one was missing [...] no methodology [...] This is typical of a group that is not yet mature [...] define [and] stick to the rules

Task 2 debrief:

Benjamin-B (LFS-France): We didn't take the time to hear

Logan-B (LFS-France): I agree [...] we need a [moderator] and an expert [...] A moderator [...] just needs to be directive and holder of the rules. [...] The group agrees on the rules and the moderator says when it's OK to speak and when to shut up

Benjamin-B (LFS-France): I agree [...] a moderator is needed to say "shut up [...] let's listen." [...] A leader should be an expert. [...] The moderator is [...] a big role to play [...] just focus on [...] the discussion without listening

Nathan-B (LFS-France): We were disciplined. [...] Joseph-B played a great role for that

Moniteur-Anita: Your method is still a bit fuzzy [...] but I was surprised; [...] before I left the room everyone was talking [...] when I returned, there were three groups working quietly [...] and then everything was on the slides; [...] you couldn't have done this [...] last time. Are you proud?

Samuel-B (FS-Canada): I always am (laughter)!!

Joseph-B (LFS-Italy): 1 beer (laughter)!!

Task 3 debrief:

Tyler-B (FS-Sweden): We were clear on who does what

Benjamin-B (LFS-France): I read the time very well (laughter)!!

Joseph-B (LFS-Italy): It was more structured

Benjamin-B (LFS-France): What was positive is that we took the time, ten minutes, to read the assignment; [...] we didn't do it the previous times; [...] this was necessary for understanding

Moniteur-Anita: On the issue, you were clear. [...] Your results were higher than average; [...] you are working well together

Task 3 interviews:

Tyler-B (FS-Sweden): The group is very respectful [...] and [...] actually trying to go forward

Task 4 interviews:

James-B (LFS-France): I was happy to work with this group because [...] we were fairly close-knit

Team C	*Task 1 debrief:*
	Kevin-C (LFS-Italy): There was no organization at the beginning; […] there were no rules
	Moniteur-Anita: Think of rules and identifying strong roles; […] define the competencies of each
	person […] [but] you should be proud of your first one
	Anna-C (LFS-Brazil): We answered the question collectively
	Luke-C (LFS-France): The group shared the same point of view
	Moniteur-Anita: There was natural leadership without assigning roles […] this was a positive point.
	Task 2 debrief:
	Kevin-C (LFS-Italy): We had a better organization and assigned roles
	Dylan-C (LFS-France): Everyone participated
	Task 4 interviews:
	Brandon-C (LFS-France): It was a friendly atmosphere; a lot of respect; […] we teased each other […] then we created something

Table II: Rule development and implementation

Team B discussed their rules orally during the team debriefs for Tasks 1-3. As shown in Table II, the group was not yet mature in Task 1, and their methodology was still a bit fuzzy in Task 2. During the debrief to Task 2, they discussed roles at great length and decided they needed two leaders: an expert to focus on the task and a moderator to manage the speaking and listening. This decision was one of their strengths; so by Task 3 they had clearer roles and were more structured, their objectives were better clarified, and they had higher results. Concerning implementation, they applied their rules flexibly.

As for Team C, they rarely discussed rules in the debriefs after Task 1. In fact, they started out with shared processes and natural leadership, and by Task 2 had already improved their working practices in terms of organization, roles, and participation. Basically, they had an implicit code of conduct and their rules were applied naturally.

Differences in rule-implementation across teams can be further illustrated with the example of asides in French, i.e., code-switching (Brett *et al.*, 2006; Hinds *et al.*, 2014; Tenzer and Pudelko, 2015; Tenzer *et al.*, 2014; Vigier and Spencer-Oatey, 2017). The negative responses of annoyance, frustration, and offense after a brief code-switching incident in Team A's Task 4 clearly indicate their rigid handling of rules:

> Audrey-A (FS-India, non-French-speaker): When [they] [...] started talking French [...] Zachary-A [FS-The Netherlands, non-French-speaker] lost [...] what they were saying [...] and then [...] I think he got personally offended of it [...] because he was really, really that frustrated.

> Olivia-A (FS-France, French-speaker): In the rules […] of the group that were written […] there was "speak only in English and slowly." […] In a specific incident […] not even ten seconds […] I don't know how many […] who […] said "[…] in English, in English!" […] It's good to have a rule like that […] [but not] […] such rigidness.

In contrast, in both Teams B and C, asides in French often occurred but were handled flexibly and naturally. In Team B, responses to code-switching were positive:

> James-B (LFS-France, French-speaker): Sometimes I judged [asides] useful [...] because
> Logan-B (LFS-France, French-speaker): People [...] for whom [...] English was a hindrance [...]
>
> sometimes [...] spoke up saying: "OK, I'm making a small aside in my native language [...] (laughs)
> because it will be faster." [...] We were successful [...] using [...] these asides in French.

In Team C, the one non-French-speaker felt it was natural for the others to migrate to French, and French-speakers were careful to avoid exclusion:

> Jordan-C (FS-USA, non-French speaker): It's just natural for them to [...] speak in [...] their language [...] and they will say: "Oh, wait a second. I see [...] Jordan-C's listening, so we need to speak in English."
>
> Allison-C (LFS-France, French-speaker): Once I was […] near Jordan-C and somebody [said], "Well, I'm speaking French because I have a problem" and I did translate to him, but he didn't ask me to do it.

Thus, while members of Teams B and C managed switches to French constructively, Team A's members expected strict adherence to their written rules, which they even read out loud at the start of Tasks 3 and 4.

Language-fluency asymmetries as antecedents to differences in rule development and implementation

We now turn to *RQ2* and consider how language asymmetries affected interaction in the teams.

English-fluency disparities

Table III reports the English-language disparities which manifested themselves across teams.

As shown in Table III, people across all teams discussed English-fluency disparities in the interviews, and acknowledged its impact on the team interactions and rule-setting processes. However, the attitudes toward asymmetries in language fluency mirrored the experience of rule development and enactment: Teams A and B seemed to have the most critical comments and Team C the least. Might there be a connection, therefore, between the effectiveness of rules for facilitating team processes and the impact of language asymmetries? We turn to the concept of faultlines (Bezrukova *et al.*, 2009; Lau and Murnighan, 1998, 2005) to explore this possibility. We, thus, move to *RQ3*.

Language faultlines

Each of the teams can be divided into two subgroups according to their fluency in English: FSs and LFSs. Language fluency can, thus, become a potential faultline, splitting the group into in-groups and out-groups

(O'Leary and Mortensen, 2010), depending on the configurations within the teams. The distribution of FSs and LFSs is shown in Table IV.

For all teams these language-fluency faultlines (Lau and Murnighan, 1998, 2005) were activated as early as Task 1 since the designation of English as the common working language made it salient. We found that because English had to be brought into play in order for the teams to interact, members of the LFS subgroups felt relatively intimidated and less powerful compared to those in the FS subgroups (see Table III). The LFSs, particularly in Teams A and B, apparently perceived a significant disadvantage due to their inability to contribute to and influence team interactions as much as their FS counterparts (O'Leary and Mortensen, 2010). Thus an in-group/out-group mentality started to emerge, along the lines shown in Table IV.

Team	Data findings
Team A	*Task 4 Interviews:*
	Audrey-A (FS-NS-India): We were not necessarily aware [...] we spoke [...] very fast English [...] or that our accents [...] were not neutral
	Olivia-A (FS-France): I felt […] the […] lack of command […] of some people in […] English […] was a problem […] because […] it didn't allow being subtle enough; […] it was […] a handicap that […] increased frustration for both speakers […] and listeners
	Ethan-A (LFS-France): It was frustrating; [...] the group didn't always stick to [...] the rule about [...] speed of speaking [...] And no matter how many times we repeated it [...] we had a very [...] hard time respecting the rule [...] In addition to the language, the accent [...] [and] [...] pronunciation [...] were often annoying
	Jacob-A (LFS-France): Language posed a problem for […] some […] [who] […] couldn't participate the way they would have liked to. […] We wasted […] time […] because […] [of the] […] language […] [which] […] slows down our comprehension […] because it's the first "excuse" […] of misunderstandings
	Michael-A (LFS-France): The disrespect […] [was] a difficulty […] with the language […] because […] perhaps […] some people did not understand everything […] and when they took the floor they changed the subject completely […] which was complex […] moving forward […]. By […] redefining what had just been said […] we could have clarified […] any […] possible misunderstandings
Team B	*Task 2 Interviews:*
	Benjamin-B (LFS-France): There are quite a few [...] who [...] participate less [...] because they follow things less quickly because of the language
	Task 3 Interviews:
	Tyler-B (FS-Sweden): The level is very different between the participants [...] and that's [...] a disadvantage [...] [to] pinpoint exactly what [they] wanted to say.
	Task 4 Interviews:
	Sarah-B (LFS-France): English [...] was an [...] obstacle because sometimes we have the ideas and then the words [...] (laughs) don't necessarily come out
	David-B (FS-NS-Australia): I think James-B (LFS-France) struggled with it, in particular [...] because he doesn't feel his English is good [...] I do have the advantage of being an English-speaker but also have the disadvantage that most people can't understand what I say (laughs)

James-B (LFS-France): The three pure NSs [...] especially when they wanted to present their arguments, tended to get carried away a bit. [...] English fluency [...] sometimes might've slowed things down for some people. [...] Sometimes [...] I first needed to understand and capture what people were saying, before thinking about my own response

Elizabeth-B (LFS-France): When [...] Madelyn-B [NS-USA] [...] or Samuel-B [NS-Canada], or David-B [NS-Australia] [...] expressed themselves [...] it was much more powerful. [...] We had a hard time responding [...] because they spoke so quickly. [...] There were times when I felt if it had been in French, I would have spoken up [...] more [...] and with more conviction [...] than in English [...] since we're still not 100% fluent so [...] we're not as powerful

Team C *Task 1 debrief:*

Moniteur-Anita: You showed respect [...]; you were listening to each other

Task 2 debrief (Vigier was asked to lead this debrief to replace Moniteur-Anita, who had a company emergency):

Brandon-C (LFS-France): There was respect; [...] we felt we were listened to; [...] we didn't feel we were going to be interrupted; [...] we felt there was enough time for each one to speak
Vigier: There appeared to be trust and confidence so everyone seemed comfortable speaking
Allison-C (LFS-France): But the language issue made it difficult to express ideas[a]

Task 2 Interviews:

Anna-C (LFS-Brazil): Things are going well [...] when I give my opinions, I feel everyone's listening. [...] The mix of cultures [and] languages [...] puts [...] everyone at the same [...] level [...] if there's someone with a higher position, someone who's worked for [...] a longer time. [...] Everyone feels at ease to contribute. [...] In the end, we succeed (laughs); [...] we have good results

Task 4 Interviews:

Carter-C (LFS-France): Nuances [...] simple in French [...] were more difficult [...] to explain in English. [...] We're always [...] afraid; we wondered [...] "Did I understand correctly? [...] Did I say [...] what I wanted to say a certain way?" [...] Other than Jordan-C [...] everyone was in the same situation [...] to have to use a non-native language. [...] I think the language levels were [...] fairly homogenous. [...] We all had an effort to make [...] each of us. [...] I felt [...] everyone [...] was tolerant; there was no [...] impatience. [...] I don't think there was anyone who held back saying: "I don't speak [...] well enough [...] I'm not going to say it."

Kevin-C (LFS-Italy): Language, for me, was a difficulty; [...] not the main one [...] but in fact [...] it was still a constraint. [...] I always [...] tried [...] to speak English [...] and [...] to say the sentence anyway [...] with mistakes and [...] with some parts in French [...] not to wait to be perfect

Allison-C (LFS-France): The [...] problem we find [...] in international contexts [...] is that

Anglophones [...] which was not [...] so often with Jordan-C, but [...] as it is their own language [...] they cannot pay attention [...] to speak slowly. [...] But I am comfortable, because I know that [...] I can ask him to repeat three times if I need it

Note: [a]Allison-C's comment on language was apparently brought up spontaneously and was, thus, not prompted by Vigier, who was asked, exceptionally, to lead the debrief to Team C's Task 2.

Table III: English fluencies disparities

Team	Number on team	Fluent English speakers (FSs) In-Group	Less-fluent English speakers (LFSs) Out-Group
A	12 (tasks 3 & 4)	4 (France, India, Netherlands, USA)	8 (7 France, 1 Romania)
B	12	4 (Australia, Canada, Sweden, USA)	8 (7 France, 1 Italy)
C	8	1 (USA)	7 (5 France, 1 Brazil, 1 Italy)

Table IV: English fluency faultline sub-groups

We suggest that fluency inequalities create the need for subordinate subgroups to seek to even out the imbalance and perceived power loss, and posit that rule emergence is a strategy in response to the subjective superiority/inferiority comparisons between subgroups to gain a more assertive identity (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Our findings indicate that the rules themselves, to some extent, emerged in order to moderate the language faultlines (van der Kamp *et al.*, 2011) by lessening the language disadvantage (Vaara *et al.*, 2005) and providing a stabilizing effect to help re-establish relative equality. Rules, therefore, became the mediator between the negative language-based anxieties (Hinds *et al.*, 2014; Tenzer and Pudelko, 2015, 2017) and positive task processes by mitigating the power effects of the language disparities so as to create favorable conditions for LFSs to communicate and contribute to team interactions more effectively (Vaara *et al.*, 2005). This mitigation involved, for example: listening, speaking slowly, allowing (but monitoring) code-switching, assigning roles, naming leaders, using expertise, clarifying objectives, working in small groups, and creating a positive atmosphere, as indicated in "Team A's rules", and Tables II and III.

We argue that rule emergence differed across teams depending on the relative superiority-inferiority comparisons within the teams. We found that the perceived language imbalance and sub-group categorizations were higher in Teams A and B than Team C (see Table III), triggering greater polarization and tension between the subordinate and superordinate subgroups (O'Leary and Mortensen, 2010) in these two teams. In contrast, although language fluency levels of the LFSs in Team C were still present and anxiety still remained, the smaller size of Team C's in-group (only one FS) added a certain equilibrium to the situation reducing the power loss and frustration to some extent (O'Leary and Mortensen, 2010). More precisely, when we compare the opposing language-fluency subgroups across teams, we can see that the FS subgroups, i.e. the in-groups, for both Teams A and B were larger (with four FSs) than that of Team C, in which there was only one FS. Indeed the LFSs in Teams A and B might have felt more insecure and less convincing than the LFSs in Team C, thus creating a more divisive rift along language lines in the former two teams, which might account for their need for more explicit rules. Perhaps members of Team C felt they could function smoothly without heavy rules because in spite of language inhibitions, there were fewer feelings of inequity and imbalance. Team C's rule-development processes, thus, flowed more naturally. Overall, we posit that the dynamics of equality vs inequality (Thatcher *et al.*, 2003; Thatcher and Patel, 2012) influences the explicitness/implicitness of the rules put into place. In summary the particular rule-development processes within each of the three teams demonstrated the consequence of the relative degree of disparity in

English proficiency; the greater the disparity the more explicit and stronger the rules, and the longer it took for these rules to be established. The greater feelings of inequality and imbalance in Teams A and B were reflected in the need for strong rules, the purpose of which was to minimize the English-fluency inequalities felt by the LFSs.

Yet, one question still remains unanswered. Teams A and B both adopted explicit rules, so why did rule development and implementation appear to be less effective in Team A, although these two teams ended up with the same language-faultline structure, i.e. 4 FSs + 8 LFSs (as shown in Table IV; see also Tables AI-AIII). We, thus, explored other faultline subgroupings within Teams A and B which might account for the differences in rule-development processes between these two teams. Interestingly, we noted that all the FSs in Team A worked in Personnel, that all three females in Team A were FSs, and that Team A's FSs were older and more experienced than the LFSs, thus strengthening the language-fluency faultline along four further attributes: professional sector, gender, age, and experience, as indicated in Table V; whereas people in Team B's FS in-group worked in several different professional sectors, there was only one female out of the three in the team, and there were lower gaps in age and experience between the FSs and the LFSs. Thus, Team A's language-fluency faultline coupled with the alignment of other attributes may have strengthened the social identity categorizations (Tajfel and Turner, 1986) and accentuated the negative subgroup dynamics in this team. This greater faultline strength might account for the greater rule-development and implementation difficulties experienced in Team A. This is consistent with the faultline model (Lau and Murnighan, 1998, 2005), which posits that subgroup boundaries are accentuated when they split along more than one attribute, creating further polarization (Bezrukova *et al.*, 2009; Li and Hambrick, 2005; Thatcher *et al.*, 2003; Thatcher and Patel, 2012). The LFSs in Team A seem to have felt more united as a subgroup, with a stronger them/us mentality, which led to greater tensions and annoyance with the "others," owing to the stronger faultline alignment. Nevertheless, these interpretations are far from definitive and merit further research investigation.

Attributes	**Strong faultline between subgroups Team A**		**Strong faultline between subgroups Team B**	
	FS In-group (4)	**LFS Out-group (8)**	**FS In-group (4)**	**LFS Out-group (8)**
Gender	3 females 1 male	0 females 8 males	1 female 3 males	2 females 6 males
Professional sector	4 Personnel	1 Logistics 2 R&D 2 Industry 1 Finance 1 Agronomy 1 Marketing-Sales	1 Finance 1 Marketing 1 Sales 1 Business Analyst	2 Communication 2 Finance 2 Industry 1 Supply Chain
Average age	45.25 years	27.25 years	38.75 years	32.65 years
Age gap	18-year gap			

Average experience (pre-GP + GP tenure)	22.5 years	7.09 years	17.75 years	9.21 years
Experience gap	15.5-year gap		8.5-year gap	

Table V. Comparison of faultline strength between Teams A and B

Discussion

Theoretical contribution

Overall, each of our teams acknowledged the need for rules and procedures to manage their interactive processes. This is in line with previous studies (e.g. Canney Davison and Ward, 1999; DiStefano and Maznevski, 2000; Earley and Gardner, 2005; Earley and Mosakowski, 2000; Gluesing *et al.*, 2003; Lau and Murnighan, 2005) which have identified the importance of rule establishment within culturally diverse teams for the effective handling of interactions. However, our study extends and goes beyond the substantial body of research on rules in multinational teams by exploring their interplay with language-fluency asymmetries and faultline subgroupings. On the basis of our findings, we propose that when there are linguistic (or other) faultlines in teams, out-group members may instigate rules to try to attenuate polarization (Lau and Murnighan, 1998) created by perceived status loss (Neeley, 2013) and power contests (Hinds *et al.*, 2014). However, such attempts to mitigate the negative effects of the language-based disparities and imbalance are not always successful and we suggest a model to capture the reasons (see Figure 1).

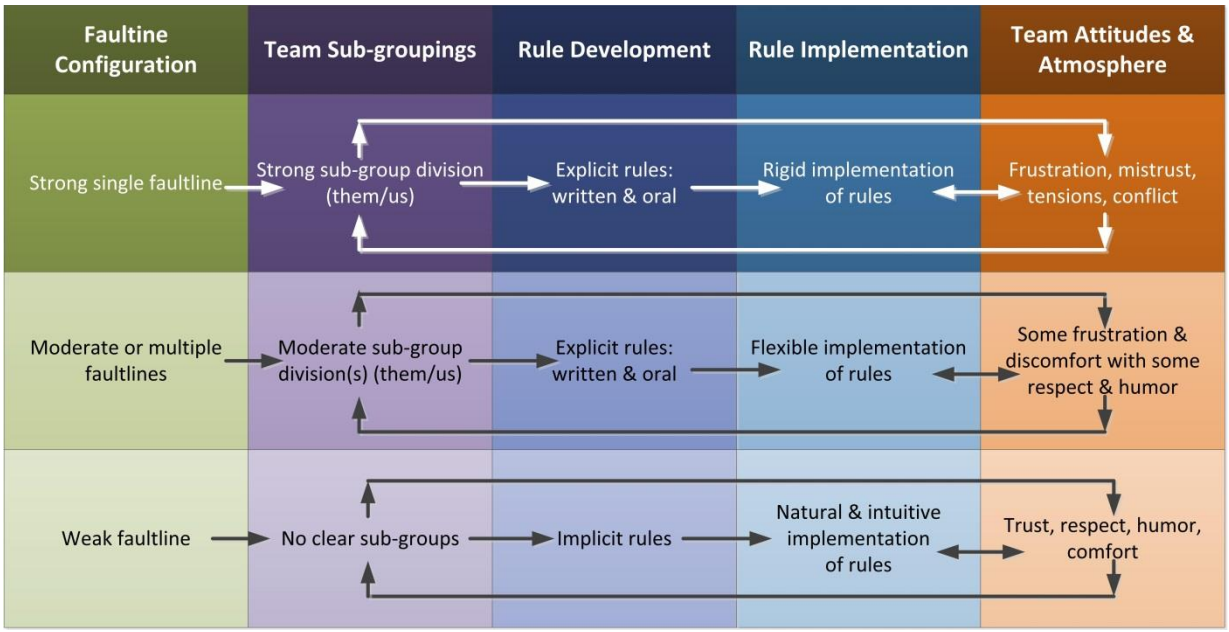

Figure 1. Interplay of rules, faultline configurations, and team dynamics

First, if there are linguistic or other faultlines (e.g. nationality, gender, professional sector, age, experience), them/us attitudes may emerge and rules may function as an attempt to reduce the power imbalance perceived by members of the less powerful out-groups. The stronger the faultline configurations and team

subgroupings, the greater the frustrations, mistrust, and tensions, and so the less rules will be based on soft social processes (e.g. Easterby-Smith and Malina, 1999; Griffith *et al.*, 2003; Pelled, 1996; Peterson, 2001; Tjosvold *et al.*, 2014). The deeper the divisions between in-groups and out-groups, the more difficult the rule development and implementation processes may be, and the longer it may take such teams to establish and implement successful rules and procedures. In fact, this belief was expressed by one member of Team A, the team with the greatest rule-setting and enforcement difficulties, the most negative attitudes and atmosphere, as well as the strongest faultlines:

> Jacob-A (LFS-France): If we had to work together on a long-term basis […] if we had had a fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth session, we would have found our cruising pace.

Our study, thus, provides one of the first empirical studies of the use of rules as an intervening mechanism on the negative effects of language-disparity subgroupings (Li and Hambrick, 2005). It also extends previous faultline research (Lau and Murnighan, 1998, 2005) by identifying language asymmetries as a potential faultline trigger and by linking both such asymmetries plus the notion of faultlines to the relative value of rules in facilitating team interaction. Team rules appear to be devised as a mechanism for bridging individual language-fluency subgroup differences and, thus, increasing the ability of the less-fluent out-groups to communicate and contribute to team tasks.

Managerial implications

Turning to managers, our research demonstrates the importance of thinking carefully about how to reduce in-group/out-group divisions and feelings of powerlessness linked with perceived power imbalance of subgroups. First, when designing teams, and in order for culturally diverse groups to operate under effective conditions, managers should consider not only national characteristics but also language-fluency levels. More specifically, managers could compose teams with a reduced number of people in the powerful FS in-groups so as to minimize the negative impact of subgroup faultlines (Lau and Murnighan, 2005) on the LFS out-groups, which could ideally limit conflict, maximize feelings of belongingness, and increase the participation of all members. Second, discussion about team processes is also crucial. For example, language issues could be addressed in team debriefing sessions rather than ignored or only discussed individually (as happened with members of the three cohorts in this study). Being attentive to all language needs would have the advantage of increasing comfort and confidence, so would tend to heighten participation and lessen the likelihood of conflict and frustration. Such discussions could also lead to consideration of rules, such as how strictly they should be implemented, in order to help reduce feelings of frustration and to build cohesion within the entire team.

Acknowledgment of limitations and areas for future research

The present research is subject to a number of limitations. First, the teams investigated were somewhat artificial in that they were created for an internal corporate program, yet the conditions were authentic: teams had real and tight deadlines, and the different teams were observed by a *moniteur* who evaluated their performance; all teams within each cohort were competing against one another, as if they were business competitors, so there was a closer link with reality than a fully laboratory experiment. Further research on

naturally occurring project teams is, however, recommended. A second limitation relates to the fact that the study examined short-term project teams in their early stages. Therefore, the particular teams studied probably had different ways of managing their processes than on-going teams would have had. Moreover, the teams carried out their tasks in only four sessions, which is a relatively short period compared to real organizational project-teams. As team dynamics and processes evolve over time, we might expect more established teams to have already adopted procedures to alleviate the negative dynamics associated with the language disparities identified. Third, as the company determined the composition of the teams, there were variations in size; and fourth, as addressed previously, Vigier's presence may or may not have affected participants' behavior and/or the data obtained. A fifth limitation involves the fact that the participants were assessed and coached by a *moniteur*. Consequently, their behavior may have differed from that of members of non-training teams since many of the team participants were concerned about how to act in front of the *moniteur*. A sixth type of limitation involves our case study approach, which limits our ability to apply our findings to other global teams since we only investigated diverse teams three teams. In fact, the aim of this study was not to generalize about the interplay between rule-setting processes and language asymmetries in all types of teams, but rather to explore at the micro-level how culturally diverse teams develop processes to facilitate smooth collaboration. This inevitably means the analysis of a small, select number of teams. These limitations highlight the conditions for the applicability of our findings. Nevertheless, despite these limitations and the caution needed in generalizing the findings, we believe the authenticity of the research setting and the richness of the qualitative data (Yin, 2009), make the study significant and compensate for some of its limitations.

Our study, thus, raises a number of questions that need to be addressed in future research. Further qualitative investigation is needed to extend our understanding of the ways in which rules affect and are affected by language asymmetries, and how they mitigate the schisms and resulting tensions of faultline subgroupings in culturally diverse teams. Longitudinal studies of established multicultural project teams would enable investigation of the effects of time on rule development and adherence, and the interaction of these processes with language-fluency subgroups, uniquely or when aligned with other individual attributes of diversity. Future research may also seek to test our findings and theoretical model quantitatively on a greater number of teams. The overall findings from such studies could help extend the insights obtained and lead to valuable practical guidelines and recommendations for managers and professionals in global business.

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Appendix 1

Alias	Nationality	Fluency in English and French	Professional sector	Gender	Age	Pre-GP experience	GP corporate tenure	Interview language
Audrey-A	India	FS Non-French-speaking	Personnel	F	35	10 years	4 years	English
Emma-A	USA	FS Non-French-speaking	Personnel	F	48	6 years	20 years	English
Ethan-A	France	LFS French-speaking	Logistics	M	43	17.5 years	1.5 years	French
Jacob-A	France	LFS French-speaking	R&D	M	32	10 years	6 months	French
James-A[a]	France	LFS French-speaking	Industry	M	49	25 years	3 months	Not interviewed
Leo-A	France	LFS French-speaking	Industry	M	31	6 years	10 months	Not interviewed
Lucas-A	France	LFS French-speaking	R&D	M	27	–	1.5 years	Not interviewed
Mark-A	France	LFS French-speaking	Industry	M	27	–	3 years	Not interviewed
Michael-A	France	LFS French-speaking	Finance	M	25	–	6 months	French
Olivia-A	France	FS French-speaking	Personnel	F	52	25 years	0 (new)	French
Parker-A	Romania	LFS French-speaking	Marketing-Sales	M	33	12 years	2 years	Not interviewed
Wyatt-A	France	LFS French-speaking	Agronomy	M	25	–	1.5 years	French
Zachary-A	Netherlands	FS Non-French-speaking	Personnel	M	46	20 years	4 years	Not interviewed

Note: [a]James-A left the team after Task 2

Table AI: Team A's components of diversity

Appendix 2

Alias	Nationality	Fluency in English and French	Professional sector	Gender	Age	Pre-GP experience	GP corporate tenure	Interview language
Benjamin-B	France	LFS French-speaking	Communication	M	33	8 years	4 months	French
David-B	Australia	FS Non-French-speaking	Finance	M	37	11 years	7 years	English
Elizabeth-B	France	LFS French-speaking	Finance	F	27	3 years	7 months	French
James-B	France	LFS French-speaking	Industry	M	27	–	2 years	French
Joseph-B	Italy	LFS French-speaking	Industry	M	35	7 years	13 years	French
Logan-B	France	LFS French-speaking	Communication	M	46	20 years	1 month	French
Madelyn-B	USA	FS Non-French-speaking	Marketing	F	41	12 years	8 years	English
Nathan-B	France	LFS French-speaking	Finance	M	37	–	13 years	French
Ryan-B	France	LFS French-speaking	Supply Chain	M	25	–	1.5 years	French
Samuel-B	Canada	FS French-speaking	Sales	M	44	5 years	20 years	English
Sarah-B	France	LFS French-speaking	Tax Law	F	31	5 years	3 months	French
Tyler-B	Sweden	FS Non-French-speaking	Business Analyst	M	33	7 years	2 years	English

Table AII: Team B's components of diversity

Appendix 3

Alias	Nationality	Fluency in English and French	Professional sector	Gender	Age	Pre-GP experience	GP corporate tenure	Interview language
Allison-C	France	LFS French-speaking	Finance	F	49	28 years	3 months	English
Anna-C	Brazil	LFS French-speaking	Communication	F	27	–	5.5 years	French
Brandon-C	France	LFS French-speaking	Industry	M	48	25 years	1 month	French
Carter-C	France	LFS French-speaking	Industry	M	26	1.5 years	4 months	French
Dylan-C	France	LFS French-speaking	Communication	M	55	22 years	1 month	French
Jordan-C	USA	FS Non-French-speaking	Marketing-Sales	M	50	10 years	17 years	English
Kevin-C	Italy	LFS French-speaking	Industry	M	36	–	11 years	French
Luke-C	France	LFS French-speaking	Supply Chain	M	25	–	1 year	French

Table AIII: Team C's components of diversity

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