

Diversity and cooperation

The minute we are born we become part of several groups, groups that we did not choose. These include our family, but also our gender, generation and nationality. We learn what it means to be part of these groups; through our upbringing and in school we are taught how we should and should not behave, what is expected of us in terms of 'appropriate' or 'normal' behaviour. While we grow up, we begin to take these norms for granted.

Later in life, when we study and start working, we find ourselves part of new groups, such as our profession and the organisation we work in. Being part of these groups is part of who we are, and we feel good in the company of people like ourselves.

Are you curious to understand which group memberships are important to you? Think about how you would introduce yourself at a casual party. What would you say; probably your name, anything else? Where you are from? Maybe what you do for a living?

Not all reference groups or group identifications have the same strength or importance to every individual, but they do influence our perception of the world and the people around us. Our reference groups also determine how others perceive us; they have expectations of our behaviour, based on our group membership.

Depending on the situation, we switch our group memberships on and off. Group memberships tend to become especially important when we are around people who are different: where we come from becomes especially important if we are in a foreign country. 'John the 30 year old stockbroker' swiftly becomes 'the American guy'.

We share values with people based on the groups that we belong to, our reference groups. When working with people outside our reference group - people who are different - we quickly find out that we have different perspectives on challenges and opportunities. Diverse groups can therefore potentially invent more options, create more solutions, and hold the key to continuous innovation.

Often, diversity leads to conflicts: people feel that the other person, who is different, must be wrong, and effective communication is no longer possible. Diverse groups will therefore encounter more challenges in terms of communication and cooperation.

CMC facilitates the process of overcoming the challenges and capitalising on the advantages of diversity, leading to more effective communication and enhanced innovative potential.

