

Gender Differences and Discrimination in Business Communication

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Abstract

This paper discusses gender differences in business communication. Women and men learn different styles of communication and different patterns of behaviour. Their attitudes toward the business world are different. The asymmetry of gender is usual in the language: when you say a man it is most often thought of man. The data from 2014, the Ombudsman for Gender Equality in Progress project, clearly illustrate that in the governing bodies of companies in Croatia is 82.68% of men versus 17.32% women. Gender structure in the supervisory boards of the Republic of Croatia is 78.31% of men versus 21.69% of women. We still have the management structure and the body usually reserved for men. It was also found that women are paid 10% less in the same job than men.

At the end of 2016 an online poll was conducted on a sample of employees in the Zagreb County. The study included 140 patients (70 men and 70 women). The results show some interesting attitudes about gender differences in business communication. The results are presented and discussed in this paper and show significant and interesting differences in terms of business relationships and communication within them.

Keywords: business communication, gender differences, gender discrimination, man, woman

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Introduction

Growing up within the cultural circle of Croatia is not the same for men and women. Women and men learn different communication styles and different behavioural patterns. Their attitude toward the business world differs.

Sex is defined as a set of anatomical, physiological and psychological characteristics based on which one can distinguish males from females of certain species" (Giddens, 2007). Gender as a concept appears within the field of sociology and is defined by the same author as follows: "gender differences are inequalities, such as, the status, power and reputation differences which women and men have within certain groups, communities and societies" (Giddens, 2007).

Since there are no societies present nowadays in which there are no sex differences, sociology studies gender inequality. There are several sociological approaches to considering gender differences: functionalists, led by Talcott

Parson, argue that the division of work between men and women is biologically founded. Women tend to assume more expressive roles whereas men have more instrumental roles. Murdock (1994) studied more than 200 different societies and has come to the conclusion that there is no society present which does not include labour divisions. Feminism introduces gender distinction as biological distinction and sex as a social construct which people assume and learn as members of their society and which entail socially acceptable behaviour, attitude, roles and activities which are expected of men or women. Such socially constructed sex identities are found as a cause of social inequality of women by feminists, because the identities ascribed to men are much more valued than those ascribed to women. There are different aspects within the theory of feminism. Radical feminism, for instance, is focused on destroying the patriarchal society because they believe it is the foundation of inequality, since it serves only to maintain

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the dominance of men. Liberal feminism argues that equality of men and women needs to be achieved, which can be done via political and legal reforms. Liberal feminism considers each woman to have abilities and skills to achieve equality through her own actions and choices and that it is therefore not necessary to completely reform the society. Eco-feminism connects ecology and feminism and the need for the care for the environment is placed as the foundation of the feministic attitude towards the world. It further considers that dominance done on women stems from the same ideology which argues dominance over nature. Concepts which are connected to gender inequality are: discrimination and sexism. Discrimination against women is defined as: *"...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of gender which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field"* (CEDAW, 1979). Sexism, on the other hand, is a form of social discrimination and segregation based on gender.

Many international documents attempted to legally equalize men and women and here are presented chronologically:

1. United Nations Charter (1984) which "reaffirmed faith in fundamental human rights, and dignity and worth of the human person" and committed all member states to promote "universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion".
2. Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) (adopted by the UN General Assembly).
3. The Beijing declaration (1995), which established 12 fields of national politics action with relate to gender equality: poverty, education, health, violence, armed conflicts, economy, decision-making, institutional mechanisms, women's rights, media and environment.
4. UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC, July 1997.) ECOSOC defines the concept of gender aware politics as gender equality in politics, economy and society. Men and women achieve the same benefits from their work.
5. EU Council defines gender aware politics: "Including gender perspective in every phase of the political process – programme, execution, monitoring and evaluation – aiming at promotion of gender equality. This entails evaluation of the influence of political measures on life and status of both men and women, as well as assuming responsibility to question and revise them in order to contribute to the process of shaping the mutual vision of manageable human development and its execution in reality."
6. Treaty of Nice, 2000 promotes freedom, respect of

human rights and fundamental rights as well as rights and principles which all EU country members have in common. The concept of "gender mainstreaming" is a crucial and widely accepted concept, relevant for the realisation of gender equality politics among all EU country members.

7. There are companies in Europe which promote family-friendly politics. Multinational companies, such as, IBM, AT&T and Xerox expanded their company policy which entails absence from work due to personal reasons, paid benefits as well as job guarantee after coming back from vacation. Second company policy is based on the right to a leave of absence due to family reasons: caring for the elder members of the family whose lifetime is being prolonged, caring for the young, competent and educated employees who are faced with this problem. All the afore-mentioned absences include members of both genders, with the emphasis on the fact that male employees have their family obligations just as female employees do (Leinert Novosel, 2003).

Results of the research conducted by Marie Charles and Karen Bradley in 2009 (with the sample consisting of 44 industrial and transitional countries, as well as countries in development) confirms that some forms of segregation are more present within societies which are esteemed as socially and culturally most developed, such as, gender can shape career, and it's supported by the increase of the gender-based career and educational choices. Greater tendency of academic fields segregation with regard to the economic development has influenced the differences between the causes of such processes within transitional and countries in development and advanced industrial societies. The tendency for segregation increases within countries in development and transitional countries as BDP increases (Charles & Bradley, 2009).

Methods

Gender Inequality in Croatia European Values Study

Data obtained by the Progress project from 2014, issued by the attorney for gender equality: Gender structure of commercial governing bodies in the Republic of Croatia was 82,68% males and 17,32 % females, gender structure of supervisor boards in Croatia was 78.31% males and 21,69% females, whereas females generally receive 10% smaller wages for the same working position than males.

Comparative research European Values Study has shown that in 1999, the Croatian society in general when compared to other European countries, is leaning toward more traditional values, especially, among the male population. In 2008 a gender role stabilization trend has been observed in Croatia after war and transition. Roughly 80% of Croatian citizens believe that marriage is not an obsolete institution and that for child raising a mother and a fa-

ther are necessary. 45% of Croatian citizens believe that a woman needs to have children in order to feel fulfilled (Črpić, Sever & Mravunac, 2010).

Croatian State department for statistics has released the following data in March 2015: women in Croatia are more educated than men, their lifespan is longer and they are more numerous than men, there are more illiterate and unemployed women in Croatia, as well as those on a minimum wage, in 1990 the percentage of female members of the Croatian parliament was 4, 6 % and in 2015 the percentage of female members of the Croatian parliament - 19,9 %.

The World Economy Forum (WEF) issued a report for the year 2015 in which it states that the "World economy forum evaluates that women and men's wages will be equal in 118 years. Along with Mali, Jordan and Sri Lanka, Croatia is at the bottom of the wage equality list with regard to gender. Iceland, Norway, Finland and Sweden are at the top of the wage equality list with relate to gender, what contributed to good family policy which includes the best possible childcare as well as best maternal/paternal leave. In 2007 Croatia was 16th out of 145 and in 2015 59th out of 145 on the countries list with regard to wage equality. One area in which the difference between the percentage of women and men has gotten smaller is education. According to the report from 2015, there are more women than men at universities in 98 countries, which is neither reflected on the wages nor the working positions – men are still predominant on leading positions in the business and political world. In only three countries women are predominant on the leading positions: Columbia, Philippines and Fiji.

The EU committee marks the 2nd of November – the day of wage inequality between men and women (Neimanis, 2005). "Women partake in top management in only 19 % of Croatian companies, whereas women on leading positions receive 57 % of wages their male colleagues receive". Croatia is, according to the criteria, at the 108th place on the gender equality countries list (Kristina Turčin – Jutarnji list, 22.11.2015.)

The first gender equality law in the Republic of Croatia came into force in 2003: "Gender equality means that men and women are equally present in all areas of public and private life, that they hold equal status, equal possibilities for accomplishing same rights, as well as equal benefit from the achieved results (Article 5 of ZRS)".

Research of Gender Discrimination and Public Opinion in the Republic of Croatia

Presentation of the most significant results of three researches (Table 1, 2, 3, 4):

1. Office for gender equality of the RC conducted a research in 2007. The sample consisted of unemployed women who applied at the labour market, of all age and education groups, whereas the research aim was to determine to what extent Gender equal-

ity law and Labour law are being violated. Results showed that during job interviews:

- 24,6% of women received compliments on their appearance.
- 4,2% of women experienced unwanted physical contact.
- 2,8% of women experienced blackmail of sexual type with regard to work.
- 12,2% of women felt they were rejected because of their gender.
- 82,6% of women believe men have better chances of getting a job.
- 64% of women consider themselves discriminated on the labour market.
- More than 50% of women claim that there is no gender equality in RC. Women and men do not have equal status in society, they do not have equal possibility to bring their rights into realization and not equal use of achieved results, as well as not equal chance to get a job.

2. Research was conducted in 2004 within the scope of the project "Modernisation and identity of the Croatian society" by the Department for Sociology of the Faculty for Human and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. One of the conclusions of the research was that in the RC mostly older men with lower education apply and promote traditional and modern sexism which are aimed against women.

3. Research conducted in 2015 within the scope of the master's thesis at the University for Applied Sciences Baltazar, Zaprešić, RC under the guidance of prof.dr.sc. Ljubice Bakić-Tomić aimed to determine whether there are significant differences between men and women in the RC. Sample consisted of a random sample of population older than 18 comprising of 200 subjects (64% women and 36% men).

Result

- 56% men and 86.36% women are of the opinion that it is easier for men to get a job than it is for women. The reason for this discrepancy can lie in the fact that within the sample there was a smaller number of male participants, but it can be as well that men are not very familiar with the problem or that they believe it does not concern them personally, although the percentage of 56% cannot be neglected and implies that the majority of men is aware of the position of women at the labour market.
- During job interviews majority of women has been asked questions about marital status and whether they had intentions of getting pregnant which is against the Labour law, Gender Equality law and Constitution of the RC. 36.36% of women receive flattering compliments on their

Table 1. Do You Consider that Nowadays Men and Women in the RC Have...

	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
	No	No	Yes	Yes	Not sure	Not sure
Equal status in society	81,8	52	15,9	48	2,27	/
Equal opportunities to execute their rights	70,45	56	18,18	44	11,36	/
Equal benefits of their work	77,27	72	18,18	24	4,54	4
Equal employment opportunities	77,27	60	13,63	40	9,09	/

Table 2. Do You Agree with the Following Statements?

	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
	No	No	Yes	Yes	Not sure	Not sure
Nowadays it is easier for men to get a job in Croatia than it is for women	13,63	44	86,36	56	/	/
Women should not be excluded from the so-called 'male' jobs	20,45	16	75	76	4,54	8
Women are very often discriminated at the labour market in Croatia	18,18	36	75	60	6,81	4

Table 3. Have You ever Experienced the Following Types of Gender Discrimination, Domination or Harassment during a Job Interview?

	Women			
	No	Yes	Not sure	I have never been to a job interview
Complimenting my appearance	50	36,36	/	13,63
Unwanted physical contact during the interview	75	11,36	/	13,63
Sexual blackmail with regard to work	79,54	6,81	/	13,63
Rejection because of my gender	63,63	20,45	2,27	13,63

Table 4. Opinions of Men and Women on Relationships between Men and Women in Society

	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
	1	1	2	2	3	3	4	4	5	5
It is natural that women are submissive to men	88,63	56	6,81	12	2,27	/	2,27	24	/	8
Men cannot take care of women equally well as women can	29,54	24	25	32	4,54	8	36,36	28	4,54	8
Differentiation between male and female jobs is an expression of ancient experience and should not be brought into question	47,72	36	11,36	24	13,63	12	20,45	24	6,81	4

appearance, whereas 20.45% considers they have been turned down due to their gender.

- No male subjects have ever been exposed to some type of sexual discrimination during job interviews.
- 24% of men consider it natural for women to be submissive to men (majority of subjects was urban population up to 50 years of age), which shows that traditional sexism is still present in Croatia. On the other hand, 80% of

men believe that marriage would function well even if the wife earned more than the husband. 52% of men think that women should not support their husband's careers at the cost of their own.

- Answers of women have been expected and within frames of the research conducted in 2004 at the Faculty for Humanities in Croatia. Nowadays women are louder about their disagreement with the statements, which

gives greater percentage of answers 'completely disagree' than 'I disagree'.

Conclusion

Research results have shown that in Croatia the majority of population believes that nowadays men and women do not have an equal status in society.

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