

Organization Studies: Selected Doctoral Theses

TITLE:

“The More the Merrier? Understanding the Effect of Group Size on Collective Intelligence” – Nada Hashmi (2017)

COMMITTEE:

Thomas Malone (chair), Lotte Bailyn, Anita Williams Woolley

ABSTRACT:

This dissertation explores how group size affects collective intelligence. It is composed of three quantitative studies. The first study explores how time pressure in small groups (size 4) and large groups (size 20) affected collective intelligence. The results showed that the large groups significantly and consistently outperformed the small groups in different time pressure conditions. This led to the second study which explored whether the collaboration tool used in the first study might have provided unexpected benefits for large groups that counteracted any process loss in the large groups. While the results from the second study confirmed that the collaboration tool did indeed significantly improve the collective intelligence score of groups, one surprising result was that this effect occurred, not only in large groups (size 20), but also in small ones (size 4). The final study then set out to explore this surprising result in further detail by including a variety of group sizes (sizes 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35 and 40) in both the collaboration conditions. It was hypothesized that by including more group sizes, the study would determine whether a curvilinear (inverted-U) relationship existed. The results not only confirmed the curvilinear (inverted-U) relationship but also suggested an optimal group size of about 30 for groups with the collaboration tool and 25 for groups without the collaboration tool.

TITLE:

“Warriors Versus Experts: Managing Conflict Between Professional Groups in the Provision of Soldier Mental Healthcare in the US Army” – Julia DiBenigno (2016)

COMMITTEE:

Katherine Kellogg (chair), Lotte Bailyn, Jayakanth Srinivasan, John Van Maanen, Ezra Zuckerman-Sivan

ABSTRACT:

Organizational life is rife with conflict between groups with different interests who pursue different goals. Integrative mechanisms to promote goal alignment do not always work, particularly when conflicts involve professional groups with strong commitments to their professional identities and perspectives. I draw on data from a 30-month comparative ethnographic field study of conflict between US Army commanders privileging their professional group’s goal of fielding a mission-ready unit and mental health providers privileging their professional group’s goal of providing rehabilitative mental healthcare to active-duty soldiers suffering from conditions such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. All providers and commanders faced longstanding conflict related to their professional group differences in goals, identities, and perspectives, and all had access to a host of integrative mechanisms to overcome these differences. Yet, only those associated with two of the four combat brigades on the US Army post featured in this dissertation regularly handled these conflicts by co-constructing integrative solutions that accomplished both professional groups’ goals and the organization’s overarching goal to have both mentally healthy and mission-ready soldiers.

I find that an organizational structure that enables what I call “anchored personalization” can help different professional groups overcome identity conflict and entrenchment in their home group’s perspective to align their goals, without becoming indoctrinated into the other group’s perspective from personalized contact with the other group. Anchored personalization resulted from an organizational structure that provided a long-term personal connection with specific members of the other group, while anchoring group members in their home group identity from working surrounded by their fellow group members. Anchored personalization reduced longstanding identity conflict between groups by broadening and expanding each group’s professional identity

to incorporate elements of the other group's perspective, enabling what I call "anchored perspective-taking." Anchored perspective-taking involved three sub-processes: 1) empathizing with the other group member's perspective, while remaining anchored in one's home group's perspective; 2) using a broadened repertoire of identity displays during intergroup interactions that demonstrate respect for the other group's perspective; and 3) drawing on one's personalized knowledge of and relationship with the other group member to collectively craft novel and customized solutions to conflicts that take both groups' perspectives into account. These anchored perspective-taking practices led to the co-construction of integrative solutions that aligned seemingly incompatible group goals to achieve the organization's superordinate goal.

I contrast the experience of these groups with anchored personalization to those who had either an anchoring in their home group, but no personalization opportunities with the other group, and to those who had opportunities for personalization with the other group, but no anchoring in their home group. I demonstrate how both of these scenarios did not lead to the accomplishment of superordinate goals. Group members who lacked the opportunity for personalized connections with the other group failed to use anchored perspective-taking practices to craft integrative solutions to conflict. Group members who developed personalized connections with the other group without being anchored in their home group's identity were indoctrinated into the other group's perspective. This research contributes to our understanding of managing goal and identity conflict between professional groups in organizations and to our understanding of the dark side of personalization without anchoring.

TITLE:

"Understanding the Conditions of Bias: Essays on Gender Differences in Evaluation Outcomes Across Three Empirical Contexts" – Mabel Lana Botelho Abraham (2015)

COMMITTEE:

Roberto Fernandez (chair), Susan Silbey, Ray Reagans, Emilio Castilla

ABSTRACT:

This dissertation contributes to our understanding of when and how gender is incorporated into the evaluation of individuals, leading to unequal outcomes for similar men and women. Prior research has shown that because ascriptive characteristics, such as gender, are associated with widely-held performance expectations, evaluators often rely on gender as an indicator of quality, particularly when quality is uncertain or indeterminate. Whereas existing research has importantly documented that gender differences in evaluation outcomes exist, this dissertation shifts the focus to uncovering the conditions under which this is the case as well as the underlying mechanisms driving these observed gender differences. Specifically, the three papers in this dissertation contribute to our understanding of the evaluative mechanisms perpetuating gender inequality by answering the following overarching research question: Under what conditions and how do evaluation processes lead to different outcomes for comparable men and women, particularly when more relevant indicators of quality are available to evaluators? I draw on data from three distinct empirical contexts to examine when and how evaluations of similar men and women vary within social networks, a financial market setting, and an organization. I pay particular attention to the often levied criticism of gender inequality research, namely failure to adequately account for underlying quality or performance differences. I show that the gender of the evaluatee, or the individual being evaluated, plays a role beyond serving as a proxy for missing quality information and that male and female evaluators incorporate gender differently under certain conditions.