Mixed Reactions to Multicultural (vs. Colorblind) Diversity Approach Signals:

A Lay Theories of Culture Perspective

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Abstract

Despite its popularity, signaling a multicultural approach to racial-ethnic diversity is often faced with both positive and negative reactions. In this article, we sought insights into what may contribute to the mixed reactions and why. Drawing on social categorization theories and mindset research, we proposed that an underexplored factor influencing stakeholders' reactions to organizations' diversity approach was their lay theories or mindsets of culture. Specifically, we argued that those who believe that racial-ethnic groups represent unchangeable deep-seated essences—a fixed (vs. malleable) cultural mindset—would react negatively toward the intergroup differentiations and comparisons evoked by multicultural approach signals. Three experiments manipulated organizational diversity approach signals. Results consistently showed that a fixed cultural mindset was negatively related to organizational attraction (Studies 1 and 2) and support for diversity promoting policies (Study 3) in reaction to a multicultural (vs. colorblind) approach. In addition, Study 3 tested and showed that ethnocentrism, a selfprotective mechanism, mediated the negative reactions. Together, the findings support lay theories of culture as a moderating factor that affects reactions toward a multicultural approach. Organizations should take individuals' theories of culture into consideration in their efforts to maximize attraction and support for diversity.

Public Significance Statement: Multicultural diversity management approaches can evoke both positive and negative reactions from stakeholders. The current research explored this phenomenon. It showed that people who believed that cultural differences are fixed would react more negatively to multicultural diversity approaches. This result suggests that organizations should consider ways to mitigate the negative impacts of such beliefs in order to enhance support for a multicultural approach.

Keywords: Diversity, multicultural, colorblind, lay theories of culture, organizational attraction

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"At Apple, we're not all the same... We draw on the differences in who we are, what we've experienced, and how we think..." (Apple, 2020)

With an increasingly globalized labor market and heterogeneous workforce, managing racial-ethnic diversity in organizations has become both a business and research priority (Moore, 2019; Roberson et al., 2017; T. Williams, 2020). Many companies, like Apple, signal their approach in diversity management (also referred to as diversity paradigms or strategies; Kulik, 2014). As scholars and practitioners have argued, such signaling bears nontrivial implications (Avery, 2003; Konrad & Linnehan, 1995; Thomas & Ely, 1996). As such, a growing body of literature in applied psychology has emerged to study diversity signaling and its implications, for example, its impact on attracting job applicants and garnering support for diversity from incumbents (Guillaume et al., 2015; Kirby & Kaiser, 2020; Olsen & Martins, 2016).

Although varied frameworks have emerged across scholarly traditions to examine the impacts of organizational diversity approaches (e.g., O'Leary & Sandberg, 2017; Shore et al., 2009), one dimension that connects existing frameworks is the extent to which a diversity approach highlights or downplays identity/group differences (Leslie et al., 2019; Plaut et al., 2018; Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013; Self et al., 2015). An identity-blind, or colorblind, approach aims to achieve equity by encouraging stakeholders to deemphasize and ignore differences in groups or identities (Rattan & Ambady, 2013). In contrast, an identity-conscious, or multicultural, approach urges stakeholders to attend to and celebrate group differences and identities (Plaut et al., 2018; Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013). As past research suggested, the promotion of a multicultural (vs. colorblind) approach could affect organizations in different ways. For instance, signaling a

multicultural approach is common and has been argued to improve corporate image, attract recruits, and garner support for the diversity policies (e.g., Avery & McKay, 2006; Chen & Hooijberg, 2000; Gilbert & Ivancevich, 2001; Harrison et al., 2006; Kidder et al., 2004; Ng & Burke, 2005; Plaut et al., 2018; Richard et al., 2000; Thomas & Ely, 1996).

The popular multicultural approach, however, can sometimes result in diverging stakeholder reactions. Specifically, a multicultural approach has been linked to both weaker *and* stronger attraction to the organization (James et al., 2001; Kidder et al., 2004; Plaut et al., 2011), as well as more *and* less support for diversity promotion in the organization (Cobb et al., 2020; Kauff et al., 2013; Kravitz et al., 2000; Self et al., 2015). These findings also align with public polls highlighting a trend of polarized reactions toward a multicultural approach (BBC News, 2011; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010). For instance, in one Canadian survey, 72% of respondents expressed feeling uneasy about their country's multicultural approach (Bissoondath, 2002; Reid, 2016); on an international online forum, 48% of participants responded negatively while 52 % responded positively to a multicultural approach (Debate.org, 2020). When and why people react so differently to a multicultural approach is still not well understood (Kirby & Kaiser, 2020; Konrad & Linnehan, 1995). Thus, organizational scholars have called for more research to examine potential factors that determine these mixed reactions (Guillaume et al., 2015; Olsen & Martins, 2016).

In this article, we address the research question by investigating a critical yet overlooked psychological factor that shapes stakeholder reactions toward organizations' diversity approaches. We focus on a multicultural (vs. colorblind) approach in managing racial-ethnic

diversity, or cultural diversity for short, which is a core domain of diversity and a critical area of applied intergroup research. Integrating social categorization perspectives (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and emerging work on people's beliefs about the malleability of human characteristics (e.g., Hong, Chao, & No, 2009), we theorize that how people react to diversity approaches and the organizations that signal them depends on their lay theories (or mindsets) of culture. A multicultural approach highlights group identity differences and inadvertently assigns people to different racial-ethnic (sub)groups (Plaut et al., 2018; Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013). Making group boundaries salient can be especially threatening for people who believe that group boundaries reflect stable and deep-seated essences (e.g., biological differences)—a kind of lay theory known as "essentialist theory" or "fixed mindset" of culture (Hong et al., 2009). In response to the threat, those who hold a fixed cultural mindset are motivated to defend their group, maintain a positive sense of self, and hence react negatively against multicultural approaches and organizations that signal them.

We conduct three experiments to test this main hypothesis. Furthermore, in the third experiment we also examine ethnocentrism (assertions of ingroup superiority) as an underlying mechanism of negative reactions. Together, this program of research makes several contributions to the applied psychological literature on diversity and mindset. It addresses how mixed reactions to a multicultural approach signal occur and adds a novel theoretical connection between the study of lay theories and diversity approach signaling. Additionally, while past work on lay theories has focused on the downsides of a fixed mindset, this research offers a new, more nuanced perspective suggesting that the effect of a fixed cultural mindset depends on the context,

¹ Racial and ethnic group identities have unique aspects but they are conflated ideas in the study of diversity and everyday language, thus for parsimony in the description, we refer to racial, ethnic, and nationality differences more generally as cultural or group differences (see Okazaki & Sue, 1995; Omi, 2001).

namely the salience of intergroup differences. Below, we outline our theoretical framework and present three studies to test our predictions.

Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

Multicultural Approach as a Double-Edge Sword: A Social Categorization Account

Multicultural and colorblind approaches prescribe contrasting levels of attention people should give to group differences (Rattan & Ambady, 2013; Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013). In essence, multiculturalism construes group differences as a necessary ingredient that drives the richness in perspectives and success in diverse groups. As a management principle or policy, a multicultural approach signal thus has the potential to not only garner support for diversity within the organization but also appeal to external stakeholders (Avery & McKay, 2006; Ng & Burke, 2005). However, from a social categorization perspective, a multicultural approach could be a double-edged sword, leading to both positive and negative reactions because of its core emphasis on highlighting identity and group differences (e.g., Brewer, 1993; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

On the one hand, people may react positively when their group memberships are made salient. The basic assumption across theories of social identity is that people derive part of their sense of self from the groups that they belong to (Brewer, 2007; Oyserman, 2007; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). A positive image of one's group promotes a positive image of the self. Hence people naturally want their group identities to be celebrated. The core principle of a multicultural approach is to celebrate identity differences, aiming to put a positive lens on the characteristics of different groups to encourage belongingness (Hahn et al., 2015; Vorauer et al., 2009). By virtue of these characteristics, an organization's multicultural approach may encourage stakeholders to see that employees of different backgrounds are valued and celebrated. This signal can communicate the openness of the organization and convey a positive image,

potentially increasing stakeholders' support and attraction to it (Leslie et al., 2019; Plaut et al., 2011). A multicultural approach may also encourage organization members to see value in representing varied identities and to show support for policies seeking to increase organizational diversity.

On the other hand, the emphasis on group differences can also lead to negative reactions. Consistent with the above theorizing, in intergroup settings, people tend to use group identities to categorize the self and others (Brewer, 1979; Brewer & Silver, 1978). To pursue or maintain a positive sense of self, people tend to favor their ingroup and react to defend the ingroup's image (Hewstone et al., 2002). The desire to celebrate one's group could inadvertently spark an adverse sense of intergroup competition. With competition comes self-threat, resulting in the motivation to bolster one's self or group as better than outgroups and self-protective reactions such as hostility and rejection (Brewer, 2007). In line with this notion, a multicultural approach is also sometimes associated with increased stereotyping (Wolsko et al., 2000), which can raise minority individuals' concern about representing their group and cause anxiety about being evaluated through the lens of stereotypes (e.g., Apfelbaum et al., 2016), and increase feelings of inauthenticity as a result of those anxieties (Kirby & Kaiser, 2020). Even for majority individuals, the multicultural approach could evoke negative responses, leading to feelings of unfairness, exclusion (Plaut et al., 2011; Ballinger, & Crocker, 2021), threat and anger (Plant & Devine, 2001), as well as general dislike and less identification toward the approach (Cobb et al., 2020).

Thus, it appears that regardless of group membership, a multicultural approach by emphasizing identity differences runs the risk of triggering a sense of self-threat due to intergroup comparisons, and subsequent negative reactions to multiculturalism and organizations

that endorse it. Interestingly, such intergroup comparisons do not need to be an actual or personal experience to shift attitudes and behaviors. The idea (or imagination) of intergroup comparison is enough to trigger self-threat (Babbitt & Sommers, 2011; West & Greenland, 2016). This means that a multicultural approach can have similar negative effects not only for internal entities but also external entities (e.g., Cheng et al., 2011) who may imagine tensions or competition among employees from different groups and feel the need to defend their group. As such, a multicultural approach may encourage stakeholders to see less value in the representation of diverse identities, and therefore, less value in policies and organizations that seek to increase diversity.

Taken together, the intergroup literature explains the possibility for a multicultural approach to evoke both positive and negative reactions. What would be theoretically meaningful and practically important to understand then, are the factors that systematically determine divergent reactions. Recent research has begun to study this topic. Thus far, much of the work has focused on characteristics that fall roughly under two broad categories. The first category relates to group status. Across studies, people favored a multicultural approach to the extent that it provided people with benefits based on their group membership (James et al., 2001; Kidder et al., 2004) or fulfilled their status motives (e.g., social dominance orientation, racial identification, right-wing authoritarianism; Ballinger, & Crocker, 2021; Guimond et al., 2013; Kirby & Kaiser, 2020; Morrison et al., 2010; Kauff et al., 2013). The second category relates to situational characteristics (e.g., organizational heterogeneity, diversity exposure). For instance, people were more likely to prioritize a minority job candidate under a multicultural approach when most in the candidate pool were white males (Self et al., 2015), and they favored an organization with a multicultural approach when their community was dominated by majority group members (Olsen & Martins, 2012). Although these group status-related and situational

factors are certainly important, they are not at all easy to ameliorate, as doing so often requires moving structural issues that can be formidable and time-consuming to change (O'Brien et al., 2015).

Here, we propose something quite different—this paper investigates the influence of lay theories, a more basic social-cognitive process that can shape the way people understand and react to social information. Based on past work, individuals' lay theories are amenable to change situationally through persuasion and training (e.g., Chiu et al., 1997; Li & Kung, 2021; M. J. Williams & Eberhardt, 2008). This feature makes lay theories particularly relevant to determining reactions to organizations' diversity approach signals and improving reactions to a multicultural approach. However, to our knowledge, there is currently no research addressing these relations. This paper therefore seeks to fill this knowledge gap by proposing and examining whether and how stakeholders' lay theories of culture moderate reactions to organizations' diversity approach signals.

Lay Theories of Culture

Individuals differ in their lay theories (a.k.a. implicit theories or lay beliefs) about the extent to which people or things possess stable and immutable essences (versus malleable qualities that are socially constructed or can be developed; Dweck et al., 1995; Gelman, 2003; Haslam et al., 2000). The belief in unchangeable essences has been referred to as an "entity theory," "essentialist theory/belief," and "fixed mindset." These fixed mindsets can vary withinand between-persons. For instance, some people may hold a stronger fixed mindset than others, believing that their personality represents deep-seated qualities such as genetic differences and is therefore unchangeable (Dweck et al., 1993). These personal mindsets may or may not reflect objective reality, and people can hold non-redundant mindsets across domains (e.g., of

personality, social groups; Dweck & Ehrlinger, 2006; Rattan & Georgeac, 2016). Importantly, as demonstrated by the rich tradition in the studies of mindsets in psychology, mindset differences have unique predictive power in many applied settings (e.g., job performance, negotiation outcomes; Heslin & VandeWalle, 2011; Kray & Haselhuhn, 2007; Zingoni & Corey, 2017).

Of particular relevance to the current research is people's lay theories of culture. Lay theories of culture are defined as individuals' assumptions about whether racial-ethnic group attributes such as behavioral patterns or values, are fixed or malleable (Chao et al., 2017; Hong et al., 2009; No et al., 2008). A fixed cultural mindset refers to the belief that cultural groups possess fixed essences that are defining characteristics of group memberships. For instance, those who have a fixed cultural mindset tend to believe that the culture a person is from (e.g., American, Japanese) determines the kind of person they are (e.g., being collectivistic vs. being individualistic, or being submissive vs. being assertive), and that these cultural characteristics are something very basic about the person that cannot be changed (Chao et al., 2017). Accordingly, past literatures have also referred to the two ends of this construct as essentialist beliefs on the one end and social constructionist or malleable beliefs on the other (Bastian & Haslam, 2006; Keller, 2005). These beliefs are common across societies. They can be proliferated via everyday language that describes cultural groups as discrete social entities (Rhodes et al., 2012) and conflates observed differences with biological differences (e.g., gene, skin; M. J. Williams & Eberhardt, 2008).

Lay theories of culture influence a wide range of outcomes related to diversity. As shown in the past literature, for instance, stronger endorsement of fixed cultural mindset was associated with more rigid thinking styles (e.g., less general creativity; Tadmor et al., 2013) and more susceptibility to stereotypes (e.g., Bastian & Haslam, 2007; Levontin et al., 2013). When shown

pictures of racially ambiguous faces, people with a more fixed mindset tend to engage in racial categorization more readily (Chao et al., 2013). The fixed mindset was also related to the perceptions of rigid boundaries between racial-ethnic groups. For example, biculturals with a stronger fixed cultural mindset were slower in switching between different cultural knowledge systems (Chao et al., 2007); they also showed both heightened psychological and physiological reactivity in situations that required them to integrate different cultural identities (Chao et al., 2017; No et al., 2008). In general, those who had a fixed cultural mindset also found it more difficult to make connections across cultures (Kung et al., 2018; Williams & Eberhardt, 2008). Furthermore, they were also more likely to expect people from different groups not to mix well together and might even show stronger outgroup prejudice (e.g., Verkuyten, 2003) during group interactions. Building on this line of work, we argue that lay theories of culture may influence the way individuals react to multicultural signals.

Heightened Self-Threat in the Eyes of the Fixed Mindset Beholder

Through perceiving cultural attributes as unchangeable, people with a fixed cultural mindset are more likely to see group differences (when made salient) as rigid and impermeable. Importantly, seeing group boundaries as rigid and impermeable has psychological consequences. One outcome, relevant to the current research, is that it may exacerbate the sense of intergroup comparison and self-threat individuals experience due to multicultural approach signals.

As intergroup conflict research suggests, impermeable group boundaries instill a sense of stability in group differences (Goldenberg et al., 2018; Miller & Prentice, 1999; Raudsepp & Wagner, 2012). The expectation that the core dispositions of the groups will not change makes observed group differences extra informative—the differences people see are meaningful differences that distinguish the groups (Chao & Kung, 2015; Levontin, Halperin, Dweck, 2013).

When the differences between "fixed groups" are highlighted, people expect that nothing can be done to change the level of comparisons and the intensity of the competition across groups (Halperin et al., 2011). In other words, for individuals who hold a fixed cultural mindset, intergroup comparison and competition feel more inevitable. As such, it is possible that those who have a fixed cultural mindset are likely to experience heightened self-threat and stronger motivation to defend their group in intergroup settings. Accordingly, the endorsement of a fixed (vs. malleable) cultural mindset can be an important factor in moderating individual reactions to a multicultural approach to diversity. As a multicultural approach is signaled, the idea of group differences is highlighted. Stakeholders who have a fixed cultural mindset are more likely to see the differences as permanent with consequential boundaries that will divide people in the organization.

The above proposition connects with our review earlier on negative reactions toward multiculturalism driven by self-threat (e.g., Plant & Devine, 2001) and elucidates one potential mechanism of the mindset effect: *state ethnocentrism*. According to the social categorization perspective, if the negative intergroup reactions are driven by a sense of threat, we should observe resistance as an indicator of anti-threat response for individuals trying to defend a positive sense of self (Brewer, 2007; Murrar & Brauer, 2019). As individuals' sense of self is especially tied to their ingroup in intergroup settings, one way to strengthen the positivity of oneself would be to promote the relative position of ingroup over the other groups (Messick & Mackie, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This is known as ethnocentrism, or beliefs that the ingroup is superior, which can be conceptualized both as a dispositional and state tendency (Neuliep & McCroskey, 2011; Ryan et al., 2007). Together, it is possible that a multicultural approach leads to heightened self-threat, due to intergroup comparisons, *particularly* for those

who have a fixed mindset about group differences. Individuals who hold a fixed cultural mindset would likely show heightened ethnocentrism as a defensive reaction. Such reactivity, in turn, would result in more negative reactions toward diversity. In summary, our research proposes that:

Hypothesis 1: The effectiveness of organizations' diversity approach signal in eliciting support for the organization and for diversity is moderated by stakeholders' fixed cultural mindset: a stronger fixed mindset is associated with more negative reactions to a multicultural (vs. colorblind) approach.

Hypothesis 2: Ethnocentrism mediates the relationship between multicultural (vs. colorblind) approach signal and organizational support, particularly for those who hold a fixed cultural mindset.

Two additional issues were taken into consideration in the conceptualization and testing of these hypotheses. First, a colorblind approach is included as a comparison group based on past research (e.g., Rattan & Ambady, 2013; Sasaki & Vorauer, 2013), but we did not make specific predictions regarding the relationship between fixed cultural mindset and colorblind approach signals because the direction of the theoretical prediction is less clear. Unlike a multicultural approach which affirms the presence of group differences, a colorblind approach focuses on the absence or negation of group differences, and a negation (compared to an affirmative) viewpoint opens more varied possibilities for people to interpret it subjectively in different ways (see Holtgraves, 1998; Kung & Scholer, 2018). For instance, if the absence of group differences means group differences fundamentally do not exist, a colorblind approach may challenge the

worldview of those who believe cultural differences are fixed, causing epistemic discomfort and negative reactions. Contrarily, it is possible that the absence means group differences *do* exist but they are simply ignored or irrelevant to the discussion. Then perhaps having a fixed cultural mindset does not affect people's reactions to the approach, or it may lead to positive responses as it helps mute the potential threat stemming from intergroup comparisons. Because of these varied possibilities, and given that resolving them is beyond the scope of the focus of the paper, the current work will focus on the direction of the predictions with regards to a multicultural approach.

Second, we expect that reactions to diversity approaches can manifest in different forms. For an external stakeholder (e.g., a potential job applicant), holding a fixed cultural mindset and seeing the signaling of a multicultural approach may prompt disengagement as a self-protective measure, which reduces their attraction to the organization (Cheng et al., 2011; Olsen & Martins, 2016; Plaut et al., 2018). For an internal stakeholder (e.g., incumbent), holding a fixed cultural mindset in an environment of an active multicultural approach may cause them to see less value in diversity representations in the organization and withhold support to organizational policies that seek to increase diversity (Jansen et al., 2016; Plaut et al., 2018; Wolsko et al., 2000). The current research will vary the outcome measures across studies to examine the generalizability of the hypothesized effects.

Testing the proposed framework makes several contributions to the applied psychology literature. It explains why stakeholders show mixed reactions to organizations currently holding a multicultural approach. It also extends our knowledge that a multicultural approach does not equally heighten a sense of intergroup divide in all people. Although the literature thus far has suggested that a fixed cultural mindset is associated with negative outcomes across situations

(e.g., more prejudice; Chao & Kung, 2015), our theorizing adds a more nuanced understanding by highlighting the contingency that the negative impact of a fixed cultural mindset depends on the context (e.g., whether a multicultural approach is signaled).

We conducted three studies to test the hypotheses. For generalizability, Hypothesis 1 was examined both in contexts where participants took the perspective of an outside-stakeholder (Studies 1 and 2) and an organizational member (Study 3). Across the studies, we measured stakeholder reactions in terms of general support for the organization (Studies 1 and 2) and support for specific diversity policies (Study 3). The proposed full moderated-mediation model, including the mediating mechanism of ethnocentrism (Hypothesis 2), is tested in Study 3. The studies were conducted in accordance with the University of Waterloo Office of Research Ethics Study guidelines (ORE#20101). Study data are available in the Open Science Framework repository (https://j.mp/3dKDQyH). Study materials and additional analyses are reported as online Supporting Information.

Study 1

This experiment sought to establish initial evidence for the role of lay theories of culture in influencing the effectiveness of diversity approach signals on eliciting support for the organization from the perspective of potential job applicants. It adopted two fictional company profiles—a between-subject design to manipulate the use of diversity approach (Condition: Multicultural vs. Colorblind approach)—and measured participants' lay theories of culture and level of support toward the organization.

Method

Participants, power, and procedure. As the study was situated in the context of external stakeholders' perceptions of an organization, it was appropriate to recruit undergraduate

students as participants because they were realistic job applicants in the near future. We recruited as many participants as possible based on participant availability. A hundred and four undergraduate students at a Canadian university participated in the study for course credits. Eight participants were excluded for missing data in key measures, resulting in a final sample of 96 (75% female; $M_{age} = 20.8$, $SD_{age} = 4.5$; 37% White, 25% East Asian, 26% South Asian, and 12% other; 97% Canadian permanent resident or citizen; three did not report demographics). A two-tailed sensitivity power analysis suggested that the sample size would give us 80% power to detect at least about a small-to-medium effect size in a two-way interaction model ($f^2 = .08$ or $\eta_p^2 = .07$; using G*Power 3.1 software, Faul et al., 2007; $\alpha = .05$).

Participants were told that they were completing two separate studies. The first study concerned general individual differences, in which we measured lay theories of culture among other individual differences. The second study concerned organizational perceptions. We asked participants to take the perspective of a job applicant, randomly assigned them to read a company statement that either promoted a multicultural or colorblind approach, and then measured their reactions to the company. Last, we collected demographic information.

Organizational diversity approach signal manipulation. As a cover story, participants were told that they would read one of several mission statements from different international corporations. In reality, all participants read one of two mission statements, with identical text except for the experimental manipulation—multiculturalism or colorblindness. The mission statement text was adopted from an actual company statement to increase the credibility of the cover story. The company identity was masked to avoid pre-existing attitudes from affecting participants' reactions. To ensue validity of the manipulations, the multiculturalism and colorblindness diversity approach manipulations —were borrowed directly from items of

validated multiculturalism and colorblindness scales (Ryan et al., 2007; Wolsko et al., 2000; full materials are presented in SI):

In the Colorblind Condition, the company advocated that,

"As a global business, the mission of [blurred out company name] is to promote workplace unity and ensure that all current and future employees are treated equally as an individual regardless of ethnicity..."

In the Multicultural Condition, the company advocated that,

"As a global business, [blurred out company name] has a mission to celebrate workplace diversity and ensure that all current and future employees are celebrated for their differences as part of the organization..."

As a manipulation check, we modified an existing diversity ideology scale (Levin et al., 2012) and asked participants how much they agreed that each of the items matched with the idea promoted by the company (from $1 = Strongly\ disagree\$ to $6 = Strongly\ agree\$): e.g., "The organization encourages their employees to retain their culture and traditions of their homeland" (2 multicultural items; r = .77); "The organization does not want employees to be identified by their race, national origin, or religion" (3 colorblind items; $\alpha = .91$).

Stakeholder reactions measure. Participants' reactions are captured in their level of support for the organizations. This measure was adopted from two existing organizational attraction scales. The first was positive perceptions of the company (i.e., perceived reputation; Highhouse, Lievens, & Sinar, 2003; e.g., "I think that the organization has an excellent reputation" from $1 = Strongly\ disagree$ to $6 = Strongly\ agree$; 8 items; $\alpha = .95$). The second was positive attitudes toward the company across realistic situations (adopted from Turban & Keon, 1993). For instance, "how likely would you be to support your government implementing

favorable trade policies for this organization?" (from 1 = Not at all to 6 = Very much/likely; 8 items; $\alpha = .94$). Because the two measures were highly correlated (r = .69, p < .001) and their findings were consistent, for parsimony, we averaged the scores to form a measure of support for the organization as the dependent variable ($\alpha = .96$).

Fixed cultural mindset measure. Participants completed the four-item fixed cultural mindset scale (Chao et al., 2017; e.g., "Although people can act differently in different situations, the core ethnocultural characteristics they hold cannot be changed much" from 1 = Strongly disagree to 6 = Strongly agree). The average score was the fixed mindset index ($\alpha = .92$).

Control variable measures. To explore the robustness of the mindset effect, based on past research, we included additional measures of individual differences that could potentially affect reactions to diversity approaches. These include: i) frequency of interaction with other ethnic groups ("How often are you exposed to other ethnic cultures?" from 1 = Never to 5 = Always; Halperin et al., 2011); ii) identification toward own ethnicity ("How much do you identify with [your own ethnic] culture?" from 1 = Very weakly identified to 7 = Very strongly identified); and iii) as a proxy for prejudiced dispositions, social dominance orientation (e.g., "Inferior groups should stay in their place" from 1 = Very negative to 6 = Very positive; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; $\alpha = .91$).

Study 1 Results

Manipulation check. A mixed-model ANOVA was conducted to compare the multiculturalism and colorblindness ratings of the company (within-subjects) across the two conditions (between-subjects). The 2-way interaction between the ratings and Condition was significant, F(1, 94) = 59.13, p < .001, $\eta_p^2 = .39$. The company in the Multicultural Condition was rated as more multicultural (M = 4.27, SD = 1.04) than in the Colorblind Condition (M = 4.27) and M = 4.27.

3.75, SD = 1.11), t = 2.37, p = .020. The company in the Colorblind Condition was rated as more colorblind (M = 4.85, SD = 1.05) than that in the Multicultural Condition (M = 3.37, SD = 1.13), t = -6.66, p < .001. These results indicated that the diversity approach manipulation was effective.²

Main analyses. Means and correlations of variables are presented in Table 1. To test Hypothesis 1, we regressed the effects of Condition, lay theories of culture, and their interaction term on reactions to the company. Supporting Hypothesis 1, we found a significant interaction between Diversity Approach Condition and lay theories of culture, B = -.46, SE = .20, p = .024, $\eta_p^2 = .05, 95\%$ CI [-.86, -.06]. This suggested that the reaction to organizational diversity approach signals was moderated by individuals' lay theories of culture. As seen in Figure 1, the interaction was a result of a trend in which the stronger participants' fixed mindset the less support they showed to the company in the Multicultural Condition, B = -.30, SE = .16, p = .063, $\eta_p^2 = .08, 95\%$ CI [-.61, .02], while the pattern was the opposite but not significant in the Colorblind Condition, B = .16, SE = .13, p = .197, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, 95% CI [-.09, .42]. Additionally, we conducted a Johnson-Neyman (J-N; 1936) test of significance region for a more nuanced estimation of the moderation effect between conditions. The result suggested that, at a mindset index of .17 SD or above the mean (M = 2.51, SD = .93)—42.7% of the sample—people showed significantly less support for the company signaling a multicultural (vs. colorblind) approach, B = -.36, SE = .18, p = .050.

Supplemental robustness analyses. Robustness analyses examined whether the hypothesized effect was influenced by other characteristics. Participants' age, gender, and racial

² Two-tailed sensitivity power analyses suggested that the sample size would give us above 80% power to detect the effect sizes in the manipulation check analyses.

 $^{^{3}}$ The interaction test was underpowered given the observed effect size (at 58% power; < 80%).

background (i.e., White-vs.-non-White) did not alter the pattern of results. The interaction remained significant after controlling for frequency of interaction with other ethnic groups, identification with own ethnicity, and social dominance orientation (see Table 2). In sum, Study 1 results provided support for Hypothesis 1. Participants' reactions depended on their lay theories of culture: the effectiveness of a multicultural (vs. colorblind) approach signal in eliciting support for a company is lower among those who held a fixed mindset than those who held a malleable mindset.

Study 2

Study 2 had two goals. First, it sought to replicate and generalize Study 1 findings to a more diverse (non-student) sample. Second, it aimed to extend the previous study: Since mindset can be shifted (Walton & Wilson, 2018), it is useful to know whether eliciting a mindset that fits with the diversity approach will increase the support for the organization. Therefore, this study experimentally manipulated lay theories of culture via a situational mindset induction and then measured support for an organization that endorsed either a multicultural or colorblind approach. This experiment adopted a 2 (Diversity Approach Condition: Multicultural vs. Colorblind) × 2 (Mindset Condition: Fixed vs. Malleable Cultural Mindset) between-subjects design.

Method

Participants, power, and procedure. We recruited 204 participants on Amazon's Mturk. We had to exclude five participants for their inability to recall any information about the mindset manipulation in an open-ended question (e.g., "I did not remember much. it was about science and very serious"). This resulted in a final sample of 199 people (55% female; $M_{age} = 37.57$, $SD_{age} = 12.13$; 81% White; and 99% U.S. permanent resident or citizen). A two-tailed sensitivity power analysis suggested that the sample size would give us 80% power to detect at

least a small effect size in a two-way interaction model ($f^2 = .04$ or $\eta_p^2 = .04$; Faul et al., 2007; $\alpha = .05$).

The cover story and materials were the same as Study 1, except that the mindset manipulation task (masked as a task about human information processes) was presented at the beginning of the experiment. We randomly assigned participants to read a company statement that either signaled a multicultural or colorblind approach, and then measured their reactions. Last, we collected demographic information. Participants' age, gender, and racial background (e.g., White-vs.-non-White) did not alter the pattern of results, and hence were not included in the analyses.

Mindset manipulation. We used the standard mindset manipulation technique (Chiu et al., 1997) by randomly assigning participants to read one of two bogus scientific articles. These articles were previously validated (M. J. Williams & Eberhardt, 2008). In the fixed mindset condition, the article argued racial characteristics to be fixed essences; it noted that, "Scientists pinpoint genetic underpinnings of race and ethnicity..." In the malleable mindset condition, the article argued racial characteristics to be malleable constructions; it noted that, "Scientists reveal that race and ethnicity have no genetic basis..." (see SI for the articles verbatim). Then participants were asked to summarize the article. We then also measured perceived quality of the article as a covariate (e.g., "In general, I think that the article presents good ideas" from 1 = Strongly disagree to 6 = Strongly agree; 4-item, $\alpha = .95$) (Chao et al., 2013).

Organizational diversity approach signal manipulation. To further enhance study realism, corporate diversity statements from Study 1 were polished as a professional company webpage (see Figure 2). Consistent with Study 1, the company's identity was masked, the two

conditions only differed in the company's diversity approach signal, and the same manipulation check questions were included (2 multicultural items; r = .88; 3 colorblind items; $\alpha = .74$).

Fixed cultural mindset measure. Afterward, participants responded to a 4-item fixed cultural mindset scale (No et al., 2008), e.g., "To a large extent, a person's race biologically determines his or her abilities and traits" (from 1 = Strongly disagree to 6 = Strongly agree; $\alpha =$.79). The average formed the individual's fixed mindset index.

Stakeholder reactions measure. We used the same 16-item organizational attraction measure as Study 1 ($\alpha = .97$) as the dependent variable.

Study 2 Results

Manipulation check. Participants reported stronger fixed mindset in the Fixed Mindset Condition (M = 3.16, SD = 1.10) than in the Malleable Mindset Condition (M = 2.69, SD = 1.30), t = 2.77, p = .006. $\eta_p^2 = .04$. The diversity approach manipulation was also effective, F(1, 197) = 118.70, p < .001, $\eta_p^2 = .38$ (a mixed-model ANOVA). The company in the Multicultural Condition signaled more multiculturalism (M = 4.92, SD = 1.03) than that in the Colorblind Condition (M = 3.42, SD = 1.17), t = 6.99, p < .001). The company in the Colorblind Condition signaled more colorblindness (M = 4.87, SD = 1.04) than that in the Multicultural Condition (M = 3.70, SD = 1.40), t = -9.29, p < .001.

Main Analysis. Means and correlations of variables are presented in Table 1. To test Hypothesis 1, we first examined the interaction effect between Diversity Approach and Mindset Conditions on support for the organization. Although the pattern of the result appeared consistent with Study 1, the interaction effect did not reach significance, B = .46, SE = .30, p = .128, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, 95% CI [-.13, 1.04]. The hypothesis was not supported.

⁴ Two-tailed sensitivity power analyses suggested that the sample size would give us above 80% power to detect the effect sizes in the manipulation check analyses.

Post-hoc Exploratory Analysis. Additional analyses were conducted to explore the effects of both the mindset index and the mindset manipulation further. Interestingly, a pattern emerged revealing that the mindset manipulation exerted a more nuanced effect than we anticipated: it modified the expressions of the interactive effect we found in Study 1 (between individuals' mindset and the diversity approach signals). Specifically, as seen in Figure 3, we observed a significant 3-way interaction between Diversity Approach Condition, Mindset Condition, and participants' lay theories of culture index, B = -.52, SE = .24, p = .032, $\eta_p^2 = .02$, 95% CI [-1.00, -.05]. Despite its statistical significance, we draw caution as the test was slightly underpowered given the sample size and effect size.⁵ Nonetheless, statistical power was sufficient ($\geq 80\%$) for lower-order two-way interaction and simple slope tests.

In the Fixed Mindset Condition, participants' lay theories of culture moderated their reactions to the diversity approach signal, B = -.39, SE = .16, p = .019, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, 95% CI [-.72, -.07]. Specifically, when fixed mindset arguments were presented, in the Multicultural Condition, there was a trend in that the stronger individuals endorsed a fixed mindset, the less support they showed for the company, B = -.26, SE = .14, p = .066, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, 95% CI [-.54, -.02]; yet in the Colorblind Condition, the relationship was not significant, B = .12, SE = .10, p = .264, $\eta_p^2 = .05$, 95% CI [-.03, .40]. Moreover, J-N test results estimated that at a minimum score of .69 SD above the mean on the lay theories of culture index (M = 2.93, SD = 1.22)—24.8% of the sample in the Fixed Mindset Condition—participants would begin to show less support for the company that signaled a multicultural (vs. colorblind) approach, B = -.40, SE = .20, p = .050. These patterns of results were consistent of Hypothesis 1.

⁵ A two-tailed sensitivity power analysis suggested that the sample size would give us 80% power to detect a coefficient of at least about a small effect size in a three-way interaction model($f^2 = .04$ or $\eta_p^2 = .04$; 8 predictors) and in a two-way interaction model ($f^2 = .04$ or $\eta_p^2 = .04$; 4 predictors; Faul et al., 2007; $\alpha = .05$).

In the Malleable Mindset Condition, participants' lay theories of culture did not moderate reactions, B = .13, SE = .18, p = .473. However, there were nuanced results suggesting that mindset affected reactions within the diversity approach signal conditions. When the malleable mindset argument was presented, in the Colorblind Condition, individuals' fixed mindset was not related to support for the company, B = -.14, SE = .14, p = .329, while in the Multicultural Condition, it was related to *more* support for the company, B = .38, SE = .14, p = .011, $\eta_p^2 = .12$, 95% CI [.09, .66]. This effect also significantly contrasted with the negative relation between mindset and reactions observed in the Fixed Mindset Condition, B = -.63, SE = .20, p = .003, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, 95% CI [-1.04, -.23]. These results were in contrast with Hypothesis 1, suggesting that the Malleable Mindset Condition overturned the negative impact of a multicultural approach on support among those who held a fixed (vs. malleable) mindset.

Overall, Study 2 revealed a rather complex pattern of results. Although we did not find direct support to Hypothesis 1, exploratory analyses looking at a more nuanced interaction effect revealed a pattern that was consistent with Study 1 results (and Hypothesis 1), particularly among those who received the fixed mindset condition. Among those in the malleable mindset condition, the pattern was different: the relationship between fixed cultural mindset and reactions toward a multicultural approach was positive. This unexpected effect indicated an interesting and practical potential that inducing a malleable view of culture may help organizations to remedy negative reactions to a multicultural approach.

Study 3

Study 3 expands the current findings in three ways. First, it extends the previous study context to examine whether lay theories of culture affect reactions of members of the organization. Second, one key indicator of successful diversity management is the level of

internal support the diversity approach can rally in facilitating diversity policies (Kulik, 2014; Thomas & Ely, 1996). In line with this, Study 3 measured organization members' support for diversity as the reaction outcome. Third, Study 3 directly tests our proposed mechanism: heightened ethnocentrism (Hypothesis 2). We modeled the hypothesis in a test of moderated mediation, such that the interaction between the diversity approach signal and lay theories of culture (moderation) would be mediated by individuals' level of ethnocentrism (mediation). This experiment used a between-subjects design (Condition: Multicultural vs. Colorblind approach).

Method

Participants, power, and procedure. We recruited as many participants as possible based on participant availability over the course of two semesters. One hundred and seventy undergraduate students at a Canadian university participated. One participant did not complete the survey, resulting in a final sample of 169 people (77% female; $M_{\rm age} = 20.8$, $SD_{\rm age} = 4.5$; 55% White, 27% East Asian, 12% South Asian, and 6% other; 94% Canadian permanent resident or citizen). A two-tailed sensitivity power analysis suggested that the sample size would give us 80% power to detect at least about a small effect in a two-way interaction model ($f^2 = 0.05$ or $\eta_p^2 = .04$; Faul et al., 2007; $\alpha = .05$).

Participants were told that there were three unrelated surveys. In the first part of the survey, participants were randomly assigned to reflect on either a multicultural or colorblind approach to diversity. The second part assessed participants' lay theories of culture and ethnocentrism among other filler items. The third part concerned participants' opinions about school and society, in which we measured their support for diversity policies toward their own institution, as well as national diversity policies. Last, we collected demographic information.

Given that age, gender, and racial background did not significantly alter the pattern of results, they were not included in the analyses.

Organizational diversity approach signal manipulation. We borrowed a pre-existing validated method (Wolsko et al., 2000) to randomly assign participants to reflect on aspects of their society that either signaled a multicultural approach (e.g., recognize and accept the strengths and weakness of ethnic groups; Multicultural Condition) or a colorblind approach (e.g., look beyond skin color and see individuals as part of a nation of individuals; Colorblind Condition). To enhance the effects of the manipulation, participants also summarized key features of the diversity approach.

Fixed cultural mindset measure. Participants completed a 4-item fixed cultural mindset scale (Chao et al., 2017; $\alpha = .90$). The average score formed the fixed mindset index.⁶

Ethnocentrism measure. We used a 9-item scale to measure generalized ethnocentrism (Neuliep & McCroskey, 2011; e.g., "My culture should be the role model for other cultures" and "My culture should try to be more like other cultures" (reverse-coded); $1 = Strongly \ disagree$ to $6 = Strongly \ agree$; $\alpha = .86$). The average score formed the ethnocentrism index.

Stakeholder reactions measures. We included two levels of measures of stakeholder reactions. First, we measured support for diversity expression at the university level (Lee et al., 2014). Participants saw a list of 12 student societies that were real communities at their school. Among the 12 student societies, three aimed to promote diversity (e.g., diversity education team), and the rest were academic clubs, interest clubs, and other volunteer activities. Participants selected: 1) the top 5 student societies most interesting to them, and 2) the top 5 they thought the university should keep in the event of a funding cut. The number of diversity-related

⁶ Participants' fixed mindset did not differ across Diversity Approach Conditions, t = 1.02, p = .310.

societies selected in the questions formed the diversity expression score. Participants' actual current involvement in the societies served as a control in the analysis (Lee et al., 2014).

Second, we measured support for policies that would increase ethnic diversity at the national level. Specifically, six items were created based on favorable policies for new immigrants and foreign workers (see SI for all items). Participants rated the extent to which they agreed with the policy implementation (e.g., "New immigrants in Canada should get equal benefits as Canadian residents"; from 1 = Strongly disagree to 6 = Strongly agree; $\alpha = .82$). The average score served as a dependent variable.

Study 3 Results

Means and correlations of variables are presented in Table 1. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, there was a significant interaction between Diversity Approach Condition and the lay theories of culture index on ethnocentrism, B = .19, SE = .08, p = .029, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, 95% CI [.02, .35]. Specifically, lay theories of culture moderated reactions toward the diversity signal approach, such that those with a stronger fixed mindset responded with increased ethnocentrism to a multicultural community signal, B = .18, SE = .06, p = .005, $\eta_p^2 = .09$, 95% CI [.06, .30], but not to a colorblind community signal, p > .250.

To test Hypothesis 2, we conducted a bootstrapping moderated mediation model with 10,000 bootstrap samples (Preacher, Rucker, and Hayes, 2007; Model 8) on each dependent variable: a) support for diversity expression and b) support for diversity policies. Each model consists of a regression test for the interaction effect of diversity approach signals and lay theories of culture on ethnocentrism and the focal test for the mediating effect of ethnocentrism on the dependent variable. Detailed regression results are presented in Table 3. The direct and indirect effects are visualized in Figure 4.

As seen in Figure 4, we found a significant indirect effect of ethnocentrism, mediating the interaction effect between Diversity Approach Condition and the lay theories of culture index on *support for diversity expression at school*, B = -.70, SE = .26, p = .009, 95% CI [-1.18, -.18] (controlling for current involvement in student societies). Increased ethnocentrism among those who held a stronger fixed mindset predicted reduced support for diversity expression in the multicultural condition, B = -.12, SE = .05, 95% CI [-.26, -.04], but not in the colorblind condition, B = .01, SE = .05, 95% CI [-.08, .13]. The test of moderated mediation (Hayes, 2015) showed that the difference across the conditions was significant, B = -.12, SE = .05, 95% CI[-.26, -.04].

Similarly, we found a significant indirect effect of ethnocentrism, mediating the interaction effect between Condition and lay theories of culture on *support for diversity-increasing policies*, B = -.25, SE = .10, p = .016, 95% CI [-.45, -.04]. Increased ethnocentrism among those who held a stronger fixed mindset predicted reduced support for diversity-increasing policies, B = -.04, SE = .02, 95% CI [-.11, -.01], but not in the colorblind condition, B = .005, SE = .02, 95% CI [-.03, .05]. The test of moderated mediation showed that the difference across the conditions was significant, B = -.04, SE = .03, 95% CI[-.14, -.004].

Overall, Study 3 replicated the interaction effects of lay theories of culture and diversity approach on stakeholders' reactions, providing converging support to Hypothesis 1. Moreover, the moderated mediation results extended previous findings; it demonstrated ethnocentrism as a mechanism underlying the negative reactions toward multicultural approach among those who hold a fixed cultural mindset, supporting Hypothesis 2.

General Discussion

The effectiveness of a diversity approach relies heavily on stakeholders' support (Thomas & Ely, 1996). However, even well-intended approaches such as multiculturalism have frequently resulted in both support and backlash. Understanding the reasons behind these mixed reactions is critical to diversity management. This article provides a new theoretical framework for understanding diversity management and contributes a new perspective to this topic by demonstrating how and why mixed support can occur. Consistent across three studies, signaling a multicultural approach caused negative reactions—less support for the organization and for the promotion of diversity—among people who held a mindset that racial-ethnic groups possess stable and deep-seated essences. As theorized, heightened ethnocentrism mediated the negative effects of the interaction between multiculturalism and lay theories of culture. The results generalized across samples, roles of participants (i.e., outside-stakeholder; organizational member), and varied stakeholder reaction outcomes.

Theoretical Implications

These findings make direct contributions to the applied psychology literature on diversity. Increasingly, diversity researchers and policymakers have favored a multicultural over a colorblind approach (Emerson, 2017; Norton, 2012). While signaling a multicultural approach can bring advantages (e.g., Plaut et al., 2018; Vorauer et al., 2009), consistent with observations from extant research and public data (e.g., Bissoondath, 2002; Reid, 2016), it can sometimes backfire. The current research adds evidence to support this observation. Moreover, this work may explain why many businesses, despite repeated efforts, may still struggle in managing diversity due to the inability to maximize stakeholder support (e.g., Moore, 2019). To maximize the effectiveness of any diversity approach, it is essential to understand why the mixed reactions

& Martins, 2016), and there has been little research that directly speaks to factors that are relatively easy to be shifted. The current research addresses these gaps by presenting a new perspective to explain why these mixed reactions can happen and by illuminating a psychological factor—lay theories of culture—that affects how people respond to organizational diversity approach signals.

More broadly, the current work also introduced a mindset perspective to understand diversity approach signaling, expanding our understanding of the mixed reactions to diversity approaches. Research has traditionally focused on policy recipients' reactions based on demographics or group status (e.g., beneficiary or non-beneficiary)—who the people are. Our research highlights that the understanding of the implications of diverse psychology underpinnings—what the people believe—also matters. Moreover, this highlighted that to understand the impacts of a multicultural approach more fully, it is essential to acknowledge that there may not be a one-size-fits-all approach. Examining the characteristics of the diversity approach is not enough—the current studies point out that it is also necessary to consider the stakeholders' characteristics, including their lay belief systems.

Additionally, the current research contributes to the lay theories or mindset literature.

First, our work has underscored a dynamic perspective of mindset effects. The majority of past research on mindsets suggests that a fixed mindset results in negative consequences (e.g., fixed mindset of intelligence reduced task motivation; fixed mindset of personality decreased supervisors' recognition of employees' performance improvement; Heslin et al., 2005; Robins & Pals, 2002). Most research on lay theories of culture more specifically also suggests that a fixed cultural mindset is associated with negative social consequences (e.g., more prejudice and

stereotyping; Chao & Kung, 2015). Extending these traditions, our theory offers a more nuanced view that a fixed cultural mindset does not always lead to negative consequences. Rather, a fixed cultural mindset would associate with negative reactions *only when* the context emphasizes intergroup differences (e.g., using a multicultural approach). In the current study, fixed cultural mindset did not lead to negative reactions when intergroup differences were silent (e.g., a colorblind approach). The recognition of mindset dynamics is relatively new in the literature, and the current work has offered empirical support to this new perspective, advancing a more comprehensive understanding of mindset effects.

Second, despite increasing work on the powerful impacts of mindsets in organizations (Heslin & VandeWalle, 2011; Wang et al., 2018; Zingoni & Corey, 2017), the empirical work on lay theories of culture in the context of organizational issues remains scarce (Chao et al., 2017). Lay theories of culture can have important implications in organizations, as showcased by the current research in the context of diversity management. Given increasing globalization (whether virtual or face-to-face) combined with recent political events and polls highlighting the polarized sentiments about diversity approaches (Reid, 2016; T. Williams, 2020), this extension is especially timely and vital. In doing so, this work also plays an important role in expanding the literature on lay theories to organizational research more broadly. We encourage future research to systematically unpack other potential organizational implications of lay theories of culture that are promising but unexplored, such as multicultural leadership, teamwork, conflict resolution (Rattan & Ozgumus, 2020), and the study of diversity more broadly.

Practical Implications

This work provides several practical implications for effective diversity management.

One direct implication is that organizations should consider the influence of lay theories of

culture when devising a diversity policy. Based on past research and our data, individuals naturally differ in their beliefs about the nature of cultural characteristics. Moreover, this work demonstrated that such differences in mindset impact critical organizational outcomes and incumbents' support for increasing diversity in the organization. These findings offer new knowledge for informed management. As discussed in the introduction, it is not uncommon for a multicultural approach to backfire, but now leaders and policymakers can understand why the negative reactions may occur. This highlights the importance of recognizing individual stakeholders' viewpoints and the majority views of cultural differences in an organization, so as to pinpoint more specific and targeted remedial actions (e.g., knowing whom they should prioritize reaching out to for more effective mitigation).

This work also highlights the potential of a proactive method to managing reactions to diversity approaches, namely to strategically induce beneficial mindsets to help increase diversity policy effectiveness. The advocacy of a malleable mindset about culture is one possibility to help people who have a strong fixed mindset to be more receptive to multicultural policies. Study 2's exploratory analyses speak to this possibility. It showed that those who held a fixed cultural mindset but received information that presented cultural mindset as malleable no longer reacted negatively toward a multicultural approach. In addition, to examine the practical utility of the possibility that a malleable cultural mindset message can improve reactions toward a multicultural approach, we conducted an additional experiment (reported in full as a Supplemental Study in Online Supporting Information). In brief, this pre-registered study (*N* = 434) compared the effects of a malleable cultural mindset manipulation versus a control condition on support toward an organization that endorsed a multicultural approach. There was a trend that a malleable cultural mindset improved reactions toward a multicultural approach, but

the effect size was relatively small and did not reach the conventional statistical significance threshold. This cautions that the effectiveness in inducing mindsets may be influenced by boundary conditions, for example that they may be more effective in everyday organizational settings (compared to highly-controlled, subtle online experiments) where multicultural signaling can be more evocative and less subtle. Although the specific findings on intervening lay theories of culture are still preliminary, the current research overall sheds new light on current practices used to promote diversity management and future directions to improve the practices. For instance, for companies that intend to promote diversity, instead of presenting a multicultural message per se, perhaps embedding the message within a larger context about cultural change or a malleable cultural mindset would increase stakeholders' support. To this end, it is essential for future research to investigate ways to amplify the strength of the malleable cultural mindset message to maximize its utility to engender positive reactions.

Third, our research offers practical insights for diversity training programs and calls for a more careful design of these programs. Diversity training programs are gaining in popularity in schools and offices; many of them aim to promote cultural knowledge and multicultural values. However, the training of knowledge of cultural differences could unintentionally reinforce boundaries across groups, and beliefs that these differences are unchangeable, which could invoke or reinforce trainees' fixed beliefs (e.g., Fischer, 2011). Taking from the current findings, this means that adding the promotion of a multicultural approach to a diversity training program may have unintended negative consequences. Therefore, we advise practitioners to take precautions in diversity training to avoid instilling a fixed cultural mindset, causing the training to backfire.

Limitations and Future Directions

These studies have both strengths and limitations that highlight pathways for several future research directions. For instance, although we recruited as many participants as possible, as described above in the result sections, several tests were not as well-powered as would be desired to detect the size of effects we observed (e.g., 3-way interaction in Study 2). In addition, although experimentally manipulating the diversity approach and adopting actual company promotional materials for the manipulation had the benefit of minimizing confounds, maximizing control, and enhancing causal inference, experimentation has its limitations such as reducing participant engagement and involvement with the issues, that can lead to weaker effect sizes than would have been observed naturally. Particularly, our experimental manipulations involved subtle diversity cues and mindset inductions. They may not have evoked the level of responses that diversity approaches could evoke in actual organizations in real life, when people's personal interests might be at stake. Given that our studies have provided initial evidence demonstrating the mixed reactions to the multicultural approach, and presenting a new theoretical impetus to motivate future research, future research should continue to test the hypotheses in ecologically embedded organizational settings (whose diversity efforts may evoke stronger responses). Further, future studies should consider using both surveys and field experiments (e.g., engaging the malleable mindset) to examine the impacts of cultural mindset and diversity signaling within an organization, and the effects of cultural mindset across organizations that endorse a broad range of diversity approaches.

Moreover, although Study 3 illustrated how state ethnocentrism could be a mechanism that underlies the negative reactions against a multicultural approach driven, it is the first step toward understanding the mechanism and more evidence is still needed to consolidate the

conclusion that the negative reactions result from a sense of self-threat. First, conceptual replications will be useful. For instance, future work will benefit from examining the proposed mechanism further across different operationalizations, ethnocentrism or other indicators of threat to self (or own group), and across other common and high-stakes organizational contexts. Second, causal demonstrations are needed to provide stronger evidence of the direction of the mechanism. Future work will benefit from manipulating threats as a result of multicultural approach signals. One way to do so is by using an experimental causal chain design (Spencer et al., 2005). For instance, after the diversity approach manipulation, researchers may introduce two threat conditions, control versus buffering (see self-affirmation task; Steele, 1988). If the negative reactions to the multicultural approach were driven by self-threat, researchers should observe weaker negative reactions in the buffering condition.

Another aspect related to future improvements to study design is the order of measurement. In Study 2, we explored a three-way interaction effect among two experimental conditions (diversity approach and mindset manipulation) and self-report fixed cultural mindset. Although the results were interesting and showed some support for our pre-existing theoretical assumptions, it is important to point out that the effects of the mindset manipulation and self-report mindset were non-independent: self-report mindset was measured after the mindset manipulation task. Future work should measure lay theories in advance and, ideally, adopt a longitudinal design to examine its impact over time in response to different diversity approaches. Relatedly, across the three main studies, mindset was measured before the diversity approach condition. It is possible that by measuring people's mindset, we temporarily activated and reinforced its cognitive associations that enhanced the reactions toward the diversity approaches. Whereas such activation may increase the intensity of the reactions, it should not change the

direction of the effects or the overall patterns of the results. Nonetheless, because this potential effect may influence the observed effect size of the outcomes, future work may consider examining this phenomenon. For example, one way to study this is by switching the order of the measures systematically and measuring lay theories of culture and reactions at separate time points (e.g., in a multi-wave study).

Finally, even though our samples are racially diverse, we draw caution that they were based in North America. Future research may consider recruiting participants in other regions to examine the generalizability of the effects to other cultures (Hamamura, 2017). In addition, the current research has purposefully focused on racial-ethnic differences due to recent debates about diversity approaches specific to the domain (Emerson, 2017; Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010; T. Williams, 2020). However, our theoretical framework should not be limited to a single domain. It has the potential to speak to reactions based on other social categories (e.g., gender and sexuality). A promising direction for future research will be to explore the effects in varied domains of diversity and examine their implications for diversity management more broadly.

Conclusion

Multiculturalism is considered a common and important approach for promoting diversity. However, recent mixed reactions to it suggest that we should not neglect its boundary conditions and it is critical to understand variations in individuals' reactions to the approach. This article offers insights by integrating perspectives of social categorization and cultural mindset; it suggests that the stakeholder's lay theories of culture matter. Those who hold a stronger fixed mindset tend to react most negatively to multicultural (vs. colorblind) signaling. This cautionary note casts no shadow on the value of celebrating diversity. Rather, it adds depth to our knowledge, suggesting that we, as scientists and practitioners, introduce nuance in how we

devise and signal diversity approaches in organizations. As future research continues to reveal insights into promoting diversity more effectively, we might come closer to achieving a diverse and harmonious society.

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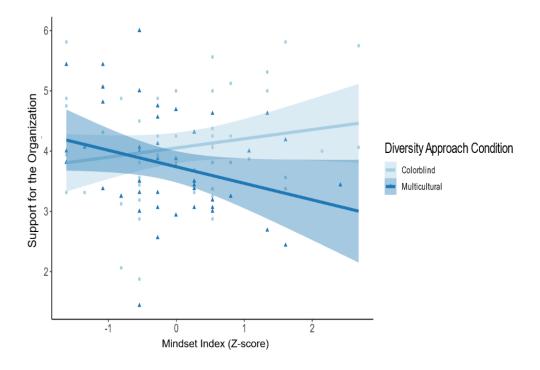


Figure 1. Results from Study 1: Stakeholder reactions to organization as a function of diversity approach signal condition and participants' fixed cultural mindset. Error bands show 95% confidence intervals. Participants' responses to the cultural mindset scale were averaged to form the mindset index. The mean score of mindset index = 2.51; Z-scores interval = .93 (i.e., the SD).

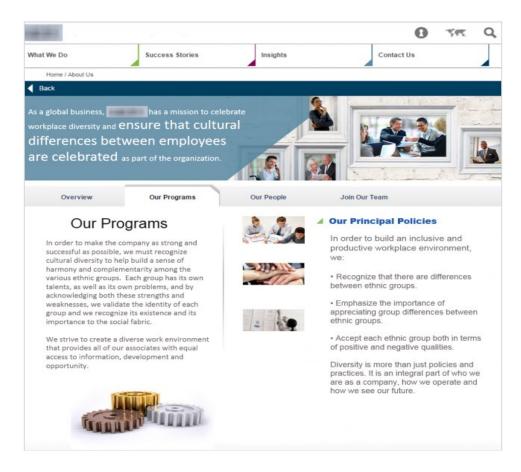


Figure 2. A stimulus from Study 2: Company statement in the multicultural condition.

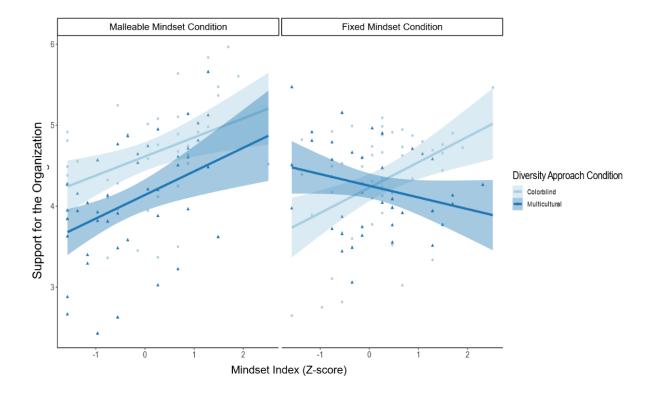


Figure 3. Results from Study 2: Stakeholder reactions to organization as a function of diversity approach signal condition, mindset condition, and participants' fixed cultural mindset. Error bands show 95% confidence intervals. Participants' responses to the cultural mindset scale were averaged to form the mindset index. The mean score of mindset index = 2.93; Z-score interval = 1.22 (i.e., the SD).

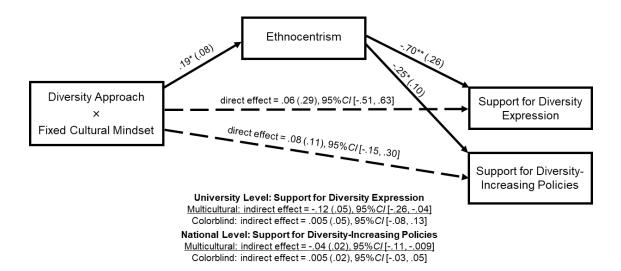


Figure 4. Results from Study 3: A moderated mediation model. Estimates are unstandardized coefficients with standard errors reported in parentheses. Diversity Approach Signal Conditions: Multicultural = 1 and Colorblind = 0. *** $p \le .001$, *** $p \le .01$, and * $p \le .05$.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations of variables across three studies.

			Correlations				
Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Study 1							
1. Diversity Approach Condition	.48	.50	-				
2. Fixed Cultural Mindset	2.51	.93	11	-			
3. Social Dominance Orientation	2.05	.79	.06	.24*	-		
4. Frequency of Intergroup Exposure	3.58	.83	.16	12	05	-	
5. Ethnic Identification	4.18	1.14	08	.22*	.01	.13	-
6. Overall Support for the Organization	3.93	.90	17	.01	.14	.04	.10
Study 2							
1. Diversity Approach Condition	.51	.50	-				
2. Mindset Condition	.51	.50	10	-			
3. Fixed Cultural Mindset	2.93	1.22	16*	.19**	-		
4. Perceptions of Article	4.17	1.41	.02	.06	01	-	
5. Overall Support for the Organization	4.28	1.18	14	01	.18*	.45***	-
Study 3							
1. Diversity Approach Condition	.49	.50	-				
2. Fixed Cultural Mindset	2.34	.98	08	-			
3. Ethnocentrism	3.31	.54	02	.14	-		
4. Support for Diversity Expression	2.36	1.95	.00	.04	17*	-	
5. Current Involvement in Diversity-related							
Activities	.20	.48	05	.15	.05	.40***	-
6. Support for Diversity-Increasing Policies	4.89	.74	.08	29**	21**	.16*	.01

Note. *** $p \le .001$, ** $p \le .01$, and * $p \le .05$. Diversity Approach Signal Conditions: Multicultural = 1 and Colorblind = 0. Study 1: N = 96; Study 2: N = 199; Study 3: N = 169. Two-tailed sensitivity analyses showed that these sample sizes would give us 80% power to detect at least about a small-to-medium correlation at the size of .277, .196, and .212, respectively.

Table 2. Study 1 robustness analyses: Multiple regression model controlling for the covariates

Independent Variables	В	SE	t	p	95% CI		
macpendent variables					lower	upper	η_p^2
Intercept	4.47	.54	8.28	< .001	3.39	5.53	.44
Diversity Approach Condition	24	.18	-1.33	.187	59	.12	.02
Fixed Cultural Mindset	.24	.13	1.92	.058	01	.49	.04
Social Dominance Orientation	37	.11	-3.25	.002	60	14	.11
Frequency of Intergroup Exposure	.05	.10	.56	.578	14	.25	< .01
Ethnic Identification	.03	.08	.36	.723	13	.19	< .01
Mindset × Diversity Approach Condition	46	.19	-2.36	.021	84	07	.06

Note. Diversity Approach Signal Conditions: Multicultural = 1 and Colorblind = 0.

Table 3. Study 3 moderated mediation analyses on stakeholder support for diversity expression and diversity-increasing policies in the community

	Moderation (Stage		Mediation Models (Stage 2)							
	Ethnocentrism (Mediator)		Support for Diversity Expression		Support for Diversity Expression (controlling for current involvement)		Support for Diversity- Increasing Policies			
Independent Variables	Coeff.	95% CI	Coeff.	95% CI	Coeff.	95% CI	Coeff.	95% CI		
Constant	3.32*** (.06)	3.20, 3.43	4.53*** (.97)	2.61, 6.45	4.30*** (.89)	2.54, 6.06	5.68*** (.35)	4.99, 6.37		
Fixed Cultural Mindset	007 (.06)	12, .10	.09 (.21)	23, .50	01 (.19)	39, .36	23** (.07)	38,08		
Diversity Approach Condition	004 (.08)	17, .16	002 (.30)	60, .59	.06 (.28)	48, .61	.09 (.11)	13, .30		
Diversity Approach Condition × Mindset	.19* (.08)	.02, .35	.09 (.31)	53, .71	.06 (.29)	51, .63	.08 (.11)	.08 (.11)		
Ethnocentrism (Mediator)			66* (.29)	-1.22,09	70** (.26)	-1.2,18	25* (.10)	45,04		
Current Involvement in Diversity Activities					1.65*** (.29)	1.08, 2.23				
	$R^2 = .05$ F(3, 165) = 2.71, p = .047		$R^2 = .03$ F(4, 164) = 1.38, p = .243		$R^2 = .19$ $F(4, 164) = 7.78, p < .001$		$R^2 = .12$ F(4, 164) = 5.46, p < .001			

Note. *** $p \le .001$, ** $p \le .01$, and * $p \le .05$. Diversity Approach Signal Conditions: Multicultural = 1 and Colorblind = 0.