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COMMUNICATING, NEGOTIATING AND STEREOTYPING:

The Roles of Context, Situation and Gender in Small Group Decision-Making

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Abstract

ABSTRACT

Making decisions together in groups takes an important role in society. Everywhere and in many different contexts people meet to make more or less formal decisions. As stereotypes constitute simplified group based perceptions of other people, decision-making groups risk making biased judgments and commit discriminating decisions. Stereotyping often follow the two universal dimensions competence and warmth (Cuddy, Fiske & Glick, 2008). How people´s judgments are affected by stereotypes has mainly been studied on individual level and less is known about how stereotypes and prejudice is communicated and negotiated in group decision-making situations. One approach to study this is to investigate how different contexts may lead to different communication patterns, different experiences, and different decisions. In this thesis context was varied in two different ways in two experiments. In the first experiment the goal set for the decision-making was varied. A competitive goal was contrasted to a cooperative goal in a group decision task using a sports scenario where the participants had to select members to a relay team. In the second experiment different information was used as a context variable. This was done by varying the information of gender and parenthood status of the applicants in a fictive recruitment scenario. In addition, in both experiments the gender composition in the groups was varied, forming yet another variable that might play a role for how the decision-making was carried out. These three factors were assumed to influence the form of the communication, the content of the communication in terms of stereotyping, and how the decision-making process was experienced. A mixed-method approach was chosen where quantitative and qualitative data were used in conjunction with each other, which was assumed to give a richer picture of the results.

In paper I the form of the communication, as analyzed with interaction process analysis (IPA), did not differ much between the two goals. On the other hand, the content showed more systematic patterns. A competitive goal seemed to lead to both inclusion and exclusion with use of both positive and negative stereotypes. A cooperative goal seemed to lead to inclusion mechanisms and only use of positive stereotypes. In paper II where the aim was to investigate what was experienced as constituting a successful decision-making process it was found that equality of influence was of importance. Furthermore, qualitative analyses of the conversation patterns, by use of the conversational argument coding scheme (CACS), seemed to validate this. The successful groups had a more complex communication pattern than the less successful groups. In paper III, where the information for the decision task was varied in terms of gender and parenthood status of the applicants, it was found that parenthood information triggered a lot of discussion. The participants did not differentiate between mothers and fathers, but they applied attributes of competence and warmth differently to the targets. Furthermore, gender and gender composition seemed to matter as male and female groups applied the attributes differently. Paper IV used data from both experiments in order to investigate how the context variables and gender composition influenced how the decision situation was experienced. The results indicate that the context variables and gender composition interacted with own gender. Men seemed more content in male groups with male targets and a male parent condition while women seemed more content in mixed groups and a female parent condition.

Context seems to play an important role, as it provides the participants in the group discussions with different information, leading to different patterns of stereotyping in the discussions. Also how the decision was experienced seems to be related to the context. Furthermore, group composition seems to function in this way too. The results are discussed in relation to practical implications and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Competition, Cooperation, Gender, Group Decision-Making, Stereotype Content Model