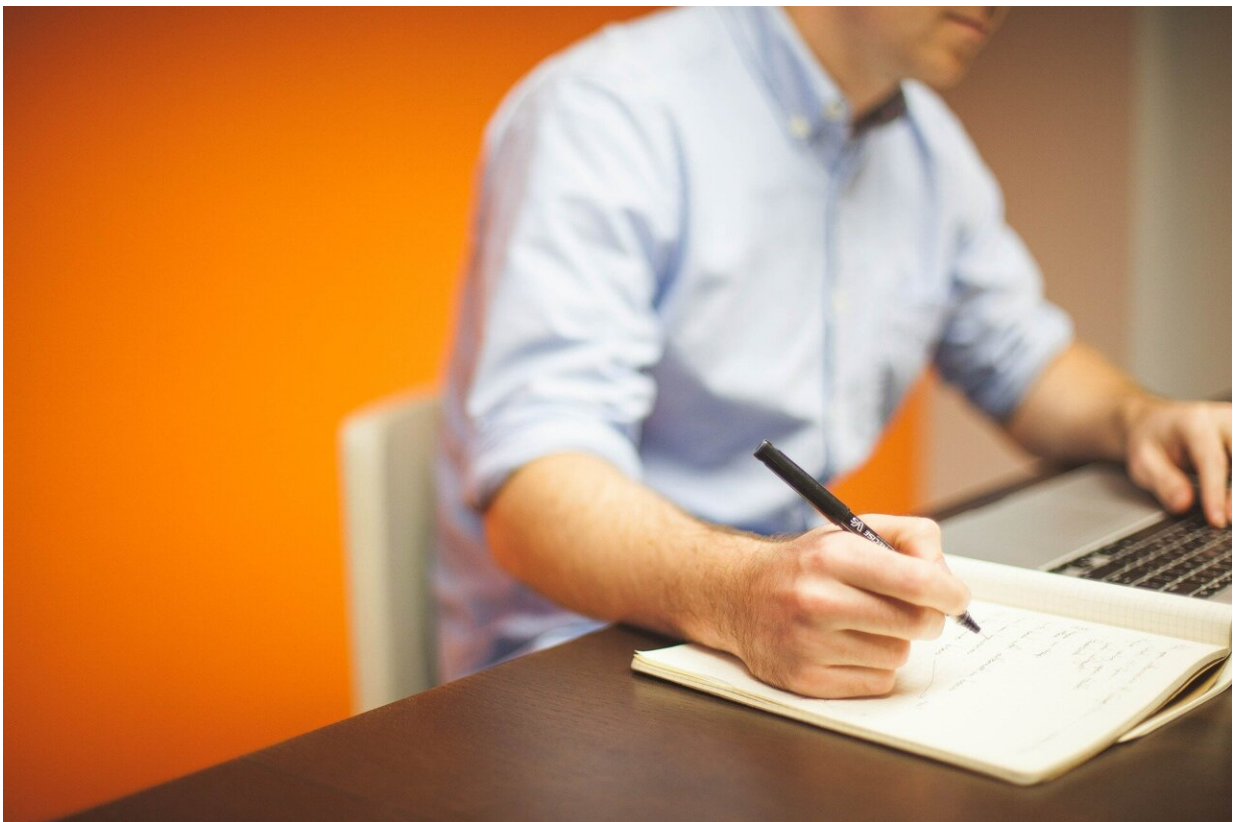


Tinder-style approach could help organisations' partnerships and projects to flourish

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The fear of being rejected and losing face can have such a big impact that companies and policy-makers could consider introducing `Tinder-

style' matching environments, according to new research from the University of Exeter Business School.

The humiliation and pain of being rejected – particularly when an individual knows the other party is aware of their interest, can cause some people to not show any interest in the first place, in order to avoid the risk. This can prevent beneficial relationships from ever getting started, even in cases where both sides actually would love to be together.

In the paper the researchers considered a solution they called 'Conditionally Anonymous Environments' (CAEs). In a CAE a third-party intermediary—which could be a human or a machine—looks through the propositions from both sides and only reveals an outcome in cases where both parties say 'yes.'

"The fear of loss of face may have a huge impact, and not only in the context of dating. If people are afraid to put themselves forward for fear of seeming needy or being rejected, then many great projects, partnerships, and endeavours will never occur. Society may be missing out on huge gains," said Dr. David Reinstein, Senior Lecturer in Economics and co-author of the research.

"What Tinder and before that speed dating have done is introduce anonymity; participants say they like someone but that person won't find out, unless they like you too.

"Conditionally Anonymous Environments could be introduced to workplace and business scenarios – for instance a Ph.D. student requesting a specific supervisor and vice-versa, to help remove the threat of embarrassment in those situations."

This research, which was carried out in collaboration with Dr. Thomas

Gall from the University of Southampton, is based on the mathematics and [game theory](#) of "matching markets." It concluded that the benefits of using CAEs would have to be weighed against the cost and complexity of introducing them.

It centred on scenarios where there are 'more desirable' and 'less undesirable' types on both sides of a market. Each person meets someone from the opposite side of the spectrum and then decides to reject or accept them based on signals reflecting how 'desirable' they are.

The research suggests that those who anticipate a high probability of being rejected, or accept their counterpart but are themselves rejected, become more reluctant to accept others in future meetings. It demonstrates how this can affect matching markets, in other words, "who benefits, who suffers, and what are the net social outcomes" when the cost of losing face increases?

Crucially, it shows that while the 'less-attractive' propositions develop an almost 'reverse snobbery' approach, by avoiding a more attractive proposition altogether for fear of rejection, the most attractive partners could end up rejecting everyone, as the potential for rejection could prove too costly.

The research suggests that there are many cases when both sides actually want to be partners but turn down the opportunity to avoid the risk of being rejected – however, with the CAE this may not occur and the [success rate](#) would substantially increase.

"If using a third party person or machine isn't practical there are ways to create a similar result," added Dr. Reinstein.

"For example, if people from a particular socio-economic background felt unsure about applying to what they see as 'high status' jobs,

employers could look to reach out to them, as already happens in some areas to help encourage more diversity."

The research, "Losing Face," is published in *Oxford Economic Papers*.

More information: Thomas Gall et al. Losing face, *Oxford Economic Papers* (2019). [DOI: 10.1093/oenp/gpz018](https://doi.org/10.1093/oenp/gpz018)

Provided by University of Exeter

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