PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHOLOGY
2020, VOL. 33, NO. 7, 997–1017
https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2020.1817885

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

ARTICLE

What is a colleague? The descriptive and normative dimension of a dual character concept

Kevin Reuter[a], Jörg Löschke[a] and Monika Betzler[b]

[a]Institute of Philosophy, University of Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland; [b]Faculty of Philosophy, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, Munich, Germany

ABSTRACT

Colleagues are not only an integral part of many people's lives; empirical research suggests that having a good relationship with one's colleagues is the single most important factor for being happy at work. However, so far, no one has provided a comprehensive account of what it means to be a colleague. To address this lacuna, we have conducted both an empirical as well as theoretical investigation into the content and structure of the concept 'colleague.' Based on the empirical evidence that we present in this paper, we argue that 'colleague' is a dual character concept that has both a descriptive and a normative basis for categorization. Its descriptive dimension is characterized by three features, according to which two people are colleagues if they work for the same institution and know each other, or if they work for the same institution and work in the same field. An independent normative dimension is revealed, which shows that, as colleagues, we are expected to fulfill substantial normative expectations. Understanding the expectations that are encoded in the very structure of this concept is crucial to lay the groundwork for an ethics of collegiality.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 23 April 2019
Accepted 2 January 2020

KEYWORDS
Colleague; dual character concept; experimental philosophy; empirical studies; thick concept

1. Introduction

Many of us spend more time with colleagues than with friends or family. In a recent study by Barclays (2015),[1] workers indicated that getting on well with their colleagues was the most important factor for being happy at work. It is therefore surprising that our understanding of what it means to be a colleague has not received any in-depth philosophical treatment, especially given how prominently the study of happiness and wellbeing has featured in philosophical and psychological discussions (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi, 2013; Haybron, 2005; Kahneman, 1999). In order to theorize about how colleagues can increase or decrease our wellbeing, we need to know exactly what colleagues are and what people have in mind when they refer to colleagues. In this paper,

CONTACT Kevin Reuter kevin.reuter@uzh.ch Institute of Philosophy, University of Zurich, Zürichbergstrasse 43, 8044 Zurich, Switzerland

we provide a comprehensive account of what people mean when they talk about colleagues as colleagues. Accordingly, our primary aim is to give an analysis of a concept that has received fairly little attention compared to other social role concepts like 'friend' (Aristotle, 350 B.C.E./1976; Helm, 2017), or 'family' (Archard, 2010; Okin, 1989). This analysis reveals some surprising facets of the concept 'colleague.' Perhaps most notably, it demonstrates that this concept has both a descriptive as well as an independent normative dimension for its application. However, studies investigating descriptive as well as normative components of concepts are scarce and few in number. Thus, our second aim is to suggest a roadmap for dealing with concepts that encode not only descriptive but also normative features. While some of these concepts belong to the class of thick concepts, many others have a different normative structure and are so-called dual character concepts. To neglect this normative structure means to fail to capture the meaning and structure of those terms in their entirety. In this paper, we suggest a way of operationalizing and testing the thickness and the dual character of concepts that allow us to investigate the normative features of the concept at hand. We will ground our theoretical discussion on empirical studies that we conducted and present in this paper.[2]

The third aim of our work is to inform both theoretical studies on the ethical implications of being a colleague, as well as studies in organizational psychology and the social sciences that empirically investigate the relationship between colleagues (see, e.g., Groysberg & Lee, 2008; Jiang & Hu, 2016; Neuberger, 1996). Whether or not we consider someone to be a friend has a significant effect on how we interact with that person. It determines not only which responsibilities we consider to have, but also which requests we can reasonably make. Similarly, whether or not we regard someone to be a colleague will also exert considerable influence on our actions and attitudes toward that person.[3] Most people also believe that we should behave according to certain standards toward our colleagues, such as offering and requesting support in work-related matters, being trustworthy, and so forth. These standards change if the person is not considered a colleague but is merely "someone who works in the same company."[4] Similar considerations apply to the psychological and social sciences. Therein, it is often taken for granted that we all agree about and know what it means to be a colleague; for example, Jiang and Hu (2016) ask their participants to rate statements like "in general, I am very close to my colleagues." However, we might reasonably wonder just how the term 'colleague' was understood by the participating individuals. In order to avoid false generalizations and to avoid people talking past each other, it is vital to specify the subject matter of research on colleague relationships, both in the philosophical as well as the empirical domain.

Here is how we will proceed: in Section 2, we discuss the various descriptive conditions that people may need to satisfy in order to fall

under the concept 'colleague.' Two empirical studies reveal which components are considered most important in identifying a colleague. Then, in Section 3, we discuss two ways in which normative considerations may play an important role when talking and thinking about colleagues, and present the results of three further empirical studies. Finally, in Section 4, we examine the descriptive and normative aspects of what it means to be a colleague in light of the new empirical data.

2. The descriptive dimension

2.1. Theoretical background

Prototypical examples are easy to categorize; for instance, sparrows are birds and desks are furniture. Things get more difficult when some of the typical features are missing, as is the case with penguins and lamps. Two salespeople who work for the same company, sell the same product, are at the same hierarchical level, know each other, and like each other are certainly colleagues. What about less prototypical cases, though? Suppose you work for a fairly big company.[5] Imagine that Kate works in the same department of that company, doing a very similar job to yours, but you do not know her and have never met her. Is Kate a colleague of yours? (People seem to be rather torn on this issue, with 49% of people answering affirmatively.) Now, imagine that Steve does almost the same job as you do and you have met him many times at trade fairs, but he works for a different company. Is Steve a colleague of yours? (As the data below suggests, an answer to this question largely depends on whether the term 'colleague' is understood merely descriptively, or normatively.) Lastly, imagine that Tom works at a nearby desk. You know him well, since you work closely with him, but you cannot stand the sight of him. Do you think of Tom as a colleague of yours?

In these scenarios, we tested your intuitions about the concept 'colleague' when some of the prototypical features – (a) knowing the person; (b) working for the same company; and (c) having a positive or, at least, a neutral attitude toward the person – were missing. There seem to be even more features that may have an effect on whether or not we would consider someone a colleague: do we need to be at the same hierarchical level in order to be colleagues? Can a colleague be double our age? Does a self-employed person have any colleagues? What about academic institutions?

What are colleagues, then? According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a colleague is "a person with whom one *works* in a profession or business" (emphasis added). This definition thus rules out fellow members in clubs as colleagues; the term 'work colleague' clearly seems to be a tautology (Chasseaud, 2014). However, the definition is vague and hence fails to provide us with criteria that allow us to determine the correct answers to

the questions raised above. For one thing, "with whom one works" can have a number of interpretations that seem to matter when we call someone a colleague. On the one hand, the phrase can be interpreted widely to include everybody who is employed by the same company or institution. If that were the case, then a recently hired intern and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the company would be colleagues. On the other hand, if the phrase is interpreted narrowly as a relation between people who work on the same project and regularly consult each other, the term is not inclusive enough: "close colleague" is certainly not a tautology – so why not steer a middle course between these extreme readings? This is simply because a middle path is too coarse-grained to be able to determine whether Kate, Steve, and Tom are colleagues. Instead, we need to find those features or conditions that either separate us from being colleagues or bind us together as colleagues.

While we are interested in the meaning and application of the concept 'colleague' in a broader sense, we are aware that there are both minor and major differences in the use of the term 'colleague' within and across linguistic and cultural groups. The English language seems to be especially rich in denoting various work-related social relations: 'colleague,' 'associate,' 'fellow,' 'peer,' 'workmate,' 'coworker,' and 'counterpart' are all various terms for which the German language, for example, only knows a single word: *Kollege*. Thus, it seems that within the English language, there are more ways of specifying work-relationships.

There are three reasons why we focus particularly on the notion of colleague in this paper. First, 'colleague' is by far the most frequently used term to refer to people to whom one is connected in work-related matters. A brief analysis using the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) reveals 860 mentions of 'coworker,' 18 of 'workmate,' and 7,338 of 'colleague.' Second, many other terms focus on relationships that are not merely work-related but presuppose the existence of additional components, for example, 'fellows' exist primarily in academia and education, while 'peers' are restricted to people of a similar age, education, or social class. Third, we are specifically interested in what a colleague is, because 'colleague' does not directly implicate a negative or a positive relationship (see also Section 3.2). In comparison, the term 'workmate' assumes a positive relation, perhaps even friendship.

This theoretical discussion revealed that there may be several descriptive features that determine when a person is considered to be a colleague. In order to avoid experimenter bias, we conducted a preliminary study (Section 2.2), which allowed us to select the most important factors that are associated with the concept 'colleague.' The results of the main experiment on the descriptive dimension are presented in Section 2.3.

2.2. Preliminary study

The aim of the preliminary study was to collect those features that are most commonly associated with colleagues. For this purpose, we used a semantic feature production task. 62 participants (M_{age} = 35.8 years; 32 females, 30 males, all English native speakers) were recruited on Amazon's Mechanical Turk and were paid a small fee for taking part in the study.[6] They were asked to note down three necessary conditions for two people to be regarded as colleagues:

> Think for a moment about what it means to be a colleague. Please state three conditions that you believe are necessary in order for two people to be colleagues.

In total, 183 responses were collected (three people responded with only two conditions). Of these responses,

- Evaluative terms, such as "reliable," "helpful," and "friendly," occurred 44 times;
- Either "work together" or "working together" was mentioned 21 times;
- "Working for the same company" or equivalent was recorded 17 times;
- "Working on a project," "in the same office," or an equivalent expression was noted by 15 participants;
- "Know each other" or "see each other regularly" was recorded 13 times;
- "Working in the same field" or equivalent was received 12 times.

Some participants mentioned social role concepts that are closely connected to being a colleague (e.g., a friend, partner, associate, or peer). Further responses included status (9 times), educational background (6 times), age (3 times), repetitions of previous responses, answers too brief or vague to be classified (work, communication, something in common), and seemingly idiosyncratic answers (e.g., computer proficient).

The high number of evaluative terms that were given indicates that there may indeed be a normative dimension of some sort that plays a role in our deliberations about colleagues. These normative aspects will be examined in Section 3. The other responses seem to fall into nonevaluative categories, some of which are fairly easy to identify: work for the same company (17 times), knowing and seeing each other (13 times), work in the same field (12 times).[7] Two other large categories are more difficult to interpret: working together (21 responses), and 15 responses that hinted at closer physical relations such as working in the same office, working close by, and working on the same project. It is, however, reasonable to suppose that these 36 responses fall roughly into the three categories mentioned above, namely, working for the same company, knowing each other, and working in the same field.[8] Thus, according to this classification, the three most decisive

descriptive features that come to people's mind when they think of the concept 'colleague' seem to be (in decreasing order of importance):

Affiliation: working for the same company or affiliation.

Content: working in the same field.

Familiarity: knowing each other.

Dividing up the categories in this way has an additional advantage: all the categories are largely independent of each other. Thus, in an experimental setting, we can manipulate one aspect without affecting the other.

2.3. Experiment on the descriptive dimension

In order to investigate the importance of the various candidates that characterize the notion of being a colleague, we focused on the three descriptive features that were mentioned most often, namely, "affiliation," "content," and "familiarity." Our aim was to specify the weight of each of the three descriptive features. In order to do so, we randomly gave 329 participants one of eight different vignettes, each of which combined elements of the three aforementioned dimensions – whether two people work for the same company (affiliation), whether they work in the same field (content), and whether they know each other (familiarity) (see Table 1, below).[9]

The participants were then asked to rate their agreement with the claim, "Max and Tom are colleagues" on a seven-point Likert scale from −3 (*completely disagree*) to 3 (*completely agree*). All three independent factors (affiliation, content, familiarity) were highly significant (all ps < 0.001), showing that each of them strongly influences a person's view on whether or not someone is considered to be a colleague. We conducted a 2x2x2 analysis of variance (ANOVA) with rating as a dependent variable, and affiliation, content, and familiarity as independent factors. Affiliation, $F(1, 321) = 266.27$, $p < .001$, $\eta = 0.5$; familiarity, $F(1, 321) = 51.87$, $p < .001$, $\eta = 0.1$; and content, $F(1, 321) = 30.59$, $p < .001$, $\eta = 0.1$, were all highly significant. There was one significant interaction between content and familiarity, $F(1, 300) = 4.81$, $p = 0.029$, $\eta = 0.02$. Importantly, the three features were not considered to be of equal importance in people's deliberations. Rather, the results (depicted in Figure 1, below) clearly demonstrate

Table 1. Descriptions of the three factors in the vignettes.

Component	Positive common feature	Lack of common feature
Affiliation	Max and Tom work for the same company.	Max and Tom work for different companies.
Content	Max and Tom both work in the electronics industry.	While Max works in the electronics industry, Tom works in the clothing industry.
Familiarity	Max and Tom know each other.	Max and Tom do not know each other.

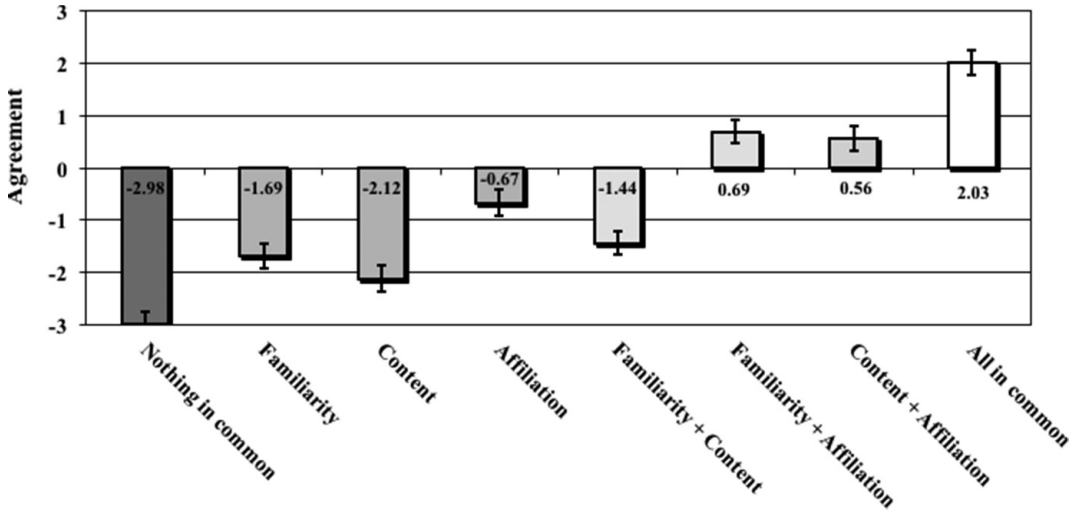

Figure 1. Average ratings for all eight conditions testing the importance of the descriptive features. Error bars indicate standard error around the means.

that 'affiliation' was by far the most important predictor ($\eta = 0.5$) for whether or not a person is regarded as a colleague. This can be most clearly seen by comparing the average results for 'affiliation' with 'familiarity and content': The study's participants strongly believed that Max and Tom, who are employed by different companies but work in the same field and know each other ('familiarity and content'), should not be considered colleagues ($M = -1.44$). In contrast, if Max and Tom work for the same company but neither know each other nor work in the same field, the participants were more likely to agree that they are colleagues ($M = -0.67$). The difference between both conditions was marginally significant, $t(81) = 1.94$, $p = 0.055$.

A majority of the participants regarded two people working for the same company and either working in the same field ($M = 0.56$) or being known to each other ($M = 0.69$) as colleagues. In both conditions, the average result was significantly above the neutral value of '0′: content and affiliation, $t(38) = 2.16$, $p = 0.038$; familiarity and affiliation, $t(41) = 2.50$, $p = 0.016$. Thus, the empirical results suggest that, for many people, either 'content and affiliation' or 'familiarity and affiliation' are the features that make a person a colleague.

The results of the empirical studies on the descriptive dimension strongly suggest that whether or not two people work in the same company fundamentally determines their status as colleagues. Hardly anyone considers two people to be colleagues – at least on a purely descriptive level – if they are not employed by the same company, even if they work in the same field and know each other. However, the results also suggest that it is not sufficient to merely work in the same company. A further condition needs to be met. Two more factors, which were identified during the course of our preliminary study, were tested in our experiments, and showed a significant effect: 'content' and 'familiarity.'

3. The normative dimension

3.1. Theoretical background

Arguably, most of our concepts are purely descriptive. When you think, "the red box is on top of the kitchen table," your thought seems to be made up of purely descriptive concepts that refer to the property 'being red,' to the objects 'box' and 'kitchen table,' as well as to the relation 'on top of.' No value is attached to any of the thought's component parts. Given our discussion above, one might reasonably wonder whether 'colleague' is also a purely descriptive concept that is devoid of any normative dimension. If that were the case, then we could stop our investigation into the meaning of the concept 'colleague' here.

Before we can even start to address this question, we first need to make a distinction between two ways in which the normative and the descriptive features of a concept can be related. Most of the philosophical literature on the normative or evaluative aspects of concepts has so far focused on so-called thick concepts, such as 'courageous,' 'murderer,' 'open-minded,' and 'kitsch.' Thick concepts pick out objective properties in the world, and also evaluate these aspects as positive or negative. For example, by calling a woman courageous, we are not only describing her as willing to take risks, we are also evaluating her – in this case positively – for being willing to take risks; and, according to one popular account of thick concepts, it is not possible to disentangle the descriptive and the evaluative dimensions of thick concepts. In other words, part of the meaning of a thick concept is to evaluate the object of reference in a specific way.[10] The concept 'colleague' does not belong to the class of thick concepts; we will give empirical evidence for this claim in the next section. By contrasting 'colleague' with the thick concepts 'friend' and 'murderer,' we can already provide intuitive support for that thesis. It is entirely apt to think about colleagues as being horrible or great colleagues. By contrast, it may sound paradoxical when we apply contrasting evaluative terms to thick concepts, such as 'fantastic murderer' or 'despicable friend.' Although a person does not cease to be a colleague just because we dislike that person, people will cease to be our friends if we constantly evaluate them negatively in their role as friends.[11]

Importantly, thick concepts are not the only class of concepts for which both normative and descriptive features play a role. Within the past few years, researchers have started to investigate a "new" class of concepts – the so-called dual character concepts – to which many social role concepts, such as 'artist,' 'scientist,' and 'mother,' belong (Del Pinal & Reuter, 2017; Knobe et al., 2013; Leslie, 2015).[12] Dual character concepts are special in that they have two largely independent dimensions for categorization: a descriptive and a normative dimension. On the one hand, we consider a person to be, for example, an artist, if certain descriptive criteria – such as painting pictures,

working with watercolors, creating canvases – apply to her. On the other hand, we may also call a person an artist if she fulfills certain normative aspects associated with being an artist – for instance, being committed to creating works of deep esthetic value. Both these dimensions are independent of each other in the sense that a person can fulfill either of these two dimensions without satisfying the other.[13] In contrast, the normative component of a thick concept has no independent basis for categorization; it merely evaluates the concepts' descriptive aspect. For example, we cannot say that Sarah is courageous without also describing her as willing to take risks.

How are the descriptive and normative aspects of dual character concepts related to each other, and why do other social role concepts, such as 'bus driver' and 'uncle' fail to show such a normative dimension? Knobe et al. (2013) argue that the normative dimension of dual character concepts consists in a specific abstract value or values that are realized by the descriptive features of those concepts. For example, the abstract value for a scientist is something akin to the quest for impartial truth, which is realized by descriptive features such as running experiments and developing theories. By contrast, no such abstract value is realized by the descriptive features that allow us to classify someone as a bus driver or uncle. Del Pinal and Reuter (2017) present an alternative theory according to which the normative dimension of a social role concept represents the "commitment to fulfill the idealized basic function associated with that role" (p. 477). Thus, if an artist is committed to producing works of esthetic value, then she satisfies the normative dimension of the concept 'artist.' Del Pinal and Reuter further argue that this sort of normative information is crucial if one wishes to predict the role-dependent behavior of people. For instance, if you know that a teenage boy is committed to creating esthetically deep work, then you can predict that he will strive to become an artist.[14]

Knobe et al. (2013)provide a way of operationalizing the notion of being dual character. The operationalization Knobe et al. used targets the independence of the two postulated dimensions of dual character concepts directly. The "ultimately not" approach presented participants with the following kind of vignette:

> There is a sense in which she is clearly a [friend/artist/soldier], but ultimately, if you think about what it really means to be a [friend/artist/soldier], you would have to say that she is not a [friend/artist/soldier] at all.

The participants then rated the extent to which the sentence sounded reasonable. Many participants found this type of sentence entirely reasonable, in contrast to vignettes in which those terms were replaced by 'uncle' or 'cashier,' for example.

These results are certainly plausible for the concept 'friend' and other social role concepts, but will the finding be the same for the concept

'colleague'? In other words, does the concept 'colleague' encode independent normative information? In the next section, we investigate empirically if, and to what extent, the concept 'colleague' is a dual character concept. The results of these investigations will allow us to discuss implications for our thinking of and speaking about colleagues because once we better understand the normative dimension of this concept, we will also understand the underlying normative expectations between colleagues.

3.2. Experimental studies

In this section, we describe the results of three experiments that we conducted to investigate the normative dimension of the concept 'colleague.' We present the results of these experiments in Section 3.2.1 (thickness), Section 3.2.2 (being dual character), and Section 3.2.3 (double dissociation). Whereas the preliminary study in Section 2.2 was primarily designed to provide the features that matter most for the descriptive dimension of the concept 'colleague', the collected responses suggest that many people associate a normative component, such as reliable or helpful, when they think about what it means to be a colleague. However, the study's results do not tell us whether the concept 'colleague' is a thick concept that is inherently laden with an evaluative component, whether it is a dual character concept that has an independent normative dimension, or both. We begin by showing that 'colleague' is not a thick concept, at least for the majority of people.

3.2.1. Is 'colleague' a thick concept?

Although philosophical research on thick concepts has flourished during the past few decades,[15] we know of no empirical studies that have been conducted in this area. This is an area of research in which empirical studies are likely to complement as well as challenge existing theories on thick concepts. Given the lack of empirical research, it is an open question how best to operationalize the notion of a thick concept. We opted for the following vignette:

> Tom and Max work for the same company. Suppose you hear Tom using the word 'colleague' when talking about Max. You don't have any further information about either Tom or Max. By using the word 'colleague,' do you think that Tom expresses a positive attitude towards Max, a negative attitude towards Max, or is it a neutral way to talk about someone you work with?

160 participants were randomly given either the vignette featuring the term 'colleague' or one of the control conditions featuring the terms 'friend,' 'coworker,' and 'rival'; they responded to the vignettes on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*very negative*) to 4 (*neutral*) to 7 (*very positive*). The mean values are shown in Figure 2, below.

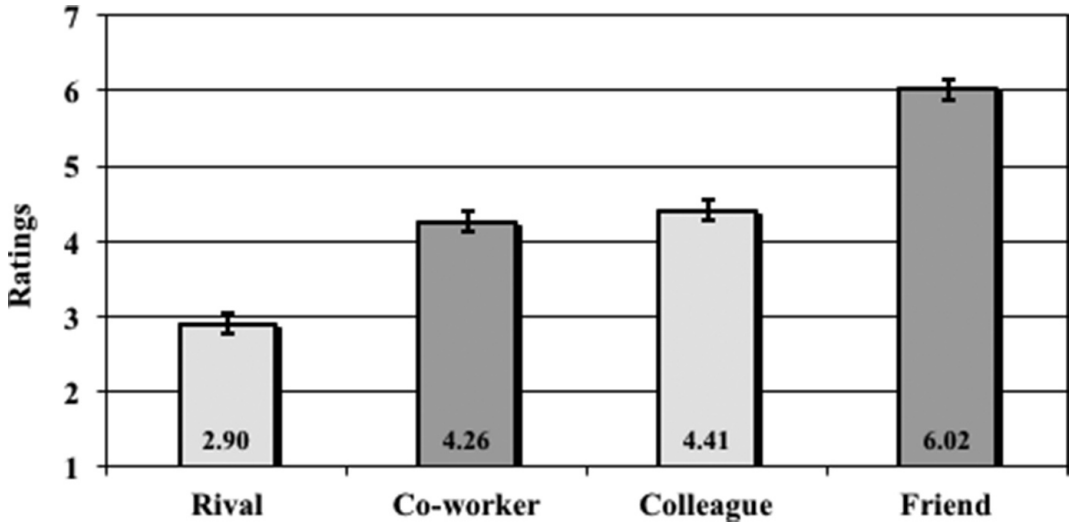

Figure 2. Average ratings of the thickness of the four concepts rival, coworker, colleague, and friend. Error bars indicate standard error around the means.

The results painted a clear picture, showing that the majority of the participants did not associate any positive evaluation with the term 'colleague' (72%) or 'coworker' (80%). There was no significant difference between the average results of 'colleague' and 'coworker.' This strongly suggests that 'colleague' is not a thick concept, for if it were, the participants would have made an evaluation when they applied the concept, even in hypothetical cases. By contrast, the term 'rival' was rated significantly less positive, whereas 'friend' was considered significantly more positive. The ANOVA was significant, $F(3, 156) = 85.89$, $p < .001$, $\eta = 0.6$. Bonferroni-corrected post-hoc tests showed that the mean rating for 'colleague' did not differ significantly from the mean rating for 'coworker,' $p = 1.000$, but that it was significantly greater than the mean rating for 'rival,' and significantly lower than the mean rating for 'friend,' both ps $< .001$.

3.2.2. Is 'colleague' a dual character concept?

As outlined above, Knobe et al. (2013) investigated the strength of the normative dimension of a number of social role concepts, such as 'friend' and 'artist,' using the "ultimately not" operationalization. Building on their research, we used this method to test the hypothesis that 'colleague' has a substantial normative dimension which is more pronounced than the concept 'coworker,' and is similar to the concept 'friend,' which has already been shown by Knobe et al. to be a dual character concept.

91 participants were recruited on Amazon's Mechanical Turk and were paid for taking part in the experiment. Each participant was randomly given one of three vignettes, each mentioning a different relationship type, and asked to rate the following sentence, on a scale from 1 (*sounds weird*) to 7 (*sounds natural*)[16]:

> There is a sense in which she is clearly a [colleague/friend/coworker], but ultimately, if you think about what it really means to be a [colleague/friend/coworker], you would have to say that she is not a [colleague/friend/coworker] at all.

The mean values of people's responses are shown in Figure 3, below. The highest average rating was recorded for 'friend' (M = 4.53, SD = 1.48), with an only slightly lower average rating for 'colleague' (M = 4.16, SD = 1.60). The mean value for 'coworker' was M = 3.27 (SD = 1.67). A univariate ANOVA with participants' ratings as the dependent measure and the independent factor type with three levels (friend, colleague, coworker) was performed. The factor type was highly significant, $F(2, 88) = 5.06$, $p = 0.008$, $\eta = 0.1$. Bonferroni-corrected post-hoc tests yielded significant differences between 'friend' and 'coworker,' $p = 0.003$, as well as between 'colleague' and 'coworker,' $p = 0.030$, but no significant difference between 'friend' and 'colleague,' $p = 0.362$.

The results from this study provide evidence that 'colleague' is indeed a dual character concept. In the "ultimately not" study, the average ratings for 'colleague' were significantly higher than the concept 'coworker,' and not significantly different from the independently researched concept 'friend.' Hence, the data clearly indicates that 'colleague' has a substantial normative dimension which is greater than the concept 'coworker'.

3.2.3. Double dissociation

It is possible that the results of the "ultimately not" study merely show that a person could fulfill the descriptive dimension without the normative dimension, but not vice versa. One of the crucial properties about dual character concepts is that their normative dimension is an independent dimension for categorization. Hence, in order to investigate whether people can also categorize a person as a colleague based merely on the normative

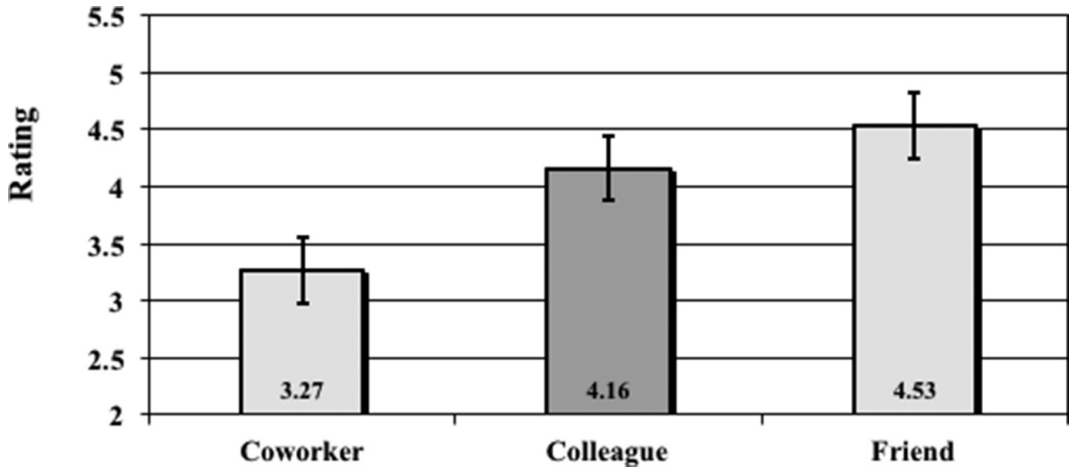

Figure 3. Mean values of the normative dimension of the concepts coworker, colleague, and friend. Error bars indicate standard error around the means.

dimension, we presented 40 participants with the following scenario (M = 35.9; 23 females, all English native speakers. One participant was excluded because she indicated not to be a native English speaker):

> Suppose Max and Tom work as computer specialists for different companies in different parts of the country. They have only met once at a fair, but every time one of them has a really tricky work problem that they cannot solve on their own, they contact each other for help.

We then asked them to tell us whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:

> There is a sense in which Max and Tom are clearly not colleagues, but ultimately, if you think about what it really means to be a colleague, you have to say that Max and Tom are colleagues after all.

Participants rated their agreement or disagreement on a scale from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*). The average response was 5.28 (SD = 1.43), which was significantly above the neutral value of 4.0, $t(38) = 5.59$, $p < .001$. Although the protagonists Max and Tom do not fulfill the descriptive conditions for being colleagues – because they do not work in the same company – people by and large agree with the claim that there is a sense in which they are colleagues. Thus, the concept 'colleague' has a normative dimension that functions as an independent dimension for categorization.

4. General discussion

We conducted several studies investigating what people mean when they think and talk about colleagues as colleagues. These studies have yielded important insights into both the descriptive and the normative dimensions of the concept 'colleague.' In light of the empirical data, we will discuss each of these dimensions in turn before we analyze the possible interactions between them.

In Section 2 of this paper, we cited and gave a critique of the definition of the term 'colleague' in the Oxford English Dictionary, which states that a colleague is "a person with whom one works in a profession or business." Given the empirical data, we propose the following amendment: a colleague is either a person who works in the same organization and with whom one is familiar, or a person who works in the same organization and also works in the same field.

Admittedly, not everybody will agree with this proposal. Of the tested subjects, 23% disagreed weakly or strongly with either of the two conjuncts in this definition. These disagreements are admissible, once we abandon the noble task of trying to come up with a classical definition according to which there are necessary and jointly sufficient conditions that determine the

extension of concepts. By adopting a psychologically more realistic prototype approach (Rosch, 1999), we can formulate the results in the following way: a number of features influence how the concept 'colleague' is applied, of which 'affiliation' carries the greatest weight; 'content' and 'familiarity' are important but subordinate features that make up the prototype of colleague (see, also, Leibowitz (2018), who proposes a prototype semantics for the related concept 'friendship'). Our proposal is a substantial advancement on the previous definition in the Oxford English Dictionary, and acknowledges the respective contributions of the three most important features of the concept 'colleague.'

Before we discuss the results on the normative aspects of colleague, we would like to acknowledge two limitations of our studies. First, in our vignettes, we described fairly specific scenarios: we mentioned specific industries, such as the electronics and the clothing industry. Hence, we cannot rule out that the results would be different if we changed these features. However, there is little reason to suppose that different fields, such as the sports and travel industry, would have revealed vastly different results, although this claim is up for further empirical investigations.

Second, in the vignettes, we specified that Max and Tom either worked or did not work in the same company. It is difficult to ascertain how far the results we obtained can be extended to different types of workplace settings, and in particular, to people not working in companies. In the academic, judicial, and medical fields, for example, a colleague is often a person who works in the same profession but is not necessarily a member of the same organization. Again, more empirical work is needed to examine possible variations across fields.

One of the central goals of this paper was to charter not only the descriptive landscape of the concept 'colleague' but also its normative character. The results of our studies on the normative aspects of 'colleague' suggest that 'colleague' has an independent normative dimension, similar to the concept 'friend.' Importantly, the normative aspects do not seem to be reducible to a purely evaluative component that is intertwined with the descriptive aspects, as is the case with thick concepts (see the results in Section 3). What are the implications of the dual nature of the concept 'colleague'?

The normative impact of using a thick concept in everyday language seems to be fairly obvious. For example, if a social role concept is thick, then its use allows us to make certain predictions about how the named person is perceived by another person.[17] To take an extreme example, "one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter." Here, the use of 'terrorist' or 'freedom fighter' allows us to draw immediate conclusions as to how a certain person is perceived by another. By contrast, no such predictions can be made from the use of social role concepts that are not thick but "merely" dual character. Hearing from Tom that Max is a colleague does not seem to give us any

information to evaluate whether Tom looks favorably on Max or not. He may like or dislike his colleague. Although no evaluative predictions can be made from using a concept that is not thick, there are ways in which dual character concepts allow us to make normative claims. Results by Knobe et al. (2013) and Del Pinal and Reuter (2017) show that the "true" modifier serves to pick out the normative dimension of a dual character concept. Hence, when Tom calls Max a "true colleague," Tom states that he believes Max to fulfill the normative dimension attached to the concept 'colleague.' In other words, Tom seems to be drawing attention to the fact that, in Max's role as a colleague of his, he is fulfilling a certain ideal or is committed to being collegial.

While the use of the "true" modifier serves to pick out the normative aspect of dual character concepts, its importance for normative reasoning is far more wide-reaching. Calling someone a true artist, a true scientist, a true friend, or a true colleague allows us to judge a person normatively precisely because we have specific normative conceptions of these social roles. These conceptions lead us to have certain normative expectations of the people in these social roles. The results in Section 3.2.2. show that 'colleague' is a dual character concept, similar to 'artist,' 'scientist,' and 'father.' This means that substantial normative considerations are also attached to the social role of being a colleague and lead us to have certain expectations of our colleagues. If a colleague – in her role as a colleague – violates these expectations, then she will often be judged appropriately, that is, held (morally) responsible for her behavior that led to the violation of our expectations.

So far, we have remained silent on a crucial question: what is the content of the normative dimension of the concept 'colleague'? We have already discussed two theories that have made different claims regarding the normative dimension of dual character concepts. Whereas Knobe et al. argue that the normative dimension consists in an abstract value that is realized by the descriptive features of the concept, Reuter and Del Pinal defend the view that the normative dimension represents the commitment to fulfilling the idealized function of the concept's respective social role.[18] If we follow their approach, then, the question is, what does the idealized function of the social role of a colleague consist in? To answer this question, it is important to consider, first, in what sense we can speak of 'colleague' as being a social role with an idealized function. The social role of a colleague differs from other social roles, such as a friend, in that it involves two kinds of social roles, both of which can be said to have idealized functions. First, colleagues occupy the same occupational roles: they are salesmen, managers, assistants, and so forth. The idealized function of these roles consists in performing the occupational tasks that are associated with their roles. This has implications for the normative standards that we associate with the social role of the concept 'colleague': a good colleague, or a colleague who meets the normative standards associated

with her role, is a person who fulfills her job-related tasks; that is, someone who does her job well. A person who constantly underperforms in her profession does not meet the normative standards that we associate with the concept 'colleague.'

Second, colleagues inhabit the social roles of colleagues in the sense that their very relationship is role-mediated. In this second sense, we speak of two people as colleagues not merely as two people who occupy the same occupational roles but as two people who have a relationship because of their shared occupational roles, and the idealized function of this role seems to be something like "providing support in work-related matters." The so-called relationship-goods account helps to shed light on this idealized function. What colleagues can jointly realize if their role-mediated relationship is ideal is that they can bring about distinct relationship-dependent goods, such as solidarity and recognition. We do not have the space here to discuss these matters in more detail, but these two dimensions of the social role of colleagues seem to determine the normative expectations that people associate with the role concept of a colleague.[19]

We would like to end this paper on a more speculative note. We have provided empirical evidence for three important descriptive features that are part of our commonsense notion of colleague. Furthermore, based on additional empirical studies, we have argued that 'colleague' is a dual character concept with an independent normative dimension which includes the commitment to providing support in work-related matters, and underscores the view that collegiality consists in realizing the relationship goods that are characteristic of colleagues. Although these dimensions are independent insofar as they allow us to categorize people as colleagues in two different ways, so far, we do not know how interdependent these descriptive and normative features really are. Thus, is it possible that the normative dimension affects who we consider to be colleagues descriptively, and vice versa?

All three of the descriptive features that we studied in this paper seem to be clearly interdependent with people's expectations of what it means normatively to be a colleague. Our commitment to supporting other people in work-related matters seems to be restricted to those people who work within the same company. Imagine that your boss is asking you to help a person from a different company in a work-related matter. It would seem entirely appropriate to respond by saying, "but she is not my colleague. Why should I help her?" Similar considerations apply to the other two features. If your boss, for example, asks you to support a person who you don't know, you may point out that this person is not a colleague of yours. On the other hand, making the normative expectations more demanding will often lead people to make claims that being a colleague is not sufficient for fulfilling these demands. Being asked to provide support in non-work-related matters seems to allow for a response along the lines of "but he is merely a colleague of mine."

Both the normative and descriptive dimensions of the concept 'colleague' vary across different languages and cultures, as well as across different fields. In Section 2, we reported that the German language is less rich than English when it comes to denoting various work-dependent relationships. It is, therefore, likely, although not necessary, that the descriptive features (or, at least, their respective weights) of the term '*Kollege*' do not match the descriptive features of the term 'colleague.' We also suggested that in the academic, judicial, and medical fields, the term 'colleague' may be used more widely to include people from, for example, different universities in different countries. Given the interplay between the normative and descriptive dimensions of the concept 'colleague,' it is quite likely that the normative expectations that academics have with regard to their colleagues also differ from the expectations of colleagues in commercial companies. Thus, perhaps the normative dimension between academic colleagues does not include a commitment to helping one another in work-related matters but merely a commitment to exchanging information that furthers knowledge in the discipline in which they both work. Expecting academic colleagues to be supportive in work-related matters would be asking too much, although more idealistic academics could argue that true colleagues are indeed committed to that kind of support.

Notes

1. The survey conducted by Barclays in 2015 is reported in various websites (see, e.g., https://engageemployee.com/tenth-post/ or https://worksmart.org.uk/news/colleagues-are-key-happiness-work).
2. We take it for granted that empirical studies are a crucial means to detail the various descriptive and normative features of many concepts (see, e.g., the empirical approach that Knobe et al., 2013 took to determine the normative dimension of dual character concepts).
3. Mentioned here are just three examples: how should you react to the request of a colleague for information on a job application if you are applying for the same position within the company? Should you inform the company of the illegal wrongdoings of a colleague that they disclosed to you? When do you tell a colleague that she is not working effectively enough? See, also, Reamer (1983).
4. We do, of course, have various kinds of responsibilities to all people, independent of whether they are family, friends, or colleagues.
5. A majority of the workforce in many industrialized countries are employed by large enterprises. According to the United States Census Bureau, in 2012, large companies (i.e., more than 500 employees) employed 51.6% of the US workforce, while medium enterprises employed 14% of the workforce (US Census Bureau, 2015).
6. The participants in the other experiments were likewise recruited on Mechanical Turk and reimbursed for their participation.
7. We have not taken the responses on status, educational background, and age into consideration in the rest of this paper. Given the low frequency of responses in the preliminary study, it is unlikely for them to have a strong impact on whether the concept 'colleague' is applied to a person.

8. In some settings, the feature 'working together' might not be captured by some of the other components, especially when people work together for a short time only (e.g., when fixing a car). However, given our main interest in the concept 'colleague' when used in larger institutions, we leave this use aside for the rest of the paper.
9. We decided to present people with vignettes specifying that Max and Tom work for a company, that is, a commercial business. In the general discussion at the end of this paper, we will discuss whether these results are likely to be applicable to affiliations that are not business-oriented.
10. Proponents of this account include McDowell (1981), Williamson (1985), Dancy (1995), Putnam (2002), and Kirchin (2010). For critiques of the inseparability of the descriptive and evaluative dimensions of thick concepts, see Elstein and Hurka (2009) or Väyrynen (2013).
11. While this claim is, of course, open to empirical falsification, it is supported by notions of friendship which highlight mutual respect and evaluation (see e.g., Leibowitz, 2018).
12. We focus here on social role concepts because both 'friend' and 'colleague' also belong to this class. Other dual character concepts that are not concepts of social roles are, for instance, 'poem,' 'sports car,' and 'love.' Note, also, that being thick and being dual character are not mutually exclusive. The concept 'friend,' for instance, is both a thick concept and also a dual character concept.
13. For a more detailed account of the independence of both dimensions of dual character concepts, see Reuter (2019) and the empirical studies below.
14. This theory also explains why some social role concepts, such as 'bus driver,' are not dual character concepts: people are usually not very committed to ferrying passengers from point A to B. Leslie (2015) provides an interesting discussion on how concepts which are not dual character by default obtain an ad hoc normative dimension through a specific context. For example, when observing a reckless bus driver, another bus driver might say that a true bus driver would make sure that her passengers arrive home safely.
15. For an overview of the current state of research, see Kirchin (2013) or Väyrynen (2013).
16. This scale was adopted from the studies in Knobe et al. (2013).
17. We do not claim that the role of thick concepts merely consists in the ability to make predictions of how others are perceived. For example, some authors (McDowell, 1981) make the much stronger claim that thick concepts show that evaluative properties are genuine features of the world. We remain agnostic about this issue.
18. Note that both the empirical work of this paper as well as the theoretical discussion of the results do not favor either Knobe et al. or Del Pinal & Reuter's theory of the normative content of the concept 'colleague.' In order to investigate this question, one would need to run experiments in which the normative content is manipulated in various ways. However, as the subsequent discussion demonstrates, we do find it plausible to cash out the normative content in terms of a commitment to provide support in work-related matters.
19. More needs to be said here, and we hope to do so in further research. It is not obvious that the content of the normative expectations that people associate with the social role of a colleague are entirely fixed by these considerations. For example, it is an open question whether the normative expectations that people associate with the social role of a colleague concern only technical support in work-related matters, or whether they also include emotional support. Furthermore, we have said nothing about the grounds of these expectations. Some might argue that the relevant role expectations

are merely conventional. Others might have more objective tendencies and argue that the normative expectations are grounded in evaluative considerations, either about the value of the shared work or the value of the relationship between colleagues. In our view, the most promising strategy for the second option is to explain the normative considerations that we associated with the role concept of a colleague by so-called relationship-goods accounts of associative duties, according to which normative expectations within personal relationships arise because their participants can realize unique goods within the relationship that they cannot realize otherwise. For accounts of how relationship goods are applied in other contexts, see, among others, Keller (2006), Seglow (2013), and Brighouse and Swift (2014). For a discussion of the relationship goods account in the context of collegial relationships, see Betzler and Löschke (ms).

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Michael Messerli and the audiences at workshops in Hamburg, Salzburg, and Vitoria, where parts of this paper were presented.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

Kevin Reuter was supported by a Swiss National Science Foundation Eccellenza Grant [PCEFP1_181082] ("Dual Character Concepts"). Jörg Löschke was supported by a Swiss National Science Foundation Grant [PP00P1_176703] ("Value-Based Non-Consequentialism").

Notes on contributors

Kevin Reuter is SNSF Eccellenza Professor at the University of Zurich.

Jörg Löschke is SNSF Professor at the University of Zurich.

Monika Betzler is Professor of Philosophy and Chair of Practical Philosophy at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich.

References

Archard, D. (2010). *The family: A liberal defence*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Aristotle. (350 B.C.E./1976). *Ethics*. (J. Thomson, Translated by). Penguin Books.

Betzler, M., & Löschke, J. (ms). *Collegial relationships*.

Brighouse, H., & Swift, A. (2014). *Family values. The ethics of parent-child relationships*. Princeton University Press.

Chasseaud, T. (2014). Dear work colleagues, let's stop using this clumsy phrase. *Guardian (London)*. https://www.theguardian.com/media/mind-your-language/2014/sep/30/dear-work-colleagues-clumsy-phrase-pointless-prefix-dictionary- definition

Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2013). *Flow: The psychology of happiness*. Random House.
Dancy, J. (1995). In defense of thick concepts. Midwest Studies in Philosophy, 20, 263–279. https://doi.org/10.5840/msp19952016
Del Pinal, G., & Reuter, K. (2017). Dual Character Concepts in Social Cognition: Commitments and the Normative Dimension of Conceptual Representation. Cognitive Science, 41(S3), 477–501
Elstein, D. Y., & Hurka, T. (2009). From Thick to Thin: Two Moral Reduction Plans. Canadian Journal of Philosophy, 39(4), 515–535
Groysberg, B., & Lee, L. E. (2008). The effect of colleague quality on top perfor- mance: The case of security analysts. *Journal of Organizational Behavior: The International Journal of Industrial, Occupational and Organizational Psychology and Behavior*, *29*(8), 1123–1144. https://doi.org/10.1002/job.558
Haybron, D. (2005). On being happy or unhappy. *Philosophy and Phenomenolog- Ical Research*, *71*(2), 287–317. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1933-1592.2005.tb00450.x
Helm, B. (2017). *Friendship* (E. Zalta, ed.). The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/friendship/>
Jiang, Z., & Hu, X. (2016). Knowledge sharing and life satisfaction: The roles of colleague relationships and gender. *Social Indicators Research*, *126*(1), 379–394. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-015-0886-9
Kahneman, D. (1999). Objective happiness. In D. Kahneman, E. Diener, & N. Schwarz (Eds.), *Well-being: The foundations of hedonic psychology* (pp. 3–25). Russell Sage Foundation.
Keller, S. (2006). Four theories of filial duty. The Philosophical Quarterly, 56(223), 254–274
Kirchin, S. (2010). The shapelessness hypothesis. Philosopher's Imprint, 10(4), 1–28. http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.3521354.0010.004
Kirchin, S. (ed.). (2013). *Thick concepts*. Oxford University Press.
Knobe, J., Prasada, S., & Newman, G. E. (2013). Dual character concepts and the normative dimension of conceptual representation. *Cognition*, *127*(2), 242–257. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2013.01.005
Leibowitz, U. (2018). What is friendship? *Disputatio*, *10*(49), 97–117. https://doi.org/10.2478/disp-2018-0008
Leslie, S. J. (2015). "Hillary Clinton is the only man in the Obama administration": Dual character concepts, generics, and gender. *Analytic Philosophy*, *56*(2), 111–141. https://doi.org/10.1111/phib.12063
McDowell, J. (1981). Non-cognitivism and rule-following. In S. Holtzman & M. Leich (Eds.), *Wittgenstein: To follow a rule* (pp. 141–162). Routledge.
Neuberger, O. (1996). Relationships between colleagues. In A. Auhagen & M. von Salisch (Eds.). *The diversity of human relationships* (pp. 269–288). Cambridge University Press
Okin, S. (1989). *Justice, gender, and the family* (Vol. 171). Basic books.
Putnam, H. (2002). *The collapse of the fact/value dichotomy and other essays*. Harvard University Press.
Reamer, F. (1983). Ethical dilemmas in social work practice. *Social Work*, *28*(1), 31–35. https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/28.1.31
Reuter, K. (2019). Dual character concepts. Philosophy Compass, 14(1), e12557. https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12557
Rosch, E. (1999). Principles of categorization. In E. Margolis & S. Laurence (Eds.), *Concepts: core readings*, Chapter 8 (pp. 189–206). The MIT Press.
Seglow, J. (2013). *Defending associative duties*. 30 (4). Routledge.

US Census Bureau. (2015). *Statistics of US businesses, employment and payrollsummary: 2012*. https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/econsusb.pdf
Väyrynen, P. (2013). *The lewd, the rude and the nasty*. Oxford University Press.
Williamson, B. (1985). *Ethics and the limits of philosophy*. Harvard University Press.