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The Gender of Power: The Female Style in Labour Organizations

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Introduction

This chapter explores how the way women exercise authority and communicate in labour organizations in Spain is seen and evaluated. Our main objectives are the following. First of all, we wish to show the influence of the work context (organizational culture and structure) on the way women manage and communicate, and on how these capacities are perceived. To this end, we shall try to identify the present model of management in Spanish companies and to examine its relationship with communication style, in particular that of women. Likewise, we shall consider the connections between the gender system and labour-related power, and in doing so examine the importance of social networks for the development of women’s professional careers and for the integration of women in labour organizations. Our second objective is to suggest good practices in work organizations. In these sections we shall encourage, by means of examples, reflection on women’s style of leadership and communication, with the aim of considering new ways of developing our professional careers.

Communication practices

Communication practices affect all aspects of life in work organizations. It is through acts of communication that information flows and circulates, that activities and tasks are organized, that relationships are established, and that teams and social networks are formed. Communication is, therefore, an essential ingredient in the functioning, constitution and structuring of work organizations and in the creation of links between those working in them. Given its importance, communication is always...
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regulated, and restrictions are imposed on how to speak, what to speak about, with whom to speak and when to speak. In this chapter we shall explore the consequences of the fact of whether those communicating are men or women.

In order to approach the issue of the regulation of communication in relation to gender, we shall need to refer to the 'communicational order'.

In relation to the way this behaviour is appraised, it is important to bear in mind that in work organizations in Spain and in many other countries, women are often subjected to the predominant, until recently, of male patterns and styles in the workplace.

In order to study the two dimensions, vertical and horizontal, of workplace relationships, we use the multidimensional grid proposed by Kendall and Tannen (1997: 98) as our point of departure. These authors established two axes of work: the hierarchy/equality axis, which refers to power relations, and the closeness/distance axis, which refers to social distance. As they point out, differences are perceived in both genders with regard to the interplay of hierarchy and connections (that is, in the balance between exercising authority and creating proximity, and in the way these aspects are combined).

Since we have not employed an ethnographic approach, the communicational practices data we have come from interviews and discussion groups, and therefore refer to social agents' perceptions of these practices. These data are approached from a sociolinguistic perspective, which is enriched by a critical discourse analysis of the social representation of managerial women. In discourse studies, CDA's understanding of discourse as a social practice has given place to a socio-constructivist epistemological stance (discourse constitutes active processes of production, reproduction and transformation of social structures: see Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999; Martin and Gabilondo Pujol 2002). The analyses, therefore, often focus on the production of discourse and knowledge in relation to social structures and societal effects. As a result, discourse analysts become engaged in specific, discourse-focused struggles, which concern the circulation of particular kinds of social representation, particularly in relation to social exclusion and the control of discursive production. In this context, adopting a critical approach to gender studies means to challenge concepts and representations, to question evidence and postulates, to break habits and ways of acting and thinking, to produce different kinds of knowledge and representation, to bring into question the taken-for-granted and the unproblematic, and to question the social and cultural practices that reproduce and legitimate them.

The emergent leadership style in Spanish companies

A key factor in understanding the problems affecting managers is the leadership model. This is beginning to dominate Spanish companies to the detriment of the old models. The greater complexity of tasks, together with the development of a more democratic society, is resulting in the emergence of a more relational and communicative model of management. This model is in contrast to the traditional, more authoritarian model, which no longer is legitimated by the hierarchical structure of the organization, but rather must be legitimated by the actual relationship with subordinates. Even more, without questioning hierarchy and the decision-making process, it stresses the formal and informal relationships and communication. A key factor in understanding these problems affecting managers is the leadership model.
gentler approach and a capacity for listening and convincing by those in charge.

In this new model, the legitimacy necessary for exercising management with authority depends on the following basic capacities (see Gómez, Martín and Callejo 2000), to which we shall return later:

- technical know-how
- capacity for decision-making
- capacity for management and organization of teams
- capacity for delegation
- communicational skill

This is the model that is positively appraised in Spanish companies at present, and in relation to which the different management and communication styles will be assessed.

Various researchers have posited the existence of female and male leadership styles, and the extent to which they might be linked to the different communication styles traditionally attributed to women and men. Let us recall the descriptions of these styles, which coincide basically with the ‘conversational styles’ established by Deborah Tannen (1990): (a) rapport talk, women’s characteristic relational style, whose conversational strategies are oriented to the establishment of connections and social bonds and to the negotiation of relationships (women’s conversational ritual thus gives an impression of equality and solidarity, with consideration of the effect of the linguistic exchange on the interlocutor); (b) report talk, men’s characteristic informative style, used as a means of preserving independence and negotiating their status within a hierarchy. (For an up-to-date review of the communication styles of men and women, focusing on the social situation of contemporary Spain, see Martín Rojo and Gómez Esteban 2003.)

For Tannen (1994), Loden (1987) or Helgesen (1993), these communication styles also appear in the workplace, and shape different management styles. Thus, in the case of women, their normal style of communication would be more democratic and ‘transformational’, in line with the emergent management models. However, although this model is perhaps the most widely followed, it remains invisible.

The data we shall consider in order to throw light on this matter and to fulfil the objectives we have set come from some of our own research (Gómez et al. 1994; Martín, Gómez and Santamaria 1995; Gómez, Martín and Callejo 2000), focusing above all on the autonomous regions of Madrid and Catalonia (the examples we present are taken verbatim from the fieldwork carried out in these studies). (For a more detailed picture of this research on communication in organizations, see Martín Rojo and Gari Pérez 2002.)

The emergent model of management in companies and women’s style

In the management model outlined above, a great deal of importance is attributed to good communication with employees and colleagues, but this does not imply, as might be expected, that women’s form of management meets less resistance. This is because the possibility of maintaining good communication with subordinates and equals, and of obtaining their recognition, is conditioned by the survival of an association between power and masculinity.

Not only does the ideal boss have a precise gender, but so does the boss that convinces, which employees of both sexes readily accept as a leader: such a boss is represented as a man who is capable of exercising authority, but ‘using tact and diplomacy’. Paradoxically, in this new management context, some of the characteristics traditionally attributed to women — such as ‘using tact and diplomacy’, being less distant, less authoritarian and more communicative — are associated with men.

Indeed, if we return to the five capacities necessary for exercising leadership with authority following the emergent model described, we see that women are always more poorly appraised.

Technical know-how: in contrast to experience, which is generally understood as ‘knowing one’s job’, and associated with men, women tend to be more often associated with ‘a good education’, implying ‘non-practical knowledge’ which is not applicable in hands-on situations.

Capacity for decision-making: this is a key capacity in modern business, given the constant need to adapt to ever-changing economic contexts. In relation to this capacity, women are in general perceived as being afraid to make decisions (in the case of public administration) or as capable of making them, but only in situations of urgency or tension, not
The Gender of Power in those that require strategy, foresight and planning. This perception, reflected in the image, many women managers have of themselves as a reference to their occupation, and to reinforce the preconceived idea that women want and have 'fewer responsibilities' in the labour context than men.

Capacity for management and organization of teams: it is men with women as their superiors who perceive management by females least positively, though this capacity depends to a large extent on the following two, in which women receive extremely low appraisals.

Capacity for delegation: women managers appear to lack this, so that they are seen as stern controllers of their employees and incapable of leaving any decision, however trivial, in the latter's hands.

Finally, we have communication skills, the most important area, since knowing how to manage is largely a case of knowing how to communicate. This area is considered to be totally lacking in women managers. In what follows, we shall examine in detail the prejudices and stereotypes underlying this perception.

The way in which these abilities are modulated in the case of women shows us that knowing how to exercise authority is not easy (even for men). The communication styles and forms of management

Communication styles and forms of management

In this section, we shall consider how women exercise power in work organizations and how this is perceived by their subordinates of both sexes. This is the path that women take when they occupy positions of responsibility, and how they are perceived as managers by their subordinates.

Let us consider in detail the resources and communication strategies it involves, and how it is used when women bosses employ it (see Martin Rojo and Garfí Perez 2002 for a more detailed exposition on this subject). The first characteristic of this style is the greater attention women seem to pay to others in verbal interaction (to their wishes, opinions, welfare, etc.). This greater attention is expressed in resources such as initiating conversations by referring to what the other has said previously ('as you said...'); naming or referring to him or her frequently while presenting their point of view ('I suppose you think...'; 'that's right, Juana, isn't it...?'); and using question tags or similar forms that invite the other's point of view ('isn't it?'; 'eh?'; 'right?'). Moreover, women tend to pepper their discourse with questions (direct or indirect) with which they try to guess and take into account the other's opinion ('I don't know what you think, but I think...').

This characteristic, in itself highly positive, may prove disruptive in the development of certain activities, particularly those considered of great importance, such as decision-making. Despite the fact that more democratic models are gradually establishing themselves, all the signs point to the continued expectation that the leader, in the decision-making process, will still expect that the leader has the final say.

The relational style of management: an inappropriate style?

The first possibility available to women when they take up positions of responsibility is to adopt the style considered traditionally feminine. Let us examine in detail the resources and communication strategies it involves, and how it is used when women bosses employ it (see Martin Rojo and Garfí Perez 2002 for a more detailed presentation of this).

The first feature of this style is the greater attention to others in verbal interaction (to their wishes, opinions, welfare, etc.). This greater attention is expressed in resources such as initiating conversations by referring to what the other has said previously ('as you said...'); naming or referring to him or her frequently while presenting their point of view ('I suppose you think...'; 'that's right, Juana, isn't it...?'); and using question tags or similar forms that invite the other's point of view ('isn't it?'; 'eh?'; 'right?'). Moreover, women tend to pepper their discourse with questions (direct or indirect) with which they try to guess and take into account the other's opinion ('I don't know what you think, but I think...').

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the 'boss' endowed with authority, assumes this responsibility. Such expectations explain why, when women in positions of authority resort to behaviour such as asking others' opinions, such behaviour may be understood as a sign of their lack of independent judgement, rather than as the expression of their desire to create a team of people with 'opinions' who participate in decisions (Gómez, Martín and Callejo 2000).

2 Another feature, frequently found in conjunction with the previous one, is not drawing attention to (or showing off) one's own merits and achievements, but perhaps even playing them down by means of strategies that dilute responsibility, such as through the use of the pronouns 'us' and 'we'. This aspect may well be associated with the fact that women presently are not brought up to compete in the workplace. This feature is in itself highly positive, but may prejudice and weaken the position of women in companies and at the most competitive levels. In Example 1 below, we see how a woman Human Resources Manager spreads and dilutes her responsibility in personnel selection, and even denies it, avoiding assuming the role of agent in this process ('they carry out'). (This tendency to renounce indicating agency in female discourse has been studied by various authors: see Martín Rojo 1997).

EXAMPLE 1
O SEA QUE TÚ TE ENCARGAS DE TODO EL PROCESO DE SELECCIÓN – de todo el proceso de reclutamiento exactamente, entonces de lo que es poner desde los anuncios en la prensa, diseñar los anuncios, eh... o entrar en contacto con (no se entiende), porque a veces el reclutamiento lo hacemos o directamente o a través de la prensa o umm, con (no se entiende) ¿no?... y, y llevan a cabo el primer proceso de selección.
(Entrevista a mujer directiva de empresa privada)

SO YOU ARE IN CHARGE OF EVERYTHING, OF THE WHOLE SELECTION PROCESS – of the whole recruitment process, exactly, from putting advertisements in the newspaper, to designing the advertisements, eh... or getting in touch with (not understandable), because sometimes we make the selection either directly or through the press or um, with (not understandable) don't we?... and, and they carry out the first selection process.
(Interview with a woman manager in a company)

3 Another feature, which we have frequently found to be criticized in Spanish companies, is the use of indirect and non-imperative forms when giving orders. For example, let us consider the difference between: 'finish the report today, and if you have to stay until 9 o'clock, then stay', and 'if we don't finish the report today we'll lose the contract, so we'll have to stay here till late'. This feature, which may be judged as highly positive from transformational leadership perspectives, gives rise, like the previous ones, to different interpretations: it may be understood either as a way of showing consideration to the other speaker and not trying to impose oneself, or, on the other hand, as an interiorization of a lack of authority reflecting a difficulty in imposing oneself.

4 Indirect style, of course, is used by both men and women, since it constitutes a fundamental element of human communication. Nevertheless, men and women, depending on their social position, tend to use this strategy in different situations and in different ways, which may lead to misunderstandings. Women are more likely to use it to regulate the behaviour of others in public spaces, in which they have not traditionally enjoyed a strong social position of authority.

In this case, as in the previous ones, we have found that indirect style in managers is appraised in a different way when used by a man or a woman. In the case of women in positions of responsibility, indirect style is always criticized. In some cases this is because it is considered as revealing a lack of self-confidence and security, and therefore of the ability to lead. It may also be criticized for being seen as a strategy of manipulation: the supposed interest in seeking the approval of the other may be perceived as merely rhetorical, since the difference in position obliges the other to follow the superior's orders anyway. In contrast, we have found that indirect style in men does not call into question either their authority or their capability.

EXAMPLE 2
Yo, pienso que las mujeres son un poco más retorcidas, ¿eh?
MÁS RETORCIDAS?
– Sí. A la hora de decirte algo, en lugar de decirte eres un 'hijo de puta', dicen que: 'Tú, no estás seguro, de que tu madre comecia y...'
(Reunión de grupo de mujeres empleadas en la Administración)

I think women are a bit more devious and oblique, eh?
MORE DEVIOUS AND OBIQUE?
– Yes. When they want to say something to you, instead of saying 'you're a son of a bitch', they say: 'Are you sure your mother didn't sell her body and...?'
(Discussion group of female Civil Service employees)
A feature that tends to be attributed to women’s style of management, and which is widely criticized in Spanish companies, is considered more frequent in the relationships formed by women, and appears to be quite disruptive in work organizations. If the woman is in a position of responsibility, the similarity and distance of power and authority in this case—assuming an image of women in positions of responsibility—is an important factor in how the communication style considered typically female contributes to the impression that women in positions of power possess are often critical of.

EXAMPLE 3

The discussion group of female Civil Service employees.

(Reunion de grupo de mujeres empleadas en Administración)

It is female employees with a woman boss that are most critical of this feature: they consider that, as was the case with indirect style, this may also lead to their being seen as less and manipulative. And if a post is also held by a female employee, this is perceived as a positive aspect in the workplace, highlighting her ability to manage difficult situations.

EXAMPLE 4

(Reunion de grupo de mujeres empleadas en Administración)

So, I have the impression that women bosses want to separate the sphere of the private world and the sphere of work. But...they don’t manage to do it?

—No. It’s that, in my case, my boss asks me directly, and does not demand, but she does put pressure on me to tell everything that’s going on around me. Then, I feel she uses it a bit against me. No, this thing is there in my case. My bosses directly and do not change when the woman arrives. This doesn’t happen to other women.

From what we have seen up to now, it would appear that this is not the case with women bosses.

So, I have the impression that women bosses want to maintain a communication style considered typically female in order to reinforce an image of women in positions of responsibility that highlights their weakness or incapacity for holding such a post; it may also lead to their being seen as false and manipulative.

The message we can draw from this does not seem particularly positive at the moment for women: if they use a female style of management they are criticized, either in the professional context or in the personal and ethical one (‘troublemakers’, ‘devious’). In the following section we shall see that, however paradoxical it may seem, the other possibility—adopting a more imposing style—does not seem to work either.
The informative style of management: also inappropriate?

The second possibility available to women in positions of responsibility
is to adapt themselves to already-established patterns and adopt an
'informative style'. This style is characterized by being more direct
when giving orders, stressing more the independence of the speaker
when making decisions, not resorting to exchanging confidences when
making bonds, and not concealing responsibility for decisions or
actions, but rather making it stand out. The use of this style is often
made necessary by a more male-oriented work context, at levels such as
the intermediate one, where women's authority is more questioned.
Nevertheless, adapting to moulds and forms traditionally considered
as typical of male bosses often leads to women being seen as strange
specimens; behaving as would be expected of a leader, but not of a
woman (the case of Margaret Thatcher is a paradigmatic one).

Women are often criticized based on the argument that they appear
incapable of finding the middle ground in their behaviour: they go
from the one extreme of quite indirect approaches to the other, an
authoritarian style characterized by shouting; indeed, it is often claimed
that managerial women shout their orders.

EXAMPLE 5
En mi caso concreto, bueno yo tengo una jefa que es, bueno no sé
como decirte. Es que no habla, grita.
(Reunión de grupo de mujeres empleadas en la Administración)

In my specific case, well, I have a female boss who's, well, I don't
know how to put it. She doesn't talk, she shouts.
(Discussion group of female Civil Service employees)

Images of women managers: subordinate or tyrannical?

Despite the fact that the communicational approaches and practices
characteristic of the relational style are useful and praiseworthy, they
are often rejected in work contexts where there is a persistence of sexist
stereotypes or difficulties in recognizing or accepting the authority of
women. Before discussing the reasons for the survival of these stereotypes
and difficulties, in this section we shall examine some of the images of
women widely found in the work environment.

In everyday communication in companies we have recorded the
following phrases used for describing women and their activity in the
world of work: 'You can clearly see it's she that wears the trousers';
'They've made her the boss because she's decorative'; 'What a sergeant-
major, an iron lady!'; 'She got to the top using her womanly wiles'; 'She
controls the budget as though it were the weekly shopping account.' All
of these reflect the perseverance of numerous stereotypes in which
power is associated with the male gender.

Also frequent are other expressions, in which men appear as the point
of reference, since neither their capacity nor their training are called
into question. These do not contribute, either, to creating a positive
image of working women: 'Women work as well as or better than men';
'women are as well-qualified or better than men' (Martin Rojo and
Gómez Esteban 2002).

Some of the allusions we have seen as we studied the communicational
resources women may use in the work context in Spain point us to an
essential fact for understanding the way women's management style is
appraised; the tendency to present managerial women either as being
overzealous or as lacking the capacity to exercise power. As we shall see
in the following example, women bosses are 'shit-scared' or abuse their
power and are seen as 'super-aggressive'.

EXAMPLE 6
... pues que está por ejemplo, la típica conservadora y acordonada y tal,
que la pobre no da para más. Y la superagresiva, que pasa al lado, te
pisa el pie y encima te grita: Anda...
(Reunión de grupo de varones empleados en empresas privadas)

... well there is, for example, the typical conservative and shit-scared
one, who's just not up to it, poor thing. And then there's the super-
aggressive one, who steps on your foot as she walks by you, and
screams at you, to boot...
(Group of male employees in a private company)

As can be seen from this example and some of our research on this
aspect (see, for example, Gómez et al. 1994; Gómez, Martín and Callejo
2000), in the work context we can identify two basic images of women
who hold positions of responsibility: 'soft' and 'hard'. And, as we shall
see, in either case the images refer to a supposed inability of women to
exercise power properly; stereotyped and prejudiced images that reflect
how people still find it hard to accept women's power.

In general, the 'soft' ones, those that are 'not up to it', are presented
as lacking authority because, supposedly, they are not professional
enough or lack leadership qualities. In this case, employees' (of both
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The reluctance to accept women as managers is expressed through a set of assumptions that define them, all of which tend to deny their femininity and underline their ‘virilized’ nature.

To summarize what we have said above, we can say that, as occurs with other behaviors in the communicational dimension, too, the way in which the power of a manager is exercised is largely associated with the communication style of this manager. This is true, for example, of the tone of voice, intonation in giving orders, and a preference for direct speech acts.

As a result of these prejudices and associations, Spanish women in positions of responsibility often find themselves obliged to perform behaviors that are expected to show consideration for and not to offend their superiors, while in the opposite direction—i.e., from superior to subordinate—the possibilities are various. Even so, such possibilities are constrained to a certain extent by the communicational model in which the association between power and masculinity, and by the association of power with masculinity, shapes the power of the manager, even if the manager is a woman.

If, as we said on presenting the emergent model of management in Spanish companies, the fact of being acknowledged by others—subordinates of both sexes—is essential for being able to exercise authority, then the rejection of women with power that still persists in the work context will make the exercise of that power difficult, and will obligate female managers to worry more about not offending their subordinates of both sexes, than about not offending their superiors.

Power and Gender

This difficult situation faced by women with power in the workplace suggests the need to consider the concept of social closure (social domination), applied by Bernstein (1975) to the sociolinguistic field. Social closure implies a process through which social groups attempt to maintain exclusive control over resources, in this case linguistic, by restricting access to them. Language and communication style, as with any of the elements associated with differences in status, may create social closure.

In this case, while no specific communication style is demanded of men for exercising power in organizations, managerial women do not seem to have an appropriate one available. This inequality in demands leads to a process of exclusion which makes it difficult, or even impossible, for women to gain access to important resources and positions in the organization. This exclusion may, in turn, give rise to a situation in which access to these high-level resources and positions is achieved by means of adaptation to the dominant styles and forms. However, such behavior will not be totally successful for women, since it will continue to be judged according to the prevailing gender stereotypes, underlain by the already-mentioned association between power and masculinity. In this case, the female manager becomes ‘de-womanized’ (in other words, her power may be accepted but she is not seen as feminine); as one of the discussion groups put it: ‘a woman has to be even more of a man to exercise leadership.’

In our studies, we have found that of the two types of image of women managers we have described, the most usual is the one that considers women as being overzealous in their job and in the exercise of power; thus, women would be more study and more hard-working, but also stricter, more authoritarian, and so on. However, it is important to stress that this female image, though distorted, reflects women’s obligation to be ‘more’ than their male peers if they wish to access positions of responsibility; and how, when they finally reach these positions, they have to continue being ‘more’, making more effort, given the greater visibility and the resistance from their environment. Given that, at the same time, the prevailing management model in Spanish companies continues to be the same, women often find that they have to take it as a reference, which implies (especially in highly masculinized work contexts) eliminating many of the communicational behaviors we consider important in the communicational dimension, if we are to succeed in getting access to power.
would expect from women. Thus it is common to find that women behave very differently from the way they did before taking up their post of responsibility or the way they behave in other contexts.

They have to be ‘more’, above all, because they lack the authority that is conceded to men. This is the main problem faced by women in positions of responsibility today: to be able to exercise power and be fully accepted, managers have to ‘have authority’, not just power, and they have to ‘earn the respect’ of their subordinates.

To obtain this recognition, however, it is fundamental to make explicit the reason for what is ordered and decided. It is not sufficient for employees merely to recognize the hierarchical level within the structure; they must also be aware of why they are required to do a certain thing. This is one of the basic points that form the basis of the criticisms of the way managerial women communicate. Subordinates (of both sexes) argue that they behave in an overemphatic and impositional way when giving orders, as though they were deliberately avoiding the necessary explanations and arguments behind the order.

This criticism is sometimes borne out by reality, since some female managers explain how they are obliged to avoid all communicational behaviour that could be interpreted as a sign of weakness; how they need to put on ‘armour’ as a means of demonstrating that they are strong and have enough firmness to occupy their position in the hierarchy. It is thus that they sometimes tend to put on a show of strength, but they are also seen as being harder than they should be, since toughness is neither expected nor tolerated in women. In contrast, male bosses are almost never perceived as ‘hard’, and their actions never considered as ‘excessive’ or overzealous. Out of this need for armour, and of the continuing robust resistance to women leaders as opposed to men, emerges the common image of female bosses as ‘masculine’ and authoritarian women.

If managerial women feel the need for ‘armour’, however, it is because they are questioned in a prejudiced and constant way with regard to their leadership, and all for the mere fact of being women. Moreover, as the images referred to show, social and work rejection of female bosses is presented as a problem caused exclusively by them, when what actually happens is that neither men nor women totally accept the exercise of power by a woman. And this rejection emerges with greatest intensity among those who have to acknowledge daily the authority of the woman boss, for it is precisely the employees (of both sexes) with women superiors who, according to our data, judge managerial women most negatively. In fact, many of the most acerbic comments come from those who generally suffer most discrimination: women in subordinate posts, who in their criticisms reproduce many of the social divisions imposed by the gender system and male domination.

By way of a summary of what has been discussed in this section, we can say that when women arrive in positions of power in Spanish companies, they find themselves in a territory organized by men and for men, and therefore in a situation of weakness. This situation often obliges them to be ‘more’ than the men, and to eliminate some of the dimensions that can allow a more natural exercise of power – which has fewer pitfalls – such as encouraging more participation of subordinates or using less direct communication styles. If this does not happen, or at least is not perceived to happen by the employees, conflicts arise whose most relevant consequence is the reinforcement of the initial view that persists in many sectors and companies, that women ‘do not know how to lead’, and that promoting them to positions of responsibility is a risk.

However, as we saw, there is also criticism of the woman manager who uses a ‘typically feminine’ communication style; thus, it seems inevitable to conclude that women always have to ‘pay’ for having power in the work context. The prevailing social logic, which associates power at work with the male, always puts women in a difficult situation.

Women are either more than men or less, according to these images, but the implicit message is clear: in order to enjoy authority at work, you have to be a man (because the only form of leadership accepted as natural is the male one). Thus, communication and the exercise of power by women is necessarily forced and unconvincing, and is consequently rejected. The gender system prevailing in our societies thus imposes itself in the productive context.

Vertical and horizontal relationships: social isolation of women in positions of responsibility

So far we have dealt with an aspect of great importance for women to accede to and work in positions of responsibility: the stereotypes and prejudices through which their exercise of power is appraised. In this section we aim to show the enormous importance, for the development
...communication in organizations, cushion the feeling of isolation, but generates relationships loaded with confusion.

**EXAMPLE 7**

She's anorexic. I mean, I had never really talked to her. I mean, I'm talking about the boss, the very top boss. Well, she was the boss, and she was trained in the organization. The communicational order we have been considering, and in particular that which is related to topics that can be touched upon in informal communication, reinforces this isolation, as we shall see. Also contributing to this is the discomfort or uneasiness shown by men, due to the difficulty many of them still have in incorporating into the work context the communicational forms and conversation topics of women (we find a similar analysis in Bhatnagar 1988).

**Peernetworks**

In order to study the factors affecting women's isolation in work organizations, we shall focus on peernetworks: that is, the informal relationships formed between individuals with the same job level. Given that one of the main objectives of this chapter is to encourage reflection on styles of communication and leadership, and above all on how women relate to their peers and superiors in the workplace, it is interesting to consider whether differences are detected in certain contexts, from coffee-breaks during work hours, to conventions and conferences with their crowded meeting and function rooms. In such contexts, those interviewed report that women are seen as quiet, reserved, and less talkative than their male counterparts. At the same time, they may be perceived as more conscientious, more friendly, and more approachable. In order to incorporate these factors into our analysis, we shall focus on the experiences of a series of women who have worked in prominent positions in different companies, and who have contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the communicational order in organizations.

In such contexts, those interviewed feel they can identify preferences by gender with regard to the form of interaction, the topics considered appropriate, and the topics that are taboo. Thus, in the interviews with women from various companies, it was found that women often mixing business with conversations about their private and personal life, while men tend to talk about their hobbies and interests, but not about their personal relationships.

**EXAMPLE 8**

...
... me, the men I see at the office, I see them talking about football, talking about bullfighting, talking about fishing. But not talking about their wives, or their husbands, about this or that.
(Discussion group of female Civil Service employees)

In fact, men often have difficulty finding appropriate subjects on which to make small talk with their female colleagues or bosses.

**EXAMPLE 9**
Hombre, yo nunca he tenido un jefe, pero estoy convencido que cuando llegas un lunes a trabajar, tienes más temas de que hablar, con un hombre que con una mujer. Muchísimo. O sea, a la hora de hablar con una mujer, te cortas muchísimo.
(Reunión de grupo de varones empleados en empresas privadas)

Well, I’ve never had a male boss, but I’m convinced that when you get to work on Monday you’ve got more to talk about with a man than with a woman. A lot more. I mean, when you talk to a woman it’s a lot more uncomfortable.
(Discussion group of male employees from private companies)

Not only is the choice different, but each gender makes a different appraisal of the pertinence of mentioning certain topics in the workplace. In the case of men, the introduction in work contexts of topics related to leisure, sex or friendship does not appear to involve risks for their position and integration in the context. Even in cases where a man reveals his private life, opting thus for a relational style, the appraisal is quite positive, especially from his female subordinates (he’s ‘nice’, ‘sensitive’). This is in contrast to what we saw in the case of managerial women.

**EXAMPLE 10**
Sí. A mí, mi jefe me ha contado cosas de su familia y, pero en plan entrañable. Me ha sentado mejor, cuando él me lo ha contado que cuando me lo contaba la otra.
(Reunión de grupo de mujeres empleadas en la Administración)

Yes. My male boss has told me things about his family and, but in a nice way. I felt better when he told me about it than when she told me about her life.
(Discussion group of female Civil Service employees)

In adapting to the dominant topics in informal communication among colleagues, we find it is women who make the most effort.

**EXAMPLE 11**
Yo paso totalmente del fútbol, pero normalmente en el desayuno, que es donde más se monta la tertulia, lo sigo por pura chorrería, porque... pero nada más. Igual que salen programas de televisión.
(Reunión de grupo de mujeres empleadas en empresas privadas)

I don’t give a damn about football, but normally over breakfast at work, where the most discussion takes place, I manage to go along with it... but that’s all. The same goes for when they talk about television programmes.
(Discussion group of female employees in private companies)

Men, on the other hand, as shown elsewhere (Henley and Thorne 1977; Kramarae 1981; Tannen 1994), do not appear to make the same effort of adaptation.

**EXAMPLE 12**
Yo no he oído a ningún compañero hablar de ropa, ¿eh?
– Ni yo tampoco.
– Pues yo sí.
– Yo sí.
– A ese nivel que me estás diciendo, no.
– De camisas y eso sí he oído alguna vez.
– De coches
(Reunión de grupo de mujeres empleadas en empresas privadas)

I’ve never heard a male colleague talk about clothes, eh?
– Neither have I.
– Well, I have.
– I have.
– At the level we’re talking about, no.
– About shirts and things, yes, I’ve heard that the odd time.
– About cars.
(Discussion group of female employees in private companies)

Until recently, in Spanish organizations, it was the male context that predominated, with its characteristic forms and styles, which restricted these peer networks to relationships among men. This allowed the use
The gender of power refers to a formal and strongly masculine style, which included physical contact (slaps on the back, for example), uninhibited expression, swearing and language with sexual allusions, as well as touching on topics that maybe considered taboo in other contexts.

Men often refer to the disconcerted merit caused now by the presence of women and the difficulty of changing their style of interaction to adapt to it.

**Example 13**
Y tú cuida de este marca. Estoy contigo. No puedes decírselo: venga, cabrón, corre y...

(Reunión de grupo de directivos de empresas privadas y administración)

And you're very careful with the way you treat them. I agree with you. You can't say: come on, bastard, go and...

(Discusión de grupo de directivos de empresas privadas y administración)

This male discomfort and the stress it appears to generate is presented by men as one of the causes of social isolation in women, to justify the distance in organizations between women and their male peers.

**Contextual situations**

Finally, informal relationships require certain scenarios, in which relations are established. This reality is not limited to public and political relationships, but also to personal and social relationships. They are important to establish, especially in situations where there is a lack of female presence, due to the predominant tastes and choices of men. This is evident in the following example.

**Example 14**
Mi mujer es ingeniera de caminos, es un mundo totalmente de hombres. Bueno, pues entonces es un mundo en el que los clubes de senderismo no tienen mujeres. Entonces se van a dos tipos de comidas: las comidas donde va ella y las comidas donde no va ella.

(Reunión de grupo de directivos de empresas privadas y administración)

It is important to draw attention to the social implications of this relative isolation and marginalization by male peer networks, since at the higher levels of organizations it is in these groups that the real power resides. Male networks operate as a mechanism of exclusion of women that is justified by ‘discomfort’ with regard to the other gender. This mechanism reduces the influence of women within the organization, hinders their promotion and facilitates the perpetuation of stereotypes and prejudices concerning women's communication and management style.

Added to this marginalization suffered by women is, in many cases, the difficulty of finding female models of reference and mentors who could help them in their professional career and teach them the rules of the game. Women often admit that they have to face uncomfortable situations and various dilemmas when establishing informal relationships in the workplace, when choosing topics, when accepting invitations, or when going to different types of meetings. Nevertheless, failing to establish links in this way leads to isolation, and this leads to difficulties and problems with regard to women's communication and management.

In the workplace, where the recognition of work is measured in terms of achievement and professional success, it is important to establish certain scenarios and situations where women can be recognized and valued. This is why the role of women in these contexts is crucial.

Adding to the social implications affected by women is, in many cases, a problem of gender identification and perception, where with regard to women’s experiences of marginalization and exclusion, it is important to draw attention to the social implications of this.

(Research of gender of female managers from private companies and the public sector)

This research of gender of female managers from private companies and the public sector is based on the idea of exploring the experiences of marginalization and exclusion of women, and the difficulties they face in establishing informal relationships in the workplace. This research is part of a broader research project on the role of women in the workplace, and the measures that can be taken to improve their situation.

The research was conducted through interviews with women managers from private companies and the public sector. The research included an analysis of the experiences of marginalization and exclusion of women, and the measures that can be taken to improve their situation.

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consideration of relationships with superiors: that is, the so-called vertical relationships.

Vertical relationships

For reasons of space, we pay less attention to vertical support relationships, despite the fact that the bonds with superiors in which someone acts as a 'mentor' in the professional context make an essential contribution to the promotion and development of the career of any professional. In this regard, in the studies carried out it has been found that women face the problem of not finding mentors due to one of the following circumstances: (a) the absence of female role models in posts of responsibility in some companies; (b) the reluctance to act as mentors for other women, as shown by some well-placed women within the hierarchy; and (c) the fact that, likewise, many men with power in the work context have enormous reservations about actively taking on this role.

With regard to those women who are reluctant to support the professional career of other women, we should point out that this attitude has been described in the specialized literature as 'the queen bee syndrome' (Baster and Lansing 1983). These may be women who are not fully aware of the difficulties that they and many others have to face for being promoted, so that they are not prepared to help others avoid these difficulties. It may also be that the struggle in developing strategies alone for adapting to a hostile environment (which highly masculinized work contexts often represent for women), and the implicit message emerging from these contexts that promotion is only gained by distancing oneself from feminine behaviours, mean that (in many cases) when they reach the top they feel unique. It may even be that, knowing they are in 'the territory of others' and that their decisions are highly questioned, the women are afraid to seem unfair if they supported their own gender.

As far as men are concerned, if they frequently reject the role of mentor for women's careers, this may be associated with the fact that whereas in the work context it is usually accepted that a man gains promotion with the support of other men, if the candidate is a woman, the relationship may be called into question or be 'under suspicion'. Furthermore, as women are assumed to have less capacity for leadership than men, defending the professional career of a woman or choosing her for a management post always has to be justified. This is not normally the case when the candidate is a man.

Some conclusions and suggestions for good practice

The study of communication regulation in Spanish workplaces has made evident the fact that women live in a situation of isolation and lack of recognition, which puts obstacles not only in the way of their doing the job, but also in the way of establishing networks of relationships, both vertical and horizontal, the role of which is equally important in the selection and promotion of employees. However women behave, there will be prejudice with regard to their activity. This will undoubtedly have effects on the appraisal of their capacities, their professional development and promotion, and their integration in the organization. Women's social isolation appears to be one of the greatest difficulties they face, but is combined with others that emerged during our research, such as the association between power and masculinity, the negative perception of gender differences and the fact that the models with regard to promotion and leadership continue to be masculine.

Thus the study of communicational regulation is essential in order to understand the on-going changes in organizations, and in order to be able to contribute to pulling down the so-called 'glass ceiling' that limits women's access to positions of responsibility. The study of organizational communicational regulation shows that this hinders women's integration into social networks, which are of crucial importance in relation to promotion.

The ethnographic perspective focused on the nature of the action and on the internal dynamics of the interaction must be complemented by a representational analysis, as shown by the analysis presented in this chapter of the social representation of women managers. Discursive practices are an expression of organizational structure, but also the means by which an organization's members create this structure and give coherence to everyday reality and practices. A CDA perspective may reveal the ideological, political and economic dimensions in which these discursive practices emerge. From the CDA perspective, the study of discourse gives access not only to the study of institutions and social practices, but also to the study of the social representations produced through these practices, and to their social implications.

In view of the situation we have outlined, it is time to consider what we can do and what may constitute good practice for contributing to changing this situation. In this chapter we have discussed the problems that may emerge in communication: independently of the style women use, it is often badly judged, and to such an extent that in many
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Cases women are faced with a dilemma deriving from the deep-rooted and close association in our culture between power and masculinity. This problem is not confined to the workplace but is reflected in all spheres of society, from the family to the educational system.

Changing ourselves, as has been proposed on occasions, by reproducing stereotypes and reinforcing the gender roles working women fulfill is detrimental to the development of their careers and to the advancement of women in management and leadership positions. This approach further stereotypes and marginalizes women in relation to management and leadership roles.

What is necessary, then, is to act on the work-related order in two ways: first, by trying to put an end to discrimination, and second, by promoting greater visibility of women's achievements. Promoting the visibility of women's achievements, for example, by publicizing their successes in management posts, would clearly contribute to the feminization of companies.

The number of women in positions of responsibility would become more natural if their presence at the top were perceived as part of a specific new paradigm. Working within this new paradigm, the appreciation of their activities as individuals.

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Note

1. Tannen devotes the whole of Chapter 3: 'Why don't you say what you mean? Indirectness at work,' to the analysis of the use of direct and indirect styles, making great efforts to destroy the negative image of the indirect style, which structures a work of Chapter 3, 'Why do you say what you mean?'

References


Introduction: some are more equal than others

Ruth Wodak