



Negotiation

Good negotiation skills play an important role in the development of individual careers, particularly in relation to securing equitable remuneration and career progression outcomes. Research consistently demonstrates the impact of gender on negotiation styles, outcomes and even the willingness to negotiate in the first place.

This guide outlines the importance of remuneration negotiation skills and offers advice to managers/leaders and staff regarding negotiating in ways that provide a fairer playing field for staff of all genders.



How is negotiation affected by gender?

Negotiation is overlaid with many myths about gender – ‘women don’t ask’, ‘women don’t like talking about money’, ‘women aren’t good at negotiation’ and so on. These myths can be traps for all involved but tools are available to navigate them effectively, and to change them.

Some of these myths point to gendered behavioural patterns that are borne out by research, while others indicate how stereotypes about gender can impact on how women may be perceived during negotiations.

Negotiation styles and perception

Some commentators argue that women’s failure to negotiate assertively explains the persistent gender pay gap and the under-representation of women at senior levels in many professions. However, recent research indicates that stereotyping around gender norms complicates negotiation¹. When women do ask, or adopt negotiation styles that may be perceived as ‘masculine’, they may be dismissed as ‘pushy’ or ‘overly aggressive’². Other research has found that many women are, in fact, excellent negotiators when speaking on behalf of others, but not as comfortable or confident when negotiating on their own behalf².

Research addressing salary negotiation has also identified that men are much more likely to actively negotiate higher salaries and better conditions while women have a tendency to accept what is offered².

Negotiation contexts. Meta analyses on salary negotiations show that men are advantaged in negotiating higher salaries or other benefits in negotiations and particularly where salary standards are ambiguous³. Research undertaken by Parlour indicates that these tendencies are also present in Australia.

Language and tone. Unfair though it is, the research is clear that most people are more likely to accept aggressive or strongly assertive behaviour from men than women².

A related observation is that men tend to be much more direct in their use of language, while women are likely to use more indirect language. For example, they may frame concerns as questions, pose open-ended questions as a way to elicit further information, and use more nuanced language. This can mean that both cues and nuance get lost in the negotiation.

It is important to understand that all of these characteristics are the outcome of social and cultural expectations. They are not innate qualities (nor do they apply to all, we are talking about women as a group).

¹ Fox, C. 2017. Stop fixing women: Why building fairer workplaces is everybody’s business. Sydney: Newsouth Publishing

² Eagly, A. & Carli, L. 2007. Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

³ Stuhlmacher, A. & Walters, A. 1999. Gender differences in negotiation outcome: A meta-analysis. Personnel Psychology, 52: 653-677.

Why does it matter?

Strong negotiation skills help to develop individual careers and enhance professional outcomes in most professions/occupations.

In the workplace

Ensuring that workplaces nurture a negotiating environment that is fair to all staff is clearly the ethical thing to do. However, it is also vital for the ongoing strength of an organisation or business.

Unequal negotiating environments can introduce a range of inequities into the workplace – pay inequity, unbalanced career prospects and progression, and poor distribution of opportunities and roles. All of these can be damaging to individual and team outcomes and prevent staff from reaching their potential.

In contrast, staff who feel that they are fairly treated and have equal opportunity to state their case are more likely to be productive, committed and engaged.

Employees

Negotiating effectively in relation to pay, promotion, projects and working conditions is vital to developing a successful, viable career. This is particularly important for women in terms of ongoing economic security, and for those who want or need to work in non-traditional patterns while still maintaining a satisfying career.

Negotiation is a skillset which can be beneficial in a range of professional circumstances.

At UQ

Skilled negotiators play an important role in the development of the University, particularly in the face of rapidly changing economic conditions and the ever tightening of access to grants and other forms of research funding.

What can we do?

Much can be done to ensure a fairer negotiating environment using considerable research, discussion and advice from the business and corporate sectors.

UQ itself is involved in extensive negotiations every day and this key skill can be extended into the negotiation of individual careers and workplace conditions.

Change is not a simple matter of women adapting their negotiation styles to dominant paradigms. Workplaces need to change to respond to the ways their staff negotiate. This is likely to result in more effective negotiation altogether. That said, women employees simply don't have time to wait for this change to be complete – they need to skilfully navigate current systems even as we all work to change them.

Much of the advice about good negotiation applies to both sides of the table, and it is important to understand each other's perspectives.

Managers and leaders

Much of the available research and advice about negotiation focuses on the individual or employee, and how women employees can successfully navigate negotiation⁴.

Material for managers and leaders is more limited, yet they play an important role in establishing a fair context for negotiation. This will be to the advantage of the University, not its detriment. However, a recent study conducted by researchers at the University of Queensland has detailed the organisational and leadership policies and practices that contribute to equitable negotiations and negotiation outcomes and much of the advice contained in this study mirrors the advice to employees contained in this guide⁵. See also **UQ Pay Equity Guide**.

Understand what makes effective negotiation

Good negotiation is a matter of give and take, where each party feels respected and leaves the negotiating table feeling satisfied that they have gained something and have been treated fairly. The best negotiations have outcomes that are beneficial to all.

- Create a negotiation environment that fosters constructive interaction, where all parties behave in a courteous yet focused and determined manner.
- Aim for goodwill and understanding on both sides, regardless of the different interests that each brings to the table.
- Don't aim to intimidate and don't be dismissive of the other's concerns or requests. You might 'win' in the short term, but you will undermine respect and trust, which does not lead to a productive and stable workplace.
- Think creatively about what UQ, your work area and team can offer an employee – what might mean a lot to them yet could be readily accommodated by you or UQ?
- Explain UQ's perspective. Negotiation is more likely to be successful when everyone understands the context in which decisions are made.
- Don't use requests for flexibility as an opportunity to push down salaries. This will build inequity into UQ. Remember to reward skill and competence and outcomes, rather than time in the office.

⁴ Fox, C. 2017. Stop fixing women: Why building a fairer workplace is everybody's business. Sydney: Newsouth Publishing.

⁵ Fitzsimmons, T., Yates, M. & Callan, V. 2020. Employer of Choice for Gender Equality Leading Practices in Strategy, Policy and Implementation. Brisbane: University of Queensland.

Be clear what is up for negotiation

Research suggests that men tend to negotiate salaries much more frequently and vigorously, especially when the 'rules' around negotiation are ambiguous⁶. The same research indicates that men are more likely to apply for jobs than women where salaries and conditions are not clear – skewing the pool in the first place.

An explicit statement that conditions and pay are open to negotiations can dramatically increase the likelihood of women entering into negotiation, thereby improving employees' chances of having fair and equal opportunities⁷. This also helps to broaden the applicant pool. Being clear about what is negotiable, and the limits of negotiation, also helps employers with strategic planning.

- If you are prepared to negotiate on salaries and/or working conditions, declare this in the job advertisement or in the information about promotion processes.
- Have clear position descriptions and salary bands in place and readily advertised and accessible. These provide a good framework for negotiation in both recruitment and promotion.
- If a role could be undertaken through a flexible work arrangement, make it clear that this possibility is up for discussion.
- Understand current rates in the profession and how other practices and organisations use flexible work arrangements to their advantage.
- Consider what you can offer an employee in terms of flexible workplace conditions and other non-traditional benefits.
- Have clear bands that apply to all employees of similar skill, expertise and experience. Negotiate within these boundaries.

Be prepared

All parties should aim to be as well prepared as possible going into any negotiation.

- Make sure you understand the likely salary expectations for the position within the Australian context. A search of similar roles may be useful in establishing an industry benchmark.

- Understand current rates for similar positions at other universities and how other universities and industry organisations use flexible work arrangements to their advantage.
- Consider what can be offered to staff in terms of flexible workplace conditions and other non-traditional benefits.
- Maintain clear salary bands that apply to all staff of similar skill, expertise and experience. Negotiate within these boundaries.

Understand different modes of negotiation

Be aware of the strengths and weaknesses in different styles of negotiation – from the aggressive to the collaborative – and be wary of making gender-based assumptions regarding behaviour.

- Double-check your reactions to guard against gender bias – for example, if you find yourself thinking a woman is being 'pushy', ask yourself if you would interpret this behaviour in the same way if you were negotiating with a man.

Have women at the table

If we are serious about equity we need to have women involved in negotiations and decisions that relate to appointments, salaries, promotion, workplace arrangements, project allocation and resourcing.

Train your staff in negotiation

Ensuring your employees are good negotiators may sound counter-intuitive, but many benefits accrue to organisations with skilled negotiators on their staff. It is also a good way to ensure that all employees have equal opportunity, and that you are not inadvertently rewarding confidence over competence.

- Teach your staff how to negotiate effectively in different contexts and with different personalities with different negotiation styles.

6 Stuhlmacher, A. & Walters, A. 1999. Gender differences in negotiation outcome: A meta-analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, 52: 653-677.

7 Eagly, A. & Carli, L. 2007. *Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Employees

There are many things that an employee can do to improve their negotiation skills and to navigate different negotiation environments. There is also a wide array of resources and advice available to help. (See resources at the end of this guide).

Don't be trapped by the myths

The research around women and negotiation seems dispiriting at times. It is important to understand how gender bias and ingrained expectations of gender roles and behaviour affect negotiation but don't let this limit or constrain you.

- Understand the systemic issues relating to gender and negotiation as a way to help navigate them. Talk to colleagues and mentors to help recognise the structural factors at play in particular situations, then strategise around them.
- Identify if and when you are falling into limiting gendered behaviour patterns and have some techniques at hand to manage this. For example, if you are hesitant about applying for promotion, asking to be involved in an interesting project, or seeking a pay raise, ask yourself how you will feel if a male colleague with an equivalent or lesser experience was successful when you haven't had a go. Then, take a deep breath, get prepared and go in and negotiate!
- Think about how well you can negotiate for the sake of a project, or for others. Now, think about how you can apply these skills to your own career.

Don't wait for an invitation to negotiate

When there is an explicit invitation or cue to negotiate, most women do so with great results. In contrast, men tend to negotiate much more frequently and effectively when there are no cues or when the rules around negotiation are ambiguous.

- Be proactive. Don't wait for someone else to notice how hard you are working and how well you are doing your job.
- If there's no cue for negotiation in your workplace, try creating your own perhaps through regularly scheduled team meetings or when completing a noteworthy piece of work or at the end of the financial or academic year.

- Be canny about the best time to negotiate better conditions or a higher salary – for example, around the time of a good performance review, when you have just completed a well-received project, or when you are about to take on extra responsibility.

Be prepared and well informed

The better informed you are, the better position you are in to negotiate effectively. Arming yourself with knowledge pays off – for example, gender gaps in salary negotiations tend to dissolve when people have a clear idea about what to ask for.

- Try to research your work unit's history with pay and conditions. If you are the first employee to request part-time hours or differing work conditions, think about strategies that might make your flexible arrangement work effectively. If you are planning to request a higher starting salary than offered in the past, be prepared to argue your case.
- When negotiating salaries, understand the relevant minimums by checking Awards, the relevant federal minimum standards and the UQ Enterprise Bargaining Agreement.
- For salary negotiations, do some research to find out what you're worth. Consult relevant careers or recruitment websites, check any recent industry research, and talk to peers and colleagues.
- Make sure you talk to men as well as women – if you only talk to other women you are likely to come up with systematically lower figures. (Remember, pitching too high can be as damaging as pitching too low.)
- If you want to negotiate a working arrangement that is new to your work unit, consider citing how other work units make it work and demonstrate how it could work effectively in your unit as well.
- If your work unit has unsuccessfully tried flexible work arrangements in the past, find out why they didn't work. Come up with solutions that will remedy any past problems.
- Keep track of your achievements and successes and positive feedback about this. For example, if you've received testimonials or thank you notes from clients, awards or other recognition, you can use these as evidence of your value to the work unit.

See also the **UQ Pay Equity Guide**.



Make the business case

Whether you're negotiating a pay rise, a promotion or flexible working conditions, you'll need to make a strong argument for the advantages to your work unit. The fact that it will be enormously beneficial to you just isn't enough. Make the business case – why will your pay rise, promotion or flexible working conditions be good UQ?

- Think laterally and positively about what you bring to your work area and UQ, and what more you could bring if your request is met.

Practice, practice, practice

The more you negotiate, the better you get at it – whether it's negotiating pay and conditions for yourself or negotiating with clients and contractors.

- Consider setting up mock interviews and practicing strategic answers. Find a partner to give you feedback (ideally one with experience as a manager – mentors can be great for this).
- Have some tactics in place to help overcome any uncertainty or lack of confidence that may creep in.
- Explore how you can use negotiation skills developed in other contexts when negotiating your career.

Be firm by flexible

Know what you want, and whether it's reasonable in the context. This applies to working flexibly, pay rises, promotions and commencing salaries.

- Know what you'll settle for before you start the conversation. (Some people ask for more than they want, seeing it as a way to test the waters and have something to concede.)
- Beware of making an ultimatum – even if you're prepared to follow through, academia is a surprisingly networked profession and you can easily burn bridges.
- Understand the context from UQ's perspective, and explain why your request is appropriate in this context.

Consider language and tone

Be mindful of the research indicating that many people find strongly assertive behaviour more confronting from women than men.

There is a range of advice about how to deal with this. Some commentators recommend women stay within 'gender boundaries' – that is, to frame their requests in ways that fit within expectations, to be collaborative, and avoid anything that could be seen as 'pushy' or demanding⁸. Others point out change is slow when we stay within accepted roles.

How you navigate this will depend on your own attitudes and negotiation style, who you are negotiating with, what relationship you have with them, and the context in which you are negotiating.

- Consider your own negotiation style(s), and identify how they could work in the particular context.
- Read the negotiation style of those on the other side of the table and respond to this. Choose a strategy that responds effectively to their interests and tactics.
- Enter the discussions with the goal of reaching a mutually satisfactory outcome. Avoid combative language.

⁸ Carli, L. 2004. Gender and social influence. *Journal of Social Issues*. 57(4): 725-741.

Contact us

This guide has been developed by the UQ Gender Steering Committee as part of the UQ SAGE Athena SWAN Bronze Action Plan. You can contact the UQ Gender Steering Committee at: athenaswan@uq.edu.au

Credits

This guide was prepared based upon the Negotiation guide from the 'Parlour Guides for Equitable Practice' series produced as an outcome of the research project 'Equity and Diversity in the Australian Architecture Profession: Women, Work and Leadership' (2011-2014) led by Naomi Stead of the University of Queensland. The original development of the guides was led by Justine Clark and Naomi Stead, working with Susie Ashworth and Neph Wake.

This current guide incorporates the findings of research undertaken through the 'Employer of Choice for Gender Equality: Leading Practices in Strategy, Policy and Implementation' research project with the Workplace Gender Equality Agency undertaken through the AIBE Centre for Gender Equality in the Workplace by Terry Fitzsimmons, Miriam Yates and Victor Callan of the University of Queensland.

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Further resources

In addition to the references located in the body of this guide there are a wide range of resources available about negotiation, most of which come from the business world. It is well worth exploring these. The following are just a few of the useful guides that are available on-line.

The Best Strategies for Women to Negotiate a Higher Salary

<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/strategies-for-women-to-negotiate-a-higher-salary-4067697>

A Woman's Guide to Salary Negotiation

<https://www.nytimes.com/guides/working-womans-handbook/salary-negotiation-woman>

Are Salary Negotiation Skills Different for Men and Women? Harvard Law School Blog

<https://www.pon.harvard.edu/daily/salary-negotiations/salary-negotiation-skills-different-for-men-and-women/>

Further reading

Fitzsimmons, T., Yates, M. & Callan, V. Employer of Choice for Gender Equality Leading Practices in Strategy, Policy and Implementation. Brisbane: University of Queensland.

<https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/UQ%20full%20report.pdf>

'Gender and Negotiation in the Workplace' - Workplace Gender Equality Agency

<https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/Negotiation-Paper-Final.pdf>

'Social Incentives for Gender Differences in the Propensity to Initiate Negotiations: Sometimes it Does Hurt to Ask'

Bowles, H.R., Babcock, L. & Lai, L. 2007. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes. 103(1): 84-103.

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