

Heuristics, Bias and Personality Traits Attribution: The Cognitive Side of Gender Career Inequalities in a Male-dominated Work Sector

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Abstract for Poster

Background: We have witnessed significant work-life policy advancements designed to help men and women combine employment with career opportunities more equally, yet gender inequality persists. This is particularly evident in some industry sectors that are traditionally male-predominant. A study was thus aimed at exploring gender career opportunities using the perspective of the Implicit Personality and the social cognitive theory in a particularly male-dominated work sector: the Construction Industry (CI).

Methods: This study is based on a qualitative approach by using ethnographic observations and interviews in 10 Construction sites in the West Midlands, UK in a frame-time period of 6 months. The great part of the data collection period was structured in observation ranging between 2 and 4 hr per day, 1 to 3 days per week. In each site, observations involved activities by 5 to 20 people.

Results: The research was able to clarify different aspects related with career opportunities for male and female Construction workers. While they enjoyed working in the environment, there was an obvious gender-lopsided workforce with most leadership positions being held by men while women work in mainly softer roles. These gender differences were markedly perpetuated by different social cognitive biases and implicit personality heuristics.

Conclusion: The Implicit Personality and the social cognitive paradigm represent an excellent framework to explain gender imbalance in construction. An understanding of how women view the construction workplace will contribute to attracting and retaining them in an industry that is in a constant growth but with a persistent gender imbalance.

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