

Map of the Book

The broad purpose of this book is to ask whether *language* is a reason why women are under-represented at senior level in the business world. Within that broad purpose, the book has two principal aims. The *first* is to assess whether there is indeed a language of female leadership, and the *second* is to ask how female leaders can utilise language as effectively as possible to achieve their business goals. This book therefore puts forward a case for the significance of language to female leadership, and to achieve this, is organised in eight chapters. Chapter 1 sets the scene for the rest of the book looking at the economic, cultural and linguistic background to the case, and introducing key terms and constructs. At the centre of the book is the notion that the language of female leadership takes place in three types of corporation: Male-Dominated; Gender-Divided or Gender-Multiple.

In Chapter 2, I show how the language and gender theory of *dominance* (Fishman 1978; Pauwels 1989; Spender 1980) is well placed to explain the discourse features of Male-Dominated corporations. Gender dominance as a theory emerged in the 1970s when feminist linguistics was in its infancy yet second-wave feminism (Baxter 2003; Mills 2003) was at its height. While times have moved on, certain features of the Male-Dominated corporation still prevail within some businesses today, often in the form of gendered discourses. Chapter 2 describes the Male-Dominated corporation in more detail, and its use of gender-neutral strategies to disguise and yet to perpetuate its outdated cultural stance on gender. Such 'gender-neutral' strategies include the endorsement of a range of stereotypical role models for female leaders, masculinised metaphors in corporate language; and a lack of contestation of hegemonic gendered discourses.

In Chapter 3, I explore how the influential language and gender theory of *difference* (Coates 2004; Tannen 1990; Holmes 2001), is well placed to conceptualise practices in Gender-Divided corporations. As a possible consequence of second wave feminist activism, there was a reassessment in the 1980s and 1990s of the qualities and attributes associated with women (Mills 2003). These were no longer perceived as weaknesses but as possible strengths that could benefit the productivity of businesses and professions. This chapter explores the language and gender 'difference' theory (e.g. Coates 2004; Holmes 2001; Tannen 1994), and shows how this theory was taken up and applied by organisation studies (Helgesen 1990; Rosener 1990), and used both by networks of female leaders and by business leaders and pundits to redefine the identity of leadership, even distinguishing it conceptually from management (Kotter 2001).

In Chapter 4, I discuss how *discourse* theory (also known as the 'social constructionist' approach; Butler 1990; Crawford 1995; Cameron 1997) is very well placed to explain the construct of a Gender-Multiple corporation, which considers language as social practice and therefore constitutive of all human activity. In the post-feminist times of the early 21st century, people have been less concerned to define themselves primarily by their sex or gender, and more interested in recognising that people have multiple identities with experience and expertise in widely varying areas of their lives. At the same time, gender is regarded as an important distinguishing feature, but not one that should cause undue prejudice or harm to a person's domestic life or professional career. This approach helps to explain the notion of multiplicity, while recognising the continuing prevalence of gendered discourses that can both enable and damage people (Sunderland 2004).

Chapter 4 explores the discourse approach and its implications for leadership under three headings: discourses in the organisation, the social construction of gender identities, and Communities of Practice (CoPs). These first two aspects of discourse theory inevitably overlap in that institutional discourses work to construct gender identities, while identities act upon discourses in order to shape and change them, so the three sections will be reflexive about this interrelationship. With its postmodernist roots, discourse theory has critiqued both the gender dominance and gender difference theories (Butler 1990; Cameron 2003; Crawford 1995), but also recognises the value of their application to particular cultural contexts at particular times. Arguably, such theoretical paradigms continue to add some value to other parts of the world where corporations are characterised much more explicitly by male-dominated or gender-divided practices (e.g. De Kadt 2002).

In Chapter 5, I present a case study from an ongoing research project (Baxter 2008), of how the language of female leadership adapts to and constructs best practice in different types of gendered corporations. I investigate some of the linguistic strategies female leaders have evolved to survive in male-dominated settings, and to thrive in gender-multiple contexts. The research study I use here reveals how senior women routinely experience negative evaluations of their work. As a response, they have developed a special kind of linguistic expertise in order to be viewed positively as effective leaders. Women leaders have to be more concerned with the *impact* of their language upon their professional colleagues than male leaders have to be, and consequently have developed a range of linguistic strategies to counter negative judgements.

In Chapter 6, I discuss a second case study from my ongoing research project (Baxter 2008) of one multi-national corporation, which might be described as 'gender-multiple'. I examine the case of a female managing director who, while not flawless, has developed a sophisticated range of linguistic strategies in order to exercise her authority and fulfil business goals in effective and successful ways. The chapter conducts a micro-analysis of the 'speech acts' (Austin 1962; Searle 1969) used by this female leader to chair and run a management meeting productively. It also conducts a macro-analysis of the gendered discourses shaping these meetings and how such discourses are drawn upon or contested in order to get business done successfully.

In Chapter 7, I propose an aspiration for female leadership by reviewing how the Gender-Multiple corporation can be best 'talked into being': a responsibility that is in the interests of all senior people. Based on good practice, I present a range of strategies for the individual leader (such as the negotiated use of humour, politeness and authority) and strategies for the corporation (such as appointing 'linguistic champions'; ways of contesting gendered discourses).

Finally in Chapter 8, I give my response to the driving question of this book, 'Is language a reason why female leaders continue to be under-represented at senior level?' I also draw some conclusions about whether or not there is a distinctive language of female leadership.

1

Leading Talk

Introduction

This scene takes place in a boardroom of a large multi-national company in the centre of London, UK:

Jan: No no (.) we're not talking about that (.) we're talking about the communication and the interaction between the people around this table and the Irish business and the people in the Irish business

Tim: well yep

Jan: Yes? So that you need to come back and say exactly what you feel is best so we actually sit down and discuss it?

Tim: Yep fair point

Jan: OK then alright so shall we have a break for five minutes is that a good idea? It's like pulling teeth (*laughs*) it's supposed to be the easy part of it (.) it's supposed to be the nice part of it (*no reactions from rest of team*).

(See Appendix 1 for transcription conventions.)

In this short extract, Jan, the Managing Director of the company's UK Division, reaches the end of a long discussion with her mainly male management team in which they have been arguing over the need to improve communication in the business. By this point in colleagues avoid her during the meeting break. An hour before, she opened the discussion by saying:

Jan: the change management in the business has been shite so that's why I've put it on the agenda to decide what we're going to communicate (.) how we're going to communicate and who's going to do it (3) so I want us to be specific 'Communication in the business' is clearly an important agenda item meriting a full and exploratory discussion among the team. But could the meeting have gone better? During the meeting, Jan was not overly heavy-handed and consulted team members at every stage. From the limited evidence of this extract, the male members of her team were not being deliberately difficult: Tim accepts his boss's point of view. So, was it the judgemental way in which Jan opened this agenda item that caused the protracted discussions among her team? Could she have presented and sought the opinions of her team in a more inclusive way? How should senior women use leadership language? Is there any difference in the way they should go about it compared to their male colleagues?

You are unlikely to find answers to these questions in the hundreds of business and management books published on leadership each month, or even within the increasing number specialising in female leadership (e.g. Eagly and Carli 2007; Hayward 2005; Vinnicombe *et al* 2009). A central issue explored in many of these female leadership books is the 'glass ceiling': women are still missing from the top of business corporations, which has implications for women at every level. Many of these books on women's leadership examine the barriers blocking women's career paths to leadership and consider what can be done to ensure a faster pace of changes so that more women's talents are utilised by their organisations to their mutual benefit. The focus is upon the economic, socio-cultural and political reasons for the challenges that face senior women, such as a lack of female role models,

insufficient mentoring or networks for women, an inflexible working day, the work-life (im)balance, organisational politics, poor impression management, and so on (Singh 2008). A commercial byproduct of such literature is the burgeoning body of self-help guides offering 'roadmaps' for career women to help them improve their the meeting, Jan looks exhausted and has to go outside for a much needed cigarette. She looks visibly shaken by the experience. Her chances of being appointed to boards and once there, establish their authority with their (often) male colleagues (e.g. Thomson and Graham 2008).

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