Engendering healthy organisational communication - evidence from Australian female managers and business people

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Engendering healthy organisational communication - evidence from Australian female managers and business people

Abstract
Keeping 'good' communication in organisations is one of the most frequently prescribed recipes for organisational well being. Training programs for employees in assertiveness, improved communication, career development, and managing oneself and others, have often called attention to the specifics of verbal interactions between managers, employees and others in the organisation. Such training programs generally suppose that direct, open approaches to communication are best. Yet it has often been asserted in sociolinguistic research that men and women communicate differently, including at work. Despite this, precepts for 'good' communication that are recommended for both genders in communication training are usually consistent with male rather than female communication patterns.

The paper begins with a discussion of the value of using scenario-based research, given some problems resulting from previous linguistic research techniques, especially the 'form-function' problem arising from an increasingly sophisticated view of gender differences in spoken communication. The paper then presents the results of a survey of 157 Australian managers and businesswomen of whom the majority were at middle or higher rungs of the corporate ladder in their organisations. For each of three scenarios illustrating common workplace communication dilemmas, participants were asked to rate a series of strategic responses to a communication problem or dilemma, rating responses both for their effectiveness and their probability. Despite their organisational seniority and their view of themselves as confident and assertive communicators, the women's views of how effective and how probable the responses to the dilemmas still varied in some cases with their belief about the gender of the 'communication strategist' in the scenario. The participants' choice of their own preferred strategy did not vary with their level on the organisational ladder and their level of confidence, although there were few extremely junior participants in organisational terms and few who described themselves as lacking confidence in expressing their opinions at work.

The paper discusses both theoretical and practical implications of these results, some limitations of the study, and suggests topics for further research.

Keywords
australian, people, business, evidence, communication, organisational, healthy, engendering, managers, female

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Engendering healthy organisational communication – evidence from Australian female managers and business people

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Abstract

Keeping ‘good’ communication in organisations is one of the most frequently prescribed recipes for organisational well being. Training programs for employees in assertiveness, improved communication, career development, and managing oneself and others, have often called attention to the specifics of verbal interactions between managers, employees and others in the organisation. Such training programs generally suppose that direct, open approaches to communication are best. Yet it has often been asserted in sociolinguistic research that men and women communicate differently, including at work. Despite this, precepts for ‘good’ communication that are recommended for both genders in communication training are usually consistent with male rather than female communication patterns.

The paper begins with a discussion of the value of using scenario-based research, given some problems resulting from previous linguistic research techniques, especially the ‘form-function’ problem arising from an increasingly sophisticated view of gender differences in spoken communication. The paper then presents the results of a survey of 157 Australian managers and businesswomen of whom the majority were at middle or higher rungs of the corporate ladder in their organisations. For each of three scenarios illustrating common workplace communication dilemmas, participants were asked to rate a series of strategic responses to a communication problem or dilemma, rating responses both for their effectiveness and their probability. Despite their organisational seniority and their view of themselves as confident and assertive communicators, the women’s views of how effective and how probable the responses to the dilemmas still varied in some cases with their belief about the gender of the ‘communication strategist’ in the scenario. The participants’ choice of their own preferred strategy did not vary with their level on the organisational ladder and their level of confidence, although there were few extremely junior participants in organisational terms and few who described themselves as lacking confidence in expressing their opinions at work.

The paper discusses both theoretical and practical implications of these results, some limitations of the study, and suggests topics for further research.

Research into gender differences in communication and its implications at work

Evidence for and against different styles of speaking based on gender has been accumulating for at least three decades. An idea of the range and detail of studies of women’s and men’s speech can be gained from studies at the micro-linguistic, often sub-sentence level, for example studies of gender differences in conversational
silences and interruptions, (eg Eakins and Eakins, 1978; 1979; James and Clarke, 1993; West and Zimmerman, 1977; 1983), turn-taking behaviour in conversation (eg Fielder, Semin and Finkenauer, 1993), the use of ‘hedges’ and ‘boosters’ (eg Holmes, 1984; 1988), as well as more broadly based speech strategies, such as paying compliments (eg Holmes, 2002), persuading (eg Andrews, 1987), gossiping (eg Coates, 1988; Pilkington, unpublished), story-telling (eg Holmes, 1997), putting and accepting proposals (Lituchy and Wiswall, 1991), self-aggrandising speech (eg Miller, Cooke, Tsang and Morgan), and the ways gender differences in speech define and reflect differences in sex roles (eg Preisler, 1986; Zimmerman and West, 1983), and membership of different community or professional groups (eg McElhinny, 1995; West, 1990). Differences between men’s and women’s speech have led some researchers to conclude that gender is a community in itself (Spender, 1979, 1980; Cameron, 1997; Cameron and Bourne, 1988; Crosby and Nyquist, 1977). Holmes (2002) citing Lakoff (1975), presents a substantial list of regularly recurring speech differences between women and men speakers of English, summarised in Table 1:

Table 1: Gender differences in the use of English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Linguistic item of gender difference</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lexical hedges or fillers</td>
<td>you know, sort of, well, you see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tag questions</td>
<td>she’s very nice, isn’t she?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rising intonation on declaratives</td>
<td>it’s really good (pronounced with a rising intonation on good, making the sentence sound like a question)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘empty’ adjectives</td>
<td>divine, charming, cute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>precise colour terms</td>
<td>magenta, aquamarine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intensifiers</td>
<td>just and so, as in I like him so much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘hypercorrect’ grammar</td>
<td>consistent use of standard verb forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘superpolite’ forms</td>
<td>indirect requests, euphemisms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avoidance of strong swear words</td>
<td>fudge, my goodness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emphatic stress</td>
<td>it was a BRILLIANT performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Many studies of gender differences in speech have often been preoccupied to a greater or lesser extent with the assertion by Lakoff (1975) that such differences in English are large enough to constitute different ‘registers’ between the genders, and that these registers in turn reflect the different levels of power between men and women in society (eg O’Barr and Atkins, 1980). This power difference, it has often been argued, both creates and is reflected in regularly recurring types of miscommunication between the genders (eg Holmes, 1986), and even communication ‘battles’ (eg Fielder, Semin and Finkenauer, 1993).

There is a temptation to correlate this information with other evidence of women’s ongoing lack of representation at senior corporate levels, especially since other approaches such as EEO legislation and business case approaches to improving women’s representation in senior levels of organisations seem not to have worked or to work very slowly. This slow progress is evidenced by, for example, the paucity of numbers of women at executive levels in Australia (3.2 percent) and the U.S. (7.9
percent) (Catalyst, 2002). Academic interest has grown in how and whether different communication styles mean women are perceived differently in the workplace as leaders and managers, conflict-resolvers and problem-solvers (eg Brenner, Tomkiewicz and Schein, 1989; Eagly, Makijiani and Klonsky; Canary and Spitzberg, 1987; Mulac and Bradac, 1995). Echoing this, the popular management literature has developed a strand aimed at women seeking to improve their fortunes at work through better awareness of the ways communication differences can subvert women’s progress towards higher organisational levels (eg Boninger, 1980; Harragan, 1976; Hennig and Jardim, 1977; O’Brien, 1993; Rosener, 1993; Tannen, 1986; 1990; 1995).

A traditional assumption about the best remedy to the ‘problem’ that women’s speech presents to their organisational progress is that women ought to adopt the more assertive speaking styles characteristic of men. This approach was regularly the basis for assertiveness training workshops. Such remedies are still regularly supported in the non-academic press in Australia, as with the recent advice from Australia’s federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Pru Goward, which links women’s supposedly diffident, even apologetic style of speech with their difficulties in claiming their place in society:

The country might not have said sorry, but Australian women say sorry all the time. Sorry for speaking softly, sorry for asking, for interrupting, sorry for food gone cold and time off with a sick child. Women speakers apologise at the beginning of speeches. It is another tradition, but nervous and destructive (Pru Goward, quoted in The Australian, January 27, 2003)

Madeleine Albright is among those women leaders on the international scene who have advised ambitious women to adopt the powerful modes of speaking associated with men, specifically ‘to learn to interrupt’ (2 February, 1997, CBS television).

These findings about the supposed differences between men’s and women’s speech and the efficacy of the ‘remedies’ for this have not passed unchallenged, however. For example, linguistic research has produced increasingly complex views of the phenomena Lakoff originally examined. This is evident from just two well-researched areas from the many linguistic phenomena under study: men’s and women’s use of interruptions and the use of tag questions in conversation. James and Clarke (1993) have pointed out that not all interruptions are about the seizing or losing of power in conversation, and may even signal agreement, even enthusiasm, or simply a desire to move the conversation along quickly. Similarly, reasons for using tag questions (that is, the question forms isn’t she?, doesn’t it?, which often conclude a sentence which would otherwise function as a statement) which were traditionally regarded as evidence of women’s uncertainty when presenting their point of view, have now been noted to include the other linguistic functions such as facilitating another party’s entry into the conversation.

Further, researchers are also taking a critical look at the ways research techniques may have tended to predetermine previous findings and interpretations of apparent gender differences in speech. For example, it can be difficult for researchers to agree on which function is at play when they examine specific instances of natural conversation. The tag question phenomenon provides such an instance. It is now accepted that that tag questions may have a variety of functions in conversation, of
which only one may be to indicate uncertainty on the part of the speaker. Other functions include simple politeness and social facilitation of various kinds (Baumann, 1976). In the light of this, it is no longer sufficient when analysing natural speech data simply to count the tag questions and use any apparent differences in the use of such questions on the part of one gender or the other as evidence of greater uncertainty or otherwise. Now it is important to try to determine the function of the tag questions. While two researchers counting tag questions may agree on their number, it has proved more difficult to reach agreement when classifying their function. This ‘form-function’ difficulty applies to many phenomena once thought to be clear indicators of differences between men and women’s speech.

Even if the many ambiguities created through the form-function problem were able to be resolved in favour of a view that women’s conversation is not as tentative and uncertain as previously thought, there is still a ‘catch-22’ for women, arising from listeners’ interpretations of men’s and women’s use of the same linguistic phenomena. The issue of rising intonation at the ends of sentences (Holmes, 2002) is a case in point. It has been shown that men as well as women make use of rising intonation at the ends of sentences. However, when men use this intonation, they are regarded as undertaking the facilitative function of checking for their listener’s understanding. Women’s use of it, however, is still seen as indicating their tentative approach to communication.

There are important practical implications if one decides that gender differences in speech constitute a problem for women. Even if it is accepted that men and women speak differently, regarding this as a problem which requires remedies – especially in the workplace – has been criticised on several grounds. First, it has been argued that teaching women to speak like men makes them uncomfortable and self-conscious – which is unlikely to improve their confidence at work (Weiss and Fisher, 1998). Second, workshops on ‘good’ presentation style, often recommended to women to improve their confidence in dealing with public speaking situations in the workplace, have been criticised as simply imposing U.S.-based, male speech norms on people of another gender and, often, another culture, for whom these speech norms are not part of their natural style. Lakoff (1975), as we noted earlier, in pointing out that different registers that women and men use within English argues that the differences are as great as other cultural differences within a linguistic group. Moreover, putting women under pressure to adopt speech approaches which are not natural for them may simply force women into situations where they are penalised for not appearing to follow recognised norms of female behaviour (Case, 1993). Finally, adopting ‘male’ speech norms may ignore the value of female culture, including speech norms, in certain undertakings, such as pursuing business in Asia, where norms of indirectness in dealing with interpersonal and business relationships more closely resemble female than male speech norms in the West.

Weiss and Fisher (1998) have suggested that, rather than adopting one model of ‘effective business communication’ exclusively, women deliberately study and evaluate several communication stereotypes for their potential in specific situations. Basing their discussion on Wood (1997) they discuss, first, a broadly ‘masculine’ model of speech which recommends using talk to assert yourself and your ideas, and to establish your status and power, avoiding sharing the talk stage as well as personal disclosures which create vulnerability, and regarding talk as being about conveying
information and accomplishing the goal, so that extraneous details are omitted. The 'feminine' model of speech, by contrast, uses talk to build and sustain rapport, and create symmetry or equality, to support others, including by being tentative and including others in the conversation, and establishing a relationship through the use of comments and side details. A third possibility, in the view of Weiss and Fisher, would be a 'postmodern' program in which communicators deliberately localise and customise their messages to the target culture (Weiss and Fisher, 1998, pp 42-43). They suggest that effective communication courses for women should include all three models, but that in real situations, women would adopt a particular model depending on the situation, their own goals within it, and so on. ‘Masculine’ models are likely to be preferred for short-term communication goals, but the postmodern program would most likely be pre-eminent for dealing with longer-term situations.

Even the advocates of choosing from a suite of communication models say that it will take time to work out empirically which one works best both descriptively and prescriptively in particular situations. After all, it may yet turn out that there are laws of human nature and behaviour such as the effectiveness of loud, clear speech or certain cultural practices which are inherently superior (Weiss and Fisher, p. 44). Another consideration is the requirement pointed out by Tannen (1994) that each model “feel like” the speaker in the deepest sense, that is, that the speaker be comfortable with using the models.

**An alternative research approach**

While awaiting the long-term outcome of such pragmatic and individualised evaluations of communication models, it is useful to consider some different research approaches to discover how people, and especially women, currently assess the likely effectiveness of different communication strategies in particular situations. As noted earlier, previous research has typically drawn on empirical linguistic techniques such as taping of natural speech happening in real workplace situations and subsequent counting and analysing of different facets of the utterances. This has the advantage that the researcher is dealing with real rather than hypothetical utterances, but also several disadvantages including the form-function problem alluded to earlier, and the resulting data-coding problems leading to lack of inter-rater reliability. Other factors arising from participants’ roles and status in the workplace as well as simple individual differences may also come into play in interpreting ‘what really happened’ in the conversation. This makes it difficult to determine what differences in communication inherently result from gender rather than other factors.

**Scenario-based research**

Another research possibility is to use scenario-based research where respondents assess a variety of responses to a particular communication dilemma. In scenario research, instead of a ‘real’ conversation in which some people participate directly and others observe and try to interpret the multiple goals associated with their speech conversation, the respondents are informed of a specific goal that a character in the scenario is trying to achieve. Scenarios have the disadvantage that they do not represent real speech, but this can be at least partially overcome by constructing the scenario out of real or typical workplace dilemmas and responses which the respondents will readily recognise and identify with. In addition, the variables in the
scenario such as status, roles and so on can be precisely described for the respondents so that they do not confound the results potentially relating to gender. Further, the possible responses or strategies for the character responding to the workplace dilemma can be chosen to illustrate either a masculine or a feminine communication style or a postmodern mixture of the two. Respondents can indicate how well they believe the communication strategy 'works' to achieve the goal set up for the character, that is, they can assess its effectiveness. Varying the gender of the person employing the communication strategy allows us to see whether women – or indeed people in general – differ in their assessment of a strategy's effectiveness depending on the gender of the person seen to be using it. Respondents can also assess the communication strategy's probability. Having respondents assess how probable the strategy is rather than its effectiveness alone is particularly powerful when the scenarios vary only in the gender of the person using the communication strategies. This allows a clear view of what is considered to be 'natural' for each gender in a particular situation.

In summary, the advantages of the scenario research approach over research based on data gathered from real situations arise from the greater degree of control in the setting up of the responses and their interpretation. The scenario can specify matters such as work roles and status of the participants in the scenario. The scenario can also specify the exact communication goal of the participant in the scenario, which reduces the form-function problem.

**Hypotheses**

Our study aims to explore the extent to which masculine, feminine or other, for example, 'postmodern' models of communication effectiveness seem to hold sway in specific workplace communication dilemmas where the only factor that varies in the communication dilemma is gender. That women themselves currently endorse a masculine view of communication strategy effectiveness in a work environment (according to the models of communication of Weiss and Fisher) would tend be supported by our finding that:

- women regard communication strategies which typify male norms of responding to a communication dilemma as more effective when they are used by a man than by a woman (H1);

- women regard communication strategies which typify male norms (clear, loud, forceful) as more probable when they are used by a man than by a woman (H2);

- It is well known in survey research that 'attribution' bias tends to affect responses, that is, that respondents to surveys typically answer questions or otherwise respond to survey situations in ways that show themselves in a more favourable light than they would 'really' respond to such situations. Support for a masculinist view of communication strategy could be expected to relate to attribution bias if it were found that women, when asked to indicate which communication strategy they would be likely to choose for themselves, pick 'masculine' rather than 'feminine' responses (H3);
• The idea that a masculine view of effective communication strategies predominates in the corporate world, including when senior positions are occupied by women, would be suggested by our finding that women near to at the top of the corporate ladder in their organisations differ in their preferred responses from women lower down the corporate ladder (H4);

• Similarly, women who regard themselves as very confident in expressing their opinions in work meetings would be expected to regard a masculine approach to communication dilemmas as more effective (H5).

An endorsement of predominantly ‘feminine’ communication strategies would tend to be supported by our making the opposite findings for H(1) through H(5). For example, we would expect to find that women regard communication strategies which typify male speech norms (clear, loud forceful) as less effective when they are used by a man than by a woman and also less probable.

A postmodern view of the workplace communication arena could be supposed to be gaining ground if there is a mixture of findings, particularly if there is a pattern to the findings which associates them with short-term and longer-term communication goals, as outlined by West and Fisher.

Method

Scenario-based survey instrument

A survey questionnaire was constructed which presented three scenarios based on situations asserted in the linguistics and business communication literature as typifying situations where women are likely to be disadvantaged as a result of their stereotypical communication style at work. In each scenario, a character – who was given a name which clearly indicated their gender – had to respond to a communication problem or dilemma for which a particular desired goal was specified. For each dilemma a number of possible responses were presented. The scenarios were based on three often-discussed ‘levels’ or manifestations of the supposed problem of women’s different communication styles compared to those of men in terms of women’s workplace advancement.

a) the very short-term, micro level. A speaker finds that she/he is interrupted during a workplace meeting. The goals of the speaker’s communication strategy is to regain the floor after being interrupted.

b) the medium-term level. A speaker believes that she/he is not being given sufficient credit for their idea put forward in a meeting. The goal of the speaker’s communication strategy is to ensure that she/he receives credit for their ideas in meetings.

c) the long-term level. A speaker wants to use communication strategies to ensure her/his achievements at work are recognised by people who will be influential in determining whether she/he receives a promotion.
The instrument also gathered information from respondents about their work situation, specifically, whether they were employed, self-employed or employed others. Respondents were also asked to indicate their position on the ‘organisational ladder’. Finally, respondents were asked to rate themselves in terms of their confidence about expressing their opinions during meetings at work.

Each scenario specified for the respondents the goal of the communication response, that is, what it was the character responding to the problem in the scenario was trying to achieve. This was done in order to eliminate possible ambiguities in respondents’ interpretation of the character’s actions, that is, to reduce the form-function problem. A copy of the questionnaire (in the first gender orientation) is reproduced at the end of the paper.

The responses in each scenario were graded from what, in terms of Western norms in English, would be regarded as the most clear, loud and forceful response to the dilemma (that is, the most ‘masculine’ approach) to the least clear and forceful (the most ‘feminine’ response). Each response was graded according to the extent that it corresponded to the masculine or feminine models described by Weiss and Fisher. Thus a response graded as ‘MM’ indicates what the linguistic literature would see as oriented towards the masculine, a loud, clear, direct response, and an ‘FF’ response indicates a quiet, indistinct, indirect response. A response graded as ‘Mf’ indicates a response with some elements of both the masculine and the feminine stereotype, but with the masculine predominating. An ‘Fm’ response indicates the reverse. The grades of each response are also indicated in the questionnaire.

The three scenarios together with the communication strategies for each (in one version) are presented in the Appendix.

**Rating the strategic responses in the scenarios**

Respondents were asked to grade each possible response to each scenario on two, five-point Likert-type scales to indicate, first, how effective they regarded each response in achieving the goal of the character in the scenario and, second, how probable they saw each response as being for the character in the scenario. Finally, the respondents were asked to choose the response they themselves were most likely to have used in the situation.

Two versions of the questionnaire were devised: one in which the character responding to the dilemma in the scenario was given a male name and the other in which the character responding was a female. The other party in the dilemma was either the opposite gender to that of the character responding or a workplace group the gender of whose members was unspecified.

**Piloting of instrument**

The questionnaire was piloted on a group of ten women managers at varying levels of seniority and three academic women. Some of the women managers owned their own businesses. No difficulty was found with the instrument’s clarity and ease of use with this group.
Administering the instrument

The questionnaire was administered at a breakfast networking meeting of businesswomen in an Australian capital city. The event was part of a well-established series of similar events which were sponsored by a prominent business newspaper. At each breakfast there was a guest speaker as well as opportunities for networking, business discussion, and so on. The guest speaker at this particular event was the researcher, and attendees knew in advance from their invitation, the event website, and so on, that the topic of the talk would be communication differences between men and women. However they had not heard the researcher’s talk at the time they completed the questionnaires. They were also unaware that, rather than each person at the breakfast completing precisely the same questionnaire, there were two versions of the questionnaire which differed by varying the gender of the communication ‘strategist’ for each scenario. The questionnaires had been distributed in equal numbers by placing them in alternate place settings at each table. At an early stage in the proceedings, that is, just after the guests had been greeted and invited to take their seats, they were asked to complete the questionnaires.

Analysis

Frequencies and distributions of responses for each scenario were calculated. T-tests for differences in the mean for the perceived effectiveness and the likelihood of each response to each of the three scenarios were carried out. Before this, however, Levene’s test for equality of variances was carried out on each response. Where results for this test showed that equal variances could not be assumed, the T-test for equality of means took account of this. Chi-square analysis was carried out to determine whether there was an association between a participant’s position on the corporate ladder, or her level of confidence in expressing her opinions in meetings, and her responses to the three scenarios.

Results

1 Demographics

The demographic characteristics of the responses are summarised below:

1.1 Number of respondents

The total number of useable questionnaires completed was 157, with 83 (52.9%) questionnaires for the first version (where the gender of the scenario 1 strategist was male), 72 (45.9%) where the gender of the other speaker as female. Two respondents (1.3%) had omitted to complete any item in the demographic section of the questionnaire.

1.2 Work situation

Table 2 summarises the respondents’ work situation.
Table 2: Work situation of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work situation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed in organisation</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>72.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not in paid employment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work for self and employ others</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table indicates that the respondents were predominantly employed by organisations. However just over 17 percent of them were either self-employed or employed others.

1.3 Position on corporate ladder

Table 3 summarises the respondents’ position on the corporate ladder.

Table 3: Position on corporate ladder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work situation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close to the bottom or at bottom</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately bottom</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately top</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>33.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to the top or at the top</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>87.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 indicates that the majority of the respondents who answered this question saw themselves as moderately close to the top, very close or actually at the top of their corporate ladder. Fewer than one third of usable responses were from women who saw themselves as being located at the lower echelons of their organisation, and only 8.3% saw themselves as being right at the bottom. About 12 percent (19) respondents had not answered this question. Overall, however, the sample appears to be an appropriate one for assessing women’s views of effective communication when women have gained some seniority in their organisation.

1.4 Level of confidence in expressing opinions in meetings

Table 4 summarises respondents’ answers to the statement: “I usually feel confident expressing my opinions in meetings at work.”
Table 4: Confidence in expressing opinions at meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work situation</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all true</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat untrue</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral or neither true nor untrue</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat true</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>39.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very true</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows that over two-thirds of the respondents, even allowing for missing responses, felt that the statement ‘I usually feel confident expressing my opinions in meetings at work” was somewhat true or very true for them. Overall, then, the sample indicates a group of women who see themselves as confident or very confident communicators in workplace situations.

2 Perceived effectiveness and likelihood of communication strategies in response to the scenario dilemmas

The results for each scenario are discussed in turn.

Scenario 1

Table 5 summarises the results for scenario 1 (regaining the floor following an interruption). The first column indicates the degree of masculinity or feminity for each of five possible responses (see the Appendix for the scenarios and the strategies, each rated separately). The second column indicates the percentage of respondents who selected the response as most likely for them. The third column the gender of the ‘communication strategist’ for each response to the scenario. The fourth, fifth and sixth columns are concerned with participants’ perceptions of the effectiveness of each communication strategy. The fourth column indicates the number of participant responses for each gender category of strategist, and the fifth and sixth columns indicate, respectively, the mean perceived effectiveness of the response when the ‘strategist’ is male or female, and whether there was a significant difference between the responses depending on the gender of the ‘strategist’. The seventh, eighth and ninth columns provide similar results for the perceived likelihood of the particular communication strategy for men and women communication ‘strategists’.
Table 5

Results for scenario 1 – Regaining the floor after an interruption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>% of respondents selecting this response as most likely for them</th>
<th>Gender of character in scenario</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>M</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>* = sig at .1</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>*** = sig at .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>** = sig at .05</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>** = sig at .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Mf</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>* (close to sig at .05)</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>3.74</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>3.00</td>
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<td>77</td>
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<td></td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>1.32</td>
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<td>75</td>
<td>2.81</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 5 we can discern the following results:

1. Respondents rated all responses with a high or fairly high ‘masculine’ style (responses 1, 2 and 3) to be more effective than more ‘female’ responses (responses 4 and 5 respectively).

2. Interestingly, however, of these three responses, the most ‘masculine’ response, 1, (means = 2.72, 3.05), was not considered to be as effective as the slightly softened, more ‘female’ responses 2 and 3 (means 3.42, 3.74 and 3.00, 3.16 respectively). Moreover, respondents actually considered the second response, which had been rated the most effective whether the character in the scenario was male or female, as significantly *more* effective when the character in the scenario was female than when it was male. The response was also considered significantly more likely when it was used by a woman as by a man.

3. Conversely, however, respondents considered the least effective response, 5, to be significantly more likely to be used by a woman than a man.

4. Respondents on average rated the *likelihood* of a female woman choosing one of the first three, more effective strategies lower than its *effectiveness*, and the likelihood of a female character in a scenario choosing an ineffective strategy higher than its effectiveness.

5. About 40% of respondents said they themselves would choose the response considered on average to be the most effective, with only about 5% saying they would choose the least effective responses. However, allowing for the respondents’ views that this response was more significantly likely for women
than for men, it may be that more of them would in fact choose this response for themselves.

Discussion of scenario 1

The first response to the problem of regaining the floor in a meeting after you have been interrupted may be considered by respondents to sound irritable or rude and hence too strong, since respondents considered it effective, but somewhat less effective than the second response. However the finding that the second response, which the research literature regards as fairly masculine, was actually considered more effective for a female to use than a male, is surprising. This result suggests there is a kind of shock value in a woman using what is still considered a typically male, assertive response. Despite this, the result for the 5th, highly ‘female’ and highly ineffective response where respondents clearly thought the scenario much more probable when a woman made the response than when a man did, suggests that women are more inclined than men to select ineffective strategies and that this may also be true for the respondents themselves.

Considering these results in relation to H(1) through H(3) suggests that there is reason to support a view that a masculine standpoint on communication strategies has considerable sway even for women, since they considered these strategies to be more effective than female communication strategies in this short-term situation. In addition, highly female strategies for this dilemma did not attract support as options the participants would choose for themselves. However there are some twists to the results, which do not give unambiguous support to a masculine viewpoint on communication. These include the finding that more masculine approaches were actually felt to be more effective when used by a woman than a man, and the rejection of the most masculine approach to the dilemma.

Scenario 2

Results for scenario 2, where the goal of the communication strategist was to get sufficient credit for an idea expressed in a meeting, are summarised in Table 6 overleaf. Table 6 follows a similar format to Table 5.

From the table, the following results can be discerned:

1. Respondents again generally regarded responses with some ‘masculine’ component to their style (responses 1 to 5 inclusive) as being more effective than very ‘female’ responses (6-7) but did not accept that the most highly ‘masculine’ responses (1 and 2) were the most effective. In fact, the second of these, which was intended to include an element of humour - I’m taking that idea back. You guys are butchering it. - rated only slightly more highly for effectiveness than the ‘female’ responses. It may be that the question was not framed adequately so that the humour was not understood or, alternatively, that the respondents did not feel that humour would be effective in this kind of situation. The most effective response was the relatively mild That plan sounds a lot like the one I mentioned earlier. It may well be considered to be effective because of its element of
Table 6
Results for scenario 2 – Gaining sufficient credit for an idea expressed in a meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>% of respondents selecting this response as most likely for them</th>
<th>Gender of character in scenario</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Effectiveness</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean Likelihood</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td></td>
<td>63</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: MM</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1.91</td>
<td></td>
<td>68</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td></td>
<td>60</td>
<td>1.92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 MF</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>3.23</td>
<td></td>
<td>69</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td></td>
<td>62</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 MF</td>
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<td>66</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>* (p = .056)</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2.87</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Mf</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2.92</td>
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<td>75</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>* (p = .055)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td></td>
<td>66</td>
<td>3.22</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 FF</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td></td>
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<td>2.73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 FF</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td></td>
<td>63</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ambiguity: the response simultaneously points out an area of agreement with the speaker and claims credit for having suggested the plan already. This response was also the one most frequently chosen by the respondents as the one they would use themselves. It was closely followed by the other two responses considered most effective.

2. In contrast to the results for first scenario, which concerned regaining the floor after an interruption, respondents considered that the humorous, but highly ‘male’ strategy for ensuring one gets credit for one’s ideas was significantly more likely to be used by a man than by a female. However two other strategies that rated well for effectiveness were the more indirect ones, where the communication is carried out by the character responding to the dilemma by calling on the offending party in their office. The ‘indirect but effective’ strategies included the one which contains an element of threat: *Two can play at that game.* The first of these was considered more effective if used by a man than by a woman. The second was considered more a likely approach for a woman than a man.

3. Unlike the first scenario, neither of the ineffective strategies was considered more likely to be used by female strategists than by males.

4. The results for all responses show a rough correspondence between the degree of effectiveness women perceive in the responses and how likely they perceive the
responses to be, with some of the strategies regarded as effective even when they are seen as slightly more likely when they are presented via a female strategist.

Discussion of scenario 2:

These findings suggest again that in some cases ‘male’ or very clear, direct responses are not considered particularly effective and that those with a more indirect, ‘female’ element may be more so. Humour seems a difficult element for people to discern, let alone judge its effectiveness, at least on paper. What is funny and effective for one person in one situation may not be so for another person in a different situation. It seems that in this case at least, and assuming that the humour was even recognised, women are not reaching for the tool of humour as part of their communication strategies to advance their position at work. When seeking to claim credit for their ideas, they prefer more mild or indirect approaches such as simply remarking on the similarity of an idea to one they had mentioned earlier, or seeing people afterwards in their offices to mention their displeasure about not being given credit for an idea. Of these indirect approaches, women are somewhat less likely to choose the one which contains an element of threat. Given that for this scenario, the respondents did not seem to feel that ineffective responses were more likely when they were chosen by women, we can be reasonably confident that they would in fact choose the responses they said they regarded as effective.

With regard to hypotheses H(1) through H(3), there is again some support for the masculine styles (clear, loud, direct) recommended in traditional assertiveness training courses, but as with scenario 1, the picture is mixed, perhaps even a little more so. Indirect communication strategies where the message was clear, but it was not delivered in the public context of the meeting are favoured. This seems consistent with a more feminine approach. However, in scenario 2, in contrast to scenario 1, the attribution effect H(3) seems consistent with a masculine standpoint.

Scenario 3

Table 7 overleaf summarises the results for scenario 3 in which the communication strategist’s goal in the communication was to ensure influential people knew about her or his achievements so as to gain promotion. Table 7 follows a similar format to Tables 5 and 6.

From the table, we can discern the following results:

1. Broadly speaking there was a similar pattern for ways of letting influential people know about your achievements as for the previous two scenarios, with the responses with a clear, direct or ‘masculine’ element to them being rated as more effective than more indirect or extremely indirect responses. Compared to the other two scenarios, however, the responses were more closely grouped together in terms of their effectiveness, with no single response being regarded as markedly ineffective or as ineffective as the most ineffective responses in the other scenarios.
Table 7

Results for scenario 3 – Making sure achievements are recognised by influential people with a view to gaining a promotion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>% of respondents selecting this response as most likely for them</th>
<th>Gender of character in scenario</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Significance</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>% of Gender of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>% of Gender of</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>10.8</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>2.88</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td></td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>14.5</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2.89</td>
<td></td>
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<td>3.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 FM</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>65</td>
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<td>3.81</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>3.51</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
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<td>3.58</td>
<td></td>
<td>77</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>M</td>
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<td></td>
<td>65</td>
<td>3.18</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>18.1</td>
<td>M</td>
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<td>3.06</td>
<td></td>
<td>62</td>
<td>3.25</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. A response which roughly equally combined direct, ‘masculine’ and more indirect, ‘female’ elements, that is, response 3, was rated as most effective. This was also the response most frequently selected as the one the respondent would most likely choose herself. The response regarded as least effective was that of doing nothing to draw influential people’s attention to oneself, but simply working harder and more cooperatively in the belief that one’s achievements will be noticed. Similarly to the results in scenario 1, this was considered to be more likely to be adopted by women than by men.

3. Response 4, in which the character in the scenario points out their achievement in writing not only to the boss but also the boss’s boss, produced an interesting result. Unusually for an ‘Mf’ item given the pattern of results in the previous scenarios where likelihood of the response roughly followed its perceived effectiveness, and women were regarded as more likely to choose ineffective responses than men, this response was regarded as being not especially effective. However respondents regarded it as a significantly more likely choice for a man than a woman.

Discussion of scenario 3:

Point 3 in the results for scenario 3 is particularly interesting. It seems that women just do not see themselves lobbying in their own career interests above the next link in the chain of command as response 4 requires. Only three respondents in the entire sample said they would choose this option for themselves. So women tend to think this strategy is not a good idea for them, but nevertheless think it is likely that men would do it. One possible conclusion is that most women believe men are in error in adopting this approach. Another, however, is that men do in fact succeed with this
fairly aggressive strategy of self-promotion, but that women find it difficult to adopt – even more difficult than telling stories of their own achievements (response 5). It is possible that women are more wary of crossing hierarchical lines, feeling these to be an important barrier. Depending on the culture of the organisation concerned, this might be justified, especially since about 80% of the respondents were employees rather than self-employed or employers of others. However but it is still noteworthy that men are perceived to have fewer inhibitions in this respect. The finding may be linked to the fairly high rating that women give to ‘simply working harder than ever’ as a strategy for promotion. In both cases women seem more cautious about adopting more daring career management strategies compared to their male counterparts.

With regard to the first three hypotheses, the picture is even more mixed than before, with less difference between results for men and women strategists in terms of both effectiveness and probability. One counter-intuitive result, however, given the findings for previous scenarios, is that women believe that one fairly masculine strategy, often recommended, is simply off-limits and perhaps even ill-advised for them, that of making their achievements known to the boss’s boss in order to advance their careers. What is effective or not seems to become more difficult to decide as the dilemma grows more complex in terms of its longer-term implications.

4. Position on corporate ladder and choice of communication strategy for oneself

As noted in the demographic section of the findings, this was a group that tended to be relatively senior in organisational terms, with more participants ranking themselves as moderately close to the top or virtually at the top of the corporate ladder. Very few ranked themselves at the bottom. Accordingly, before testing via a chi-square analysis whether there was any association between a participant’s position on the corporate ladder and her preferred communication strategy for each scenario, the data were combined in order that results for participants who placed themselves lower than halfway could be compared with those who placed themselves above the half-way point.

For each scenario, however, there was no instance in which a preference for a particular response was associated with either a ‘top half’ or a ‘bottom half’ position on the corporate ladder. This suggests that the earlier findings do not vary appreciably with a woman’s position on the corporate ladder. This means that H(4) is not supported. That is, we do not find a more masculine view of preferred communication strategy as one goes higher on the corporate ladder. This is unexpected, since ideas about corporate culture suggest that women reaching higher levels might tend to accept the communication strategies of their male colleagues as ‘part of the way we do things around here’.

5. Position on corporate ladder and confidence in expressing one’s opinions in meetings

As indicated in Table 8, confidence in expressing one’s views in meetings increases as one goes up the corporate ladder, but was never really low.
Table 8
Mean confidence in expressing one’s opinions in meetings at work and position on the corporate ladder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position on corporate ladder</th>
<th>Mean level of confidence about expressing opinions at work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Close to or at the bottom</td>
<td>2.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately close to the bottom</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately close to the top</td>
<td>4.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close to or at the top</td>
<td>4.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Level of confidence in expressing one’s opinion in meetings and choice of communication strategy for oneself

Recalling H(5), it has often been suggested that with more confidence women will adopt a more masculine style of communication for themselves. The results for the demographics section indicated that this was a group with very few members who considered themselves to be unconfident in expressing their opinions in meetings at work. Accordingly, before checking via a chi-square analysis whether there was an association between level of confidence in expressing one’s opinions in meetings at work and the participants’ preferred communication strategy. The chi-square analysis was carried out to check for an association between the resulting three levels of confidence and preferred communication strategy. As with position on the corporate ladder, no significant association was found. Accordingly H(5) is not supported.

7. Conclusions and implications

Overall, it seems a masculine model of communication strategy still has a place in communication strategies. That is, it is thought to be both effective and probable as a means of achieving certain goals. However the masculine model is more valued for short-term communication situations such as regaining the floor after interruption in meetings. Even so, in the view of our participants, it is most effective if there is some moderation of it to include a small feminine element. The effectiveness and the probability of women using masculine communication strategies, while still evident, becomes somewhat less in medium term situations (such as ensuring one gets adequate credit for one’s ideas in meetings) and considerably less as situations move to the longer term (as happens when one is planning strategies for a future promotion). In the latter case some masculine strategies such as lobbying people in the higher echelons of the organisation are rejected, despite their being often recommended to women. Thus there is some evidence for the postmodernist approach recommended by West and Fisher. That is, the strongest masculine responses tended to be rejected as too strong even in short-term situations and more indirect approaches are favoured especially in longer-term situations. These results appear contrary to the conventional wisdom given out in assertiveness training workshops. Similarly, at least in this study women with growing confidence and growing seniority do not seem to gravitate towards preferring different communication strategies from their less confident and more junior sisters. Perhaps women have brought their own experience to bear on the matter and drawn their own conclusions about how to handle communication strategically.
8. Limitations of research

The study examined only a small number of communication dilemmas, incorporating a small specific set of socio-linguistic issues felt to be important in debates about women's workplace communication. This was necessary due to the time constraints of a breakfast meeting environment. It is possible that a more fine-grained study with more issues examining dilemmas in finer detail may have produced more differentiated results. Equally, though our pilot study did not indicate that other likely responses to the scenarios were missing, it is possible that other, viable communication strategies which met the goals of the strategists were not included.

The environment - a breakfast meeting - in which the survey was administered may have affected the results. Specifically it is notable that somewhat more responses were received for scenario 1 than for the other two scenarios, no doubt also due to breakfast meeting environment in which participants had limited time to fill in their responses and many distractions to contend with.

The characteristics of the sample are also likely to affect results. For example, as noted in the demographics section, this group was not evenly distributed in terms of seniority or level of (self-rated) confidence in expressing their opinions at work. While there were some participants who rated themselves fairly low on the organisational ladder and fairly low on confidence in expressing opinions, a larger sample may have included more people with these characteristics and allowed a more precise picture to emerge of the effects of these elements. Additionally, some participants may have been more or less aware of the debates within linguistic and management research, which may have influenced their responses.

9. Further research

Despite these limitations, the value of scenario research has been demonstrated in its capacity to yield some interesting results which suggest that there is not a one-fits-all "learn to interrupt" strategy to be adopted to solve typical workplace communication dilemmas for women. Further research should be undertaken to find out more about the nuances of this. For example, scenario research could be extended to encompass the specifics of communication dilemmas within the context of specific work environments or industries, or other contexts, such as supervisory relationships.

An obvious extension of the work would be to compare the responses of male participants with those of women and the responses within and between different cultural groups. Since some stereotypes about women's likely preferences were not upheld in this study, it could well be that male stereotypes might be similarly fading. The responses of different cultural groups to dilemmas of the kind used in our scenarios is of course a different set of problems again, making this a wide-open area for further research.
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Crosby, F & L Nyquist  

Eagly, A H, M G  

Makhijani & B G Klonsky  

Fielder, K, G R Semin & C Finkenauger  

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Hennig, M & A Jardim  

Holmes, J  

Holmes, J  


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Tannen, D


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Appendix

The three scenarios and their communication strategies, rated for masculinity/feminity

**SCENARIO 1:** The scene is a staff meeting. The two people talking are colleagues; neither is subordinate to the other, and there is no formal chairperson. The agenda item Jim is discussing is something he knows a great deal about.

**Jim:** What I think we should [do is...]

**Jane:** (interrupting him): [We can] deal with that issue later. On the Singapore deal, though, we’ll just move ahead right away – if we don’t our competitors will grab it.

**Jim:** I’d just like to finish [this point...]

**Jane:** (interrupting again): [I want] to be sure we get the Singapore matter resolved today.

**THE PROBLEM:** Jim wants to “regain the floor” and continue talking about his topic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>Masculinity/Feminity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Jim: “Jane, you’ve just interrupted me for a second time. I insist on finishing my point, which is ...” <em>(He continues talking about his topic.)</em></td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Jim: “Jane, you may not have realised you were interrupting me, but you were. What I was saying was...” <em>(He continues talking about his topic.)</em></td>
<td>Mf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Jim <em>(holding his hand palm outwards in Jane’s direction):</em> “Jane, your turn will come. Now, as I was saying...” <em>(He continues talking about his topic.)</em></td>
<td>MF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Jim: “Jane, just a minute....” <em>(He trails off and doesn’t revert to his topic.)</em></td>
<td>Fm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Jim says nothing but sits there fuming as Jane continues talking about the Singapore deal.</td>
<td>FF</td>
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</tbody>
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**SCENARIO 2:** The scene is a staff meeting. Sally has just brought up an idea which Paul had thought of first and mentioned earlier in the meeting. Sally talks about the idea as if it had not been mentioned before and as if it were her own.

**THE PROBLEM:** Paul wants to make sure that people at the meeting realise the idea was his.

<table>
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<tr>
<td>1 Paul: “Sally, get your own idea. That one was mine. When I proposed that plan I had something slightly different in mind.”</td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Paul: “I’m taking that idea back. You guys are butchering it.”</td>
<td>MM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Paul: “That plan sounds a lot like the one I mentioned earlier.”</td>
<td>Mf</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4  Paul says nothing at the meeting, but goes to Sally’s office afterwards and says to her, “We can work well together, Sally. Just remember to give credit where it’s due. By the end of the meeting, I think everyone thought my project upgrade idea was yours. You know, two can play that game.”

5  Paul says nothing at the meeting, but goes to Sally’s office afterwards and says to her, “I don’t know what you were thinking in that meeting today, Sally. I’d appreciate at least a footnote next time you borrow one of my ideas.”

6  Paul says nothing, and does not go to see Sally after the meeting, but turns away from her with an injured expression when they next meet.

7  Paul says nothing and gives no indication to Sally that there is any problem.

SCENARIO 3: Susan has just finished a meeting in which she closed an important deal which took skill and determination to bring off.

THE PROBLEM: Susan would like to increase her chances of promotion this year.

STRATEGY  | Masculinity/Feminity
---|---
1  Susan says and does nothing but works even harder and more cooperatively over the coming year. Working hard and getting results will eventually be noticed.  | MM
2  Susan says nothing straight away, but a couple of weeks later suggests to her boss that he might like to take a look at the performance figures for their profit centre before the next board meeting. Presumably he will make the connection between the healthy figures and her hard work.  | Mf
3  Susan sends a copy of the figures to her boss with a memo drawing his attention to her achievement at the meeting and its positive effect on the figures.  | MF
4  Susan does the same as in response C, but also sends a copy of the figures and the memo to her boss’s boss.  | Fm
5  Susan comments to the next five colleagues she meets following the meeting – one of whom is her boss – “You won’t believe what happened in that meeting today...”. She follows this with a description of the challenge and how she accomplished it.  | FF