



QUIET CONFIDENCE

Research Team | Waverly Dolaman, Leslie Sim, Angela Wang
Executive Mentor | Claudia Goodrich
Faculty Mentor | Beverly Sauer

Introduction

For this project, we define Quiet Confidence as being aware of one's capabilities and strengths but not necessarily drawing attention or demonstrating engaging verbal and body language cues in professional interactions.

Research Question

Do successful women and men in senior leadership positions exhibit Quiet Confidence communicative characteristics in professional communication?

Literature Review

Sociolinguist Deborah Tannen found that women and men exhibit different communication styles in the workplace. By examining pronoun usage in the workplace, Tannen concluded that many men say "I" in situations where many women say "we." Overall, women tend to be more indirect in workplace communication, "quietly coming up with the ideas that influenced their groups." (Tannen 1995). Cognitive linguist Jens Allwood demonstrated that speakers' body movements often align with his/her verbal content but also convey identity, illustration, specification, and sense of communication management to the audience. (Allwood 2002).

Hypothesis

Women and men leaders have characteristically different communicative styles. Executives who exhibit confident and assertive communicative styles in professional interactions are more likely to reach top-tier leadership positions. Quiet Confidence characteristics thus limit career advancement opportunities.

Research Methodology

We aim to examine women and men top-tier leaders' communicative style in public interactions. We conducted a microanalysis of women and men leaders in online interview videos of *The Washington Post's* "One Leadership" series because the videos were public resources that provided a wide range of industry leaders for this analysis, including leaders in education, Fortune 500 corporations and nonprofit organizations. To test our findings, we passed a survey to explore executives' impressions of their peer leaders' communicative styles. Five female executives at J.P. Morgan Chase took this survey.

Qualitative Research Methods

In the video analysis, since interviews are often framed communicative events where the interviewer tends to orchestrate the interviewees' verbal content, we categorized interview questions as well as responses into *personal* (life stories, personal experiences irrelevant to the speaker's organization),

organizational (content directly relevant to the speaker's organization) and *uncategorized* categories. We examined women and men leaders' pronoun usage as well as if gestures frequently accompany the speaker when speaking. We selected "I, We, You She/He/They" as pronoun variables and hand movements and head-nodding/shaking as gestures.

Quantitative Research Methods

We divided 18 videos into 9 industry pairs. Each pair featured woman and man leaders who belonged in a similar or related industry. We calculated pronoun usage based on the total word count of the response to determine which pronoun is frequently used. We also checked for consistency between interviewees' response category, i.e. *personal* or *organizational*, with the interviewer's question category. The 18 videos we examined had 80 interview questions total; women received 16 organizational questions and 23 personal questions while men received 27 organizational questions and 9 personal questions.

Findings

Our findings supported the hypothesis that women leaders who demonstrate confident, attention-grabbing communicative styles tend to reach top senior executive positions. In our video analysis, we found that in the 80 interview questions, women received 38% more *personal* experience questions than men; however, women responded with 47% more personal responses than men because women leaders answered both *personal* and *organizational* questions with more personal examples and the pronoun "I" while more men approached questions with their organization's examples regardless of the type of question asked.

Interestingly, in answering the survey question, "What is the likelihood that a woman will lead your organization in the next five years?" * 80% of the responses from the five female executives at J.P. Morgan Chase selected, "It is unlikely." The executives also noticed peer women executives used the pronoun "we" i.e. the organizational voice more frequently than men executives, who used the pronoun "I" frequently. In body movements, the executives who responded to the survey also had the impression that women use more head gestures to indicate agreement or disagreement and hand gestures (directive hand and finger movements, interlacing and counting, etc.) than peer men executives. This survey supported our hypothesis that women in top executive positions have a more 'animated,' attention-drawing communicative style via gestures.

Conclusion

Performance and competence are undoubtedly crucial criteria in attracting advancement opportunities. While our research and data are limited, findings do suggest Quiet Confidence is not beneficial to obtaining top-tier leadership positions. Instead, assertive, animated and sensibly attention-drawing communicative styles, including using the personal voice "I," content-relevant gestures and personal stories, may help to engage the speaker's audience in workplace interactions and increase the speaker's visibility and exposure to career advancement opportunities.

*Same audience poll question at PwC's annual diversity forum in 2008

