

A Study of Communication with Reference to Male and Female Approaches and Perceptions

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Communication plays a very significant and crucial role in our daily lives as it helps us to express our ideas or views in front of other people thus establishing our identity as human beings. It is always important at home and professionally its significance increases when we interact with our executives, subordinates or colleagues at work place. It is very important to avoid any type of miscommunications, or improper communication at home or workplace as it could lead to conflicts and even crisis, which would consequently lead to ruining of personal relationship in case of home and degradation of personal and professional relationship as well as of overall productivity in case of workplace. The presumed biological and psychological differences between men and women have long been subject to research and investigation. With women playing an active part on the personal and professional front gender differences in communications between the opposite sexes, the intricacies of gender and how gender affects communication have become a source of interest among the researchers. Some researchers disagree on how wide the gender gap is, but they do not question its existence. But the time has come to realise the importance of gender communication as understanding how the opposite gender interacts with each other can make the world a better place to live.

Organizational communication is an indispensable part of any business, be it a small scale business, a retail shop or a huge corporate house. Various departments of an organization communicate among themselves through different mediums; either verbally or non-verbally. When male counterparts are late and rarely offer any input women never hesitate complain to the superiors. Women focus on feelings while Men focus on facts they directly convey the concrete realities of the situation and remain objective. They consider the feelings irrelevant in the workplace, so they become confused and/or frustrated when a woman airs grievances that have emotional foundations. When a new assignment is explained to a mixed group a woman asks several questions to clarify the purpose of the project and make sure she understands the tasks. On the other hand a male after hearing the explanation nods and the meeting continues. "Women ask questions to gather information," says **Krotz**. "It's how they attack problems and come up with solutions."¹ She asks questions because she feels it would improve her performance on the job and prevent communication problems from arising down the line. Men, on the other hand, talk to give information. So rather than thinking aloud and sharing nascent ideas, they think to themselves until they reach a more developed plan of

action. Men view questions as a sign of weakness and assume the questioning co-worker to be incompetent. On the other hand, "women assume that men know exactly what they're doing because they don't ask questions,"² Krotz states.

Earlier women used to be much more quiet and passive in the workplace due to the relatively small number of female employees in comparison to males. But the present scenario has entrusted women dual task of raising a family and creating their niche in the professional world. In fact the potential for gender communication gaps are widest in those organizations where one gender takes up most of the senior executive positions. For years, male stock brokers have been selling mostly to other males - their comfort zone. Another example is the healthcare industry where female nurses and gynaecologists are ruling the scene. As the face of business transforms with more women occupying key management positions, the requirement of reducing the gender communication gap is growing: miscommunication can cost money, opportunities, and jobs.

When men communicate they communicate to report facts and in short phases with little or almost negligible. Women, on the other hand, will communicate to build lots of rapport and a lot of details. **Dr. Deborah Tannen**, believes that men communicate primarily for status, and women for human connection. She writes; "We expect differences when we talk to people who come from different countries...but we don't expect romantic partners...to understand words differently and have different views of the world. But they often do".³ The way in which men and women perceive the message the other is sending is a result of these differences. When a man and a woman become involved in a romantic relationship, they begin to learn a lot more about each other through non-verbal communication. Men and women, in general, communicate in different ways and for different purposes. Being able to see things from the perspective of the other person allows one to understand the role of the receiver in the communication process.

Working women in India are facing a lot more challenges than their counterparts in the other parts of the world. In India men do not share of most of the household chores, it is women who have to cook, clean the house, do the dishes, wash clothes, get their children ready for school etc. Man just took care of a few chores that are to be dealt outside the house. So the major burden of running the family is on the shoulders of women. It was alright for women to handle all the chores as long as they were homemakers. Now with their increasing need for getting some income for the family, they have to work all the more harder. They have to take up a 9 to 5 job plus handle all the household chores that they handled as a homemaker. Women have developed dual personas; one for the home and one for the workplace whereas men's role has not changed much.

On the home front she deals with the stress of handling communication problems, be it with her husband, children and in-laws. She is the one who is the communication link between the different members of the family. Men of a family usually have an autocratic attitude they always want to be listened and not to be questioned. Their lack of patience either breaks down the communication link or creates misunderstanding. If there's a problem, men think about it. For women, it isn't enough to just think about the problem on their own. They need to articulate their thoughts without even necessarily wanting solutions. They want to discuss it and have someone lend an ear and their time to them. Men want solutions. They like to fix problems and not just discuss them. So when you're talking to a man, you can expect some sort of solution, even if all you intended was simply to be heard.

Men rarely ask questions. Even if they do, it's usually to gather information. If someone asks too many questions they get annoyed. Women ask questions more frequently, but for two purposes - to gather information and to cultivate the relationship. That's why women sometimes ask questions they know the answer to, such as, "*So you're back from vacation?*" or "*So you're taking your lunch?*"

The formal and informal conversation takes place among mixed-sex at different professional and personal levels. The differences between Men and Women are evident in the way they handle the same situation in many ways. When in a business meeting a mixed sex group discusses an effective approach for their latest project the interaction between the male members becomes noticeably heated while the women participants immediately wish to calm the dispute and become uncomfortable during the exchange. Women's thought process works like a web: everything is interconnected. So when it comes to a project, the people and the process are just as important as the end result. Men, on the other hand, are more task-oriented and fixated on the end result; the process is less important to them as long as the result is adequate, for them heated discussion had nothing to do with their relationship. It was merely a way for them to reach a conclusion. Men become annoyed with women's tendency to discuss everything related to a project as a means of finding a solution. On the other side, women become very concerned when co-workers clash.

Women communicate on the basis of their emotional link; they enjoy talking about their family and personal preferences. If they don't like someone they will not like interacting with that person. Men can work with people they don't like. Women generally can't. This is because men can compartmentalize - work is work. But women naturally make associations. Relationship building is not important for men while for women working environment is directly related to interpersonal network within the organization. If a man wants to express his feelings, he'll talk to his wife or girlfriend. Women are willing to talk to more than just close friends about their feelings - co-workers, hairdressers, doctors, neighbour, maid etc. Men communicate to share information, not necessarily to establish a relationship. Women like to share the how, why and where details and the feelings and emotions whereas a man avoids those extra details typically.

“Men and women also take different approaches when it comes to talking about problems with others. When someone tells a man about his/her problems, he/she can expect a response that is fairly straightforward as he dishes out his advice. Some men respond to talk about problems by being dismissive and downplaying how serious the issue maybe.”⁴When women discuss someone's problems, they are likely to try to connect with the other person and demonstrate their understanding. For example, when someone tells a woman about his problems, she may respond by discussing a similar problem she is going through to show solidarity. In other circumstances, men's talk is characterized by being quite bold and in some cases it can be perceived as rude, according to DeVito, “when men give an order, for example, they will explicitly tell someone to do something. On the other hand, women use more indirect speech in these cases and their orders can be so watered down that they sound like suggestions rather than directives. For example, a man who is talking to an employee may say “*get me some coffee*” while a woman in the same situation may say “*it would be great if you could get some coffee for me*”.”⁵

Men tend to be more hierarchical and include only the people closest to them at their level in the decision making process when they think it is essential. Men sometimes engage in conflicts and disagreements for the fun of it, sometimes to jockey for power. Regardless of the reason, they feel more comfortable with the conflicts. Women, however, tend to feel uneasy with conflicts and avoid them. Consensus decision making style is considered a female style she asks others for their views and ideas as she does not want environment to get resentful.

When it is the matter of decision of making men tend to argue more and find it interesting to disagree. Women more often seek agreement and see disagreement as more threatening to relationships. Let's look at an example from the workplace. When a male suggests a risky action the fellow male team members feel comfortable directly refusing the action while a female member might respond with “*I think we need more time to explore further*”. Because

women are more relationship oriented, they tend to lead by consensus. Men tend to make unilateral decisions and are more comfortable giving and taking orders (from higher level males, in particular). Women tend to seek input and consensus and are more comfortable with giving and taking suggestions from men and women. When women say, "*Do you think we should do this?*" This sends confusing signals. Women will hear this statement as asking for input and taking suggestions. Men, however, will hear this as wishy-washy and wonder if the speaker lacks confidence. Men usually don't feel it necessary to check with others before deciding and taking action. Women, on the other hand, usually expect to be consulted about decisions and changes and may take it as an affront if not. Women tend to be more relationship oriented and accomplish tasks by building relationships first. They then know whom to ask and are comfortable asking others to get things done. Men tend to be more tasks oriented and go straight to the task. They build their relationships when they are in the task or project.

Men communicate to share information, not necessarily to establish a relationship. A conversation with a man might not always be as satisfying as a conversation with a girlfriend. Men keep their 'information sharing' to a minimum. They get to the point, state it and are usually done. Women like to share the how, why and where details and the feelings and emotions whereas a man avoids those extra details typically.

Men tend to be more direct, while women give orders using softened demands and tag lines. Women are naturally disposed to maintain harmony, so they will follow up a demand with something like, "*If you don't mind*". When a woman says, "Would you mind possibly moving your car?", she is polite and considerate and when a man says "*I'd like you to file this correspondence for me*" or "*I want you to finish this by tomorrow*" he is blunt and direct. Men can be more direct and blunt when giving feedback about anything, whereas women tend to use more tact and sensitivity. Men respond to the idea and not the person - it's not a personal attack but a female take a blunt response as a personal attack.

Three communication strengths for females:

- Ability to read body language and pick up nonverbal cues.
- Good listening skills.
- Effective display of empathy.

Three communication weaknesses for females:

- Overly emotional.
- Meandering - won't get to the point.
- Not authoritative.

Three communication strengths for males:

- Physical presence.
- Direct and to-the-point interactions.
- Body language signals of power.

Three communication weaknesses for males:

- Overly blunt and direct.
- Insensitive to audience reactions.
- Too confident in own opinion.

"Communication between men and women can be like cross cultural communication, prey to a clash of conversational styles."⁶ This is due, at least in part, to differences in the way men and women generally look at the world. Therefore, it is no coincidence that women see talk as the essence of a relationship while men use talk to exert control, preserve independence, and enhance status. The ways in which concepts of social relationships differ between genders are parallel to gender differences. Culture and the way an individual has been brought up also affect gender communication. As children in India boys and girls are usually

segregated at different stages of their lives. Boys tend to play with other boys, and generally choose the same to be their primary companions; the same is also true of girls. As a result, the communication skills they develop, as children, are primarily geared toward communication with those of the same gender. Therefore the course of gender communication is not a simple, because it goes against everything that one has learned through experience in same-gender communication.

Hygiene and grooming, eating habits and attire can vary from country to country and culture to culture. For example, some women may wear revealing attire or overload themselves with jewellery such women can prove a distraction to men; they become glamorous dolls pretty to look at but a hurdle to smooth flow of communication. On the other hand a shabbily dressed woman or man can also impede communication for nobody wants to talk to a rag. Many men and women have certain eating habits, they use spices in their diets or if they have a tendency to sweat a lot as a result their body perspire a lot. Their body emits a repulsive odour which is interpreted as dirty or unhygienic.

The ability to understand and use nonverbal communication is a powerful tool as it helps to connect with others, express what you really mean, navigate challenging situations, and build better relationships at home and work. Women have an innate aptitude to read nonverbal signals, as mothers, wives or sisters they observe their male counterparts and can analysis their mood swings and tacit messages by monitoring their body language. On the work front in many countries, women are subordinate to men. When women of such countries work in European business houses or multinationals, they may feel they should defer to their male counterparts or should not speak to or even look directly in the eyes of their male supervisors, managers or co-workers. When men innocently try to interact with them in the workplace, such women can feel uncomfortable or violated in some way. In contrast, males with such cultural backgrounds may not adapt well to working equally with females or having female supervisors, thus these differences need to be respected and not to be ignored. People from some cultures do not feel comfortable shaking hands. An American worker or manager may view this as a lack of respect or ignorance. When men and women communicate at workplace posture, gesture and eye contact contribute a lot to the flow of communication .The way a man sits or stands in front of a woman or vice versa becomes significant for workplace communication.

Through recent research we have learned that gender differences in communication are not something that we are born with, they're not due to differences in brain matter and they are definitely not due to the two sexes being from different planets. We are who we are and we communicate how we communicate because it is what society and culture demand from out of us. While much has been said about women and men being from different planets and having their own cultures, the reality is that we have all grown up on the same planet, and interact with each other in different ways on a daily basis.

Works Cited:

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