

communications guide to your future

bridging the gender communication gap

welcome

Women in Print is proud to present its second webinar panel opening the discussion of communication across gender and how we can work together to create a 'communication utopia'. Bridging the Gender Communication Gap, through a panel discussion, aims to raise awareness and consideration of how we communicate woman to woman, man to man, man to woman and woman to man. Or is it more a communication of power, seniority, industry? Or simply just focusing being human. A discussion to keep you thinking long after the session completes.

The following provides a summary of the discussion and thought starters to continue your own discussions into the weeks and months ahead.



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digital communications

1

Don't overcommunicate by email, pick up the phone or walk to a person's desk.

2

Make good use of subject lines, this is a courtesy to ensure your reader can prioritise their response.

3

Keep messages clear and brief, lengthy emails are simply not read.

4

Be polite, CAPITAL letters in a digital communication environment can be interpreted as raising your voice. This would never have a place in a professional setting and should be considered as such in a digital setting. Written word is also more interpretative than spoken given it is non-contextual or non-verbal communication dominant. Consider this in your digital communications, keeping a polite opening – Good morning John, I hope you are well – allows you to set the purpose and interpretation of your digital communication, especially in emails.

5

Check your tone. Repetitive punctuation points can seem accusatory as can, not starting your emails with a salutatory greeting. Digital communications are often short-handed and can be brief so ensuring your tone cannot be misinterpreted is key.

6

Proof-read. If writing a formal letter, we proof-read and consider the information be included. When emailing or posting, digital communications are often sent without being re-read and this can lead to embarrassing, if not, dangerous communications being issued.





communicating about myself

1

Avoid submissive body language – Body language is a very important part of communication and it's important to avoid certain stances, gestures or poses that can convey weakness. These might be subliminal, so we need to make a conscious decision to challenge them – crossing legs when standing, holding hands low and over-gesticulating. Keep a calm, open and strong stance. Speak clearly and with precision.

2

Don't use devaluing language when talking about your achievements. Some phrases to remove from your professional vocabulary include:

'Sorry to bother you....'

- You do not need to apologise for something until you've done something.

'I'm just' – The word *"just"* needs to be extracted at every opportunity. It shows a lack of confidence and weakness, particularly when asking for something. Have your opinion and own it.

'I was happy with my response but....' - using *'but'* instead of *'however'* is more defining to the negative. *'But'* ends and closes the first part of the sentence, whereas *'however'* continues the first part of a sentence with the second.

"I think" vs *"I believe"* vs *"I feel"*. The use of these statements can have a significant impact on the message being conveyed. Women often use *"I think"*, which is much more submissive than *"I believe"*. Male communicators favour *"I believe"* which signifies ownership and personal validation of the fact about to be expressed.

3

Understand the power of compromise. While we're adamant about displaying confidence and being sure of yourself, that doesn't mean that people won't disagree with you. Compromise is one of the most powerful weapons in negotiation as it displays a maturity to accept another school of thought and reach a solution that is acceptable to both parties. Adopting the *"I must win every point"* way of thinking is unreasonable and you will almost certainly fail in this endeavour. Confidently voicing your opinion in conversations and meetings, respecting the other opinions (regardless of gender), then having a mature discussion of how to resolve conflicts in thought is a sign of an excellent communicator, whether you're male or female.



positioning and context language

1

From 'old wives' tales' to 'carrying on like an old woman' to 'God is He' to 'He was a doctor; she was a nurse' and so on. We all perpetuate stereotypes and should be more aware as we place these generational and gender stereotypes across our subconscious language. The famous study of children in early learning being asked to draw a Doctor, an Astronaut, a Nurse, a Teacher, a Police Officer, a Builder, an Office worker and so on show strong stereotypes across gender, however then provides an opportunity to discuss and challenge these stereotypes in young children. Adults similarly can learn from the same process.

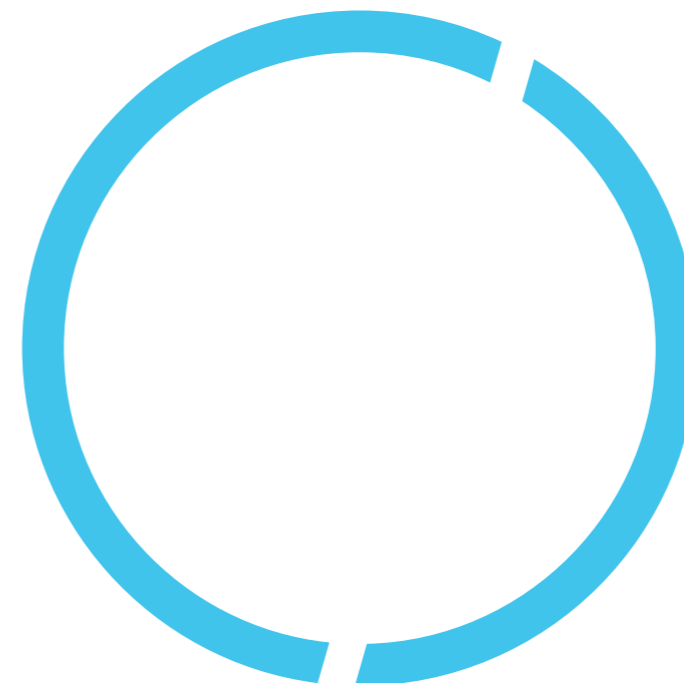
2

Positioning language to challenge perceptions is also key across media representation, however can also be challenged by our own active consciousness. When discussing victims of domestic violence we often hear 'why didn't she/he leave earlier?' as opposed to 'why didn't he/she stop?'. Victim-blaming in the media is an area of constant review and one we can also play a role in restructuring with language positioning.

3

Context can sometimes be generational. For a middle-manager working 9-5.30pm standard office day 'I'll send it through by the end of the day' means something entirely different to a new generation of younger freelance workers whose 'end of day' may well be midnight. 'I'll send you a draft'. To some a draft is final copy that has been reviewed by peers, edited and prepared for final comment, for others a 'draft' is a Google or One Drive link that has continual edit options. Communicating your expectations clearly and succinctly is critical to achieving the desired outcome.

Making a conscious decision to challenge your own gender stereotypes and therefore your own gender positioning across language will be a part you can actively play to address language.





consider your audience

1

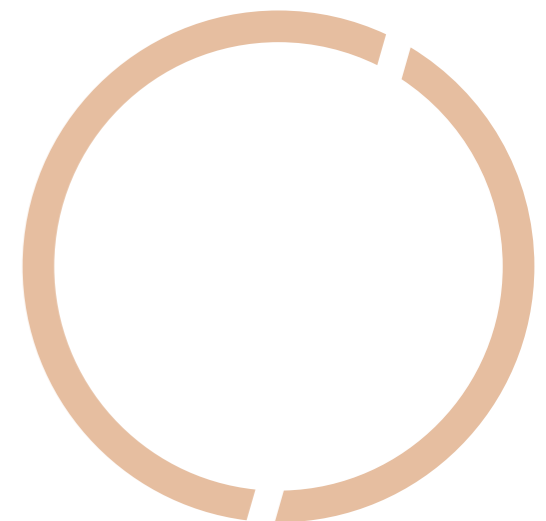
If you are constantly apologising to preface your communication, "sorry to bother you", "would you mind doing me a favour", "I know you're busy, but would you mind"... consider how this can be interpreted by your staff. People are looking for direction from their leaders – give it. 'Can you please get me that report by Friday?', 'I need this by Tuesday, is this possible or can we move some priorities to meet the deadline?' A more direct communication style is often welcomed by staff who seek your direction.

2

Being collaborative has its benefits, however can often be approached as 'being a friend' rather than being collaborative. Leaders aspire and encourage teams. You can approach this with direction rather than emotion. In meetings, call on the quiet team member to include their ideas that you may have discussed earlier that week. Watch your team closely in each meeting to ensure all actively contribute, 'how does that sound to you Laura?' or 'Susan, you look like you have something you want to say?'. This approach to bringing in a wider audience of contributors across your team will deliver a more diverse and enriched conversation across your team.

3

Consider being 'empathetic' not 'sympathetic' to your team. Listening to the problem and providing professional solutions rather than 'fixing' or 'doing' the work for the individual because you have sympathy to a situation.





our discussion

Q: Why is it important to understand, or at least acknowledge, the difference in communication styles between the sexes, as subtle as research may suggest they be? How has making allowances for those differences helped you in your role?

A: Remember we are all humans, communicating with each other in different workplaces requires differing communication skills. Sometimes being more direct is equally as important as collaborating. Remaining empathetic whilst not losing credibility in being overly emotional is always a balance also. You won't get communication strategies perfect every time, however if you remain conscious of how you communicate, how others respond to your communication style and how you can best achieve your goals through your communication you will remain committed to self-improvement and professional development.

Q: As our professional worlds evolve in an era of much discussion across gender balances in the workforce, how does the actual communications channel also impact how we communicate? For example, moving into a more common digital communication environment over written?

A: Digitalisation has been a modern-day disrupter from how we read our news to how we communicate. Social media, emojis, emails and more are all influencing how we communicate. In a professional setting letters being replaced by emails or texts can create confusion, misinterpretation of even offence and we must be mindful of this. Remain polite, revert to the number one rule, how would I feel if I received this email? If you would be offended then you need to reconsider your approach.

Refer Digital Communications tips for more ideas on how to best communicate in a digital world.

Q: Communication as a whole can be a complex experience between generations. This panel offers an important insight to our discussion. Can you share through your lens some insight how you view communication between older generations compared with your own generations?

A: Generational communication can impact language and tone. Whilst there is an older generation using their influence and seniority to empower changes across gender in society and the workplace, there is also a younger generation who are more controlled than ever by procedure and fear of offending. Communicating in a 100% neutral tone all the time on all issues is a difficult obstacle for the younger generations to navigate.

Q: Is it really about gender or is it in fact just about how we as individuals communicate effectively and respectfully to one another?

A: Kindness and humanity across all communication styles goes above and beyond gender. As individuals we all communicate differently, with strengths and weaknesses. The aim for us all should be to seek inclusive diversity as opposed to diversity and inclusion. We know from McKinsey reports, Lean In and Women in the Workplace, that diversity and inclusion programs are not delivering. Rather, if we aim for inclusive diversity, that is we embrace each other's differences and learn from how to build on our strengths we'll develop a stronger form of inter-office and outer-office communications to achieve more for our own professional development, but also for companies to be stronger than their competitors. A modern day example of this is Google, a strong company culture, with a trained and unified communication and professional development global program.

Q: Tonality, positioning and context often surround these discussions, where do we start and end in our own learning or self-management to know what is right and what is wrong? Or how do we re-train our own behaviours to not reiterate stereotypes?

a) how do we empower our colleagues?

b) what does this support look like?

A: The best way to empower yourself and your colleagues is to provide a platform to have a voice. Put the issue of gender tone and bias front and centre and understand the wounds we can cause with our words and actions. Actively undertake staff training on what is and what is not acceptable. Invite diverse speakers and thinkers to come in to share their experiences to challenge negative roles we might play in perpetuating stereotypes.

Empower yourself and/or staff by giving them clear guidelines on what is and what is not acceptable via a Code of Conduct and to ensure it's alive and kicking, the opportunity, permission and platform within companies to call out sexist or inappropriate comments.

Actively support an inclusive workplace that values and celebrates uniqueness. With the introduction of additional recognised genders, we need to be more accepting and acknowledge personal prejudices, normalising differences to remove stigmas. LinkedIn's research shows 70 per cent of job seekers believe it's important that recruiters and hiring managers know their gender pronouns, whilst also respecting those that don't want to do this.

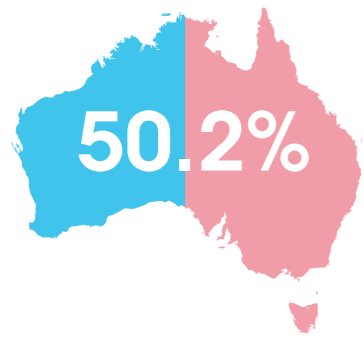
Most leaders agree an inclusive workplace is important. However, what being inclusive means and how it comes to life varies widely from one company to the next. For some, it involves hiring and retaining a diverse cross-section of employees. For others, it means hosting unconscious bias trainings or launching employee resource groups, either way being actively aware and developing your own consciousness about this is critical to making change.

Q: Quotas have been long argued with some passionately for and some passionately against. Where do quotas sit in this discussion of communication across gender and the workplace?

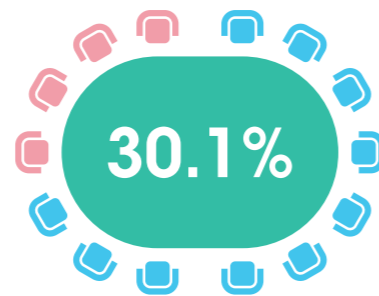
A: As ample research has established gender biases are built into many organizational systems and human decision-making processes. Psychological research shows that we are susceptible to unconscious biases and stereotypes. As a whole, these unconscious processes are deeply embedded in individuals and organizational systems, and it is unrealistic to expect that these will disappear without an abrupt external shock, such as quotas. Some argue quotas are the 'external shock' required, others that this will not work.

In the context of communication however, countries and Boards that have implemented quotas realise several benefits across discussion and solution building, including more robust deliberation, disruption of groupthink, more effective risk management, higher quality monitoring of management, and more systematic work. Indeed, because searches for female board members often lead to candidates who may not fit the typical profile, women end up bringing more diverse experience in a wider variety of functional areas than men – often adding skills in the areas of community, people, government relations and marketing that might have been lacking. The new female board members or politicians introduce and communicate new viewpoints not previously considered which leads to stronger parliaments and companies.

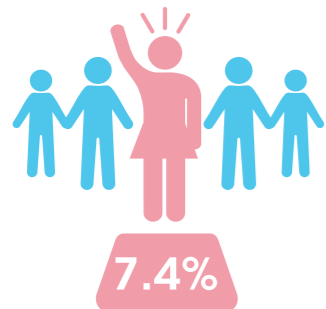
why we still need to keep communicating. facts matter.



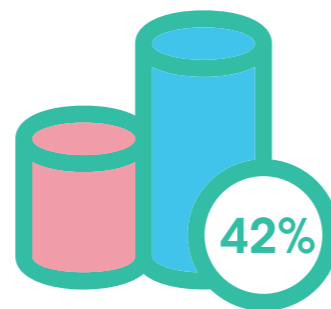
According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Women comprise of half of the Australian population (**50.2%**) (2010).



Women comprise of less than one-third of all parliamentarians in Australia's parliaments (**30.1%**) (2020).



Women lead 37 of the Fortune500 companies, that is a **7.4%** leadership across the largest corporations (2021).



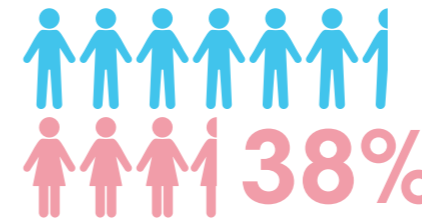
The Future Face of Poverty Report found Australian women retire with **42%** less super than men (2020).



The Australian Government reports women earn **13.4%** less than men (2021).



According to a recent survey from McKinsey & Company, women are **20 percent** less likely than men to get difficult feedback, which can help them improve their performance (2020).



For the sixth year in a row, women continued to lose ground at the first step up to manager. For every 100 men promoted to manager, only 85 women were promoted. As a result, women remained significantly outnumbered in entry-level management at the beginning of 2020—they held just **38 percent** of manager-level positions, while men held 62 percent (Women in the Workplace, 2020 McKinsey & Company).

According to research by the Limeade Institute and Artemis, employees who feel included:

- Are **28%** more engaged at work
- Have **19%** greater well-being in their lives
- Are **43%** more committed to their company
- Are **51%** more likely to recommend their company as a great place to work
- Typically intend to stay with their company **3 times** longer

And for companies, inclusion can mean a lot. Inclusive workplaces:

- Are **6 times** more likely to anticipate change and effectively respond
- Are **8 times** more likely to have overall better business outcomes
- Have **2.3 times** higher cash flow per employee over a three-year period

additional references

1. Lee Caraher, www.leecaraher.com
2. Deborah Tannen, The Power of Talk: Who Gets Heard and Why
3. Dana Manciangli, The Business Journals
4. Carol Kinsey, www.carolkinseygoman.com
5. Carolyn M. Cunningham Ph.D. (Editor), Heather M. Crandall Ph.D. (Editor), Alexa M. Dare (Editor), Gender, Communication, and the Leadership Gap (Women and Leadership)
6. John Gray, Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus and 8 Blind Spots between men and women and work
7. Harvard Business Review, On Women and Leadership

about

Women in Print is fifteen years young, with Susan Heaney, our Queensland Patron, one of the original founding Patrons (a shout out to that commitment!) as Chair of the Board. Karen Goldsmith, originally under GAMAA and later Visual Connections, from the founding of the organisation led the charge of Women in Print for more than a decade before stepping down and handing the reigns to Sarah Moore, Visual Connections over the past two years. Under the Visual Connections' management, the Women in Print Breakfast series achieved year on year record attendance, increased engagement and a growing movement that forms the new Women in Print community today.

The Secretariat was handed to The Real Media Collective in 2020 when the organisation was registered as an independent entity.