

Sensitive and Respectful Communication at CEITEC MU

Standards and recommendations for internal and external communication in English aimed for all employees of the institute

CEITEC has long been committed to the principles of equal opportunities. This handbook is one of the practical tools we use to improve our internal culture and our working environment.

Language is a reflection of the attitudes, behaviours and norms within a society. It also shapes people's attitudes as to what is 'normal' and acceptable.

Let's cultivate our communication together so that it does not exclude anyone and so that it contributes to the creation of a better scientific environment. Research shows that women, as well as people from other under-represented groups, are very often "invisible" in the scientific environment and their contribution to research and innovation activities is undervalued. By using sensitive communication, we will contribute to a realistic representation of the scientific environment in its diversity.

More sensitive use of language can contribute to breaking down cultural stereotypes, unintended prejudices, and in the long run can attract more girls and women to science and keep them there, as well as help our foreign colleagues, both female and male, feel comfortable at CEITEC MU.

The topic of sensitive communication (and equal opportunities in general) is now receiving a lot of attention from the European Commission. An active policy and plan to promote equal opportunities even forms a mandatory prerequisite for Horizon Europe projects, and bonus ratings are available in other schemes. **In terms of practical aspects, the use of sensitive language can also help in the evaluation of your grant applications and other documents addressed to the EU institutions and grant providers.**

Research also shows that the use of sensitive communication contributes in the area of recruitment. The language of an advertisement has great power to influence whether or not a prospective candidate applies. Our experience with editing advertisements at CEITEC MU shows that the use of sensitive language is appreciated by both female and male candidates. Last but not least, it's something we can start using right away and it doesn't cost us anything.

General Principles and Recommendations

Whether you are writing a grant application, a team event invitation or a work email, we recommend that you follow the standards and recommendations below. Using gender-sensitive communication is largely about experience; we may grope and our language may feel machine-like at first, but this will certainly improve with practice. In general, it is recommended that when communicating, we remember **to address everyone involved in the communication in a balanced way.**

If you are unsure whether your text contains gender stereotypes or unconscious preconceptions, try the "Flip it to test it" exercise described in the box below. As well as being self-reflective, this exercise is very entertaining at times 😊

TIP – Flip it to test it

Try to modify your prepared text (or pictures) by substituting women for men and vice versa. If you don't like something about this and find it strange, then the text probably contains stereotypes or unconscious biases.

Let's try to avoid the generic masculine - let's play with language

A generic masculine noun is a masculine noun "intended" to refer collectively to both men and women.

- » Avoiding stereotypes: Avoid gendered pronouns (he or she) when the person's gender is unknown.
- » If the group we are writing or talking about includes both women and men, let's try to avoid generic masculine.

Every man => Every person, Mankind => Humankind, Spokesman => Spokesperson

Let's contribute to better visibility of under-represented groups

- » Let's contribute to better visibility of under-represented groups – in science, often women. An example might be addressing or introducing women first, followed by men.
- » You should be aware of the word order of your phrases and make sure that you are not always putting the male version first.

Let's also communicate visually

- » Similarly, the accompanying pictorial material can contribute to better visibility of an under-represented group (for example, 21% of women in the position of research group leaders), or to show the real situation (for example, at CEITEC MU, 46% of women are employed in scientific positions).

Let's be consistent in addressing – a.k.a. "Honourable Professor, dear Amanda"

- » Let's avoid the practice where men are addressed by titles and referred to by adjectives such as esteemed or honourable, while women are addressed by first names, automatically asked to prepare minutes or make coffee, even though it is not in their job description.

Professional expertise takes precedence over gender / Avoid irrelevant information about gender

- » The term "woman" denotes sexuality. In gender-sensitive communication, it is not important to draw attention to gender/sexuality. Instead of "women use the university nursery", it is appropriate to use, for example, "parents of young children" or "employees".
- » We recommend specifying the qualification or position according to the specific context, e.g. director, lawyer, professor (in the feminine forms, if appropriate).

Let's speak English

- » CEITEC MU is proud to have a high proportion of scientists from abroad. It is important to always communicate in English (or bilingually) if there is even one person among the recipients of the communication who does not speak Czech. This applies both to written communication (including e.g. minutes of meetings) and to verbal communication at meetings or other gatherings.

Extra Tips and Recommendations For External Communication

- » **Let's shatter stereotypes – scientist = a white man in a white coat?** This is related to the visual side of communication. The aim is to present the most varied reflection of reality, i.e. men and women, in different clothes, different ages, nationalities, different environments.
- » **It's not just about focusing on women and promoting them at all costs!** Campaigns should have a broader focus - for example, support for caregivers of young children (parents), presentation of different perspectives on scientific careers, the topic of transparent working conditions, the contribution of team diversity to innovation potential, work-life balance, mental health in science, etc.
- » **Let's open equal opportunities topics both with women and men.** Let's talk about topics such as work-life balance, burnout prevention, psychological difficulties in the academic environment, sexism, etc. Let's not close our eyes to these topics. Let's ask different people about these topics, regardless of their sex and gender, because equal opportunities are everybody's business and persistent stereotypes harm not only women but also men.
- » **Let's use women's surnames strictly in their original form (don't add the Czech suffix “-ová” to foreign surnames).** This not only shows respect, but also improves their traceability in Internet texts and thus the readability of your presentations.
- » **Let's monitor the representation of our people.** Women make up almost half of all employees in scientific positions, so they should also be given sufficient space in external communication. As a first step, gender-segregated data should be monitored (e.g. the number of press releases that show a mixed group, only female scientists or only male scientists) and then evaluated and compared with reality. For example, if we have 21% of women as research group leaders, we cannot expect every second press release depicting this group to feature a woman. On the other hand, if we have more than half female PhD students, it is reasonable to expect that they will be portrayed at an appropriate rate.
- » **Tips for social media.** When using “emoji”, we should again take into account the diversity of gender and/or ethnicity – while respecting the reality of CEITEC MU. It is not the goal to pretend that we are more diverse than we actually are, but if we have different groups of people working for us, let's try to represent them also in social media.

This handbook has been prepared using the texts “Rady pro obce, instituce i jednotlivé osoby: Jak lépe komunikovat a propagovat vlastní i týmovou práci” (advice for municipalities, institutions and individuals: how to better communicate and promote your own and team work) (J. Valdrová, 2020) and “,Příručka pro užívání genderově sensitivního jazyka v komunikaci TA ČR” (Handbook for the use of gender-sensitive language in the communication of the TACR) (2016).

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