

**Bridging and Bonding:  
Disentangling Two Mechanisms Underlying the Diversity-Performance Relationship<sup>1</sup>**

Brad R. Fulton  
Associate Professor  
O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs  
Indiana University – Bloomington  
1315 E. 10<sup>th</sup> St. | Bloomington, IN 47405  
fulton@indiana.edu  
812.855.6948

Keywords: diversity, interaction, cohesion, performance, and organizations

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<sup>1</sup> Fulton, Brad R. 2021. "Bridging and bonding: Disentangling two mechanisms underlying the diversity-performance relationship." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 50:54-76. DOI: 10.1177/0899764020939654

## **Bridging and Bonding: Disentangling Two Mechanisms Underlying the Diversity-Performance Relationship**

### **Abstract**

Although extensive research has examined whether diversity hinders or improves organizational performance, the aggregate results remain inconclusive. Social bridging theories argue that diverse organizations perform better than homogenous organizations, while social bonding theories argue that diverse organizations perform worse. When scholars test these competing theories, they often specify bridging and bonding as the inverse of one another. This study instead specifies them as distinct mechanisms and measures them independently using data from a national study of organizations containing information on the race, class, gender, and religion of each organization's leadership team and the frequency, type, and content of their interactions. The analysis indicates that both bridging and bonding are positively associated with an organization's performance; however, their respective performance benefits depend on the type of task being performed. The results suggest that social diversity facilitates performance related to accessing external resources and social interaction facilitates performance related to internal coordination.

## **Bridging and Bonding: Disentangling Two Mechanisms Underlying the Diversity-Performance Relationship**

Although many organizations aspire to be socially diverse, diversity's consequences for organizational performance remain unclear. Most meta-analyses of studies that examine the diversity-performance relationship emphasize the mixed findings and provide minimal guidance for adjudicating between the competing views.<sup>1</sup> The “optimistic” view privileges social bridging theories (c.f., Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973) and argues that diverse organizations will perform better because they have access to a broader range of social resources via their members' networks (e.g., Jackson and Joshi, 2004; Kearney, Gebert, and Voelpel, 2009).<sup>2</sup> The “pessimistic” view privileges social bonding theories (c.f., Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988) and argues that diverse organizations will perform worse because they are less cohesive as a result of their members' social differences (e.g., Li and Hambrick, 2005; Rao, Yue, and Ingram, 2010).<sup>3</sup>

Advancing knowledge about the diversity-performance relationship has been hindered because many studies operationalize the mechanisms of bridging and bonding using the same measure—the organization's social composition (see Beyerlein and Hipp, 2006; Coffé and Geys, 2007; Ruef and Kwon, 2016; Smith and Hou, 2015). Such studies view diversity as positively related to the social resources that come with bridging and negatively related to the social cohesion that comes from bonding. This approach assumes that bridging and bonding are necessarily opposing mechanisms, preventing analyses from assessing their independent effects.

This study advances diversity-performance research by specifying bridging and bonding as distinct mechanisms and measuring them independently—bridging based on the social diversity of an organization and bonding based on the social interaction of its members. The study assesses the mechanisms' independent effects on performance using data from a national study of organizations containing information on the race, gender, income, education level, and

religion of each organization's leadership team and the frequency, type, and content of their interactions. These data describe community-based advocacy organizations whose leadership teams exhibit a wide distribution of diversity along several social dimensions (Fulton and Wood, 2017; Walker and Stepick, 2014). These 501c3 organizations have characteristics of both social movements and civic engagement: they mobilize constituents to address issues through the public exercise of political power (Tarrow, 1994) and their most common forms of public engagement are collective civic actions (Sampson et al., 2005).

While many diversity-performance studies rely on a single measure of performance (Pallotti and Lomi, 2011), this study assesses multiple dimensions of performance: an organization's ability to acquire sponsors, develop strategies, and mobilize people. The analyses examine how social diversity and social interaction are related to each other and to organizational performance. The first analysis challenges the assumption that bridging and bonding are inversely related. The second analysis indicates that both bridging and bonding are positively associated with an organization's performance; however, their respective performance benefits depend on the type of task being performed. The results suggest that social diversity facilitates the performance of tasks that primarily involve accessing external resources and social interaction facilitates the performance of tasks that primarily involve internal coordination.

## **Theory**

Many studies that analyze the diversity-performance relationship use a version of the conceptual model depicted in Figure 1, which presents bridging and bonding as countervailing causal pathways (Reagans and Zuckerman, 2001). The bridging pathway hypothesizes that diversity increases the range of social resources an organization can access and that social resources are positively related to organizational performance. The bonding pathway hypothesizes that diversity decreases the social cohesion of an organization and that social

cohesion is positively related to organizational performance. Using this model, however, is problematic because both of the mechanisms hypothesized to improve performance—bridging and bonding—are measured using the organization’s level of social diversity, and these mechanisms are assumed to be inversely related. While Reagans and Zuckerman (2001) referenced this model to illustrate the problems with relying solely on an organization’s social composition to measure its level of bridging and bonding, many scholars, as noted above, persist in using this flawed model. Given this model’s reliance on an organization’s social composition to measure its levels of bridging and bonding, it is understandable that meta-analyses of diversity-performance studies find mixed results. Moreover, analyses that use this approach cannot isolate the individual contributions of each mechanism on performance.

**[Figure 1]**

The network theory of social capital provides a helpful framework for explaining why bridging and bonding are distinct mechanisms that are each independently related to an organization’s performance (Borgatti and Foster, 2003; Lin, 2001; Moody and Paxton, 2009). This theory draws on the connection between social bridging and structural holes (c.f., Burt, 1992) and the connection between social bonding and network density (c.f., Coleman, 1988). These network properties need not oppose one another; an organization can concurrently bridge structural holes and increase network density (Reagans and Zuckerman, 2001). Reagans and Zuckerman distinguish between *local* structural holes, which exist *inside* an organization, and *global* structural holes, which exist *outside* the organization. Local structural holes—the absence of ties between organizational members—reduce an organization’s network density, which can undermine its performance. Global structural holes—the absence of ties to networks outside the organization—limit the range of social resources the organization can access, which can undermine its performance. Accordingly, an organization can improve its performance by

concurrently increasing the number of external structural holes it bridges and increasing its internal network density. This conceptualization presents bridging (to external ties) and bonding (among internal ties) as distinct mechanisms that can: 1) be measured independently, 2) vary independently, and 3) be independently related to performance. Recasting diversity-performance research in network terms provides conceptual clarity and addresses the inaccurate assumption that social bridging and bonding are necessarily opposing mechanisms. Specifically, network theory clarifies that bridging is related to an organization's external ties, which can facilitate accessing resources, and bonding is related to an organization's internal ties, which can facilitate coordinating activities.

Diversity-performance research has also been hindered because many analyses use an organization's social composition as a proxy for its internal dynamics (Pfeffer, 1983). This approach is based on the flawed assumption that an organization's level of diversity necessarily corresponds with dynamics such as trust, communication, and cooperation (Lawrence, 1997; Reagans and Zuckerman, 2001). Assessing the social *interactions* among an organization's members rather than the social *composition* of the organization can provide a more direct measure of the organization's cohesiveness (Stolle, Soroka, and Johnston, 2008). A small number of studies take this more direct approach. Reagans and McEvily (2003) measure how often organizational members communicate with each other and their emotional closeness, Han et al. (2014) measure how often organizational members discuss work-related topics and emotional issues with each other, and Oh et al. (2004) measure how often organizational members informally socialize with each other. These studies not only provide evidence that an organization's social composition is an inadequate indicator of its cohesiveness, they also suggest that, in addition to the frequency of interaction, the type and content of social interaction can influence this cohesion.

The present study approaches bridging and bonding as distinct mechanisms and measures them independently. Bridging is operationalized as the social diversity of an organization, and bonding is measured through the social interaction of its members (see Figure 2). As a result, this study advances diversity-performance research by disentangling the mechanisms of bridging and bonding and assessing their independent effects on performance.

### **[Figure 2]**

#### *Social diversity and organizational performance*

An organization's level of social diversity indicates the range of social resources it can access (Lin, 2001). This claim relies on two assumptions: 1) an organization's level of diversity corresponds with the diversity of its external network and 2) the diversity of an organization's external network corresponds with the range of social resources it can access. Regarding the first assumption, the influence of homophily likely results in organizational members' contacts outside the organization sharing their social characteristics (Smith, McPherson, and Smith-Lovin, 2014). This tendency of individuals to develop contacts resembling themselves means that an organization's external network exhibits roughly the same level of diversity as the organization. As the diversity of an organization increases, the diversity of its external network will increase because its members are less likely to have the same contacts (Baggetta, 2016).

Regarding the second assumption, social bridging occurs when a tie between two actors spans a social boundary or structural hole (Burt, 1992; Granovetter, 1973). The resulting bridge provides the actors access to unique social resources, and actors with a more diverse social network have access to a greater variety of social resources (Lin, 2001). At the organizational level, organizations with more diverse members have access to a greater variety of resources.

Social resources—which include influence, information, and experience—can facilitate organizational performance, and organizations with access to a greater variety of these resources

are likely to perform better (Page, 2007). Diverse organizations tend to have ties to a broader range of influential people and institutions, which can increase an organization's capacity to accomplish its goals (Gazley, Chang, and Bingham, 2010). Similarly, having non-redundant sources of information increases the variety of ideas, which can promote creativity and lead to innovation (Burt, 2004). Furthermore, because demographic differences are often associated with different life experiences, social diversity can provide alternative perspectives and practices, which can increase an organization's strategic capacity (Ganz, 2000; Hillman, Cannella, and Harris, 2002). Given the relationship between an organization's social composition and the range of social resources it can access, an organization's level of social diversity is expected to be positively related to its performance.

#### *Social interaction and organizational performance*

Social interaction can influence performance by affecting the organization's cohesiveness and ability to coordinate activities. The mechanism underlying this claim is social bonding, which can enhance an organization's internal dynamics such as trust, communication, and cooperation. Social bonding occurs when a tie between two actors is strengthened through social interaction; the resulting bond produces social cohesion between the actors (Granovetter, 1973). At the organizational level, social interaction can strengthen ties among organizational members, which can facilitate their ability to work together (Beal et al., 2003).

When estimating the strength of ties between actors, it is important to measure multiple components of interaction. Granovetter (1973) conceptualizes tie strength as a combination of four indicators—time together, emotional intensity, intimacy, and providing reciprocal services. Similarly, Marsden and Campbell (1984) distinguish between the amount of interaction and the depth of interaction, using the breadth of topics discussed as an indicator of tie strength.



The *frequency* of interaction is expected to influence organizational cohesion because members who interact more often tend to exhibit greater trust, better communication, and more cooperation (Chatman and Flynn, 2001; Reagans and Zuckerman, 2001). The *type* of interaction can also influence an organization's cohesiveness. For example, an organization can strengthen its collective identity by having its members participate in shared cultural activities such as playing games, sharing meals, and praying together (Bernstein, 2005; Braunstein, Fulton, and Wood, 2014; McNeill, 1995). Research on social movement organizations indicates that singing songs together builds solidarity (Danaher, 2010; Paretskaya, 2015; Roy, 2010). Members of organizations who participate in these types of activities tend to be more cohesive and committed to working together (Braunstein, Fulton, and Wood, 2014; Fredette, Bradshaw, and Krause, 2016). Similarly, the *content* of interaction is expected to be related to organizational cohesion (Marsden and Campbell, 1984). Members of organizations in which social differences are regularly discussed are more likely to report feeling valued and respected by their colleagues, a stronger emotional attachment to their colleagues, and a greater commitment to the organization (Ely and Thomas, 2001; Fulton, Oyakawa, and Wood, 2019).

Organizations that exhibit high levels of trust can navigate group decision-making processes with greater ease (Bergman et al., 2012). Similarly, when members of an organization communicate well with each other, task delegation and project implementation can improve (Newell, Tansley, and Huang, 2004). Furthermore, when members of an organization cooperate with each other, knowledge transfer and coordinating activities are both facilitated (Reagans and McEvily, 2003). Given the relationship between the social interactions among an organization's members and the organization's cohesiveness, the frequency, type, and content of interaction among an organization's members are expected to be positively related to its performance.

### *Multiple measures of organizational performance*

Many diversity-performance studies rely on a single measure of performance, even though performance is a multidimensional concept (Pallotti and Lomi, 2011). Studies that reduce performance to a single outcome ignore that organizations have multiple stakeholders with varied interests and priorities (Sowa, Selden, and Sandfort, 2004). Moreover, because this study seeks to disentangle the effects of two mechanisms associated with an organization's performance, relying on only one measure would risk selecting an outcome that is more directly influenced by one of the mechanisms and thereby produce biased results (Pallotti and Lomi, 2011). While it is expected that both social diversity and social interaction are positively related to an organization's performance, their effects occur through independent mechanisms and their significance likely depends on the type of task being performed (Jehn, Northcraft, and Neale, 1999). Because social bridging can expand an organization's access to resources, it is expected that an organization's level of diversity is positively associated with tasks that involve accessing external resources. Because social bonding can influence an organization's internal dynamics, it is expected that the intensity of interactions among an organization's members is positively associated with tasks that involve internal coordination.

To assess whether the significance of bridging and bonding depends on the type of task being performed, this study analyzes multiple measures of performance: an organization's ability to acquire sponsors, develop strategies, and mobilize people (Davis et al., 2005).

*Acquiring Sponsors.* Nonprofit organizations often rely on sponsors to support their activities. Sponsorship capacity represents the range of individual and institutional sponsors an organization can solicit for support (Jenkins, 2006). Nonprofit organizations tend to seek financial and political sponsorship through their leaders' personal networks, but they must compete with other organizations (Barman, 2002). Thus, organizations with a diverse leadership team are expected

to have greater sponsorship capacity, because they tend to have a broader network of potential sponsors (Gazley, Chang, and Bingham, 2010; Walker and McCarthy, 2010). Because organizations typically acquire sponsors through individuals reaching outside the organization, minimal cohesion and internal coordination are needed to accomplish this task (Ancona and Caldwell, 2009). Thus, the frequency, type, and content of interaction among an organization's members are not expected to be related to an organization's ability to acquire sponsors.

*Developing Strategies.* Strategies are the means by which an organization mobilizes resources to achieve its goals (Walker and McCarthy, 2010). An organization's strategic capacity comprises the range of effective strategies it is likely to generate. When people develop strategies, they draw from their life experiences, which shape the way they frame issues, see political opportunities, and mobilize resources (Ganz, 2000). Because people with different backgrounds develop different strategies, it is expected that organizations with greater social diversity possess greater strategic capacity (Wang and Soule, 2012). In addition, because organizational strategies are often developed through members interacting with each other, an organization's strategic capacity is expected to be positively associated with the intensity of its members' interactions (Hutzschenreuter and Kleindienst, 2006).

*Mobilizing People.* Grassroots organizations demonstrate power through their ability to mobilize people, and an organization's mobilizing capacity corresponds to the pool of potential volunteers it can recruit and constituents it can assemble (Wood, 2002). Organizations tend to recruit participants from their leaders' personal networks, and because overlapping networks can limit an organization's mobilizing capacity, it is expected that organizations with a diverse leadership team can mobilize a greater number of participants (Tindall, Cormier, and Diani, 2012). An organization's mobilizing capacity also depends on its ability to retain the participants it has recruited (Staggenborg, 2015). An organization can facilitate participant retention by

inducing social interaction among its members (Shi et al., 2017); the intensity of members' interaction corresponds with an organization's cohesiveness and its ability to sustain participation (Vasta, 2010). Furthermore, organizing events that will attract and sustain participant involvement is a collective effort that requires extensive internal coordination (Swarts, 2008). Thus, it is expected that the frequency, type, and content of interaction among an organization's members are positively related to the organization's ability to mobilize people.

## **Method**

To examine how the mechanisms of bridging and bonding are related to each other and to organizational performance, this study analyzes data from the National Study of Community Organizing Organizations (NSCOO) (Fulton et al., 2011). The organizations in this study are located throughout the country in every major city and most mid-major cities. In each location, the organizations bring together individuals from their member institutions to address social, economic, and political issues affecting their community (Wood, Fulton, and Partridge, 2012). Each organization has a team of volunteer leaders consisting of representatives from its member institutions, which include religious congregations, nonprofit organizations, schools, unions, and other civic associations. Because most of the organizations have few paid staff, this team function as the organization's core leadership team and its members meet together on a regular basis to lead the organization. These commonalities enable the analyses to hold the organizations' form relatively constant, while allowing their social composition, internal interactions, and organizational outcomes to vary.

The NSCOO surveyed the entire field of these organizations by distributing a two-part survey to the director of each organization. Part one was an online survey that gathered extensive data on each organization's history, interactions, and activities. Part two consisted of customized spreadsheets that directors used to provide detailed demographic information about their

institutional members, leadership team members, and paid staff. In this multi-level study, 148 of the 189 organizations provided data for all of the variables used in the analysis. These data include demographic information on the 3,407 member institutions, 1,950 leadership team members, and 447 paid staff affiliated with those organizations (Fulton, 2018).

### *Measures of social bridging*

The analysis operationalizes social bridging as the diversity of the organization's leadership team, which is measured by tabulating the race, gender, household income level, education level, and religious affiliation of its members. The racial diversity of an organization's leadership team is calculated using the normalized Blau Index, which takes into account both the number of racial groups and the proportion of each group represented on the team to generate a diversity score that ranges from 0 to 1 (Blau, 1977).<sup>4</sup> The Blau Index is similarly applied to calculate the gender and religious diversity of an organization's leadership team.<sup>5</sup>

The variable for the leaders' household income has five categories: less than \$25,000 per year, \$25,000 to \$49,999 per year, \$50,000 to \$74,999 per year, \$75,000 to \$100,000 per year, and more than \$100,000 per year. The variable for the leaders' education attainment level has three categories: less than a bachelor's degree, a bachelor's degree, and more than a bachelor's degree. Because the "groups" represented in these variables have an inherent ordering (Reardon, 2009), the standard deviation of the leaders' income and education levels are used to calculate the diversity (i.e., the spread) of levels represented on the organization's leadership team.

### *Measures of social bonding*

The analysis operationalizes social bonding based on the social interactions of the organization's leadership team members, which comprise their frequency of 1) interaction, 2) participation in shared cultural activities, and 3) discussion of social differences. The variable used to measure the frequency of interaction is the number of leadership team meetings the

organization held in the previous year. The remaining items were ordered categorical variables from survey questions with five response options (never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always), which the analysis converted to a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 5. Participation in shared cultural activities is measured using directors' reports of how often their organization's activities included members singing songs together over the past year. For instance, the type of singing that might occur at a protest or prayer vigil. Directors were also asked to indicate how often their organization explicitly discussed racial differences in their meetings over the past year, and were asked identical questions related to gender, socioeconomic, and religious differences. The values from these four variables were summed to create a variable indicating how often the leaders discussed social differences in their meetings.<sup>6</sup>

One limitation of the NSCOO dataset is that it does not contain measures for individual-level interaction between an organization's leaders. Given that the level of involvement among an organization's leaders can vary substantially, the analysis restricts the sample of leaders to those who attended at least half of their organization's leadership team meetings in the previous 12 months.<sup>7</sup> On average, 81 percent of an organization's leaders met this criterion. This subset is defined as the "active" leaders and the analysis includes only these leaders. These high-attending leaders are more likely to interact with each other, and they provide a more accurate measure of the leadership team's functional level of diversity.

#### *Measures of organizational performance*

To assess whether the significance of bridging and bonding depends on the type of task being performed, this study analyzes multiple measures of performance: an organization's ability to acquire sponsors, develop strategies, and mobilize people. The analysis uses two dependent variables for each of these measures. Bivariate analyses (not displayed) indicate weak

correlations between each of the six performance measures, which suggest that these measures capture different aspects of performance, thus warranting separate analyses.

For acquiring sponsors, *revenue from grants and donations* indicates the total amount of funding the organization received from individuals, foundations, corporations, and the government in 2010.<sup>8</sup> *Number of city officials* indicates the number of different city officials the organization met with in the past year. Unlike the boards of most nonprofit organizations, the boards (i.e., the leadership teams) of the organizations in this study are not the organization's primary donors; they are representatives of the organization's member institutions. Thus, an organization's success relies partly on its leaders having ties to a broad base of potential funders and public officials.

For strategic capacity, the *number of organizing tactics used by the organization* indicates the number of different organizing tactics the organization used in the past two years to address socio-political issues. Respondents could select up to eleven different tactics: boycotts, leafleting, mass letter-writing, prayer vigils, press conferences, accountability sessions, rallies, sit-ins, and strikes as well as two open-ended response options. *Number of modes used for mass communication* indicates the number of different modes of communication the organization used in the past year to communicate simultaneously with many of its constituents. Respondents could select up to eleven different modes: bulk mail, robocalling, email listservs, Facebook, Evite, YouTube, Twitter, podcasts, online photo albums, blogs, and websites. The strategic capacity of grassroots organizations can be assessed by examining their portfolios of organizing tactics and modes of communication (Ganz, 2000). Organizations with broader portfolios demonstrate a greater capacity to develop and implement new strategies.

For mobilizing people, *number of volunteers* indicates the number of people who regularly attend planning meetings or work on the organization's projects. *Total turnout* indicates the total number of people who attended at least one of the organization's events in the past year.

The analysis controls for the organization's age and the number of its paid staff, member institutions, and leaders. Each of these organizational characteristics is known to be associated with the performance measures and the independent variables (Wood and Fulton, 2015). Table 1 displays descriptive statistics for the variables used in the analysis.

[Table 1]

## **Results**

The first analysis examines whether social bonding is inversely related to social bridging by assessing whether the interaction patterns of an organization's leadership team are correlated with its levels of diversity.<sup>9</sup> Table 2 displays the results of the fifteen bivariate analyses that regress the three measures of social interaction on the five dimensions of social diversity.<sup>10</sup> Among the fifteen analyses, only two indicate a negative relationship: 1) a team's income-level diversity and the number of meetings it has, and 2) a team's education-level diversity and how often it discusses social differences. The analysis also indicates a positive relationship between a team's level of racial and religious diversity and how often it meets. Overall, the most notable finding is the general lack of relationships between a team's level of social diversity and the interaction patterns of its members. This finding challenges the assumption that social diversity (i.e., bridging) is an adequate indicator of social interaction (i.e., bonding), and thus underscores the need to use more direct measures of social bonding.

[Table 2]



### *Social diversity and organizational performance*

The second analysis examines how an organization's performance is related to the diversity of its leadership team and the social interactions of its members.<sup>11</sup> A Poisson regression was conducted for each of the dependent variables. Table 3 displays the results of the six multivariate regression models in which the variables are included in each model simultaneously.

The analysis indicates that the racial, gender, and religious diversity of an organization's leadership team are positively associated with its revenue. Because grants and donations are often identified and secured by the organizations' leaders, organizations with more diverse leadership teams have access to a greater variety of funding sources. For example, faith-based foundations can be a substantial source of funding for these organizations, and an organization with leaders from several different religious traditions likely has ties to a greater variety of faith-based foundations than an organization with leaders from only one religious tradition (Fulton, 2017). Similarly, organizations that are more racially and gender diverse are likely to have access to a greater variety of funding opportunities for which they have a competitive advantage.

The income and education-level diversity of an organization's leadership team, however, are not associated with its revenue. This result is unsurprising, because individuals' access to funding sources corresponds with their income and education level. Additional analyses (not displayed) indicate that the mean income and education level of an organization's leadership team are positively related to its revenue; however, the proportion of white leaders and male leaders are not significantly associated with the organization's revenue. Furthermore, the racial, gender, and religious diversity of the organization's leadership team remain significant in the models that control for the leadership team's mean income and education level. These analyses demonstrate that the observed relationships are driven by social diversity rather than social privilege (DiTomaso, Post, and Parks-Yancy, 2007). These observations underscore the

importance of differentiating between distinct types of diversity (i.e., variety, separation, and disparity diversity) (c.f. Harrison and Klein, 2007) when conducting diversity-performance analyses.

[Table 3]

A similar pattern is observed for the number of city officials an organization met with in the past year. The racial, income, and education-level diversity of an organization's leadership team is related to meeting with a greater number of city officials. This finding is expected because organizations with a diverse leadership team likely have a greater proportion of non-redundant external ties. For example, members of a racially diverse leadership team, compared to members of an all-white leadership team, likely have less overlap in their personal contacts. Contrary to expectations, the analysis indicates a negative relationship between gender diversity and the number of city officials with whom the leadership team met.

Among the variables related to developing strategies, the relationship between social diversity and the performance of these tasks is less consistent. The religious, income, and education-level diversity of an organization's leadership team is positively associated with the number of tactics and modes of mass communication used by the organization. Religious traditions vary in the tactics they use to address social issues (Fulton and Wood, 2012; Markofski, Fulton, and Wood, 2020). For example, a Catholic leader reared in the Jesuit tradition likely draws on a set of tactics that differs from those of a Jewish leader influenced by the social justice teaching of Reform Judaism. Similarly, the organizing tactics and modes of mass communication used by advocacy groups vary by the class of its members (Dean, 2016; Doussard and Fulton, 2020). An additional analysis (not displayed) indicates that organizations with low-income leaders are more likely to use "low-tech" modes (e.g., newsletters and phone calls) to mass communicate with their constituents and organizations with high-income leaders

are more likely to use “high-tech” modes (e.g., Twitter and blogs). These relationships help explain why the spread of income levels represented on an organization’s leadership team is positively associated with its number of different modes of mass communication. Contrary to expectations, the analysis indicates that racial diversity is unrelated and gender diversity is negatively related to strategic capacity.

Most striking is the solitary positive relationship between social diversity and the outcomes related to mobilizing people. Apart from racial diversity being positively associated with the number of volunteers, the analysis indicates either no significant relationship or a negative relationship between the social diversity of an organization and its number of volunteers and event participants.

The mixed findings observed when analyzing the relationship between diversity and performance are consistent with previous research. However, because this study uses social interaction to measure social bonding, it can assess the effects of social bonding within an organization independent of its social composition.

#### *Social interaction and organizational performance*

The analysis indicates that an organization’s number of leadership team meetings is not associated with the amount of revenue it obtains and negatively associated with the number of city officials with which it met. Because these tasks require minimal internal coordination, it is understandable that the frequency of the leaders’ interaction is not positively related to the organization’s performance on these measures. The analysis also indicates that an organization’s number of leadership team meetings is negatively related to its ability to develop strategies and positively related to its ability to mobilize people. The magnitude of the effects of meeting frequency, however, are minimal. For the variables related to the type and content of interaction among an organization’s leadership team members, the analysis indicates a clearer pattern.

Interaction that includes leaders participating in shared cultural activities (singing together) and discussing social differences are positively associated with each of the variables measuring an organization's ability to develop strategies and mobilize people. Such interaction promotes trust, communication, and cooperation, which can enhance an organization's performance of tasks that involve internal coordination.

## **Discussion**

The first analysis contradicts claims that social bonding is inversely related to social bridging. This finding challenges the assumption that an organization's social composition is a reliable indicator of its members' interaction patterns. Although many scholars cite Pfeffer (1983) to defend their use of an organization's social composition as a proxy for its internal dynamics, Pfeffer's "black box" approach to analyzing the diversity-performance relationship relies on flawed assumptions (Lawrence, 1997). Congruence between demographic predictors and organizational dynamics cannot be assumed. For example, the relationship between an organization's social composition and its cohesiveness can vary by context. Reagans and Zuckerman (2001) use simulations to illustrate how organizations with the same social composition can have different interaction patterns. The present study uses survey data to further underscore the importance of disentangling the bridging and bonding mechanisms when conducting diversity-performance research.

The second analysis indicates that social diversity is strongly related to an organization's ability to acquire sponsors, moderately related to its ability to develop strategies, and generally unrelated to its ability to mobilize people. In contrast, the type and content of social interaction are moderately related to an organization's ability to acquire sponsors and strongly related to its ability to develop strategies and mobilize people. A likely explanation for the mixed results is that the performance benefits associated with social diversity and social interaction depend on

the type of task being performed: social diversity facilitates the performance of tasks that primarily involve accessing external resources and social interaction facilitates the performance of tasks that primarily involve internal coordination. Tasks like obtaining external funding and meeting with public officials are facilitated by having access to a variety of external resources but typically require relatively little internal coordination. In contrast, developing strategies and mobilizing people are positively related to social interaction because these tasks often require substantial internal coordination.

It is less clear why social diversity is not more strongly associated with developing strategies and mobilizing people, given that these tasks could benefit from having access to a wide range of social resources. One possible explanation is that merely having access to a greater variety of social resources is insufficient to realize their benefits; dynamics within diverse organizations may inhibit their full utilization (Fulton, 2019). For example, although social diversity can provide access to a wider variety of strategies, an organization's ability to implement those strategies may depend on its inner workings (Newell, Tansley, and Huang, 2004). Similarly, although a diverse organization has access to a broader range of constituents, its internal dynamics may inhibit the organization's ability to mobilize them (Walker and Stepick, 2014; Weisinger, Borges-Méndez, and Milofsky, 2016).

On a related note, the numerous null findings concerning the relationship between an organization's level of social diversity and its ability to develop strategies and mobilize people is consistent with research indicating that diverse and homogeneous organizations differ in the conditions they need to perform these tasks effectively (Weare, Musso, and Jun, 2009). A diverse organization's mobilizing capacity depends on its ability to cultivate a shared identity among its diverse base of constituents (Yukich, Fulton, and Wood, 2020). In contrast, a homogeneous organization is more likely to possess a shared identity; thus, its mobilizing capacity relies

primarily on its ability to recruit new participants (Davis et al., 2005). Most diversity-performance studies analyze differences between homogeneous and diverse organizations, whereas more studies are needed to analyze differences among diverse organizations. As organizations become more diverse and more data on diverse organizations become available, future research could analyze variation among socially diverse organizations to explain differences in their performance.

In response to the unexpected negative relationship between an organization's level of gender diversity and its ability to develop strategies and mobilize people, additional analyses (not displayed) reveal that the relationship between gender diversity and the performance of these tasks is curvilinear. Organizations with a high percentage of either male or female leaders tend to perform better than organizations with a more even mix of male and female leaders. This finding is consistent with lab-based research on gender faultlines (Pearsall, Ellis, and Evans, 2008), and this study is among the first field-based studies to observe this phenomenon. The dearth of field-based studies is partly due to few samples of organizational data containing sufficient numbers of both predominantly male and predominantly female leadership teams (Bell et al., 2011). Such sampling and range restrictions can produce distorted results (Allen et al., 2007). Further research is needed on organizational sectors that contain wide variation in the gender composition of their leadership teams.

## **Conclusion**

Studies analyzing the diversity-performance relationship often emphasize the importance of social bridging and social bonding. Although scholars agree that both mechanisms are positively related to an organization's performance, many regard them as opposing one another, assuming that an organization that exhibits high bridging will exhibit low bonding and vice versa. That view persists because many studies operationalize bridging and bonding using the same measure—the

organization's social composition—with diversity positively related to bridging and negatively related to bonding. That approach relies on the flawed assumption that bridging and bonding are necessarily opposing mechanisms. Furthermore, specifying these mechanisms as the inverse of each other prevents analyses from assessing their independent effects on performance.

This study advances diversity-performance research by specifying bridging and bonding as distinct mechanisms and measuring them independently. Unconstrained by the approach that models bridging and bonding with countervailing causal pathways, the analysis provides an expanded understanding of the social mechanisms underlying the diversity-performance relationship. The analysis indicates that social bridging and social bonding are independently related to an organization's performance and reveals how these relationships depend on the type of task being performed. The results suggest that social diversity facilitates the performance of tasks that primarily involve accessing external resources and social interaction facilitates the performance of tasks that primarily involve internal coordination. More broadly, this study provides evidence that an organization can expand its access to resources by increasing the diversity of its leadership team and improve its ability to coordinate activities by increasing the intensity of its leadership team's interactions.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> See Bell et al. 2011, Walker and Stepick 2014, and Williams and O'Reilly 1998.

<sup>2</sup> The term “social resources” is used to represent the various types of resources embedded in members’ social networks (Lin, 2001), such as influence, information, and experience.

<sup>3</sup> The term “social cohesion” is used to represent the quality of relationships among organizational members (Friedkin, 2004), such as trust, communication, and cooperation.

<sup>4</sup> Diversity =  $1 - [(\sum_k \rho_k^2 - 1/k) / (1 - 1/k)]$  where  $\rho_k$  is the proportion of leaders in group  $k$ .

<sup>5</sup> The racial and religious groups reported in Table 1 are the groups used to calculate the respective diversity scores.

<sup>6</sup> As the bivariate analyses in Table 2 indicate, a leadership team’s likelihood of discussing social differences in general is unrelated to the team’s specific levels of racial, gender, income, and religious diversity.

<sup>7</sup> As part of the customized spreadsheet portion of the survey, the directors were asked to indicate the proportion of leadership team meetings each leader had attended in the previous 12 months. This ordered categorical variable has five response options (zero; less than half, but not zero; half; more than half, but not all; and all).

<sup>8</sup> The organizations in the NSCOO focus on advocacy and shaping public policy rather than providing services. Consequently, they receive a very small percentage of their revenue from government grants (mean = 2.1%) and program service fees (mean = 1.1%).

<sup>9</sup> Because this study surveyed the entire population of institution-based community organizing organizations in the U.S. and received responses from 94 percent of the organizations, a finite population correction factor— $\sqrt{(N - n)/(N - 1)}$ —is applied to each analysis (Cochran, 1977). The finite population correction factor is based on the 148 organizations (out of 189) that provided data for all of the variables used in the analysis.

<sup>10</sup> For each bivariate analysis, the type of regression used was selected based on the type of dependent variable being analyzed (i.e., Poisson for the count variable and ordered logistic for the ordered categorical variables).

<sup>11</sup> Causal order cannot be determined because the analysis uses cross-sectional data; thus, the interpretations of the results avoid using language that implies causality.



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## **Biographical Paragraph**

Brad Fulton is an associate professor at Indiana University in the O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs. His research examines the social, political, and economic impact of organizations and has been published in journals including the *American Sociological Review*, *Sociological Methods & Research*, and *Social Problems*.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the community organizing organizations and their leadership teams

Variable	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
<i>Measures of Social Diversity<sup>a</sup></i>				
Racial diversity of the organization's leadership team	.57	.23	.00	.97
Proportion Caucasian	.51	.27	.00	1.00
Proportion African American	.29	.27	.00	1.00
Proportion Latinx	.17	.22	.00	1.00
Proportion other	.04	.08	.00	.58
Gender diversity of the organization's leadership team	.88	.15	.00	1.00
Proportion female	.52	.17	.00	.89
Income level diversity of the organization's leadership team	.94	.32	.00	1.72
Proportion that earns less than \$25,000 per year	.23	.21	.00	1.00
Proportion that earns \$25,000 to \$49,999 per year	.35	.19	.00	1.00
Proportion that earns \$50,000 to \$74,999 per year	.24	.18	.00	.90
Proportion that earns \$75,000 to \$100,00 per year	.12	.15	.00	.93
Proportion that earns more than \$100,000 per year	.05	.10	.00	.67
Education level diversity of the organization's leadership team	.72	.19	.00	1.15
Proportion with less than a bachelor's degree	.23	.19	.00	.79
Proportion with a bachelor's degree	.35	.19	.00	.90
Proportion with more than a bachelor's degree	.42	.21	.00	1.00
Religious diversity of the organization's leadership team	.66	.19	.00	.91
Proportion Catholic	.36	.23	.00	1.00
Proportion mainline Protestant	.30	.21	.00	.81
Proportion black Protestant	.20	.22	.00	1.00
Proportion conservative Protestant	.06	.09	.00	.38
Proportion Jewish	.04	.08	.00	.33
Proportion Muslim	.01	.03	.00	.18
Proportion other	.03	.08	.00	.50
<i>Measures of Social Interaction</i>				
Number of leadership team meetings	20.43	8.51	5.00	57.00
How often activities include members singing together	3.03	.99	1.00	5.00
Frequency of discussing social differences in meetings	11.04	2.90	4.00	19.00
<i>Measures of Organizational Performance</i>				
Revenue from grants and donations (x \$100,000)	2.72	7.10	.02	78.30
Number of city officials the organization met with	14.66	12.13	.00	80.00
Number of organizing tactics used by the organization	4.39	1.98	.00	9.00
Number of modes used for mass communication	5.36	2.39	.00	11.00
Number of volunteers (x 100)	1.11	.99	.07	6.00
Total turnout (x 1,000)	1.27	1.48	.00	11.86
<i>Characteristics of the Organization</i>				
Age of the organization	13.47	8.73	1.00	40.00
Number of paid staff	3.02	2.76	1.00	19.00
Number of member institutions	23.02	13.21	4.00	77.00
Number of "active" leadership team members <sup>a</sup>	13.18	6.37	3.00	40.00

Source: 2011 National Study of Community Organizing Organizations; n = 148

<sup>a</sup> Based on the leadership team members who attended at least half of their organization's leadership team meetings (n = 1,950).

Table 2: Bivariate regressions estimating the relationship between social diversity and social interaction

<i>Measures of Social Diversity</i>	<i>Measures of Social Interaction</i>		
	Number of leadership team meetings <sup>b</sup>	How often activities include members singing together <sup>c</sup>	Frequency of discussing social differences in meetings <sup>c</sup>
Racial diversity of leadership team <sup>a</sup>	.124* (.056)	.600 (.346)	.474 (.354)
Gender diversity of leadership team <sup>a</sup>	-.171 (.092)	.303 (.551)	-.510 (.320)
Income level diversity of leadership team <sup>a</sup>	-.148* (.058)	-.247 (.195)	-.080 (.201)
Education level diversity of leadership team <sup>a</sup>	.112 (.069)	-.561 (.414)	-.698* (.299)
Religious diversity of leadership team <sup>a</sup>	.258* (.078)	.611 (.584)	.250 (.597)

*Note:* Linearized standard errors reported in parentheses; constants are not displayed; n = 148.

<sup>a</sup> Based on the leadership team members who attended at least half of their organization's leadership team meetings (n = 1,950).

<sup>b</sup> and <sup>c</sup> Coefficients generated from Poisson and ordinary least-squares regressions respectively.

\* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001 (two-tailed tests).



Table 3: Poisson regressions estimating the relationship between social diversity and social interaction and organizational performance

	<i>Acquiring Sponsors</i>		<i>Developing Strategies</i>		<i>Mobilizing People</i>	
	Revenue from grants and donations	Number of city officials the organization met with	Number of organizing tactics used by the organization	Number of modes used for mass communication	Number of volunteers	Total turnout
<i>Measures of Social Diversity</i>						
Racial diversity of leadership team <sup>a</sup>	2.650*** (.705)	1.315* (.155)	.932 (.069)	.895 (.066)	1.454** (.170)	1.156 (.200)
Gender diversity of leadership team <sup>a</sup>	1.418* (.249)	.291*** (.066)	.681*** (.064)	.774* (.088)	.981 (.151)	1.111 (.262)
Income level diversity of leadership team <sup>a</sup>	.992 (.134)	1.258** (.110)	1.178** (.057)	1.098* (.050)	.984 (.082)	.974 (.087)
Education level diversity of leadership team <sup>a</sup>	1.601 (.624)	1.700** (.290)	1.518*** (.141)	.933 (.070)	.694* (.100)	.339*** (.078)
Religious diversity of leadership team <sup>a</sup>	1.705* (.403)	.726 (.122)	1.230* (.102)	1.596*** (.159)	.870 (.126)	.382*** (.101)
<i>Measures of Social Interaction</i>						
Number of leadership team meetings	.997 (.006)	.983*** (.004)	.993*** (.002)	.999* (.001)	1.007* (.003)	.996 (.003)
How often activities include members singing together	1.015 (.045)	.867*** (.027)	1.082*** (.016)	1.095*** (.017)	1.077** (.029)	1.156*** (.047)
Frequency of discussing social differences in meetings	1.015 (.015)	1.074*** (.011)	1.030*** (.006)	1.040*** (.005)	1.017* (.009)	1.052*** (.013)
<i>Characteristics of the Organization</i>						
Age of the organization	1.006 (.006)	1.000 (.003)	1.003 (.021)	1.002* (.002)	1.021*** (.003)	1.019*** (.004)
Number of paid staff <sup>b</sup>	3.956*** (.558)	1.249*** (.049)	1.229*** (.026)	1.315*** (.028)	1.248*** (.044)	1.340*** (.067)
Number of member institutions <sup>b</sup>	1.048 (.076)	1.259*** (.076)	1.040 (.031)	.993 (.030)	1.275*** (.082)	1.356*** (.110)
Number of leadership team members <sup>a,b</sup>	.470*** (.087)	1.414*** (.096)	.946 (.038)	.928* (.032)	1.753*** (.123)	1.481*** (.103)

Note: Coefficients are reported as incidence rate ratios—the incidence rate ratio is calculated by exponentiating the Poisson regression coefficient (for more details see <https://stats.idre.ucla.edu/stata/output/poisson-regression/>); linearized standard errors reported in parentheses; constants are not displayed; n = 148.

<sup>a</sup> Based on the leadership team members who attended at least half of their organization's leadership team meetings (n = 1,950).

<sup>b</sup> Logged values.

\* p < .05; \*\* p < .01; \*\*\* p < .001 (two-tailed tests).

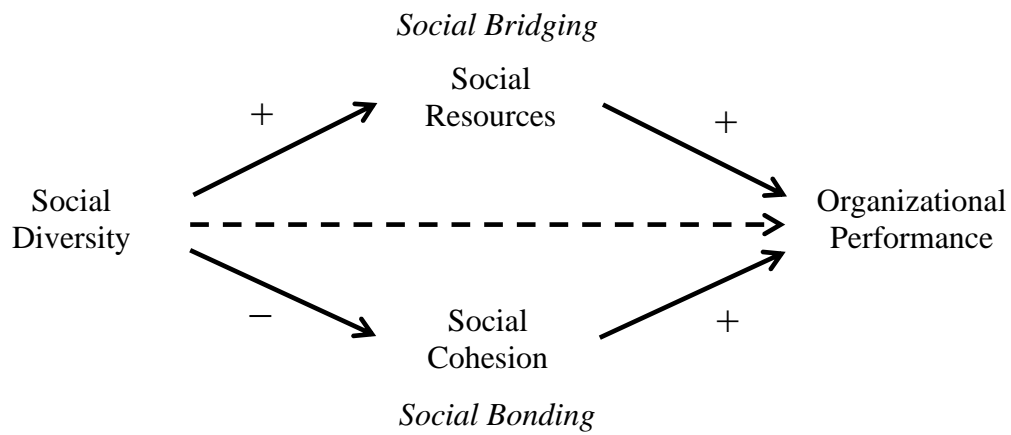


Figure 1: Countervailing causal pathways of social bridging and bonding

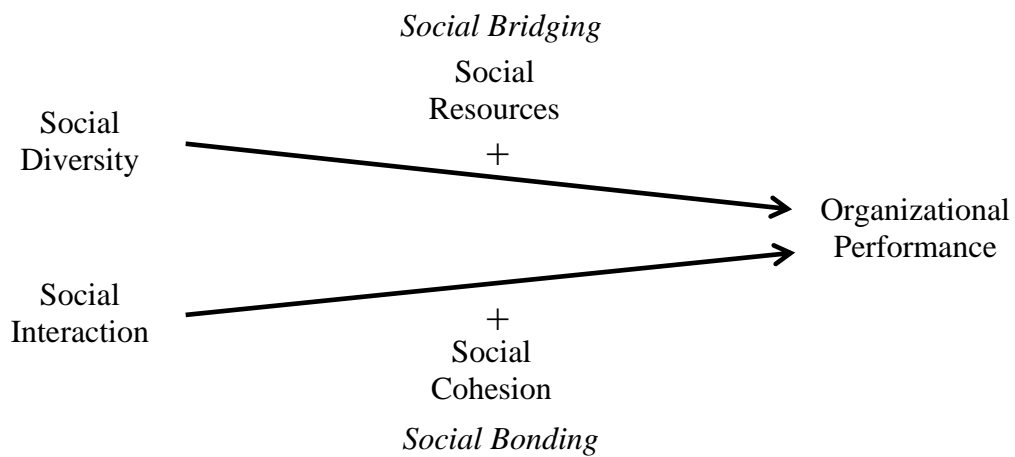


Figure 2: Disentangled causal pathways of social bridging and bonding