What is gender?

Gender is a socially constructed definition of women and men. It is not the same as sex (biological characteristics of women and men) and it is not the same as women. Gender is determined by the conception of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in society and in public and private life

**what is Communication**

Communication is a process of exchanging information, ideas, thoughts, feelings and emotions through speech, signals, writing, or behavior. In communication process, a sender(encoder) encodes a message and then using a medium/channel sends it to the receiver (decoder) who decodes the message and after processing information, sends back appropriate feedback/reply using a medium/channel.

**Types of Communication**

People communicate with each other in a number of ways that depend upon the message and its context in which it is being sent. Choice of communication channel and your style of communicating also affects communication. So, there are variety of types of communication.

**Types of communication based on the communication channels used** are:

1. Verbal Communication
2. Nonverbal Communication

**Verbal Communication**

Verbal communication refers to the the form of communication in which message is transmitted verbally; communication is done by word of mouth and a piece of writing. Objective of every communication is to have people understand what we are trying to convey. **In verbal communication remember the acronym KISS**(keep it short and simple).

When we talk to others, we assume that others understand what we are saying because we know what we are saying. But this is not the case. usually people bring their own attitude, perception, emotions and thoughts about the topic and hence creates barrier in delivering the right meaning.

So in order to deliver the right message, you must put yourself on the other side of the table and think from your receiver’s point of view. Would he understand the message? how it would sound on the other side of the table?

**Verbal Communication** is further divided into:

* Oral Communication
* Written Communication

**Oral Communication**

In oral communication, Spoken words are used. It includes face-to-face conversations, speech, telephonic conversation, video, radio, television, voice over Internet. In **oral communication**, communication is influence by pitch, volume, speed and clarity of speaking.

**Advantages of Oral communication** are:
 It brings quick feedback.
 In a face-to-face conversation, by reading facial expression and body language one can guess whether he/she should trust what’s being said or not.

**Disadvantage of oral communication**
 In face-to-face discussion, user is unable to deeply think about what he is delivering, so this can be counted as a

**Written Communication**

In written communication, written signs or symbols are used to communicate. A written message may be printed or hand written. In written communication message can be transmitted via email, letter, report, memo etc. Message, in written communication, is influenced by the vocabulary & grammar used, writing style, precision and clarity of the language used.

**Written Communication is most common form of communication being used in business.** So, it is considered core among business skills.

**Advantages of written communication** includes:
 Messages can be edited and revised many time before it is actually sent.
 Written communication provide record for every message sent and can be saved for later study. A written message enables receiver to fully understand it and send appropriate feedback.

**Disadvantages of written communication** includes:
 Unlike oral communication, Written communication doesn’t bring instant feedback. It take more time in composing a written message as compared to word-of-mouth. and number of people struggles for writing ability.

Difference in communication between the two genders?

*attitude towards tasks vs. relationships.* Women tend to be more relationship oriented and accomplish tasks by building relationships first. They then know who to ask and are comfortable asking others to get things done. Men tend to be more task oriented and go straight to the task. They build their relationships when they are in the task or project.

1. *Way of Processing Information.* When women have to make a decision they will often process and look at options out loud while men tend to process internally until they come up with a solution. Women often think that the man is being unresponsive to suggestions because of this and men often think that women are looking for approval when they process out loud or don’t know what they are doing. Some men think that a woman’s way of processing is a sign of weakness.
2. *Leadership Style.* Because women are more relationship oriented, they tend to lead by consensus. 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 necessary.
3. *Communication Styles.* In non-verbal behavior women will nod their head to show that they are listening. Men leave the conversation thinking that a head nod means agreement and will be surprised to find out that the woman didn’t agree at all. When a woman is speaking to a man and he does not say anything and stays in neutral body language to show that he is listening, a woman will interpret that as the man being bored or not understanding what she is saying. This can lead the woman to become very uncomfortable and repeat what she is saying or ask the man each time if he understands what she is saying. The man then interprets that as insecurity, or talking to much and which then lead him to think she is not assertive or confident to be a leader. Women will actually use more direct eye contact in conversation to create relationship and connection while many men take that as a challenge to their power or position. Women will also approach a man from the front while men often approach from the side at an angle, which is how each of them tends to stand or sit when talking to others. Men interpret the face to face as too personal, or aggressive and women will interpret the talking side to side as though he is not being upfront or even hiding something from her.
4. *Talk time.* Men take up more time and space at meetings, while women try to make sure there is more equality in the room. Despite stereotypes to the contrary studies have shown that men talk more then women. Men interrupt women and talk over them much more that women interrupt men. All of this can lead to the type of miscommunication based on assumptions of why member of the other sex are using certain verbal and non-verbal behaviors. These miscommunication can result in team breakdown, people not listening to each other and loss of good ideas.

What are the challenges in gender communication?

#### Gender inequality

The historical and multiple forms of inequality that persist between women and men across all societies enable violence against women and girls to continue in both public and private settings. This discrimination and the barriers preventing women and girls from exercising their rights, accessing services and other opportunities, greatly increase their risks of experiencing violence.  Socially-accepted gender norms and values about what constitute acceptable behavior and interpersonal relationships are instilled since childhood. For example, in simplified terms, in many societies girls are raised to be more submissive and to defer to male authority, while boys are taught to be more controlling, dominant and aggressive – also reflecting traditional gender roles of what is expected of them later in life in terms of becoming a woman (wife and mother) and what it means to be a man (a virile provider and protector).

How men and women are socialized and the definitions and understandings of womanhood and manhood establish their positions of relative power and control at home and in society. These same norms governing gender power relations influence how violence against women and girls is viewed and tolerated in different contexts. These norms, gender biases and discriminatory attitudes also often permeate the various sectors within government, whose public officials are likely to hold many of the same views as those in the society within which they live. Addressing gender inequality is critical across sectors responsible for delivering justice, social, health and security services to survivors and to those responsible for the education of boys and girls.

One of the greatest challenges in ending violence against women and girls lies in unraveling how harmful gender attitudes and roles are deeply ingrained across the fabric of societies, and fostering values of mutual respect and equality.

#### Impunity

The lack of state accountability in comprehensively addressing violence against women and girls is a significant obstacle to ending the problem. Generalized acceptance of violence against women, lack of political will, inadequate legal protections and enforcement, insufficient resource allocation and/or poor implementation of national commitments contribute to pervasive impunity. This is particularly evident in countries and communities with weak justice systems and where customary law practices and more widely-used informal justice mechanisms may contradict international human rights standards. In such contexts, access to formal justice for women and girl survivors of violence may be hindered by obstacles such as gender bias and discriminatory attitudes, social stigma and financial constraints (linked to women’s lower socio-economic status). Ending impunity requires adequate prosecution and punishment of perpetrators; equal protection for women under the law and equal access to justice (that holds up to public scrutiny); and the elimination of attitudes that foster, justify or tolerate violence against women. (AusAID, 2008; UN General Assembly, 2006)

#### Inadequate human, technical and financial investments

While an increasing number of countries have adopted laws and policies, they are rarely accompanied by adequate budget allocations, nor the requisite institutional, staffing, infrastructural improvements and other supports that may be needed at the national and sub-national levels to implement them. Skills and knowledge on preventing and responding to violence against women and girls, including in evidence-based programming, is often limited, particularly in resource-scarce settings. This is also compounded where high staff turnover poses additional challenges in retaining a skilled and experienced cadre of individuals. Long-term and sustained resource investments, including for strengthening expertise and building ‘critical masses’ of expertise in key areas and sectors, and improvements to remove service delivery bottlenecks are critical across sectors, in order for governments to deliver on their commitments to ending violence against women and girls.

#### Weak coordination and monitoring mechanisms at the national level

Addressing violence against women and girls requires a multisectoral approach, involving at a minimum the health, education, social, legal and security sectors, and strategically, other key sectors such as labour, migration and urban planning, among others. Unlike stand-alone sectors, there is no ‘natural’ government entity to take charge of coordination for ending violence against women. In many cases it is the Ministry of Women’s Affairs or its equivalent, which are often under-resourcedand lacking the institutional and political influence within government. Other mechanisms and processes, such as [sector-wide approaches](https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/1956174.pdf) (SWAps) and [decentralization](http://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/accountability/evaluation/decentralized-evaluations) may pose additional challenges to coordinating and monitoring the implementation of policies and programmes, where addressing violence against women may not be seen as a priority. Formal channels of communication and information-sharing between and among government and non-governmental entities working on this issue are also needed for coordinated, effective responses.

#### Insufficient data and research

Though an area receiving increased attention and investments, statistical data on the scale, nature and consequences of violence against women and girls remains limited. Quantitative surveys have been conducted in roughly 100 countries, though there is wide variation in methods, in the size of the population surveyed, and in the type of information that is collected. Surveys usually do not capture all forms of violence, nor reflect variations among different groups of women within a given country or other disaggregated information that is useful for planning. Population-based surveys (of which there are fewer) are the most reliable sources of data, but are costly to implement and require technical expertise. Without regular implementation of such surveys (every five to ten years), progress on reducing the prevalence and incidence of violence cannot be monitored over time. High impact advocacy messages that are not backed by hard data also hinder ongoing efforts to ensure policy commitments and investments.

#### Limited attention to neglected groups and issues

Insufficient attention has been paid to certain forms of violence, to certain groups of women or to particular contexts, and their costs and consequences. This is due in part to the absence of data and analyses that can help develop understanding of how violence differs for different parts of the population in different situations. These will vary by country and region, but include:

* Femicide
* Violence against marginalized or excluded groups, such as indigenous women, domestic workers, women in detention and migrant workers (UN General Assembly, 2006)
* Sexual violence and rape within marriage and as experienced by adolescent girls and young women in all contexts
* The intersections between violence against women and HIV and AIDS
* Violence and sexual harassment in public spaces such as public transport, marketplaces, cities, schools, farm fields and other common locales
* Political violence directed at women during elections, vying for public office or in high-level decision-making positions

## Relationship Orientation

Women are focused on relationships and men are focused on tasks. Generally, women prefer to first develop a relationship and then to use that relationships to work collaboratively, but men experience frustration with this method. Generally, men use tasks as a means to connect with others. The differences between the two approaches effectively establishes a gender barrier between men and women in how they communicate. Task-oriented communication versus relationship-oriented communication may become exaggerated when conflict arises. Women are inclined to discuss conflict in an effort to preserve the relationship. Men tend to internalize conflict, discarding the effect it may have on the relationship. Women's natural inclination to be empathic instead of analytical deepens the divide.

## Decision-Making Process

Style differences during decision making is a common gender barrier to communication. Women are process-oriented and prefer to gather information, whereas men rely on a product-driven communication style. When an issue arises in the workplace, a female leader is likely to seek the advice of other colleagues. A male leader may view this as a weakness and may believe that a leader should be able to make the decision on his own, without consultation. Similarly, women prefer to discuss issues verbally, whereas men tend to process internally. A woman may interpret silence from a man as disinterest in the issue or as disengagement from the group.

## Non-Verbal Communicative Differences

Women use body language to affirm the person who is communicating with them. They believe that non-verbal communication demonstrates investment in the conversation. This non-verbal signal may be a smile, a head nod or direct eye contact. When men are listening to others, they tend to remain still. Women often interpret an absence of non-verbal affirmation from men as disinterest in the conversation, a lack of understanding or even an effort to negate what is being communicated. Women may even repeat themselves to provide more clarification or to entice the man to engage. Men may feel annoyed with this or they may even interpret the woman’s behavior as weak or as lacking in confidence.

## Unequal Engagement

Men provide information; they rarely seek information. Women seek to understand and listen to others in mixed gender groups. They are focused on giving everyone an opportunity to contribute to a conversation. Dominating the conversation and interrupting women are behaviors commonly exhibited by men. Men may consider it their responsibility to lead a conversation or to demonstrate competence. When this occurs, women are often silenced or choose to opt out of the conversation.

What are the solutions to the challenges in gender communication?

## Overcoming Gender Barriers to Communication

If you suspect gender barriers are affecting your workplace communication, here are some helpful hints:

Educate your team about gender and gender bias. People often struggle to identify their own biases and areas of ignorance, but when people are made aware of them, it creates the possibility for positive change. Most people, given information that shows how they’ve treated another person unfairly, will want to do what they can to correct their behavior.

Encourage diversity. If you’re sitting in a conference room discussing how a new policy/process will affect your entire company and only men are present, chances are you could be missing out on ramifications that unfairly affect other genders. Include people of different genders, races, backgrounds, etc., so that decisions can be made in light of how they will affect everyone at your company, and not just one group or gender.

Equip your HR team. If an issue does arise, you want to make sure you have an HR representative who is informed and equipped to deal with these kinds of matters in a respectful, tactful, and fair manner.