

# A Study on Gender Stereotypes: Enhancing Cross-Cultural Communication in Workplace

Dr. Smita Mayekar

Associate Professor, Hirachand Nemchand College of Commerce, Solapur (Autonomous)

**Abstract:** *In the realm of organizational dynamics, effective communication among employees of varied cultural backgrounds transcends gender and hierarchy. This article delves into the crucial yet often overlooked aspect of communication within diverse workforces, shedding light on the potential pitfalls of neglecting gender role disparities. Recognizing the adverse consequences of such oversight, ranging from confusion to bias, on overall organizational performance, this study underscores the imperative for successful organizations to foster inclusive communication practices. Given the fluid nature of gender stereotypes across societies and cultures, this paper highlights the pivotal role of cultural adaptation for organizational well-being. Through an in-depth exploration of communication patterns between genders, the research aims to pinpoint the gender-based stereotypes that hinder workplace communication. Additionally, the article proposes practical strategies to bridge the communication gap between male and female employees, facilitating harmonious interactions and reinforcing a collaborative work environment.*

**Keywords:** gender based stereotypes, seiroeht secnereffid redneg

## 1. Introduction

Communication is necessary in all aspects of human endeavour. Good communication and collaboration are essential pillars of success in personal and professional world. Needless to say, communication plays a major part in the smooth functioning of a business. All of us have different styles of communicating with other people. Our style depends on a number of factors: where we're from, how and where we were brought up, our educational background, our age, and it also can depend on our gender. Generally speaking, men and women talk differently although there are varying degrees of masculine and feminine speech characteristics in each of us.

Research indicates men and women socialize differently and consequently, have diverse styles of speaking. Men and women speak in particular ways mostly because those ways are associated with their gender.

Review of literature on research on communication of male and female gender can be grouped in two categories, academic research and popular literature. Academic research points out major differences in conversation characteristics and traits across gender, while popular research focuses on major stylistic differences in conversation styles between men and women. Popular literature also points out common pitfalls and areas of conflict due to gender differences in communication styles of men and women. In addition to differences in their communication styles, men and women also differ in the way in which they influence other individuals. Books like Deborah Tannen's (1990) *You Just Don't Understand: Men and Women in Conversation* and (1994) *Talking from 9 to 5*, Marian Woodall's (1990) *How to Talk so Men Will Listen*, and John Gray's (1992) *Women are from Venus, Men are from Mars* have immensely contributed to the recognition of gender communication. (Maccoby, 1990)

## Gender based stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are a result of nurture rather than nature as suggested by many research studies. Research on this topic in the cultural context, says that women are passive, quiet, nurturing, group-oriented, and intuitive. In contrast, male stereotypes include assertive, competitive, and logical thinking and communication. From about age three, boys and girls start interacting more frequently in gender-separate groups. These groups take on unique norms and characteristics: girl groups form more intimate friendships, show greater demonstrations of dominance (Maccoby, 1990). As they mature through their adolescence years to adulthood, males and females continue to exhibit these gender differences (Cross & Madson, 1997). Following are some general variations observed in the way men and women communicate.

- Men focus on power / rank / status. Women focus on relationships.
- Men talk to give information or report. Women talk to collect information or gain rapport.
- Men talk about things (business, sports, food). Women talk about people / relationships.
- Men focus on facts, reason and logic. Women focus on feelings, senses and meaning.
- Men thrive on competing and achieving. Women thrive on harmony and relating.
- Men "know" by analyzing and figuring out. Women "know" by intuiting.
- Men are more assertive. Women are more cooperative.
- Men tend to be focused, specific, logical. Women are holistic and organic.
- Men are at ease with order, rules and structure. Women with fluidity.
- Men immediately want to get working on a project. Women tend to ask lots of questions before beginning a project.
- Men want to think. Women want to feel.

**Theories on gender differences:**

There are many different theories about gender differences. Two of the most popular are social learning theory and the biological differences theory.

**Social learning theory** (Bandura) suggests that people are raised from birth to behave according to certain 'codes' associated with their gender. Albert Bandura (1977) says that people learn in childhood through observation, which he calls Observational learning. Structural forces (such as education systems and cultural practices) also contribute to developing gender differences. Children are surrounded by influential models, such as parents, teachers, friends, peer group members in school and society. These models provide examples of behavior to observe and imitate. They learn the feminine and masculine behavioral traits from others around them, particularly parents and other influential adults. Social learning theory is reinforced by watching kids play. Often, if little girls get hurt, they are held and comforted. In contrast, when boys get hurt, they are often told to 'shake it off' and discouraged from crying or showing weakness. These messages come from parents, teachers, and even their peers. Basically, this theory says that women are 'taught' to be nurturing, to work to make people like them, and to be self-effacing. On the other hand, men are 'taught' to be assertive and competitive. Support for social learning theory can be found in the fact that different cultures have different communication styles. For example, in America (and most Western countries), men in business communicate in an assertive and competitive style. But in Asian countries, businessmen communicate in a more self-effacing manner. This is because those cultures do not value assertiveness and independence as much as American culture does. As a result, boys are 'taught' to communicate and behave differently there than they are.

**Biological differences theory**: Biological psychology regards gender identity and role as arising from biological processes. Hormones play a huge role in gender differences and it is our DNA that dictates our behavior as men and women. The fundamental cause of our gender differences is our genetic makeup, more specifically, the DNA found in our two 23rd chromosomes - the chromosomes that dictate which sex we are. Women and men act, think and feel differently because of differences in how their brains work. These brain differences may result from chromosomal differences and may also be the result of hormonal differences. A biopsychology would argue that it is these differences in brain development, and the differences in brain activity caused by the secretion of androgens in adulthood, that cause men to behave differently from women (e.g. acting more aggressively). It is clear from a range of studies involving humans and other animals that chromosomal and hormonal differences between males and females affect a range of masculine and feminine behaviors, which supports the biological view.

**Gender differences in communication at workplace:**

The only way to have a healthy working atmosphere within an organization is to identify the differences and find ways to bridge the communication gulf between the sexes. The styles that men and women use to communicate have been described as "report talk vs. rapport talk".

Deborah Tannen (1990) *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*.

Through two quizzes an attempt has been made in this work to explore different approaches followed by male and female associates to communicate in an organization.

Tannen writes that, from childhood, boys and girls learn different approaches to language and communication. Tannen calls these different approaches "genderlects." Females engage in "rapport-talk" - a communication style meant to promote social affiliation and emotional connection, while men engage in "report-talk" — a style focused on exchanging information with little emotional import. According to Deborah Tannen, "men are more likely to engage in what is referred to, as report talk, which is primarily characterized by "focus on content". Men talk about affairs that are public matters, such as sports or politics. During report talk, men demonstrate their knowledge about a subject and will give general information about the topic".

She further says "that rapport talk, on the other hand, is designed to establish relationships and make people in relationships feel closer to each other. Women are engaged in this kind of talk more often than men. Rapport talk deals with more intimate matters than report talk hence include topics such as family and marital relationships" (Tannen 1991)

**Rapport talk is indirect style containing the following features**

- Use of Qualifiers, Succinct style
- Apologizing
- Taking Blame
- Thanks
- Maintaining an Appearance of Equality
- Downplaying Qualifications
- Considering the other Person and relationship
- Downplaying Authority

**Report talk includes the following features**

- Direct Requests
- Longer Talk at Meetings
- Ritual Fighting, Teasing, Banter
- Giving Advice to Solve Problems rather than Showing Support
- Mixing Business and Non-business talk
- Rarely Give Praise or Compliments
- Avoiding the One-down Position, Downplaying Doubts

The idea that men and women speak a different language is well-worn in regards to personal relationships, but John Gray, author of the famous relationship guide *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* says the same communication difficulties we struggle within our personal lives also play out in the office. He, along with gender intelligence specialist Barbara Annis, conducted over 100,000 interviews with male and female executives and coauthored *Work With Me* to highlight the blind spots in workplace communication that create conflict between the sexes. They argue there are innate differences between how men and women respond to situations in the workplace and understanding what they are

and why they exist can not only facilitate better communication but result in a happier and more productive working environment.

### Strategies for Bridging the Gender Communication Gap

According to Joanna L. Krotz, in *The Woman's Playbook*, women and men who work together often get tied up in communication knots, especially over issues that involve power, advocacy and managing the troops. In line with the study by Krotz strategies suggested to bridge the gender communication gap are as follows:

- **Avoid gender-reversing descriptions to communicate use gender-neutral images:** Where as men tend to be more direct. Women, for example, use tag lines, phrases like, "don't you think" following the presentation of an idea, "if you don't mind" following a demand or "this may be a crazy idea, but" preceding a suggestion. Women frequently use stories or illustrations about home or relationships. Men tend to rely on metaphors about sports or war. This sets the stage for miscommunication. Women often do not follow the touchdown analogies, while men would have trouble following home decorating stories. Don't simply use gender-reverse images to communicate. Instead, consider your audience and use gender-neutral images.
- **Borrow a bit from other's style to avoid Power struggles:** Person of the male and female gender can learn from each other. While women tend to be more cooperative focusing on relationships, men tend to be more assertive and focus on rank and status in an organization. Men can focus more on a collaborative approach. Women need to be more assertive. To jump the divide, borrow a bit from the other's style.
- **Getting to the point:** Women like to tell and hear stories, including methods of coping with distress and finding solutions, men just want to get to the point. Women push for details while men look for the big-picture message. Each gender can benefit from the other's communication style. Men need to explain their thinking and not simply jump to conclusions. Women need to get to the point in a speedier manner
- **Do not mix Facts & feelings and avoid importing personal life and professional life:** Women are generally more comfortable talking about their feelings. Men prefer to focus on the facts and skip the feelings. This can result in significant communication problems. Every type of communication has both an intellectual and an emotional element. It is important for both genders to see there are two parts at play. Make sure you're not importing a personal issue into a business environment

## 2. Conclusion

noisulcnoc nI, taht yas nac ew men and women do indeed have different communication styles. However, neither are right or wrong, era yeht just different. We need to pay close attention to gender differences so we can untangle the gender communications knots. This will not only help get the job done more efficiently, this will also create a more positive workplace atmosphere. So Venus or Mars - whichever you are - the trick is to know when your communication style is an aid to success. It is helpful to

know when your personal "default" communication style (whatever it may be) is an asset. The most effective communicators, male and female, are masters at balancing power and empathy signals, so that they come across as both confident and caring. And enlarging your repertoire of communication skills, so you can employ strategies that are most effective under various circumstances, will definitely give you an advantage.

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