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He, She, We: Gender Impacts in Teamwork

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ABSTRACT

It is well known that organizational teams are highly valued in work settings (Marquis, 2019; Sachiko & Takeda, 2014). Some research has shown gender differences such as “team collaboration is greatly improved by the presence of women in the group” (Baer & Woolley, 2011; Hoogendoorn, Oosterbeek & VanPraag, 2013). Other studies support mixed gender teams as advantageous (Apestequia, Azmat & Iriberry, 2012; Sachiko & Takeda, 2014). This paper will review the perceptions of gender contributions in teams from the literature and report on a study of current business students in a liberal arts university. Some comparisons are made to the author’s 2017 survey on gender effects in team projects in the same school.

Keywords

Assessment, gender, performance, team

1 INTRODUCTION

Many organizations are transitioning from hierarchal structures to team-based management according to a 2019 study by Deloitte of nearly 10,000 respondents in 119 countries (Volani, Schwartz, Indranil, Hauptman, Van Durme, Denny, & Bersin, 2019). Most or almost all work done in teams was reported by 31% of the respondents and significant improvement in performance from transitioning to team-based models was described by 53% and minimal improvement by 21% (Volani, et al., 2019). In the meta-analytic review by Joshi and Roh (2009), the context was assessed as more of a moderator than gender or other diversities. A study of 83 teams in eight organizations (Kearney, Gerbert & Voelpel, 2009) purported that cognition as a personality trait was the influential effect in team-work rather than gender. Whatever the composition, teams are used extensively and increasingly including management teams, project teams, parallel teams, and virtual teams.

2 PAST TEAM GENDER STUDIES

Fenwick and Neal’s (2001) study of gender differences using a business simulation found a positive relation to performance due to more co-operative, interactive and people-oriented workstyles. Though very few all men groups ranked first or second, mixed groups’ high performance was attributed to the combination of women and men’s competitive and analytical decision-making style. A contrasting analysis was made by an assessment of three years’ worth of data from the L’Oréal E-Strat Challenge of 37,914 participants from 1,500 global universities with women numbering 12,759 undergraduates and 3,934 graduates and men numbering 14,525 undergraduates and 6,697 graduates [37,915 one not included in assessment]. Apestequia, Azmat and Iriberry (2012) reported that decision-making teams of three women performed worse than mixed teams or all men teams.

Mixed teams also had beneficial ratings in self- and peer-assessments of 192 groups of 3-7 students, the median number of 5 students in 100 groups, reported “enhanced collaboration” in gender-balanced groups (Sachiko & Takeda, 2014). In another study using peer-assessments (Tucker, 2014), 1523 students in four degree programs of two universities made 18,814 ratings with women assessed higher than men though not significantly. However, there was a significant difference in the generosity of ratings by men rather than women. Tucker (2014) ventured this could be due to men compensating for deficient teamwork skills through greater magnanimity.

In a L’Oréal study, the authors, (Apestequia, Azmat & Iriberry, 2012) postulated that poor ranking of all-female teams could be due to selection processes such as low ability or shy women choosing all-women teams affecting reduced skills and interactions.

3 STUDENT TEAM GENDER STUDY

A survey of undergraduate business students rated the effectiveness of team projects by gender. An instrument in Survey monkey was e-mailed to students through class rosters for anonymous responses. Most business courses require some form of

team collaboration for short or full semester projects. The results were compared to a 2017 assessment by the author of 23 women and 20 men. For example, in that survey women were rated as better performers in 5 of 6 categories: work done - men 30.2%, women 69.8%; attention to grammar/writing - men 27.9%, women 72.1%; concern for due date - men 23.7%, women 76.7%; correct formatting - men 25.6%, women 74.4; and team conscientiousness - men 39.5%, women 60.5%. Only focus on relevant research was ranked higher for men at 51.2% and 48.8% for women (see Table 1).

Table 1: Performance Ranking (2017)

Better Performance	Men N=20	Women N=23
work done	30.2%	69.8%
attention to grammar/writing	27.9%	72.1%
concern for due date	23.3%	76.7%
focus on relevant research	51.2%	48.8%
correct formatting	25.6%	74.4%
team conscientiousness	39.5%	60.5%

4 RESULTS

Students from Spring 2020 Management of Human Resources class completed the online survey. There were 13 male and 13 female responses. To the question “In general, which gender would you rank as the better performer in any of your class work/projects?” the better performance of women was again rated higher, even higher than 2017, to men (see Table 2).

Table 2: Performance Ranking (2020)

Better Performance	Men N=13	Women N=13
work done	15.4%	84.6%
attention to grammar/writing	11.5%	88.5%
concern for due date	11.5%	88.5%
focus on relevant research	26.9%	73.1%
correct formatting	15.4%	84.6%
team conscientiousness	23.1%	76.9%

There was a female comment that “men sometimes add more creative content and a more relaxed work environment which helps the team”

The questions of the Spring 2020 students are compared to the those of Fall 2017. The work of women ranked high for exceptionally helpful in both studies, but more considered the work only moderately helpful in 2020 than they did in 2017 (see Table 3).

Table 3: How would you assess the work of women in any class/work projects? Spring 202 N=26 Fall 2017 N=43

	Not Very Helpful		no label		Moderately Helpful		no label		Exceptionally Helpful	
	2020	2017	2020	2017	2020	2017	2020	2017	2020	2017
work done	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	19.2%	2.3%	15.4%	32.6%	65.4%	65.1%
attention to grammar/writing	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	11.5%	4.7%	26.9%	27.9%	61.5%	61.5%
concern for due date	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	19.2%	2.3%	19.2%	34.9%	61.5%	62.8%
focus on relevant research	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	11.5%	7.0%	23.1%	30.2%	65.4%	62.8%
correct formatting	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	11.5%	2.3%	19.2%	41.9%	69.2%	55.8%
team conscientiousness	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	11.5%	4.7%	19.2%	34.9%	69.2%	60.5%

The impression of men's contribution exceptional helpfulness to team efforts regarding due date, research, formatting and conscientiousness increased. However, men's attention to grammar/writing and work done decreased in exceptionally helpful categories (see Table 4).

Table 4: How would you assess the work of men in any class/work projects? Spring 2020 N=26 Fall 2017 N=43

	Not Very Helpful		no label		Moderately Helpful		no label		Exceptionally Helpful	
	2020	2017	2020	2017	2020	2017	2020	2017	2020	2017
work done	3.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	34.6%	20.1%	23.1%	30.3%	38.5%	48.8%
attention to grammar/writing	3.9%	0.0%	3.9%	0.0%	26.9%	23.3%	23.1%	32.6%	42.3%	44.2%
concern for due date	3.9%	0.0%	3.9%	0.0%	42.3%	18.6%	11.4%	44.2%	38.5%	37.2%
focus on relevant research	3.9%	3.9%	0.0%	0.0%	30.8%	13.9%	15.4%	34.9%	50.0%	46.5%
correct formatting	3.9%	3.9%	0.0%	0.0%	30.8%	13.9%	15.4%	39.5%	50.0%	41.9%
team conscientiousness	0.0%	3.9%	0.0%	0.0%	34.6%	18.6%	11.5%	30.2%	53.9%	46.5%

5 LIMITATIONS

The study of 26 human resource management students is a small focused group and is not representative of different majors, geographic areas or cultures. The literature yields studies of larger numbers but are also limited. More research on the success and satisfaction of mixed teams compared to same gender teams could be illuminating. Also, the current study did not include only virtual teamwork which has increased with home workers because of the pandemic (Roddy, 2020) and more global locations of workers (Sahin, 2020).

6 CONCLUSIONS

The increased score for women's improved performance in a team correlated with a study of 245 participants of virtual teams Comprised of 43% female and 57% male, higher level of perceived team performance was reported by 77% of women compared to 55% of the men participants. "Men want clear objectives and women valued communications." (Boiney, 2001).

In a study of 699 people in groups of two to five that was not designed to focus on any gender effect, it was found that "the tendency to cooperate effectively is linked to the number of women in a group." (Woolley, et al., 2010). The effectiveness of the team was not dependent on the intelligence of the members rather than the social sensitivity and hence the collective intelligence of the group. The study authors purported that it is "possible to improve the intelligence of a group by changing the members of a group, teaching them better ways of interacting or giving them better electronic collaboration tools."

For this study, the work of women was ranked higher than men and this perception of better performance by women increased from Fall of 2017 to Spring of 2020. The composition of teams for successful projects is a critical factor and it will be challenging to assess the effective dynamics of teams for in person and online work.

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