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Gender relations in virtual project team

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate the existing gender stereotypes in virtual project teams and the assessment of the personality characteristics of the team members in terms of desirability and social utility. These stereotypes can influence the perception in work efficiency and the distribution of tasks in developing and implementing the specific professional projects, depending on the gen of participants.Investigated subjects (17 men and 13 women), are students involved in the work process. They were asked to imagine a situation where they are working that coordinators in a team project (educational, social and industrial respectively). In this situation the subjects are asked to describe, in a first stage, the individuals and the activities / workload of individuals included in the project team. In the second stage, the person characteristics are assessed in terms of their social desirability and social utility.The results follow the evidence of gender bias regarding the type of project and activities of its members. Gender difference is evident in estimating the personal characteristics of team members in terms of their social desirability and social utility.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to study the influence of gender stereotypes upon professional relations, namely preferences to work with members of a certain sex of a virtual team, involved in a professional project. In the given context, the collaboration with other members of the team is not directly but through the Internet, a neutral environment that does not exercise any influence on interpersonal relationships. Moreover, the gender of the people communicating via the Internet, can be said or conjectural assumed, situation in which male and female roles are assumed appeal to the concept of gender, a culturally constructed concept, and not at sex that is constructed biologically.

A stereotype is a set of personal beliefs to a group, beliefs about certain personal characteristics (Leyens, Yzerbyt & Schadron, 1994).

Traditional gender stereotypes are related to family, work and participation in government services. For example, estimating the performance of a woman and a man are in the same working conditions, shows that, generally, men

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are judged more favourable than women when their results are identical (Pheterson, Kiesler & Goldberg, 1971; Deaux & Tayna, 1973). Moreover, the performance of a man in a male task is explained by competence, while the performance made by a woman in an identical task is attributed to chance (Deaux & Emswiller, 1990).

Thus, a first objective of this article is the study of the gender stereotypes over performance in certain professional activities.

A second objective is the investigation of personality characteristics of team members, and then evaluating these features in terms of desirability and social utility.

According to Beauvois and his colleagues (Beauvois, 1995; Beauvois, Dubois & Peeters, 1999, Dubois 2005, Dubois and Beauvois, 2001; Cambon, 2002; Le Barbenchon, Cambon and Lavigne, 2005), the social value of people is dichotomizing in social utility and social desirability.

Desirability, which participates in a socio-relational registry anchored on the emotional and motivational level, would refer to the agreeableness, attractive and pleasant, to each of the characteristics of the person (and more generally of the object) evaluated. Social utility provides information on the suitability of the person with social functioning, in other words, we specify the adequacy of its characteristics to the requirements of social functioning. It should be noted that this is not a situational or functional utility and must consider the economic dimension of social utility and its relationship to the social context. Dubois (2005, p.47) presents the social utility that refers to "knowledge that we have about the chance of success or failure of a person in society according to its more or less match to the requirements of social functioning in which it is." Cambon (2006) for a better understanding of the social utility term, talks us about the value of a person, which leads us to an economic significance of utility.

Another way to say it: the desirability respond to emotional or motivational record, and the utility respond to ability to evolve effectively in the social system in which the valuation is made (Beauvois, 1995).

2. Method

Investigated subjects (17 men and 13 women), are students in a Romanian university involved in the work process. Subjects are asked to imagine a situation where they are coordinators of teams involved in a professional project. For various reasons the communication with team members over an unspecified period of time will be done via the internet. Subjects are asked to indicate the gender of the persons considered suitable to perform in the teams that they will coordinate, teams that are being involved in an educational project in a social project and in an industrial project.

In a second phase students belonging to a group equivalent to the first group investigated, are asked to describe, using five characteristics, those involved in educational, social and respectively industrial projects. Characteristics obtained have been analyzed for their utility and social desirability.

The usefulness and desirability were analyzed referring to the procedure described by Le appel Barbenchon, Cambon et Lavigne (2005). In a previous study Mazilescu and Gangloff (2012) used two desirability scales and two utility scales to assess social value of evoked spontaneous personality descriptors. Usefulness was measured by estimating (on a scale in seven steps), on the one hand the ability to succeed in professional life and on the other hand the rate of the salary, and desirability by estimating (on other two scales in 7 steps) the capacity of being loved and the ability to have many friends. From the hierarchies of social values of personality descriptors analyzed in the above mentioned study, the classes of desirability and social utility of the characteristics attributed to people involved in educational social and industrial projects were identified.

3. Results

After analyzing the results on gender of persons involved in some type of project, there can be determined the existence of gender bias. Thus, for the entire group, the distribution of females and males in project teams looks as follows (Table 1):

Table 1. Gender distribution of persons distributed in educational, social and industrial projects

Nr.	Educational project	Social project	Industrial project
F	86,667 %	70 %	16,67 %
M	13,333 %	30 %	83,33 %

Table 1 is showing us that for the educational and social projects, women have been preferred in percentage of 86,67% respectively 70%, while for the industrial projects, men were preferred in a percentage of 83,33%.

It should be noticed that there are no significant differences between male and female students regarding the distribution of females and males in the project teams mentioned above.

Table 2. Differences on the distribution of people in the projects, by gender

diferente F-M	Educational project	Social project	Industrial project
Distribution of females	$\chi = 0,08$; p= 0,783 (n.s.)	$\chi = 1,05$; p= 0,304 (n.s.)	$\chi = 0,03$; p= 0,861 (n.s.)
Distribution of males	$\chi = 0,48$; p= 0,487 (n.s.)	$\chi = 2,56$; p= 0,109 (n.s.)	$\chi = 0,15$; p= 0,693 (n.s.)

In the second phase were investigated personality characteristics attributed to people involved in educational, social and respectively industrial projects, and afterwards these features are evaluated in terms of their desirability and social utility.

In Table 3 are presented the most frequent characteristics of individuals involved in educational, social and industrial projects. At a simple analysis of these personality characteristics, we see that persons involved in educational projects are assigned predominantly female characteristics, while those involved in industrial projects are assigned predominantly male characteristics. For people involved in social projects there are not clearly differentiated features, in this category are included both female characteristics (patient) and male (optimistic).

Table 3. Percentage distribution of the most common features given to individuals involved in different projects

Educational project	%	Social project	%	Industrial project	%
Patient	18,09	With a good soul	8,45	Intelligent	24,55
Carefully	14,67	Merry	5,08	Strong	18,47
Understanding	11,97	Optimistic	4,94	Competent	18,02
Affectionate	8,64	Sociably	4,88	Determined	8,67
Agreeable	5,33	Patient	4,35	Resourceful	7,98

The characteristics mentioned above were analyzed in terms of their desirability and social utility. For this purpose we have been identified the classes of desirability (D +, D0, D-) and utility (U +, U0, U-) of the hierarchies of the social value of personality descriptors spontaneously evoked, hierarchies obtained by Mazilescu and Gangloff (2012).

Thus, in Tables 4,5 and 6 are shown the desirability and utility classes for the characteristics of individuals involved in educational, industrial and social projects.

Table 4. The social characteristics given to individuals involved in educational projects

Characteristics given to individuals involved in educational projects	Class of desirability	Class of utility
Patient	D+	U0
Carefully	D+	U0
Understanding	D+	U0
Affectionate	D+	U0
Agreeable	D+	U+

Table 5. The social characteristics given to individuals involved in industrial projects

Characteristics given to individuals involved in industrial projects	Class of desirability	Class of utility
Intelligent	D+	U+
Strong	D-	U+
Competent	D+	U+
Determined	D+	U+
Resourceful	D+	U+

Table 6. The social characteristics given to individuals involved in social projects

Characteristics given to individuals involved in social projects	Class of desirability	Class of utility
With a good soul	D+	U0
Merry	D+	U+
Optimistic	D+	U+
Sociably	D+	U+
Patient	D+	U0

It can be noticed that persons involved in educational projects are assigned generally personality characteristics considered socially desirable (D +), but mostly with neutral utility (U0), while those involved in industrial projects are assigned characteristics that are both desirable (D +) as well as socially useful (U +).

4. Discussion and conclusions

Differences between male and female roles were clearly highlighted, especially in the professional activities. Since ancient times there was been a difference between male and female tasks, the difference was not based upon the fragility of feminine or masculine force, but took into account women's ability to procreate, to nurse and raise children. Emancipation of women has brought important changes in our society, especially in the labor market where many traditional activities reserved for men were taken by women.

However there has been and still exist a system of beliefs about men and about women, about the roles of male and / or women that they assume or are being assigned. It is know that men are dominant, rational and self-centered, while women are warm, emotional and oriented to the needs of those around them (Hurtig & Pichevin, 1997).

Differences appear, also, in the judgment evaluation of women and men: women are generally undervalued or negatively valued, especially in activities traditionally considered masculine, but their performance are recognized in traditionally feminine activities (Eagly & Mladinic, 1994).

Our results confirm gender stereotypes that women are considered to perform well in activities related to raising children (educational activities) or targeted to the needs of others (social activities).

Changing the perspective of gender stereotyping analysis and analyzing the characteristics of people involved in different projects, we see that persons involved in educational projects are assigned predominantly female

characteristics, while those involved in industrial projects are assigned predominantly male characteristics.

Continuing this analysis in terms of social value characteristics attributed to people from different professional groups, we obtain a greater social valuation (D + and U +) of the characteristics of persons involved in industrial projects (which were given masculine features) compared to those involved in educational projects (D + but U0), who were given female characteristics.

Acknowledgements

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