Exploring Social Desirability within the Zulu Culture: An Emic Perspective

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Abstract : Social desirability is an important topic to study. It may be possible that different cultures experience social desirability in different ways. Different cultural groups exist within South Africa, however the focus of this study is specifically in the Zulu culture. This research aims to explore social desirability from an emic perspective within the social constructivist paradigm among individuals within the Zulu culture. The researcher intended to identify those features Zulu individuals deem as socially desirable and undesirable from their cultural viewpoint. The research was conducted using a qualitative research design and the constructivism paradigm was utilised in this study. Combined purposive and quota non-probability sampling was employed for this study. A sample of 30 employees (N = 30) working in various organisations from the provinces of Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal formed part of this study and data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The main findings showed that Zulu people regard certain behaviours and actions as socially desirable and others as undesirable. The following are considered socially desirable: Conscientiousness, dominance, subjective expectations and positive relations, these are the themes that were reported on the most. These are positive features in the Zulu culture, and they reflect on behaviour patterns, attitudes and manners that people display, which are also seen as acceptable and good in the Zulu culture. The following are regarded as socially undesirable features that were identified by people who belong to the Zulu culture, the themes that were identified as undesirable are: non-conscientiousness, non-dominance (male), dominance (females), tradition, negative relations and subjective expectations. This study creates awareness on social desirability in the workplace and provides basic tools to management on how to deal with such behaviours relating to this phenomenon in the workplace. This knowledge informs employees on the concept of socially desirable behaviour, and provide more insight into behaviours and/or emotions Zulu individuals. The outcome of this study provided new indigenous, empirical knowledge on the phenomenon of social desirability within the South African context.
Keywords : cultural diversity, emic perspective, social constructivism paradigm, social desirability, Zulu culture
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