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Gösta Ekman

(1920–1971)

Increasingly, in recent years, Swedish psychologists have offered important contributions to and illustrations of quantitative methodology. Prominent among those contributions have been those of Gösta Ekman, who died in May, 1971, following more than a year of illness.

Ekman received his Ph.D. from the University of Stockholm in 1947. He served from 1952 until 1967 as Professor and Chairman, Department of Psychology, University of Stockholm. From 1967 until his death, he was Research Professor of Psychophysics and Scaling and was Head of the Psychophysics and Scaling Unit of the Psychological Laboratories at the University of Stockholm, a unit sponsored by the Swedish Council for Social Science Research.

Professor Ekman's early research on test theory and individual differences led to reports published in Swedish of considerable influence within Scandinavia. From 1954 to 1971, his research was oriented primarily towards scaling methodology and applications of scaling to problems in perception and cognitive processes. His publications appeared in a number of American and European journals; many of his papers have appeared in edited books, and he is the author of several textbooks in Swedish. In his methodological investigations, he extended both the indirect scaling methods of Thurstone and the direct scaling methods of Stevens. In several pioneering studies, Ekman and associates successfully demonstrated systematic relations between results obtained by applying direct and indirect scaling methods. Among the experimental domains to which he applied psychological scaling procedures are color vision, visual brightness, olfaction, gustation, audition, perceived velocity, perceived time, perceived length, weight, and volume, perceived roughness and smoothness, moral judgment, conservatism, masculinity, subjective effects of alcohol, subjective effects of electrical stimulation, subjective number, subjective temporal and geographic distance, and subjective intelligence.

From his research on scaling, Ekman hypothesized for subjective stimuli an analogue to Weber's Law in psychophysics, that the size of just noticeable differences in perceived magnitude is a direct function of the magnitude of the reference subjective stimulus. Ekman's hypothesis has been verified empirically in a variety of studies.

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Several of Ekman's colleagues and students are continuing their research at the Psychophysics and Scaling Unit, University of Stockholm. It is hoped that this laboratory, founded by Ekman, will be maintained, and that it will remain the source of innovative research in psychometrics, upholding the high standards so consistently evidenced in the work of Gösta Ekman.

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