

Gendering expert work and ideal candidacy in Finnish and Estonian job advertisements

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to analyse the ways the textual materials of job advertisements do the gendering for prospective expert positions and create a space for ambiguity/non-ambiguity in the gender labelling of this expertise. Expert positions are almost always openly announced and are important to organizations because they often lead to higher managerial positions. By gendering the prospective positions, the job advertisements bring forth repertoires strengthening the gendering of work and gendered expert employee positions.

Design/methodology/approach – This study draws on qualitative textual and visual data of open job advertisements for expert positions. The materials of the study are gathered from open job advertisements in two countries, i.e. Finland and Estonia with rather similar labour market structures in relation to gender positions but differing as regards their gender equality.

Findings – The analyses show that the gendering of expert work takes place in the job advertisements by rendering subtly gendered articulations, yet allowing for interpretative repertoires appear. The analysis reveals some differences in the formulations of the advertisements for expert jobs in the two countries. It also shows that in general the requirements for an ideal expert candidate are coated with superlatives that are gendered in rather stereotypical ways, and that the ideal candidates for highly expert jobs are extremely flexible and follows the ideal of an adaptable and plastic employee, willing to work their utmost. This paper contributes to the “doing gender” literature by adding an analysis of the textual gendering of ideal candidates for positions of expertise.

Research limitations/implications – The research materials do not expose all the issues pertinent to questions of the ideal gendered candidate. For instance, questions of ethnicity in relation to the definition of the ideal candidate cannot be studied with the data used for this study. Being an exploratory study, the results do not aim for generalizable results concerning job advertisements for expert positions.

Originality/value – This paper contributes to the “doing gender” and “gendering” literature by addressing the question of how and in what ways gender is defined and done for an expert positions prior the candidates are chosen to those jobs. It also offers new insights into the global construction of gendered expert jobs advertisements by addressing the topic with data from two countries. It further contributes to understanding the gendered shaping of expertise in the management literature.

Keywords Finland, Estonia, Job advertisements, Doing gender, Expert position, Ideal candidacy

Paper type Research paper



1. Introduction

Open job advertisements are among the first tools for employers to contour the desired gender of prospective employees and at the same time, to promote their organizational brand. Job advertisements are also one of the earliest components in the recruitment process, where aim is to attract potential candidates and persuade them to apply for the position. Job advertisements commonly project an ideal, gendered candidacy and through that attract suitable candidates (McDowell, 2009; Askehave, 2010; Breugh and Starke, 2000).

The open recruitment process for expert positions means that prospective individuals are not pre-determined. Management recruitment literature focuses surprisingly little on this fact (Broadbridge and Fielden, 2015). Rather, openly announced posts are designed to attract a large talent pool and thus require publicly articulated expressions of the type of qualifications sought. Unlike targeted and closed searches carried out by consultants and recruiters, where the recruiters are the gate keepers (van den Brink and Benschop, 2014; Holgersson, 2013), open calls have to publicly articulate the idealized candidacy for the expert position. There is little analysis on how the candidacy for an expert position becomes gendered.

The research into management and the sociology of work has shown how recruitment, particularly of young men and women is not based on learned skills and acquired qualifications alone but increasingly on gendered appearances and the “suitability” of a person and often weighted with idealized gender-related aspects (Bradley, 2016; Simpson, 2014; Wolkowitz, 2006; Hochschild, 1983). This is audible in employees’ narratives describing the need for branding (Vallas and Cummins, 2015) and aestheticizing the job and the work (Ren, 2017; Witz *et al.*, 2003; Warhurst and Nickson, 2007). Several researchers suggest that the current discourse on personal branding and the gendering of work are indeed truly pervasive among jobseekers for all expert jobs (Vallas and Cummins, 2015; Ren, 2017). The evidence also suggests an interesting shift in the definitions of gendered work and the demands that recruited experts face (Vallas and Cummins, 2015). If recruited experts have the idealized gendered features, how about the prospective expert jobs yet to be staffed? Are expert jobs gendered prior to their “occupant” and if so, how is this gendering done, especially if legislation restricts the actual expression of a desired gender in job advertisements?

The job recruitment materials, such as advertisements, are designed to attract “ideal candidates” who feel themselves to possess the qualifications and requirements defined in the advertisement. The qualifications become articulated through not only the chosen vocabulary, e.g. by defining the array of skills and preferences, education and training qualifications but also in other ways. Our claim is that these subtler definitions of suitability for a job have become pervasive and are done in job advertisements in many ways, such as through visual design of the ad and the selection of colours, pictures, texts, display of materials and the vocabulary. What kinds of explicit and/or tacit gendered imageries do the job advertisements work on, and to what extent do they vary when empirical materials from two, in principle different but in fact broadly homologous cultural contexts, that is Estonia and Finland, are analysed? Our analysis extends to material from two countries but without any explicit goal to compare strict “cultural differences”. While the countries are simply too similar for such a straightforward task to succeed, the ways in which the country-specific materials are brought together in this study is meant as a rich and multifaceted exposition of job advertisements’ increasing standardization. We also want to inspire novel research designs concerning the Estonia-Finland “case”. However, we claim that the contextualization of the interpretations gains more strength and depth through the analysis of materials from two countries.

Despite the fact that job advertisements play a critical role in the recruitment process by imaging the job and the organization and by attracting the prospective candidates, they are not widely used as empirical materials in research that deals with gender, management, expertise and expert work of different kinds. One of the less studied features is indeed the gender framing of open jobs in recruitment.

How the articulations used to advertise expert positions create the space for “doing gender” has not been investigated in the ways this article aims to explore. This article analyses the ways the textual and visual materials of job advertisements produce an imagery of an idealized, gendered candidacy for expert job positions. We chose to focus on “expert work” because these positions typically are openly advertised. This is in contrast to top-management posts, for example. Expert positions typically cover a wide variety of expertise gained through education and possibly also leading to managerial positions.

This study aims to make a contribution to the field in the following ways. First, we analyse the question of gendering expert jobs and work through how job advertisements direct, position and “freeze” the gender of the job available through the visual and textual materials. Second, we compare and contrast empirical material from two countries. The study aims to make a contribution to the cultures not as stereotypes (Kim, 2017) but as part of the global culture and confined by nationally varying institutions, such as legislation. Even though they are often discussed as a global subject in research, most expert and managerial positions are rooted in some national contexts. Job advertisements for expert positions are almost always national (OECD, 2017), a point rarely discussed in the studies on management or indeed in recruitment or HRM literature (Bradley, 2016; Tarique and Schuler, 2010). For these reasons, although explicit or strong comparison of the two national contexts is not possible because of their crucial likeness, our research design teases out several noteworthy national similarities and differences in the execution of the advertisements. This is the second contribution of the article.

The article proceeds with a literature review, followed by a short presentation of the research context, the chosen materials and the methods used in the analyses. The final section provides the key findings and conclusions.

2. Doing gender and the gendering of expert jobs and positions

The gender is embedded in work, organizations and culture in several ways (Acker, 1990, 2012; McDowell, 2009; Bradley, 2016; Wharton, 2016). The ways gendering occurs in organizations is covered well in the literature, as are also the hiring practices where a gender balance is notoriously difficult to achieve, most often because of sexist hiring practices of both women and men in managerial positions (Reuben *et al.*, 2014; Wittenberg-Cox, 2014; Hill *et al.*, 2010; Correll, 2001). There is also a solid body of management research literature highlighting the gendered image of a capable employee (Benschop and Doorewaard, 2012), most often in an expert position.

Gendering is indeed an ongoing process at work in any organization and in any job or position. McDowell notes that individuals “do gender in the workplace” (McDowell, 1997, p. 133), but they also “do gender” for the status of jobs such as managerial positions (Reuben *et al.*, 2014; Ridgeway, 2011). The jobs and positions thus become gendered even before individuals are selected for those positions. The managerial positions filled by recruitment consultants have been shown to play an important role in gendering management (Ridgeway, 2011). There is, however, little or no research on how those posts that are openly announced as expert positions become gendered prior to the candidates being chosen for those positions.

Workplaces and prospective and desired jobs are active sites of performative construction for prospective (expert) employees to the extent that they have a certain kind of agency (Nelson, 1999). Hence, we argue, “doing gender” is not only about the process of individuals, managers and organizations following gender ideals and stereotypes at the workplace. “Doing gender” is also about doing gender through framing and using culturally gender laden meanings and images with the help of materials and performative actions outside the workplace, such as in job advertisements. Cultural (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2015; Wharton, 2012; McNeil, 2007) as well as managerial (Meriläinen *et al.*, 2015) and gender studies (Butler, 1993; Bradley, 2016) have all shown how materials such as visual displays, branding and textual wording all actively reinforce and give shape to gender ideals in organizations.

The key theoretical frame of “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman, 1987; Gherardi, 1994), refers to the ways in which gender is prevalent in many taken for granted activities and becomes reinforced in everyday activities. Gendered practices are most often understood as repertoires of actions and behaviour of individuals or groups that are culturally available in a society to “do gender” or stereotypically associated with some gender (Martin, 2006). Gender becomes defined through contextualized practices, and these practices are refined and negotiated in everyday interactions (Poggio, 2006) and discourses, and a symbolic gender order in a culture is created (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001). Gender is not just an attribute of an individual but subtle and sticky relations reproduce the gender order in organizations and the gendering of ideas and images of jobs (Poutanen and Kovalainen, 2013).

The research study has shown how an ideal expert in most organizations is traditionally regarded as a man, which is of course a masculine construction (Acker, 1990; Billing and Alvesson, 2000; Brumley, 2014; Broadbridge and Fielden, 2015). Despite the calls and attempts to emphasize femininity, e.g. in discussions concerning the de-masculinisation of management and gendered redefinitions of expertise, e.g. in technical skills (Poutanen and Kovalainen, 2017), the constructions of the expert in the workplace have remained for the most part masculine (Poutanen *et al.*, 2016; Tienari *et al.*, 2002; Koivunen *et al.*, 2015).

3. Constructing the gendered candidacy for an expert job

Analysing the ideal candidate in job advertisements brings the actual “doing gender” thinking in organizations and “constructing ideal candidacy” together. By studying job advertisements, the preferred qualifications can be put into the context of a wider cultural frame, and this represents the understanding of an ideal employee at a certain time and place. The qualifications requested in job advertisements are generally idealized (Varje *et al.*, 2013), even if they are based on recruitment needs. The “ideal candidacy” is a projection of the organizational needs and may not only exist in reality but also projects the gendering of the expertise.

Existing studies of recruitment practices have been centred around executive and managerial search practices and interviewing either recruiters or those chosen for managerial posts (Tienari *et al.*, 2013; Meriläinen *et al.*, 2015; Askehave, 2010). In these studies, the individuals and their managerial and/or executive positions have been the focus of the study, and few researchers have analysed overall expert recruitment practices (Rynes *et al.*, 2013). According to Rynes *et al.* (2013), the vast majority of recruitment research has focussed on a small portion of the expertise in the labour markets, such as college graduates or managers. In these studies, job advertisements are rarely used as data. Less attention is given to positions that include managerial tasks and duties, which are classified as expert jobs.

Not all vacancies and jobs are publicly advertised, and advertising is only one part of the overall recruitment procedure in addition to other methods, such as social media (e.g. LinkedIn and Facebook), that have become a more preferred method for recruitment by attracting younger generations. Besides providing information about open positions, job advertisements also serve as a wide-range marketing tool for organizations, and therefore, their position in the recruitment process is quite stable. It should be noted that outsourced recruitment has gained a foothold in some contemporary organizations (Koivunen *et al.*, 2015) where the main recruitment responsibilities are carried out by recruitment professionals.

Kuokkanen *et al.* (2013) and Varje *et al.* (2013) have analysed job advertisements from a historical perspective in the Finnish context. Kuokkanen *et al.* examined the ideal Finnish employee, based on job advertisements published over a 50-year period in a major Finnish newspaper, and they argued that the requirements for an ideal expert employee and manual labourer have transformed over the decades towards more demanding and diverse qualifications, particularly for expert employees. While Kuokkanen *et al.* did not study advertising for managerial or expert positions, Varje *et al.* focussed on such positions in their study of “ideal Finnish managers” and found a similar type of transformation of requirements for expert and managerial jobs as Kuokkanen *et al.* found for employees in general (Varje *et al.*, 2013).

In a similar manner to Hochschild (1983), Varje *et al.* argue that a feminine and democratic management ideal that emerged in the 1960s was replaced by a rational masculine management ideal from the 1970s onwards. According to Varje *et al.* the preferences in the management ideal reflect cultural and economic conditions present in a certain society at a certain time (also Askehave and Zethsen, 2014; Heilman *et al.*, 2015). Both studies suggest that overall the request for “emotional capital”, that is, skills related to managing psychological and emotional assets in a company have grown during the studied time period. This was initially uncommon in post-war times, but it became a key characteristic at the end of the past century.

Heilman *et al.* (2015) and Askehave and Zethsen (2014) analysed management ideals in leadership positions, but their analyses do not cover expert jobs. The focus on managerial ideals (Meriläinen *et al.*, 2015; Tienari *et al.*, 2002) has left the paths and routes to management, such the route from expert positions unanalyzed. However, as shown by Flynn *et al.* (2015) and Schein (2007), the advancement to managerial positions takes place mainly via expert positions. Indeed, Gill and Scharff (2011) note that these paths are far from linear. Rather, the posts and positions in organizations often conceal a range of inequalities embedded in gendering processes and mechanisms at the workplace level. Therefore, it is of crucial importance to look into the different ways of framing the gender in expert positions to understand the multitude of underlying mechanisms for “doing gender” in the labour markets.

Job recruitment advertisements are designed in organizations, but they address the talent pool outside the organization and compete for the best expertise on the labour markets. It is for these reasons that the nationally attuned cultural imagery sets the boundaries for the “suitable” gendering of expert jobs. An analysis of the current strive towards perfection raises many points in the expert jobs themselves. Poutanen *et al.* (2016) discuss the new types of requirements arising: it seems that the third spirit of capitalism in the new global economy highlights the employee who is not only flexible but who also clearly benefits from the learning stereotypically feminine attributes, such as “empathy”, “emotional skills” and “emotional intelligence”.

The literature shows that both national and global cultural characteristics materialize in job advertisements. The global corporate culture is present in national cultural settings, but regional and local cultures also, however, play an important yet most often rather nebulous role in the hiring process (Poster and Yolmo, 2016). It is estimated that the majority of employee searches still take place at a national level, and that over 70 per cent are filled through various kinds of national network information flows (OECD, 2017). It is therefore of utmost interest to analyse what kinds of expert positions are openly announced.

To analyse whether there are elements that differ between the two countries, this study is based on two large job advertisement data sets from two countries, Finland and Estonia. The aim here is not to focus on the country comparisons or cultural comparisons as such but to see whether the boundaries between the two countries are visible in the definitions of expertise for the job markets. National cultures are constantly domesticating features from other cultures, and thus, the idea of a uniform or entirely national culture is blurred. On the other hand, legal frameworks that regulate employment recruitment differ somewhat between the countries, and some mediated effects of this fact arguably emerge in the empirical materials. Furthermore, the supranational legislation at the EU level also sets its governance on the gender dimension of recruitment (Velluti, 2010). The legal boundaries set the general frame, but as texts, they are not analysed in the empirical part of this article, as they are not directly present in the materials as such.

4. The national contexts of the study

Finland and Estonia as neighbouring countries share geographical proximity and rather strong cultural and linguistic closeness, yet the two nations display certain differences in their gendered cultures (Pels, 2016). The differences between the two countries arise partly from dissimilar historical developments, societal structures and economic developments, all feeding into and reinforcing the cultural variation. Estonia has undergone broad political and economic changes during the past 20 years, including a transition from a centralized planned economy to a free market economy, and similarly to Finland, leading to integration with the EU (Saleem *et al.*, 2015).

Finland as one of the Nordic welfare states has a high profile in gender egalitarianism. In the Global Gender Gap Report for 2016, Finland ranked second, similar to the report two years earlier. Interestingly, Estonia ranked 22 in 2016, while its ranking was 62 in the 2014 report. Both countries score highly in the report's educational attainment index sharing the first position with 23 other countries, but on a general level, the two countries are notably divergent (reports.weforum.com; Alas and Tuulik, 2007). The actual cultural practices in both countries blur and mix with global influences that become domesticated in several ways (Drori *et al.*, 2006).

Gender discrimination is prohibited by law in both countries, but there are some differences in the equality and employment legislation between Finland and Estonia, and this affects some of the formal regulative aspects in job advertising. Both countries have open labour markets for experts, i.e. expert jobs are openly announced, recruited (Crozet and Orefice, 2017) and provide opportunities for upward mobility towards management positions in both countries.

5. Empirical research design, materials and analysis

5.1 Data

The data for this study of potential gendering in job advertisements consist of two sets of data which were analysed both separately and jointly. The job advertisements were published on and gathered from e-recruitment portals. For Finland, we used the Monster

portal with c. 90,000 jobseekers navigating the pages weekly (www.monster.fi). For the Estonian data, we collected the data from the CV-Online portal, which has over 10,000 published job advertisements weekly (www.cv.ee). Both portals are very actively used by private and public sector employers and announce professional and managerial positions.

Our criteria in the data collection were first, that the job advertisements had to be published for expert tasks in management and/or consultancy, including IT, specialist services and expert research jobs; and second, they had to clearly state and announce the area of expertise, i.e. that the advertisements were targeted at specialists and experts with formal education and experience. These two criteria were met by 437 advertisements during the data gathering period of July 2015 and August in 2015 ([Appendix Figure A1](#) for the data gathering, processing and analysis flowchart). The variety of materials in the job advertisements was one criterion used for gathering the material. There was no clear-cut point for closing the data collection, as we did not aim for any particular level of “saturation” of the data. A data screening and collection period of two months resulted a high number of job advertisements for expert positions which suited the purposes of the study.

5.2 Methodology and analysis

The analyses examined the gendered themes and ways a gendered candidacy was constructed in the advertisements. The conducted analyses drew from a constructive, grounded theory inspired approach ([Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016](#)). A qualitative content and thematic analysis were implemented which focussed on the contents, phrasing, expressions and articulations used in the material ([Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2016](#); [Bryman, 2004](#); [Eikhof et al., 2013](#)). The analysis included a range of techniques, such as classifying and categorizing the data, followed by theme formation through content analysis. In addition, the frequency of occurrences in the data was used to discover commonalities and varieties in the articulations of expertise. The [Appendix](#) presents the data gathering, classification and analysis phases ([Appendix Figure A1](#)). All the steps in the data gathering process and the analysis techniques were scrutinized and discussed in author meetings.

The visual contents of the advertisements, such as images, colours, font types and shapes of pictures were systematically monitored for obvious discrepancies, that is, for cases where, e.g. a “masculine” gendered text was embedded in a stereotypically “feminine” image design and vice versa. No such clear contradictions emerged in the analysis.

A thematic analysis was used to identify the emerging themes and to aggregate them into a meaningful constructions (classifications). This was done first separately for the Finnish materials, then for the Estonian materials, and then on the joint data set, to determine whether and to what extent the themes resonated, as the differences between the countries as such were not the focus here. The analysis thus provided an empirical basis for reflection and evaluation of the key theoretical claims concerning “doing gender” in this context.

6. Findings

6.1 The creation of a perfect candidate for expert jobs

Dissecting the job advertisements and their gendering practices through the qualitative analyses broadly shows how the global culture spreads similarities – at least in expressions – transcending possible cultural differences ([Drori et al., 2006](#)). When examining the surface, the globally reigning recruitment “talk” indeed seems to smooth out some of the differences in the national materials. The five most often appearing expressions in both countries were: *language, communication, team, attitude* and *business*. The dominance of

these words cannot be considered a big surprise, and it is noteworthy that they do not seem to imply any self-evidently gendered connotations.

When omitting the most used expression in both countries, which was “language skills”, some differences between the descriptions emerged. These differences are visible in Figure 1, where also the relative closeness of individual expressions is further displayed.

In the Finnish materials, the ideal candidacy for an expert job was constructed via the ability to develop a positive attitude, serve customers and work in a team. An expert seeking the post was somebody who as a person should display skills in areas such as team-playing, co-operation and development. The Estonian materials, for their part, emphasized independence, analytics and communication. The Estonian ideal candidacy refers to a “free actor, who is capable and able to communicate”. Interestingly, knowledge, management and leadership were not emphasized in either countries, even though many of the expert jobs were targeted at experienced jobseekers. In general, the expressions, word choices and some of the visual images, such as colours and pictures chosen, were more versatile in Estonia than in Finland.

The differences found in the two national data sets (Figure 1) do not claim any form of difference in the “authentic national culture” or differences in the cultures of the nation-states. However, the differences found in the ways the expertise was expressed was surprising given the closeness of the two cultures. The findings are surprising also in the sense that they show similarities in the ways the gendering was done in the calls for the expert positions advertised in these two countries. For this reason, the analysis of the gendering of expert candidacy (below) is presented as a joint and not as national pool of data, as the similarities were so striking.

6.2 Gendering the expert candidacy in the job advertisements

The second-level analysis was based on the first-order classification. In the analysis, the connections, relationships and coherence between the first-order items were examined to organize the themes into more coherent categories which would describe how the actual “doing gender” for the expert candidacy took place (Appendix Figure A1). The category formation was an abductive process, in which interpretations were developed in a continuous dialogue with the textual data and theoretical frames. In this process, we identified five themes which are presented below. In essence, these themes articulate the multidimensional relationship between the theoretical insights into “doing gender” and the rich empirical materials at hand.

The aim of this part of the analysis was thus to determine how “gender is done” in the search for expertise for organizations. The articulations in the descriptions of the expert positions are directly or indirectly gendered and “do gender” in multiple ways. The simultaneous presence and absence of gender in the material was layered and blended with other textual elements. In addition, the branding of the organization was inherently part of the job description, also making the gendering practices “glossier” than perhaps other types of textual material, such as internal job descriptions, would have done. A list of the thematic

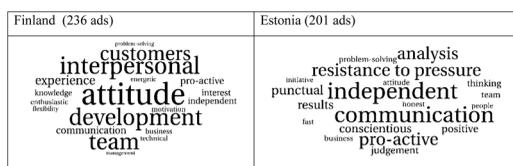


Figure 1. Word clouds of most frequent terms of the Finnish and Estonian advertisements

first-order articulations in each category is presented in the [Appendix Figure A2](#), and below are descriptions of the five themes.

6.2.1 A true team player: communication and team-work. The expert candidacy emphasizing *communication and team-work* abilities carries certain references to a gendered female expert. This interpretation received support from the visual elements (such as the layout, colour scheme, photos) of the advertisements. Communication and co-operation are generally assumed to be abilities with a feminine touch ([Billing and Alvesson, 2000](#); [Prime et al., 2009](#)). It has been suggested that these abilities are more related to femininity and women, than to men ([Prime et al., 2009](#); [Heilman et al., 2015](#)). Following this logic women are claimed to be emotional, sensitive and good at communication. The category of expertise with “communication and team-work” skills emphasizes an expertise which requires social and communication skills and the capacity for emotional labour. Social flexibility and the ability to work in teams are conventionally attached to women and their abilities to work flexibly with different people. A professional with social and emotional skills, who is good at carrying out emotional labour and who can transcend the many expert repertoires, is highly sought after in the labour markets. We have argued elsewhere that articulations such as “strong teamworking skills” and “positive attitudes to life” have gradually become features that are required from all employees and managers alike ([Poutanen et al., 2016](#); [Poutanen and Kovalainen, 2017](#)).

6.2.2 To-go-the-extra-mile: independence and responsibility. The candidacy with “independence and responsibility”, emphasizes the search for an expert who is hard-working, responsible, rigorous and reliable but also independent. Examples of the first-order themes that were included in the category of *responsibility* during the analysis were: “independence”, “responsible, trustable, and committed to work” and “tolerant of pressure”. Qualities required in the job advertisements included, among other things, “a high level of self-discipline”.

Agency is often assumed to be masculine in the sense that attributes attached to agency such as an achievement orientation, assertiveness and autonomy ([Heilman et al., 2015](#)) are stereotypically masculine. Being “agentic” constructs an ideal expert, who is among other things able and committed to long and flexible working hours. This in turn, also in our materials, suggests that the ideal candidate may not have too many obligations outside of work: the ideal is unencumbered ([Acker, 2012](#)). While the gendering of this candidacy was not clear-cut, the unencumbered ideal is visible in the calls for a “can-do attitude” and “this is NOT a 9-5 role”. The long hours typically entail the masculine idea in organizations with a boundless time schedule and suggests that the supposedly ideal candidate should not have any responsibilities for taking care of the home or children, for example. The requirement for a long and indeterminate schedule might particularly push mothers away from this candidacy for an expert post ([Cahusac and Kanji, 2014](#)).

6.2.3 Willing to enter unknown territory: renewal. For many jobs, the expert candidacy is also about finding new ideas and solutions. Many advertisements called for non-task related, more general skills such as the ability to learn, flexibility, open mindedness and creativity. Indeed, the emphasis on innovativeness, bravery, constant learning, unknown territory and for a forward-looking solution-oriented expert, etc. all call for individuals who are able to “renew” themselves for their organisation and work. The advertisements analysed in this study defined the best candidacy in slightly more stereotypically masculine-related expressions.

But is “the first man in the moon” necessarily a masculine expert? [Prime et al. \(2009\)](#) problematize the masculine connotation of problem-solving in their study, where they analysed managers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of female and male managers based on

a variety of leadership skills. In their analysis, male managers assumed men to be more effective at problem-solving than women in general, but the empirical tests proved otherwise, confirming that the traits and their gendered connotations are not stable, one-dimensional or unchanging but are indeed varying and multifaceted, thus allowing for multifaceted expertise as well. The analysis by Prime *et al.* also cautions against reading simple stereotypes into our textual material, as the job advertisements are just one part of a range of complex and changing patterns and practices of doing gender.

6.2.4 Understanding value: business and entrepreneurship. The expert category of “business and entrepreneurship” calls for “business skills”, an “entrepreneurial spirit” and “economic skills”. In addition, the expert candidate should have “a strong professional identity”, take “professional pride” and have “a strong understanding of business processes” and should “not be afraid to get their hands dirty”.

Displaying an all-encompassing entrepreneurial type of behaviour and spirit has become an important requirement for any ideal employee nowadays (Poutanen and Kovalainen, 2017; Winkler, 2018). These requirements also concern management. At the same time, the new ideal employee needs to be able to learn new things, be adaptive and flexible, also in a way that traditionally has been understood as feminine, involving emotional labour and social skills (Poutanen *et al.*, 2016; Kuokkanen *et al.*, 2013). Many studies conceptualize emotional labour as a technology of the self. Basically, this means that people draw on their available repertoires of social knowledge and adjust certain emotional experiences to use in their expert skills (Winkler, 2018; Poutanen and Kovalainen, 2017).

The job advertisements relating to this theme were searching for people for business tasks with an emphasis on an entrepreneurial spirit. An entrepreneurial spirit refers stereotypically to masculine qualities, but on the other hand, with its aura of flexibility and adaptation, it also resonates with stereotypically feminine qualities. The advertisements indeed contour the ideal candidate as a fluid, almost omnipotent expert (Poutanen *et al.*, 2016). This desired omnipotence and fluidity were most clearly visible in this category, and the interpretation was supported by the relevant visual materials.

6.2.5 Having a data-driven curiosity: analytics. The ability to work with numerical information, along with analytics, technical skills, logical and analytical thinking, programming and modelling skills, in other words, a candidate with “engineering mind-set” and computer literacy were examples of qualities for the jobs advertised in this category.

Excerpts from the data indeed draw a picture of an ideal candidate, who “loves technology” and sleeps with a copy of the “Clean Code” under their pillow, as the two excerpts show. The level of analytical skills sought for in the advertisements varied from requiring a basic to comprehensive understanding and expert, superior and even calling for a supposed “amazing level” of understanding.

Some authors emphasize that analytical skills are considered predominantly a masculine ability especially in business environments (Askehave and Zethsen, 2014; Billing and Alvesson, 2000). This view has been partly confirmed, but it also has been partly challenged in the wider contextualizations of technical skills (Wajcman, 2006; Poutanen and Kovalainen, 2017). In the expert post announcements in this study, the textual expressions blur the rigid definitions of analytical skills. The announcements seeking not only analytical and technical skills but also for “love”, “sympathy” and a “passion for algorithms” call for a new, more fluid interpretations of gender categorisations and gendered identities.

7. Discussion and conclusions

The analysed articulations of the expert positions serve to constitute not only the expert jobs in question but also the ideal subject positions and jobs in the organization. Working

through the textual job advertisement materials from Estonia and Finland, this study has analysed the question of how gender “is done” for expert jobs before the candidates for the jobs are selected. By analysing the open calls for expert positions, we have looked into the ways expertise is described and called for and the differing ways gender is called into this process in two countries where the employment and equality legislation forbid direct one-gender-favouring recruitment.

The two countries resemble each other in which direct or explicit gender discrimination is forbidden in job announcements, and in general, neutrality in the wordings needs to be followed. The equality legislation in both countries has a clear steering power, and we did not find any obvious violations against the equality and discrimination legislation. Even if there are ways to circumvent the formal regulations, such as crafting visual displays and characterizations of the candidacy, there were no clear infringements in our data.

The expert jobs in question required a formal education, qualifications and most often also previous work experience. Expert positions are a good way to acquire the skills necessary for advancing into managerial positions. Working inductively from expert job advertisements and abductively with an interpretation of the “doing gender” theoretical framework which was supported by relevant visual materials, this study builds towards a new understanding of gendering/doing gender in relation to the constructed nature of an “ideal employee”.

The cultural and economic similarities today may unite the demands and markets for expert labour in the two countries examined in this study following globalization. It was highly interesting to note that in the analysis of the empirical data gender was both present and absent simultaneously: the gender binary order is not fixed descriptively, but the binary order may be taken up through advertisements.

The article contributes to the discussion in the “doing gender” literature. The expertise articulated in the job advertisements and the descriptions partly reinforce and partly destabilize the current understanding of expert work and its appropriate gender and this enables the imageries of the gendered jobs to be temporarily set. It also sets the tone of the job’s possible gendered nature. Equally importantly the expressions used and articulated shape the desired qualities and gender that are sought for the job. While we do not claim that the job advertisements fully reflect working life through discursive practices, the job advertisements do, however, shape the future and direct prospective candidates to apply or not apply for the jobs advertised.

The job advertising practices look attuned to remarkably global standards, although certain national differences also occurred in our research materials. In the digitalized and global “network capitalism”, the conceptions of an ideal expert are arguably becoming more unified. Thus, the demands for expertise are becoming globally described in a more unified way.

The requirements from an ideal sort of expertise are coated with superlatives, such as “strong”, “amazing” and “superior”. Many of them have often been gendered in stereotypical ways. More generally, “super individuals” were sought as ideal experts, irrespective of the type of expertise. A plausible explanation for this is that a culture in which recruits should “be entrepreneurial and pitch themselves to employers” has been adopted in the Finnish and Estonian advertising culture. This finding is consistent with [Poutanen and Kovalainen’s \(2017\)](#) discussion of global level employee requirements. Overall, the requirements for an ideal employee, and even for a manual worker have changed over time, requiring more qualifications than before, as shown by [Kuokkanen et al. \(2013\)](#).

The subtlety of gender in the advertisements allows for some space for advertisements which were not stereotypically feminine or masculine but open to interpretation. Overall, in such materials, gender was present only indirectly through the chosen vocabularies and wordings, and even through the display of the visual materials, such as the colour schemes and pictures of people in the advertisements. Our study accordingly brings out certain ways that gender is “on the move”, that is how gender is no more done in traditionally ossified or stereotyped ways but in more nuanced and flexible registers.

The analyses thus reveal that the gendering of expert positions is not exclusively based on stable masculine or feminine meanings and framings, contrary to what is often found in the management literature (Collinson and Hearn, 1994; McDowell, 2001, 2009). When the gendering of expert jobs is actually in the making, that is, when the jobs are in the process of becoming gendered, there is no one fixed point where the job is determined as masculine or feminine. The gendering of expertise is a process whereby the actions taken prior to the candidates being selected are more crucial than ever, as the expert jobs and tasks are increasingly hybrid and require the kinds of skills and talents that no longer fall smoothly into earlier categorizations.

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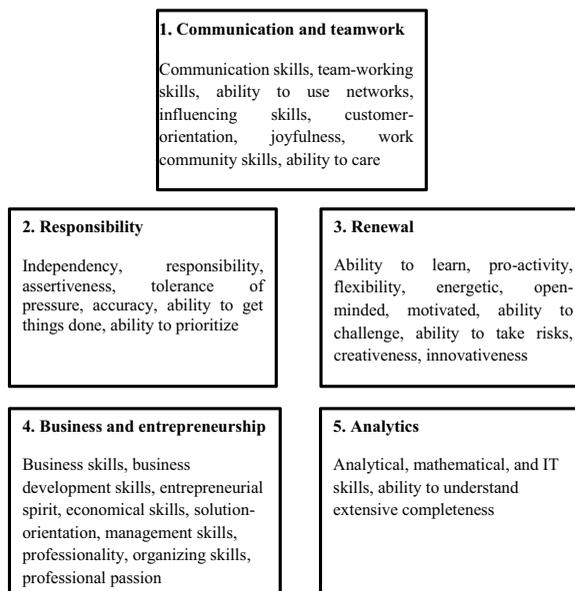


Figure A1. Data selection, screening, classification and analysis flow diagram

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Figure A2.
Analytical categories
and examples of
thematic first-order
articulations



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