

Menu of evidence on messaging to combat sexism in organisations

Evidence-based ideas for developing communications campaigns and the messaging within them.

First published 29 November 2023

Combatting sexism or any form of bias is complex. Different policies and interventions may be more or less effective depending on context.

There are no guarantees that a particular approach will work in a given scenario. However, research evidence can provide pointers as to approaches that can be effective.

The following principles have been developed from a review of the evidence. Some of them will seem like common sense, while others may be less obvious. In all cases, there is evidence to suggest that these principles may be helpful in combatting sexist behaviours in some contexts. They can be viewed as a menu that can be used to provide ideas for developing communication campaigns and the messaging contained within them.

Knowledge, understanding and skills

Knowledge, understanding and skills can be built into messaging by:

- correcting a tendency among male officers and staff to overestimate the frequency of behaviour displayed by their colleagues that is sexist, and the sense that these behaviours are more 'normal' than they are (Kilmartin and others, 2008)
- ensuring that the audience clearly understands the rules and standards that operate in their setting (Paluck and Green, 2009)
- providing insight into the negative impact of sexist behaviour (Becker and Swim, 2011)
- emphasising how gender equality benefits everyone – for example, by improving workplace performance (Nolan, Moran and Kotschwar, 2016; Herring, 2009)
- encouraging dialogue and open conversations to foster understanding (Kalev, Dobbin and Kelly, 2006; Ely and Meyerson, 2000)
- incorporating gender issues into broader training (Wood and Lenze, 1991)

- ensuring that the context in which anti-bias training takes place is supportive and non-blaming (Legate and others, 2023)
- demonstrating how to challenge sexist behaviour and model the use of assertive language (Wood and Lenze, 1991; Bingham, 1991; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023)
- ensuring that those witnessing or experiencing sexist behaviours feel empowered and supported to come forward and assert their rights (McDonald, 2012)

Motivation

Motivation can be built into messaging by:

- highlighting positive examples of gender equality and respectful behaviour (Lockwood, 2006), recognising that the majority of people do not instigate or condone this behaviour, and showcasing individuals and organisations that exemplify positive behaviour (Sprague, 1975)
- connecting to values held by the target audience, such as fairness, professionalism and justice (Bicchieri and Chavez, 2010; Haidt)
- conveying respect and empathy for the audience's perspectives while encouraging them to reflect on biases (Czopp and Monteith, 2003)
- refraining from using shaming or blaming tactics, as they can lead to defensive reactions (Czopp and Monteith, 2003; Dickerson, Gruenewald and Kemeny, 2006; Gausel and Leach, 2011)
- including statements from organisational leaders that are clear and consistent with messaging from other sources (Buchanan and others, 2014)
- involving communities and stakeholders in developing and promoting messages, so that there is a sense of ownership (Laverack, 2006; Bohnet, 2016)
- considering tailoring messaging to specific groups and contexts for maximum relevance (Acker, 1990)

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Tags

Violence against women and girls