

Chapter 20

Gender, Group Composition and Task Type in Virtual Groups

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Introduction

Two recent trends in the way organizations accomplish work, the use of teams¹ and the use of CMC, allow organizations to leverage the expertise of their employees to accomplish necessary goals, regardless of employees' physical or temporal proximity. These 'virtual teams' allow rapid assembly of teams of experts to solve urgent problems. Utilizing such teams effectively could provide an organization with tremendous advantage in today's hypercompetitive business climate. For example, the use of virtual teams allows work to be accomplished at any time (asynchronous communication) and avoids expensive and complicated travel arrangements for team members. The emergence of these two trends and the concomitant increase of women in the workforce have led researchers to examine exactly how the use of CMC to accomplish organizational goals is impacted by the gender of team members under various work task conditions. The purpose of this chapter is to review current theory and research on CMC communication in accomplishing tasks as it relates to the variable of gender. Specifically, this chapter will examine the relationship among gender, team composition, task type and both group processes and effectiveness for teams using CMC communication.

Overview of Current Research

Communication, Group Processes and Group Outcome Linkages

Conventional wisdom states that effective communication is the key to any successful team. But what is 'effective' communication and how is it linked to successful team performance? According to Bales (1950), effective team communication focuses on what he termed both 'task' and 'maintenance' behaviours. Task behaviours are focused on accomplishing the goal at hand. These include such behaviours as asking for or sharing information, summarizing the statements of others and checking for comprehension. Maintenance behaviours focus on developing and preserving cooperative relationships among group members. Such behaviours include supporting

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