

A Study on Gender Differences in Workplace Communication across Organizations

Dr Kabita Kumari Dash¹, Dr Susanta Kumar Dash² and Dr Swayamprabha Satpathy³

¹Assistant Professor, Srusti Academy of Management, Bhubaneswar. Corresponding author.

Email: vahi.Kabita@gmail.com

²Professor, Odisha University of Agriculture & Technology, Bhubaneswar

³Associate Professor, Shiksha "O" Anusandhan University, Bhubaneswar.

Email: swayamsatpathy@soa.ac.in

ABSTRACT

Communication is an important aspect of human existence. It has a huge impact on the functioning of any organization. Organizations progress if there is close and greater coordination among both genders. The present study was conducted at Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Odisha. Socio-academic data on 120 employees of three different types of organizations, viz. Government, NGO and Corporate, taken at random were included in the present study. This is an empirical study on gender differences and their effect on workplace communication in various organizations. The objectives of this study are to find out the gender differences in communication in different workplaces and analyze the effects of socio-academic factors like age, qualification and experience on gender-related communication. The study findings depict qualification and gender was found to be dependent across the organizations with a χ^2 estimate of 8.542. More employees were found to be engaged under moderate qualifications from both genders. The age and experience of employees were revealed to be independent of the gender of employees in the present study. The distribution of males recorded significant dependency of age and organization with χ^2 value of 20.081 revealing a higher frequency of higher age group employees in government and non-government institutions in comparison to corporate. Both the new entrants and highly experienced females had lower communication abilities than their male counterparts. However, in the middle part of employment, the females showed an edge over males with regard to this variable. Females in the age group of 31 to 40 years recorded significantly better organizational communication than their male counterparts.

Keywords: Gender difference, Workplace, Communication, Organization, Socio-academic data

Introduction

People often do things that make sense to them. Both men and women try doing the right thing, but by different sets of rules. It is merely not about right or wrong or good or bad. It is simply about the difference. We also see gender differences in communication, attitude, emotional intelligence and leadership styles between men and women, which can have a profound impact on one's career advancement. By having an understanding of these differences in the workplace



This Open Access article is published under a Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. For citation use the DOI. For commercial re-use, please contact editor@rupkatha.com.

and understanding the intent of both the genders, it may make a significant impact on the success as a trainer, as well as the organization's ability to manage the inherent talent in its employees, which may be possible by just modulating the training with regard to the ability of the employees.

Men and women live in different cultures. It starts at birth and is carried forward into adulthood. Let's take a look at how children play. Boys play games centred on conflict and competition and try to be the winner by any means. In these games, boys learn how to win and lose, get to the goal, take risks and play with people, usually, they do not like. In contrast, girls play games centred around relationships and with no conflict. In these games, girls learn how to negotiate, avoid conflict and share happiness with an even distribution of power. As adults, we carry these lessons into the workplace in the way we work within a structure, the way we hold meetings, the way we work in teams, the way we talk and even in the way that we lead others and communicate.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To assess the existence of gender differences in communication in the workplace
- To examine the effects of socio-academic factors like age, qualification and experience on gender in workplace communication

Literature Review

Extensive literature review on studies related to gender and communication in various organizations have been conducted to know the impact as well as the effectiveness of gender-related communication in the workplace.

Stolyarchuk *et. al* (2019) discusses specific communication related to gender in the workplace. The study gives a valuable insight on various types of gender differences due to our patriarchal society and traditional thinking and reveals various conditions which support effective gender communication in the workplace based on gender equality by breaking the stereotypes of psychology related to attitude and communication in society.

Hearn (2019) focuses on the relationship that exists between gender and the working environment in the organization. According to him sometimes working environment, technological changes and innovations, the introduction of artificial intelligence and robotics may bring inequalities in the field of communication, attitude and income of both genders inside the organization by affecting the economy worldwide.

Catalino (2019) opines that there is no surprise if men and women experience their work differently, rather it is quite natural on their part to follow the trend. The most important thing is, organizations should take initiatives for this by widening their vision on leadership, encouraging acceptance, and initiating more self-introspection for a gender balance culture inside the organization.

Kalev (2018) suggests that modern workplaces should be designed in such a way that both genders would work in harmony with each other. It should try to reduce gender inequalities in the

organization as well as in society. The focus should be more on developing an institutional mechanism for reducing this gender gap and promoting a peaceful and gender-friendly working environment where women can act as catalysts of organisational change and development.

The idea that women and men have different communication styles have become the theme of many best-selling books on gender differences such as the book written by Gray (1992) titled "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus". This book argues that there are significant and consistent differences in communication styles between men and women, expressing the notion of gender differences and propagating stereotypes. Tannen (1990) declares that scholars and individuals must acknowledge that men and women communicate differently. Gray (1992) may have taken Tannen's propositions further by declaring that men and women not only communicate differently, but they have so little in common as to be from completely different planets-struggling to comprehend one another. An important justification for this research is that Gray (1992) himself never claims to have conducted any scientific research and his pronouncements are based purely on his theory and not supported by empirical research of Wood et al., (1998). We also feel that there is a difference in communication between two genders, irrespective of the type of organization and position of the individual in the workplace.

Women are mostly indirect in their communication. They often use tagged phrases like "don't you think" before the presentation of an idea, "if you don't mind" following demand or "this may be a silly idea, but" preceding a submission or suggestion. Several studies showed that women tend to soften their demands and statements, whereas men tend to be more direct according to Coates (1989), Tannen (1990), Spender (1980) and Case (1994).

Gray (1992) states women mostly talk about their problems to connect with others. They normally don't seek a solution to their problems. Men on the other hand, often try to solve their problems on their own and if they are not able to, they will discuss their problems with others anticipating solutions to be given. The problem arises if women talk about their problems to men and men offering solutions when the women only want to have an emotional connection and not anything other than that. Similarly, problems occur when men talk to women about their problems expecting solutions, instead, only get emotional support from the women.

Dash & Dash (2018) opines that in workplaces, men appear to be very direct in communication and come to the point very quickly. In group meetings, they are often the first to speak and do not hesitate to share their opinions or ideas. In contrast, women are shy in group communication and they may either be silent or find a female colleague to chat with. Usually, they never start the proceedings. Women mostly prefer to converse in a more roundabout way and refer to matters indirectly. Men are also not hesitant to use abusive terms and harsh language when they speak with their friends and colleagues, even about office matters. On the other hand, women tend to use cleaner language. They usually keep their tone quite polite while speaking with others.

According to Mosakowski and Earley (2000), males are often not good listeners. Men have short attention spans and do not take much interest in listening to others. They get bored easily and do not hesitate to do other things like sending texts or emails with their mobiles, while someone else is speaking, even on a very important matter. In contrast, women tend to give their total attention while listening to others and show interest in what others are saying. Tending to keep eye contact when listening and acknowledge what is being said is a general characteristic in women.

Within culturally and gender-sensitive uniform teams, the people interact with each other in different ways. All the members have common agenda to share, common understanding and consensus over any issue, strong unity and bond with each other, with a common perception process.

Gibson (2002) expresses his view on the importance of communication for human existence. In many organisations' employees of different genders work in a team or group, at home or organisation etc and meet the targets within stipulated periods. Organisations maintain such flexibility for more productive output from different genders. Communication in a culturally diversified work environment is a part of organisation policy and very essential for the development and growth of organisations.

According to Ceglarska *et al.* (2008), globalisation affects employee behaviour, communication and attitude in a diversified work environment. Nowadays, organisations consist of employees from different cultures, gender, knowledge and intellect contributing as a whole towards organisational development. Sometimes diversity in genders initiates communication in a negative way and diversity in different cultures may result in a positive way of communication.

Leaper (1991) in his study says men and women behave differently in different situations because of their gender roles. Both of them also have different styles of communication. Research says women feel communication to be most important to maintain social lives and creation of relations unlike men in societies who exercise dominated behaviour to influence others.

Studies of Basow and Rubenfield (2003) examine the conversation process of women in the workplace and find women to be more open, meek, submissive and gracious in their interaction process, whereas men are more forceful, confident, and sometimes exercise power.

As per the research of Chodorow (1978), both men and women also differ in their relations. Women try hard to be more social in their communication with others, while men value their autonomy.

Dash *et al.* (2018) opine that gender has no significant effect on the communication and attitude of employees across organizations like government, non-government and corporates. Both genders understand the working procedures of the organizations well and work towards meeting the organizations' goals and objectives.

Wood (1987) reports that gender-balanced groups have more positive interaction including communication and conflict reduction, compared to both predominantly male and predominantly female teams.

Stringer (1995) elaborates on the importance of gender balance inside the workplace and how gender-balanced teams are more consensus-seeking, which could improve communication within groups and reduce the conflict.

Keeping the above findings and statements in the backdrop, the present study is aimed at assessing gender differences in work-related communication concerning other social factors across different organizations.

Materials and Method

The present study was conducted at Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Odisha. Socio-academic data on 120 employees (72 males and 48 females) of three different types of organizations, viz. Government, NGO and Corporate, taken at random were included in the present study.

Data on communication were collected directly from the respondents through a scheduled questionnaire having 16 questions with close-ended multiple-choice answers and further grouped according to age, gender, qualification, experience as employee and type of their organization. The highest and the lowest scores concerning work-related communication through the questionnaire were estimated at 32 and 16, respectively. Subjects with scores ranging from 16 to 21, 22 to 27 and 28 to 32 were grouped as low, medium and high with regard to work-related communication. The age of respondents was operationalized based on the number of years completed as on the date of interview as expressed by them. The respondents were categorized into the following three categories on the basis of their distribution over the age categories. A1 for the age group ≤ 30 , A2 (31 to 40), A3 (41 to 50) and A4 was assigned for the age group of ≥ 51 years. Gender was categorized as G1 for males and G2 for females. Qualification was taken as Q1 (up to graduation), Q2 (post-graduation), Q3 (graduate with technical background) and Q4 (Management/Ph.D.), irrespective of discipline of study. The experience was grouped as E1 for the experience of ≤ 5 years, E2 for 6 to 10, E3 for 11 to 15 and E4 for > 15 years of job. More than 6 months' period was taken as a full year of experience. The organization was categorized as O1, O2 and O3 for government, NGO and corporate, respectively. The different tests used for this study are the Chi-Square Test and the Frequency distribution of employees over age, gender, qualification and experience.

Results and Discussion

Gender wise distribution of employees/respondents under different organizations is presented in Table 1. Coincidentally total employees (120) were distributed equally under three types of organizations. Out of a total of 120 employees, 72 males and 48 females were taken as samples for the study. Qualification and gender were found to be dependent through the organizations with an χ^2 estimate of 8.542. Furthermore, employees were found to be engaged under moderate qualifications from both genders. Age and experience of employees were revealed to be independent of the gender of employees in the present study.

Table 1. Gender wise distribution of employees for other social and academic factors.

Factors	Variables	Male	Female	Total	χ^2
Organization	Government	26(65.0)	14(35.0)	40(100.0)	1.250
	NGO	26(65.0)	14(35.0)	40(100.0)	
	Corporate	20(50.0)	20(50.0)	40(100.0)	

Qualification	Q1	14(87.5)	2(12.5)	16(100.0)	8.542*
	Q2	46(54.8)	38(45.2)%	84(100.0)	
	Q3	10(71.4)	4(28.6)	14(100.0)	
	Q4	2(33.3)	4(66.7)	6(100.0)	
Age	A1	14(46.7)	18(53.3)	32(100.0)	4.271
	A2	18(56.2)	14(43.8)	32(100.0)	
	A3	16(61.5)	10(38.5)	26(100.0)	
	A4	24(75.0)	8(25.0)	32(100.0)	
Experience	E1	8(50.0)	8(50.0)	16(100.0)	4.189
	E2	14(50.0)	14(50.0)	28(100.0)	
	E3	20(52.6)	18(47.4)	38(100.0)	
	E4	30(78.9)	8(21.1)	38(100.0)	

Fig- 1 showing Estimated Marginal Means of Communication

Graphical presentation of gender-wise mean communication of employees under three different organizations is made in Fig- 1 above, presenting the fact that, females in corporate sectors were more communicative than their male counterparts, unlike the other two sectors. Further, the females in the corporate sector were the best followed by NGO and government organizations with regard to organizational communication.

Gender and age-wise distribution of employees/respondents under three organizations is presented in Table 2. The distribution of males recorded significant dependency of age and organization with χ^2 value of 20.081 revealing a higher frequency of higher age group employees in government and non-government institutions in comparison to corporate.

Table 2. Frequency distribution of employees over gender*organization*age of the employee.

Gender	Factor	Variables	A1	A2	A3	A4	Total	χ^2
Male	Organization	Government	2(7.7)	8(30.8)	4(15.4)	12(46.2)	26(100.0)	20.081**
		NGO	2(7.7)	6(23.1)	8(30.8)	10(38.5)	26(100.0)	

		Corporate	10(50.0)	4(20.0)	4(20.0)	2(10.0)	20(100.0)	
Female	Organization	Government	6(42.9)	2(14.3)	4(28.6)	2(14.3)	14(100.0)	9.348
		NGO	4(28.6)	2(14.3)	4(28.6)	4(28.6)	14(100.0)	
		Corporate	6(30.0)	10(50.0)	2(10.0)	2(10.0)	20(100.0)	

Fig- 2 showing Estimated Marginal Means of Communication

Graphical presentation of gender-wise mean communication of employees under three different organizations is made in Fig 2, presenting the results obtained in the present study that, as a whole, very young and old females as employees were less communicative than their male counterparts. This may be attributed to the logic that, younger girls showed shyness in the working place and family burden at fag end of employment forced the females to inhibition. However, females under the age group of 31 to 40 years recorded significantly better organizational communication than their male counterparts.

Gender and qualification wise distribution of respondents under three organizations is presented in Table 3. The distribution of males recorded a highly significant dependency of qualification and organization with an χ^2 value of 35.673 revealing a higher frequency of higher qualified employees in government and lower to moderately qualified employees in the corporate sector.

Table 3. Frequency distribution of employees over gender*organization*qualification of the employee.

Gender	Factor	Variables	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total	χ^2
Male	Organization	Government	8(30.8)	8(30.8)	10(38.5)	0(0.0)	26(100.0)	35.673**
		NGO	6(23.1)	18(69.2)	0(0.0)	2(7.7)	26(100.0)	
		Corporate	0(0.0)	20(100.0)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	20(100.0)	
Female	Organization	Government	0(0.0)	10(71.4)	2(14.3)	2(14.3)	14(100.0)	8.698
		NGO	2(14.3)	12(85.7)	0(0.0)	0(0.0)	14(100.0)	
		Corporate	0(0.0)	16(80.0)	2(10.0)	2(10.0)	20(100.0)	

*Significant difference between gender with organization and qualification

** Highly significant dependency of qualification and organization with χ^2 value of 35.673

Fig-3 & 4 showing Estimated Marginal Means of Communication

Graphical presentation of gender-wise mean communication of employees under three different organizations across age groups is made in Fig 3 above, reveals that, except low qualified persons, almost all male employees had a little edge over the female counterparts with regard to organizational communication.

Graphical presentation of gender-wise mean communication of employees under three different organizations across working experience is made in Fig 4 above, depicts that, both the new entrants and highly experienced females had lower communication ability than their male counterparts. However, in the middle part of employment, the females showed an edge over males with regard to this variable, which is in agreement with the findings of Dash and Dash (2018).

Conclusion

The style of communication and way of expressing one's emotion in the workplace is significant from an organizational perspective. Women tend to follow the processes whereas men believe in a product-driven approach in their communication style. Therefore, it is very important to have gender-friendly environments to achieve the desired goal in an organization. Effective gender communication in all workplaces can enhance the productivity of employees, develop a cordial working relationship and result in achieving greater heights.

The present study depicts qualification and gender to be dependent across the organizations with an χ^2 estimate of 8.542. More employees are found to be engaged under moderate qualifications from both genders. The age and experience of employees are revealed to be independent of the gender of employees in the present study. Newly joined females interact less in the organization but middle-aged females show greater interaction with their male counterparts.

The study was limited to only three different organizations but other organizations can also be taken like academic institutions, hospitality sector for a better understanding of gender communication and its impact on organizational development. Gender being a cross-cutting issue in almost all aspects of organizational climate also need to be studied well. Better understanding between the genders in the working environment can yield better output and help in establishing a harmonious relationship inside the organization without any communication barrier. Priorities should be given and equal efforts should be made by both genders for sharing ideas, innovations, bringing out excellence and contributing wholeheartedly towards meeting the organization goals.

References

- Basow, S. A. and Rubenfeld, K. (2003). Troubles talk: Effects of gender and gender typing. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 48(3-4). <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1022411623948>.
- Case, S. (1994). Gender differences in communications and behaviour in organisations. In M. J. Davidson, & R. J. Burke (Eds.), *Women in Management: Current Research Issues* (pp. 144–163). London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Ceglarska, E., Kai Chen, Lei Li, (2008). Dissertation paper on How does Culture and Gender Diversity Impact Communication in Project Teams submitted in Kristianstad University
- Coates, J. (1989). Women's speech, women's strength? *York Papers in Linguistics*, 13, 65–76.
- Catalino, N. (2019) Article on When women lead, workplace should listen, Mckinsey Quarterly <https://www.mckinsey.com/our-people/natacha-catalino>
- Dash, K., Satpathy, S. and Dash, S. K. (2018). Studies on Socio-Academic Factors Influencing Communication and Attitude of Employees in the Organization. *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, 9(II):223-231
- Dash, K and Dash. S. K. (2018). Influence of age, sex, qualification and experience on perception of employees on communication and attitude in Organizations. *Research Journal of Social & Life Sciences*, XXV: 20-29
- Dash *et al.* (Kabita Dash, Swayam Prabha Satpathy, Susanta Kumar Dash) (2018). Socio-Academic Diversity in Organizations Vis-A-Vis Organizational Communication and Attitude of Employees. *Asian Journal of Research in Business Economics and Management*, 8(10):1-8.
- Gibson, R. (2002). *International Business Communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gray, J. (1992). *Men are from Mars and women are from Venus: A practical guide for improving communication and getting what you want in your relationship*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Hearn, J. (2019) Gender, Work and Organization: A gender–work–organization analysis <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12331>
- Kalev, A and Deutsch, G. (2018) Gender Inequality and Workplace Organizations: Understanding Reproduction and Change. Springer International Publishing
- Leaper, C. (1991). Influence and involvement in Children's discourse: Age, gender, and partner effects. *Child Development*, 62: 797-811.
- LI Stolyarchuk *et. al.* (LI Stolyarchuk, I A Stolyarchuk, V I Chumakov) (2019): IOP Conf. Series: *Materials Science and Engineering* 483, doi:10.1088/1757-899X/483/1/012063
- Mosakowski, E. and Earley, P.C. (2000). A Selective Review of Time Assumptions in Strategy Research. *Academy of Management Review*, 25: 796-812.
- Spender, D. (1980). *Man-Made Language*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Stringer, D.M. (1995). The role of women in workplace diversity consulting. *Journal of Organizational Change*. 1: 44-51.
- Tannen, D. (1990). *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. New York: William Morrow.

Wood, W. (1987). Meta-analytic review of sex differences in group performance. *Psychological Bulletin*, 102: 53-71.

Wood, W. and Dindia, K. (1998). *What's the difference? A dialogue about differences and similarities between men and women*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

B. J. Risman et al. (eds.), *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender*, *Handbooks of Sociology and Social Research*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76333-0_19