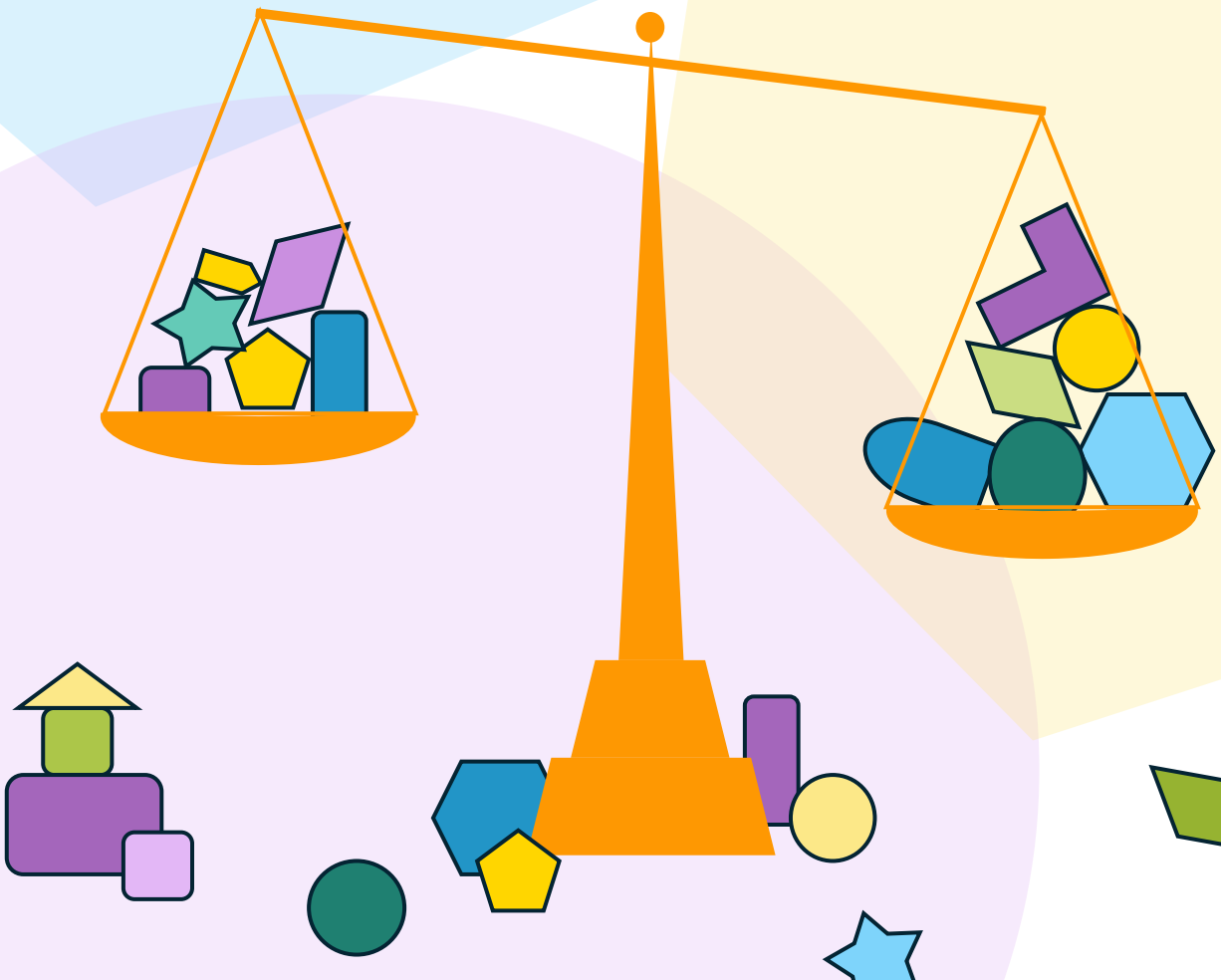
Gender Roles

& Task Distribution



Workshop on Gender Roles & Task Distribution in Teams — Moderation Guide

Intro: Who this workshop is for

This workshop is for iGEM teams and other student project groups who want to look at how they share work before habits set in. You don't need an acute conflict or a clear sense that something is off. Curiosity about who does what in your team, and why, is enough. Teams that already feel unhappy with their task distribution will find it just as useful.

The best moment to run it is early in the project, after a few weeks of settling in. By then everyone has taken on some tasks and has a first impression of how the team works, but roles haven't hardened yet. Run it too early and there is little experience to reflect on. Run it much later and patterns are harder to change, because people have grown used to them.

The workshop takes 1.5 to 2.5 hours and works for groups of 6 to 16 people. Larger teams can split into parallel groups. It is designed so that team members without moderation experience can run it themselves, using the scripts and guiding questions in this document.

You won't solve every question about task distribution in one session, and that is not the goal. What you can expect is a clearer view of who carries which kind of work, how people feel about it, and the role gender often plays in this, usually without anyone intending it. You will also leave with concrete ways to act on what you notice.

Overview

Step	Duration	Purpose	Content
0. Opening	10-15 min	Set the purpose, build trust and share some background	Ground rules, a short rationale and the survey context
1. Warm-up (opinion line)	10-15 min	Get the group moving and see where everyone stands	Three statements, with a free choice not to take a position
2. Short plenary	10 min	Collect first reactions	Open questions about what stood out
3. Time pie exercise	65-75 min	Make time use and confidence visible and open a change of perspective	Personal time pie with satisfaction rating, silent selection, pair conversations, insight capture
4. Action items	10 min	Carry the insights into daily teamwork	Weekly challenge card box, optional rotation of tasks
5. Closing	20-25 min	Bring the learning together and invite action	Back to the opinion line, personal reflection, call to action
Total	2-2.5 h		

For a 1.5 h session, run only two rounds in Step 3. Shorten the background in Step 0 to one or two sentences, ask just one question in Step 2, and keep Step 5 to parts 5b, 5c and 5d. For a 2.5 h session, keep all three rounds in Step 3 and leave more room for open sharing in 5a. Use the extra time in 5d to schedule the follow-up check-in together.

Material checklist

- Printed time pie worksheets, one per person plus a few spares, with the seven categories already labelled, a column for the percentage, a column for the satisfaction score from 1 to 5, a name field and room for one or two example tasks per category
- Pens for everyone
- Wall or table space to hang all worksheets side by side
- Small blank slips for the private selection, one per person per round
- A box or hat to collect the slips
- Post-its in one colour for the insight step after the pair conversations
- A flipchart or poster with the definitions of the seven categories, visible throughout the session
- A second flipchart or poster for the insight Post-its
- Enough open floor space for the opinion line
- Blank cards for the weekly challenge card box
- A small box to keep the cards in the team's office or lab afterwards

Workshop

Step 0: Opening (10–15 min)

The goal of this step is to explain why the workshop is worth your time, to create a feeling of safety and to give the group some background on why the topic matters, not only what the exercise will be.

You can open with words like these.

"You have just formed as a team, and that is exactly the right moment to take a conscious look at how you share your tasks. This is not about assuming that something is wrong. It is about noticing patterns early, because patterns are easiest to change before they settle."

Next, share some background. In one or two sentences, explain why your team is running this workshop. You could refer to the findings of your own survey on gendered task patterns, tell a personal story or use a general statistic on how care work is distributed. Keep it short, because this is context and not the main part. This background is new in V2.

Please share the following ground rules at the start. They are longer and more explicit than in V1, following the reviewers' feedback.

- This is a safe space. What is shared here stays here.
- Nobody has to share anything personal, and nobody has to take a position on anything they would rather not. Passing is always fine.
- We treat each other with respect. There is no room for stereotyping or discriminatory comments, about gender or anything else.
- Humor is welcome, and we stay mindful of how it lands for others.

A few notes for the moderation team.

- If possible, moderate as a mixed-gender pair. The reviewers saw this as valuable for a topic like this.
- Use gender-inclusive language throughout, not only in the parts that deal with gender directly.

Step 1: Warm-up — opinion line (10–15 min)

The goal of this warm-up is to get the group moving and to see where everyone stands at the start.

Imagine a line across the room. One end means "fully agree" and the other end means "fully disagree". Read out one statement at a time, and everyone places themselves on the line. In-between positions are welcome.

You can introduce it like this. "I will read out a few statements. Place yourself on the line wherever your opinion sits. There is no right or wrong answer, we simply look at where we stand as a group. If you would rather not position yourself on a statement, that is completely fine. Just step to the side."

Read out the statements one at a time and leave enough time to move between them.

1. "Task distribution in teams is often based on gender roles."
2. "You often take on tasks because otherwise nobody else does."
3. "In an iGEM team, you should also take on tasks outside your comfort zone."

If time and the group's focus allow, you can add a fourth and more specific statement, for example "I have taken on (or turned down) a task before because it is 'typically' done by my gender." The reviewers suggested this to sharpen the gender focus of the warm-up. Add it only if it does not take time away from the core exercise.

If you have time, ask one or two people at different ends of the line why they chose their spot. Please do not start a discussion here, because the aim is only to hear different perspectives.

Do not worry if everyone clusters in the middle. That is a valid result too, and there is no need to push for sharper positions.

Step 2: Short plenary reflection (10 min)

The goal of this step is to briefly process what just happened before moving on.

You can make the transition with these words. "You have just seen where opinions differ in the room. Let us quickly gather what stood out."

"Before we move on, what impression are you taking from this exercise? Which result surprised you most?"

Keep this part short. It is a round of first reactions and not a deep discussion, because the deeper conversation comes later.

Step 3: The Time Pie exercise (core, ~65–75 min)

The goal of this core exercise is to make visible how team time is actually split across the categories and how satisfied people are with that split. It also opens a conversation that helps everyone see the work of others, based on the categories each person feels least confident to take on.

This transition marks the deliberate step from the explicit gender framing of the warm-up to the more open framing of the rest of the workshop. It also names intersectional factors, following the reviewers' feedback.

"Whether the reason for an uneven split is gender or something else entirely, such as experience, time pressure, habit, language or being the first in your family to study a subject like this, let us look closely at who in your team carries which kind of work, and why."

The seven categories come from your team survey and stay the same across teams, so results remain comparable. **Coordination** covers admin, organisation and scheduling. **Social & Care Work** covers resolving conflict, planning team events, keeping morale up and remembering birthdays. **Leadership** covers mentoring, coaching and taking responsibility. **Execution** covers following established processes, such as lab work, tidying up and documentation. **Conceptual Work** covers concept development, data analysis, programming and design-cycle work. **Outreach** covers fundraising, PR, networking and presenting. **Innovation** covers creative work, such as posters, rethinking protocols, new approaches and visualisation. Please post these definitions where everyone can see them. Some tasks, like fundraising, can fit two categories, depending on whether the angle is strategic (Coordination) or external-facing (Outreach). It helps to mention this ambiguity at the start.

3a. Individual time mapping (7–8 min)

Each person gets a time pie worksheet and works alone through these four steps.

1. Distribute 100% of the time you typically spend on team work across the seven categories. The numbers need to add up to 100%.
2. For every category above 0%, add a satisfaction rating from 1 ("I resent doing this") to 5 ("I genuinely enjoy this").
3. If you like, note one or two example tasks next to your largest categories, so others can picture what is behind the number.
4. Write your name at the top.

You can say it like this. "Think about the last few weeks. Of all the time you spend on team work, roughly what share goes into each of these seven categories? It should add up to 100%. Then, for every category above zero, rate how satisfied you are with it, from 1 to 5."

3b. Display (5 min)

Hang all worksheets on the wall or put them on tables. Number each one (Sheet #1, #2 and so on), so it is easy to refer to them in the next step.

3c. Silent gallery walk & selection (5–7 min, repeated each round)

Everyone walks along the wall in silence and reads all sheets. Then each person privately writes one sheet number and one category on a blank slip. The category should be one where the sheet's owner reports a high percentage, where you marked 0% (or close to it) yourself and

where you would feel **least confident or prepared** to take on the work. The slips go into the box.

You can say it like this. "Walk along the wall quietly and read everyone's sheet. Then write one sheet number and one category on your slip. Choose a category that someone else spends real time on, where you spend little or no time yourself, and where you would feel least confident stepping in. Please do not discuss it with anyone. This is your own private choice."

3d. Pairing (5 min)

The moderator reads out the selections and forms the pairs. Each pair consists of the sheet owner and the person who picked that sheet.

- If two people pick the same sheet or category, decide with a quick coin flip, or assign the second person directly to a sheet that nobody else picked.
- Some sheets may remain unpicked after the first round. These are often the quieter, "invisible" categories such as Social & Care Work. This is a perception gap that is worth naming. The moderator assigns these sheets to anyone who still has no partner, for example with the words "Nobody picked this one, and that is worth noticing in itself. I am assigning it to you."
- If pairs cluster along gender lines, for example if people read as women mostly pick the same few categories from people read as men, or the other way round, the moderator can name this gently as an observation and not as a verdict. It is a good prompt for the later plenary and does not need to be resolved on the spot.

3e. Paired conversations (10–12 min per round)

Give each pair the following four questions, written down or visible to everyone.

- Ask your partner how it feels to carry this category, time after time.
- Explain to your partner why you think this category matters.
- Why wouldn't you take on your partner's category yourself?
- What would you need in order to take it on?

Also invite the pairs to look at the satisfaction rating on the sheet. They can ask, "What is behind the number you gave this category?"

3f. Insight capture (5 min per round)

Before the next round starts, each person writes one or two insights from their conversation on a Post-it, without a name, and puts it on the shared insight board. This way, what happened in each pair also reaches the group and not only the two people involved. Everyone takes a brief look at these notes before the closing plenary.

3g. Repeat

Run two or three rounds in total. Before each new round, remind everyone to pick a different sheet or category than last time, so that pairs do not repeat. The sheets stay on the wall unchanged between rounds.

Three rounds take roughly 65-75 minutes in total. This includes about 10-12 minutes for setup and about 18-20 minutes per round. For a 1.5 h session, cut to two rounds.

Step 4: Action items (10 min)

The goal of this step is to give the group something concrete to carry forward, so that today's insights do not fade.

You can lead into it with these words. "You have just named what you would need to pick up a category that is new to you. To keep this from staying just an insight, here is something your team can run from now on, a weekly challenge."

The weekly challenge works like this.

1. Everyone writes at least two tasks they regularly do for the team on separate cards. The time pie worksheets can feed directly into this.
2. The cards go into a box that gets a permanent spot in your office or lab.
3. Each week, someone draws a card at random and takes on that task for the week.
4. Nobody checks whether it happens, but it is worth talking as a team from time to time about how it went.
5. If it motivates your team, you can turn it into a small points system. This is optional.

The reviewers suggested one more option. Anyone who feels unsure about a drawn task can do it together with the person who usually does it the first time, instead of doing it alone. This turns the challenge into a chance to learn from each other and not just a cold hand-off.

Beyond these individual challenges, your team can also talk about structural changes. One option is a fixed rotation for recurring Social & Care tasks, if these currently sit with just a few people.

Step 5: Closing (20–25 min)

The goal of the closing is to round off the workshop, to name the learning goal openly and to make sure the insights turn into action.

5a. Return to the opinion line

"Let us go back to the statements from the start. I will read them again, and you can place yourself on the line once more, in your mind or for real. Has anything shifted for you? As before, you are welcome not to reposition at all."

Read out the three statements from Step 1 again. If time and energy allow, briefly ask whether and why anyone's position has moved. Nobody has to take part.

5b. Individual reflection

"How ready do you feel right now to take on a task outside your comfort zone? Give yourself a number from 1 to 10 and briefly note why."

5c. Naming the learning goal

This is the most important moment of the workshop, and it now goes one step further than just naming the pattern.

"Today we saw that gender often plays a role in who ends up doing what, usually without anyone noticing, even though our conversations were about specific categories and reasons. This is not about blame. It is a pattern worth watching for. And you now also have a few ways to act on it once you notice it. You can pick a card from the challenge box, speak up when you see an imbalance, or look at today's pie sheets together in a few weeks."

5d. Call to action

In addition to the weekly challenge card box, suggest a follow-up moment, so that the effect does not fade.

"Please put a 15 to 20 minute slot into a team meeting in three to four weeks, to revisit today's pie sheets. Has anything actually shifted? This is separate from the weekly challenge. The

challenge is a small ongoing habit, and this check-in is a moment to step back and look at the bigger picture together."

5e. Closing caution

Please name one limit of the exercise, just once. A quick and informal assignment of roles in daily team life, and a gendered habit of giving in when two people want the same role, cannot be fully shown by this workshop alone. Naming this limit openly also helps to keep the group's attention on the topic afterwards.

Common pitfalls and moderation notes

- If the percentages do not add up to 100%, gently ask people to adjust them before moving on. A rough estimate is fine, because precision is not the point.
- If a category sits at 0% for almost everyone, that is a result in itself. You can name it in the closing, for example by asking, "Nobody wrote anything down for this category. What does that tell us?"
- If nobody picks a particular sheet, apply the rule for unpicked sheets from Step 3d. It is a perception gap worth naming and not a mistake in the process.
- If several people pick the same sheet or category, decide with a coin flip or assign directly, as described in Step 3d.
- If pairs cluster along gender lines, the moderator can gently name this as an observation, without turning it into a verdict. It is useful material for the closing.
- If a conversation becomes emotional, pause and refer back to the ground rules. Offer to continue the conversation one-to-one later, and not in front of the group.
- If the group stays very quiet during the opinion line, that is fine and there is no need to push. The effect often shows up later in the small-group conversations.
- If possible, co-moderate as a mixed-gender pair. The mix of perspectives helps, especially in Step 3.
- Moderators should model gender-inclusive language throughout the session, and not only in the parts that deal with gender directly.

Appendix: pie chart template

Print this once per person for Step 3a. Each person writes their name, splits 100% of their time across the seven slices, and adds a satisfaction score from 1 to 5 next to each slice they use.

Pie Chart Template

Each person splits 100% of their time spent on the team project across the slices and notes a 1-5 satisfaction score per slice.

