

COMMUNICATION IN GENDER DIVERSE GROUPS

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Abstract

The world's increasing globalization lead to increasing diversity of workforce. Furthermore, as managers explored new ways to improve business results and profitability, they found team based work a possibility to create a competitive advantage. Nowadays, it is obvious that diverse workforce and team based work are the new trends in profit and non profit organizations. The new trends, brought communication to a next level, as managers and employees think that communication is an important tool of their work. Diversity includes a wide range of facets: gender, race, ethnic, religion, socio-economic status, and ability. In this article we will focus on gender diversity in groups and its influence on group communication. The main goal of the present article, consist in identifying the communication barriers that appear in gender diverse groups. Strategies to improve communication in gender diverse groups are also discussed.

Keywords: *communication, gender diversity, teams, workplace.*

INTRODUCTION

Groups in profit and non – profit organizations have become increasingly diverse over the years due to the continuous globalization process (Knippenberg & Shippers, 2007; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Further more, changes such as women emancipation, gender reversal on career aspiration and gender convergence (Golding, 2014), brought men and women together in many types of working contexts and industries. However, there is little understanding of the advantages and benefits to organizations of fostering this type of diversity, other than satisfying demands for equal employment opportunities, social enrichment and increased morale of minorities (Fenwick & Neale, 2001, p. 206). Some evidence indicates that increased gender diversity may enhance performance and enrich management (Rigg & Sparrow, 1994;

Kochan & colab, 2003; Naqvi & colab, 2013, Lee & Farh, 2004), while others indicate that gender mixed groups may be disadvantageous as they are associated with poor communication, conflict and less work satisfaction (Maznevsky, 1994). There is a diverse body of research that focused on gender differences with regard at organizational behavior (Sandelands, 2002, Heilman & Chen, 2005) and on organizational communication (Spaho, 2011; Yates & Orlikowski 1992). The present article will focused on gender communication differences, communication barriers that appear in communication in gender diverse group and on strategies to improve communication in gender diverse groups.

DO MEN AND WOMEN COMMUNICATE THE SAME?

Before answering the question we proposed for the main part of the article: "Do men and women communicate the same?" we will present the definition of communication used in this article. Small group communication refers to interaction among three or more people who are connected through a common purpose, mutual differences, and a shared identity (Fiske, 2002, p.9). Literature concerning communication and gender is sparse with mixed results. While some studies emphasize the important impact of gender differences on group communication, others indicate that gender may not be as critical as may be assumed (Satyanarayana & Chaganti, 2011). In order to identify barriers that appear in communication in gender diverse groups we analyzed eight empirical studies that researched the impact of gender diverse groups on mixed group communication (table 1).

Table 1 Studies review

Author(s)	Study purpose	Results
Stevens, Lehmann, Cooper & Whitehouse (2008)	To analyze the differences in communication between men and woman	Results shows that women asked more question than man and used fewer declarative statements. Men rain dominant and direct in their speech patterns while women use indirect communication. Women appear less conflict, ask more questions, and are less direct than man.
Smith & Dykann (2010)	To explore whether there are gender differences with regard to the use of direct and assertive language.	Results showed that there is equality in language styles: men are not more direct than women.
Myaskovisky, Unikel & Dew (2005)	To examine the separate and combined impact of gender composition on interpersonal behaviors exhibited in small groups.	Results indicated that gender moderated the effect of solo status on the amount of talking in the groups. Solo women were less talkative than women in the majority, whereas solo mean were more talkative than men in majority. Men fare better as solo groups members than do women..
Wheelan & Verdi (1992)	To investigate the types of verbal contributions made by man and woman, over time, in mixed groups.	Results report that men are more task - oriented and women are more maintenance - oriented in group discussion in a 30-60 minutes session. However, after this period, no clear pattern is evident between the genders and no significant differences.
Herring (1993)	To explore men and women communication styles in computer - mediated communication	Results revealed that men's posting to the news - groups showed sarcasm, insults, self-promotion and strong assertions, whereas women's messages showed supportiveness and personal orientation.
Leaper (1991)	To explore boys and girls communication patterns	Girls' and boys' communication patterns were more similar than different.
Basow & Rubenfeld (2003)	To explore gender and gender-typing communication styles;	Results showed that women are, overall, more expressive, tentative, and polite in conversation, while men are more assertive, and power-hungry.
Tannen (1990)	To analyze men and women conversational styles	Men and women differ in communication styles.

CONCLUSION

Research affirms that men and women differ psychologically from the way they perceive and understand organizational reality to the way they use communication (Rao, 1984; Baslow & Rubenfeld, 2003). The studies reviewed showed that communication differences consist in different communication styles (numbers of question asked, politeness, speech assertiveness, task - relationship orientation, etc.). When working together, the differences in communication style result in group conflict and communication misunderstandings. On the other hand, gender diverse groups can bring innovative and creative ideas to organizations. In order to benefit from gender diversity in working groups managers and human resources professional need strategies to transform the communication barriers that appear in gender mixed groups into advantageous intergroup communication tools.

Approaching gender diversity as an advantage means allowing different communication styles to exist simultaneous. To benefit from these differences, group members need, first, to better understand their communication style and, second, to better understand the communication styles of the people working with. Team members need to become aware of the each other's strength and the way it can enhance team performance. Training programs that focus on communication styles can be a way to find out the benefits and strength of gender diverse groups and the way communication can be used as a tool that creates better gender understanding and higher performance. Also, managers and human resources professional should pay much more attention to barriers in communication when creating gender diverse group for performing task.

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