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The Influence of Team Demographic Composition on Individual Helping Behavior

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ABSTRACT

The aim of our laboratory study was to examine how the demographic composition (in terms of gender and culture) of work teams can influence levels of helping behavior demonstrated among group members. Participants included 216 university students from undergraduate business programs in two large North American universities (108 men, 108 women) who were randomly assigned to small groups for the purpose of engaging in business case discussions. Discussions were videotaped in order to observe helping behavior among individuals. Our findings indicated that the numerical minority member (measured in terms of gender or ethnicity) was less likely to engage in the helping activity. These findings suggest that the effects of numerical minority status are not confined to task-performance related behaviors like participation and emergent leadership, but also influence behaviors that involve how members relate to one and other, and whether they engage in helping behavior.

KEYWORDS

Helping Behaviour; Gender; Ethnicity; Groups

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