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**Abstract**

Multicultural work teams are increasingly common and provide a challenge to achieving the integration associated with greater effectiveness. The vague and abstract nature of many definitions of culture can make the difficulties in acknowledging and addressing difference challenging. This longitudinal study of a multicultural team follows the anthropological roots of cultural studies to focus on the material role of food and drink in team development. In an empirical, ethnographically-oriented study of a culturally diverse work team over time, we explored the ways that food and drink acted as boundary objects in processes of integration, differentiation and cultural adaptation and negotiation. By employing the lens of material culture, with its sensory nature and its associations with identity, we highlight the complexity of cross-cultural interaction, with its possibilities of co-operation, learning, difficulties and resistance. Our study shows that food and drink allow team members a grounded discussion of culture, accommodation and difference. We contribute to the multicultural team literature, emphasizing the roles of materiality, constrained choice, and complexity, translated into performance by the generative mechanisms of agency in context. We also identify specific contributions to practice arising from this research.

**Keywords:** material culture; food and drink; multicultural team; cultural difference; culture; team performance; faultlines; boundary objects

## **Introduction**

Studies of cultural influences in work organizations have focused on values and attitudes at the expense of the material. In response to calls to incorporate into cross cultural research perspectives beyond that of cultural values as major differentiators between nations, this paper argues that manifestations of material culture, more specifically food and drink, play a role in culturally diverse teams. They constitute a focus where important aspects of cultural difference are encountered and negotiated. Food and drink are both sensory and symbolic, having the power to evoke cognitive and behavioural aspects of culture in very specific ways as well as being imbued with meanings and value associations. Food and drink are part of both cultural identity and the physical body, and, in diverse teams, have the potential to serve as barrier or bridge between cultures, hindering or facilitating team performance. As boundary objects, they both play a part in the processes of constrained choice by which team outcomes are achieved, and point to the complexity and ambiguity of culture and its influences.

### ***Organization of Paper***

We develop our argument as follows.

In our review of the literature, we firstly review some conclusions from the literature on culturally diverse teams: namely, that processes of social integration and differentiation are important in team outcomes and are influenced by culture and difference, and that there remain questions as to the nature of culture and cultural difference and the mechanisms by which they operate.

Secondly, we focus on a relatively unexplored aspect of culture and difference in drawing on definitions of material culture and arguing that food and drink are important cultural artifacts, integral to cultural identity, combining sensory and symbolic aspects and evoking powerful meanings and value associations.

In the final part of our review of the literature, we discuss implications for team performance of cultural differences in eating and drinking. We suggest that food and drink act as boundary objects, that is, as a focal point for the discussion and negotiation of culture, sameness and difference. We situate this argument within a conceptualization of the influences of culture and difference on team performance, which we see not as deterministic or as an input in a systems-type model (input-process-output), but as the outcome of the agency of team actors in processes of constrained choice.

Our review of the literature suggests that while food is acknowledged as important in social integration, the nature of the interactions around food and drink in work teams has been neglected. The next section of our paper outlines an empirical study undertaken to investigate these questions, describing the ethnographically oriented approach taken, the team, the context and their task, and the processes of data collection and analysis. The following section describes the findings of this study, in discussing both the answers to the research questions and the ways in which the findings indicate further layers of ambiguity and complexity.

In our final sections, we discuss the implications of our findings for organizational practice and for theory and research, as well as some limitations of our work and some directions these indicate for future investigation, before summarizing our conclusions.

## **Literature Review**

Culturally diverse work teams are an increasingly common form of organization in the workplace (Gibson and Cohen, 2003); (Stahl et al., 2010); (Zimmermann, 2011). The importance of the tasks with which many of these teams engage (Maznevski and Chudoba, 2000) has ensured that considerable research attention has been paid to cultural diversity, which is widely acknowledged to present challenges (Mockaitis et al., 2012), and to the influence of diversity on team performance. Performance itself is recognized as a complex, multidimensional, and highly contextualized construct, incorporating a variety of outcomes such as group learning, task performance, and quality of relationships (Gibson et al., 2003).

## ***Influences of Cultural Diversity***

We know that cultural diversity matters in teams; much has been written on the topic of how. A meta-analysis (Stahl et al. 2010) demonstrates the complexity of the influences of diversity. Key points emerge. Firstly, diversity tends to increase divergent processes: that is, those that introduce different ideas and values. Secondly, it also decreases convergent processes: that is, those that align team members to common objectives or promote commitment within the group. Further emphasizing the complexity of diversity's influence, both divergent and convergent processes potentially lead to performance gains or losses: conflict may be productive or destructive, group cohesion may foster trust and openness or lead to 'groupthink'. A clear theme nonetheless emerges, that of the importance of integration and fractionation.

### *Social Integration, or Fractionation?*

Cultural differences pose challenges for groups which, to perform well, have to achieve social integration, communicate effectively (both in terms of frequency and content), (Stahl et al. 2010), and develop a "hybrid culture" (Earley and Mosakowski 2000). Groups must avoid the potential danger of splitting into subgroups along cultural "faultlines", the "...hypothetical dividing lines that may split a group into subgroups based on one or more attributes" (Earley and Mosakowski 2000). Individuals tend to trust, like and choose to spend time with those they find similar to themselves (Tsui and O'Reilly 1989), and to consider outgroup members as less capable, or less worthy of trust (Li and Hambrick 2005). Subgroups can form along national lines in multicultural teams; the activation of these "faultlines" impacts on team performance (Earley and Mosakowski 2000). Emphasizing difference, cultural faultlines can lead to task and behavioural conflict and group dysfunction, even to "behavioural disintegration" (Li and Hambrick 2005). A further consequence of group fragmentation is a tendency for both the frequency and content of communication to be reduced (Vora and Markoczy 2012).

Fractionation is not, however, inevitable. Faultlines may go unnoticed unless triggered by external forces such as differential treatment, different values, assimilation or simple contact (Chrobot-Mason et al. 2009; Lau and Murnighan 1998). It follows that attention can usefully be paid to the nature and incidence of such triggers.

The findings briefly summarized above represent important advances in our understanding of multicultural teams. Despite these, however, the influence of cultural diversity and the mechanisms by which it influences performance remain imperfectly understood (Barinaga 2007; Stahl et al. 2010). This has led to shifts in research attention in two areas: first, an increased focus on what goes on inside the 'black box' where cultural difference operates, and secondly, a more critical consideration of nature of culture itself.

### *Opening the 'Black Box'*

A number of scholars (for example Barinaga 2007, Zimmerman 2011, (Zimmermann and Sparrow, 2007)) have questioned approaches conceptualising the functioning of culturally diverse teams using linear systems models such as I-P-O, that is, "inputs influencing processes and both determining outputs" (West et al., 1998) or I-M-O-I (input-mediator-output-input) (Ilgen et al., 2005). Instead, perspectives such as configurational (Zimmermann, 2011) or discourse (Barinaga, 2007) have been suggested, perspectives which, although differing in a number of respects, have in common a focus on the choices, actions, and interactions of team members which in turn lead to particular outcomes. Rather than being "dopes of culture", team members exercise choices in the ways they shape and develop their work, in the wider context of notions of culture and diversity (Barinaga, 2007). Acknowledging culture as constructed and negotiated by active agents leads us to reconsider the notion of 'culture' itself.

## *Nature of Culture and Difference*

An issue in advancing the field of multicultural research has been the conceptualization of “culture”. Organization studies in particular have been both enriched and limited by approaches such as Hofstede. A prevailing emphasis on cultural values as the main differentiator between nations has been identified as a barrier to cross cultural research (Aritz and Walker 2010; Barinaga 2007; Jameson 2007; Shapiro et al. 2007; Tsui et al. 2007; Zimmermann 2011). It has been suggested therefore that a re-examination of the nature of culture should incorporate “multiple contexts for holistic and valid understanding” (Shapiro et al. 2007), and take account of different sources of the meanings which influence organizational actors (Tsui et al. 2007).

In order to incorporate sources of meanings other than psychological or communicative, we turn to a consideration of materiality, more specifically ‘material culture’, defined as “the corporeal, tangible objects constructed by humans...objects that are used, lived in, displayed and experienced” (O’Toole and Were, 2008). Material culture consists of artifacts that are situated in specific social contexts, within which they have meanings “embedded in a set of practices...where meanings can only be deciphered through practice and evocation – through...mutual implication of materials and non-materials” (Hodder, 2000). The nature of material culture, rooted as it is in specific cultural contexts, is as both a manifestation of, and influence on, culture (O’Toole and Were, 2008).

Material culture, then, represents both social and symbolic meaning, embedded in culture and practices of a group (Hodder, 2000). It is important to stress, however, that meanings are associated with objects, physical manifestations experienced through the senses. Rather, than focusing purely on psychological and communicative knowledge, we should acknowledge not only the symbolic nature of culture, but also physical and sensory ways of knowing. Culture is not only a “cognitive-representational abstraction”, but also involves “perceptual-embodied experience” (Flores-Pereira et al. 2008). Such experience of material culture can be vividly exemplified by examining, as do Flores-Pereira and her colleagues, food and drink.

To summarise, we have argued that outcomes in culturally diverse teams are the result not of deterministic processes but of individuals' actions and choices, and that the physical and sensory nature of cultural experience has to be acknowledged alongside more abstract manifestations of culture. It follows, then, that examining the ways in which members of culturally diverse teams engage with materiality can advance our understanding of the influences of cultural difference in generating team performance.

In our next section, we develop our argument that the specific cultural artifacts of food and drink should be our focus of attention.

### ***Why Food and Drink Matter***

An influential management textbook (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997) is illustrated (page 22) by "a model of culture", showing a series of embedded circles "like an onion" which the authors maintain has to be unpeeled "layer by layer" to be understood. The outer circle is labeled "artifacts and products", and two points are made: firstly, these observable realities such as language, food, architecture, make culture explicit, and secondly, that these represent, as "less esoteric, more concrete factors" the individual's "first experience of a new culture". These concrete factors are contrasted later in the text with implicit culture, that is, the (less observable) norms, values and basic assumptions. Observable reality takes on a quality beyond materiality to become "material culture", when it can be "disengaged from its mere actuality and used to impose meaning on experience" (Geertz, 1973), that is when, for example, it has symbolic or ritual connotations as well as its physical nature.



Food and drink are tangible products of human cultural activity, with an implicit “highly elaborate corpus of ideas, symbols and meanings” (Beardsworth and Keil, 1997) (page 69). Food and drink are associated with identity (Laroche et al., 2005; Avieli, 2005) are not only as cultural artifacts but also as elements of universal human existence. We have to eat to live, and by eating and drinking are involved in activities imbued with cultural meanings. Basic foodstuffs, preservation, preparation, and cooking methods vary considerably across cultures, as do the compositions of meals in terms of amount and variety (Chang 1977). This diversity is reflected in culinary tastes and practices (Harris 1998). Experiencing cultural difference through food and drink is therefore part of the lived experience of international travellers, including members of culturally diverse teams.

As we shall now argue, food and drink can make cultural difference in teams both obvious and salient.

#### *Food and Drink in the Literature*

While many anthropological studies have explored the production arrangements and cultural functions of food and drink, relatively little attention had been paid to the ways “eating and greeting” may reflect or shape organizational processes (Sturdy et al. 2006). Addressing this gap, a Human Relations (2008) special issue on “Food, Work and Organization” drew on studies of food and drink to explore for example the tensions, explicit and implicit meanings in rituals (Thomson and Hassenkamp 2008) and the central role of commensality in community (Parker 2008).

Surprisingly, despite this work, cultural difference in food and drink, has not been explicitly addressed in the context of multicultural teams. It has, however, received some attention in the expatriate adjustment literature, sometimes tangentially. Food and drink, along with climate and living conditions, is one of the three core areas in which expatriates must adapt (Black and Stephens 1989) to be able to function without undue stress and be accepted by hosts (Van Vianen et al. 2004). Drawing specific attention to the sensory and symbolic aspects of eating and drinking, (Earley and Ang, 2003) (page 83), in their work on Cultural Intelligence, outline the issues faced by a European sojourner faced with culturally unfamiliar foodstuffs, such as being “provided with a plate filled with a local delicacy of fried earthworms and grasshoppers”. The authors stress that the problem is likely to go beyond courtesy (how to refuse what may seem unpalatable or even revolting) to self-management of emotional responses (how not to show disgust or revulsion through involuntary expression or body language). Such examples demonstrate how eating and drinking can confront us with a vivid and visceral groundedness in material day-to-day existence, how food and drink can encompass both celebration and disgust.

We have argued then, that food and drink, as an important part of material culture, associated with identity, meaning and symbolism, have the potential to embody culture: to define difference, and make it problematic or a focus for bonding and development.

In the context of culturally diverse teams, this has important implications; we now turn to the concept of ‘boundary objects’ in considering the ways in which cultural differences in food and drink may influence team performance.

### *Boundary Objects*

Boundary objects are 'mediating artifacts' (Barrett and Oburn, 2010). The construct focuses on objects and the varying roles they play. Not all artifacts operate as boundary objects; artifacts become boundary objects when they are in use, through and mediating social interaction (Barrett and Oburn, 2010). Boundary objects are conceptualized as including material objects such as Powerpoint slides or electronic sensors (Nicolini et al., 2012), and also organizational artifacts such as technologies, protocols or practices. Barrett and Oburn (2010), for example, studied software specifications and project management tools as boundary objects in software development teams, (Yakura, 2002) examined timelines, (Harvey and Chrisman, 1998) analysed how GIS (geographical information system) data standards were used in negotiating and stabilizing localized social arrangements. Much of the literature focuses on the role of objects at the boundaries of occupational or professional groups, (Barrett and Oburn, 2010)'s study of a culturally diverse project team, is a rare demonstration of how boundary objects may be interpreted and utilized in different ways at different times in a cross-cultural group.

#### *Food and Drink as Boundary Objects*

Food and drink, instrumental, symbolic, sensory and imbued with cultural meanings as they are, possess the characteristics that typify boundary objects which are, according to (Star, 2010), interpretive flexibility, a dynamic between ill-structured and more tailored uses of the object, and vague but useful shared representations. For example, food may be regarded as fuel for the body or as symbol of cultural identity, the nature of certain items as food or non-food may be contested, the notion of a meal and the way it is structured and conducted may be vague. At the same time, food and drink are universally instrumental in social relationships in a number of ways.

#### *Operation of Boundary Objects in Teams.*

Boundary objects play roles, instrumental and symbolic, which potentially enable or disable interactions amongst groups (Swan et al., 2007). Conclusions from a number of studies suggest that these roles can include encouraging and facilitating information sharing and achieving collaboration in groups as well as mediating relations between different groups, but also reinforcing intergroup boundaries or triggering cultural clashes and interpersonal conflicts (Barrett and Oburn, 2010).

### *Food, Drink and Team Functioning*

As (Harvey and Chrisman, 1998) maintain, boundary objects can “separate different social groups at the same time as they delineate important points of reference between them”. Our review of the multicultural team literature indicates that key processes affecting the outcomes of such groups are integration and differentiation. Food serves, “like all culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance of social relationships, ... both to solidify group membership and to set groups apart” (Mintz and Du Bois 2002).

#### *“Solidify Group Membership”*

Commensality, “the practice of eating together, often strongly defined by societal rules and conventions” (Calhoun 2002), “...is universally known to be one of the most effective forms of human social bonding. (Fox, 2004) elaborates: “In all cultures, the offering and acceptance of such hospitality constitutes at the very least a non-aggression pact .... at best a significant move towards cementing friendships and alliances.” This symbolic role of food in bonding is shared in many (but, importantly, not all) cultures by alcohol, which has for centuries been used “...as a catalyst for relationship building, coalition formation, and bonding among business partners” (Schweitzer and Kerr, 2000). Food and eating have many different social purposes (Mintz 1996); their role in building relationships is one, exchanges of gifts of food between individuals, symbolizing reciprocity and interdependence (Beardsworth and Keil 1997) (page 52), is another. Gifts of foods associated with national identity may have particular symbolism in cross-cultural interactions; it is suggested for example that the gift of a home-cooked Dutch delicacy enabled an expatriate to overcome barriers and reach agreement with an Indonesian counter-party (Van Vianen et al. 2004). Again in cross-cultural settings, willingness to explore the unfamiliar food of others may provide an opportunity to recognize and share difference and can build positive affect. (Sinha 2004) relates how an expatriate manager in India shared the local food: “...he freely mixed with employees, often took lunch with them...seemed to love the Indian curry. Employees found in him a great listener”.

This experience of Sinhas' expatriate in India suggests that not only the foodstuffs

themselves, but also the context of sharing food may play an important role. Joint meals may act as a vehicle for positive affect, indeed they are often valued as relatively informal spaces where “private” issues can be shared (Sturdy et al. 2006).

In summary, we have argued in this section that eating and drinking, utilizing the symbolic and identity-related aspects of foodstuffs and drawing upon widespread cultural meanings of commensality, may have the potential to help members of multicultural teams bond and integrate. This leads us to our first Research Question.: *What role does food and drink play in the social integration of a multicultural team?*

“Set groups apart”

Food and drink, may, however, not inevitably lead to social integration Differences in food habits may also delineate boundaries between “us” and “them”. Dimensions of ethnic identity are often closely related to the consumption of traditional foods (Laroche et al. 2005), consumption of particular foods and associated rituals serve as a means of “concretizing” and practicing national identity (Avieli 2005), thus playing a part in what Gergen (2009) describes as a “positioning” of selves and others. Food can be implicated in social categorization, indicating “...status, gender and group membership” (Mintz and Du Bois 2002).

Group identity can be symbolized not only by consumption but also by abstinence, for example in religious practices of Hindus, Muslims and Christians. Rejecting meat or alcohol “...can be a powerful cultural device to reinforce and emphasise a particular group's collective identity...rejection... is in itself a clear expression of the individual's continuing commitment to the religion or system of belief in question” (Beardsworth and Keil 1997). Other cultural and social norms dictate what is not ‘food’ – horse and dog meat and insects are taboo for example in Britain and the USA, although eaten in other countries.

People have strong feelings about what they should eat, and what they should not:

“...people are enculturated to eat just about anything...as well as to claim that whatever they eat is the best or only good food for real human beings” (Mintz 1996).

The food and drink of others may seem strange or disgusting at an emotional level; it may also be rejected on the basis of impurity at a physical level. For example in Pakistan sojourners may be wise to drink only bottled water as they have

“...insufficient time to be ‘acclimatised to the local bacterial flora’ which would increase the risk of unplanned ‘enteral events’” (Ahmad 2007). However, water is offered symbolically to denote hospitality and friendship, and refusal has symbolic implications. Ahmad quotes one of the participants in her study:

“.. these people don’t even see it fit to drink our water... and they ask us about what we think”

Different sights, smells, tastes and ways of eating may powerfully reinforce a tangible sense of strangeness, in a way that differences attitudes or values do not. Fears of impurity may be emotional, or based in rational assessment of involuntary physical reactions to ‘other’ foods.

What implications may these aspects of difference have for culturally diverse teams?

The associations of consumption or abstinence with cultural identity may be strong. Food preferences may lead to delineation of subgroups in a very visible way, as groups may form to avoid eating meat, or to enjoy foods that are important for their wellbeing or sense of identity, but which others may find unpleasant or even disgusting. Group fractionation, then, may be represented or triggered by differences in food habits.

The sensory nature of food and drink is inextricably linked with meanings: the sight, texture and smells of certain foods may invoke visceral reactions in those unused to the particular delicacy, accompanied by disgust or revulsion. The consequences of such reactions may vary, from withdrawal from the scene, to being unable to hide one’s disgust, to an extra psychological toll in attempting to manage reactions.

Our second research question therefore seeks to explore:

*Research Question 2: How do differences in food habits in multicultural teams emphasize cultural differences and reinforce faultlines?*

*“Solidify Group Membership” or “Set Groups Apart”: the Role of Alcohol*

In considering the role of cultural difference in food and drink, the role of alcohol is

illustrative of the dual tendencies we have discussed. Responses to the consumption of alcohol can be an indicator of belonging or of separation.

Drinking alcohol leads to certain universal behavioural and psychological effects: sensorimotor impairments, and an increase in sociability and talkativeness (Baumeister 2005, page 71). Perhaps because of these effects, alcohol often plays a part in transitions from work to play (Flores-Pereira et al. 2008; Fox 2004), and is regarded in many cultures as “a kind of social lubricant”, an aid to team communication (Erickson and Stull, 1998). The decision to drink/not drink alcohol is likely to be influenced by individual choices (for example health, lifestyle), as well as culture, including the norms of national culture and religion. Whereas some, for example Islamic, cultures, discourage or forbid the drinking of alcohol, in others it is accepted, even encouraged, including as part of organizational life (Schweitzer and Kerr 2000). A decision not to drink may have consequences for team work: where team members do not take part in “moderate feasting and team based imbibing” they are likely to miss out on sharing gossip and other team experiences (Erickson and Stull 1998). Refusal to join in drinking rituals may be interpreted by colleagues as a sign of mistrust, for example in Japan, where “copious drinking is common.... [and] where the refusal to drink may be interpreted as a sign of mistrust” (Schweitzer and Kerr 2000). In some cultures, non-drinkers may even be stigmatized (Ghumman et al. 2012).

The role of alcohol in social and cross cultural interaction emphasizes our argument that food and drink can both aid integration and sharing, or be implicated in withdrawal and fractionation: groups may fragment into members who join in the rituals of alcohol drinking and those who do not. The ways in which these inherent possibilities translate into team outcomes is not deterministic, but, rather, depends on the choices and actions of individuals confronting and dealing with difference within the team, enabled or constrained by their cultural identities.

Given that individuals working in culturally diverse teams are likely to be faced with cultural difference in eating and drinking, it follows that they will have to develop strategies for dealing with these differences.

### *Negotiating Difference*

As we have seen, food and drink fulfill important social functions in building and delineating groups. Differences are not trivial, nor necessarily under cognitive control. They are implicated in fundamental taboos about what is ethically or religiously acceptable, in basic ideas of disgust and pleasure and in physical differences in tolerance. Knowledge of what behavior is acceptable will not always enable people to overcome these differences. Cultural difference in food and drink involves who eats with whom, what is eaten, what is rejected, and how foods are consumed. In the context of multicultural teams, these matters have potential to be instrumental in group integration and fractionation. The individual team member, presented with unpalatable or unacceptable food, or asked to partake of alcohol prohibited by religion is faced with a problem. On some occasions individuals may be able to conceal disgust or overcome scruples, on others they may feel unable to participate. The problems of self management include ways of negotiating refusal without causing offence (Earley and Ang 2003) (page 83). This leads us to our final question:

*Research Question 3: How do team members manage differences in habits of eating and drinking?*

We have argued in this review that, in the context of culturally diverse teams, food and drink act as boundary objects, that is, a focus where difference may be perceived and negotiated. Three research questions have been posed to develop this argument, and in our next section we describe an empirical study undertaken to investigate these questions.



## **The Study: Food and Drink in a Culturally Diverse Team**

In this section we outline the approach we took, describe the team and its task as well as the setting within which it was carried out, and outline the processes of data collection and analysis.

### ***Methods***

#### *The Approach*

The study seeks to understand the ways members of a culturally diverse team experienced and negotiated culture and difference through the medium of material culture, specifically food and drink. The ethnographically-oriented approach taken (Watson, 2007) was consistent with the aims of the research, which, in the traditions of studying processes in organisations, was concerned with questions of analysing how and why phenomena develop over time and identifying theoretical mechanisms: in short, studying "what's going on here" (Langley et al., 2013)

#### *The Team and their Task*

The team participating in this study worked within a company referred to under the pseudonym 'FinCo'. The main cultural dynamic of the team was Indian/German, with input also from nationals of Turkey and Mexico. The team was a newly formed group within FinCo, which is a multinational company with headquarters in Germany and a subsidiary company in India. The team had a clear structure and was tasked with developing a programme of web-based learning materials. Indian members of the team worked in India, with extended visits to German Head Office, German members visited India for shorter periods. Work processes involved both regular technology-enabled communication (phone calls, computer mediated communication) and face-to-face interactions.

The composition of the team, nationality and location of each member, is outlined in Table 1. All members are identified by pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality. Indian team members were new recruits to FinCo, other team members had worked for the company for some time.

Table 1 around here

The working language of the team was English.

### *The Setting*

The project was designed in advance of the recruitment of the Indian team members. The researcher's engagement with the team commenced when two of the German team members, Karina and Kai, visited India for the first time, for one week. They met their Indian colleagues, and introduced themselves, the project, and the work processes. After they returned to Germany, work on the first stages of the project commenced; six weeks later, three of the Indian team members (Amit was not able to obtain a visa) left India to spend a month in the German office, where they met members of both the core team and the wider organization. Over the following 18 months, other visits were made: Gautam, Neelam and Dilip spent time in Germany, Matthias visited India for a week, Erika spent some days there, Karina visited again at the end of the 18 month period.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

#### *Process of Data Collection*

The first author, an English national resident in India, who had previously also lived in Germany, studied the team from the time it was set up until the Indian members left the team and it became mono-cultural, a period of 18 months. Her role was to conduct research as "participant as observer" (Burgess 1984), that is, observing work processes, interviewing team members, and sharing in group activities, in the process forming relationships with team members.

#### *Nature of Data*

The data set (Table 2), consisted of interview and observational data. Observations were recorded in field notes written up during or immediately after on-site observations in both India and Germany. These notes include records of meetings, training sessions, and conference calls, as well as informal chats (in the office, the corridor, the kitchen, the hotel, whilst commuting from the office, for example). Eating and drinking took place both inside and outside the office, at tea breaks and lunches, in formal and informal and informal settings.

Insert Table 2 around here: data sources

Observations and semi-structured interviews were guided by the overall aim of the research project, which was to examine how team members made sense of their team's performance of the team using notions of "culture". In this wider context, the role of food and drink emerged during observation and the initial analyses of interview data and field notes.

### Process of Analysis

Directed content analysis (Duriau et al. 2007; Hsieh and Shannon 2005) allowed the integration of observational and interview data. This "reductive" (Van de Ven and Poole, 2002) method, recognising that analysis takes account of extant knowledge, led to an initial categorisation scheme from theory, which was then adjusted and modified in iterative engagement with the data. The data were systematically coded, into a scheme that was examined, refined, and eventually organized into a scheme of higher and lower order codes illustrating the main themes (see Appendix 1). In the course of this process, the research team had regular meetings to discuss and reflect on the findings..

The results are explored in the following section. To illustrate our findings, quotes have been chosen from the data corpus; in some cases they are representative of typical remarks, in others they are included because of the vivid ways in which they illustrate the theme under discussion.

## **Findings**

In our review of the literature we argued that the role of cultural difference in the performance of culturally diverse teams operates through the two important processes of integration and differentiation. We suggested that food and drink, as boundary objects, play a role in both encouraging integration and in emphasizing difference, and that this dynamic implies that team members need to actively manage cultural difference to engage. In this section, we present findings supporting these arguments. Our analysis of food and drink through the lenses of material culture and boundary objects, however, also indicates a further level of complexity in cross-cultural interaction.

### ***Cultural Difference in Food and Drink: Encouraging Social Integration***

Our first research question concerned the role played by food and drink in integrating the team. In interviews team members talked enthusiastically about the team and the project, and the importance of its success. Eating and drinking together were a feature of team life. Meals were, both formal and informal: Indians on their first visit to Germany were welcomed to meet the whole team over coffee and local speciality biscuits, and invited to a vegetarian restaurant, later in their visit a meal was arranged in a restaurant specializing in the local cuisine. Lunches were often taken together in the canteen in Germany. More informally, the Indians were invited to visit a famous Beer Garden in Germany, and Indian team members arranged a picnic and a cricket match in the park. When German team members visited India, they were invited for dinner in local Indian restaurants, Erika and Karina were invited to team members' homes for meals, Matthias took part in a birthday party in the Indian office, partaking of a wide range of Indian snacks.

Eating together was recognised as “not always about the work, also about getting to know each others' cultures, reducing barriers” (Emre). Cultural learning was recognized by this group as a valued outcome of their project, and eating together, learning about each other's food, was part of this: "...to have this Indian feeling... getting to know India, yeah. Drinking chai, and all this, and eating Indian...there is something that stays with us” (Kai). Erika commented on the invitation to a meal at an Indian colleague's home: “..it was a real, like a relationship kind of growing”.

Eating and drinking together afforded environments in which relationships had space to develop, spaces which appeared to allow discussion and questioning about culture . The first author recorded a conversation over dinner in Germany on the first visit of the Indians: questions about Indian culture included arranged marriage, the role of the cow in the Hindu religion, and how it was possible to drink milk from such a sacred animal.

These findings support our first proposition, that food and drink can play a role in the social integration of a culturally diverse team. Turning, however, to our second proposition, our findings suggest that, in accordance with our second proposition, habits of eating and drinking can also emphasise differences and reinforce faultlines.

### ***Cultural Difference in Food & Drink: Potential Barrier***

Commensality was important in this team, however, eating and drinking together raised a number of issues. Team members were keen to share food; they were also concerned to eat food that they found tasty, 'safe', satisfying and culturally appropriate.

This was a problem in number of ways. Field notes record reactions to the different appearance, textures, smells of the food as well as anxieties about safety and purity: Kai and Karina, visiting the Indian office for the first time, voiced concerns about fly-borne disease and lack of cleanliness in local kitchens, asked whether the food would be too spicy, would it taste good, would it be safe. Their expressions (wrinkling noses, drawing back slightly) suggested a visceral reaction.

The Indians, too, on their first visit to Germany, were concerned about the safety of the food - would it make them sick? These concerns were amplified by anxieties about the availability of acceptable, that is, vegetarian, food. Dilip ate no meat, fish, eggs or cheese. On his visits to Germany, to the concern of his German colleagues he subsisted on a limited range of foods: bread, rice, potatoes and salad or vegetables. For the Indians, accustomed to highly flavoured foods, there was a further concern, the (for them) blandness of the food in Germany; much of it was simply not tasty. Vegetarian Neelam fasted one day a week for spiritual reasons, and continued this practice whilst on her visit to Germany.

Alcohol, and the assumption common in many Western cultures that it can play an important role in team bonding, was a cause of concern for Matthias, who, recognising that his Indian colleagues did not drink, asked the Researcher for tips on team building if not by going for a drink. After all, he suggested, "it is difficult to go to a bar and drink milk."

Our findings suggest, therefore, that cultural differences in eating and drinking posed some concerns for team members. We will return to the implications of these in our discussion of the findings. Before moving on to this, we consider our third proposition, that team members might develop strategies to manage cultural differences in eating and drinking habits.

### ***Dealing with Difference: Strategies***

**The data suggest that team members themselves demonstrated an awareness of the opportunities and problems inherent in different styles of eating and drinking, and adopted a number of strategies to negotiate these.** Strategies can be categorized in two ways: firstly, ways of minimizing the problems of difference, such as preparation, adaptation, avoidance, and finding ways of not giving offence, secondly ways of building on difference, such as exchanging gifts, and demonstrating concern.

#### *Preparation*

Concerned that they should be able to find tasty and adequate food in Germany, Indian team members prepared for their visits by researching Indian shops and restaurants at their destination, and by taking with them a number of spices and essential ingredients in order to cater for themselves. Dilip researched easy recipes so that he could prepare his own food in Germany.

#### *Avoidance*

During their initial visit to India, Kai and Karina often chose to eat sandwiches rather than join the rest of the team in the canteen where only Indian food was served. They joined their Indian colleagues for a South Indian dinner, however otherwise took evening meals in the hotel, where they could choose European dishes.

### *Adaptation and Accommodation*

Gautam, who had been as he put it "...a purely vegetarian person", started in a previous overseas assignment to eat a little meat or fish, he also, in Germany, despite being previously teetotal, accepted an invitation from German colleagues to visit a beer festival, and joined them in trying the local brew. Matthias, in contrast, on his visit to India learned to appreciate tea as a replacement for alcohol in team bonding. Kai learned some of the intricacies of eating with his hands, and tried (even, according to a field note, appeared to enjoy) spicy foods.

### *Finding ways of not giving offence*

Adaptation as a strategy was not universal. Karina continued to be nervous of spicy food, Dilip and Neelam neither ate meat or fish, nor drank any alcohol, on their visits to Germany. Georg did not eat the sweets brought into the office by Indian colleagues.

There was recognition that avoidance of food or drink, or withdrawal from social occasions, may have adverse consequences for relationships. As Amit acknowledged: "... it is considered impolite, to refuse, to say 'no, I won't take beer or wine'.... It becomes 'you are not joining me'". To counter this possible interpretation, he therefore adopted a strategy of claiming that his abstinence from alcohol was for religious reasons. Georg, resident in India, devised a way of not offending the Indian staff in the office who brought him local sweets and pastries whenever they travelled. Explaining to the Researcher that he could not eat these, having seen the conditions in which many of such sweetmeats were prepared and sold, he nonetheless accepted them, disposing of them (discreetly) afterwards.

There were, then, individual differences in degrees of tolerance and adaptation. There were aspects of food culture where some individuals decided to modify their practices, whereas others did not. Similarly, there were differences in levels of taste, disgust or indeed enteral sensitivity which some individuals found difficult to adapt to at a visceral level. Dealing with this, by either adaptation or avoidance, involved extra effort on the part of team members; efforts in self-management, dealing with the practicalities of eating and drinking, and in developing strategies to manage difference without losing face. Amit's remark indicates that finding an acceptable form of words to justify eating and drinking habits without causing offence was recognized as important for maintaining relationships.

Strategies of avoidance, accommodation, and avoiding offence, were ways of minimizing potential barriers posed by food and drink practices. Team members also adopted strategies where cultural difference was used to positive effect.

#### *Exploiting Difference: Gifts*

Team members exchanged gifts of traditional foods: Mozartkugeln (marzipan sweets covered in chocolate) were brought by one of the Germans, beer chocolate by another. Indian team members presented mangos, Indian pickles and paneer (a soft cheese), items which had been particularly enjoyed by the Germans on a previous visit.

Colleagues' enjoyment of traditional foods was important: "...obviously..." said Amit "... I appreciate it when they like Indian food..." . Indeed, Amit extrapolated, on the basis of his enjoying curries, that Kai liked India.

#### *Exploiting difference: Demonstrating Concern*



Team members also appeared to exploit differences in food and drink to demonstrate their cultural sensitivity and a concern for colleagues' well-being. In Germany for example the Indians were invited on their first day to a vegetarian restaurant, thereafter when meals were arranged restaurants where vegetarian options were available were chosen. Indian team members, realising that their German colleagues were nervous of eating unaccustomed food, invited them to dinner at a local restaurant but as Amit related: "specifically asked the cook to do it a bit mild, and make sure it's not too spicy", in addition to adapting their hosting style so as not to "force people to eat more...there's no point of forcing people. But in India you're supposed to do that, it's part of, you know, good hospitality"

To summarise, then, our findings support our argument that difference in the material artifacts of food and drink are implicated in processes of social integration and differentiation in teams. Sharing food is symbolic of mutual respect and co-operation, and can act as a potent means of bringing team members together. It can be a forum for demonstrating respect for cultural difference and concern for the well-being of team colleagues. For this team, food was shown to be important in both integration and in the ongoing negotiation of cultural difference through accommodation, compromise or explanation. Food was shown however also to be important in differentiation. The findings indicate that food preferences, deep-seated and rooted in culture as they are, may unequivocally underline difference. 'Foreign' foods may trigger adverse physical responses, induce powerful emotions of disgust, cross religious beliefs, and lead to anxiety about social practices in ways which other cultural differences (in values, for example, or in working practices), do not.

Whereas differences in food offered both possibilities for, and barriers to, social integration, differences in habits of alcohol were shown to be more problematic, perceived mainly as either a barrier to integration, or a problem which must somehow be negotiated.

Team members, demonstrated keen awareness of the possibilities and problems involved in differences in eating and drinking, and how these could be negotiated. Difference could be exploited, but also posed dilemmas and extra burdens: burdens of self-management, anxieties about well-being, the necessity of developing strategies to cope with differences, a concern about 'what will they think of us'.

These findings point to the role of food and drink in important team processes; furthermore they indicate the complexity of cross-cultural interactions beyond notions of enablers and barriers. Underlying the work of this team, all of whom had international experience, were themes of difficulty and resistance. Principles of hospitality and commensality, common across many cultures, were expressed in this team, were recognized as important in bonding, and were at the same time problematic. Difference in eating and drinking was interesting, enjoyable, and also difficult or threatening. Potential threats lay in visceral and emotional reactions, in cultural or religious identity, difficulties lay in managing reactions, the extra burden of practical arrangements, and in cognitive, motivational or behavioural accommodations or adaptations.

*Complexity: Talking about Culture, Talking about Food*

A feature of this study was the way in which food and drink appeared to allow for an explicit examination of cultural and difference.

From the start of the project, cultural difference was a matter of interest to members of the FinCo team. They talked about their own and others' cultures, using terms such as "direct", "rigid", "friendly", "flexible", "open", "professional", "caring", "respectful" and "tough". They expressed concerns about how "the others" might act and react in various circumstances, for example, how Indians would deal with tight deadlines (Kai), whether Germans would be flexible (Dilip). Cultural differences could be problematic, it was agreed as the team started its work; however in this particular team they felt these would be easily overcome as all team members had international experience and were used to different ways of working. As the team work progressed, difficulties (for example in meeting deadlines, and in giving and receiving feedback) were nevertheless encountered. Problems were attributed to cultural difference "...it's a cultural thing" (Gautam), however culture continued to be discussed in rather general terms, indeed cultural attributions were couched in terms of ambiguity: "maybe it's culture, and maybe it isn't" (Erika).

In contrast, food and drink, as material manifestations of culture, appeared to offer team members ways of talking about culture and cultural difference in concrete and understandable terms. The successes of multicultural integration and learning were summarised by for example “drinking chai and eating Indian” (Kai) and visits to a beer festival. Where differences were manifested concretely in food and drink it appeared to become easier to talk about difference without giving offence; issues concerned with eating appeared to both prompt and be an acceptable starting point for discussing differences. For example, towards the end of the project, in an interview discussing the team’s performance, and where food had not been mentioned, Matthias offered a view:

“Culturally, ...um, I think the biggest challenge was to find adequate food for Dilip over here”. Finding “adequate” food had indeed exercised the energies of sojourners and hosts alike; in the case of Dilip, whose diet whilst in Germany was very restricted, this was a cause of concern for both himself and his team leaders. However, given the context of Matthias’ remark, alternative interpretations are possible. Dilip was perceived by his German colleagues to be somewhat difficult to work with. The “difficulties of finding adequate food” may have functioned in some way as a proxy: a proxy for a perceived challenge of, and inflexibility in adapting to, German processes and ways. This was in contrast with Gautam and Neelam, both of whom were perceived by their German colleagues to be adaptable and easier to work with; interestingly, Gautam had adapted to eat some meat and drink some alcohol, whereas Neelam chose to adhere to her vegetarian and teetotal preferences. Similarly, Kai, who despite some initial reservations had started to enjoy Indian food, was credited (by Amit) with liking India.

In more abstract discussions of cultural difference in the team, the tendency was to either minimise or reify difference, while sharing food proved to be an arena in which both willingness to participate and seriousness of barriers had to be confronted. Our findings suggest therefore that the material reality of food and drink, and the associated rituals and habits, represent boundary objects, employed as team members negotiated what cultural difference meant for them. We suggest that material culture in the form of food and drink, bound up as it is with identity, having both symbolic and sensory aspects, and with implications of social and moral order, provides a focus at the boundaries of difference, allowing negotiation with others, but also with oneself, so as to proceed with work.

### ***Nature and use and effects of boundary objects – constrained choice***

Focusing on food and drink as boundary objects foregrounds agency. Faced with meaningful difference, team members have choices as to how to respond, how to negotiate this difference. However, the choices social actors are called upon to make are embedded in contexts which may constrain as well as enable action (Pawson and Tilley, 2000; Pawson and Tilley, 1994; Giddens, 1984). So while FinCo team members exploited cultural difference to demonstrate care and concern (in gifting food, organizing suitable options, negotiating with the chef), we also noted that some team members were not able to adapt or accommodate. It appears that the deep-seated nature of culture and practice cannot be discounted, that cognitive awareness and flexibility is not the whole story. Constraints may be of a number of types, for example cultural (internalized norms or values or behaviours, symbols, rituals, habits, social and moral order), individual (differences in willingness/ability to adapt), or physical (environmental as well as physiological). Whereas some of these constraints may be in awareness, others may not; and not all actors will recognize or deal with them in the same way. The personalities, previous experience, organizational or personal circumstances of some actors may influence the ease of accommodation or adaptation. The emphasis on the constrained choices of team members leads us back to considering a major theme in the multicultural team literature - the mechanisms by which cultural diversity influences team performance.

### ***Implications: Food and Drink and Team Performance***

In the context of culturally diverse teams, this study suggests that food can serve as a means for considering the nature of culture, difference, and cultural accommodation. In this way, food may play an important part in both the integration and cultural learning that are important for team performance. While social bonding is assumed to take place over food and drink, the potential of eating and drinking to threaten identities or pose unacceptable burdens leading to withdrawal or subgroup formation must be acknowledged.

The very aspects of physical comfort and social exchange that allow food and drink to be a source of integration may also present physical and emotional barriers that cannot be consciously overcome or suppressed. Links to religious practice and ideals of cleanliness may add a moral aspect that gives managing strange food and alcohol an explosive potential to expose divisions. Difference may involve, in some circumstances, involuntary or visceral reactions that cannot be minimised or denied and that may present not just the individual but the team with a problem. Differences in food and drink may add to the burden (Behfar et al. 2006) of working in culturally diverse teams. Team members may need to direct energy and attention, otherwise available for team tasks, to the practical business of obtaining appropriate foods, to anxiety about food, and to self-management in situations where politeness may demand it. Where diets are limited by the availability of acceptable foodstuffs, or where digestive upsets occur, the effects on team members' health and "physiological resourcefulness" (Heaphy and Dutton 2008) may decrease individuals' contributions to both task and relationship aspects of team outcomes. It follows that team performance is likely to be affected. Such aspects have been hitherto underrepresented in the multicultural team literature as elsewhere: "biological facticity", the need for inputs to the biological systems of organizational actors, is generally minimized (Pina e Cunha et al. 2008). Matters of the body are rarely mentioned in organizational science, but can have very real effects, as we know from the embodied cognition literature (see for example Harquail and Wilcox King 2010; Heaphy and Dutton 2008; Loewenstein 1996; Maitlis and Sonenschein 2010; Risen and Critcher 2011).

## ***Implications for Research***

### *Research Methodology*

Given the complexity of multicultural teams, and the need to take into account a range of contextual factors, the study underlines the value of “up close and grounded” qualitative research methods (Birkinshaw et al. 2011) in this area. The findings rely on a methodology which was, by examining material culture, able to take account of the seemingly contradictory nature of cultural difference as both enabler of, and barrier to, team integration in context and over time. The study confirms the value of examining artifacts in organizational research, allowing the integration of sensory, cognitive and behavioural aspects (Vilnai-Yavetz and Rafaeli 2006), revealing symbolic dimensions, meaning and associations (Flores-Pereira and Cavedon 2010).

### *Conceptualization of “Culture”*

Taking food and drink as a focus of interest responds to the calls in international management for moving beyond a “trait” approach to culture (Shapiro et al. 2007; Tsui et al. 2007). Exploring food contributes to a “polycontextually sensitive” approach to incorporate the range of “ways of knowing” that is essential for a holistic understanding of cultural phenomena (Tsui et al 2007). The FinCo study highlights that, although much cross-cultural research focuses on cognitive and affective phenomena, cultural difference is often, and often most immediately, experienced through the senses, and that this may have a number of consequences.

### *Models of Multicultural Team Performance*

In supporting the shift from systems models of team performance to look at mechanisms of agency and constrained choice, this research contributes to a growing body of work (examples include (Barinaga, 2007), (Ailon-Souday and Kunda, 2003), and (Zimmermann, 2011)) problematizing Hofstede's (1991) metaphor of national culture as “software of the mind”, and demonstrating how organizational

actors are sophisticated users of notions of national culture and cultural difference, employing these for particular purposes.

### ***Implications for Practice***

The results of our study have a number of implications for practice.

#### *Multicultural Teams*

We have suggested that food and drink are important, and that as boundary objects they offer possibilities for both action and negotiation of meaning. Given that, according to Star (2010), the shared representation afforded by boundary objects “might be quite vague and at the same time quite useful”, team members have in food and drink a focus allowing a grounded discussion and understanding of culture without requiring an agreed definition (Jahoda 2012). Food, as Jackson et al. (2013) maintain, “serves as a vehicle for the circulation of a variety of related concerns”. Culturally diverse teams can usefully exploit these insights, by focussing on the opportunities afforded by commensality for bonding and integrating. Food and drink can be the starting point for recognition and discussion of the power of cultural difference, that may be otherwise both hard to pin down, and easily underestimated.

#### *Other Cross-Cultural Interactions*

Although this paper is concerned with multicultural teams, the central argument may have implications for expatriate adjustment, for cross-cultural negotiators in any interactions involving international travel and sojourn.. As Sturdy et al (2006) maintain, it is “common knowledge that in many, but not all, cultural contexts business deals get done over meals”. This realisation prompts a call for more attention to be paid to the management of food and drink in cross-national interaction, including the provision of suitable options, taking account of cultural preferences and needs, where international travel is a feature of the workplace.

#### *Cultural Sensitivity and Pre-Departure Training*

The cultural barriers identified in the FinCo study went beyond those of cultural ignorance or courtesy dealt with in many 'cultural sensitization' programmes. The literature for practitioners of cross-cultural teamwork or management, with such titles as "Kiss, Bow or Shake Hands" (Morrison et al. 1994) and "Mind your Manners" (Mole 1990), as well as the academic literature, politely underemphasizes the lived experiences of many international travellers, which is that difference can involve anxiety, physical discomfort, even pain. This study suggests that such aspects go beyond the subjective well-being of travellers to potentially affect both individual and team performance.

Pre-departure training is often tied to specific cultures and locations. Specific pre-departure guidance for business travellers might include concrete information about the food and drink habits at their destination. However, including food and drink as a focus in cultural sensitivity training would allow more general discussion of the nature of culture and cultural influence, and how these may involve both practical preparation as well as personal and interpersonal strategies. This might include discussion of accommodation, adaptation, and the management of areas where these strategies are not acceptable, thus potentially mitigating some of the extra burden of anxiety that may otherwise be experienced. Including eating and drinking in such programmes, offers tangible, widely recognised and relatively uncontroversial ways of discussing culture and difference, whilst acknowledging the powerful emotional, moral and physical aspects of sharing food and drink across different cultures.



## Limitations and Future Research

The findings of this study, concerned as it is with one team and with a particular cultural dynamic, both demonstrate that cultural differences in food and drink can play important roles in culturally diverse teams, and suggest ways in which a further research agenda might be developed.

The two cultures represented in the team have sufficiently different eating and drinking habits to be useful for the exploration of difference. However, differences in eating and drinking may not be as useful in exploring groups with more similar food habits, Dutch/German groups, for example, or Indian/Bangladeshi, or indeed within a national culture where different traditions co-exist side by side, such as in Singapore or Malaysia where Chinese, Malay, and Indian cuisines are commonly available. Furthermore, faultline theories suggest that highly heterogeneous groups are less likely to divide into cultural subgroups. In such groups, it could be interesting to explore whether differences in food and drink are relevant in the fractionation into subgroups. Studies could also explore whether there is less likelihood of visceral reaction to some Indian foods, and less challenge in self-management, for groups in the United Kingdom, where cuisines originating in the sub-continent have become part of the national diet. Building on this raises the question of whether addressing differences in food and drink could be used to explore other aspects of diversity within groups.

In the literature review, the concept of liminality was touched upon. (Sturdy et al., 2006) maintained that meals are typically treated as private or semi-private, thus allowing for conviviality and the development of intimacy, taking place and being valued as “liminal”, that is “ betwixt and between formal organizational and ‘non-work’ practices”, not however “isolated from... other social routines, norms, and structures”. The data in our study do not support specific conclusions as to the role of liminal contexts in general (rather than those focused on food and drink) in social integration, Future research could seek to disentangle the ways in which liminality and materiality are implicated in what goes on in these situations.

A further research agenda might be concerned with considering the individual differences underlying intercultural success, whether or how these are manifested in strategies related to food and drink. Individual team members are likely to have differing previous international experience, which is often linked with greater adjustment, but also with the reinforcement of previously held negative beliefs and stereotypes (Caligiuri and Tarique 2006). The FinCo study suggests that exposure to different eating and drinking habits does not necessarily lead to adaptation, exploration of alternative antecedents to particular levels of adjustment might therefore be sought. Personality factors might be implicated, in particular openness to experience might encourage experimentation and acceptance of cultural differences (Caligiuri and Tarique 2006). Alternatively, adaptation might be linked to the composite of knowledge, behavioural skills and motivation described by (Earley and Ang 2003) as “cultural intelligence”. These considerations offer a number of possible directions for further research.

## **Conclusion**

Meta-analysis of cultural diversity in work teams suggests that this can be either an asset or a liability, and that outcomes “...will ultimately depend on the team’s ability to manage the process in an effective manner, as well as on the context within which the team operates” (Stahl et al. 2010). They suggest that research should therefore focus on the mechanisms by which diversity affects both team dynamics and performance. This study, by taking material culture in the form of food and drink as markers with material, symbolic and subjective values in meanings and interactions, advances this agenda by offering insights into the nature and effects of culture, elaborating the contexts/processes by which cultural diversity may lead to particular outcomes.

“Meaning” maintain (Zanoni et al. 2010) is “conveyed in a multiplicity of forms”, and this study highlights the value of integrating the perspective of engagement with material culture, suggesting how engagement with food and drink offers members of diverse teams both material and symbolic ways of negotiating the cultural terrain. In extending the literature on eating and drinking in organizations, the study contributes to the previously under-researched area of observable cultural difference in teams, and demonstrates some of the complexities of the mechanisms by which cultural difference and performance can be related. Placing cultural difference on the table makes culture both visible and salient, provides material through which difference may be both perceived and negotiated, makes eating and drinking the arena where difference can be explored and played out, and underlines the ambiguity and complexity inherent in cross-cultural work in teams.

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