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Dominance and Sociality: Mapping Perception of Collective Entities

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Abstract

Collective entities such as corporations, nonprofits, governments, are central to social life, yet little is known about how people perceive and reason about them. Across three studies, we investigated the mental representation of collective entities. Study 1 (N = 106) used free listing to identify 50 ecologically valid collectives spanning 10 categories. Study 2 (N = 50) employed contrastive elicitation to derive 18 features people spontaneously use to characterize collectives. Study 3 (N = 255) had participants rate these entities across 25 constructs capturing structural features and mind perception. Factor analysis revealed a two-dimensional structure of organizational features: *Dominance* (power, prominence, scope, size, hierarchy) and *Sociality* (cohesiveness, prosocial purpose, trustworthiness, entity–member relations). These dimensions differentially shaped mind-related attributions: Dominance was associated with cognitive capacity and moral agency but reduced experiential attribution, whereas Sociality was associated with both cognitive and experiential capacities as well as moral patienthood.