Gender-related specifics of communication in the work place

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Abstract. The paper discusses gender-related specifics of communication in the work place. The authors study the issue of gender-related stereotypes impeding business communication between men and women. The paper gives an insight into reasons for patriarchal self-consciousness of both genders, based on traditional views on sexes (physiological differences of men and women), which are wrongly applied to a concept of «gender» (social behavior, social attitudes) typical for communication in the work place. The authors reveal conditions, supporting efficient communication in the work place, which put no obstacles in relations between men and women, provide them with equal chances in various professional fields, and eliminate stereotype gender-related attitude and expectations existing in the society. The implementation of gender-related approach to communication in the work place is studied in educational institutions of Volgograd.

1. Introduction

Serious transformations taking place in all spheres of our life caused alteration in communication between men and women in the work place (changing from patriarchal, dominant to relations, where partners enjoy equal rights), that is why, it is necessary to carry out more detailed research into the specifics of gender-related communication in the work place, since investigation and application of gender-based theories and methodologies have already been a professional standard in the world’s scientific community for a long time.

For collaboration with foreign partners, participation in international conferences, forums and exhibitions it is vital to study gender-based specifics of communication in the workplace, which is a priority task in the state policy of different countries, e.g. Germany, Canada, Luxembourg, Norway, the USA, Finland, France, Sweden etc., where important insights into gender-based peculiarities of communication in the workplace, potential gender-based conflicts in companies and organizations and their probable solutions have been accumulated.

Researchers, focusing on communication in the workplace, pursue an aim to improve business operation and strongly believe a style manager communicates with subordinates is a key factor in this case (equality of individuals, i.d. egalitarian style of communication); despite a common goal personal achievements of employees, their individual efforts, high mobility irrespectively to their gender specifics are important. On one hand, transformations taking place in the present day Russia should further the development of a tolerant society. There is a tendency to redress injustices relating to gender, promote young girls’ rights in education, choice of occupation and professional development.

On the other hand, traditional gender-related stereotypes existing in the society, being in conflict with a dynamically changing gender-related reality, still hinder successful development of communication in the workplace on the base of gender-related standards in the world educational space.
Furthermore, the issue under consideration is important because it is necessary to establish conditions of gender-related communication in the work place, which enable all communicants to become active subjects in the gender-related interaction. Under conditions of globalization equal gender-related interaction contributes to successful business operation, full scale evolvement of human resources, improvement of production processes and manufactured goods. The implementation of a gender-related approach to communication in the work place has a positive effect both on all employees and success of a company. Gender-related peculiarities of communication in the work place imply democratic relations in a company and take into account communicative gender-related competence of employees.

2. Ideological and theoretical fundamentals of gender-related specifics of communication in the work place

Production is considered to be direct creation of material and spiritual values with the purpose to meet human and social needs on the base of demand elasticity [1].

We view communication in the work place as a turnout of information between individuals in a form of oral or written messages, body language and speech and as a process of communication. It is a vital condition for human existence in the society, equal collaboration between men and women in an enterprise, in a sub-division (as a part of the company) and furthers their success. Therefore, American theoreticians of management (R. Blake and I. Mouton) emphasized importance of two managerial activities: «focus on production» and «care about employees» [2]. To stimulate the efficient work they called for encouragement of employees for creativity, interest in innovations, enthusiastic experimental activity and for training of employees to interact with each other.

A diversity of views on communication between men and women in the work place has been established over centuries (it was started as an idea of a destiny to carry out different jobs by men and women, so a gender-related labor division into male and female jobs).

First notions «gender», «gender-related approach» were used in psychology and sociology in the 1970s of the 20th century in connection with the concept proposed by Marxist feminists of a «dual system» (capitalism and patriarchy), oppression of women in family and society. However, before the opposition (sex-gender) was introduced, the issue under consideration had been discussed as «relations between genders» with respect to two approaches – biological and social ones.

The biological (traditional) approach (P. Abailard, Aristotile, Demokrit, D. Dominici, M.N. Katkov, N.S. Leskov, L.N. Tolstoy) was based on anatomical and physiological differences between men and women. In accordance with these differences a «natural» destiny for labor was established: men are to be engaged into the social sphere, whereas women – into housekeeping. «Useful mothers of families and good wives» were trained for housekeeping in classical educational institutions (gender-differentiated government-supported girls’ gymnasiums) in Russia (second half of the 19th century – early 20th century). Émile Durkheim attributes public gender-related division of labor to the social development: «one of the genders took hold on emotional functions, the other one – on intellectual ones» [4], and reasons this «natural» labor division due to natural differences, which are automatically copied in the social sphere.

The social (radical) approach (Quintilianus, N.P. Ogarev, Platon, A.S. Simonovich, M. Wollstonecraft, N.G. Chernishevsky) originated as critics of traditional patriarchal views on «natural» splitting of labor into «male» and «female» one. It implied the idea of equality of men and women, offered women to leave «airless walls» of families and encouraged them for a social mission equally with men. Private girls’ gymnasiums, special schools for young women and training courses in Russia in the second half of the 19th century – the early 20th century were inspired with the idea of emancipation of women, directed women towards the professional recognition (accountant, telegrapher, teacher, medical assistant etc.). Feminist sociologists West and Zimmerman [5] developed the fundamentals of social equality between men and women, required for their access to work equally with men, at least in several jobs.
The democratic approach relied on ideas of the social approach (like another offshoot of the radical one), but it was used in search for the «golden mean» – elimination of gender-related discrimination in labor both for men and women. Its further development as a gender-related approach is research of Giddens [6] and Bem [7]. A strict norm-oriented approach in Bem’s questionnaire on androgyne turned into the idea of variability of masculine and feminine properties in studies on gender-related characteristics viewed as variables in constantly changing communication in the work place.

To date, gender-related studies in Russia (T.V. Bendas, E.A. Zdravomyslova, I.S. Kon, I.S. Kletsina, O.I. Klyutchko, A. Temkina, L.V. Shileva etc.) are focused mainly on the development of their theory and methodology, in the scope of the gender-related approach empirical studies are carried out (leadership development, specifics of present day competition between men and women in the field of production etc.). Russian (theoretical) discourse is thought to be open nowadays. It seems to be in the phase of learning, mastering, perception, absorption, and «digestion» of various theories with quite different origin. Its main feature implies co-existing and overlapping of theoretical models. Different paradigms are co-evolving – a gender-role approach coexists with its radical criticism, social-constructivist research discusses the idea of a «female experience», which hasn’t become a well-established research domain in the Russian research discourse.

In recent days gender-related specifics of communication in the work place is thought to be a key factor for understanding of social transformations. Gender-related approach is accepted in a discourse space, which brings into question patriarchal traditions of communication men and women are involved in the work place, at the same time, it makes a contribution to methodology, subject area and methods or research, creating incentives for interdisciplinary studies.

3. Specifics of communication in the work place: gender-related dimension

3.1 Advances in communication in the work place – a factor of production growth

Prosperity of economic activity in an enterprise or a company is strongly dependent on advances in communication. That is assessment of a manufacturing process not only according to the physical output, but also with respect to advantageous research ideas of employees, their creative products, «godsends» with the aim to increase sales, consumer-friendly innovations to improve the quality of provided services and acknowledgment of successfully made decisions by employees and management – all these factors support favorable conditions of communication in the work place. For successful development of «production» and «communication» their efficient combination is needed in a real manufacturing process in companies and industries. Gender-related peculiarities of communication in the work place are considered as interpretation of socially organized relations between genders within the professional framework.

3.2 Actual strategies in organization of gender-related communication in the work place

To date, a gender-related strategy in communication in the work place originating from the biological approach still exists (47%) and comes to the idea of biological male and female labor dichotomy. It refers to fundamentals of essentialism (sex differences between men and women), traditional expectations and stereotypes in the society. In the process of research (Volgograd State Social-Pedagogical University, Volgograd State Medical University, Volgograd State Academy of Physical Education, Volgograd State Academy of Postgraduate Education) typical gender-related attitudes – oppositions were disclosed: – the man initiates and creates, whereas the woman saves and implements; – the man is competition-centered, and the women is oriented towards partnership and establishment of relations; – the man is rational and prudent, whereas the woman – emotional and willing to empathy; – being in new conditions the man starts changing the space around him, the woman is more adaptive and conservative. Conditions of the gender-related mode thought as a state of play in communication in the work place can manifest themselves exclusively within encouraged manhood.
and womanhood. In spite of stable gender-related stereotypes this strategy has been losing its influence.

A social strategy, originated from ideas of the social approach and based on fundamentals of accidentalism implies equal rights of men and women in the work place (21% educational institutions under consideration). The framework of the social strategy in the gender-related communication in the work place is not stable and supposed to study gender-related modes, gender contracts [9], breakdown of old patterns. Transformations might result from governmental actions (reforms etc.), due to changes in the work place (regulations, orders and other documents) and egalitarian position of the manager. The purpose of a manager (often a woman) is to eliminate gender-related stereotypes of employees. For instance, men have strong leadership skills, whereas women prefer to stay in the background, like to be advised and are willing to work selflessly. Naturally, men are more aggressive; being determined, therefore, to fight and compete, while women tend to find compromises without competing. Communication is supposed to be a means to achieve a business goal for the masculine type of behavior, and it is an end in itself, on the contrary, for the feminine type. Egalitarian managers assess critically gender stereotypes mentioned above and try to eliminate them in the process of communication in the work place. Attitudes towards them are reconsidered in companies, the initiative of women and their communicative skills are supported with respect to their professionalism, initiative, dynamism, and personal results.

A suggested integral strategy emphasizes the importance of eliminating any kinds of discrimination, equivalence of communication in the work place both for women and men. A unifying paradigm in the gender-related approach encourages new gender-related practices in conventional gender-related relations. A challenge initiated by a group or individual marginal is needed to change patriarchal gender-related stereotypes, creating a precedent for «new» gender behavior. For example, leaving the work place without completing tasks, a working mother is regarded a neglecting employee, but if she earns enough and can hire a babysitter to work without any stress, this person isn’t thought to be a neglecting employee or a bad mother anymore. Initially, a single-parent man is also thought to be a marginal, since it obstacles business, career, apprehending reliability of this employee; but later it can become an acceptable combination of career advancement and parenthood. Although gender stereotypes still exist, there is an opportunity to “soften” gender relations in communication in the work place (32%). Social prescriptions and inequality between the sexes might be reflected critically and changed.

An integral strategy within the unifying paradigm can be «a useful methodology of analysis» to study power relations, based on cultural and symbolic sex determination, viewing gender as an achieved status. Gender-related approach, aimed at resolving the dilemma between biological and social approaches, admits and does not deny gender differences between men and women, arguing, however, these issues are beyond the scope of this research field. The methodology for analyzing gender relationships in the workplace aims to have insight into social relations, including gender-based ones; therefore, a biological strategy is thought to be unacceptable to study social relations. An integral strategy in organization of gender-related communication in the work place is supposed to be a new strategy aimed at reflecting gender relations in enterprises and companies, democratic changes and transformations. The focus of managers on goals of production implies free and equal competition of male and female employees, assessing fairly results of their work. Managers should have a non-prejudicial and equal attitude to individual characteristics and skills of men and women, free from gender-related narrow-mindedness and stereotypes.

4. An interdisciplinary model in organization of gender-related communication in the work place

For efficient organization of gender-related communication in the work place it is necessary to take into account global dynamic transformations, taking place in the society these days, and reconsider theoretical knowledge accumulated in different sciences: history and philosophy of education, sociology, psychology, theory of management in industry, theory of communication and theory of
gender education with the purpose to develop an interdisciplinary model, providing an integrated system for resolving a multidimensional theoretical problem and its implementation in practice.

4.1 First component – «managerial»
The first component «managerial» in the interdisciplinary model of organization of gender-related communication in the work place relies on Blake and Mouton theory of management. Basic fundamentals of the theory imply search for the balance between «focus on production» and «care about people», so a combination of two core components. A «managerial net», oriented towards production, horizontally, and environment of cooperation, vertically, in their reasonable combination are still considered a base for the development of up-to-date theory of human resource management in industry, in different companies, and institutions. A list of statements suggested in the theory for assessment of a managerial style makes it possible to reveal «a small-minded style of management» because of neglecting production and mishandling employees. Focusing only on achieving high performance has an exhausting effect on creative energy of employees. Orientating exclusively on human relationships, it is possible to lose competitiveness of production, and company, resulting, in the worst case, in cessation of their economic activities. A management style oriented towards «focus on production» and «care about people» furthers achievement of better production results and keeps employees working. Both short-term results and long-term development of the organization are important for this managerial style, as well as trusting relationships of employees, achievement of company goals by people holding the same views, creating team spirit, mutual respect, and individual development of employees. The gender-related approach to the organization of communication in the work place is meant for contribution to the development of new gender rules. They are to meet requirements of social reality and internal needs of an individual, justice between genders, resulting as a consequence, in the increase of economic return of employees and their labor performance.

4.2. Second component – «communicational»
The second «communicational» component in the interdisciplinary model of organization of gender-related communication in the work place is based on social communication theories, which address communication as a necessary condition for a person’s existence in a society. Communicability is supposed to be an ability to communicate, collaborate; it is an important factor promoting success in the modern society. Public communication is gaining in importance for any enterprise or organization alongside with external, internal, and interpersonal communication due to its importance for competition and relevance for public opinion and public image of a company. No doubt, public image of all employees, their position on a carrier ladder are important; they can be tracked in the Internet by managers, employers and colleagues. In gender-related communication, a so-called frame is manifested; i.e. a cognitive structure anticipating the development of a situation according to a social and cultural context. Today, it extends norms of masculinity and femininity, increasing the spectrum of individual behavioral manifestations. Framing of social reality gains in importance, as well as structuring of gender, “gender display” (I. Goffman, M. Sokolov, V. Vakhshhtayn) as a theoretical and methodological basis for analysis of everyday communication at home and in the work place with reference to gender-related specifics of objective reality. Frame-based analysis of professional interaction has not been studied in details from the standpoint of gender dimension, so it can be considered a promising research domain of communication in the work place.

4.3. Third component – «Gender-related»
The third «gender-related» component in the interdisciplinary model of organization of gender-related communication in the work place is based on a gender-related approach to training and education of employees. In the present day world a lot of women make a career like men. In this case they just have to accept rules of the play in the business world: competition, leadership, strategy and orientation towards professionalism evolve such feminine characteristics as adaptability, ability to cooperate,
collaborate, skills to be focused on details for a long time. The business world is thought to belong to men, that is why, both men and women have to meet its requirements to be successful.

A core means in implementation of a gender-related component in the interdisciplinary model of gender-related communication in the work place is business ethics (official relations are built like a hierarchy in the production process, activity of the upper member of a hierarchy and subordination of male and female employees), and an auxiliary means is an everyday ethics of man and woman relations (a man protects a women against inconveniences). Interrelations in the work place are to be based on equality and equivalence of labor achievements and personal characteristics of employees, both men and women. For instance, initiating a conversation a hand is given by a person with an upper status, even if it is a man, a woman shakes a hand first if communicants with equal right start conversation. Being asked to enter a manager’s office, both male and female subordinates have to wait for an invitation to take a seat, although they may ask for a permission to sit down if it is not mentioned by a manager. A male manager has a right to enter a room first, as well as go upstairs and enter the lift, following a subordinate woman; however, gallantry towards women allows him to make a concession to a woman. Being in a car, a priority place is always given to a male manager, unless he offers it to his female subordinate. Due to subordination rules a male manager doesn’t perform work in the office which does not agree with his status, e.g. carry chairs or heavy folders, however, if there are no other men in the office, he can help women, following rules of an everyday ethics. Business ethics, excludes sexual harassment at work, because it violates the principle of gender equality, undermines authority of a manager and credence of employees because of exceptional and unequal attitude towards them. To date, business environment and industrial sector are considered harsh, so men and women are advised to reflect their own gender stereotypes and prejudices to eliminate them. Instead of focusing on the gender and its features in gender-related communication in the work place it is more important to observe rules of business ethics and conditions of egalitarian interaction for successful adaptation to the world of business.

5. Conclusion

The approaches above (biological and social) have accumulated theoretical knowledge of different sciences: history and philosophy of education, sociology, psychology. They are heuristically important, although past and present day state of the art can’t be compared on their base because of different social situations and contexts. Synthesizing scientific achievements available nowadays and relevant for understanding of gender-related communication in the work place in theory and practice of modern education, it is possible to identify origin of its present day strategies (biological, social, integral) in the context of gender-related transformations taking place nowadays.

The suggested integral strategy of organization of gender-related communication in the work place implies a unifying paradigm, a new methodology in the gender-related analysis. It expands the scope of gender ideas, making natural sex differences less significant in professional development of competitive specialists, and encourages for dialog and partnership. To date, gender-related labor division and standards of gender behavior tend to be multiple, variable and dynamic, therefore, organization of gender-related communication in the work place, oriented towards a new reality, is supposed to be prospective on the base of the interdisciplinary model. The interdisciplinary model, comprising managerial, communicational and gender-related components, establishes structural scientific combination between the theory of management in industry, theories of communication and frame-analysis (sociology), and gender-related approach (theory of gender education). It provides an integral system to solve a multidimensional problem of research; as a result, a new quality is formed – a professional with flexible gender-related attitude and skills of business ethics, open to global democratic transformations, which are strongly required in the present day Russian industry.
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