



Egalitarian communication



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The challenge of interpersonal relationships



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Communicative responsibility

At CaixaBank we are strongly committed to diversity, equal opportunities and people's talent. Currently, 53.2% of the staff and half of our customers are women.

Following this approach, we are currently setting ourselves a brand new goal which is entirely innovative in the Spanish banking sector: to implement professional egalitarian behaviour at CaixaBank through even-handed communication, free from sexism, going beyond inclusive language. This guide can be used as the basis to implement it.

It is important for people with managerial responsibilities to be aware of the communicative differences between women and men, to suitably interpret certain distinctive communication mechanisms of one style or another, especially regarding feminine communication, given that it is less recognised in organisational contexts. This will enable us to treat women and men that we work with and to whom we provide services with more empathy and impartiality.

It is time for a new era. And that is why, at CaixaBank, we have chosen a mixed communication style, for more egalitarian relationships from a gender viewpoint, to adapt to change and to new organisational structures. Because good communication brings people together.

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Daily Challenges

This document contains information and proposals backed by international theory and by professional experience and practice that should clearly help implement egalitarian communication in twenty-first century organisations that set out to face such challenges. It is fair to say that changes have been proposed for several years, most notably in certain linguistic forms: the use of cognates or invariable forms from a gender viewpoint or dropping the generic masculine form, for example. However, this guide works from another perspective. What this guide sets out to do is make professionals consider women in their daily communication, try to address them and understand how to communicate with them, leaving stereotypes to one side.

The approach is based on studies and experiences that demonstrate that **institutions can benefit greatly from using forms of language and communication that are more egalitarian from a gender viewpoint**, because it lets them:

1. Stimulate and optimise the organisation's female talent.
2. Provide more effective and competitive service to female customers.
3. Develop communicative strategies within the organisation that cover the best abilities of feminine and masculine styles to perfect the company's communicative efficiency.
4. Build a communicative culture at CaixaBank in keeping with European and international high-level standards to internationalise services and products in a more effective way.

If an organisation's professionals are aware of their female interlocutors, their language will change automatically, almost without realising. It will not only help professionals to structure their discourse better through the use of gender cognates when appropriate, but their jokes, examples, comparisons and anecdotes will also be significant both for their male and female colleagues.

Chapter 1 **Gender stereotypes (7')**

A **cliché**, a stereotype or a trite remark is a thought that is composed in advance. Clichés are sometimes very straightforward because you do not have to think: in the event of a specific situation, the **pattern of fast thought** is uncritically enabled and ready. Nevertheless, an organisation whose members' work is influenced by stereotypes CANNOT be **innovative**, because innovating expressly consists of applying **lateral, disruptive and creative thinking**.

To check whether you employ gender stereotypes, i.e. if you have specific preconceived ideas about how women and men act and communicate when they interact at work, you are hereby invited to read this chapter. It does not matter whether you are a man or a woman, because **nobody is immune to stereotypes** or completely free from them. Take a look.

In this section, you can also see how very limiting the clichés we have inherited can be; and how much everybody at CaixaBank has to gain by discarding them. Page 14

Chapter 2 **Silencing and self-imposed silencing of women's voices (9')**

Do we listen to a woman, partner, customer or boss, in the same way as we listen to a man? Does the voice of female professionals at CaixaBank have the same relevance and authority as the voice of their male counterparts?

Specialised studies and empirical data show significant differences in the attention and respect shown to our interlocutor when they are a man or a woman. Why do women, who are creditworthy professionals, often not reveal everything they know on a topic in work meetings? Why do they tend to keep quiet and "be discrete" when they could say and contribute more?

What can we do at CaixaBank to guarantee that we make good use of all the **female talent**? International reports show that **egalitarian communication encourages effectiveness** both in management and customer service. Take a look at this chapter if you want to find out more. Page 20

Chapter 3 **Communicative insecurity and stereotypes (8')**

You have probably noticed that when a person is clear, secure, direct, assertive, resolute and always gets to the point... if it is a man, he is deemed **efficient**, but when it is a **woman**, she is considered **bossy**.

Why does this **double standard exist**? And what implications does it have for our everyday work in business?

Have you ever asked yourself why men often feel obliged to raise their voice above the rest of the group, to talk first or last or to make a Herculean effort to be heard; whereas women usually seem hesitant, insecure or do not finish their sentences? Why is it important for a leading organisation in its sector (like CaixaBank) to encourage and explicitly value **clear, assertive and courteous speech** among its male and female professionals? Page 26

Chapter 4 **Indirection or circumlocution (7')**

Surely at some point or other you will have heard the stereotype that women are more "contrived", "tricky", "less direct" and more "manipulative" than men. Research into colloquial conversations and workplace conversations shows that, indeed, **women** tend to use more **indirection mechanisms**, especially when giving **instructions and orders**.

Why do they do it? Why do we expect all women to be less direct than men? Are males never indirect? When do they use circumlocution?

This section analyses **real communicative situations** that occur in actual professional contexts, as well as the **consequences** caused by the communicative phenomenon covered. It sets out alternative good practice to avoid unwanted situations and communicatively strengthen collective talent. Page 32

Chapter 5 **Attenuation and self-discrimination (7'30")**

After reading this chapter, you will note that men are frequently educated to conceal their doubts and insecurities when communicating (because a "man" has to be secure and able), whereas women are usually trained to disguise their security (because a "charming" woman is discrete).

What **impact does that communicative gender bias** have on day to day communication at CaixaBank? What can we do to make our **everyday interactions** at work more **egalitarian**, more **productive** and more **effective**? Page 38

Chapter 6 **Put your hand up (7'30")**

The broad international bibliography irrefutably demonstrates that a much lower percentage of women put themselves forward for a project, task, trip, promotion, etc. compared to their male colleagues. Facebook's number two, Sheryl Sandberg provides some highly illustrative examples of this phenomenon that we cover here. If **female professionals put themselves forward** far **less** frequently than their male colleagues, the chances of fair promotion for the company's female talent are drastically reduced.

What can we do to reverse this state of affairs? We suggest some solutions in this chapter.

The chapter also contains some **recommendations** on how to manage your male and female colleagues' interventions in a meeting. This might be valuable to you, especially if you coordinate a group. Page 44

Chapter 7 *The “I” that is hidden in “we” (5’)*

Saying phrases like “we have achieved” (us), “the company has achieved” or “the group has designed”, thus, including one’s own achievement in the accomplishment of a wider matter, is a **modesty resource** that comes across as highly **empathetic**, encourages team spirit and reveals a more modern and horizontal organisational structure than a traditional and hierarchical one.

However, do male and female professionals always use this empathetic “we” in the same way and for the same purposes? Page 50

Chapter 8 *Pirated ideas (6’)*

What is a pirated idea? It is intriguing, right? Well, in professional meetings they are a lot more frequent than you might expect. And we cannot fight them if we do not know what they are about. To debunk them, it is necessary to be able to identify them.

This chapter includes several professional situations of deliberate or inadvertent theft of **ideas** that have been **formulated beforehand**. You are quite likely to have personally experienced one of these situations.

We need good alternative practice, such as we are proposing here, to prevent the pirate from always winning, and help the group to always come out on top. Page 56

Chapter 9 *Interruption (6'30")*

We know from our personal experience that in conversations with friends and family, some interruptions are actually highly collaborative. However, when we are interrupted at work, we usually feel attacked and ignored. Personal experience, international studies and also the flood of videos on political debates or television talk shows that can be seen on the internet if you look up "interrupting a woman" confirm that female professionals, even when it comes to major experts on an issue, have far fewer chances than their male counterparts to **definitely** finish their **sentence** because someone interrupts them, possibly by another woman, or, more commonly, a man.

Why do we "shut" women up more often than men? What do the organisation and work groups have to lose with this malpractice, which often goes unseen? What can we do to avoid it? What does CaixaBank's communicative style of **respectful, clear and efficient moderation** entail in work meetings? Page 62

Capítulo 10 *Mansplaining (5')*

Mansplaining is an international expression that has been stunningly successful. It was chosen for The New York Times list of words of the year in 2010, and was picked as the most creative term of the year in 2012 by the American Dialect Society. It was included in the online version of Oxford Dictionaries in 2014. It already has its own Wikipedia entry, also available in Spanish.

What is the reason for such overwhelming success? Probably because it is the name for a communicative phenomenon that a plethora of women - and also some men - have personally experienced. The term refers to "Explaining something to someone, generally a man to a woman, in a manner regarded as **condescending** or **patronising**." The chapter contains the illustrative anecdote that went viral and was promoted by its author, Rebecca Solnit, who coined this term.

The condescending way in which some men treat women is based on the **sexist stereotype** assuming that men are usually better educated or more intelligent than women, or that they have more extensive and solid qualifications. However in the twenty-first century and specifically in a knowledge-based organisation, such as CaixaBank, all professionals (both male and female) are presumed to be knowledgeable and intelligent, regardless of their sex.

Mansplaining is a communicative reflex that exposes an old-fashioned way of thinking and an attitude that is inappropriate and ill adapted to new interpersonal communication stages. Page 68

Chapter 11 **Non-verbal communication (5'30")**

From the point of view of **occupying public spaces**, some striking gender differences can also be spotted. For example, in a professional meeting or presentation, do women and men tend to choose the same kind of location? Or different ones?

What do men and women choose to do to position themselves in a professional space? How do you explain this territorial preference characterised by gender bias? And what professional implications does it have?

Thanks to neuroscience developments, we now empirically know that how we position and adjust our bodies in certain contexts **is not a trivial gesture**, by any means. In turn, evidence shows subconscious mental programming regarding how to act in public. What implications does this relationship between bodily and psychological attitudes have for female and male professionals? Page 74



Gender stereotypes

First of all, a few gender stereotypes that are important for anybody coordinating a group of people at CaixaBank to deactivate in their mind and, as a result, in their use of language and communication.

Take the following situation as a starting point:

A female professional knocks on the door of her boss's office:

- Come in.
- Good morning, Juan. Hey, sorry, whenever is good for you I'd like to talk to you about a professional matter that is going to affect my timetable over the next few months...
- (With a big complicit smile) You're expecting!
- Ehh... No. I would like to study a master's degree.

Narrative from a participant at the seminar *Yo, directiva. Comunicación [I, manager. Communication]*. Government of Catalonia, Ministry of Employment (2010).



There is no doubt that the boss's hypothesis in the previous dialogue would have been different if it were a man who knocked on the door. And it is not as if the boss cannot think of any other reason why the female professional's timetable could be affected; the boss's reaction does not express his thoughts, but a stereotype.

Gender stereotypes are not just something that men apply to women. Most professionals apply them, both men and women.

Like all stereotypes, gender-based clichés are prefabricated thoughts, preconceived ideas relating to men and women with certain features and functions. They are neither innocent nor harmless: they can stunt the development of talent and ability in boys and girls, men and women.

For this reason, the higher the managerial scope of a person in an organisation, the more important it is that they are aware of the stereotypes that they may be using, since this implies limited potential for new connections and conclusions. Pre-programmed clichéd thought prevents innovating and leading transformation.

To beat the competition by creating new products and services that are impossible to imagine, design and create, it is necessary to detect and drop trite remarks.

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Stereotypes, fast pseudo-thought patterns, dominate possible hidden truths since revealing them is rather more difficult. More importantly, this compels us to act in a new way, i.e. echoing how the brightest professionals from innovative organisations act.

The safest way of ending stereotyped beliefs is to acknowledge them and to think about their causes and consequences. Below, you can find some gender stereotypes related to communication in professional contexts.

Stereotype 1

Male professionals express themselves assertively, frankly, and seriously. They are concerned about their work: it is only normal that responsibility leads to their serious, and even tough attitudes. It is only normal that they talk about their professional success.

When female professionals are decisive, they are perceived as bossy; when they embrace leadership, they are seen as dominant. If they talk about their professional success, they can be construed as arrogant. They are communicatively pleasant if they are passive, they smile and they are attentive.

The hidden truth

Men are expected to be strong and secure when they express themselves socially, whereas women are expected to be communicatively pleasant, and not to compete, be ambitious, or stand out.

The benefits of dismantling it

Egalitarian communication enables organisations to adopt the best of both genders' communicative styles: pleasant and rigorous, courteous and clear communication, that promotes a work atmosphere that enables the potential talent of all men and women to be expressed reliably.

Stereotype 2

Male professionals talk clearly; they have a trustworthy and well-founded way of speaking. You can trust what they say. They have more authority and are more capable of leading groups and projects.

It is often thought that women never clearly say what they want or what they think; they are perceived as contrived or manipulative because "they say one thing when they are really thinking something else". They are deemed to have less authority and be less capable of leadership.

The hidden truth

The traditional pattern with which men socialise enables them to express themselves with self-confidence, so people listen to them. Women are expected not to dominate, and to support and corroborate what other people say, not to be confrontational, and to use "feminine" means of persuasion.

The benefits of dismantling it

Considering the different principles that, more or less consciously, constitute the communicative socialisation of men and women enables misunderstandings to be avoided. The feminine communication style, which has been present in organisations for less time than the masculine style, is generally known and understood as less astute than the masculine style. This hinders success in interactions among mixed professional groups.

Stereotype 3

For men, work comes first. That is why there is less absenteeism among men. That is also why they know what they are talking about; they can get straight to the point, be clear and make decisions.

Many people still believe that personal life is more important than work for women and that as a consequence they are absent from work more often. And that is also why they show less self-confidence in the professional field.

The hidden truth

Statistics irrefutably show that absenteeism is not higher among women than men. In turn, balancing professional life is still considered strictly a woman's responsibility. The uncertainty or (apparent) insecurity of feminine discourse is not due to being unprepared, but instead to clichéd assumptions of how a woman should talk in public.

The benefits of dismantling it

When we reflect in the organisation on how communication patterns are related to the education you receive, you can correctly interpret communication traits such as the modesty pattern that can be confused with insecurity. Furthermore, it is also possible to promote a mixed communication style among women and men in the organisation.

Stereotype 4

Men are better with numbers, technology, data, the economy, etc. They are usually deemed better educated, intelligent, and better informed.

Many people still believe that women have a poorer understanding of numbers, technology, data, economy, etc. and that as a result, their discourse is weaker, less well-founded and has less value.

The hidden truth

In general, experts who you consult on such fields of knowledge are always men. Male professionals reached such fields before women, but many female professionals today are experts and even pioneers in those areas. As a result of educational patterns that prevailed for centuries, women tend to show their knowledge in public to a lesser extent than their male colleagues.

The benefits of dismantling it

Having the expert knowledge of female professionals, in addition to that of the men in the organisation, adds opportunities and options when running projects or making decisions that require both genders to work together and pool their expertise.

After a first reading, the reaction of male and female readers is most probably “No, I do not act according to stereotypes”. However, as you will see in the subsequent pages, these are the beliefs underlying men’s and women’s communication patterns in professional contexts. After reaching the end of these key communicative points, perhaps the reader might reconsider these stereotypes from another angle.

This guide is a tool to ease understanding on how communication essentially works, to thoughtfully reveal and analyse the mechanisms that govern and harmonise interactions between men and women to decide

how they are applied in CaixaBank and to achieve balanced relationships within the organisation, that promote the talent of all members of the company.

International studies - and observing reality - show that in a social setting, men and women do not receive the same instructions on “appropriate behaviour”, on the specific roles of a man and a woman, or regarding communication. Interpreting the way our interlocutors communicate according to stereotypes hinders any possibility of the egalitarian and effective communication that is precisely sought in an organisation such as CaixaBank.

In short, there are three fundamental mainstays in this guide for egalitarian communication

- **reflection**, in order to understand the distinctive rules governing the communication styles of men and women in the workplace;
- **flexibility**, to refrain from simply clinging to inherited communication patterns, to recognise the potential benefits of using other styles in professional interactions, to flow from one style to another in accordance with what is more effective in a certain situation; and, finally,
- **freedom**, to choose the most efficient patterns in each specific context. That freedom must erase the communication “labels” of traditional clichés.

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Silencing and self-imposed silencing of women's voices



Why women and men behave in different communicative ways in a public setting.

Observe the following two situations:¹

1

The manager receives a call. He leaves his office to go his team's work area (5 men and 3 women) and, addressing all the members, announces, jubilantly:

- *Guys! The Vancouver customer has suggested that we go and present the project there, with their people! Who is up for going to Vancouver for three days next week?*

Immediately, three hands go up.

- *Perfect! - he exclaims, satisfied. There's only a budget for two, so Carlos, Guillermo, Pepe, go into the office, and let's see how we work it out. Fellas! What great news!*

(This situation is resolved in chapter 6)

2

Strategic challenges presentation session. It is now the fourth area's turn. The team making the presentation comprises a man and a woman. The woman starts. When she has been talking for 3 minutes, someone in the audience asks her a question. The female professional starts to reply, when her male partner jumps in:

- *What Marta is trying to say is that...*

And he continues until he has finished giving a detailed explanation in response to the question. From that moment on, all the following questions are put exclusively to him.

(This situation is resolved in chapter 9)

All situations presented in this guide are real cases, modified to a greater or lesser extent for the occasion.

Legitimised speech is acknowledged by the professional community as having accurate and valuable content due to the authority of the person giving it.

The ritual view of communication consists of the linguistic behaviour that members of a community are expected to follow in a certain context.

Note

² Current campaign #DondeEstánLasMujeres (#OnsónlesDones in Catalan - #WhereAreTheWomen)

These two situations, which are so frequent in our professional environments that they often go unnoticed and are deemed “normal”, have something in common: **the woman’s voice has not been heard on an equal footing with the voice of her male colleagues.** Although it is probably involuntary, these are two cases of clear communicative **inequality between genders.**

This is because many women tend to be silent in a public setting where one individual voice has to stand out from the rest. And women are also frequently silenced - usually by men, but also by other women - when they decide to intervene in such situations.

The famous “invisibilization” of women in organisations and in a “public” setting does not only consist of women not being included or in women being under-represented at certain levels (e.g. managers), but also, even within institutions with highly regarded women, they are rarely heard in public. Furthermore, a legitimised feminine discourse is usually given little attention.

What can we do in our institution to improve this situation?

Why do men and women communicate differently in a public setting?

Usually, women are reciprocated in a private setting, in family relationships. The home has been their only space for centuries. Even today, throughout most of the world, it is deemed abnormal for women not to be in the home.

In that small space, family relationships have formed the core of women’s relationships for a long time.

In turn, public spaces have been

a typically masculine area. Both in a professional setting (wage-earning work, trade unions) and in a leisure setting (social gatherings, bars, sports teams, “going out for a drink with colleagues”), for centuries, public spaces have belonged exclusively to men and they have colonised them with “traditional” masculine communicative styles. Only very recently, top **organisations in innovation have proposed egalitarian communicative styles to improve efficiency of management and customer service**, given that both involve women.

Because women have only gained access to professional spaces outside the home very recently and even more recently given access to executive tasks, women usually feel strange and untrained in the rituals and distinctive communication styles of work relations. In turn, many men also seem accustomed to the female voice only being present in a private setting, which is why, either consciously or unconsciously, they do not facilitate (and even prevent) women being heard with authority in professional interactions.

However, as you will see, this state of affairs is changing.

The female trend towards self-imposed silencing in public.

Reality shows that in the media,² in many organisations and in other public settings, female professionals are not expected to be on a par with their male colleagues. Furthermore, analysis of several research papers has demonstrated that a greater percentage of women sometimes show apparent discomfort when hearing their voice in a public setting,

as though they wanted to avoid seeming too prominent.

Thus, on TV talk shows, radio programmes, public scientific debates, parliamentary sessions and also in semi-formal professional meetings, it is demonstrated on a daily basis that women tend to take the floor on fewer occasions than men and when they do, they usually speak less than their male counterparts, **even when they are knowledgeable on the matter being discussed**. It is also well-known that they **are interrupted** in the middle of sentences more frequently than men, who are more likely to be given the chance to seamlessly finish what they were saying.

It is not a question of them never opening their mouths and remaining in total silence. However, when they are observed closely, it is possible to see that they frequently refrain from expressing information or an opinion, instead making a strictly corroboratory remark, giving positive feedback, like “yes, yes”; “that’s right”; “all right, okay”; which does not involve taking the floor, but only emphasising what another person is saying instead. Or they express this communicative support through one of its variants, such as corroboratory smiles.

Women tend to take on the empathetic role of listening attentively, especially when the speaker is a man, as though they unwittingly or deliberately work communicatively to bolster the other’s self-esteem.

This does not necessarily constitute inadequate communicative practice when all participants follow the same rules of the game. However, if it is only women who do this communicative adjustment work, the energy invested by both is strikingly uneven.

Why do women tend to remain silent in public?

In fact, this discretion and convenient “background” position taken by women has traditionally been praised. Therefore, many female professionals store in their subconscious memory the command telling them to be suitably discrete or cautious in many situations where males, on the other hand, can be highly assertive. For that matter, female professionals themselves admit that there is a certain feminine way of acting that consists of not saying everything you know.

For that matter, female professionals admit that there is a certain feminine way of acting that consists of not saying everything you know.

Along these lines, a female professional that holds one of the few executive positions occupied by a woman in an important financial institution in Spain tells how her Republican-leaning grandmother, constantly encouraged her to train as a female professional. “Study, my child, study. You can have a profession, you can earn money that is yours. Study and learn, but... don’t make it too obvious”.

Now, however, **intelligent organisations want intelligent professionals that DO NOT feel obliged to hide their talent, and instead contribute all their potential to the company**. That is the objective.

The question is that this professional setting belongs to a public sphere in which assertiveness, self-confidence and

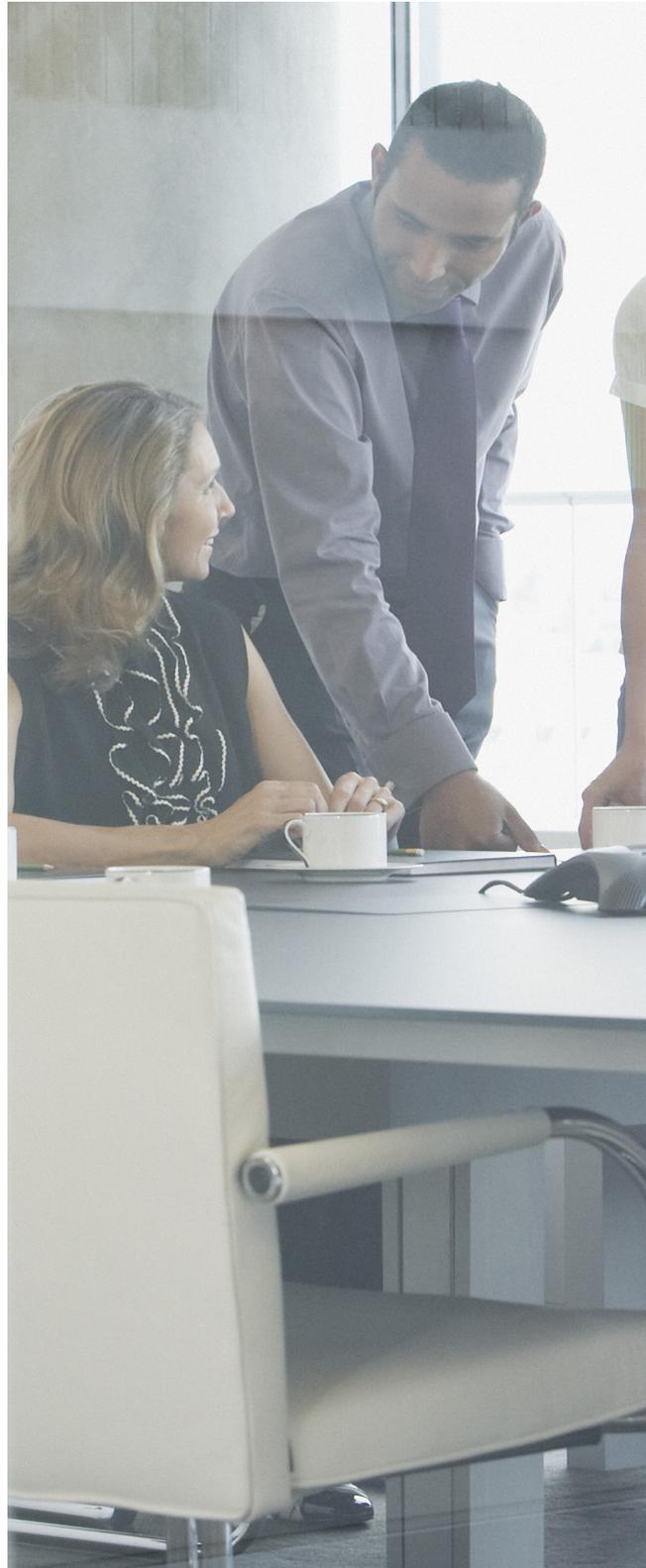
legitimacy are necessarily linked to standing out in the centre of the group and fearlessly taking the floor. This is especially fundamental at managerial levels. Leading means having an opinion and having vision, and expressing them convincingly and persuasively.

However no male or female professional can procure acknowledged authority if they do not express their ideas, suggestions and instructions assertively, with conviction and determination. Furthermore, we all know that there are no prizes in the workplace for anyone who hides what they know or does not demonstrate their talents. Therefore, **a company committed to equal opportunities that highlights diversity has to create a business culture that includes the steady belief that both a man and a woman can be managers and leaders, without coming across as communicatively aggressive, smug or know-alls.**

We now return to situation ① that opened this chapter. **How can you prevent and resolve situations like this?**

Fundamentally, the person who directs or coordinates meetings like this should be aware of the trend among many women in the professional field to self-conceal, as well as how some males excessively take up meeting time.

There are many possible solutions: there are many ways of arranging the order of speakers. For example, the person that coordinates the meeting can propose an order of responses or a target criterion (such as the number of workers from different subsidiaries or reversing the order from the previous meeting). Other solutions will be shown in the coming chapters.





In short, women's voices are often not heard on an equal footing with the voices of their male colleagues.

What consequences does this have?

- Women that are highly knowledgeable on a topic tend to act according to "appropriate discretion".
- Important information is lost.
- They are sometimes silenced by the others.

Why?

- Because, for centuries, "modest" and discrete women have been rewarded for keeping in the background as expected.
- Because they have been taught to hide what they know and they fear seeming like know-it-alls.

What can we do?

- Learn to recognise situations in which the voice of female professionals is not heard on an equal footing with their male colleagues.
- Bear in mind how many women tend to favour quiet "discretion" in the professional field as well as the tendency of some men to speak excessively and implement compensating strategies.

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A woman with long brown hair, wearing a grey blazer and a silver watch, is leaning forward and listening intently to a man in a dark suit. The man's back is to the camera, and his hand is visible near the woman's face. The background is a bright, out-of-focus office setting.

Insecurity and communicative stereotypes

Why women - even highly qualified professionals - seem hesitant or insecure so often. Communication stereotypes.

Observe the situation:

A meeting featuring various areas that must implement a new IT tool. Javier Zabala, the IT manager who has developed the tool, speaks first:

- *Right, okay... Good morning... As you know (smile), today we will explain a bit about how to use the new program to manage customer insurance (smile). So, if you don't mind, before asking any questions, could you open the program and start using it*
- *Hey, Javier - Carmen García, the manager of another team, interrupts - Why on earth do we have to change the program again when as far as I know nobody has raised any issues about the previous one? I don't understand - and I believe that I am speaking for everybody here - why must we change a computer system that DOES NOT give us any problems while we keep others that are a downright disaster? Which criteria have been followed? Really, it does not seem to be particularly obvious.*

There is something in this situation that does not feel right, something strange, right? And it is the highly unexpected style that both coordinators, Javier and Carmen, have used. They are rather harsh dialogues... although not so much if we use the so-called *reverse test*.

Now let us reverse the roles and assign the initial dialogue to Carmen and the rather-snappish interruption to Javier. Hmm. Perhaps now the exchange is no longer so surprising (in fact, that was the original distribution of roles in the real-life situation). Carmen is the first person to speak and she presents herself to us as someone who wants to be liked and to come across as friendly, although she seems a bit frightened, insecure, and maybe shy. And Javier seems like a guy with clear ideas who does not want to waste a minute more than necessary, although that sometimes means he comes across as very direct.

Who seems more "boss"-like? The second one undoubtedly.

And what happens when the second role corresponds to Carmen? Does she seem like a boss or rather an "iron-fisted ruler" or "bossy"?

Some people attending the meeting work with Carmen and know that she is a true expert in her field, the specialist who everybody goes to when they are lumbered with an IT "mess" of major proportions. At university she came first in her class, and she deserved it. Why then, should she - according to what we deem as "normal" - express herself so meekly?

Although it seems outdated, the explanation lies in that fact that **women and men continue to receive different instructions on how to communicate appropriately.**

Throughout our socialisation process, both women and men have received, with varying degrees of subtlety or explicitness, different instructions about how we have to use language; different "communicative usage instructions" are instilled in us.

Instructions on the use of communication based on stereotypes

Instructions for women	Instructions for men
<p>Seldom speak in society and when they do, do so “delicately”. In contrast to men who can strengthen their masculine role by sometimes using rude language, women should not say swear words or curse. They can use “delicate” emotional expressions, such as “Good lord!”, “you’re kidding me!”, “goodness”, “oh!” etc.</p>	<p>Remember that, when the situation calls for it, you can use rude language, for example, to expressively intensify (“dude!”, “shit-hot!”, “fuck!”), to highlight both your masculinity and your status.</p>
<p>Avoid raising your voice (speak with a soft, “feminine” voice).</p>	<p>Speak with a deep voice (a “man’s” voice).</p>
<p>Speak correctly (following formal or well-educated patterns of pronunciation, using elegant words).</p>	<p>Speak loudly, solidly and firmly.</p>
<p>Avoid coming across as offensive or aggressive; do not give direct orders (therefore, avoid imperatives and assertive present tenses, instead using conditional paraphrasing like “I would like”, “It would be beneficial”).</p>	<p>Give orders (use language to show you influence in the conversation, that you have leadership qualities).</p>
<p>Be courteous, diplomatic, avoid any kind of confrontation, and smile to show you agree with the other speaker.</p>	<p>Fight for the floor, talk over other voices.</p>
<p>Extend this “courteous understanding” to the speaker who “steals” the floor; kindly give way to other speakers.</p>	<p>Have the first and last word. Demonstrate that, when you have the floor, it is not easily snatched from you.</p>
<p>Avoid being too assertive or giving your opinion enthusiastically.</p>	<p>Be assertive (“be self-assured”, be direct, show self-confidence).</p>
<p>Seem a little childish when speaking (high tone of voice, frequently using diminutives and disparatives (“little idea”, “around ten-ish”); formulate unfinished sentences.</p>	<p>Promote a solid and competent adult self.</p>

Men have, undoubtedly, also received rules on how to behave linguistically. In fact, men run a serious risk of being interpreted as weak or effeminate if they overuse linguistic mechanisms that appear on the left side of the table, which are traditionally attributed to the feminine way of speaking, or if they use them in inappropriate situations.

The vast majority of women and men have internalised these educational patterns that are difficult to “erase” from their hard disk or from their long-term memory precisely for this reason. Mass inclusion of women in the workplace in recent decades and therefore their everyday contact with masculine style speakers in a social setting could lead us to believe that women have gradually and predictably abandoned their traditional female group traits in favour of strategies and mechanisms specific to the masculine style of speech, given that this is, ultimately, established as the habitual, “correct,” “legitimate” and “prestigious” style in a public setting.

Nonetheless, on the one hand, it is not so easy to cast off communication patterns that have been inherited over several generations. On the other hand, by using communication patterns specific to the feminine style of speech, it seems that women sometimes (perhaps subconsciously) seek implicit praise from male colleagues who “reward” those who do not “abandon their role” with their compassion.

It is difficult to seem assertive, secure, committed, demonstrating vision and leadership skills, if you feel obliged to formulate unfinished phrases, lessen any convincing affirmation, use diminutives and disparatives, and smile apologetically. One of the main pitfalls preventing females from taking part on an equal footing with their

male colleagues lies in the fact that a **public setting demands and rewards communicative attitudes such as self-assurance, fighting for the floor, and self-promotion. In short, this involves empowering “yourself”, which collides head-on with communicative patterns with which women have been traditionally educated** and which we will analyse in greater detail in the following chapters.

Organisations that lead innovation promote a more flexible and less hierarchical mixed communicative style.

In turn, the fact that men feel obliged to talk over the voices of others, to have the first and last word or put up a Herculean fight for the floor, instead of negotiating are not highly effective communicative traits for twenty-first century organisations. Organisations driving innovation **promote a mixed communication style** that combines the most effective traits of both styles to adapt to new socio-economic contexts and to new, more flexible and less hierarchical organisational structures.

Priorities in an innovative organisation are communication skills consisting of knowing how to listen, negotiating the conversation’s subject and development with other speakers, including the rest of the participants in the discussion, and seeking consensus; all of which are specific strategies of the predominant style among women (also known as rapport). This explains the advantage and the need to incorporate more women in strategic managerial and coordination roles.



Returning to the situation presented at the start of the chapter.

Consider firstly that a female professional who appears insecure probably... only seems it; but is not actually insecure. Furthermore, it is likely that, while aware of it or not, she feels obliged to show a certain insecurity. This is why it is important

that whoever is listening to her does not judge her too quickly by her - perhaps only apparently hesitant - style.

And it is also important that the organisation accepts, promotes and explicitly values - **clear, assertive and courteous speech**. These are deemed the most effective.



In short, women and men are educated to communicate according to certain patterns that lead to stereotyped communication styles. Women must be courteous, not too assertive and by no means aggressive.

Why?

- Because traditional educational patterns remain in force.
- Because women and men have deeply internalised the rules with which they were educated.

What consequences does this have?

- A “masculine” communication style still prevails in the workplace.
- Women seem insecure or hesitant.
- Sometimes women who show their leadership qualities in their communication style are implicitly “punished”.
- Their male colleagues are friendlier towards female professionals that do not abandon their communicative role.
- Occasionally, the “masculine” role is subliminally branded with communicative traits of scant empathy or impoliteness.

What can we do?

- Recognise that communication models that give rise to feminine and masculine styles are highly ingrained in all of us.
- Refrain from immediately judging a professional as insecure because they express themselves unconfidently.
- Explicitly value the more assertive ways that our institution’s professional communicate.
- Consider the communicative advantages of many rapport-style traits.

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Indirection or circumlocution



Insecurity or fear of seeming too direct?

Observe the following dialogue, taken from an everyday setting:

❶ In a restaurant, a couple is deciding what to drink with dinner.

HIM: *What type of wine do you fancy?*

HER: *Ah, whatever you want...*

HIM: *Okay... I'm going to have a look at the list of reds.*

HER: *But you've ordered fish, right?*

HIM: *Yes... Shall we try this red Priorat?*

HER: *Red with fish?*

HIM: *Well... now sommeliers pair fish with any type of wine...*

HER: *But red... in this heat!*

HIM (watching her with an expression of somewhat irritated bewilderment): *Hey, if you preferred white, why the hell didn't you make it clear from the beginning?*

Two different attitudes can be noted in this exchange representing how we express what we want. The first is the masculine one, perceived as transparent. The other is based on **indirection**. As we saw in chapter 2, "feminine" women do not usually, directly and conclusively express their desires, proposals or opinions so they have learnt to do it in a meandering way.

The question is, why did the prototypical participant of this dialogue try to cover up her predilection, thinking that it was not appropriate to explicitly state it? Is it a purely empathetic attitude towards the other or is she upholding the (semblance of) subordination to him?

The feminine communication pattern of frequently resorting to indirection generally responds to the objective of trying not to dominate the other speaker. The previous dialogue is probably also governed by the instruction to seduce, passed down throughout the centuries, that involves relinquishing choices to the male (following the precept "make him feel like he's in charge, that he's the one who decides"). Indirection clearly appears as a specific strategy of the person who does not have the power in situations such as this.

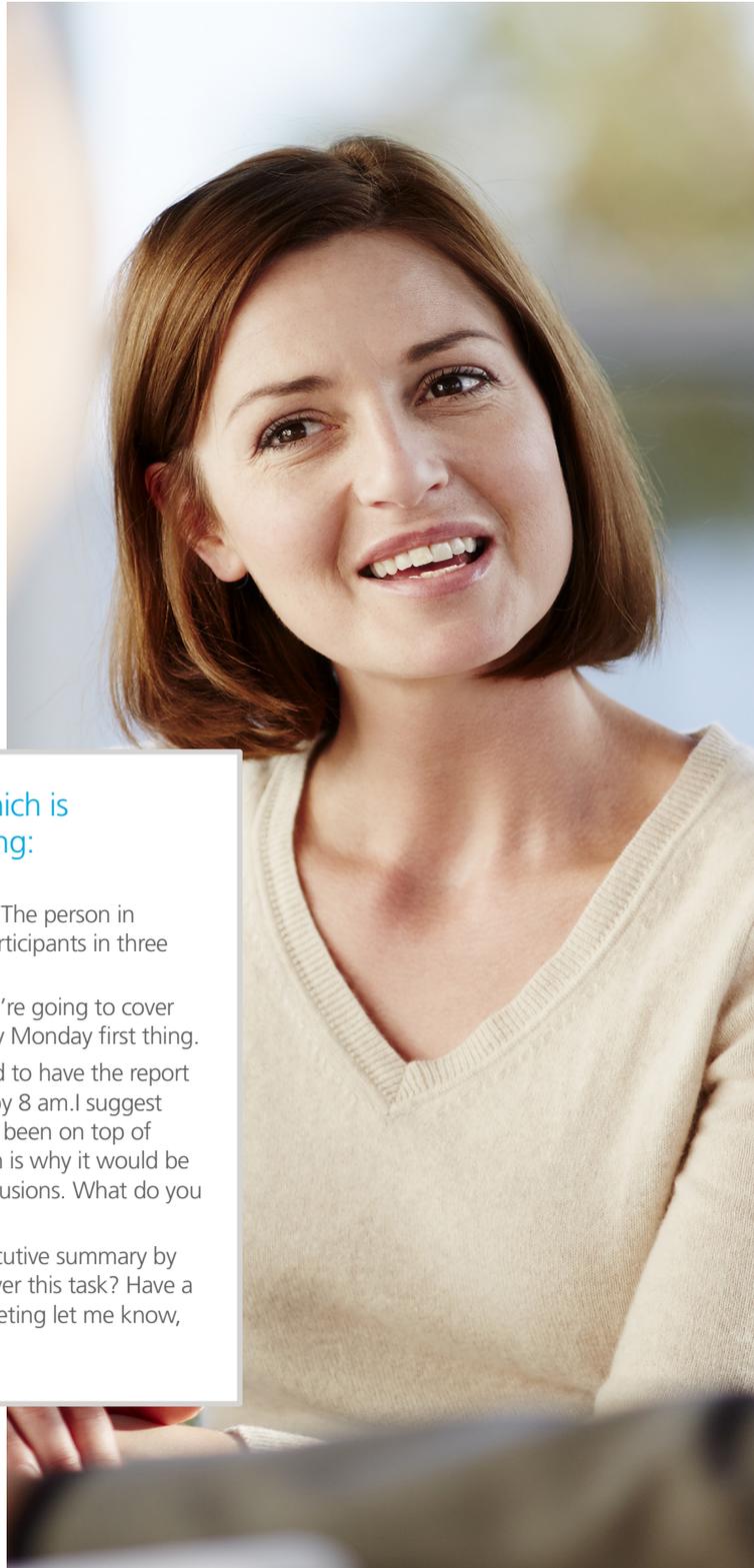
The recurring use of these communicative detours strengthens the stereotype that women never clearly state what they want or think. Thus, some interpret women as contrived or manipulative because "they say something when they are really thinking something else."

Listen up, indirection is a communication mechanism used by everybody, including men and women. We use it above all when what we are saying may hurt or annoy the recipient. For example, the two following sentences:

- *Hmmmm... I am not sure those trousers are really your style.*
- *Shall we meet up this weekend? I actually have a lot of work on...*

They are both indirect sentences because neither transparently expresses the message that is implicitly communicated (“The trousers don’t suit you” and “I’m not going out with you”). The fact that both cases concern indirect messages does not prevent the recipient from understanding them perfectly. In both cases, indirection is employed through linguistic courtesy: they are the linguistic result of an attempt by the speaker not to communicatively attack their interlocutor.

However, as highlighted in the most recent research on gender discourse, **men and women use indirect messages in different settings and for different purposes.**



Now look at this situation, which is specific to a professional setting:

- 2 Team meeting on Thursday evening. The person in charge of the group can address the participants in three different ways:
- A - Good afternoon. Ernesto, Ana, you’re going to cover this task. We need the final summary by Monday first thing.
 - B - Good afternoon. We’ve been asked to have the report by Monday sharp. So it must be ready by 8 am. I suggest that Ana and Ernesto write it. You have been on top of this project and you know it best, which is why it would be more beneficial if you oversee the conclusions. What do you think?
 - C - Good afternoon. We need the executive summary by Monday first thing. Who is going to cover this task? Have a think about it and at the end of the meeting let me know, all right?



Current studies show that **women's use of indirection generally comes in response to a desire not to impose themselves** impolitely and not to come across as too demanding or pushy. In fact, it seems that women tend to use indirect messages more than men, especially when it comes to “blurring” orders or instructions. Female managers' **discourse often contains indirect formulations**, especially when addressing their subordinates.

Women tend to use indirect messages more than men, especially when it comes to “blurring” orders or instructions.



In short, not only do women use indirection to avoid making the person they are talking to feel uncomfortable, but they especially use it when they have to give orders or instructions. Managerial women's discourse usually contains indirect formulations.

Why?

- Because of the traditional educational patterns they have been taught.
- Because women avoid imposing themselves on the other speaker and coming across as too pushy or demanding.

What consequences does this have?

- Recurring use of these indirect forms strengthens the stereotype that women never clearly state what they want or think.
- Women seem tricky or manipulative.
- Indirect orders can be misinterpreted and understood as mere suggestions people ignore.

What can we do?

- Suitably interpret the indirect message as an instruction that does not want to come across as excessively imposing and make it more specific.
- Promote professional participation with coordination responsibilities that include clear, unambiguous and efficient discourse that is neither arrogant nor authoritarian.
- Promote this communication style and explicitly value it.



What can we observe in the three possible ways of organising the task that was presented in situation 2?

The first version has the advantage of immediate clarity: the work is quickly assigned. However, there is a disadvantage: if it is an impact project, the people selected have clearly been “rewarded” which perhaps looks like favouritism in the group or they are “indebted by the favour”. And if the task is a hassle, the two chosen professionals have been punished to a certain extent.

Options **B** and **C** have added advantages: in instruction **B**, which is also immediate, the person in charge is the only one making decisions, but they use two noteworthy empathy mechanisms towards the group: (i) they show appreciation of the work of the people assigned the project and (ii) at the end of the discussion, they ask a question seeking consensus: “What do you think?”

As regards option **C**, what disadvantage does it have? The work has not been assigned from the outset. However, there are several advantages: the team members are able to put themselves forward as volunteers. Furthermore, since members do not have to put their hand up immediately, people who tend to think it over a bit more before volunteering (usually women) will have time to do so.

In short, in an innovative organisation, it is beneficial to take note and identify professionals who can propose clear and respectful instructions to be able to highlight this communication style.

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Attenuation and self-discrimination



Attenuation. When you do not want to appear too intelligent. The preface of ritual self-discrimination. Lack of knowledge or fear of excess limelight?

Let us begin with this brief dialogue and its two possible replies:

① A male worker asks somebody in his team:

- *What do you think of the report I sent you?*

To which his colleague can reply in these two ways:

Ⓐ *Your report? It was full of mistakes!*

Ⓑ *Well... I don't know... I scanned over it a little, but it seemed to me that the sales figures presented from the last semester were not accurate.*

Notice that the person answering in example Ⓑ has used more words than answer Ⓐ. What is the reasoning behind this? Clearly they intend to soften the implicit statement "Your report contains mistakes." Furthermore, the second speaker has used "extra" words by arranging them into different mechanisms that speakers use, when appropriate, to make sentences less forceful, for example, when they may seem to hurt others.

Thus, reply Ⓑ includes several mitigating language resources: the expression of uncertainty "I don't know", the verb to believe - unsure - "I believe", or the assurance-mitigating phrase "I scanned over it a little". In brief, the speaker has decided to make an "extra" discursive effort to avoid direct confrontation with the interlocutor, so as not to attack them.

Now let's look at this exchange:

② In a work meeting, one of the participants says:

- *If the latest data I have received is accurate, electricity utility shares are probably going to rise by 3.45 points next week.*

The speaker has used two simultaneous mechanisms to avoid committing to the absolute accuracy of the data being given. The basic statement "Electric utility shares are going to rise by 3.45 points next week" has been softened (attenuated) through the use of the adverb "probably" and the conditional clause (hypothetical) "if the latest data I have received is accurate."

Attenuation mechanisms are resources used to tone down the clout of phrases, mitigate the message and to make them less forceful. They are often used to preserve your own image or to avoid coming across as hurtful.

These three mechanisms allow the speaker to communicate that they are quite sure of what they are saying, but at the same time they “cover their backs” in the event that their statement turns out not to be correct. Thus, if someone subsequently specifies “Actually, there will be a 3.25 rise,” nobody could accuse the first speaker of being a liar or inaccurate given that they already warned that they did not completely commit to the accuracy of the statement. To sum up, in the event that the statement is not accurate, the speaker’s image as someone who is thorough and reliable remains intact.

What can we observe here? That the message attenuation mechanisms are not the result of an attempt to avoid appearing hurtful, rather more presenting yourself as a serious professional instead. In anthropological terms, it can be said that the mechanisms of attenuation here are used to save face professionally.

Interestingly, both men and women use linguistic mechanisms to soften their messages, but prototypically we use them for different purposes. Thus, we subconsciously tend to identify the speaker in the latter situation as a man and we tend to attribute phrase **B** of the opening scene to a woman.

Now, let’s look at this third situation:

3 Team-leader Meeting. The objective is to gather participants’ proposals and opinions on how to specify projects within a strategic challenge. There are 15 people present, including six women. After three male colleagues have spoken, the first female professional to take the floor says:

- *Well, I don’t know; what I am going to say has probably already occurred to some of you, but I believe that perhaps we should...*

Then, two male coordinators speak. A second female professional speaks after them:

- *Well, maybe what I am going to say does not apply, but it seems to me that perhaps we would have to...*

Subsequently, the third female team leader to speak states:

- *Let’s see... As you know, this is not exactly my specialist field, but perhaps it would be convenient to check the entire programme from the beginning, testing it from a user-friendly perspective, right?*

What do the three interventions by the three female speakers have in common? They have clearly dedicated the first part of their intervention to attenuating the force of the subsequent content, almost as a sort of introduction.

As we saw in previous chapters, women have generally been educated to disguise their assuredness, scale down their successes and to seem less intelligent than they truly are. Given that the "Handbook of communication instructions on how a woman is expected to act" includes playing down your own successes (as well as women's tendency to appear kind and unassertive), it is no wonder that when speaking in public, female professionals often begin with authentic ritual **self-discrimination prefaces** as demonstrated in the latter situation.

The use of this modesty tactic is sometimes interpreted by other participants as being correct. i.e. as a ritual sign of rhetorical humility and not as a sincere statement of incompetence or ignorance.

However, it is also likely that you have occasionally attended a meeting in which a male colleague that did not know guidelines of the "ritual modesty pattern" snatched the female professional's turn to speak, believing that the female speaker was actually not too sure of what she was saying and was encouraged by the idea that "if she is not sure of what she is saying, let's not waste time with what she has to say."

The explanation of this widespread feminine habit of formally underrating yourself, especially when starting to speak in public, lies in inherited sociological guidelines on how women and men should act. Thus, men

are accustomed to disguising their doubts (since they have to appear as "secure" and "adept" individuals), whereas women tend to disguise their security, given that they are socially acknowledged for being "kind" and "passive". **Even though a woman has a good understanding of the technical field in question and the topic being discussed, she may simply feel obliged to linguistically formulate her relative inexperience or insecurity purely out of courtesy.**

The self-discrimination ritual is an attenuation mechanism subtype that consists of minimising your own merits to discredit or even to formally vilify yourself.

Men are used to disguising their doubts, whereas women tend to disguise their security.

Therefore, men run the risk of being branded haughty, arrogant or "big-headed", whereas women may seem insecure, indecisive or hesitant. Furthermore, when a woman appears assertive, they are too often considered "aggressive" by the people around them. Many women with managerial responsibilities have mentioned these reactions.

However, in twenty-first century organisations arrogance and subservience are neither effective nor beneficial communicative styles. Therefore, **it is vital to overcome the oldest traits of traditional styles in favour of greater communicative responsibility and understanding.**



In short, female professionals often begin with ritual self-discrimination prefaces when speaking in public.

Sometimes, men feel obliged to “display” their security by engaging in inconsiderate communication with others.

What consequences does this have?

- Female professionals are considered insecure, indecisive.
- Professional women seem to have less authority to say what they say.
- Their communication seems less legitimised, is underrated and is more likely to be interrupted or not taken into consideration.
- Men that “masculinise” their communication can come across as arrogant and callous.

Why?

- Women have been educated to disguise their self-assurance and minimise their successes, to seem less able than they truly are.
- They are expected to be kind and passive. They feel obliged to express their relative incompetence or insecurity purely out of courtesy.
- Men have received the instruction that they must be “secure” and forceful.

What can we do?

- Recognise the ritual self-discrimination prefaces as a mere formal modesty guideline.
- Compensate ritual self-discrimination when speaking by also using resources to confer confidence in what you are saying.
- Encourage clear, direct and polite speech models from other women in the organisation.



Now let's return to the third situation
How can we foresee any potential communicative problems?

One possibility lies in observing the style of women and men who intervene politely, without arrogance and directly. Guarantee and encourage this kind of communication style. Take note that there are professionals who compensate using a brief ritual modesty preface with other assertive and self-confident communicative procedures, i.e. maintaining eye contact with the other attendees, articulating the message with a clear voice and structuring coherent and well-worded speeches.

Possible alternative version:

- *Well... this is not exactly my specialist field, [RITUAL PREFACE] but in accordance with the results that we have achieved in other projects and considering how we have managed to solve similar problems on other occasions, I propose that we revise the whole programme from the beginning, testing it from a user-friendly viewpoint. [REST OF SPEECH IS ASSERTIVE]*

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Put your hand up



Learn to put your hand up. What to do when professionals do not put themselves forward.

Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, recounts the following experience:

❶ Some years ago I spoke at a conference on gender issues in front of several hundred Facebook employees. After my speech, I answered all the questions I could in the allotted time. Afterwards, that same afternoon, I returned to my office where a young female worker was waiting to talk to me.

- *Today I have learnt something* - she said. - *What?* – I asked satisfied, since I imagined that she was about to tell me that my talk had deeply touched her. Instead, she stated:
- *I have learnt to keep my hand up.*

She explained to me that towards the end of my conference I said that I would only reply to two more questions. I did, which is why she and every other woman put their hands down. However, several men kept theirs up. Since there were still hands waving in the air, I replied to more questions that were only posed by men. Instead of my words being an inspiration, they came down on me like a ton of bricks. Although I had given a conference on gender issues, I had an issue right in front of me that I had been unable to see.

Let's compare that with the second situation presented in chapter 2:

❷ The male manager receives a call. He leaves his office to go his team's work area (5 men and 3 women) and, addressing all the members, announces, jubilantly:

- *Guys! The Vancouver customer has suggested that we go and present the project there, with their people! Who is up for going to Vancouver for three days next week?*

Immediately, three more hands go up.

- *Perfect!* - he exclaims, satisfied. *There's only a budget for two, so Carlos, Guillermo, Pepe, go into the office, and let's see how we work it out. Fellas! What great news!*

What do they have in common? Both reveal how women tend to conceal themselves in public. This is a tendency that we have already addressed in previous chapters where we have seen it expressed through various verbal mechanisms (the tendency to disguise intelligence and worth, the use of indirection, using self-discrimination introductions, etc.).

Putting your hand up, making yourself seen or putting yourself forward implies a drastic breach in expected, instilled feminine discretion.

In the two previous situations, we could also see that same trend to remain “discretely in the shade,” but it is now expressed through non-verbal communication: putting your hand up or keeping it lowered. A lowered hand is the gesture that highlights self-concealing. Nonetheless, the conditions where you usually put your hand up (big conferences with a lot of people) are not required for this trend to be produced: it can be seen in any group context where a question is asked starting with “Who knows/wants...?”, “Who would like/is interested in...?”.

Women often refrain from taking a step forward in public, even more so if it means getting ahead of another person (situation ②). They tend to demurely obey the rules, even when it implies an individual loss (for example, not having the option to ask a question - situation ①).

In fact, it is very significant that one of the three pieces of advice

given by Sheryl Sandberg to women professionals around the world who have seen her TED talk “Why we have too few women leaders” (currently viewed by more than 5,000,000 people) is precisely: **“put your hand up”**. In other words, she proposes that they unlearn the traditional instruction to hide and encourages them to learn to put themselves forward.

It seems easy. An ordinary action: putting your hand up in public. However, for a clear majority of female professionals, even the highest-level executives like Sandberg, putting their hand up, making themselves visible or volunteering themselves implies drastically breaching the expected feminine discretion instilled in all women from early childhood, inherited over the generations and also expected of them by their surrounding environment.

It is evident that the communicative tactic being addressed here (hiding your hand, not putting it up, as an expressive metaphor for concealing yourself) reveals a deeply relevant aspect to the optimum development of talent available to an organisation: **if female professionals do not put their hands up and do not put themselves forward, the chances of the institution's female talent being impartially promoted are reduced.**

Like the remaining statements presented in this guide, the realisation that **women are accustomed to appearing hesitant to openly nominating themselves as candidates is empirically proven.**

For example, Lloyds TSB discovered that its female employees tended to refrain from nominating themselves for promotion despite having 8% more possibilities of meeting the standards or exceeding them than their male

colleagues. Similarly, various studies on gender and workplace promotion, mainly conducted in universities in England and Australia, also revealed that women often hesitate when putting themselves forward because they underestimate their own skills, abilities and work experience. An internal report by Hewlett-Packard revealed that women only apply for vacant posts when they believe they meet 100% of the necessary requirements, whilst men put themselves forward if they believe they meet 60% of requirements. Sandberg herself cites other similar studies, and also includes her extensive personal experience.

As a matter of fact, studies show that non-verbal communication from male professionals in the workplace

is consistent with the feminine self-concealing tendency, as we will see in chapter 11.

Thus, when observing a mixed meeting with men and women who have the same level of responsibility, several members of the male group can be seen sitting in the front seats (if seats are arranged in rows) and centre seats (in the previous case and when the meeting is organised as a round table). However, **the women tend to gravitate towards the end of the table and the edge of the room, far from positions that imply status.** That is, females tend to use the common professional space, like they are guests as opposed to owners.

In short, women do not usually volunteer themselves in professional contexts or put their hand up in public to the same degree as their male colleagues.

What consequences does this have?

- Female professionals remain in the shade.
- Female professionals miss out on opportunities for experience and promotion.
- In organisations, it is not possible to promote female talent impartially.

Why?

- Women have been educated to behave discreetly and not to get ahead of others.
- Professional women underestimate their own skills, abilities and work experience.

What can we do?

- Encourage women to participate in meetings, debates, decision-making, selection processes, applications for promotions, etc.
- Refrain from immediately choosing the first person to put themselves forward. Give yourself time to see to all available candidates.

How can the situations presented be prevented or resolved?

Let's review the situation ①.

Option A:

Sandberg concludes that one possible solution is to encourage female professionals to put their hand up fearlessly and to keep it up, even when they may receive discouraging messages from the people around them. However, for an organisation's female professionals to be encouraged to openly show their contribution or candidacy, especially in professional contexts in which women are still a minority, we need the moderator, coordinator or the person responsible for the appointment to see them and we need them to endeavour to see the scarce (and courageous) female hands in the probable sea of raised male arms.

Another possible action to avoid uneven situations such as dialogue ①, consists of promoting participation of female attendees.

Option B:

- *Ladies and gentlemen. Sorry, but we can only take two questions. The lecturer has to catch a plane. (...)*
- *Uh huh. Here on the front row I see several hands. The man on the left-hand side was the first one to put his hand up, I believe... Ah, and I also see a lady there at the back who wants to ask a question, right?*

Indeed, reports intended for the senior executives of leading American firms urge people with managerial responsibilities to ensure that everybody speaks and is heard in work meetings. They are even urged to observe where their team members sit down to ensure that both men and women occupy the front and centre seats.

They are encouraged to openly ask the women to contribute to the conversation, and publicly acknowledge their contributions by mentioning their names.

- *And you Clara, what do you think? - (...)*
- *All right. That is a point of view that we had not considered until now. Thank you, Clara.*

Observe the situation ②. It is clear that in organisations' daily work, there are many situations in which it is necessary to make fast decisions. However, it is possible to blend fast decisions with a measured choice; not yielding to the person who is the fastest to "unleash their arm", so to speak. As we have seen, studies show that many female professionals' resistance to putting themselves forward is not necessarily due to family matters (not travelling in order to be able to take care of children or parents), apathy to travelling, lack of training or experience in undertaking the position or task, but the fear of appearing too prominent instead.

Strategies that have proven to be effective in other cases are not assuming that the first people to volunteer are always chosen systematically or suggesting to female professionals that they can also be candidates when they meet the necessary requirements. Lastly, it is also worthwhile taking into consideration that **in the twenty-first century business world, teams made up of both women and men demonstrate the company's respect and attention to equality and the wealth of diversity. They help win over the loyalty of the talent in the organisation and achieve better results than homogeneous teams** made up only of men (or only of women), in accordance with various international reports.

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The “I” that is hidden in “we”

The tendency to hide achievements. Uncover the “I” that is hidden in the use of “we”.



The following two situations have a communicative aspect in common:

① On a Spanish palaeontological site, one of the most important in the world to date, a highly relevant scientific discovery was made of human remains suggesting that the date established up to now for the hominid attributed to this setting was incorrect. The news reached the media through the voice of the site's managers (both male) who gave a detailed, satisfied explanation of the importance of the discovery for international palaeontological science and of the site and the rigorous work being carried out there.

However, the discovery was made by a female palaeontologist managing the internal excavation, whose name has hardly been published by any media outlet and was barely mentioned by the managers.

Finally, when some colleagues and journalists ask the female palaeontologist for the circumstances and the "scientific clues" that brought about the success of her discovery, she modestly answered:

- *I... well... Well, I have been lucky.*

② A large auditorium. Presentation of a major corporation's results. A female economist, the Finance Manager, is speaking:

Our team has also envisioned that the progress... (...). I am available if you have any questions.

- ... as the on-screen data shows, the company's initial launch on the Stock Market was a success. We have designed a strategy which, although it seemed risky, has proven to be effective in the current context. The group has, thus, achieved... (...).

Someone in the audience speaks:

- Well, firstly, I'd like to congratulate you. However, I would like to know who exactly was the manager who led launched the company on the Stock Market?

- *Eh... well... let's see... ehh... I mean... Me.*

Again, both scenes have one aspect in common: notice that the expert who speaks modestly hides her individual contribution to the success of the scientific or financial project, downplaying all importance.

Women mask their achievements, while their male counterparts do not have any qualms about expressing them publically.

Why do they do it? Because it seems there are social double standards to assess how women and men should behave as regards explaining their success i.e. self-promotion.

Women tend to deem that speaking about their own professional merits constitutes (inappropriate) exhibitionism. In turn, men - with all the cultural and individual differences that can be perceived - seem to be more comfortable in accepting that showing what you do (especially if you think you have done well) is part of the rules of the game in the professional world, a world in which the principle of modesty-based courtesy is assumed to be on-hold, its incompatibility covered by the prescriptive incompatibility that governs job promotion.

As has been explained in previous pages, if society expects women not to speak assertively, not to be competitive and not to make themselves noticed, then **within a work environment, women are generally deemed not to profess their own merits and successes, but instead to dilute them** through strategies to blur the

“I” in favour of the “we”, “the team”, “our group” or “the company”.

Female professionals often use the forms of “we”, especially when they have coordination responsibilities. It is indisputably a very empathetic “we” and also a “we” that shows solidarity with the team, since it includes a group extending beyond the individual manager. However, it is also a “we” that often hides the female professional’s personal achievement.

Could it be negative for male or female professionals to use the aforementioned modesty strategies? Is it perhaps incorrect that they dilute their personal responsibility for the success and that they display it as a team result? No. Not in the slightest. However, this is only true as long as men and women use the same strategies. When this does not happen, often the female professionals unknowingly follow **disadvantage rules**: they mask their achievements almost ritually, whereas their male counterparts generally do not have any qualms about publicly expressing them when they believe they have done something well.

The innovative twenty-first century organisations seek a less hierarchical, more fluid, creative and flexible structure that enables them to adapt to highly changing circumstances. In these new organisational structures, it is vital that communication in each team foment mutual enrichment and promotes the best of each individual. Therefore, the person who is responsible for group coordination must know how to publicly highlight the important aspect of the contribution made by each team member. Following on from this, it is worth vindicating female communication patterns, since they are

The “I” is blurred through linguistic mechanisms that hide the relationship between what is being said and the person that is speaking.

accustomed to linguistically expressing the importance of teamwork and they value the contribution of participants.

Remember that organisations with a better gender balance tend to have inclusive cultures that optimise

employees' abilities and contributions. They also benefit from empathetic leadership attributes which, although common to men and women, are more frequent in the female approach to work.

In short, female professionals mask their personal successes: their "I" is hidden in the "we", in "our group", "the team" or "the company".

What consequences does this have?

- "We", "the company" or "the team" conceal the achievements of female professionals to a greater extent than men's achievements.
- Women may be at a disadvantage in the job promotion game.
- However, they publicly recognise the importance of each team member's participation and contributions.

Why?

- Because society judges how men and women express their own achievements differently.
- Because women avoid appearing competitive and actually shun the limelight.

What can we do?

- Highlight the credit that a female professional is due when she is being overly quiet.
- Promote speech where professionals can make personal contributions without overshadowing what their colleagues have to say.



Let's return to the situations proposed at the start of this section. **What can you do?** There are several possibilities.

One. Remember that a reiterated "we" coming from a female professional may be hiding her significant individual involvement.

Two. If a female professional has sufficiently empathetic colleagues around her another person can explain that she was the one who achieved it when she masks her role when talking about an achievement.

Three. The most ambitious strategy. Promote mixed speech (for men and women) within the organisation in which professionals can give their personal contribution without forgetting the participants' necessary and vital contribution:

- With my team's assistance, I can make this proposal today.
- The idea came from my experience in X and, to carry it out, I worked with...
- None of what I am presenting today would have been possible without the expertise and the involvement of the team members...

Four. The most innovative international businesses propose that people with executive positions become involved to guarantee that female professionals receive the approval they deserve and seek and find opportunities to appraise their achievements. They also propose helping women to identify their own success, regularly taking an interest in their work, addressing their interest with friendly questions such as "How are you?", "How is the new project going?", "What did you finally decide to do?". These are questions that, without interpreting them as control strategies, genuinely seek to gain first-hand knowledge of the female professional's activity.

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Pirated ideas

What pirated ideas are and how to expose them.



The following scene comes from a Spanish film:

① The scene plays out as follows. We can see three people in an office. A man and a woman are sat at a table in a meeting. Another - somewhat older - man is standing and seems to be the manager of the group. The woman opens a folder and hands some documents to her colleague and another copy to the person in charge while she says:

- *My proposal is to change the processors and increase the memory. These machines are very old. The new ones could be construed as an investment and not an expense. We could also obtain some subsidies from R&D.*

The boss, who is standing, looks at the documents and seeks confirmation from his male colleague.

- *Marcos, is this right?*

The employee turns towards him, for a few seconds and answers:

- *Shit, sure. I hadn't thought about the subsidies.*

At that moment, someone knocks on the door. The CEO enters the office, excusing himself:

- *Sorry. Excuse the delay.*

The group's manager, with documents in his hand, turns towards the person who has just arrived and proposes the following:

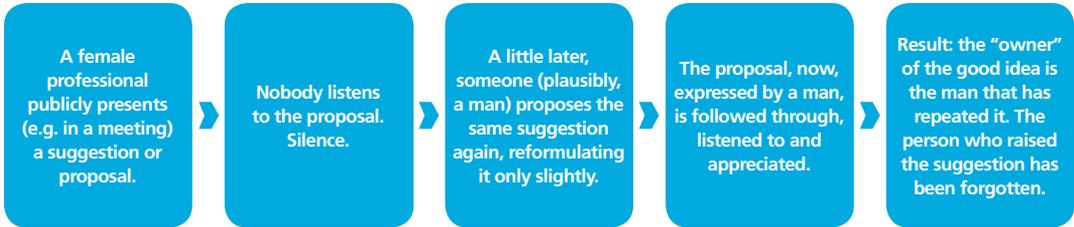
- *Look, I was thinking of renewing the machines, and Marcos tells me that we could get some subsidies from R&D. What do you think?*

The CEO picks up the document that is offered to him, scans it and answers:

- *It doesn't seem like a bad idea.*

Meanwhile, we see the expression of surprise and anger on the female professional's face.

The situation clearly describes a phenomenon that many professionals (above all, many female professionals) have experienced at one point or another, witnessing, speechless and irritated, the following sequence:



Given the compulsory “natural” modesty of “good professional girls”, other male colleagues (either unaware or deliberately) take or steal the ideas, proposals or suggestions that they have contributed in the “blurred” and oblique way that we have analysed in previous sections.

And the scope of the phenomenon is more commonplace and recurring than you might suspect. It is so common that some years ago, the Norwegian Labour Party’s Women’s Federation identified it and called it “pirated proposals”. Indeed, women often put forward ideas or proposals that go unnoticed and watch some time later (even later on in the same meeting) as men propose their same points, passing them off as their own and receive praise and recognition for them. Female professionals very often do not know how to handle the situation and choose to stay quiet and not make a fuss. This passive reaction does not benefit women’s self-esteem but creates resentment and frustration instead.

Thus, the most predictable result in a communicative situation like this:

② Staff meeting. Ignacio has just proposed an idea that Consuelo had already mentioned earlier in the meeting. Ignacio addresses the idea in question as though it had never been mentioned and as though it were his own.

is the following:

Possible reply **A**:

Consuelo says nothing, and she doesn’t speak to Ignacio later, but in the following meeting she looks away from him with an offended expression.

This frequent reaction by no means enables the organisation to progress.

The public “owner” of the idea is not the person who thought it up. The person who proposed the idea feels frustrated and abused. She has not cleared things up with her colleague who - perhaps inadvertently - claimed her proposal without quoting her and she has not made it clear to the rest of her colleagues that there has been some kind of mistake that could prevent it from happening again in the future. Furthermore, she feels pent-up anger towards Ignacio which will flare up to a greater or lesser extent someday. In short, perhaps the “pirate” has won, but on the whole the team has clearly lost.

As in the case of other communication mechanisms we have analysed in this Guide, this tactic of one speaker dominating another does not occur exclusively to the detriment of women. Other younger males with less experience or initiative or with another less hostile frame of mind may also suffer this type of word or idea theft.

Now let’s look at another potential communicative reaction:

Possible reply B :

Consuelo says nothing in the meeting but later goes to Ignacio’s office and tells him:

- *You and I have a good working relationship, Ignacio. But, please remember to give credit where it is due. Today, I believe that everybody thinks that the idea that I had already proposed at the start was yours alone. Well, in any case, we are both on the same side*

Here, Consuelo takes some initiative and decides to tell Ignacio that his actions were not fair. She speaks with a very courteous tone at all times and even looks for his sympathy. We will have to wait until the next occasion to find out whether Ignacio has taken on board what his colleague said. In any case, nothing has been cleared up with the rest of their colleagues. In the eyes of the others, Consuelo is still not the author of the idea.

There is a third communicative option:

Possible reply C :

Staff meeting. Ignacio has just proposed an idea that Consuelo had already mentioned earlier in the meeting. Ignacio addresses the idea in question as though it had never been mentioned and as though it were his own.

Pablo:

- *I agree, Ignacio. It seems to me like a good solution. In fact, I thought so before when Consuelo proposed it first. I think we should implement it.*



This is the solution proposed by the aforementioned Norwegian female professionals and also in other international studies. When someone in the organisation witnesses the repeated proposal of an idea that had already been presented in vain by a woman, they should vindicate authorship for her.

Experience also shows that if the male colleague who vindicates the female's authorship of the idea is an executive, everyone present will notice that it is not good practice to claim the intellectual ownership of other people's ideas.

The female professional affected also has the option of speaking in public:

Possible reply 🗣️ :

Consuelo, addressing Ignacio:

- *Gosh, this plan seems a lot like the one I proposed earlier.*

Consuelo now makes herself heard in public, vindicating authorship of the idea, coming across as someone who is assertive and controlling her irritation by using humour. Humour is an excellent tool for transmitting a message in a pleasant way. A recent study has even proven that "sense of humour" was the expression most frequently used to describe the most effective leaders.¹ However, it is only possible to control irritation when you know it is not going to come across as unpleasant or as an outburst.

In short, women (more often than men) are affected by a male colleague presenting their points in public as his own and receiving praise and acknowledgement for themselves.

What consequences does this have?

- The female professional usually keeps quiet, but feels frustrated, abused and hurt by her colleague who "has stolen" her idea
- Confidence between colleagues suffers and the organisation loses out.

Why?

- Because women put forward their ideas or proposals more discreetly, less assertively, blurring the "I".

What can we do?

- Vindicate the idea as our own in public or by speaking to the colleague who stole it.
- If you witness someone who takes an idea that had already been presented in vain by another person and passes it off as their own, vindicate the original authorship.

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Note

¹Bell Leadership Institute. *Humor Give Leaders the Edge*, 2012, http://www.bellleadership.com/pressreleases/press_template.php?id=15

Interruption

What interrupting means. Why women are interrupted so often. How to avoid it.

MEETING ROOM

Let's look at the following scene:

❶ The central figures are two professionals: Ana and Luis. The context is a team meeting attended by eight people. They are colleagues; neither takes orders from the other and there is no formal moderator. The issue that Ana is addressing is a subject that she understands in depth:

Ana:

- *What I believe we should do is...*

Luis (interrupting her):

- *We can discuss this subject later. Regarding the Polish market, on the other hand, we must get a move on if we don't want the competition to leave us without a piece of the pie.*

Ana:

- *I'm about to conclude my presentation...*

Luis (interrupting again and overlooking her):

- *I would like to make sure that we resolve the Poland issue today...*

Let's summarise the third situation presented in chapter 2:

❷ Strategic challenges presentation session. It is now the turn of the fourth area. The team making the presentation is made up of a man and a woman. The woman starts. She has been talking for 3 minutes, and someone in the audience asks her a question. The female professional starts to reply, but her male partner jumps in:

- *What Marta is trying to say is that...*

And he continues until he has finished giving a detailed explanation in response to the question. From that moment on, all the following questions are put exclusively to him.

A communicative pathology is bad practice that hinders optimum human communication.

In both scenes, we can see the same phenomenon, broadly documented in the international bibliography: interruption of a female professional while she is speaking.

Interruption is the communicative pathology that female professionals most often complain about. Studies based on direct observation show that women are interrupted more often than men in a professional setting. Thus, they are less likely to be able to finish their turn to speak without a setback; and that helps strengthen their reticence to make contributions in public. On the other hand, the observation also highlights that men interrupt most often.

In fact, the frequency of interruptions suffered by female professionals, especially from their male colleagues, produces communicatively uncomfortable moments. Women often feel unable to recover their turn to speak despite their anger, since they consider that they would have to take actions that they deem highly aggressive.

Along these lines, here are some potential replies to the situation presented in 1 comprises attitudes often seen in our working environments:

Possible reply A:

Ana says nothing and she remains in her seat, furious, while Luis continues discussing the issue of the Polish market.

Possible reply B:

Ana:
- *Luis, one moment...*

(She stops speaking and does not resume her point)

However, what is true is that no female professional can let their turn to speak be systematically snatched from them and let it go unpunished, especially if she is responsible for coordinating a group. If this happens, her colleagues usually judge her as “weak”, lacking in character and indecisive. However, neither is it a good strategy for her to recover her turn to speak with an angry tone. The female professional is obliged to find a way of recovering her turn to speak that is efficient, categorical and elegant:

Possible reply C:

Ana (holding up the palm of her hand slightly and pointing it towards Luis, signalling for him to stop):

- *Luis, when I have finished, you can speak. As I was saying...*

(and she continues making her point)

Nonetheless, everyday experience in our organisations - as well as several international studies on the matter - shows that this way of assertively and firmly recovering your turn by calmly but unquestionably stopping the person who has interrupted is by no means simple for female professionals, nor is it habitual.

One of the most operational interventions in this type of setting consists of the higher-ranking manager noticing what is happening and acting to enable the woman to recover her turn. At the same time, they should indicate that impolite interruption is not highly regarded in the organisation when whoever is speaking - a woman or a man - has all the legitimacy to do so.

Possible reply :

Higher-ranking manager:

- *Thank you for your interest in the Polish market, Luis. But suddenly addressing issues that do not appear in the points of the agenda and breaking the train of thought on the point of the meeting is not an effective way of going on. In any case, we will talk about it when we finish with this. Ana, please continue.*

The following narrative comes from an internationally-known executive and highlights the beneficial effects of this tactic of **intervening on behalf of the female professional who was interrupted**:

Ken Chenault, CEO of American Express, is a true leader in this matter. Ken openly acknowledges that, in meetings, both men and women are more likely to interrupt a woman and credit a man for an idea that has been previously proposed by a woman. When he witnesses behaviour of this kind, he stops the meeting to point out it.

Since he speaks from authority, employees think twice before doing it again. Lower-ranking women and men can also intervene when a female colleague is interrupted.

They have the power to kindly but firmly say to the group: "Before moving on, I would like to hear what [the higher-ranking woman] has to say."

This not only benefits the higher-ranking woman, but it **can also raise the kudos of the lower-ranking person**, since speaking to defend another person shows both self-confidence and community spirit. The lower-ranking person is seen as someone who is competent and also pleasant.¹

Note

1. Sandberg, Sheryl, *Lean in*, 2013, p.171.



In short,

female professionals are interrupted more often than their male counterparts. They do not manage to finish speaking and recovering their turn to speak can require resorting to impoliteness.

Why?

- Because interrupting women has few to no consequences, or simply fewer consequences than interrupting men.
- Because what women say is given less credit than what men say.

¿What consequences does this have?

- Once again, they can appear insecure.
- Female professionals' self-esteem is undermined and work relations are harmed.
- Important information is lost.

What can we do?

- Learn to recognise interruptions
- Intervene on behalf of the person who was interrupted.
- Become familiar with calm but firm ways of recovering your turn to speak and value them.
- Unequivocally show those who tend to interrupt that what they are doing is not highly regarded in a merit-based organisation.

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Mansplaining



What 'mansplaining' is and how to avoid it.

Before analysing this communicative phenomenon, let's take a look at the following situation:

① My friend Sallie and I had been invited to a party in a luxurious chalet in Aspen, Colorado. The owner was a very rich man who worked in the advertising business. At one point, he approached us and asked me inquisitively:

- *So? I have heard that you have written a couple of books.*
- *Several, actually –I replied.*

And with the tone that you would use to address a seven-year-old to encourage them to speak, he asked me:

- *And what are they about?*

They were about very varied matters, but I started to tell him about my most recent work, my book on Eadward Muybridge, the annihilation of time and space and the industrialisation of everyday life.

As soon as I mentioned Muybridge, he interrupted me:

- *And have you heard about the important book on Muybridge that has been published this year?*

I was so taken aback by the way he had decided to judge me as inexperienced that I was perfectly willing to accept that another book had been published on Muybridge that I knew absolutely nothing about. He started to talk to me about that important book.

Now, let me say that over the years I have had the good fortune to be surrounded by charming men such as a long list of editors who have listened to me since I was young and have encouraged me in my work, my younger and infinitely generous brother and wonderful male friends. Nonetheless, these other men also exist.

Mr. Know-it-all continued to smugly talk about the book which I should have known about when Sallie interrupted him to say:

- *That's her book.*

Or, rather, she tried to interrupt him. However, he simply continued talking. My friend had to tell him "That's her book" three or four times before he finally realised. And then, as though it were a nineteenth-century novel, he turned pale and speechless.

The anecdote comes from the author who has contributed the most to raising awareness about the word 'mansplaining'. The term has been amazingly successful. It was chosen for The New York Times list of words of the year in 2010, nominated as the most creative term of the year in 2012 by the American Dialect Society and added to the online version of Oxford Dictionaries in 2014. It now has its own Wikipedia entry which is also available in Spanish.

The word 'mansplaining' is an Anglophone neologism based on the composition of the words "man" and "explain", that is defined as "Explaining something to someone, generally a man to a woman, in a manner regarded as condescending or patronising." It is also understood as "explaining without taking into account the fact that the person receiving the explanation knows more on the matter than the person doing the explaining. This behaviour occurs especially when a man explains something to a woman."

The success and propagation of the term is due to the fact that it defines a phenomenon known to millions of women throughout the world; it is an old concept and is frequently experienced.

2 A business meeting bringing together employees with highly diverse qualifications and functions, from different areas and with different responsibility levels.

Coffee break. Around a high table, an employee addresses a female professional who is looking at her tablet:

- ¿What? Getting some work in?
- Yes – she answers, looking up.
- I've got to enter some data that I can't forget.
- Ah, yeah, a customer's data, I bet. It's our curse: entering customer data. Perhaps you haven't heard of it yet but there's a new app that's amazing: it lets you scan the customer's ID card using your phone. It works fantastically. I found out about it because I always try to keep up to date with the company's cutting-edge technology. You can scan the ID either in the office or on the move, which works a treat when you're, I don't know, at the customer's office or at their home. Plus, the app automatically recognises the ID number when it scans it in the photo and assigns it ipso facto to the corresponding customer! Like I said. Ask them to install it for you as soon as possible.
- Thank you - she answers. I'm glad you find this tool so useful. We developed it in my team.

The communication scenario observed here, as in the previous scene, is a form of condescension clearly defined by gender. Like the host in the anecdote, some men consider that the woman they are addressing knows less than them on almost any topic. **This condescending treatment is based on the sexist stereotype that men are usually better educated or more intelligent than women.** Several experts from all kinds of fields have recounted similar experiences.

The issue that remains is that this kind of behaviour strengthens the female tendency of self-questioning and self-imposed silencing. It also strengthens the idea that male speakers are more solid and creditworthy than their female counterparts.

As we have seen in previous sections, mansplaining confirms that for the purpose of the kind of discourse that is initiated, the recipient's gender is just as important or even more so than the gender of the person who is speaking. This is because several studies on mixed conversations in professional fields show that the speakers (men and women) use different styles according to whether they are addressing a man or a woman. Thus, both men and women interrupt women more than men; they tend to speak more (they have longer and more frequent turns to speak) when the woman is the interlocutor and assume more often that the woman does not know as much about the matter being discussed.

In short, female professionals are more often in situations in which a colleague kindly explains something to them when they actually have more knowledge on the matter and the men explain it as if the women are not as well versed in the matter as them.

What consequences does this have?

- It strengthens the tendency of self-questioning and self-imposed silencing among women.
- It bolsters the idea that the discourse of male professionals is more creditworthy than that of their female colleagues.

Why?

- Because there is a gender stereotype according to which men are usually better educated or more intelligent than women.
- Because women are taught to conceal their knowledge.

What can we do?

- Like Sallie, try to redress the mansplainer's mistake and highlight the knowledge of the female listener.



Several studies on mixed conversations in professional fields show that speakers use different styles according to whether they are addressing a man or a woman.

How can this condescending behaviour be avoided?

In fact, if the goal of the previous chapters is met, it is likely that the temptation to over-explain technical details to a female professional without previously checking whether she really needs such explanations will barely come about. When preconceived ideas are dismantled and a woman can truly be considered as intelligent, efficient, clear and adept as a man, it is less likely that she will be deemed as simply naive or inexperienced.

In any case, the initial anecdote in ① provides a clue about how to act when you encounter mansplaining. It is Sallie's voice that draws the condescending man's attention to his clear mistake in assessing who the woman in front of him is and how much she knows.

Female professionals must be encouraged to cut short any over-explanations pointlessly addressed to them by using short, educated and irrefutable clarifications of their abilities.

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Non-verbal communication

A photograph of two men in white shirts sitting at a white conference table. They are both smiling and looking at a document held by the man on the right. The man on the left is pointing at the document. The setting is a modern office with a printer and a desk in the background.





Let's look at this example of a professional meeting.

What catches your eye?

You can see that women are present in the scene, but when taking a closer look, notice that they are in slightly strange positions: they appear to be sitting in peripheral places, far from positions of authority and power, such as the head or the central places at the table.

We see many women on a daily basis who, even when legitimately part of a professional setting and holding positions of responsibility, tend to place themselves in positions far from "areas of authority" (like a "newcomer" or as though their presence were not essential), allowing others to occupy the more central places and higher ranking spots. Something similar happens in rooms with rows of seats, where women are often accustomed to avoid sitting in the front rows, and generally

gravitate towards positions far from the presentation space and will occasionally sit closer to the door.

This feminine arrangement of space is clearly the non-verbal embodiment of the same phenomenon that we have addressed in previous chapters: the tendency to self-conceal, avoiding prominence and fearing standing out in public.

As stated in chapter 5, **reports intended for the senior executives of leading American firms urge people with managerial responsibilities to ensure that they take note of where their team members sit in work meetings to ensure that both men and women occupy the front and centre seats.**



Consider this scene.

At first glance, it appears as though this is a pleasant image. However, we shall ask three questions:

1. Which of the two would you say is the authority figure?
2. Which of the two people do you consider more adept in the common professional field?
3. Whom would trust with managing a group to develop a new project?

Your answer to all three questions is probably the same. And that unanimous reply with regard to the status and degree of expertise of people who we have never seen before and who, for that matter, we know nothing about, is determined by our interpretation of their non-verbal communication.

The man in the image is using protective body language. He comes across

as though he is the strong partner of the two, and she comes across as the weak partner who needs to be defended.

This masculine gesture of a steady individual and “fosterer” immediately assigns the “cradled” woman the role of “powerless”, “insecure” or “novice”.

A total of 100% of the women that were shown this picture and who were asked “What do you see in this image?” replied something along the lines of “Patronising” or “Indulgence”.

By no means does this mean forbidding or excessively-controlling gestures among colleagues, but instead raises awareness on what our body language and space management tell others about our attitude with respect to them. In this case, body language is a reflection of a certain attitude towards the interlocutor: condescension.



Look at this third situation.

It is thought-provoking. If you look closely at the number of cubic centimetres of communal space that is expected to be occupied in the subway, on a plane or in a meeting by a person depending on whether it is a woman or a man, regardless of their size, it is easy to deduce that there is a clear gender bias in how people occupy public space.

From childhood, women are taught to cross their legs, thus, occupying as little space as possible. Women have learnt that sitting in a “feminine” way consists of firmly keeping their knees together, crossing their legs charmingly without generating so much as a small gap between them and not spreading their arms excessively far from their body. In short, sitting like a woman consists of **self-shrinking**.

In turn, in public it is possible for any observer to see some men’s tendency to spread their legs, elbows and arms in order to make themselves comfortable by occupying as much space as possible. The phenomenon is so noticeable and widespread that it has recently given rise to its own dazzlingly successful term which even has its own Wikipedia entry: manspreading, the masculine tendency to spread out when sitting down, even when this encroaches on the personal space of the people around them.

Thanks to developments in neurology studies, we now know that how you adjust your body in certain settings is so much more than a mere cosmetic or empty gesture: it constitutes the unspoken mental



programming of how to act in public. Following on from this, **when you systematically minimise the volume of space occupied by your body, you also internalise the fact that your public presence must also be reduced,** fittingly “discrete” and “modest”. These are two adjectives that we have seen in the previous chapters, which are usually related to the appropriate communicative actions of “charming women”.

In short, **less physical occupation of space implies less symbolic occupation in public.**

This feminine behaviour, that we can call womanfolding, is usually lethal in the business world. Several specialists have highlighted the practical consequences of this feminine tendency of shrinkage, such as female professionals subconsciously presenting themselves in public as insecure people, devoid of authority or power.

Many handbooks on group management present the characteristics of non-verbal communication associated with leadership in the terms set out below. We have highlighted in bold the space management traits that we have mentioned in this chapter:

- Upright bodily position
- Head held high
- Direct eye contact
- Clear and loud voice (sometimes “deep” is indicated)
- Firm and steady walk
- **Dominates physical space**
- **Location in central positions**

In view of these non-verbal communication traits, it is easy to infer that when female professionals act using “feminine” gestures like raising the pitch of their voice, walking on their tiptoes, shrinking their bodies when occupying a public space and sitting in peripheral positions or “non-power” positions in meetings, they are at serious risk of being considered “charming”, but unsuitable for leadership, authority or power.

<p>In short, some phenomena of non-verbal communication, such as occupying marginal positions in meetings or curtailing presence, also reflect the tendency to self-conceal and avoid prominence that determines women’s communicative style. Similarly, some males tend to spread themselves even when this implies occupying space reserved for others.</p>	<p>What consequences does this have?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women, subconsciously, present themselves in public as people who are insecure and devoid of authority. • Female professionals are at risk of being considered charming, but unsuitable for leadership, authority or power. • Men “overplay” their masculine role of leaders, sometimes annoying others without realising.
<p>Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because women have been educated to behave discreetly, to avoid excessively drawing attention to themselves. • Because women fear seeming too prominent in a public setting. 	<p>What can we do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become aware of what our body and our space management communicates to others, and how it is related to what is communicated by our words. • Group managers must ensure the same professionals do not always occupy the same places (central or peripheral places).

What can we do in this regard?

We have already seen what we can do in the case of the feminine tendency to sit far away. People with responsibilities must ensure that the same professionals do not always occupy the same positions in groups, be they central or peripheral spots.

Basically, it is important to be aware of the huge amount of emotional and relational information that is communicated by our body, and

the importance of that non-verbal communication in our relationship with others, since body language does not appeal to the rational brain of our interlocutors, but instead it expresses our emotional attitude. To transmit credibility, empathy, legitimacy and natural authority, it is important to have verbal and non-verbal communication in unison, not colliding or contradicting each other.



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Some linguistic considerations



When addressing a broad audience, made up of both men and women, gender-inclusive language is important to avoid bias towards one gender or another.

In English, this generally means using nouns that are not gender-specific to refer to roles or professions (gendered-nouns) and avoiding the use of pronouns he, him and his as the “default” when referring to a mixed group.

The United Nations has come up with the following best practices or strategies to make discourse more gender-inclusive:

1. Use non-discriminatory language
2. Make gender visible when it is relevant for communication
3. Do not make gender visible when it is not relevant for communication

(<https://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml>)

1. Use non-discriminatory language

Forms of address – use forms of address that are consistent with the person’s gender identity

Men and women should be consistently referred to in the same way
e.g. “Mr Jones and Christine will be attending” is non-inclusive. It should be written “Mr Jones and Ms Smith will be attending.”

Ms should be used rather than Mrs when the woman’s preference is not known.

Avoid gender-biased expressions or expressions that reinforce gender stereotypes

Boys will be boys

You throw like a girl

Man up!

2. Make gender visible when it is relevant for communication

Using feminine and masculine pronouns. This is called pairing
e.g. The applicant should hand in his or her form by Wednesday.

It is advisable not to overuse this option as it can make discourse long-winded.

Using two different words

Use this where highlighting gender will make it more inclusive

e.g. Boys and girls should attend the football training session at 5 pm.

3. Do not make gender visible when it is not relevant for communication
 Use gender-neutral words.
 e.g. humans instead of mankind, artificial instead of man-made,
 chairperson or coordinator instead of chairman.
 Use plural pronouns/adjectives. In informal writing, the plural pronouns
 ‘they’, ‘them’ and ‘their’ can be used to be more gender-inclusive.
 However, this is not appropriate for formal writing.

Use the pronoun one.

“A staff member in Antarctica earns less than **he** would in New York.”

“A staff member in Antarctica earns less than **one** in New York.”

Use the relative pronoun who

“If a complainant is not satisfied with the board’s decision, **he** can ask for a rehearing.”

“A complainant **who** is not satisfied with the board’s decision can ask for a rehearing.”

Use a plural antecedent

For generic subjects

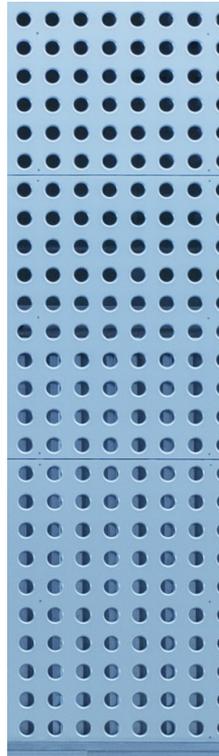
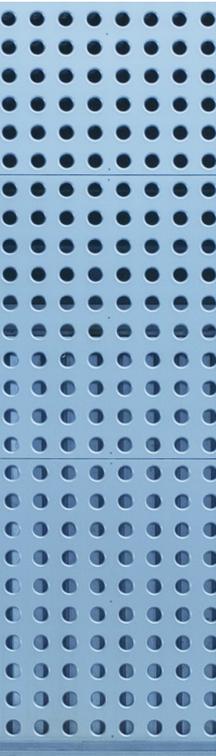
A substitute judge must certify that **he** has familiarized **himself** with the record of the proceedings.”

“Substitute judges must certify that **they** have familiarized **themselves** with the record of the proceedings.”

Omit the gendered word

“A person must reside continuously in the Territory for 20 years before **he** may apply for permanent residence.”

“A person must reside continuously in the Territory for 20 years before applying for permanent residence.”

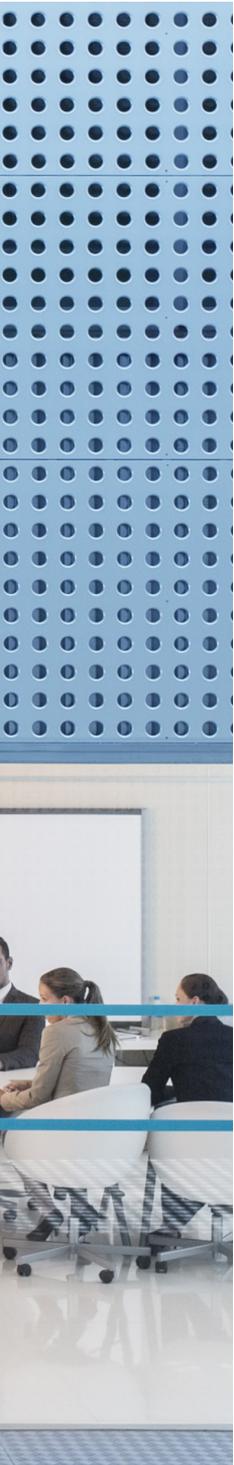


Use the passive voice

This does not work for all sentences in English as it might change the emphasis of the sentence but it can help avoid gendered constructions..

“The author of a communication must have direct and reliable evidence of the situation **he** is describing.”

“The author of a communication must have direct and reliable evidence of the situation being described.”



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